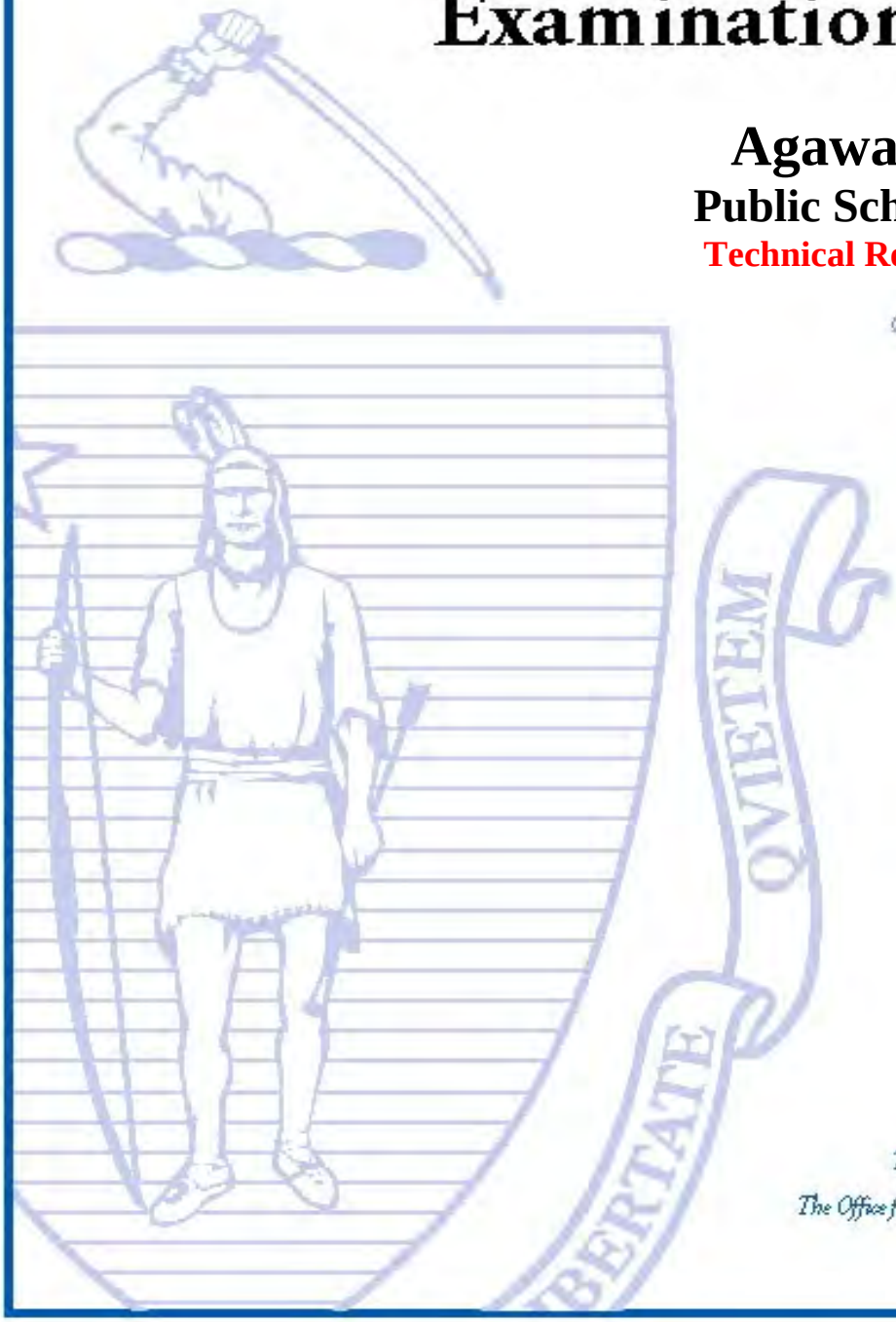
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

# School District Examination Report:

## Agawam
## Public Schools
### Technical Report

*data driven*
*standards based*
*learner centered*




*The Education Management Audit Council*
*The Office for Educational Quality and Accountability*

**2005 - 2007**

## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
## Office of Educational Quality and Accountability



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**The Educational Management Audit Council accepted this report at their meeting of April 11, 2008, and issued a management letter to the district expressing commendations and concerns based on the findings contained herein.**

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Department of Education; the Superintendent of the Agawam Public Schools, Mary Czajkowski; the school department staff of the Agawam Public Schools; and the town officials in Agawam.

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# Executive Summary

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Agawam Public Schools in October 2007. With an English language arts (ELA) proficiency index of 88 proficiency index (PI) points and a math proficiency index of 81 PI points based on the 2007 MCAS test results, the district is considered a 'High' performing school system according to the Department of Education's rating system (found in Appendix A of this report), with achievement above the state average. On the 2007 MCAS tests, 68 percent of Agawam's students scored at or above the proficiency standard in ELA and 59 percent did so in math.

## District Overview

The town of Agawam is located in Hampden County in southwestern Massachusetts, adjacent to the city of Springfield. Formerly a rural community and now a suburban one, Agawam maintains its small town ambiance amidst a variety of natural resources. The largest sources of employment within the community are educational, health, and social services; manufacturing; and retail trade. The town has a Mayor-Council form of governance.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Agawam had a median family income of $59,088 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 226 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 28,144, with a population of 4,971 school-age children, or 18 percent of the total. Of the total households in Agawam, 31 percent were households with children under 18 years of age. Twenty-one percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2006-2007 the Agawam Public Schools had a total enrollment of 4,374. The demographic composition in the district was: 94.8 percent White, 2.2 percent Hispanic, 0.9 percent African-American, 0.9 percent Asian, 0.1 percent Native American, 0.4 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.6 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 1.8 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 16.3 percent low income, and 14.1 percent special education. Ninety-three percent of school-age children in Agawam attended public schools. The district participates in school choice, and 69 students from other school districts attended the Agawam schools in 2006-2007. A total of 51 Agawam students attended

public schools outside the district, including seven students who attended Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School.

The district has eight schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 12, including one early childhood center for preschoolers, four elementary schools serving kindergarten through grade 4, one middle school serving grades 5 and 6, one junior high school serving grades 7 and 8, and one high school serving grades 9 through 12. The administrative team consists of a superintendent, an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, an assistant superintendent for business, and a director of special services. Each school has a principal except the Early Childhood Center, which has a director of early childhood education. The district has a seven-member school committee.

In FY 2007, Agawam's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $10,359, compared to $11,789 statewide, ranking it 196 out of the 302 of 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2005 to FY 2007, net school spending increased from $34,254,178 to $40,520,636; Chapter 70 aid increased from $9,966,288 to $12,524,413; the required local contribution increased from $20,437,232 to $22,041,666; and the foundation enrollment increased from 4,337 to 4,403. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending increased from 29 to 31 percent over this period. From FY 2005 to FY 2006, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 62 to 60 percent.

## Context

The town of Agawam, nestled in a picturesque part of western Massachusetts adjoining the city of Springfield, is a community that strongly supported its public school system during the period under review. At a time when many school districts faced the dual challenges of financing both health insurance and liability insurance out of the district budget, the Town of Agawam financed both on the town side of the ledger rather than the school side, allowing the school district to focus on educational expenditures. This has resulted in a school district that has had the freedom to focus on educational issues. Students performed well on recent MCAS tests but showed little

improvement in recent years. Other than that, the EQA examiners found a district that had more positive than negative attributes in place.

Examiners found a district that, while not over-funded, was well placed to control its costs. Fourteen percent of its students received services under special education management, which was slightly less than the statewide average of 18 percent, although spending on these students consumed 24 percent of the budget, whereas the statewide average was closer to 17 or 18 percent. Some of the additional spending, however, was credited to outside program audits that were used to maximize the efficiency of the special education services that the district provided. The district managed its finances efficiently, averaging lower per pupil expenditures in all categories than statewide averages.

In addition, examiners found that the district planned its curriculum and its potential response to emergencies with care. It gathered and used data on student achievement, although it was less effective in gathering data on student discipline and dropouts at the high school. Both teachers and administrators took advantage of a liberal policy on professional development, but despite that averaged fewer than eight days of absence per year, resulting in an average attendance rate of over 92 percent. Only eight of the 297 teachers reported to the Department of Education are employed on waiver, and over 100 paraprofessionals employed by the district had been trained to provide special education services, with three-fourths of them having attained college degrees. Parents and community members were invited to participate in the schools. Throughout the district, public message boards announced parent meetings, teas with the principal, and similar activities planned to provide information to the public.

EQA examiners concluded that the staff at the Agawam Public Schools was suitably qualified to provide educational services to its students, and that the district had an efficient and effective management structure in place to do so.

## Recommendations

As a result of its examination, the EQA arrived at recommendations for the district, which were presented to the superintendent subsequent to the examination. They are as follows.

- Develop and implement systems for academic program evaluation and curriculum revision.

- Provide direction and professional development in curriculum leadership to assist principals in seeing and strengthening the link between curriculum and instructional delivery. This is at the heart of the district's fidelity of implementation issue.
- The district's special education inclusion model is exemplary and could be used by other school districts.

## The EQA Examination Process

The Massachusetts Legislature created the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in July 2000 to provide independent and objective programmatic and financial audits of the 350-plus school districts that serve the cities and towns of the commonwealth. The agency is the accountability component of the Education Reform Act of 1993, and was envisioned in that legislation. The EQA works under the direction of a five-person citizen council, appointed by the governor, known as the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC).

From October 29 through November 1, 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Agawam Public Schools for the period 2005-2007, with a primary focus on 2007. This examination was based on the EQA's six major standards of inquiry that address the quality of educational management, which are: 1) Leadership, Governance, and Communication; 2) Curriculum and Instruction; 3) Assessment and Program Evaluation; 4) Human Resource Management and Professional Development; 5) Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support; and 6) Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency. The report is based on the source documents, correspondence sent prior to the on-site visit, interviews with the representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers, and additional documents submitted while in the district. The report does not consider documents, revised data, or comments that may have surfaced after the on-site visit.

For the period under examination, 2005-2007, Agawam Pubic Schools is considered to be a 'High' performing school district, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'High' in math on the 2007 MCAS tests. Over the examination period, student performance improved by two PI points in ELA and seven PI points in math, which narrowed the district's proficiency gaps by 14 percent in ELA and 27 percent in math.

The following provides a summary of the district's performance on the 2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and the findings of the EQA examination.

## Summary of Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

### Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Agawam participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

### Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, two-thirds of the students in Agawam Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, three-fifths of Agawam students attained proficiency in math, and more than two-fifths attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-five percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination.

- Agawam's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 88 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of 12 PI points, two points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of less than two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- In 2007, Agawam's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 81 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 19 PI points, five points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two and one-half PI points per year to achieve AYP.
- Agawam's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 76 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 24 PI points, four points narrower than that statewide.

### Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2004 and 2007, Agawam's MCAS performance showed improvement in English language arts and in math, and a slight decline in science and technology/engineering.

- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Agawam improved at an average of less than one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the

proficiency gap, of nearly 16 percent, a rate lower than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 66 percent in 2004 to 71 percent in 2007, with the gain occurring between 2006 and 2007.

- Math performance in Agawam showed more improvement over this period, at an average of two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 24 percent, also a rate lower than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math rose from 50 percent in 2004 to 60 percent in 2007, with the gain also occurring between 2006 and 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Agawam had a slight decline in STE performance of more than one PI point over the three-year period, resulting in a widening of the proficiency gap by close to six percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 51 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2007.

### Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Agawam students. Of the four measurable subgroups in Agawam, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 23 PI points in ELA and 27 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Agawam in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students.

### Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?

In Agawam, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA was 19 PI points in both 2004 and 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 21 to 27 PI points over this period.

- All student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students, whose performance improved by

two and one-half PI points. The performance of the other subgroups improved by one PI point or less.

- In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Agawam with the exception of students in disabilities improved between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroup in math was also non low-income students, whose performance improved by six PI points.

## Fidelity of Implementation

A characteristic of effective educational organizations (schools and districts) is the strong alignment of goals, plans, processes, and actions—from the policymakers to the classroom. Therefore, the EQA has developed a protocol for assessing the alignment of these elements. The *fidelity of implementation* is an indicator of the consistency of execution of a district's expectations: its stated goals, plans, curricula, and various processes, down to the level of instruction. When these various components are consistent and highly aligned, a high level of fidelity of implementation exists. When these are inconsistent and poorly aligned, a low or poor level of fidelity of implementation exists. The classroom observation protocol is designed to collect evidence of district and school goals, plans, and expectations in the instructional setting.

The fidelity of implementation was generally high in Agawam Public Schools. The district had a set statement referred to as Vision 2010, containing a mission statement, core values, and eight goals. The superintendent explained that the previous strategic plan, dating back to the late 1990s, was developed without input from all stakeholders. Planning for Vision 2010 included surveys sent to all stakeholders and involved the participation of the school committee. The superintendent asked all principals to review the document with staff members, a copy of the document was provided to all staff members, and, through the services of the local newspaper, it was made available to all community members as well. All of the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) aligned with the vision, core values, and district goals of Vision 2010.

The mission statement stated that the district would "provide students with a safe and technologically advanced learning environment that fosters academic excellence to maximize student potential for life-long learning in a diverse world." One district goal was to "increase student achievement through a curriculum with high standards for all students." Over the period under examination, the district supported the fidelity of implementation of school and district

goals with substantial professional development offerings and by supporting a curriculum and instruction team that built on a pre-existing strength in literacy programs and stressed mathematics instruction. A second district goal was to "provide a positive and safe learning environment for all students." Examiners found that all schools maintained safety plans that were aligned with the district crisis plan, were routinely provided to teachers and included in substitute teacher packages, and were practiced with the students. Other district goals were uniformly implemented throughout the school buildings and school community as a whole.

During the four-day visit, EQA examiners participated in over 28 interviews with administrators, principals, school committee members, parents, and teachers. Examiners asked groups of interviewees a similar series of questions to determine if the fidelity of implementation permeated all levels of the district on an intellectual level. All respondents spoke of "ELA, math, and school safety" as major instructional priorities. All groups were able to describe to examiners the ways in which the improvement of student achievement in literacy and mathematics and the promotion of school safety were achieved in the respective buildings to which they were assigned. All of the interviewees were able to articulate the role they played in contributing to the attainment of the district goals.

During visits to 40 randomly selected classrooms, with the exception of actively using technology as a part of the lesson, EQA examiners observed good instructional practices in a relatively high percentage of classrooms. Although examiners found that teachers used technology appropriately to deliver instruction in only 18 percent of the classrooms observed, they otherwise noted positive instructional practices in 71 percent of the classrooms visited.

## Standard Summaries

### Leadership, Governance, and Communication

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Excellent' on one, 'Satisfactory' on 12, and 'Needs Improvement' on one of the 14 performance indicators in this standard.

The superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator, and the district practiced site-based management. The entire administrative team,

comprised of the superintendent and assistant superintendents, principals, and director of special services, met biweekly, and the superintendent prepared agendas for all meetings with input from administrative team members. The superintendent expanded upon the general agenda by having a leadership activity presented by a different administrator once a month.

The seven members of the school committee included six elected members and the mayor who served as chairperson. The committee had minimal turnover, was involved in local and state meetings, and totally understood its role to advocate for students. Newly elected members met with the superintendent as soon as possible following the election, and they received the policy manual and all pertinent information needed to prepare them for the position. While the committee did not have a formal mentoring program in place, veteran members offered their assistance and support to new members via telephone, face to face meetings, and e-mail. The committee had formal subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and budget development and formed an ad hoc committee during contract negotiations. The school committee's policy manual showed signs of age, and while the committee had made some updates and modifications, it acknowledged that the entire manual needed to be reviewed. The live airing of committee meetings allowed the community the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the district and each school and program.

The district developed systems for data analysis, alignment of curriculum and instruction, and provision of appropriate professional development to ensure the fulfillment of the goals included in the Vision 2010 strategic plan, the District Improvement Plan (DIP), and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The district has conducted strategic planning for a number of years and expected Vision 2010 to lead the district forward. The five-point plan, which included mission and vision statements as well as core values and eight district goals, served as the cornerstone of the district and all members of the educational community embraced it. The local newspaper absorbed the cost of printing the district brochures, which all parents/guardians received at the beginning of the school year. The school committee reviewed all plans on a regular basis, and formal presentations by the superintendent and building principals occurred during the spring of each school year. Vision 2010, the DIP, and the SIPs were all in alignment and included specific goals regarding student achievement and the use of data.

The district analyzed MCAS test data on a regular basis utilizing TestWiz, and administrators provided the school committee and the community at large with an annual report outlining the MCAS results and the achievements of the district. School committee members used the data in this report when making budget decisions.

While the district regularly reviewed aggregated assessment data, the only use of disaggregated data was for the special education and low-income subgroups. The district did not disaggregate other data because of limited numbers of students in other subgroups. Members of the teaching staff were afforded the opportunity to participate in many professional development activities. Faculty and grade-level meetings focused on school programming, the review of data, curriculum, and assessment.

The district website provided a great amount of information and included updated notices of importance issued by the superintendent of schools, profiles of the school committee and the administrative team, as well as links to all schools. The school committee, the superintendent, town officials, and all of the unions in the district worked collaboratively with the entire community to succeed in its attempt to provide a challenging educational system for the student body.

### Curriculum and Instruction

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of ‘Satisfactory’ on this standard. They rated the district as ‘Excellent’ on one, ‘Satisfactory’ on five, and ‘Needs Improvement’ on five of the 11 performance indicators in this standard.

The Agawam Public Schools aligned its curriculum to the state standards and frameworks and ensured that the curricula in all tested content areas aligned both horizontally within grades and courses and vertically within schools. Various content areas documented their curricula using different formats that were inconsistent in detailing curriculum components such as goals, objectives, skills, instructional strategies, targeted outcomes, and assessments. Some were more complex and/or complete than others.

Curricular revisions derived mainly from an analysis of MCAS test results, or through alignment with the five-year textbook renewal cycle. The district did not have a systematic and timely

process to review and revise academic programs based on research and best practices. Key inclusionary special education programs received an outside evaluation every three years to ensure effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Curriculum leadership rested mainly with building principals who collaborated with curriculum specialists and assistant specialists. Principals used data from the MCAS test and other formative and summative assessments, particularly at the K-8 levels, to monitor curricula, identify gaps and weaknesses, and inform decisions for curricular changes, professional development, and resource allocation. Curriculum specialists and assistant specialists also monitored curricula using achievement data and worked with either other specialists or teams of teachers to revise curricula. However, since curriculum specialists had no authority and little time to monitor the delivery of the curriculum, links between improving curriculum and improving instruction were weak.

At each school the principal served as the key administrator responsible for instructional improvement. Principals analyzed and shared MCAS test results at school-level, grade-level, content-level, and department meetings, especially in grades K-8. During the review period, the district implemented formative and summative assessments to improve its comprehension of student progress. Although leaders used assessment data to implement changes in curriculum, they only informally used those data to monitor, supervise, and evaluate instructional practices. Once priorities for improvements became evident, the district or the school allocated resources for professional development or approved teachers' individual choices for professional development that aligned with school and/or district improvement plans and priorities.

The district increased instructional time for students at risk of failure in ELA and math through intensive classes, smaller groups, and remedial instruction. MCAS prep classes existed at the junior and senior high schools for all students, as did special prep classes for secondary students who either had failed the MCAS tests or were at risk of failure.

Curricula for high school math classes as well as programs oriented toward career education integrated educational technology with classroom instruction. However, the district as a whole had insufficient technology infrastructure, capacity, and leadership during the period under review. Teachers used technology based on their expertise and creativity, not because is was an

integral part of curriculum and instruction. The district took steps to remedy this situation late in the review period by partnering with the town to upgrade wiring, servers, and the quality and number of computers.

In observations of 40 randomly selected classrooms, EQA examiners observed inconsistent levels of instruction from level to level and noted stronger instructional practices in grades K-8. Examiners described the high school as being "generally weaker than all of the other buildings in the observable areas" with respect to classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student work, and classroom climate.

### Assessment and Program Evaluation

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on five and 'Needs Improvement' on three of the eight performance indicators in this standard.

Agawam Public Schools had practices in place to collect and analyze student assessment data. The district engaged in practices to support participation in the MCAS tests, and student participation rates exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement during the review period. Analysis of the student assessment results began in the district office, where the superintendent met with principals and analyzed results together. Principals then shared results with curriculum specialists and staff members, who together examined the MCAS results for trends, gaps, and weaknesses. Although "ten or twelve" staff members were trained in TestWiz, certain staff members at each level were clearly identified in interviews as "go-to people" for more in-depth analyses.

The school district measured student progress with benchmarks in some subject areas at some levels and used formative and summative assessment tools. Elementary levels used the Dynamics Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Gates-McGinitie assessments to gather information. At upper elementary levels, teachers used results from common midterm and final examinations to determine progress. The common examinations ended at the junior high school and high school levels, but teachers were able to access diagnostic tools accompanying Study Island and

testGEAR through grade 9. After that, teachers gave more attention to the development of schoolwide rubrics, and less to assessments.

The district reported assessment results to students, parents, and the community using a variety of tools. The elementary and middle schools communicated individual student achievement information to parents through report cards for all students three times per year, and through progress reports for students in Title I and for those with an IEP. The junior high school provided report cards for all students as well as midterm progress reports for students with academic problems. All high school students received a midterm progress report in addition to quarterly report cards. The district reported student achievement data to the community through the town's annual report, through school committee meetings, and through posting of information on the district and school websites.

The district used assessment results to measure the effectiveness of support programs, but evaluations of academic instructional programs were informal and not based on the analysis of specific data. Internal review of curriculum was similarly informal, and was not based upon formal student achievement data. Other than a variety of internal and external audits for special education, EQA examiners found no documented evidence of external evaluations of regular education programs. Although the school committee handbook had policies on assessment and program evaluation, the superintendent told the EQA team that the policies were outdated and in need of review. Administrators conducted walk-throughs in their buildings, occasionally accompanied by central office personnel, but provided little oral or written feedback to teachers. Most administrators were reluctant to use student achievement data as leverage to improve instruction through written evaluations.

The district and school leadership reviewed assessment and other data to prioritize goals and allocate time and resources. Administrators met with the superintendent to determine the needs of the school system and identified goals for the district's strategic plan and the School Improvement Plans. All SIPs included goals to increase the number of students scoring in the 'Proficient' and 'Advanced' categories on the MCAS tests. Because of low MCAS scores, students at the middle and junior high schools were targeted for intensive math and reading instruction based on their scores and teacher observations. Low performing students in grades 5

and 6 received small group instruction in both reading and math. Math periods were increased from five to seven per week. Additionally, according to teachers, foreign language was eliminated from grade 6 to provide more support in math. At the junior high school, targeted students received an extra math period every other day for half the year. Students needing additional reading support met two to three times per week during the year. The high school responded to low math scores by offering MCAS prep help, StudyIsland.com, and peer tutoring on a volunteer basis after school. Administrators and teachers stated, however, that these changes were not based on formal program evaluations.

### Human Resource Management and Professional Development

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on 10 and 'Needs Improvement' on three of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

The Agawam Public Schools followed an established process in recruiting and hiring professional staff members. The school district policy manual indicated that the superintendent assumed the responsibility to determine the personnel needs of the school system, and principals had the responsibility to ascertain the staffing needs of their respective schools. Although the process of screening and interviewing potential candidates varied slightly from school to school, all principals used interview teams and acknowledged that they had hired the candidates they felt were the best fit for their schools, with no financial limitations placed on the process. Principals reported that they consistently made teaching assignments for their new personnel by trying to assign teachers where their strengths were the greatest. When administrative positions became vacant, a wider posting would take place, and screening committees of teachers, parents, and community members would interview potential candidates and assist in the hiring process. All interviewees agreed that they believed that the hiring practices employed by the district resulted in having an effective teaching and supervisory staff.

The percentage of the district's teachers and administrators who held appropriate licensure was 97.6 percent (348 of 357), and more than 60 percent of the district's 114 paraprofessionals were 'highly qualified.' The district expected the few teachers hired on waivers to work actively on

becoming certified, and the central office expected their respective principals to monitor closely the licensure progress of these individuals.

The district offered a comprehensive orientation program to its new teachers. During the period under review, all the first-year teachers new to the district were assigned veteran teacher mentors, and both the district's administrators and its teachers deemed the program very helpful and successful. Additionally, the district provided monthly professional development sessions to all first-year teachers. The district hired a former superintendent to serve as a mentor/consultant for the administrators new to the district.

Many and varied professional development opportunities for the district's teachers took place during the period under review. Interviewees stated that the district's professional development program changed over the course of the last two years from one that had been mostly districtwide to a program that was more school-, grade-level, and/or department-based. Interviewees stated that the professional development opportunities offered had received input from teachers by means of the districtwide professional development committee, and that the offerings focused more on program assessment and analysis of student achievement data. Administrators were trained in analyzing data using TestWiz and they, in turn, were expected to train the teachers in their respective schools. All interviewees, administrators and teachers alike, agreed that adequate funding was available for appropriate professional development during the period under review.

Interviewees stated that the district placed high priority on retaining an effective professional staff. The EQA team learned that the annual teacher turnover rate in the district was quite low during the period under review, and interviewees indicated that most of those leaving the district had been teachers who retired. Interviewees agreed that teachers who worked in Agawam tended to remain there for many years, some throughout their careers. Teachers stated that pleasant teaching conditions and collegiality existed at all the district's schools and that the district had a competitive salary schedule.

Both teachers and administrators in the district had been observed and evaluated by their superiors in a timely fashion, and the instruments used followed the standards required by the Education Reform Act. The EQA team found that the summative evaluations in all teacher

personnel files they examined included informative and/or descriptive comments, but only three included instructive and/or constructive comments or statements about how individuals could improve their professional growth and/or overall effectiveness. The administrators' evaluations lacked qualitative assessment comments, except for the superintendent's, which members of the school committee had completed. Administrators expressed satisfaction with the evaluation process followed by their supervisors.

The district provided training in crisis management to all building principals, who annually reviewed the safety and emergency protocols established for all the district's schools. An extensive and comprehensive Safety and Emergency Advisory Handbook was readily available in every classroom throughout the district.

### Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on 10, 'Needs Improvement' on two, and 'Unsatisfactory' on one of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

The district provided supportive services to its student population at all levels. Among the four elementary schools, three were eligible for Title I services. The district funded the hiring of additional teachers at the fourth elementary school to mirror the programmatic offerings of the three Title I schools. The district offered Reading Recovery at all the elementary schools and after-school help from teachers at all levels, for which the district provided late transportation at no cost to the students or their families. Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) were in place at all schools to identify students for whom support services would be helpful. Students at the high school had additional services provided by voluntary peer tutoring by National Honor Society students. High school students who performed at the 'Warning/Failing' level on either the grade 8 or grade 10 MCAS tests had Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) generated for them.

In 2007, student subgroups in the district participated at acceptable levels in MCAS testing. All students were reported to have participated at rates of 99.0 percent in English language arts (ELA), 99.2 percent in mathematics, and 99.4 percent in science and technology/engineering (STE). Of the district's regular education students, 99.1 percent participated in ELA, 99.3 percent in mathematics, and 99.7 percent in STE. Students with disabilities participated at rates

of 99.4 percent in ELA, 99.7 percent in math, and 99.1 percent in STE. Students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) participated at rates of 90.1 percent in both ELA and mathematics, and 99.1 percent in STE.

Student attendance in the district exceeded the state average for each of the years under review. For school years 2004, 2005, and 2006, the district reported student attendance rates of 94.6, 94.7, and 95.0 percent, respectively. Over the same three years, the statewide averages were 94.2, 94.4, and 93.8 percent, respectively. Agawam Middle School reported the highest attendance rate at 96.4 percent, while Agawam High School reported the lowest attendance at 93.1 percent. The district lowered the percentage of students reported as chronically absent from 13.4 percent in 2004 to 12.9 percent in 2005 to 11.6 percent in 2006. The district employed a full-time attendance officer who was also a licensed social worker.

The principal of each building effectively monitored staff attendance, and called violators of the district's attendance policy to the attention of the superintendent for further action. Attendance within the district varied from an average of 2.8 days absent at Agawam Middle School to 4.7 days absent at Granger Elementary School, excluding professional development. The largest single component contributing to the fluctuation was long-term days absent, a factor over which the district had little control.

The district reported rates of out-of-school suspensions, which occurred primarily at the high school, that were better than the state averages, at 3.9 percent in 2004, 3.9 percent in 2005, and 3.4 percent in 2006. The statewide rates during the same period were 5.9, 5.6, and 5.8 percent, respectively. However, in-school suspensions exceeded the state averages during these three years. In 2004, the district reported that it had assigned 10.5 percent of its students to in-school suspension for at least one day, compared to the state rate of 3.6 percent. In 2005, Agawam's in-school suspension rate dropped slightly to 10.1 percent, while the state average declined to 3.1 percent. In 2006, the district's in-school suspension rate was 11.5 percent, while the state average was 3.4 percent. Administrators reported that they were aware of disciplinary referrals but were not able to track them conveniently, and had few programs in place to lower the number of disciplinary referrals or suspensions. They relied on the Instructional Support Teams and the services of the attendance officer to assist in limiting the number of disciplinary referrals.

## Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The EQA examiners gave the Agawam Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Excellent' on one, 'Satisfactory' on 10, and 'Needs Improvement' on two of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

The Agawam Public Schools had a formal budget process with a comprehensive schedule that began in November of the current budget year with administrators discussing priorities and guidelines. The process concluded the following April with a completed budget presentation at the annual town meeting. Examiners learned in interviews that the process was open and participatory with many stakeholders involved. The school committee, central office administration, school administrators, teachers, parent councils, and municipal boards and administrators had the opportunity to provide input and guidance.

Interviews with building administrators indicated that the process was collaborative and included their meetings with staff members and parent councils and a number of meetings with administrators. Principals prepared building-based budgets that incorporated staffing requests and maintenance and capital improvements to their schools. The final budget document provided clear and accurate information and tables, and was it comprehensive in that it contained all funding and expenditure categories by cost centers utilized in the district. The district provided evidence that the budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data, although written evidence of this process was limited in the budget preparation documents, budget meeting minutes, or the budget document itself.

Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators and staff members, and the public. The assistant superintendent for business met with the school committee's budget subcommittee every two weeks, and the full school committee received financial reports regularly at their meetings. School committee policies relative to financial reports were general in nature and did not include a number of the practices in effect in the district. Principals stated in interviews that they could obtain their budget status at any time. Local, state, and federal financial reports and statements were accurate and filed on time.

The school district budget increased each year of the period under review, and the district exceeded its net school spending requirements by an average of over $5 million, or more than 15 percent, during the review period. The district did not have to reduce staff members in order to meet other budget needs. Salaries and materials for nurses, custodians, and maintenance personnel were included in the municipal rather than the school district budget. Energy costs were also included in the municipal budget, and therefore rising energy costs did not result in reductions in other budget categories. The district and town had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district budget by the town.

The mayor, who chaired the school committee, stated to examiners that the community valued education and that no layoffs or reductions in staff members or services to the schools had been necessary. School personnel stated in interviews with examiners that they had adequate supplies and materials. The district had not established any fees for transportation or student activities such as athletics. In addition, the district continued to provide transportation for secondary school students, despite the state no longer requiring this practice.

The district's facilities were clean, well maintained, safe, and secure. The district had completed a number of projects in recent years, including the installation of six modular classrooms at elementary schools to accommodate programs for special education and to reduce class size. The Massachusetts School Building Authority, after reviewing the conditions of all the district's schools, rated all in the top category, which indicated that the buildings were in good condition with few or no building systems needing attention.

District administrators had placed a strong emphasis on building security. The district planned and installed state of the art equipment and monitoring systems, and engaged a consulting firm to evaluate all schools. The district's schools had cameras and monitors in numerous locations, and all entrances were secured and numbered. Computerized school floor plans have been made available to the police department; however, they have not yet been installed in police vehicles.

# Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The EQA's analysis of student achievement data focuses on the MCAS test results for 2004-2007, with primary attention paid to the 2007 MCAS tests. This analysis is framed by the following five essential questions:

1. **Achievement: Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?**
2. **Equity of Achievement: Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?**
3. **Improvement: Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?**
4. **Equity of Improvement: Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?**
5. **Participation: Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?**

In order to respond accurately to these questions, the EQA subjected the most current state and district MCAS test results to a series of analyses to determine whether there were differences between the mean results of district students and those of students statewide or among student subgroups within the district. Descriptive analyses of the 2007 MCAS test results revealed differences between the achievement of students in Agawam and the average scores of students in Massachusetts.

To highlight those differences, the data were then summarized in several ways: a performance-level based summary of student achievement in Agawam; and comparative analyses of district wide, subject-area, grade, school, and subgroup achievement in relation to that of students statewide, in relation to the district averages, and in relation to other subject areas, grades, and subgroups.

The EQA then subjected the data to gap analysis, a statistical method that describes the relationship between student aggregate and subgroup performance and the state standard or target of 100 percent proficiency on the MCAS tests. Gap analysis also describes the relative achievement of different entities at a specific point in time, as well as how those relationships change over time. Gap analysis consists of several separate indicators, each of which builds on the others, and can be applied to a district, school, or subgroup of students.

The basis for gap analysis is the *proficiency index*, which is a measure of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, or meeting the state standard. The unit of measure is proficiency index (PI) points, and a score of 100 indicates that all students in the aggregate or in a subgroup are proficient. It can be calculated for overall achievement as well as achievement in an individual subject. Please see Appendix A for more detailed information about the proficiency index

The *proficiency gap* is a measure of the number of proficiency index points by which student achievement must improve to meet the goal of proficiency for all students. It is the gap or difference between the current level of proficiency as measured by the proficiency index and the target of 100. A gap of zero indicates that all students in the aggregate or in a subgroup are proficient.

The *performance gap* is a measure of the range of, or variance in, achievement among different student subgroups within a district or school at a specific point in time. It measures the differences between the proficiency index of the highest-performing subgroup and those of the other subgroups. It also measures the difference in performance between any two subgroups.

## Achievement

### Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

**Findings:**

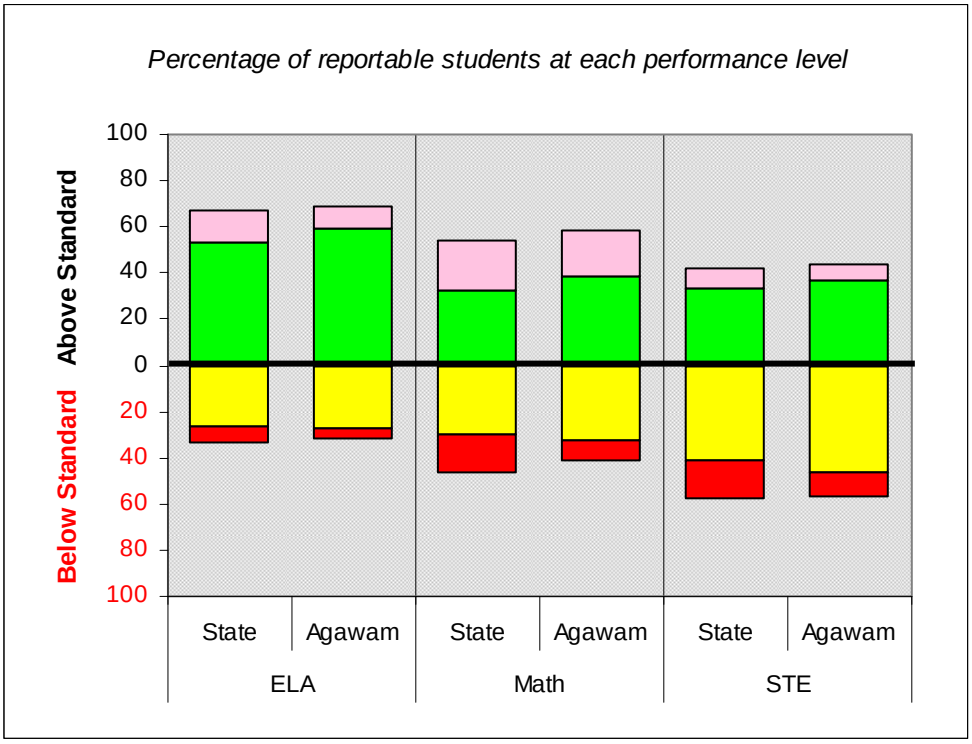
- On average, two-thirds of the students in Agawam Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, three-fifths of Agawam students attained proficiency in math, and more than two-fifths attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-five percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination.

- Agawam's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 88 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of 12 PI points, two points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of less than two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).

- In 2007, Agawam's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 81 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 19 PI points, five points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two and one-half PI points per year to achieve AYP.

- Agawam's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 76 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 24 PI points, four points narrower than that statewide.

**Figure/Table 1: MCAS Test Performance by Subject, 2007**



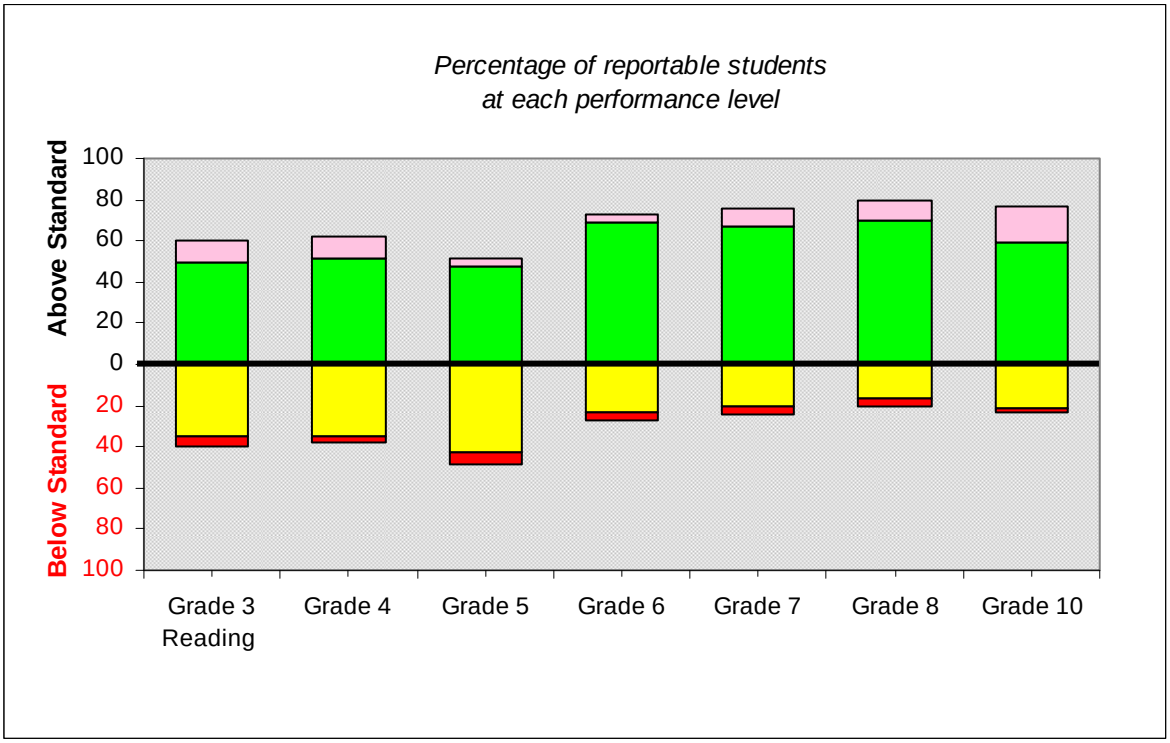

| | ELA | | Math | | STE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 13 | 9 | 22 | 21 | 9 | 7 |
| Proficient | 53 | 59 | 32 | 38 | 34 | 37 |
| Needs Improvement | 27 | 27 | 30 | 32 | 41 | 46 |
| Warning/Failing | 7 | 4 | 17 | 9 | 17 | 10 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 66 | 68 | 54 | 59 | 43 | 44 |
| Proficiency Index (PI) | 85.7 | 87.9 | 76.1 | 81.3 | 72.1 | 76.0 |

In 2007, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was higher in Agawam than statewide. In Agawam, 68 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 66 percent statewide; 59 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 54 percent statewide; and 44 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 43 percent statewide.

The 2007 proficiency index for Agawam students in ELA was 88 PI points, compared to 86 PI points statewide; in math it was 81 PI points, compared to 76 points statewide; and in STE it was 76 PI points, compared to 72 points statewide.

The ELA proficiency gap for Agawam students in 2007 was 12 PI points, compared to 14 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of less than two PI points annually to make AYP. Agawam's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 19 PI points, compared to 24 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of more than two and one-half PI points per year to make AYP. Agawam's STE proficiency gap was 24 PI points, compared to 28 PI points statewide.

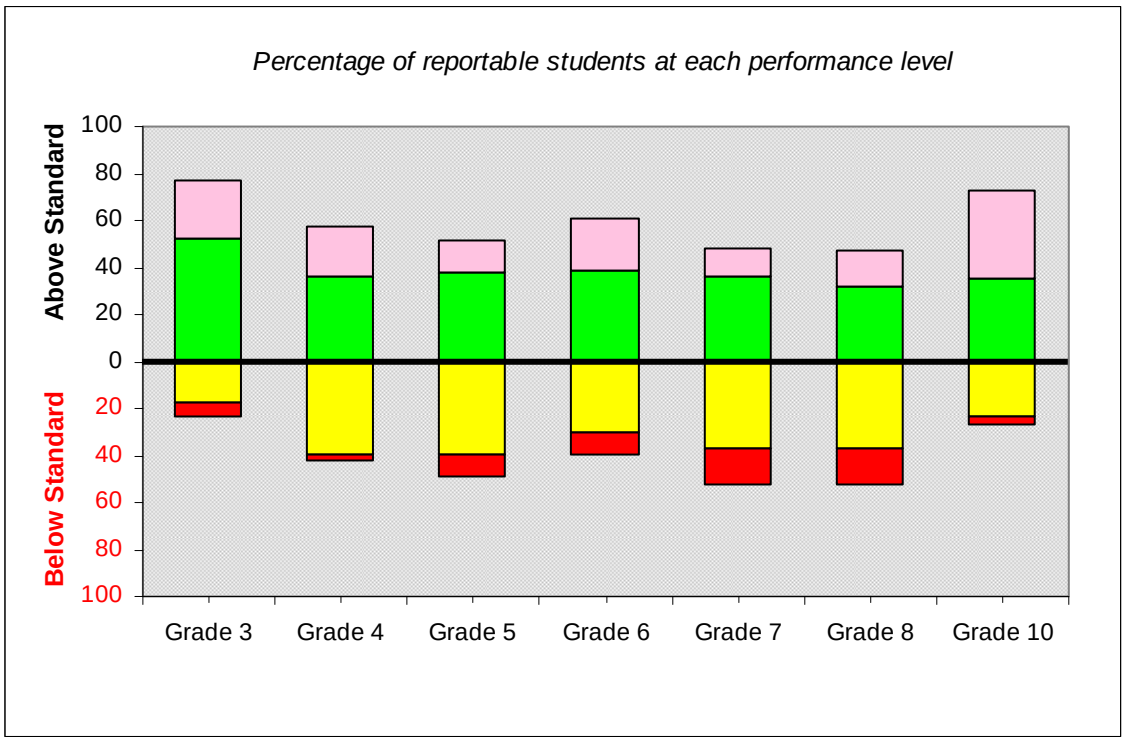
**Figure/Table 2: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Grade, 2007**




| | Grade 3 Reading | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 10 | 11 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 17 |
| Proficient | 50 | 51 | 48 | 68 | 67 | 70 | 59 |
| Needs Improvement | 34 | 35 | 43 | 23 | 20 | 16 | 21 |
| Warning/Failing | 5 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 60 | 62 | 52 | 73 | 76 | 80 | 76 |

The percentage of Agawam students attaining proficiency in ELA in 2007 varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 52 percent at grade 5 to a high of 80 percent at grade 8.

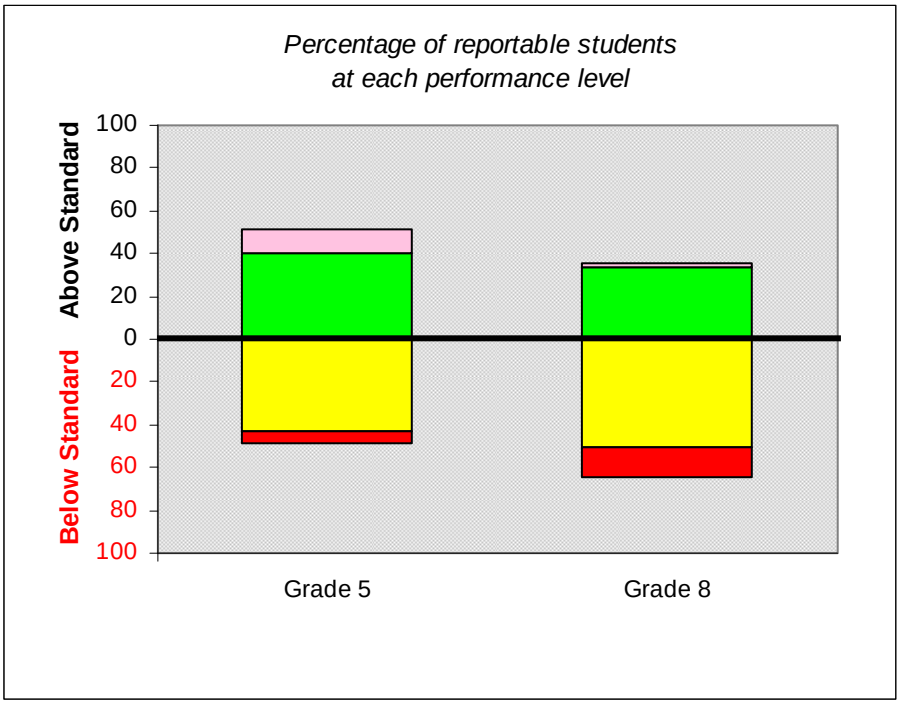
**Figure/Table 3: MCAS Math Test Performance by Grade, 2007**




| | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 25 | 21 | 13 | 22 | 12 | 15 | 38 |
| Proficient | 52 | 37 | 38 | 38 | 36 | 32 | 35 |
| Needs Improvement | 17 | 40 | 39 | 30 | 37 | 37 | 23 |
| Warning/Failing | 6 | 3 | 10 | 9 | 15 | 16 | 4 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 77 | 58 | 51 | 60 | 48 | 47 | 73 |

The percentage of Agawam students attaining proficiency in math in 2007 also varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 47 percent at grade 8 to a high of 77 percent at grade 3.

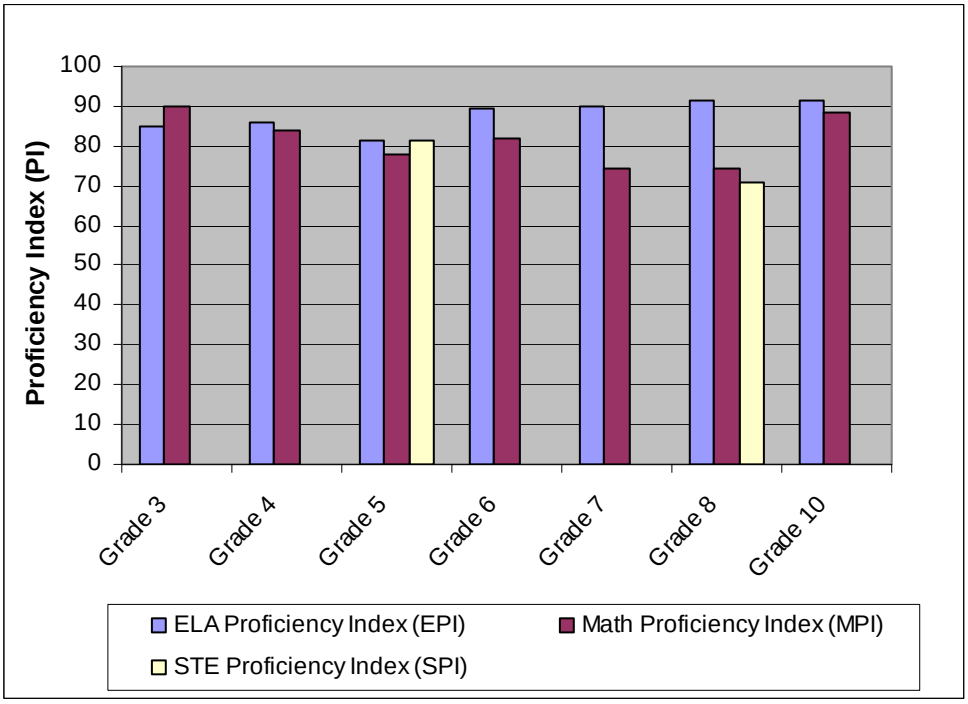
**Figure/Table 4: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Grade, 2007**




| | Grade 5 | Grade 8 |
|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 11 | 3 |
| Proficient | 40 | 33 |
| Needs Improvement | 43 | 50 |
| Warning/Failing | 6 | 14 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 51 | 36 |

In Agawam in 2007, 51 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 36 percent of grade 8 students did so.

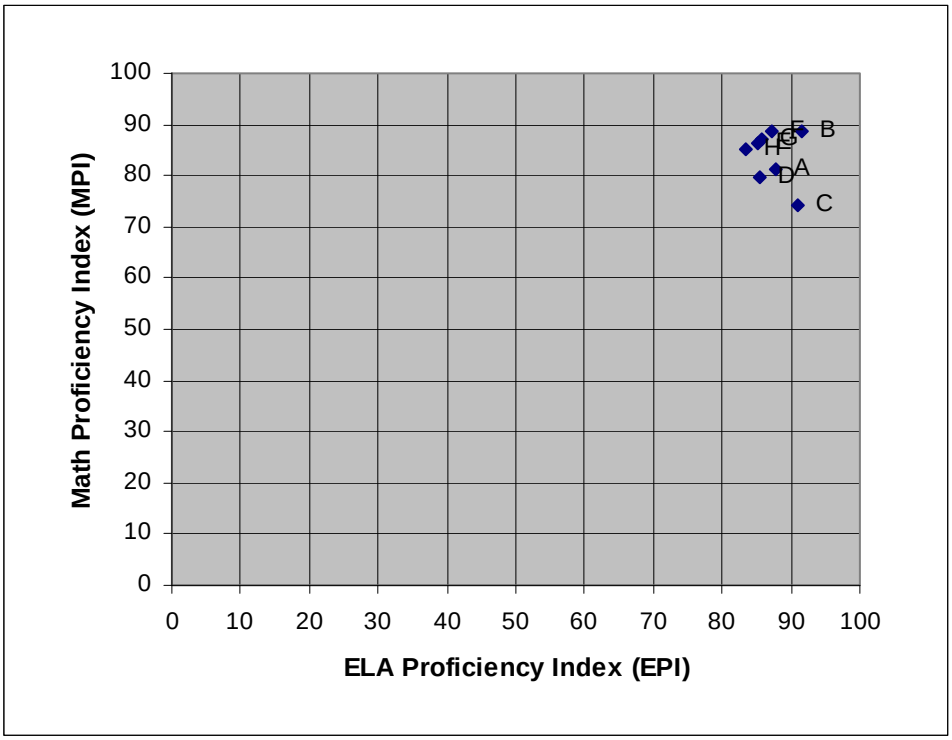
**Figure/Table 5: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Grade and Subject, 2007**




| | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) | 84.7 | 86.1 | 81.4 | 89.6 | 90.2 | 91.7 | 91.5 |
| Math Proficiency Index (MPI) | 89.8 | 83.9 | 77.7 | 81.9 | 74.2 | 74.2 | 88.6 |
| STE Proficiency Index (SPI) | | | 81.2 | | | 70.9 | |

At every grade level except grade 3, the performance of Agawam students on the 2007 MCAS tests was strongest in ELA. Agawam's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of 8 PI points at grades 8 and 10 to a high of 19 PI points at grade 5. Agawam's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 10 PI points at grade 3 to a high of 26 PI points at grades 7 and 8. Agawam's STE proficiency gap was 19 PI points at grade 5 and 29 PI points at grade 8.

**Figure/Table 6: MCAS ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) vs. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by School, 2007**




| | | ELA PI | Math PI | Number of Tests |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Agawam district average | 87.9 | 81.3 | 4,788 |
| B | Agawam High | 91.5 | 88.6 | 650 |
| C | Agawam Junior High | 91.0 | 74.2 | 1,415 |
| D | Agawam Middle | 85.5 | 79.8 | 1,413 |
| E | Benjamin J. Phelps | 85.2 | 86.4 | 352 |
| F | Clifford M. Granger | 87.3 | 88.5 | 326 |
| G | James Clark | 85.7 | 87.2 | 298 |
| H | Robinson Park | 83.5 | 85.2 | 334 |

Among Agawam's schools, the ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of eight PI points at Agawam High to a high of 16 PI points at Robinson Park. Agawam's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 11 PI points at Agawam High and Clifford Granger to a high of 26 PI points at Agawam Junior High.

## Equity of Achievement

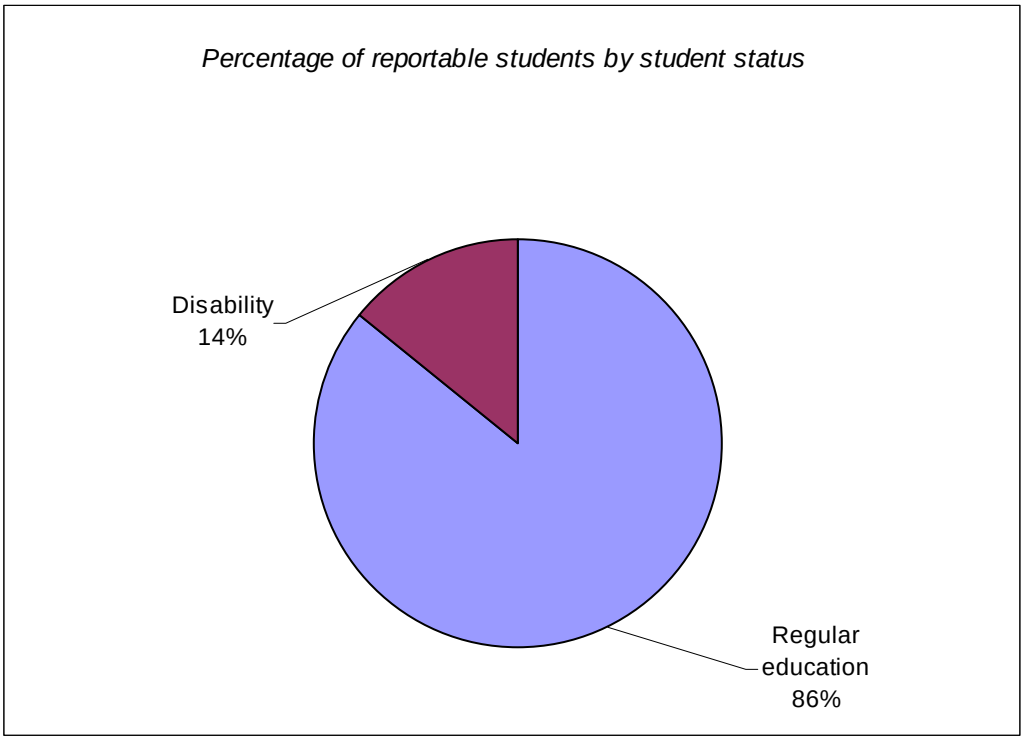
### Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

**Findings:**

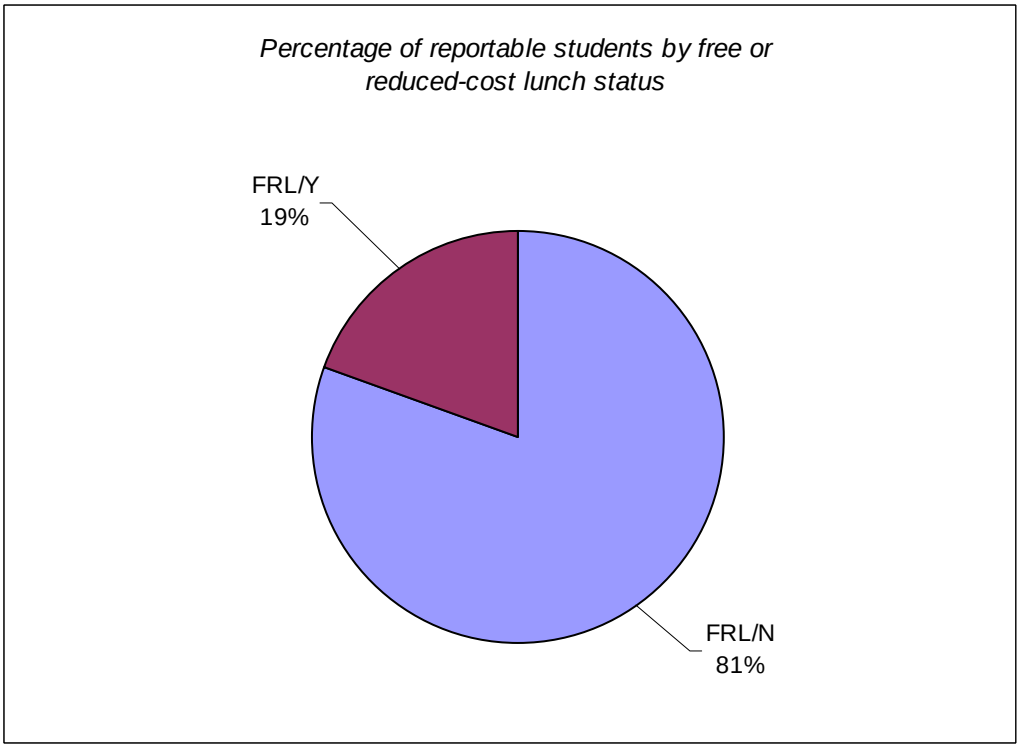
- MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Agawam students. Of the four measurable subgroups in Agawam, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 23 PI points in ELA and 27 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).
- The proficiency gaps in Agawam in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students.

**Figures 7 A-B/Table 7: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2007**

**A.**




**B.**

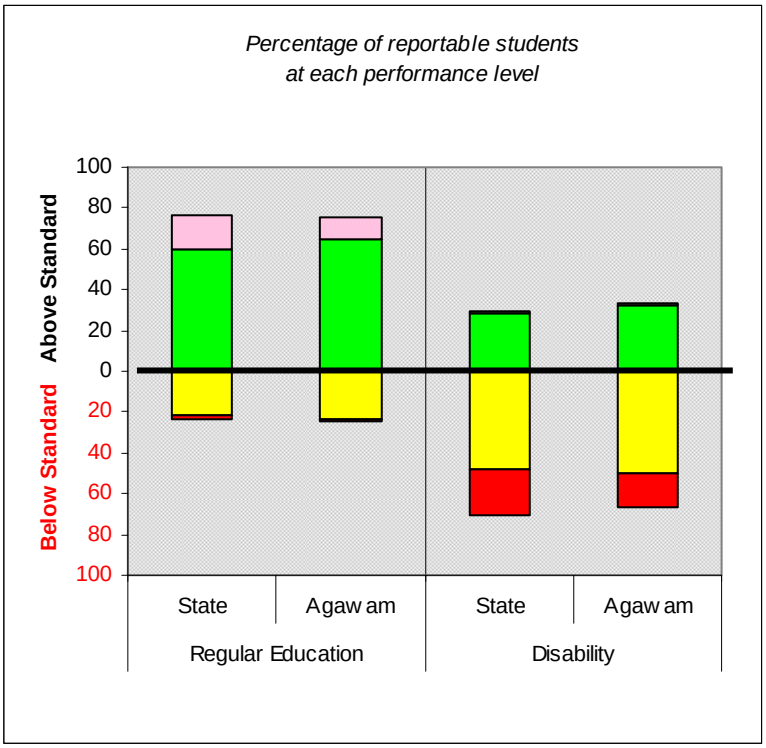


| | Subgroup | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|
| Student status | Regular education | 2,039 |
| | Disability | 339 |
| Free or reduced-cost lunch status | FRL/N | 1,949 |
| | FRL/Y | 469 |

Note: Data include students in tested grades levels only.

In Agawam in 2007, 14 percent of the students tested were students with disabilities. Nineteen percent of the tested students participated in the free or reduced-cost lunch program.

**Figure/Table 8: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007**

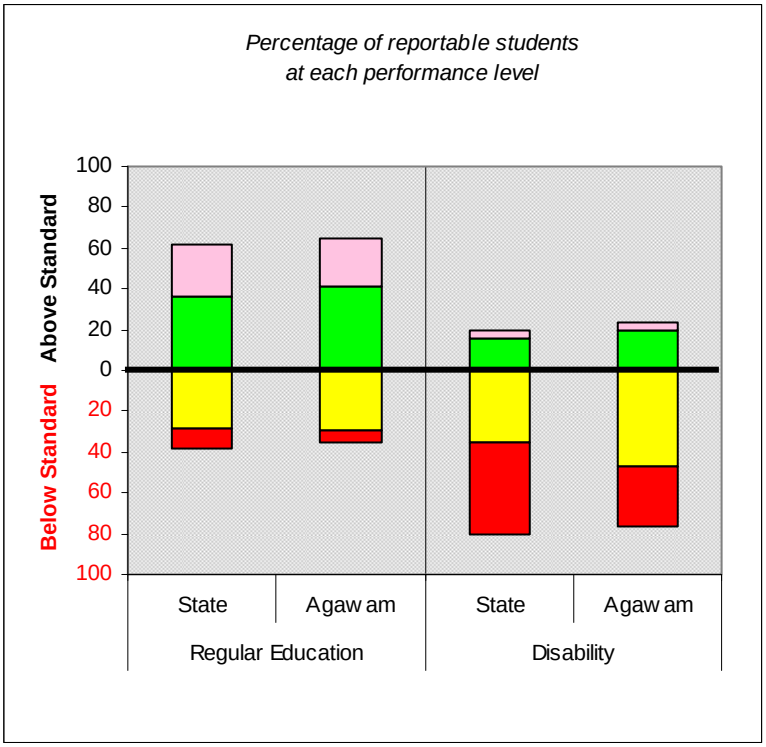



| | Regular Education | | Disability | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 16 | 11 | 2 | 1 |
| Proficient | 60 | 64 | 28 | 32 |
| Needs Improvement | 21 | 23 | 48 | 50 |
| Warning/Failing | 2 | 2 | 22 | 17 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 76 | 75 | 30 | 33 |
| Proficiency Index (EPI) | 91.3 | 91.4 | 64.8 | 68.4 |

In Agawam in 2007, the proficiency rate in ELA of regular education students was more than two times greater than that of students with disabilities. Seventy-five percent of regular education students and 33 percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in ELA on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Agawam's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 was nine PI points for regular education students, the same as that statewide, and 32 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 35 PI points statewide. The performance gap in ELA between Agawam's regular education students and students with disabilities was 23 PI points.

**Figure/Table 9: MCAS Math Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007**

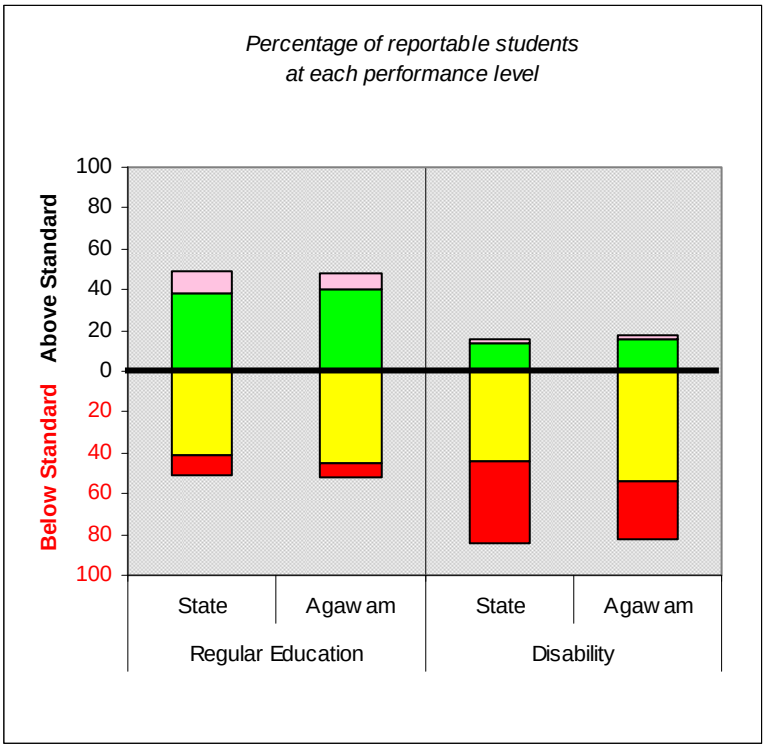



| | Regular Education | | Disability | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 26 | 24 | 4 | 3 |
| Proficient | 36 | 41 | 16 | 20 |
| Needs Improvement | 28 | 30 | 36 | 47 |
| Warning/Failing | 10 | 6 | 44 | 30 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 62 | 65 | 20 | 23 |
| Proficiency Index (MPI) | 82.2 | 84.9 | 51.0 | 58.3 |

In Agawam in 2007, the proficiency rate in math of regular education students was nearly three times greater than that of students with disabilities. Sixty-five percent of regular education students and 23 percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests in 2007.

Agawam's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 15 PI points for regular education students, compared to 18 PI points statewide, and 42 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 49 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between Agawam's regular education students and students with disabilities was 27 PI points.

**Figure/Table 10: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007**

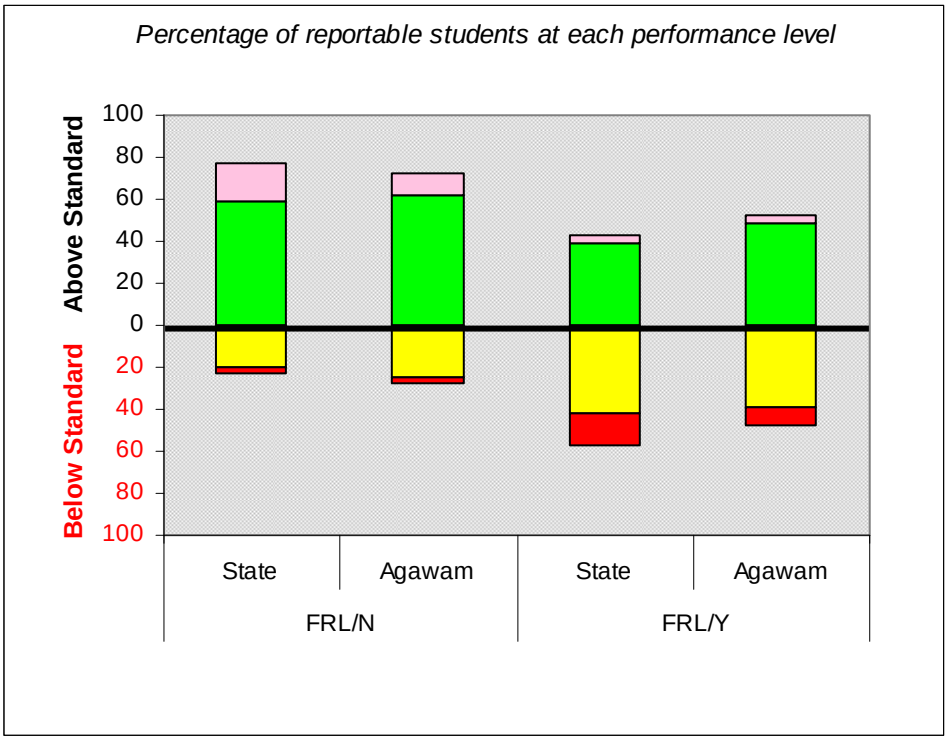



| | Regular Education | | Disability | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 10 | 8 | 2 | 2 |
| Proficient | 39 | 41 | 14 | 16 |
| Needs Improvement | 41 | 45 | 44 | 53 |
| Warning/Failing | 10 | 7 | 40 | 29 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 49 | 49 | 16 | 18 |
| Proficiency Index (SPI) | 77.5 | 79.5 | 51.8 | 56.9 |

In Agawam in 2007, the proficiency rate in science and technology/engineering of regular education students was more than two and one-half times greater than that of students with disabilities. Forty-nine percent of regular education students and 18 percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in STE on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Agawam's STE proficiency gap in 2007 was 20 PI points for regular education students, compared to 22 PI points statewide, and 43 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 48 PI points statewide. The performance gap in STE between Agawam's regular education students and students with disabilities was 23 PI points.

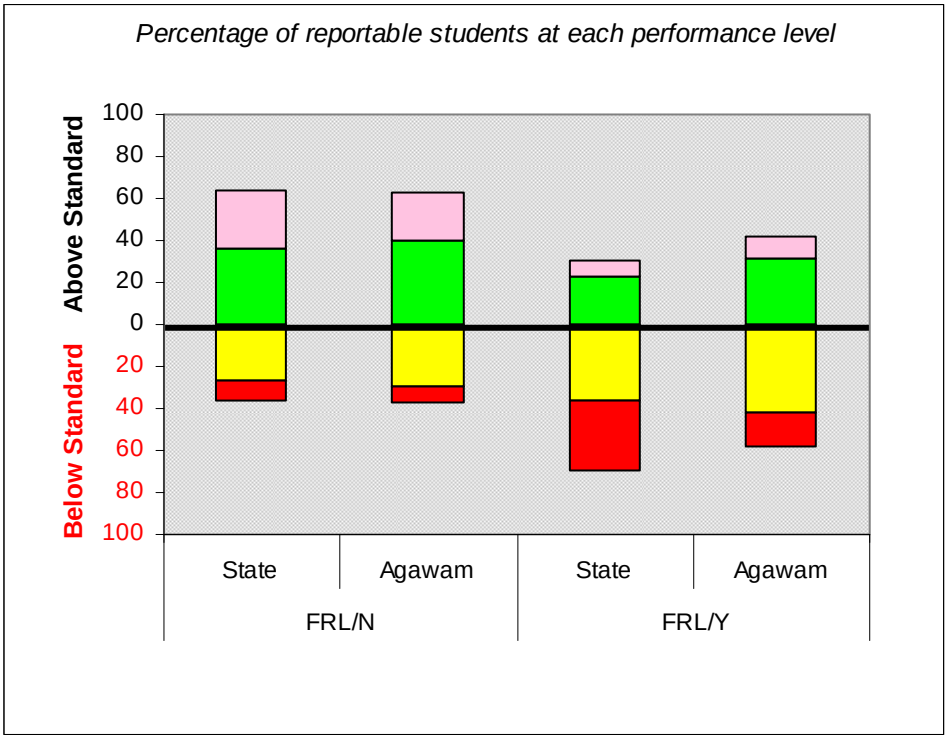
**Figure/Table 11: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007**




| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 17 | 11 | 4 | 4 |
| Proficient | 59 | 62 | 39 | 49 |
| Needs Improvement | 20 | 25 | 42 | 39 |
| Warning/Failing | 3 | 3 | 15 | 9 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 76 | 73 | 43 | 53 |
| Proficiency Index (EPI) | 91.0 | 89.9 | 73.4 | 79.5 |

In Agawam in 2007, 53 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in ELA on the MCAS tests, compared to 73 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The ELA proficiency gap was 20 PI points for low-income students, compared to 27 PI points statewide, and 10 PI points for non low-income students, compared to nine PI points statewide. Agawam's performance gap in ELA between the two subgroups was 10 PI points.

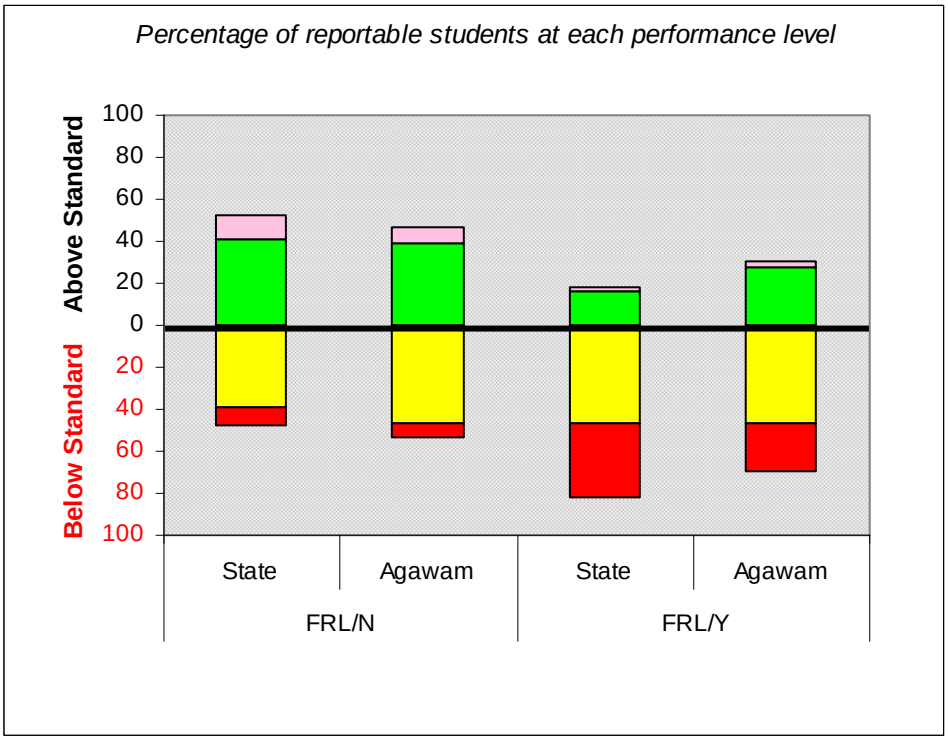
**Figure/Table 12: MCAS Math Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007**




| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 27 | 23 | 8 | 11 |
| Proficient | 36 | 40 | 23 | 31 |
| Needs Improvement | 27 | 30 | 37 | 42 |
| Warning/Failing | 10 | 7 | 33 | 16 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 63 | 63 | 31 | 42 |
| Proficiency Index (MPI) | 82.7 | 83.5 | 60.3 | 72.0 |

In Agawam in 2007, 42 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests, compared to 63 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in math was 28 PI points for low-income students, compared to 40 PI points statewide, and 16 PI points for non low-income students, compared to 17 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between the two subgroups in Agawam was 12 PI points.

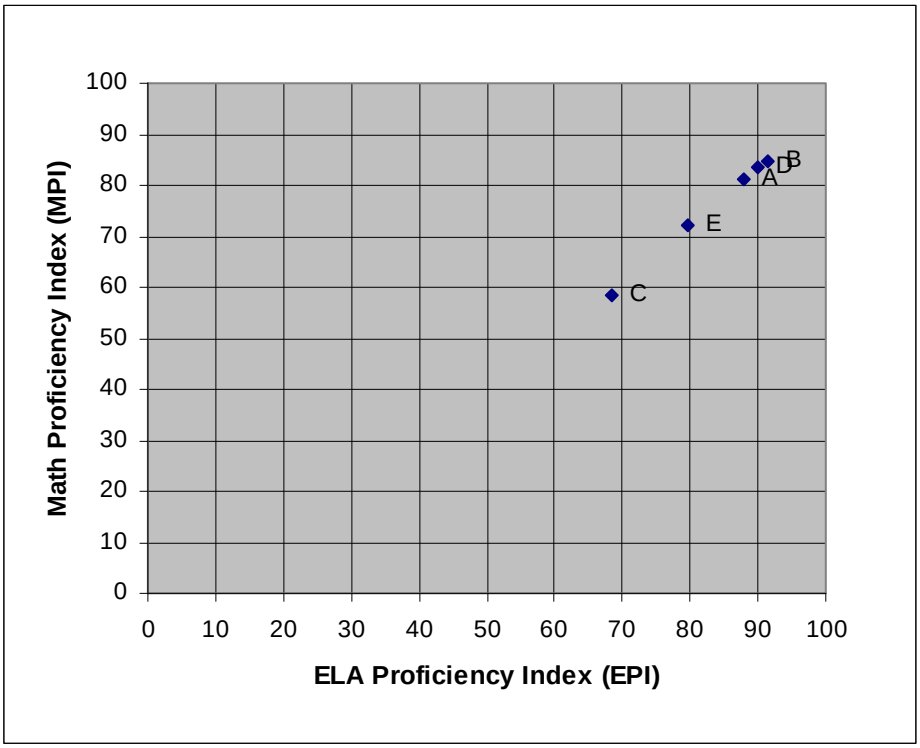
**Figure/Table 13: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007**




| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Agawam | State | Agawam |
| Advanced | 11 | 8 | 2 | 2 |
| Proficient | 41 | 39 | 17 | 28 |
| Needs Improvement | 39 | 46 | 47 | 47 |
| Warning/Failing | 9 | 7 | 34 | 23 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 52 | 47 | 19 | 30 |
| Proficiency Index (SPI) | 79.4 | 78.3 | 55.2 | 66.1 |

In Agawam in 2007, 30 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in STE on the MCAS tests, compared to 47 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in STE was 34 PI points for low-income students, compared to 45 PI points statewide, and 22 PI points for non low-income students, compared to 21 PI points statewide. Agawam's performance gap in STE between the two subgroups was 12 PI points.

**Figure/Table 14: MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index by Subgroup, 2007**



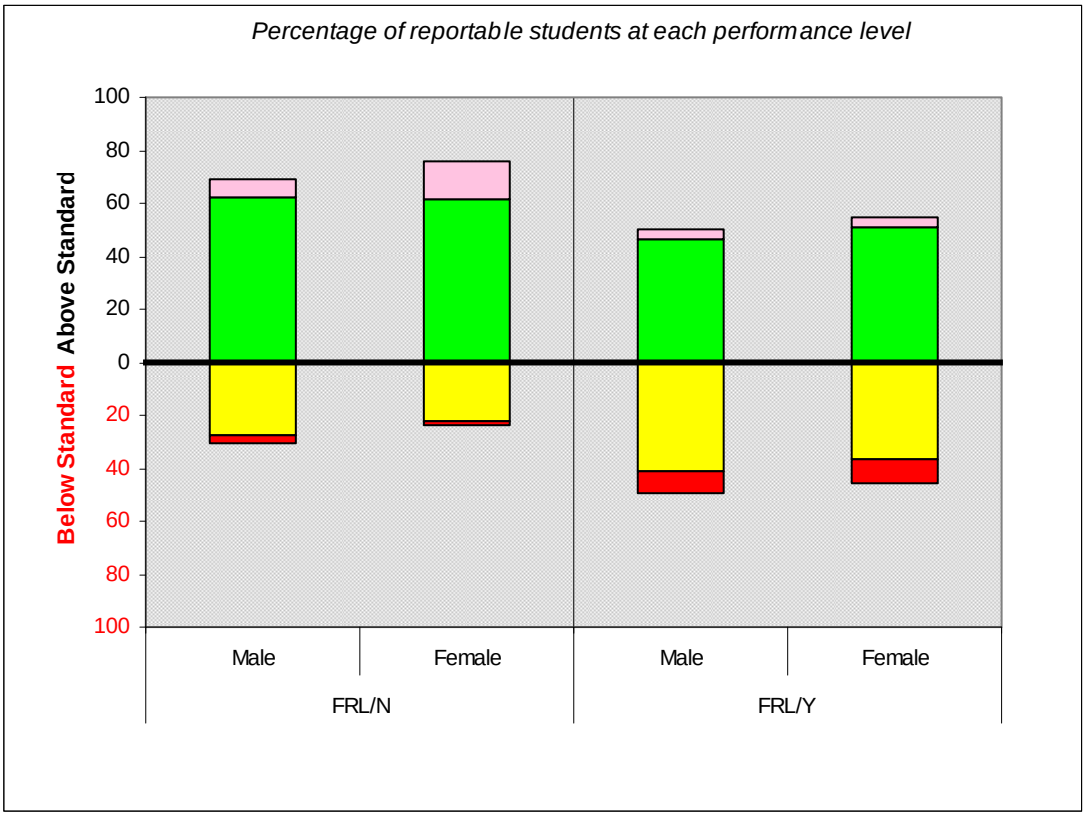

| | | ELA PI | Math PI | Number of Tests |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Agawam | 87.9 | 81.3 | 4,788 |
| B | Regular Education | 91.4 | 84.9 | 4,070 |
| C | Disability | 68.4 | 58.3 | 638 |
| D | FRL/N | 89.9 | 83.5 | 3,864 |
| E | FRL/Y | 79.5 | 72.0 | 924 |

The gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in Agawam in 2007 was 23 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 27 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

Regular education students and non low-income students in Agawam performed above the district average in both ELA and math in 2007, while students with disabilities and low-income students performed below the district average in both subjects.

Each subgroup in Agawam had stronger performance in ELA than in math on the 2007 MCAS tests. The gap between performance in ELA and math was six and one-half PI points for regular education students, 10 PI points for students with disabilities, six and one-half PI points for non low-income students, and seven and one-half PI points for low-income students.

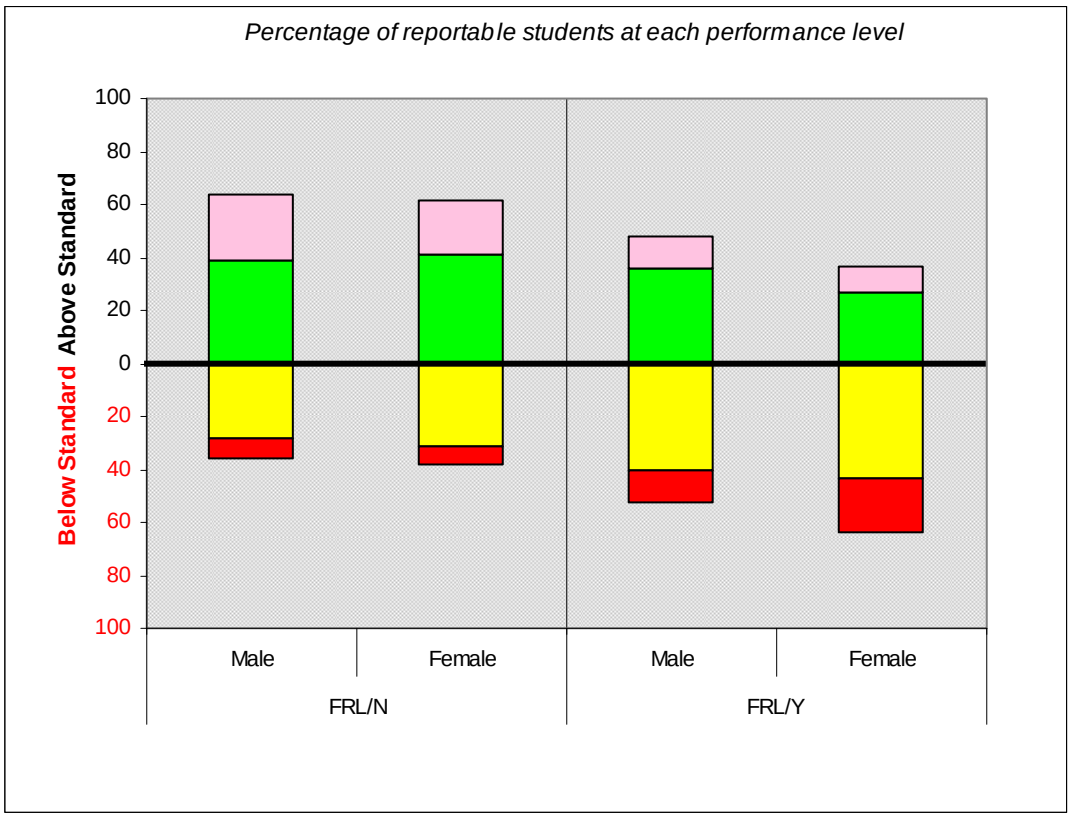
**Figure/Table 15: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007**




| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Advanced | 7 | 15 | 4 | 4 |
| Proficient | 62 | 61 | 46 | 51 |
| Needs Improvement | 27 | 22 | 41 | 37 |
| Warning/ Failing | 4 | 2 | 9 | 9 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 69 | 76 | 50 | 55 |
| Proficiency Index (EPI) | 88.4 | 91.6 | 79.1 | 79.9 |
| Number of Tests | 1,001 | 932 | 228 | 233 |

On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, Agawam's female students outperformed male students in both socioeconomic subgroups. The performance gap in ELA between female and male students was three PI points for non-low income students and one PI point for low-income students.

**Figure/Table 16: MCAS Math Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007**




| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Advanced | 25 | 20 | 12 | 10 |
| Proficient | 39 | 41 | 36 | 27 |
| Needs Improvement | 28 | 31 | 40 | 43 |
| Warning/ Failing | 8 | 7 | 12 | 20 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 64 | 61 | 48 | 37 |
| Proficiency Index (EPI) | 83.9 | 83.1 | 75.4 | 68.6 |
| Number of Tests | 1,000 | 931 | 228 | 235 |

On the 2007 MCAS tests in math, Agawam's male students outperformed female students in the both socioeconomic subgroups. The performance gap in math between male and female students was one PI point for non-low income students and seven PI points for low-income students.

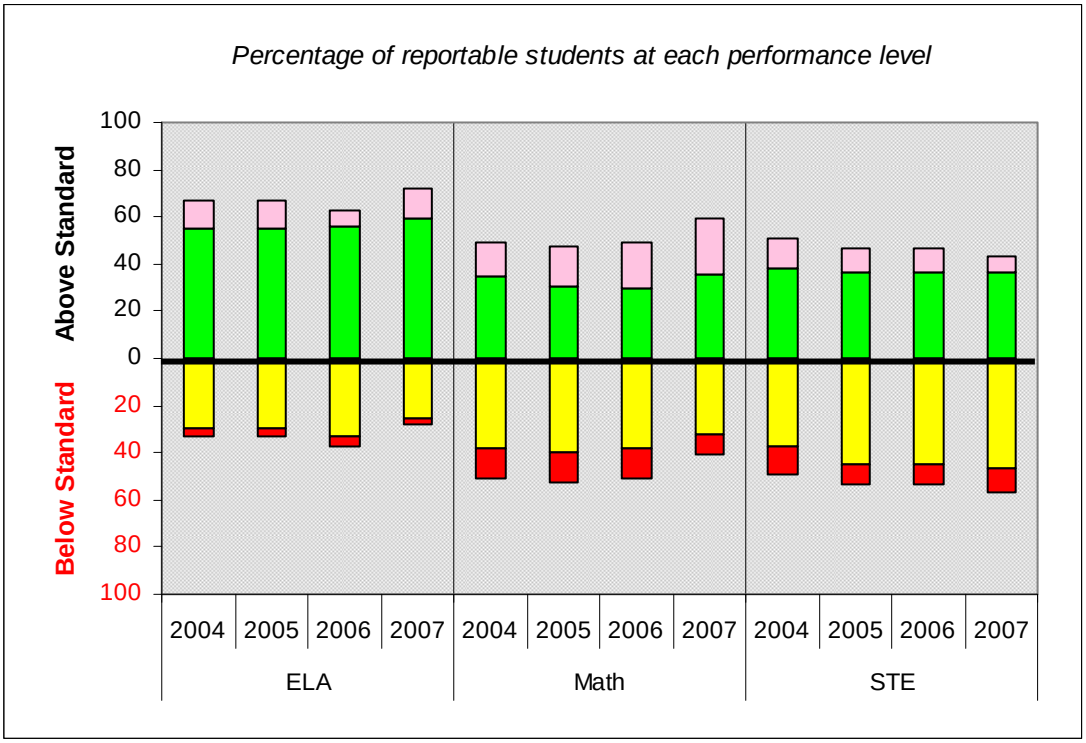
## Improvement

### Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

**Findings:**

- Between 2004 and 2007, Agawam's MCAS performance showed improvement in English language arts and in math, and a slight decline in science and technology/engineering.
- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Agawam improved at an average of less than one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of nearly 16 percent, a rate lower than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 66 percent in 2004 to 71 percent in 2007, with the gain occurring between 2006 and 2007.
- Math performance in Agawam showed more improvement over this period, at an average of two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 24 percent, also a rate lower than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math rose from 50 percent in 2004 to 60 percent in 2007, with the gain also occurring between 2006 and 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Agawam had a slight decline in STE performance of more than one PI point over the three-year period, resulting in a widening of the proficiency gap by close to six percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 51 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2007.

**Figure/Table 17: MCAS Test Performance by Subject, 2004-2007**




| | ELA | | | | Math | | | | STE | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
| Advanced | 11 | 12 | 7 | 12 | 15 | 17 | 20 | 24 | 13 | 10 | 10 | 7 |
| Proficient | 55 | 55 | 56 | 59 | 35 | 31 | 29 | 36 | 38 | 36 | 36 | 37 |
| Needs Improvement | 30 | 30 | 33 | 25 | 38 | 39 | 38 | 33 | 37 | 45 | 45 | 46 |
| Warning/ Failing | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 8 | 12 | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 66 | 67 | 63 | 71 | 50 | 48 | 49 | 60 | 51 | 46 | 46 | 44 |
| Proficiency Index (PI) | 87.3 | 87.6 | 85.2 | 89.3 | 76.3 | 75.4 | 76.2 | 82.0 | 77.3 | 77.4 | 77.4 | 76.0 |

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2007 ELA and math data may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 1.

The percentage of Agawam students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 66 percent in 2004 to 71 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in ELA narrowed from 13 to 11 PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of nearly 16 percent, a rate lower than that required to make AYP.

The percentage of Agawam students attaining proficiency in math increased from 50 percent in 2004 to 60 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 24 to 18 PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 24 percent, also a rate lower than that required to make AYP.

The percentage of Agawam students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 51 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in STE widened by close to six percent from 23 to 24 PI points.

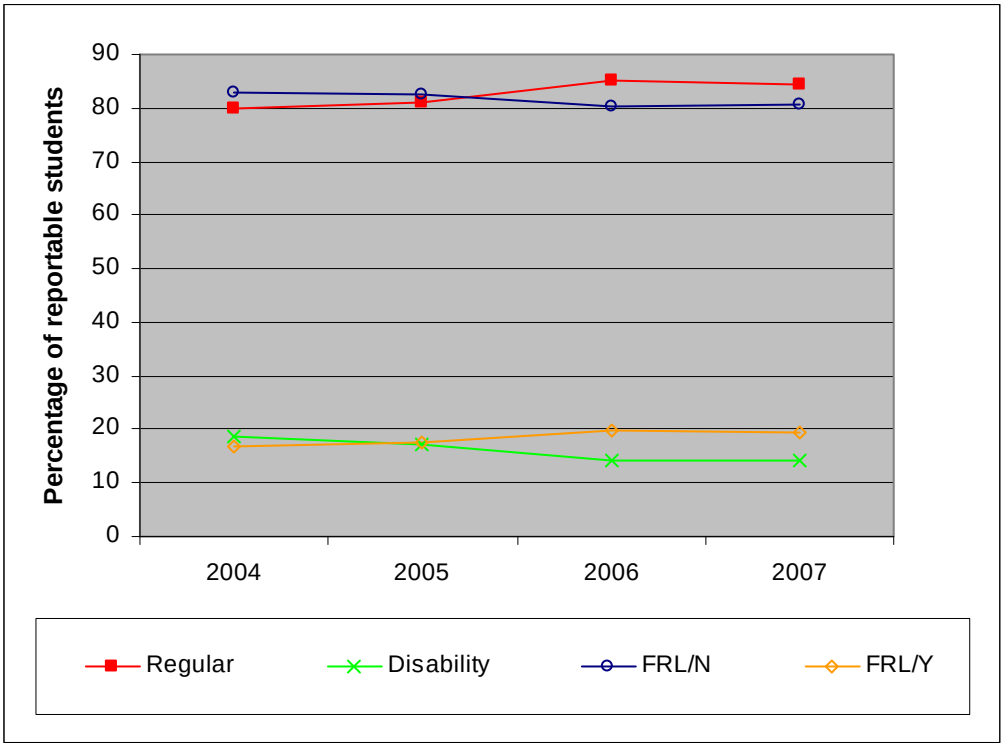
## Equity of Improvement

### Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?

**Findings:**

- In Agawam, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA was 19 PI points in both 2004 and 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 21 to 27 PI points over this period.
- All student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students, whose performance improved by two and one-half PI points. The performance of the other subgroups improved by one PI point or less.
- In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Agawam with the exception of students in disabilities improved between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroup in math was also non low-income students, whose performance improved by six PI points.

**Figure/Table 18: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2004-2007**



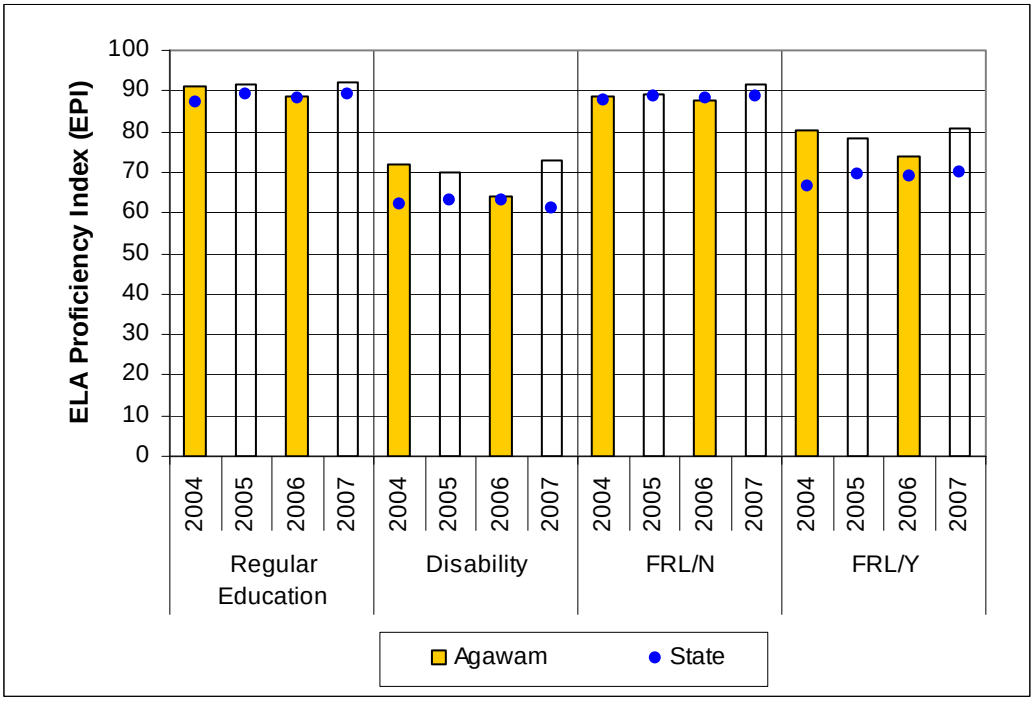

| | Number of Students | | | | Percentage of students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** |
| Agawam | 1,987 | 1,997 | 2,379 | 2,418 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Regular | 1,588 | 1,621 | 2,024 | 2,039 | 79.9 | 81.2 | 85.1 | 84.3 |
| Disability | 371 | 345 | 334 | 339 | 18.7 | 17.3 | 14.0 | 14.0 |
| FRL/N | 1,651 | 1,647 | 1,906 | 1,949 | 83.1 | 82.5 | 80.1 | 80.6 |
| FRL/Y | 336 | 350 | 473 | 469 | 16.9 | 17.5 | 19.9 | 19.4 |

Note: The 2007 percentages of students reported here may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 7; the percentages shown here are based on the total number of students in the district, whereas the percentages shown in Figure 7 are based on the number of students in reportable subgroups. Data include students in tested grades only.

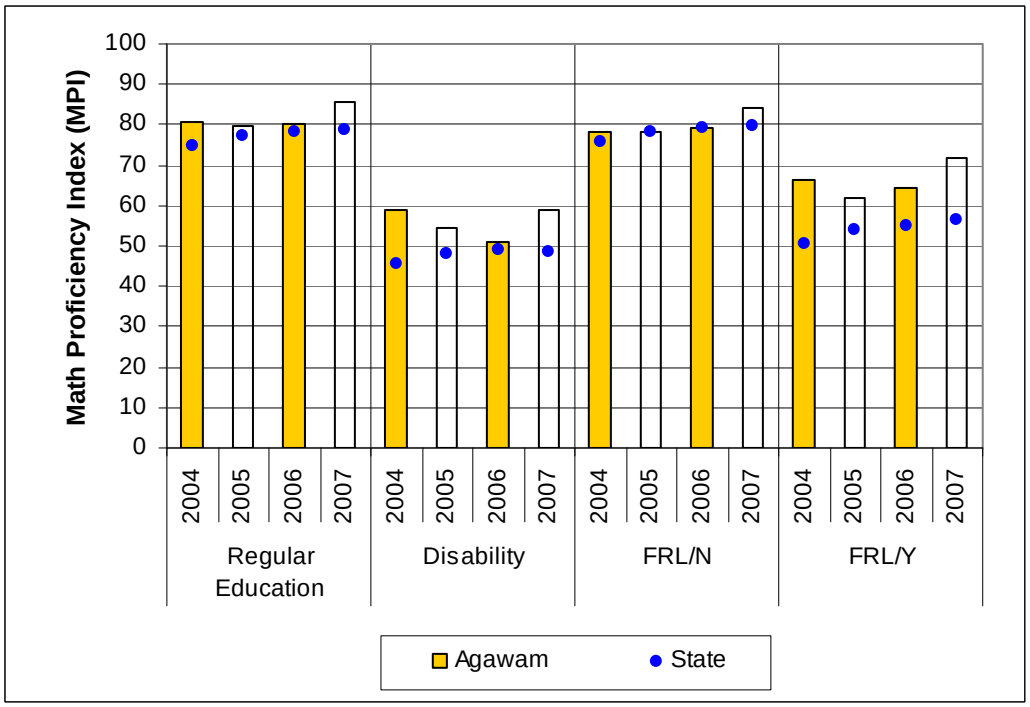
Between 2004 and 2007 in Agawam, the proportion of regular education students increased by more than four percentage points and that of students with disabilities declined by nearly five percentage points. The proportion of low-income students increased by two and one-half percentage points.

**Figures 19 A-B/Table 19: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Subgroup, 2004-2007**

**A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups**




**B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups**

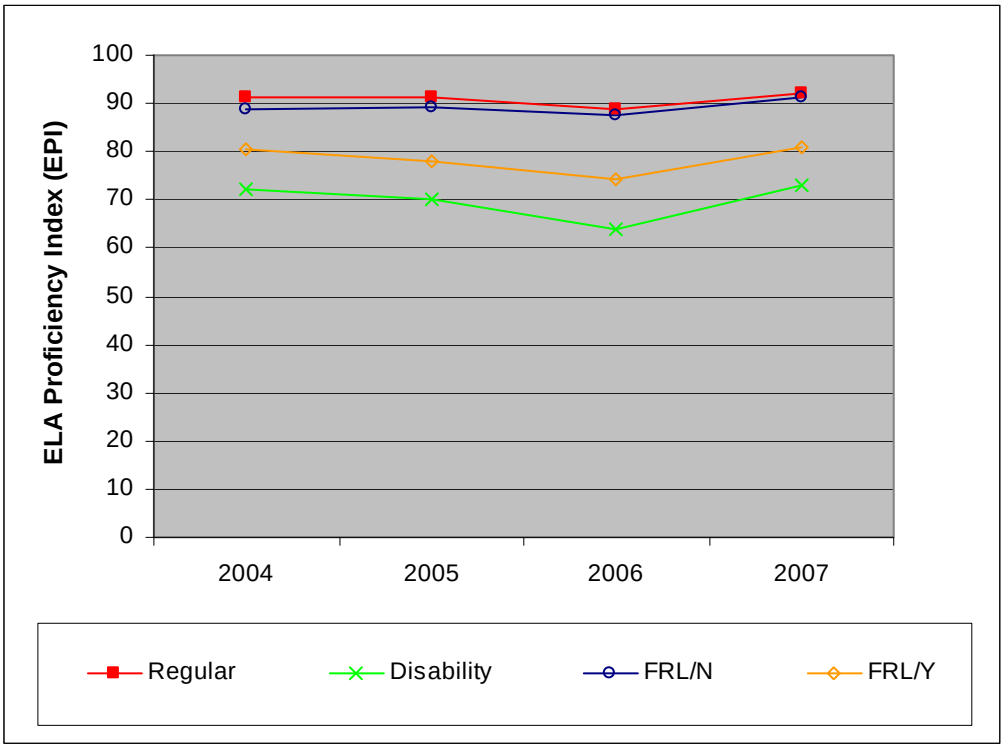


| State | | | | Agawam | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Subgroup** | **Year** | **EPI** | **MPI** | **Subgroup** | **Year** | **EPI** | **MPI** |
| Regular Education | 2004 | 87.3 | 74.7 | Regular Education | 2004 | 91.3 | 80.5 |
| | 2005 | 89.2 | 77.4 | | 2005 | 91.4 | 79.9 |
| | 2006 | 88.3 | 78.2 | | 2006 | 88.6 | 80.1 |
| | 2007 | 89.0 | 78.9 | | 2007 | 92.0 | 85.7 |
| Disability | 2004 | 62.1 | 45.3 | Disability | 2004 | 72.0 | 59.1 |
| | 2005 | 63.3 | 47.9 | | 2005 | 70.1 | 54.4 |
| | 2006 | 62.9 | 49.0 | | 2006 | 63.8 | 51.1 |
| | 2007 | 61.2 | 48.4 | | 2007 | 73.0 | 58.9 |
| FRL/N | 2004 | 87.9 | 75.9 | FRL/N | 2004 | 88.8 | 78.4 |
| | 2005 | 88.9 | 78.1 | | 2005 | 89.4 | 78.1 |
| | 2006 | 88.3 | 79.0 | | 2006 | 87.6 | 79.3 |
| | 2007 | 88.6 | 79.7 | | 2007 | 91.4 | 84.2 |
| FRL/Y | 2004 | 66.6 | 50.7 | FRL/Y | 2004 | 80.3 | 66.2 |
| | 2005 | 69.7 | 53.9 | | 2005 | 78.1 | 61.9 |
| | 2006 | 68.8 | 55.0 | | 2006 | 74.1 | 64.2 |
| | 2007 | 70.0 | 56.3 | | 2007 | 80.8 | 71.7 |

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 8, 9, 11, and 12.

In Agawam, most student subgroups had greater improvement in math than in ELA between 2004 and 2007. Over this period, the performance of regular education students improved by one PI point in ELA and by five PI points in math. The performance of students with disabilities improved by one PI point in ELA and stayed the same in math. The performance of non-low income students improved by two and one-half PI points in ELA and by six points in math. The performance of low-income students improved by one-half PI point in ELA and by five and one-half points in math.

**Figure/Table 20: MCAS English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007**



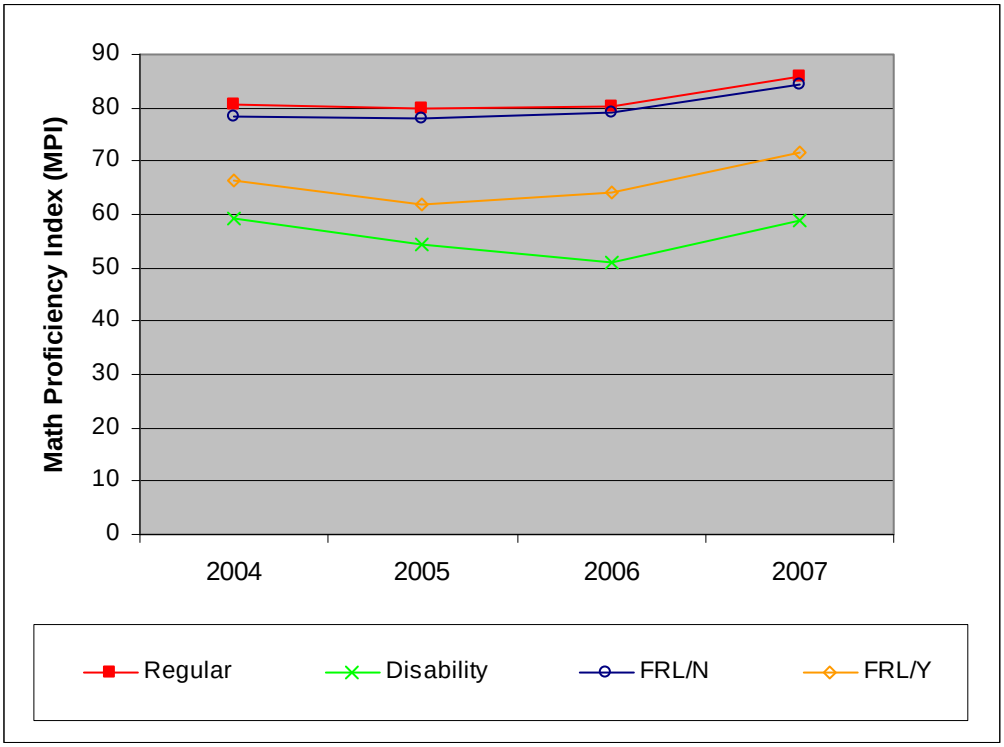

| | ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) | | | | Percent Attaining Proficiency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
| Agawam | 87.3 | 87.6 | 85.2 | 89.3 | 67 | 67 | 63 | 72 |
| Regular | 91.3 | 91.4 | 88.6 | 92.0 | 75 | 75 | 69 | 77 |
| Disability | 72.0 | 70.1 | 63.8 | 73.0 | 36 | 30 | 23 | 38 |
| FRL/N | 88.8 | 89.4 | 87.6 | 91.4 | 70 | 71 | 67 | 76 |
| FRL/Y | 80.3 | 78.1 | 74.1 | 80.8 | 51 | 48 | 40 | 55 |

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 8 and 11.

All student subgroups in Agawam had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The ELA proficiency gap for Agawam's regular education students narrowed from nine to eight PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of eight percent, and for students with disabilities it narrowed by three and one-half percent from 28 to 27 PI points. The ELA proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed from 11 to eight and one-half PI points, an improvement rate of 23 percent, and for low-income students it narrowed by two and one-half percent from 20 to 19 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in ELA between regular education students and students with disabilities remained the same. The performance gap in ELA between non low-income and low-income students widened by two PI points over this period.

**Figure/Table 21: MCAS Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007**



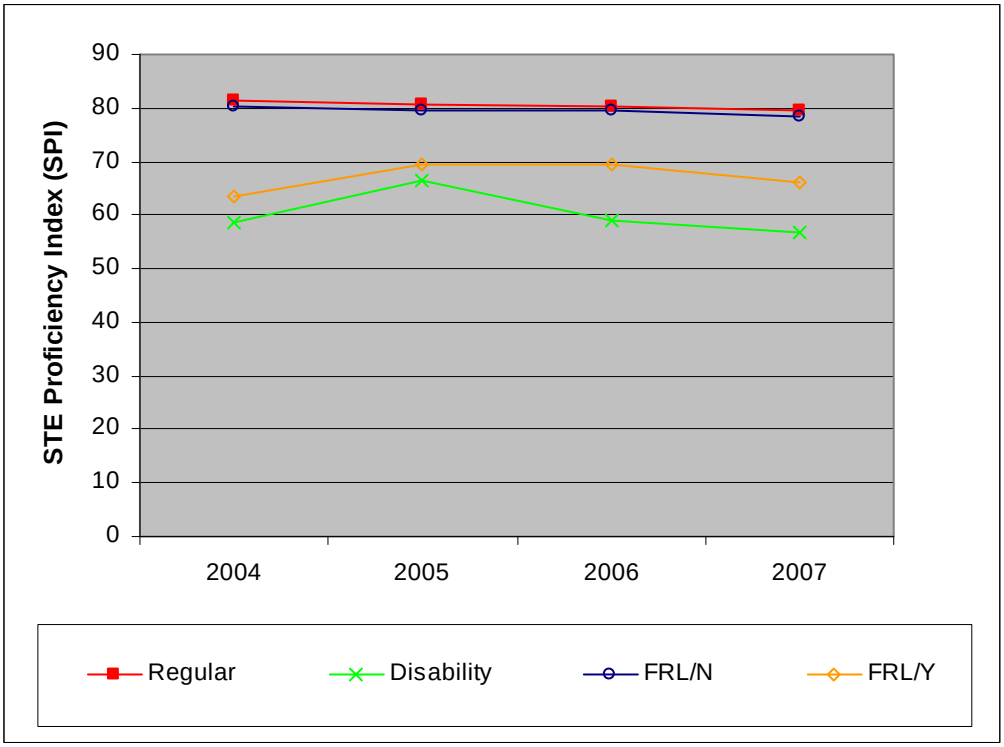

| | Math Proficiency Index (MPI) | | | | Percent Attaining Proficiency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** |
| Agawam | 76.3 | 75.4 | 76.2 | 82.0 | 49 | 48 | 49 | 59 |
| Regular | 80.5 | 79.9 | 80.1 | 85.7 | 55 | 54 | 54 | 65 |
| Disability | 59.1 | 54.4 | 51.1 | 58.9 | 28 | 18 | 17 | 23 |
| FRL/N | 78.4 | 78.1 | 79.3 | 84.2 | 53 | 52 | 54 | 63 |
| FRL/Y | 66.2 | 61.9 | 64.2 | 71.7 | 34 | 25 | 31 | 41 |

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 9 and 12.

In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Agawam except students with disabilities improved between 2004 and 2007. The math proficiency gap for Agawam's regular education students narrowed from 20 to 14 PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 27 percent, and for students with disabilities it stayed at 41 PI points. The math proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed from 22 to 16 PI points, an improvement rate of 27 percent, and for low-income students it narrowed from 34 to 28 PI points, an improvement rate of 16 percent.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in math between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by five and one-half PI points. The performance gap in math between non low-income and low-income students remained the same over this period.

**Figure/Table 22: MCAS STE Proficiency Index (SPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007**




| | STE Proficiency Index (SPI) | | | | Percent Attaining Proficiency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
| Agawam | 77.3 | 77.4 | 77.4 | 76.0 | 51 | 46 | 47 | 44 |
| Regular | 81.3 | 80.5 | 80.3 | 79.5 | 57 | 51 | 51 | 48 |
| Disability | 58.8 | 66.5 | 59.0 | 56.9 | 22 | 28 | 18 | 18 |
| FRL/N | 80.3 | 79.6 | 79.6 | 78.3 | 56 | 49 | 50 | 47 |
| FRL/Y | 63.6 | 69.6 | 69.4 | 66.1 | 28 | 34 | 33 | 30 |

In science and technology/engineering, the only student subgroup in Agawam with improved performance between 2004 and 2007 was low-income students. The STE proficiency gap for Agawam's regular education students widened by 10 percent from 19 to 21 PI points over this period, and for students with disabilities it widened by five percent from 41 to 43 PI points. The STE proficiency gap for non low-income students widened by 10 percent from 20 to 22 PI points, and for low-income students it narrowed from 36 to 34 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of seven percent.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in STE between regular education students and students with disabilities remained the same. The performance gap in STE between non low-income and low-income students narrowed by four and one-half PI points over this period.

## Participation

### Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

**Finding:**

- On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Agawam participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

## n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2007

| Subgroup | Performance Level | ELA | Math | STE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agawam | ALL LEVELS | **2,394** | **2,394** | **708** |
| | Advanced | 225 | 493 | 47 |
| | Proficient | 1,418 | 915 | 261 |
| | Needs Improvement | 657 | 771 | 329 |
| | Warning/Failing | 94 | 215 | 71 |
| Regular Education | Advanced | 221 | 481 | 45 |
| | Proficient | 1,308 | 832 | 242 |
| | Needs Improvement | 471 | 606 | 269 |
| | Warning/Failing | 35 | 116 | 40 |
| Disability | Advanced | 4 | 11 | 2 |
| | Proficient | 102 | 63 | 16 |
| | Needs Improvement | 158 | 150 | 54 |
| | Warning/Failing | 55 | 95 | 29 |
| Limited English Proficient | Advanced | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | Proficient | 8 | 20 | 3 |
| | Needs Improvement | 28 | 15 | 6 |
| | Warning/Failing | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| White | Advanced | 213 | 472 | 46 |
| | Proficient | 1,367 | 870 | 260 |
| | Needs Improvement | 611 | 731 | 312 |
| | Warning/Failing | 81 | 198 | 64 |
| Hispanic | Advanced | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| | Proficient | 18 | 22 | 0 |
| | Needs Improvement | 20 | 14 | 6 |
| | Warning/Failing | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| African-American | Advanced | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| | Proficient | 15 | 9 | 1 |
| | Needs Improvement | 12 | 11 | 8 |
| | Warning/Failing | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| Asian | Advanced | 3 | 7 | 0 |
| | Proficient | 9 | 5 | 0 |
| | Needs Improvement | 4 | 6 | 2 |
| | Warning/Failing | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No | Advanced | 207 | 443 | 44 |
| | Proficient | 1,194 | 770 | 224 |
| | Needs Improvement | 478 | 577 | 267 |
| | Warning/Failing | 54 | 141 | 41 |
| Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes | Advanced | 18 | 50 | 3 |
| | Proficient | 224 | 145 | 37 |
| | Needs Improvement | 179 | 194 | 62 |
| | Warning/Failing | 40 | 74 | 30 |
| Male | Advanced | 80 | 280 | 31 |
| | Proficient | 727 | 469 | 150 |
| | Needs Improvement | 366 | 376 | 161 |
| | Warning/Failing | 56 | 103 | 31 |
| Female | Advanced | 145 | 213 | 16 |
| | Proficient | 691 | 446 | 111 |
| | Needs Improvement | 291 | 395 | 168 |
| | Warning/Failing | 38 | 112 | 40 |

## n-Values by Grade and Year, 2004-2007

| Grade | Year | ELA | Math | STE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 3 | 2004 | 345 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 333 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 334 | 332 | 0 |
| | 2007 | 322 | 321 | 0 |
| Grade 4 | 2004 | 321 | 323 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 349 | 348 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 339 | 338 | 0 |
| | 2007 | 333 | 334 | 0 |
| Grade 5 | 2004 | 0 | 0 | 347 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 0 | 331 |
| | 2006 | 350 | 351 | 351 |
| | 2007 | 352 | 352 | 352 |
| Grade 6 | 2004 | 0 | 339 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 348 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 336 | 341 | 0 |
| | 2007 | 355 | 354 | 0 |
| Grade 7 | 2004 | 368 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 351 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 347 | 354 | 0 |
| | 2007 | 351 | 354 | 0 |
| Grade 8 | 2004 | 0 | 367 | 367 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 355 | 355 |
| | 2006 | 351 | 352 | 352 |
| | 2007 | 356 | 354 | 356 |
| Grade 10 | 2004 | 265 | 265 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 287 | 286 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 302 | 297 | 0 |
| | 2007 | 325 | 325 | 0 |
| All Grades | 2004 | 1,299 | 1,294 | 714 |
| | 2005 | 1,320 | 1,337 | 686 |
| | 2006 | 2,359 | 2,365 | 703 |
| | 2007 | 2,394 | 2,394 | 708 |

## Notes

Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years. The following grades are included in the trend data for 2004-2007 reported in Figure/Tables 17-22 and in the table of n-values by grade and year:
English language arts (ELA): 3, 4, 7, 10
Math: 4, 6, 8, 10
Science and technology/engineering (STE): 5, 8

The highest performance level for grade 3 reading in 2006 and 2007 was Advanced/Above Proficient; this level did not exist in prior years, when the highest level was Proficient.

Subgroup inclusion is based on the number of students and the number of schools in the district. To be included as reportable, a subgroup must have at least 10 times the number of schools in the district. Subgroup inclusion for all years of the trend data is based on the 2007 data.

N-values represent the number of tests taken unless otherwise specified.

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

# Standard Summaries

| Standard I: Leadership, Governance, and Communication | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **14** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | **1** |
| **Satisfactory** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | **12** |
| **Needs Improvement** | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | **1** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## I. Leadership, Governance, and Communication

School committee, district leadership, and school leadership established, implemented, and continuously evaluated the cost effectiveness and efficiency of policies and procedures that were standards-based, focused on student achievement data and designed to promote continuous improvement of instructional practice and high achievement for all students. Leadership actions and decisions related to the attainment of district and school goals were routinely communicated to the community and promoted public confidence, financial commitment and community support needed to achieve high student and staff performance.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- The district had a Vision 2010 strategic plan, a District Improvement Plan, and a School Improvement Plan for each school, and all were in alignment.
- The school committee, chaired by the mayor, experienced minimal turnover. All members participated in training programs, were active in local and state meetings, and understood their roles.
- The district utilized various sources of data to aid in the development and regular update of programs to best meet the needs of the entire student body. The administrative team met on a biweekly basis to review data to ensure the district made sound educational decisions.
- The superintendent worked very closely with the business manager, the school committee's budget subcommittee, and town officials during budget development, addressing the goals in Vision 2010, the DIP, and the SIPs pertaining to the financial needs of the district and each school.

- The superintendent evaluated each administrator on an annual basis utilizing a check-off tool that included the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. Each administrator evaluation reviewed by the EQA, however, lacked a narrative of any nature pertaining to the strengths and/or weaknesses of the administrator.
- The district had a crisis/safety plan in place reviewed on an annual basis by the superintendent, the entire administrative team, the chief of police, and the fire chief. Regular drills occurred annually, and all new staff members received appropriate training prior to the start of the school year.
- The district formed many partnerships with a variety of agencies and local businesses to provide at-risk students and families the resources needed to deal with a variety of social and health-related issues.

**Summary**

The superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator, and the district practiced site-based management. The entire administrative team, comprised of the superintendent and assistant superintendents, principals, and director of special services, met biweekly, and the superintendent prepared agendas for all meetings with input from administrative team members. The superintendent expanded upon the general agenda by having a leadership activity presented by a different administrator once a month.

The seven members of the school committee included six elected members and the mayor who served as chairperson. The committee had minimal turnover, was involved in local and state meetings, and totally understood its role to advocate for students. Newly elected members met with the superintendent as soon as possible following the election, and they received the policy manual and all pertinent information needed to prepare them for the position. While the committee did not have a formal mentoring program in place, veteran members offered their assistance and support to new members via telephone, face to face meetings, and e-mail. The committee had formal subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and budget development and formed an ad hoc committee during contract negotiations. The school committee's policy manual showed signs of age, and while the committee had made some updates and modifications, it acknowledged that the entire manual needed to be reviewed. The live airing of committee

meetings allowed the community the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the district and each school and program.

The district developed systems for data analysis, alignment of curriculum and instruction, and provision of appropriate professional development to ensure the fulfillment of the goals included in the Vision 2010 strategic plan, the District Improvement Plan (DIP), and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The district has conducted strategic planning for a number of years and expected Vision 2010 to lead the district forward. The five-point plan, which included mission and vision statements as well as core values and eight district goals, served as the cornerstone of the district and all members of the educational community embraced it. The local newspaper absorbed the cost of printing the district brochures, which all parents/guardians received at the beginning of the school year. The school committee reviewed all plans on a regular basis, and formal presentations by the superintendent and building principals occurred during the spring of each school year. Vision 2010, the DIP, and the SIPs were all in alignment and included specific goals regarding student achievement and the use of data.

The district analyzed MCAS test data on a regular basis utilizing TestWiz, and administrators provided the school committee and the community at large with an annual report outlining the MCAS results and the achievements of the district. School committee members used the data in this report when making budget decisions.

While the district regularly reviewed aggregated assessment data, the only use of disaggregated data was for the special education and low-income subgroups. The district did not disaggregate other data because of limited numbers of students in other subgroups. Members of the teaching staff were afforded the opportunity to participate in many professional development activities. Faculty and grade-level meetings focused on school programming, the review of data, curriculum, and assessment.

The district website provided a great amount of information and included updated notices of importance issued by the superintendent of schools, profiles of the school committee and the administrative team, as well as links to all schools. The school committee, the superintendent, town officials, and all of the unions in the district worked collaboratively with the entire

community to succeed in its attempt to provide a challenging educational system for the student body.

**Indicators**

1. The district and school leaders had a clearly understood vision and/or mission, goals, and priorities included in the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The standards-based plan and the analysis of student achievement data drove the development, implementation, and modification of educational programs.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had a strategic plan, developed by the current superintendent, covering the school years 2002 to 2006. The district developed an updated plan in 2006 by a steering committee including the administration, school committee members, staff members, parents, and community members/leaders entitled "Vision 2010." The five-point plan included the areas of business/financial management; curriculum, instruction and assessment; professional staff; school governance and leadership; and student/staff/parent programs and services. Vision 2010 included a mission statement, vision statement, core values, and eight district goals.

The district utilized its No Child Left Behind (NCLB) plan as the District Improvement Plan (DIP), which it has updated on two occasions during the past five years. The plan had five goals and included person (s) responsible, timelines, expected results, and potential financial commitments. Review of the plan occurred on a regular basis at administrative and faculty meetings, and the contents became the cornerstone of the district management. The five major goals were English language arts (ELA) and math proficiency for all students, academic success of English language learner (ELL) students, hiring of highly qualified staff, drug-free and safe schools conducive to learning, and 100 percent of students graduating from high school. The EQA review of administrative meeting agendas, faculty meeting agendas, and school committee minutes verified that discussion occurred on a regular basis, and the community became aware of the plan's status through televised meetings, materials sent home with the students, and the local newspapers. Annual reports given during school committee meetings described the extent to which the goals and objectives were met, which brought forth discussion regarding needed

program changes and updates, as well as the financial implications that might arise during the establishment of the next budget.

Interviewees stated that the analysis and review of data prompted changes, modifications, and the adoption/revision of programs in the district, and all initiatives were tied to the DIP. Many examples surfaced during the interview sessions, including major initiatives in ELA and mathematics.

The district posted its mission statement, vision, and goals on its website, and the local weekly newspaper included a brochure with this information during the first week of school at no cost to the district.

2. School committee members were informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act, and relied on student achievement data and other educationally relevant data as the foundation of their policy-making and decision-making.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The seven-member school committee included six elected officials serving two-year terms and the mayor who served as the chairperson. It experienced minimal turnover, and years of service ranged from two to 35 years. During the interview session, those members present stated they all attended the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) training program for school committee members. Members also stated they were active in district meetings as well as the annual meeting. One member previously served as the president of the MASC. New members met with the superintendent to review their responsibilities and received a copy of the policy manual, a great deal of supporting information pertaining to the district, and an update of current issues facing the district. While there was no formal mentoring program in place, veteran members communicated with newly elected members to offer assistance. Interviewees stated that the superintendent had regular conversations with the committee and the lines of communication were always open. School committee members acknowledged that the superintendent quickly informed the committee of any issues that arose to ensure that no surprises came up at school committee meetings.

The committee had active subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and budget development and added a special education subcommittee during the 2007-2008 school year. In addition, the committee established an ad hoc committee during contract negotiations to assist and keep the entire committee apprised of the status of each contract.

School committee members all stated that they were knowledgeable about their responsibilities, that they left the day to day operations of the district in the hands of the superintendent, and that micromanagement did not hinder the operation of the district. They further stated the committee's role was that of a policymaking board which offers support in the form of advocating for students.

The school committee's policy manual showed that the committee had revised some established policies and had adopted new policies during the period under review. The committee acknowledged that it had not addressed many of the policies in the manual for a number of years, and that they intended to review the manual in its entirety during the next school year. Veteran members stated that MASC assisted the district a number of years ago when the policy manual needed revision and would once again provide assistance.

School committee members emphasized the importance they placed on the use of data to inform both budget and program decisions for the district. They cited the example of providing portable classrooms to accommodate new special education programs established to reduce the number of out-of-district placements.

3. The district was highly effective at data selection, data generation, data gathering and interpretation, data use, and data-driven decision-making.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The EQA team found information regarding both the selection and gathering of data in its review of documents, and interviewees consistently stated the district had procedures and practices in place that both supported the use of data and were derived from the use of data. During the period under review, the district conducted a great deal of MCAS data analysis on a regular basis and shared the results with the school committee and the community. The administrative team

and the curriculum specialists reviewed the MCAS results as soon as the information arrived in the district and promptly informed classroom teachers of their building results. Some members of the teaching staff aired some concern that they did not receive district information to make comparisons.

All administrators and curriculum specialists and some teachers have been trained in TestWiz, and the district distributed the information gained using this software to all staff members. In addition, the district engaged the services of a full-time data collection specialist. In teacher focus groups, teachers stated they understood the analyses, which enabled them to use the information during regularly scheduled faculty meetings as well as during monthly grade-level or department meetings with the curriculum specialists.

Interviewees stated that the ability of the district to review the data as soon as they arrived made it possible to adjust curricula and teaching strategies in those areas of noted strength and weakness. Examples given to the EQA team included the decision to increase the time allocated to the teaching of mathematics at both the middle and junior high schools starting in the 2005-2006 school year. In addition, the district hired two mathematics tutors to work with students in grades 9 and 10 having difficulty in mathematics, to provide small class settings, and to provide individual assistance in areas of identified weakness.

The district provided the EQA team with past copies of MCAS results that it shared with the school committee in the fall of each year. School committee members stated they spent a great deal of time reviewing and discussing the data to determine how they could provide resources during the budget planning to improve achievement scores across the district. The district presented the report during development of the annual budget, thus affording the committee the time to make adjustments deemed necessary. Members also stated that if immediate resources were needed they would support the administration in finding the necessary funding to make appropriate budget transfers.

4. Each school used an approved School Improvement Plan (SIP) that was aligned with the DIP and was based on the analysis of student achievement data. (Only for multi-school districts)

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The EQA team reviewed the annually updated School Improvement Plans (SIPs) for all district schools for each of the years under review. Each SIP contained the same goals as the DIP and addressed the particular needs of the school pertaining to student achievement and to safe and secure schools. Each plan included objectives and strategies for each of the goals and additional goals and objectives deemed necessary by the school council. Interviewees reported that school councils were very active, and recruiting members was never an issue. All plans contained specific objectives and timelines that directly related to the level of achievement on the MCAS tests and placed added emphasis in the areas of ELA and mathematics. Interviewees further stated the superintendent reviewed all SIPs and met with each principal to review the contents of each plan. The superintendent reported the status of each SIP to the school committee during the school year with the principals in attendance to answer questions. The school administrations had developed a common understanding of what was necessary to ensure all the plans aligned and were clear.

Interviewees stated that all school councils met on a monthly basis with set agendas, and meetings were publicly posted. Administrators stated that attendance at these meetings was regular, and parents and community members expressed much interest in serving on each council. The faculty meeting agendas provided evidence that discussion with all members of the staff occurred concerning the goals and objectives contained within each SIP. Administrators acknowledged they regularly discussed the goals contained in the DIP and the SIPs, and the EQA team verified this through the review of district and school meeting agendas.

5. <u>The district leadership promoted equity by treating schools' populations and allocations differently and allocating more and better resources to their students and schools with greater needs.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees in administrative and budget sessions stated that the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for business worked hand in hand and sought much information from other administrators and principals as they developed the budgets. Each building was allocated a baseline budget based on a per pupil cost that covered items such as paper, pencils, and other

classroom and teacher needs. In addition, each principal submitted additional needs such as personnel, textbooks, technology, and new programs. Principals and program directors had to justify the particular needs submitted to the central office administration as well as to the school committee's budget subcommittee. All requests and their merits were discussed during administrative meetings. When the budget did not allow for incorporating all requests, the administrative team collectively determined the requests to remain in the final budget document. Examples given to the EQA team were the intensive mathematics courses at the middle and junior high schools, MCAS prep review at the high school, and the placement of at-risk students in smaller sized classes to provide more teacher contact.

Teachers in focus groups stated they never had a problem receiving needed materials, classroom supplies, or textbooks. They further stated that if situations occurred during the school year that warranted additional supplies or materials, it was "not a problem" and their requests were granted even as the end of the school year approached. Interviewees stated that authorization required prior justification based on the needs of the student(s). In addition, parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) in each school raised money to supplement the needs of both the building and the classroom teachers. Interviewees also stated that there were no student fees assessed for any programs, including athletics and the arts, and that eligible secondary students were provided with bus transportation.

6. <u>The superintendent annually recommended and the school committee annually approved educationally sound budgets based primarily on the analysis of student achievement data and advocated for these budgets with the appropriating authority and community.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The school committee approved educationally sound budgets based on the analysis of student achievement data as evidenced through a review of documents and the interview sessions. Interviewees stated that during the entire period under review the budget development was a grassroots initiative. At the beginning of the school year, principals met with staff members to solicit their needs for the forthcoming year. The review of MCAS test results and information provided by the administrative team informed development of annual budgets for the entire

period under review. School committee members stated they reviewed the budget figures from the previous year and allocated monies to the areas of greatest need after the review of test data and recommendations of the teaching and administrative staffs. Members of the school committee's budget subcommittee stated that they worked closely with the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for business throughout the budget development process and corresponded with town officials on a regular basis.

In interviews, it was repeatedly stated that the town was vested in the education of its children, and a town official stated that during the entire period under review there were no cuts in the school budget, no reduction of services, and no school-related layoffs. The mayor had traditionally been a strong supporter of the school department and its budget needs. Interviewees reported that the budget was developed using data as well as teacher and administrator input, and reflected the needs of individual schools, classrooms, and programs. This was evidenced by the fact that the town purchased multiple modular classrooms to meet identified space deficiencies in the area of special education.

7. The leadership periodically reported to the school committee, staff, and community on the extent of its attainment of the goals in the DIP and the SIPs, particularly regarding student achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The leadership of the district gave formal reports annually to the school committee on the attainment of goals in the DIP and the SIPs, as determined through interviews and review of school committee agendas. Interviewees stated the superintendent kept the school committee informed of goal attainment through periodic reports and updates. The superintendent reviewed all SIPs prior to school committee presentation. All principals and members of the school councils presented their SIPs for the upcoming year to the school committee in late spring, at which time discussion occurred relative to the rationale behind each goal. The committee also discussed the attainment or non-attainment of goals in the previous year's SIP. Also during this time of the year, the DIP came up for discussion regarding the meeting of timelines and objectives set forth the previous year. School committee members stated the goals contained in

the DIP and SIPs reflected the direction the community wanted to move toward, particularly regarding student achievement, safe and secure schools, and the fostering of communication and collaboration throughout the district.

The live television presentation of school committee meetings allowed members of the community to become aware of the direction and the status of the district and to provide feedback to the superintendent and members of the school committee. Two local newspapers also reported the results of each meeting, thus providing an additional resource for parents and members of the community to understand the goals of the district and each school. A brochure outlining Vision 2010, including the mission, vision, core values, and district goals, was readily available. Vision 2010, the DIP, and the SIPs all appeared on the district website, which also included a great deal of additional information about the entire district.

8. District and school leadership used and effectively implemented practices that required all staff to regularly use aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data to improve instructional programs and services for all student populations.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees stated that the district analyzed MCAS test results on a regular basis for the entire period under review, under the purview of the central office administrative team, the principals, and the curriculum specialists. Staff members analyzed and used both aggregated and disaggregated data. Members of the staff had monthly grade-level or department meetings at which they reviewed and discussed the data gathered by the principals and curriculum specialists. While the district did disaggregate the data for some subpopulations, such as special education and low-income students, administrators cited the limited number of students in many other subpopulations as the reason deeper analysis did not occur.

Interviewees stated that principals and curriculum specialists met regularly with staff members, sometimes before and sometimes after school, to develop strategies to improve instruction. They noted that the elementary specialists carried full teaching loads and were neither able to monitor classroom teaching nor able to meet with teachers during the school day. Interviewees stated that

the collective bargaining agreement prohibited the curriculum specialists from being involved with the evaluation process.

During the site visit, district staff members described for the EQA team how the review of data led to program and curriculum changes, such as establishment of in-district autism programs, the hiring of speech and language pathologists, and the establishment of a peer tutoring program at the high school level. Other examples cited included an increase in the number of math periods at the middle school from five to seven, introduction and analysis of midyear and final exams at the high school, and the establishment of common planning time for high school special education and content area teachers.

9. District and school leaders monitored student achievement data throughout the year, considered the goals identified in the DIP and the SIPs, and implemented or modified programs, policies, and services as required.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The ongoing monitoring of student achievement afforded the district the opportunity to modify and/or implement programs and services as deemed necessary by the administration. Interviewees stated that administrative meetings always allocated time to discuss the implementation of the DIP and SIPs as well as student achievement. An administrative meeting agenda indicated that discussions took place concerning quality programs and curriculum, continuous student improvement, and adequate resources. The district provided copies of reports of MCAS test results for all of the years under review to the EQA team. Principals and curriculum specialists shared MCAS data with all members of each building and addressed areas of both strength and weakness. Interviewees stated they were able to make modifications when the data showed a weakness in a particular discipline at a district level, at a grade level, or in a building. Teachers in focus groups stated that while the building results were shared with the faculty, the overall district results were not included in the information packet.

School committee members stated that the reports of MCAS results engendered discussion, and that the committee considered the recommendations of administrators regarding needed

curriculum changes and, if needed, advocated for additional resources such as materials, textbooks, and new or expanded programs.

To address the lack of improvement in student proficiency during the period under review, the district added extra time in both ELA and mathematics, introduced the practice of classroom review of released MCAS test questions, and changed the sequencing of material in some courses to ensure students had exposure to the content of potential test questions.

10. The performance of the superintendent, administrators, and principals was annually evaluated based on MCAS results, other student achievement data, and the attainment of the goals in the DIP and the SIPs.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

The superintendent evaluated all administrators on an annual basis utilizing an instrument that incorporated the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. The completed evaluations were timely and signed by both parties. The tool included 27 statements in checklist form. Each evaluation reviewed by the EQA team lacked a narrative of any nature pertaining to the strengths and/or weaknesses of the administrator. Interviewees all stated they set annual goals with the superintendent that were tied to instructional leadership and directly linked to the DIP, the SIPs, and the current year of Vision 2010. While annual salary increases were tied to the teachers' increases during the period under review, the school committee had given the superintendent a range for the 2007-2008 school year to determine the raises that will be afforded to each administrator. The district recently created professional learning communities that involved the analysis of student achievement data by a group of assembled professionals who discussed weaknesses and learning gaps and how best to address those areas.

The personnel file of the superintendent contained timely evaluations for the entire period under review. The superintendent established an annual set of goals in conjunction with the goals of the school committee and goals contained within the DIP. The superintendent gave the school committee a self-evaluation regarding the attainment of her goals as a reference point prior to the school committee members writing the final evaluation. The tool employed by the school committee called for both a narrative and a rating of 'exceeds expectations,' 'meets

expectations,' or 'needs improvement.' Members of the committee submitted their evaluations to the chairperson, who read each evaluation during a regularly scheduled televised meeting. The reviewed evaluations contained statements that were informative, promoted growth, and identified areas that the superintendent needed to address. The contract of the superintendent provided for predetermined salaries for the first two years with an option for setting new salary parameters during the final four years of the contract. The contract did not contain a direct link between salary adjustments and improved student achievement.

11. The superintendent effectively delegated the educational and operational leadership of the schools to the principals and program directors and used student achievement data to assess the success of their leadership.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The administrative team, comprised of the superintendent and assistant superintendents, principals, and director of special services, met every other Friday morning to discuss all issues concerning the district. All meetings had set agendas, and interviewees stated that all members had the opportunity to provide input and to discuss district, building, and program needs. Sample agendas reviewed included items pertaining to the strategic plan (Vision 2010), the DIP, the SIPs, student data, the budget, school safety, program assessment, and other administrative issues that needed attention. The agendas also revealed that at the beginning of each monthly meeting a member of the administrative team presented a leadership activity. Interviews revealed that close communication existed among all administrators, who used a team approach in decision-making. Principals also stated that they communicated regularly when questions arose. The district also held an annual five-day retreat off site prior to the start of the school year. A sample agenda included Vision 2010, school committee goals, school year priorities, staff development, technology, special education programs, school safety, and a series of other items for discussion. School committee members and union officials were invited to attend segments of the retreat.

Administrative interviewees stated the superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator. Interviewees stated that principals, members of the

staff, and, in some cases, parents worked cooperatively when hiring new staff members. Principals submitted the credentials of each final candidate to the office of the superintendent, and in some cases the superintendent interviewed the finalist. Administrators stated they had the ability to place teachers in the positions they felt best met the needs of the student body.

While the contracts issued to principals and other administrators did not have specific language related to student achievement or the use of data as part of the hiring or re-hiring process, the attainment of mutually agreed upon goals was connected to the DIP and the SIPs, and each of these documents referred to student achievement.

12. The school committee and superintendent created a culture of collaboration and developed contracts and agreements that encouraged all stakeholders to work together to support and sustain improved student achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Throughout the entire period under review, the communication between the school department and the town departments was open and cooperative. Under the mayoral/town council government, the mayor served as the chairperson of the school committee. All interviewees consistently stated that the community was vested in the educational system, citing the fact that the town annually approved the school committee approved budget. The town did not have to consider Proposition 2 ½ overrides, nor was the school district denied annual appropriations that consistently met the needs of the district. Town officials uniformly stated that the superintendent worked very closely with the community to ensure open lines of communication, provided regular updates via a superintendent newsletter, and regularly attended town functions and meetings.

The school district worked with the teacher union, the paraprofessional union, the secretarial union, and the cafeteria union, and all contracts were negotiated during the same period. While on site, the EQA team was notified that the new teacher contract for 2007-2010 had been recently accepted. Interviewees stated that the latest round of negotiations included language pertaining to an additional 10 minutes per day of instructional time and the provision of prep time for all elementary school teachers. Members of the union and administration stated that the

issue of student achievement and merit pay never came to the table. The school committee and the teachers' union both retained the services of an attorney/Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) representative during negotiation sessions. The superintendent and a subcommittee of the school committee participated in contract negotiations.

Members of the union and the superintendent stated they had open communication through telephone calls and face to face meetings, and during the past two years they had eliminated monthly scheduled meetings. All interviewees stated that issues were addressed both professionally and immediately, and solutions were cooperatively attained. During the period under review, an average of three grievances per year reached the school committee.

13. The district formed partnerships with community human service agencies and benefactors, such as corporate and civic sponsors, to provide at-risk students and families access to health, social, recreational, and supplemental educational services.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district has formed many partnerships in a variety of venues. Interviewees stated the largest providers of financial resources were Six Flags (an entertainment park) and Berkshire Power, both of which had consistently contributed educational materials and start-up funding to the district for new programs and initiatives. The high school has developed and nurtured close relationships with local businesses and industry to build long-term partnerships. During the past three years, the Chamber of Commerce has offered support to existing and new programs. The district has benefited from in-kind donations, student scholarships, and direct student services. The Career Center coordinator worked with local businesses and the chamber to develop partnerships through networking, program introduction, job shadowing, and internships. High school students were also involved in paid cooperative education positions in area work places.

The district provided resources to all parents pertaining to medical facilities, drug and alcohol abuse programs, and mental health agencies to assist with any needed aid. The district has formed partnerships with a multitude of agencies, including pharmacies, therapy programs, Mercy Hospital, BayState Health and ob/gyn systems, Heritage Hall, Dental Associates, and special programs for at-risk students through the Phoenix House. The district also worked with

Western New England College, Westfield State College, and Springfield College to access needed programs for students and parents. The district provided information to any member of the community in need of a GED program to aid in securing a diploma and information on courses and programs available to learn new skills.

Community members were invited into all schools on a regular basis as career and outreach speakers for both students and parents, and information was readily available to all members of the community. One of the many examples given of community aid was the contribution by a local restaurant that provided a breakfast for the honor roll students and their parents.

14. The superintendent created and disseminated a comprehensive safety plan in collaboration with the community and plans were reviewed annually with the police and fire departments prior to each school year. School and district safety plans were aligned.

**Rating: Excellent**

**Evidence**

During the 2005-2006 school year, the superintendent developed a draft of a comprehensive staff crisis manual, and distributed it to all administrators and school committee members, the chief of police, and the fire chief for additional input. The school committee reviewed the final document and adopted the final package. The easy to use flip chart contained pertinent information regarding lockdown and evacuation training, floor plans, and various scenarios school personnel should follow. The EQA team observed the flip charts in all classrooms visited and in other areas such as the main office, the library, the gymnasium, and the cafeteria. New members of a building, including teachers, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, and student teachers, received training and classroom knowledge of where to find needed information and materials and how to use the flip charts.

The handbook included procedures for potential situations such as field trip incidents, medical emergency, fire/explosion, weapons/hostage situation, utilities malfunction, out of control students, and natural disaster. It also included needed phone numbers and building maps. The fire department worked with the school administration, the mayor, and safety education specialists to develop a fire prevention manual in 2006 to reduce the dangers of fire by establishing a uniform, practical plan of action for use in all school buildings. The police and fire

departments had electronic plans of each building outlining the floor prints, thus affording a quicker response time to any issues that might arise.

There were fire drills, bus evacuation drills, and lockdown drills noted in memos sent to and from the office of the superintendent. The EQA team observed a variety of school security initiatives in visits to the schools, including requirements for visitor badges, a visitor sign-in log, and in some cases the use of cameras. The office of the superintendent was equipped with surveillance software enabling the central office to observe the areas outside each building. All staff members and students at the high school were required to wear badges and the EQA team confirmed that the practice was in widespread use. The district has also had school safety audits completed for every building.

| Standard II: Curriculum and Instruction | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | **1** |
| **Satisfactory** | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | **5** |
| **Needs Improvement** | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | **5** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## II. Curriculum and Instruction

The curricula and instructional practices in the district were developed and implemented to attain high levels of achievement for all students. They were aligned with components of the state curriculum frameworks and revised to promote higher levels of student achievement.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- The curricula in all tested content areas aligned both horizontally and vertically as well as with the state curriculum frameworks.
- Curriculum documents were inconsistent in format and uneven in the breadth and depth of their inclusion of components such as objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, measurable outcomes, and assessments.
- Principals served as instructional leaders in their buildings and shared responsibility for curriculum leadership with curriculum specialists and assistant specialists.
- The district's extensive inclusionary programs for special education students were exceptional in their scope and in their focus on continuous improvement.
- Agawam Public Schools did not have a systematic, timely, documented process for the review and revision of academic curricula based on research, best practices, MCAS results, and other formative and summative assessments.
- Using achievement data, the district identified and addressed curricular gaps and weaknesses, identified professional development needs, and reallocated instructional time for at-risk students in ELA and math by assigning them to additional intensive classes or remedial

sessions. The district did not, however, use achievement data to monitor and address teachers' instructional weaknesses.

- Due to a lack of technological infrastructure, capacity, and leadership during the review period, the use of educational technology was neither widespread nor fully integrated in instructional programs.
- Random classroom observations revealed inconsistencies and weaknesses across school levels in indicators of classroom management; instructional practice; expectations; students activity, work and behavior; and classroom climate for learning.

**Summary**

The Agawam Public Schools aligned its curriculum to the state standards and frameworks and ensured that the curricula in all tested content areas aligned both horizontally within grades and courses and vertically within schools. Various content areas documented their curricula using different formats that were inconsistent in detailing curriculum components such as goals, objectives, skills, instructional strategies, targeted outcomes, and assessments. Some were more complex and/or complete than others.

Curricular revisions derived mainly from an analysis of MCAS test results, or through alignment with the five-year textbook renewal cycle. The district did not have a systematic and timely process to review and revise academic programs based on research and best practices. Key inclusionary special education programs received an outside evaluation every three years to ensure effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Curriculum leadership rested mainly with building principals who collaborated with curriculum specialists and assistant specialists. Principals used data from the MCAS test and other formative and summative assessments, particularly at the K-8 levels, to monitor curricula, identify gaps and weaknesses, and inform decisions for curricular changes, professional development, and resource allocation. Curriculum specialists and assistant specialists also monitored curricula using achievement data and worked with either other specialists or teams of teachers to revise curricula. However, since curriculum specialists had no authority and little time to monitor the delivery of the curriculum, links between improving curriculum and improving instruction were weak.

At each school the principal served as the key administrator responsible for instructional improvement. Principals analyzed and shared MCAS test results at school-level, grade-level, content-level, and department meetings, especially in grades K-8. During the review period, the district implemented formative and summative assessments to improve its comprehension of student progress. Although leaders used assessment data to implement changes in curriculum, they only informally used those data to monitor, supervise, and evaluate instructional practices. Once priorities for improvements became evident, the district or the school allocated resources for professional development or approved teachers' individual choices for professional development that aligned with school and/or district improvement plans and priorities.

The district increased instructional time for students at risk of failure in ELA and math through intensive classes, smaller groups, and remedial instruction. MCAS prep classes existed at the junior and senior high schools for all students, as did special prep classes for secondary students who either had failed the MCAS tests or were at risk of failure.

Curricula for high school math classes as well as programs oriented toward career education integrated educational technology with classroom instruction. However, the district as a whole had insufficient technology infrastructure, capacity, and leadership during the period under review. Teachers used technology based on their expertise and creativity, not because is was an integral part of curriculum and instruction. The district took steps to remedy this situation late in the review period by partnering with the town to upgrade wiring, servers, and the quality and number of computers.

In observations of 40 randomly selected classrooms, EQA examiners observed inconsistent levels of instruction from level to level and noted stronger instructional practices in grades K-8. Examiners described the high school as being "generally weaker than all of the other buildings in the observable areas" with respect to classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student work, and classroom climate.

**Indicators**

1. The district implemented curricula for all grade levels in tested core content areas that clearly addressed all the components of the state curriculum frameworks. The curricula document contained, at a minimum, components that addressed: objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

The district had implemented curricula at all grade levels in ELA, math, and science/technology that aligned with state standards and curriculum frameworks, according to a review of its curriculum documents and interviews with staff members. The presentation of the curriculum documents lacked coherence in format. The district had not established a districtwide format to document curricula, and inconsistencies existed across grade levels and within subjects regarding the breadth and depth of individual curriculum documentation. Therefore, although all curricula included most of the components needed to implement a sound academic program—objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments—some were more complete than others, and some were clearer than others. District standards did not extend the expectations for student achievement beyond the state mandate.

Content curricula consisted of a variety of teacher-designed documents such as curriculum maps, benchmarks, and matrices of standards, content/skills, resources, and timelines. Five different types of documents described the K-6 ELA curriculum and three described ELA for grades 7-8. Each outlined the curriculum in varying degrees of detail, often with overlapping features. At the high school, a curriculum team rewrote the English curriculum in the last year of the review period. It consisted of the department's mission statement, goals, and objectives; course syllabi, each of which included a course overview; and individual course descriptions that delineated goals consistent with the department's goals, objectives, benchmarks, essential questions, content/skills, learning standards, suggested assessment formats, and resources for each strand or topic in the course.

Interviewees described curriculum as outlines of required knowledge and skills and understood that standards, texts, and other resources were tools used to teach those knowledge and skills. For

the ELA program at the four elementary schools (grades K-4) and the middle school (grades 5-6), the district used a balanced literacy approach that combined language- and literature-rich activities using leveled readers by Fountas and Pinnell, published by Heinemann. During the review period, the district designed its own writing guide, The Agawam Model: Writing Scoring Guides and Writing Organizers for K-6 developed by Agawam Teachers, K-6, that contained writing rubrics, visual (graphic) organizers, word lists, writing prompts, and scoring guides.

Grades 7-12 ELA used the anthology *Elements of Literature* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), supplementary novels, and Genevieve Schaefer's *Steps to Good Grammar* and *Understanding Good Grammar* (Walsh). The high school English curriculum also used *Elements of Literature* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) plus supplementary novels, films, plays, poems, and other texts at the discretion of the teacher. Courses across content areas shared writing standards and used a common writing rubric.

In math, the district revised curricula throughout the review period and developed new documents for each grade level aligned to state standards. Across grade levels and math courses, math curricula included curriculum maps and a variety of documents that outlined standards, benchmarks, essential questions, texts, math vocabulary, and timelines to teach topics and implement assessments. Based on research conducted earlier in the review period, the district introduced a new math program in 2007-2008 in grades K-2 called Investigations, developed by TERC (formerly known as the Technical Education Research Center). One grade 3 classroom and one grade 4 classroom served as Investigations pilot classrooms. Other grade 3-5 classes still used a Scott-Foresman mathematics text, with no determination yet as to whether or not they would implement Investigations in the future.

In grades 6-8, the district used texts published by Prentice Hall for grades 7 and 8 math and for Algebra 1. The high school curriculum documents named specific texts: *Algebra 1* and *Algebra 2* (Prentice Hall), *Geometry Explorations and Applications* (McDougal Littell), *Advanced Algebra* and *Tools for a Changing World* (Prentice Hall), *Advanced Mathematical Concepts: Pre-calculus with Applications* (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill), *Elementary Statistics: Picturing the World* (Prentice Hall), and *Introduction to Statistics with the TI-83 Graphing Calculator* (Venture

Publishing). The high school curriculum documents also listed teacher-developed units and other supplementary curricula and texts.

The science program included National Science Education Standards, produced by the National Research Council, that encompassed teacher standards, professional development standards, and content and assessment standards. The science curricula for grades 3-6 and grades 7-8 included earth science, physical science, and life science. Curriculum documents delineated key concepts, objectives, suggested activities, and literature connections. There were no timelines or grade-specific outcomes or recommended assessments.

The high school science curricula included curriculum maps with concepts, objectives, and suggested activities. High school course syllabi detailed course objectives, content organized by essential questions, and assessment strategies. The curricula identified texts such as *Modern Chemistry* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) and *Biology* (Prentice Hall).

Curriculum maps for technology described units of study for grades 6-8 that included transportation, manufacturing, robotics, bio-related construction, and applied mathematics. Technology objectives included general skills and knowledge goals as well as performance objectives by strand linked to state technology standards. The curriculum also listed resources such as texts, periodicals, monographs, library resources, online periodical databases, software, websites, and suggested assessment strategies. The technology/engineering curriculum listed broad concepts and suggested learning activities for strands such as engineering design, construction technology, energy and power technologies, and fluid systems.

2. <u>The district's curricula in all tested areas were aligned horizontally and vertically.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Evidence from documents and interviews revealed that in all tested content areas the district implemented curricula that aligned internally both horizontally and vertically and with the state standards and curriculum frameworks. Common texts, curriculum maps, benchmarks, and other documents suggested that horizontal alignment was strong throughout the district. Principals, curriculum specialists, and assistant specialists made use of several supervisory practices to

monitor alignment. For example, in all schools the principals and/or specialists checked teachers' plan books monthly, some even weekly, to ensure horizontal alignment across classrooms in a specific grade or course.

Late in the review period, principals conducted classroom walk-throughs to informally check the curriculum alignment, the fidelity of curriculum implementation, and instruction. Interviewees stated that principals and specialists received professional development in 2006-2007 to learn how to conduct walk-throughs. In the 2007-2008 school year, walk-throughs served as an informal and unstructured technique to better understand classroom practice. Although principals sometimes offered informal verbal or e-mail feedback to teachers after a walk-through, contractual issues prevented them from documenting or using that information in teacher evaluations.

Curriculum specialists and assistant specialists also conducted informal walk-throughs when time allowed, and sometimes offered informal verbal feedback to teachers. Because specialists and assistant specialists maintained full-time teaching assignments, except for the specialists responsible for ELA and math in grades 7-12 who taught three periods per day instead of five, most specialists had little free time to conduct walk-throughs. Moreover, because specialists belonged to the teachers' union, they lacked authority to either formally or informally monitor instruction, and their work focused mainly on curriculum issues.

Interviewees also stated that the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and the director of special services also walked through classrooms from time to time. Interviewees expressed they were pleased that key central office personnel demonstrated an interest and took time to learn what occurred in classrooms.

Principals also made use of their role as evaluators to monitor alignment. During pre-meetings and classroom observations, they looked for teachers to indicate clearly which standards and frameworks guided their lesson and asked teachers in follow-up meetings to explain that lesson's goals and objectives. They also checked classrooms for posted standards and agendas during formal observations. When EQA examiners conducted classroom observations, they noted standards and agendas posted in some classrooms.

Meetings provided another vehicle to monitor alignment, although the tool of common planning time for grade-level and course-level teachers or pairings of content and special education teachers existed for only a few teachers. During monthly one-hour faculty, grade-level, or department meetings, principals and specialists pointed to trends and activities observed in informal walk-throughs, formal observations, or student achievement results to underline curricular and/or instructional areas needing improvement and attention. Teachers also met informally at their own initiative to conduct professional conversations, and new teachers, who met regularly with their mentors, collaborated with them to ensure curricular alignment.

At the elementary, middle, and junior high schools, benchmark assessments compatible with textbooks in ELA and math also ensured horizontal curriculum alignment. At the high school, common midterm and final exams and benchmark tests in math provided a vehicle to ensure that math content and pacing aligned horizontally. High school English classes were prevented from giving common exams since students read novels at different times during the year, although English teachers continued to work on developing common questions to use when students worked with specific novels or texts.

3. Each school in the district had a curriculum leader who oversaw the use, alignment, consistency, and effectiveness of delivery of the district's curricula that focused on improvement for all of its students.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees pointed to the building principals as the curriculum leaders in their buildings. At the district level, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction maintained oversight of all curriculum-related work including rewriting curricula and professional development, but he delegated most curriculum revision to principals and specialists. Curriculum specialists and assistant specialists influenced the design of the curriculum more than its delivery, and met monthly with the assistant superintendent as well as with principals and teachers. The district had a number of mechanisms in place to focus on improvement; however, by the end of the review period, the district had realized only modest aggregate gains in achievement in ELA and math scores as measured by MCAS tests and a decline in MCAS scores in science and technology.

Both principals and specialists, as noted earlier, made use of informal walk-throughs, faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and department meetings to oversee the use, alignment, consistency, and effectiveness of the delivery of the curriculum. In addition, interviewees stated that principals could use the evaluation process as a tool to monitor effective delivery of curriculum; yet, EQA examiners found in its review of 328 teacher evaluations a general lack of informative and instructive comments that might improve how teachers implemented the curriculum for the benefit of all students.

During the period under review, more principals strengthened their data analysis skills through training in and use of Test Wiz. They distributed school- and grade-level MCAS results as key indicators of progress or lack of progress in student achievement and effective or ineffective delivery of the curriculum, especially at the elementary, middle, and junior high schools. Interviewees reported that in the latter part of the review period, principals held more data-based conversations at all school levels and used those discussions to identify curricular gaps and weaknesses in order to identify how the curriculum and its delivery could be made more effective for all students. Because of their supervisory and evaluative roles, they had the power and the authority to do this. Specialists, on the other hand, used data analysis to support the need for curricular improvements and worked with other specialists or teams of teachers to make necessary adjustments and improvements to the curricula.

When the district adopted new textbooks, appropriate professional development supported the effective delivery of the new program. For example, K-2 teachers who were in the process of implementing the new Investigations math program had specific training from the publisher and from district specialists. The Hampshire Education Collaborative (HEC) offered ELA professional development for multiple years during the period under review to improve reading comprehension at the elementary and middle schools. Professional development in differentiated instruction also intended to improve the ability of teachers to target the learning and developmental needs of all students, yet EQA observers noted little differentiation when observing randomly selected classrooms.

4. Each school provided active leadership and support for effective instructional strategies, techniques, and methods grounded in research and focused on improved achievement for all students.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Principals provided leadership and support for improvements in instructional strategies aimed at increasing student achievement. They made use of many of the same mechanisms described earlier to address curricular weaknesses and applied them in this instance to instructional gaps and weaknesses. Once identified and shared at the school level and system-wide, district and/or school leaders planned and implemented professional development to address improvements in instructional practice. Additionally, teachers could use the $450 the district allocated for each individual's professional development to pay for programs and courses that would tie his/her specific instructional needs to the school's improvement priorities. When interviewed, principals also stated that they spoke to teachers both individually and collectively about instructional improvement based on information gleaned from walk-throughs and frequent checks of lesson plans.

Curriculum specialists also endeavored to address instructional weaknesses in their recurrent work with teachers. However, specialists operated with little time and not much authority. Their impact was more obvious in fostering improved curricula rather than improved instruction.

Priorities from School Improvement Plans (SIPs), mainly aligned to district priorities, also indicated how each school addressed instructional improvement goals. Many reflected the district's priority to introduce instruction strategies to improve its movement to full inclusion and boost achievement for its subgroup of special education students.

During the review period, the district required each School Improvement Plan to identify at least one instructional priority in ELA, math, and special education, and included them as goals for one or more years, according to interviewees and documents. At the elementary level (grades K-4), most SIPs called for principals, reading specialists, and ELA specialists to support administration of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to all students in fall, winter, and spring. The district also established specific reading benchmarks for the DRA and/or Gates-

McGinitie assessments at each grade level that elementary students should achieve by the spring. Leaders and teachers focused on identifying students at risk of scoring below the 'Proficient' level on the MCAS ELA tests and those reading below targeted threshold levels, and supported those students with additional instructional time with the school's reading specialist. Reading Recovery teachers worked with Title I students as well as regular education students to improve reading comprehension and other literacy skills. Furthermore, during a five-year period that encompassed the period under review, many elementary teachers participated in district-sponsored professional development offered by the Hampshire Education Collaborative for teaching literacy using the district's guided reading program and for interactive writing. Interviewees also underscored their use of flexible reading groups as a means to improve reading instruction, tailoring it to the learning needs of individual students.

The middle school (grades 5-6) identified improvements in mathematics instruction during the latter part of the review period. One instructional focus was to ensure that all students would have access to the full math curriculum with accommodations, modifications, and support services when needed. To accomplish this, language-based classrooms (inclusion classrooms) targeted refinements in the delivery of the math curriculum, and special education teachers collaborated with classroom teachers to identify effective instructional strategies to use with their students. The middle school also made a commitment to use data such as MCAS test results, report card grades, and grade 5 and 6 readiness test results to identify students in need of intensive math classes. The middle school also highlighted ELA for instructional improvement, and ensured that teachers had professional development opportunities in differentiated instruction and in the use of the DRA and Gates-McGinitie reading achievement tests to guide instruction.

In singling out instructional effectiveness as the school's highest priority in its 2006-2007 SIP, the junior high school identified and achieved several ELA and math goals aimed at strengthening student performance of both regular and special education students. The school also ensured that most teachers received professional development in differentiated instruction and other strategies to improve instruction in both regular and inclusion classrooms. In addition, special education teachers and content area teachers shared common planning time when

feasible. The school also offered professional development to improve math instruction based on an analysis of gaps and weaknesses in students' MCAS results.

Although the junior high school intended to work with consultants to help in data analysis and program development in reading, this was not accomplished. However, the school did charge reading teachers to improve reading instruction for struggling readers by administering the DRA and improving reading strategies for decoding vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, teachers developed and monitored Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) for students at risk of failing the MCAS tests and assigned at-risk students to intensive math and ELA classes that met an additional two or three times each week. Students in grade 8 attended extra classes during the first half of the year, and students in grade 7 during the second half.

Agawam High School also targeted improved instructional strategies in mathematics and special education in defining its goals for the 2006-2007 school year. To meet expectations, the school was able to ensure that inclusion math classes had both a content teacher and a special education teacher in all classrooms and, when feasible, shared common planning time. Also, MCAS remediation teachers and inclusion teachers improved their collaboration with classroom teachers to address students' weaknesses. The school offered ongoing professional development in instructional strategies to use in inclusion classrooms, and when evaluating teachers in inclusion classrooms, high school evaluators specifically looked for evidence that teachers used a variety of strategies. In an attempt to integrate mathematics across the curriculum, the high school expanded the use of mathematics vocabulary in other instructional programs and encouraged teachers to collaborate across disciplines in order to do so.

5. <u>The district had an established, documented process for the regular and timely review and revision of curricula that was based on valid research, the analysis of the MCAS test results, and other assessments, and focused on improved achievement for all subgroups.</u>

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

Although the district had no established, documented process, either through policy or practice, for the regular and timely review and revision of academic curricula during the period under review, ongoing curriculum review and revision still took place. School leaders regularly

analyzed and used MCAS test results and benchmark tests to understand weaknesses and gaps in student performance and shared their analyses with teachers. In response, principals and curriculum specialists worked with teachers to consistently adjust and fine-tune a specific area of the curriculum as well as to support changes in its use and delivery. The district also tended to scrutinize curriculum when a new textbook adoption was imminent at a specific level. As noted earlier, the district made modest gains in ELA and math achievement as measured by MCAS results.

Special education programs under the responsibility of the director of special services submitted to systematic and timely external reviews every three years. In a regular cycle, evaluators from outside the district reviewed special education programs and services, and evaluated them against best practices in the field and made recommendations for improvement. However, analysis of MCAS data from the Merrimack Education Collaborative (MEC) indicated that changes in achievement of special education students demonstrated only slight improvement in ELA proficiency (72 to 73 percent from 2004 to 2007), little change in math achievement, and a drop in science and technology achievement during that same period. Math achievement of special education students declined from 59 percent proficient in 2004 to 54 percent in 2005 to 51 percent in 2006 before coming back up to 59 percent in 2007. Science and technology MCAS results of special education students declined from 59 percent proficient in 2004 to 57 percent in 2007.

In 2006-2007, an outside assessment team, chaired by Suffolk University's director of school counseling programs, reviewed the district's guidance program to define how it could better serve the town's youth. As a result, the district adopted the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs for the 2007-2008 school year and hired a new director of guidance to oversee its implementation. The new guidance program is a research-based, standards-based, data-driven school counseling program designed by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA) and based on a national model developed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

Modifications to the academic curricula tended to occur at specific grade-level clusters overseen by curriculum specialists. For example, because three specialists were responsible for

mathematics programs, math was examined at the K-6, 7-8, and 9-12 levels. Specialists and assistant specialists for specific content areas communicated with each other and met monthly with the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Yet, EQA examiners found through document review and interviews with teachers and administrators that trends in achievement that led to modifications and improvements at one level were not obviously planned to link to program modifications at another level, although changes did occur at all levels, often simultaneously. No larger, more visionary plan guided improvements to both curriculum and instruction across sequential school-defined grade clusters within the district. No specialists or leaders guided the curriculum holistically by taking into consideration districtwide trends in student achievement, changes in the demographics of the community, or changes in best practice.

The guiding framework for curricular changes, as reported by interviewees, was always MCAS test results or changes in the frameworks by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE). As noted, curricular improvements did occur at all levels. Once the district or individual school identified topics or areas in need of improvement, principals, specialists, and teachers collaborated or worked independently to address them, often by revising curricula. For example, during the review period, low math scores led curriculum teams to identify needed improvements and recommend changes in curriculum. Specialists worked with teacher teams either during the summer or after school to make these improvements. However, in interviews a number of teachers lamented the fact that they had no role in developing curriculum, which seemed to be the work of a small group that then handed them a revised document.

An example of the lack of a broader review and revision of curriculum was the shift to the Investigations math program in grades K-4 during the last two years. Teachers interviewed stated "the decision to use Investigations was made at the central office by principals and specialists." Along with implementation came a significant financial investment by the district to support instructional proficiency in the new curriculum with professional development by Scott Foresman, the publisher. However, the district has not yet made any decisions regarding improvements to the math curriculum after grade 4, and one administrator commented "We'll see how it goes [in K-4]." Simultaneously, teachers and specialists at the secondary schools have devoted much of the review period to upgrading the written math curriculum and to improving

instructional strategies in mathematics for regular and special education students without apparent links to the mathematics taught in earlier grades and how it is taught.

6. The district analyzed student achievement data and allocated instructional time in the tested core content areas that focused on improved rates of proficiency for all students.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district provided ample opportunity for principals, curriculum specialists, and teachers to analyze and use achievement data to improve student achievement. The district trained and retrained principals and curriculum specialists in TestWiz each year. MCAS test results in the tested content areas worked their way through the district's schools, content areas, grade levels, and departments to focus teachers' attention on student achievement. Although teachers did not have districtwide MCAS data to comprehend how well the district progressed as a whole, principals did share school-level data at faculty meetings as well as student-level data at grade-level or department meetings. Elementary principals gave teachers the MCAS results for the current and previous years' students to review. Curriculum specialists also analyzed MCAS data along with other achievement data in content-level meetings with teachers as well as with school or district administrators.

In addition to MCAS test results, principals, specialists, and teachers considered other achievement data in making decisions related to the allocation of instructional time and the focus on improved proficiency for all students. Teachers used formative and summative assessments in ELA and math along with MCAS test results to identify students either at risk of failure or not achieving at grade-level or threshold proficiency levels. At each elementary school, low achieving and at-risk students worked in a remedial setting with one of the school's two reading specialists, or a Reading Recovery teacher in the Title I schools, for two or three periods per week for additional literacy support. At the middle school, ELA students with lagging literacy and math skills were grouped in smaller groups so that teachers had more instructional time with them. The junior high school also assigned low achieving and at-risk students to intensive math instruction for two or three additional math periods per week for half the year. The high school

offered MCAS remediation courses after school for students in grades 9 and 10 who either failed or were at risk of failing the MCAS tests.

The district met all state requirements for allocated instructional time.

7. Appropriate educational technology was available and used as an integral part of the instructional process.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

According to interviewees and a review of the district's technology plan and other documents, appropriate technology was available in the district; however, it was inadequate in supply and quality during most of the period under review. In addition, until the 2006-2007 school year, the district lacked capacity to use technology well due to a weak infrastructure that could not support a rich instructional technology environment. To remedy the district's educational technology problems, it collaborated with the town in 2005 to upgrade wiring and servers in the schools to ensure 100 percent connectivity by 2007-2008, to replace and add computers, and to upgrade school media centers and computer labs. In 2005-2006, the district installed 212 computers at the high school, budgeted for 320 additional computers throughout the district, and purchased 120 graphing calculators for the high school math department and 240 for the junior high school. In addition, in 2005 the district improved communication technology by installing a call system to enhance school-parent communication. By 2006-2007, all schools had e-mail for teachers, and the district budgeted for a new web system and began to update its website.

Nevertheless, although infrastructure remained weak, motivated teachers with expertise managed to use educational technology in their instruction. The district also encouraged teachers to take web-based courses and engage in professional development that would enhance the use of educational technology in class. Nevertheless, no systematic effort to integrate technology into the instructional process had yet taken place at individual schools or districtwide, with the exception of mathematics in grades 7-12 and business, information technology, and career education services. Early in the review period, the district collaborated with Whalley Computer to offer online professional development training for staff.

In reviewing school-based inventories that described the use of educational technology in classrooms, media centers, and administrative procedures, EQA examiners found creative activities throughout the district across grades K-12. For example, individual teachers reported using instructional websites such as Study Island, CoolMath, and Phschoolsuccess.com. They used software such as Fleish Kincaid to improve writing, ProDesktop in engineering classes, Geometer's Sketchpad to understand math concepts, and TI Navigator to provide wireless communication between students' graphing calculators and the teacher's computer. In addition, textbooks were online for Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. Many teachers also reported using PowerPoint and video to enhance instruction. In the business, IT, and career education department, courses had fully integrated technology into the curriculum. Technology was also an asset in the special education program, where students and teachers had access to plentiful assistive and supportive technology resources such as Lexia and Lindamood-Bell reading software to assess phonemic awareness and comprehension, as well as communication resources, access devices, and various low-tech tools.

Interviewees also reported examples of individual initiatives in using technology. For example, in Project SEE, a program for gifted middle school students, each student had use of a computer during pullout sessions. All students took an online MCAS prep course and teachers who taught the MCAS prep sections used Test Wiz to track students' progress. However, interviewees reported that there was no specialist in the district responsible for helping teachers to integrate technology into programs and pedagogy. The district did have a web person and staff who could troubleshoot and manage equipment.

During random observations of 40 classrooms in the elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools, EQA examiners recorded an average of 1.5 computers per observed classroom, with 10.1 students per computer in the elementary schools, 21.1 students per computer in the middle school, 11.2 students per computer in the junior high school and 20.6 students per computer in the high school. Overall, observers found students appropriately using technology in only eight percent of observed classrooms. Observers also noted few interactive whiteboards either present or in use in schools. However, it should be noted that interviewees reported new laptop carts at some schools, although none were in use or visible during the classroom observations.

8. District and school leaders actively monitored teachers' instruction for evidence of practices that reflected high expectations for students' work and mastery.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

When asked to describe practices that indicated high expectations for students' work and mastery, interviewees highlighted the superintendent's use of themes to encourage a culture of achievement in the district. In the 2007-2008 school year, at the district's opening convocation the superintendent announced the theme "good to great," sharing her view that the schools were "good" but could be "better" and efforts would be focused in making them better. The administrative team also intended to read and discuss *Good to Great* by Jim Collins during the current year's administrative study group.

Interviewees reported several initiatives to support the superintendent's theme. For example, in 2006-2007 the administrative team engaged in professional development to implement professional learning communities (PLCs) in each school in order to encourage distributive leadership throughout the teacher ranks and help build a culture where everyone is both a teacher and a learner. The district began to put PLCs into practice in 2007-2008, and teachers alluded to discussions at PLC meetings during interviews. In addition, interviewees from one school noted that the agenda of a recent faculty meeting had focused on the qualities of high performing schools.

Documents and interviews indicated other evidence of practices that reflected high expectations for students. For example, the district supported focused and sustained professional development in literacy and mathematics teaching, principals began to conduct walk-throughs, and the district instituted multiyear literacy and math initiatives to develop curricula, benchmarks, and rubrics to improve student achievement. In addition, a more focused use of formative and summative assessment data increasingly informed decision-making and encouraged teachers that the district had taken steps toward operating with high expectations.

Nevertheless, achievement as measured by the MCAS tests was relatively flat during the period under review. Despite efforts to maintain a culture of high expectations in the district, during the 40 classroom observations conducted by the EQA examiners, they found classroom expectations

across all levels to be lower than expected. Observers noted high expectations in 66 percent of observed classrooms in the elementary schools, 83 percent of observed classrooms in the middle school, 60 percent of observed classrooms in the junior high school, and only 31 percent of observed classrooms in the high school.

9. The district created inclusive classrooms or programs for student populations, through an integrated services model, minimizing separation from the mainstream.

**Rating: Excellent**

**Evidence**

The district continued to implement, evaluate, and make improvements to a multi-faceted inclusionary program that the district initiated before the period under review and that minimized separation of special education students from the mainstream. In addition, the director of special services asked outside evaluators to review the department's programs and make recommendations for improvement once every three years. Based on evidence from a review of documents, program reviews, and interviews, the following description, edited from the program description on the district's website, describes the district's integrated services model.

During the review period, the district maintained an early childhood center for children age three or four that provided developmentally appropriate, specially designed instruction and related services in an inclusionary setting.

At the elementary level, the district's two primary preventionists worked with elementary school students who were at risk for developing specific learning disabilities in reading or math. Students were selected for participation in this intervention based upon the results of universal screening measures administered in elementary school. Intervention activities emphasized pre-treatment and post-treatment assessment and ongoing curriculum-based measures to document students' responses to intervention. The district typically employed about 100 paraprofessional staff to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Every preschool and kindergarten classroom had a full-time paraprofessional to ensure that students with disabilities had access to developmentally appropriate learning activities.

The district's inclusion facilitator provided consultative services to teachers and support staff members in grades K-12. The objective of this service delivery model was to help regular education teachers design appropriate modifications and implement necessary accommodations to enable students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled peers in regular education classrooms.

A teacher of the visually impaired provided direct instruction to students, supervision and training of teaching assistants responsible for Braille production, and consultation to teachers and related service providers. The teacher of the visually impaired provided access to general education classrooms so students with low vision or blindness could be educated with non-disabled peers.

A teacher of the hearing impaired provided direct instruction to students, supervision and training of teaching assistants responsible for communication strategies, and consultation to teachers and related service providers. The teacher of the hearing impaired provided access to the general curriculum so that deaf or hard-of-hearing students could also be educated with non-disabled peers.

A behavior interventionist worked with school and classroom staff members to conduct Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) of students exhibiting maladaptive behaviors, and developed or adjusted Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) that provided positive behavioral supports for students whose behavior impeded their own learning or the learning of others. The behavior interventionist monitored the implementation of BIPs and helped teachers working with emotionally or behaviorally involved students to effectively manage the behaviors of their students.

Other related services provided an adaptive physical education program, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language therapy to support students in grades preK-12. Adaptive physical education supports were always provided in an inclusionary setting, although other therapies could be provided as inclusion, pull-aside, or pullout services.

Language-based programs were available in each school except the Early Childhood Center. The language-based program provided students with mild to moderate communication disorders or

language-based learning disabilities strategy-based instruction in an inclusionary setting. The evidence-based practices emphasized in the language-based programs included phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, use of graphic organizers, explicit teaching routines, vocabulary support, study skills instruction, and flexible grouping. Language-based classrooms contained a teacher and a paraprofessional who collaborated for the benefit of all students in the classroom.

Many students with severe learning disabilities, cognitive or neurological impairments, or multiple disabilities required more intensive support and more extensive modifications to the regular curriculum than those provided in the language-based programs. At the elementary level, these students could participate in resource room classes, which provided students with opportunities to reinforce academic skills and review course content. At the secondary level, in order to have access to teachers who were highly qualified in core content areas, students requiring extensive curriculum modifications could participate in inclusion classes co-taught by a special educator and a content specialist. Evidence-based practices emphasized in the resource and inclusion programs included reduced class sizes, individualization of learning goals, and collaboration between special educators and content area teachers.

The district also provided seven special classes in age-appropriate school settings designed to meet the needs of students with significant developmental, emotional, or behavioral needs. Students could not be placed in any of these programs simply because of the existence of a disability. Placement in a special class was appropriate only if the needs of a student rendered a less restrictive placement option ineffective. Students placed in a special class could be included with non-disabled peers for some or most of their learning time.

Agawam is a member district of the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC). When none of the in-district options described above met the needs of a student, the IEP team considered placement at a Collaborative program. If none of the Collaborative programs was appropriate, placement at an approved private special education school was considered.

Tutoring services were provided for students who were under orders from a physician to remain at home for more than 14 consecutive or cumulative days in a school year. Students hospitalized for extended periods received educational services provided by hospital staff members.

10. Through the ongoing use of formative and summative student assessment data, the district monitored the effectiveness of teachers' instruction and provided resources, professional development, and support to improve and maintain high levels of instructional quality and delivery.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

During the period under review, the district monitored both student achievement and curricular effectiveness through the analysis and use of student assessment data, but was inconsistent and infrequent in using achievement data to monitor the effectiveness of teachers' instruction, as revealed through document review and interviews. School leaders stated in interviews that they used data gleaned from walk-throughs and formal observations to gain a general sense of teaching efficacy and freely used that knowledge in faculty meetings or grade- or course-level meetings. However, few leaders regularly monitored individual teacher effectiveness using assessment data, as evidenced by a review of 328 teacher evaluations by EQA examiners.

Although achievement as measured by the MCAS tests remained relatively flat during the review period, only recently did a principal place a teacher on an improvement plan based on the quality of his or her classroom instruction. In addition, curriculum specialists could not pair the content of the curriculum with effective delivery of the curriculum since their formal responsibilities excluded meaningful instructional supervision. In addition, most specialists taught full time and therefore had neither the time nor the authority to monitor delivery of the curriculum.

As noted earlier, late in the review period the district provided more platforms for data-based discussions at each school that led to professional development and changes in resource allocation to promote effective instructional practice. The high school math specialist analyzed MCAS test results using TestWiz and shared that analysis with the administrative team and curriculum specialists. Interviewees also noted that the districtwide IT specialist and the director of special services were also highly capable in data analysis and contributed to the effort. Once the principals and specialists received the MCAS data analysis, they met with teachers at school-, grade-, content-, and department-level meetings to discuss results and to target improvements to both curriculum and instruction in general. Some interviewees explained that they received the

MCAS results for current as well as past students. In addition, principals, teachers, special education teachers, and reading specialists used formative and summative assessments to track trends in both individual and aggregate student achievement.

Formative assessments used in the elementary schools to monitor reading skills for regular education students included the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Gates-McGinitie reading assessment, although a few early elementary teachers administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Stanford Diagnostic. Special education and reading teachers administered assessments such as the Woodcock-Johnson to measure general intellectual ability, specific cognitive abilities, scholastic aptitude, oral language, and academic achievement; the Weschler Individual Achievement Test II (WIAT-II) educational and psychological battery; the Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) tests to assess oral and written expression and listening comprehension; and reading assessments such as Lexia and Lindamood-Bell to assess student progress. K-8 principals and teachers monitored report cards as summative indicators of achievement and progress and, of course, teachers gave numerous chapter and unit tests to track achievement. The EQA team noted, however, during classroom observations that few quick-checks occurred to indicate whether students understood new ideas, concepts, or vocabulary introduced in class.

In the K-8 mathematics program, benchmark tests and pre- and post-tests compatible with the textbook series tracked student progress and provided both instructional and curricular topics for teachers to address. At the high school, teachers monitored math achievement through pre- and post-tests and administered common midterm and final exams that they used for both formative and summative purposes.

11. Random observations of classrooms revealed that teachers used a variety of effective techniques and strategies to address differences in learning style, and that instruction was student-focused, reflected high expectations, and called for engaged learning and participation on the part of students.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 40 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 33 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching, grouped into five categories: classroom management; instructional practice; expectations; student activity, work, and behavior; and classroom climate for learning. Examiners recorded the attributes observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. Observations were conducted at the district's eight schools as follows: 18 at the elementary level, seven at the middle school level, six at the junior high school level, and nine at the high school level. In total, the EQA examiners observed 23 ELA classrooms, 13 math classrooms, and four science classrooms. In calculating the presence of observed practices, where appropriate, the practices that would not be applicable were noted and were removed from the total to obtain a proper basis for determining the percentage.

EQA examiners viewed the overall quality of instruction observed throughout the district positively, although noted that it varied from school to school and level to level. Generally, they found the best classroom management and classroom climate for education at the elementary and middle schools. Similarly, teachers seemed to expect more from the students at those levels than at the junior and senior high school buildings. Examiners described the high school as being "generally weaker than all of the other buildings in the observable areas" with respect to classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student work, and classroom climate. High school instruction tended to be most traditional, followed by the junior high school, and elicited fewer positive comments from examiners than were recorded at the lower grades.

*Classroom management* refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Classroom rules and routines are established and internalized, and students take responsibility for their work with or without teacher direction. The teacher models and promotes respectful behavior and maintains safety in the classroom. Instructional time is maximized due to smooth transitions between activities. Other adults working in the classroom have an active instructional role. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 82 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 84 percent at the elementary level, 97 percent at the middle school level, and 70 percent at the combined junior high and high school levels.

EQA examiners noted positive classroom management in comments such as “students attentive throughout the observation period,” “all students engaged,” “teacher is at ease in explaining, giving examples, and asking students to participate at the board; she introduced several linked math skills and modeled them with good transitions,” and “inclusion class taught by both teachers; rules posted.” Negative comments included “when I entered, midway through period, many students talking with one another as teacher is talking,” “this teacher is the second teacher today to be chewing gum while teaching,” and “one student slept the entire time.”

*Instructional practice* was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher implements instructional strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities. The teacher makes learning goals clear to students, and students understand their relevance. The teacher increases the level of learning by using a variety of instructional techniques. Instructional time is allocated and used effectively, and the pace of instruction is appropriate to students’ varied rates of learning. The teacher elicits student contributions and uses a variety of questioning techniques that encourage elaboration, thought, and broad involvement. The teacher checks for student understanding and corrects misunderstandings, and provides clear and explicit directions that are understood by students. English language acquisition and language development are embedded in all subject areas. The teacher uses available technology appropriately to deliver instruction. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 66 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 70 percent at the elementary level, 70 percent at the middle school level, and 60 percent at the junior high and high school levels.

Among the comments, EQA examiners noted “students encouraged to participate and praised appropriately when warranted,” “transition to reading smooth—all students working diligently on individual assignments,” and “great questions from students and teachers.” Other comments included “teacher-led Q&A—ineffective in that students were just speaking out the answers to the questions and teacher just moved on,” “students contribute when asked but they never ask her or each other questions; no checking for understanding when introducing a new concept,” and “when I enter, teacher is reading *Of Mice and Men* aloud to the class. Then she asks students to read aloud, one by one, up and down the rows. Her questions ask ‘who-’ and ‘what-’ fact-type questions with no probing for deeper meaning or understanding.”

*Expectations* refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. The teacher communicates and enforces expectations and guidelines for student work and behavior, and the teacher encourages students and expresses confidence in their ability to do challenging work. Instructional time focuses on having students produce high quality work, and the teacher provides models and rubrics to exemplify such work. High quality student work is shown to be valued through activities such as celebration, citation, exhibition, and publication. Positive indicators of expectations for students were evident in 60 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 66 percent at the elementary level, 83 percent at the middle school level, and 43 percent at the junior high and high school levels.

In their comments, EQA examiners noted that "expectations were obviously high as evidenced by the probing Q&A technique used by the teacher." "Teacher explains what groups will do in math and what expectations are for their work; provides models of estimation." "Science worksheet from publisher is rigorous." "School expectations are posted in a matrix format organized by location in school, i.e., in the classroom, in the cafeteria, on the playground." Other comments included "I could see no expectations of anyone learning anything," and "students reading in unison throughout the observation period."

Positive *student activity, work, and behavior* are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They show an understanding of the lesson's objective, and they demonstrate ownership of learning by asking their own questions. Students are able to recall information from prior learning and make connections to new learning. They make appropriate use of technology in the classroom. The interaction between students is respectful, and they are purposefully and productively engaged in learning. Student work reflects quality, complexity, and care. Positive indicators of student activity, work, and behavior were evident in 62 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 68 percent at the elementary level, 78 percent at the middle school level, and 48 percent at the junior high and high school levels.

Positive comments on observed classrooms noted that "enthusiasm of students was amazing," "probing questions, high expectations," "homework integrated with the lesson for understanding," "goals posted and reinforced by the teacher," and "classroom groups in use; assignment was fairly complex." On the negative side, examiners commented, "very passive—

one student reads aloud," "this is so 'rote,' controlled, and students follow directions," and "a lot of teacher talk; it is good content, but little student activity here."

Finally, indicators of positive *classroom climate for learning* are considered evident when the teacher creates an inclusive environment where all students are accepted and where the space is used to accommodate a range of learning activities. The teacher uses positive reinforcement to enhance students' self-esteem and self-confidence, and appeals to students' interests or curiosity to motivate them. The classroom is well provisioned and includes multiple resources that address different learning styles. Positive indicators of classroom climate for learning were evident in 70 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 77 percent at the elementary school level, 94 percent at the middle school level, and 49 percent at the junior high and high school levels.

EQA examiners noted in their comments that "teacher was very caring and warm; the classroom climate was inviting and stimulating," "classroom filled with learning aids and student work; excellent learning environment—effective lesson!" and "lots of materials and manipulatives." On a negative note, examiners recorded that "teacher did not get all students involved in lesson; only marginally effective," and "ineffective lesson; I could not find any item to check off that I observed—very disappointing experience," and finally "in response to a student's question, teacher says, 'that does raise an important question and we'll talk about that. But, I want to get through chapter three by tomorrow. I'm going to read the last couple of pages to get through it. OK?"

## Summary of Classroom Observations

| | Number of Classrooms | | | | Average Class Size | Average Paraprofs. per Class | Computers | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ELA | Math | Science | Total | | | Total Number | Number for Student Use | Average Students per Computer |
| **Elementary** | 12 | 5 | 1 | 18 | 17.4 | 0.3 | 32 | 31 | 10.1 |
| **Middle** | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 21.1 | 0.4 | 7 | 7 | 21.1 |
| **Jr. High/High** | 7 | 6 | 2 | 15 | 19.8 | 0.1 | 19 | 19 | 15.6 |
| **Total** | 23 | 13 | 4 | 40 | 19.0 | 0.3 | 58 | 57 | 13.3 |

| | Classroom Management | Instructional Practice | Expectations | Student Activity, Work, and Behavior | Classroom Climate for Learning |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Elementary** | | | | | |
| **Total observations** | 68 | 135 | 59 | 84 | 69 |
| **Maximum possible** | 81 | 192 | 89 | 123 | 70 |
| **Avg. percent of observations** | 84% | 70% | 66% | 68% | 77% |
| **Middle** | | | | | |
| **Total observations** | 32 | 54 | 29 | 38 | 33 |
| **Maximum possible** | 33 | 77 | 35 | 49 | 35 |
| **Avg. percent of observations** | 97% | 70% | 83% | 78% | 94% |
| **Junior High and High** | | | | | |
| **Total observations** | 42 | 99 | 32 | 50 | 37 |
| **Maximum possible** | 60 | 165 | 75 | 104 | 75 |
| **Avg. percent of observations** | 70% | 60% | 43% | 48% | 49% |
| **Total** | | | | | |
| **Total observations** | 142 | 288 | 120 | 172 | 139 |
| **Maximum possible** | 174 | 434 | 199 | 276 | 200 |
| **Avg. percent of observations** | 82% | 66% | 60% | 62% | 70% |

| Standard III: Assessment and Program Evaluation | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Satisfactory** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | **5** |
| **Needs Improvement** | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | **3** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

## III. Assessment and Program Evaluation

The district and school leadership used student assessment results, local benchmarks, and other pertinent data to improve student achievement and inform all aspects of its decision-making including: policy development and implementation, instructional programs, assessment practices, procedures, and supervision.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- District assessment practices included the collection, analysis, and use of test results by administrators and curriculum specialists.
- Agawam Public Schools used benchmarks and other assessment tools to measure student progress.
- The district did not provide widespread training to administrators and staff members in using TestWiz for analyzing aggregated and disaggregated data. However, both teachers and administrators told the EQA team that they felt comfortable with data analysis.
- The district regularly communicated assessment reports to the school committee, staffs, parents, and community.
- The district used assessment results to measure the effectiveness of support programs but not regular education academic programs. Program evaluations were conducted informally, except for special education for which internal and external audits were conducted.
- The district met the state's required rate for student participation on the MCAS tests.

**Summary**

Agawam Public Schools had practices in place to collect and analyze student assessment data. The district engaged in practices to support participation in the MCAS tests, and student participation rates exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement during the review period. Analysis of the student assessment results began in the district office, where the superintendent met with principals and analyzed results together. Principals then shared results with curriculum specialists and staff members, who together examined the MCAS results for trends, gaps, and weaknesses. Although "ten or twelve" staff members were trained in TestWiz, certain staff members at each level were clearly identified in interviews as "go-to people" for more in-depth analyses.

The school district measured student progress with benchmarks in some subject areas at some levels and used formative and summative assessment tools. Elementary levels used the Dynamics Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Gates-McGinitie assessments to gather information. At upper elementary levels, teachers used results from common midterm and final examinations to determine progress. The common examinations ended at the junior high school and high school levels, but teachers were able to access diagnostic tools accompanying Study Island and testGEAR through grade 9. After that, teachers gave more attention to the development of schoolwide rubrics, and less to assessments.

The district reported assessment results to students, parents, and the community using a variety of tools. The elementary and middle schools communicated individual student achievement information to parents through report cards for all students three times per year, and through progress reports for students in Title I and for those with an IEP. The junior high school provided report cards for all students as well as midterm progress reports for students with academic problems. All high school students received a midterm progress report in addition to quarterly report cards. The district reported student achievement data to the community through the town's annual report, through school committee meetings, and through posting of information on the district and school websites.

The district used assessment results to measure the effectiveness of support programs, but evaluations of academic instructional programs were informal and not based on the analysis of specific data. Internal review of curriculum was similarly informal, and was not based upon formal student achievement data. Other than a variety of internal and external audits for special education, EQA examiners found no documented evidence of external evaluations of regular education programs. Although the school committee handbook had policies on assessment and program evaluation, the superintendent told the EQA team that the policies were outdated and in need of review. Administrators conducted walk-throughs in their buildings, occasionally accompanied by central office personnel, but provided little oral or written feedback to teachers. Most administrators were reluctant to use student achievement data as leverage to improve instruction through written evaluations.

The district and school leadership reviewed assessment and other data to prioritize goals and allocate time and resources. Administrators met with the superintendent to determine the needs of the school system and identified goals for the district's strategic plan and the School Improvement Plans. All SIPs included goals to increase the number of students scoring in the 'Proficient' and 'Advanced' categories on the MCAS tests. Because of low MCAS scores, students at the middle and junior high schools were targeted for intensive math and reading instruction based on their scores and teacher observations. Low performing students in grades 5 and 6 received small group instruction in both reading and math. Math periods were increased from five to seven per week. Additionally, according to teachers, foreign language was eliminated from grade 6 to provide more support in math. At the junior high school, targeted students received an extra math period every other day for half the year. Students needing additional reading support met two to three times per week during the year. The high school responded to low math scores by offering MCAS prep help, StudyIsland.com, and peer tutoring on a volunteer basis after school. Administrators and teachers stated, however, that these changes were not based on formal program evaluations.

**Indicators**

1. District assessment policies and practices were characterized by the continuous collection, analysis, and use of student assessment results by district and school leadership.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

During the period under review, the district had practices in place to collect and analyze student assessment data. The superintendent presented MCAS results, both aggregated and disaggregated, to building principals and the director of special services. The superintendent stated that she expected principals to lead discussions of test results in their buildings. Curriculum specialists stated that they also analyzed data with staff members. The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, curriculum specialists, and teachers agreed that they received the scores of present and past students, the building-level results for the aggregate student population and for the special education and low-income subgroups, and item analyses.

Although teachers and staff members received student and building information, they did not receive districtwide test results. Many teachers and curriculum specialists were unaware that districtwide MCAS test scores had been relatively flat since 2004. In the past, the district had provided printouts of individual class results, but the teachers' union resisted that practice. The union claimed that that the district was using the information to identify teachers who "were not doing well." A review of evaluations revealed that neither teacher nor principal evaluations were linked to student achievement.

The superintendent and assistant superintendent stated that approximately 10 to 12 individuals were trained in TestWiz. Although the district had an information technology person who supplied test data information, many teachers and administrators identified a high school math curriculum specialist who had "a good grasp and understanding of the data" as the "go-to" data person. Curriculum specialists told the EQA team that they, together with teachers, examined MCAS results for trends, gaps, and weaknesses.

The district also used other instruments to gather assessment data. The elementary schools included the DRA and Gates-McGinitie reading test. Pre- and post-tests as well as the use of

benchmarks at some levels in math were also used to track student progress. Midterm and final exams were also used and provided teachers with formative and summative information.

Programs in special education were examined every three years, according to the director of special services. Additionally, he requested audits to determine what improvements in the delivery of services could be made. As a result, all classes became inclusionary in grades 7-12.

2. District and school leadership required all students to participate in all appropriate assessments.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

According to interviewees and as stated in school handbooks, the district and school leadership required all students to participate in the MCAS tests. The district's participation rate of 98-100 percent for the aggregate population and for subgroups exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement. The director of special services stated that students placed out of district were also required to take the MCAS tests.

Administrators and teachers told the EQA team that the district notified parents of test dates ahead of time so as not to schedule vacations and other events that would keep students out of school. The district sent notices home and posted messages on the website reminding parents of the importance of a good night's sleep and breakfast. On test days, administrators or designees called the homes of absent students.

3. Through the use of district-generated reporting instruments and report cards, and school leaders implemented assessment systems to measure the attainment of goals, progress, and effectiveness. These assessment reports were focused on student achievement and were communicated to all appropriate staff and community members.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

For the period under review, district leaders used assessment data to measure student progress and reported these results to students and staffs, parents, the school committee, and community

members. According to the superintendent, she visited schools and classrooms to ensure that principals were enforcing district goals.

The elementary and middle schools communicated individual student achievement to parents by progress reports for students in Title I and for those with an IEP, and distributed report cards for all students three times per year. At the junior high school, midterm progress reports were provided for students with academic problems as well as report cards. All high school students received a midterm progress report in addition to quarterly report cards.

Student achievement data were reported to the community through the town's annual report, through school committee meetings, and through posting of information on the district and school websites. In interviews with EQA examiners, members from the school committee confirmed that they received information on assessments and student achievement.

The School Improvement Plans closely aligned with the district's strategic plan and reflected the importance of student achievement. Administrators met to discuss the needs of the district, which became goals for the district's strategic plan and the SIPs. Some administrators distributed the goals during staff meetings while others met with curriculum specialists who in turn ensured that teachers became aware of school goals. Teachers in focus groups stated that they received copies of the district's goals on a yearly basis.

Math was identified as a district priority. Administrators told examiners that all content subject courses in the high school were to include math in their instruction, regardless of subject area. Curriculum specialists stated that the focus on and importance of the math goals were clear to staff members. According to teachers and administrators, the district hired a math consultant to work with teachers in the elementary schools.

4. In addition to the MCAS test, the district and school leadership regularly used local benchmarks and other assessment tools to measure student progress and analyzed and disseminated the results in a timely manner to appropriate staff.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

In addition to the MCAS tests, the school district used benchmarks and other assessment tools to measure student progress**.** The elementary schools screened all kindergarten students using the Ames-Webb, while some schools administered the DIBELS to children in grades K-1 to track reading progress. Reading Recovery was offered to grade 1 students who needed additional help in reading. The district also had a primary prevention program in place for other identified at-risk students. The goal of the program was to provide 10 weeks of interventions and then return the student to the regular education program.

The DRA was administered to students in grades 1-4 three times per year to identify those who needed intervention, and the Stanford-Diagnostic was used to identify Title I students. Students in grades 1-6 took the Gates-McGinitie reading tests (pre and post). Teachers in the elementary grades used Guided Reading and administered the assessments and benchmarks as suggested by Fountas and Pinnell. Additionally, the Agawam Model: Writing Scoring Guides and Writing Organizers for K-6 was developed by teachers in the system. This model gave examples of writing prompts and scoring guides for grades 7 and 8.

According to one elementary school principal, all grades in the building used the same assessment tools and shared information. This principal stated that instruction was “data-driven” in the school. Although there were commonalities across the district, the elementary schools operated in different ways, presented their School Improvement Plans in different formats, and used somewhat different assessments.

The junior high school did not have common assessments, according to administrators. Although there were no formal benchmarks in ELA at the junior high school, classes participated in open-response questions throughout the year using MCAS writing rubrics from the state in addition to the SAT rubric from the College Board for timed essays. The school used the DRA to track the progress of remedial reading students at this level.

Students in grades 7 and 8 also participated in StudyIsland.com as an online MCAS prep activity, while grade 9 students used testGEAR. Both of these were diagnostic tools and teachers had access to the results for each student and for the whole school.

Teachers in the high school focus group told examiners that there was an emphasis on the development of schoolwide rubrics so "everyone would be on the same page." According to interviewees, the high school had midyear and final assessments in math and only some common assessments in English.

According to a review of documents and interviews, the district used a number of other related assessment tools to measure the progress of students with IEPs. Primary interventionists conducted pre- and post-tests, and a behavior interventionist conducted behavioral assessments when necessary. The Woodcock-Johnson, Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS), Lindamood-Bell, and Lexia were also available to assess special education students.

5. The district and school leadership used student assessment results and other pertinent data to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

During interviews with administrators and teachers, examiners determined that the district used MCAS test results to measure the effectiveness of support programs, but not regular education instructional programs. Concerned with the MCAS results of the special education subgroup, the district conducted several outside evaluations to evaluate the special education program. For the most part, however, the district used MCAS results and conversations with teachers to discuss the effectiveness of instruction. The process was informal with no documented evidence that the district utilized student assessment results to formally assess the effectiveness of instruction.

At the elementary level, teachers examined the schools' shortcomings in performance in the various strands of the MCAS tests. The middle school did not make AYP in math, and an outside consultant was working with teachers to develop strategies to help move students out of the 'Warning/Failing' and 'Needs Improvement' categories. The high school brought in graduate students to assist students.

At the junior high level, curriculum specialists met with teachers to analyze MCAS results. They examined the strengths and weaknesses and shared the successes of instructional strategies in some classrooms. Although the district did not directly measure instructional programs in a

formalized manner, teachers participated in conversations that included questions such as "How can I instruct so my students get this?" Administrators and curriculum specialists told examiners that high school teachers also shared instructional strategies during department meetings. They reported that when "teachers were very successful" they would model lessons and share "what they had done" with colleagues. According to one curriculum specialist, this practice did not necessarily result "in a massive change" in programs.

After reviewing MCAS scores, teachers and administrators decided to increase the use of open-response questions in math and ELA. Middle school teachers were asked to focus on open-response questions during their homeroom periods. Intensive math and ELA classes were offered to students who needed additional support in these areas.

6. The district and school leadership regularly engaged in internal and external audits or assessments to inform the effectiveness of its program implementation and service delivery systems. The data from these assessments were provided to all appropriate staff.

**Rating: Needs improvement**

**Evidence**

A review of documents and an interview with the director of special services revealed that several internal and external reviews were conducted during the period under review, primarily in special education. According to administrators, the results were conveyed to them, but there was little evidence that the results were shared with teachers. EQA examiners found no documentation that the district conducted audits of the academic programs.

Levine and Associates conducted four reviews for the district. The first, Autism Spectrum Disorder/Verbal Behavior Program, Fall 2005, suggested that rather than creating larger programs, planning should address the creation of more programs and classrooms when there is a predicted level of need. The second, High School Inclusion Program, February 2005, found that the inclusion classes at the high school were working effectively but there was some stress for teachers learning how to teach students on IEPs and teachers requested more training in differentiated instruction, which the district provided. The third, Developmental Learning Center, January 2006, included several suggestions, including the placement of an adjustment counselor in the lower grades. The fourth, Language-Based Learning Disorder Classrooms' Fidelity to the

Lindamood-Bell System, June 2006, stated that "discipline, organization, and teaching tone was indistinguishable from regular education classrooms."

The reports also identified concerns in the four elementary schools ranging from resources that were spread "too thin" to the use of techniques that were used more on "an ad hoc basis than in a focused, comprehensive, programmatic way." A self-evaluation conducted by the director of special services during the winter of 2006 also concluded that despite the training that teachers received, the Lindamood-Bell reading program was not used as designed.

Although not during the period under review, three evaluations were conducted in addition to the Coordinated Program Review (CPR), Title I, and NEASC reviews. The superintendent requested the Clinical Services Analysis to identify strengths and weakness in the service delivery system within special education, particularly speech and language. The Program Review of District Counseling Programs and Services examined the district level coordination of services across grades preK-12. Lastly, a clinical and educational psychologist conducted a Vocational Academic Program Review, and found the program for the 10 students to be laudable, but concluded that the math curriculum needed to reflect a broader range of skills.

7. <u>The district and school leadership annually reviewed student assessment results and other pertinent data to maximize effectiveness in assigning staff, prioritizing goals, and allocating time and resources.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district and school leadership reviewed assessment and other data to prioritize goals and allocate time and resources. Administrators stated that MCAS results were analyzed at the school level by department or grade to identify weaknesses and gaps. As a result of not making AYP in math, the junior high school identified students whose scores were in the 'Warning/Failing' and 'Needs improvement' categories and assigned them to an intensive math program. These small group instruction classes met every other day for half the year. Similarly, students with weaknesses in ELA participated in a remedial reading class that met two to three times a week all year. School Improvement Plans for all schools included goals to increase the number of students scoring in the 'Proficient' and 'Advanced' categories on the MCAS tests.

According to principals and teacher interviewees, school and district leaders conducted walk-throughs. Administrators and staff members stated that occasional verbal feedback was provided after walk-throughs, but comments were not put in writing. Evaluations did not link student achievement results to effective instruction. Teachers' union representatives told members of the EQA team that walk-throughs and teacher assignments were presently contractual issues. However, administrators made it clear that principals made the final decision regarding staff assignments.

8. District and school leadership routinely used program evaluation results to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services to continuously improve the delivery of instruction and student achievement.

**Rating: Needs improvement**

**Evidence**

Although the district had a policy (File: ILBA) for the evaluation of programs, several administrators and curriculum specialists were unaware of this policy. The policy did not include timelines, was not specific in nature, and was not dated. Administrators and staff members agreed that the district did not have a formal, systematic way of assessing programs other than for special education.

When asked how they knew if the curriculum was effective, administrators and teachers responded that principals reviewed scores on tests and report cards and observed lessons in the classroom to ensure that the curriculum was properly implemented. Most of the evaluations were conducted informally in conversations with staff members and were reactionary in nature. Administrators and curriculum specialists reported that weaknesses in math prompted the district to identify improvement in math as a district goal.

Although the district had no formal means of assessing programs, teachers said they looked at pacing guides and discussed curriculum in their departments. In order to prepare students to take the MCAS social studies test, the department changed the order of teaching U.S. History and World History. Curriculum specialists also acknowledged the lack of a formal process of evaluation, but concurred that conversations took place informally in all departments regarding student progress.

Because of low MCAS scores, students at the middle school and junior high school were targeted for intensive math and reading instruction based on their scores and teacher observations. Low performing students in grades 5 and 6 received small group instruction in both reading and math. Math periods were increased from five to seven per week. Additionally, according to teachers, foreign language was eliminated from grade 6 to provide more support in math. At the junior high school, targeted students received an extra math period every other day for half the year. Students needing additional reading support met two to three times per week during the year. The high school responded to low math scores by offering MCAS prep help, StudyIsland.com, and peer tutoring on a volunteer basis after school. Administrators and teachers stated, however, that these changes were not based on program evaluations.

The pending NEASC review (to be conducted in 2008-2009) has prompted curriculum review at the high school recently, according to an administrator. Teachers in focus groups told examiners that the need to align standards with MCAS and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards led to a change in the math textbook used. They also stated that a research paper component was added to the English curriculum and two teachers were presently developing rubrics for the paper.

| Standard IV: Human Resource Management and Professional Development | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Satisfactory** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | **10** |
| **Needs Improvement** | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | **3** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## IV. Human Resource Management and Professional Development

The district identified, attracted and recruited effective personnel, and structured its environment to support, develop, improve, promote and retain qualified and effective professional staff who were successful in advancing achievement for all students.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- The Agawam Public Schools followed an established process in recruiting and hiring the best candidates for professional vacancies without financial limitations.
- Most professional staff members held appropriate licensure, and principals closely monitored the progress of teachers seeking licensure.
- The district successfully operated its induction program for first-year teachers new to Agawam that included a special orientation day before the school year began and the use of trained, experienced mentors who met regularly with their protégés throughout the school year.
- The district's professional development opportunities changed from mostly districtwide initiatives to offerings that were more school- and/or grade-level based, with a focus on improving student achievement.
- District administrators evaluated teachers in a timely fashion and followed the components of the Education Reform Act. All summative evaluations were informative and/or descriptive in nature but few had qualitative comments about the teacher's performance.
- Immediate supervisors evaluated district administrators in a timely fashion; however, qualitative comments had not been included as part of those evaluations.

- Each school followed prescribed safety procedures and had crisis management teams and written protocols in place, and the district provided training in crisis management to all building principals.

**Summary**

The Agawam Public Schools followed an established process in recruiting and hiring professional staff members. The school district policy manual indicated that the superintendent assumed the responsibility to determine the personnel needs of the school system, and principals had the responsibility to ascertain the staffing needs of their respective schools. Although the process of screening and interviewing potential candidates varied slightly from school to school, all principals used interview teams and acknowledged that they had hired the candidates they felt were the best fit for their schools, with no financial limitations placed on the process. Principals reported that they consistently made teaching assignments for their new personnel by trying to assign teachers where their strengths were the greatest. When administrative positions became vacant, a wider posting would take place, and screening committees of teachers, parents, and community members would interview potential candidates and assist in the hiring process. All interviewees agreed that they believed that the hiring practices employed by the district resulted in having an effective teaching and supervisory staff.

The percentage of the district's teachers and administrators who held appropriate licensure was 97.6 percent (348 of 357), and more than 60 percent of the district's 114 paraprofessionals were 'highly qualified.' The district expected the few teachers hired on waivers to work actively on becoming certified, and the central office expected their respective principals to monitor closely the licensure progress of these individuals.

The district offered a comprehensive orientation program to its new teachers. During the period under review, all the first-year teachers new to the district were assigned veteran teacher mentors, and both the district's administrators and its teachers deemed the program very helpful and successful. Additionally, the district provided monthly professional development sessions to all first-year teachers. The district hired a former superintendent to serve as a mentor/consultant for the administrators new to the district.

Many and varied professional development opportunities for the district's teachers took place during the period under review. Interviewees stated that the district's professional development program changed over the course of the last two years from one that had been mostly districtwide to a program that was more school-, grade-level, and/or department-based. Interviewees stated that the professional development opportunities offered had received input from teachers by means of the districtwide professional development committee, and that the offerings focused more on program assessment and analysis of student achievement data. Administrators were trained in analyzing data using TestWiz and they, in turn, were expected to train the teachers in their respective schools. All interviewees, administrators and teachers alike, agreed that adequate funding was available for appropriate professional development during the period under review.

Interviewees stated that the district placed high priority on retaining an effective professional staff. The EQA team learned that the annual teacher turnover rate in the district was quite low during the period under review, and interviewees indicated that most of those leaving the district had been teachers who retired. Interviewees agreed that teachers who worked in Agawam tended to remain there for many years, some throughout their careers. Teachers stated that pleasant teaching conditions and collegiality existed at all the district's schools and that the district had a competitive salary schedule.

Both teachers and administrators in the district had been observed and evaluated by their superiors in a timely fashion, and the instruments used followed the standards required by the Education Reform Act. The EQA team found that the summative evaluations in all teacher personnel files they examined included informative and/or descriptive comments, but only three included instructive and/or constructive comments or statements about how individuals could improve their professional growth and/or overall effectiveness. The administrators' evaluations lacked qualitative assessment comments, except for the superintendent's, which members of the school committee had completed. Administrators expressed satisfaction with the evaluation process followed by their supervisors.

The district provided training in crisis management to all building principals, who annually reviewed the safety and emergency protocols established for all the district's schools. An

extensive and comprehensive Safety and Emergency Advisory Handbook was readily available in every classroom throughout the district.

**Indicators**

1. The district's policies and practices for the identification, recruitment, and selection of professional staff resulted in the employment of an effective teaching force that advanced student achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The Agawam school district followed an established process in recruiting and hiring the best possible candidates for the professional vacancies that existed during the period under review.

The school district policy manual, in the section entitled Professional Staff Recruiting, indicated that the superintendent assumed the responsibility to determine the personnel needs of the school system, and principals had the responsibility to ascertain the staffing needs of their respective schools. During the interview process, the district's principals all agreed that the hiring philosophy of the district during the period under review had been to acquire the best possible person for the job with no financial constraints placed on that process.

Once a vacancy arose, the central office advertised locally and through the SchoolSpring.com website as well as through *The Republican* of Springfield. The district had received almost all applications for teaching and/or administrative positions electronically in the last two years. When the application deadline passed, the respective principals, with the assistance of designated interview teams, reviewed the applications and selected candidates to interview.

At all schools, the interview teams were typically comprised of grade-level teachers, department members and/or specialists, as well as the respective curriculum specialist. The teams screened and then interviewed the candidates they thought would be the best fit for their school, eventually sending the name of the top candidate to the superintendent. Whenever possible, the superintendent would interview the finalist and make sure the paperwork of the individual had been properly processed, including a CORI check. All the district's principals stated that they ultimately had the authority to hire the teachers they felt would be the best fit for their respective

buildings. Several principals gave examples of teachers hired recently at or near the top of the teacher salary scale, emphasizing the fact that financial constraints in the hiring practices of the district did not exist. Respective principals made specific teaching assignments of all new personnel, always trying to keep the greatest strengths of the teacher in mind.

Central administrators informed the EQA team that when a vacancy existed for an administrative position in the district a wider posting took place, often including advertising in *The Boston Globe*, before a screening committee of parents, teachers, community members, and the superintendent chose and interviewed potential candidates. The committee developed a set of questions asked of each candidate and rated each interviewee. Before naming the finalist, every effort was made to check references, and, whenever possible, that person was visited at his/her school by a team from the screening committee. All interviewees agreed that they believed that the hiring practices employed by the district resulted in having an effective teaching and supervisory staff.

2. All professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district data on certification of its professional staff indicated that during the 2006-2007 school year 322 of the 331 teachers in the district possessed appropriate Massachusetts licensure, and all 26 administrators possessed appropriate credentials.

At the beginning of the school year, the district applied for and received appropriate waivers from the DOE for teachers lacking certification. Through interviews with the superintendent and other central administrators, EQA examiners learned that principals continually monitored the progress of those people on waivers in their respective buildings to ensure that they had completed the necessary work toward certification.

The district employed 114 instructional aides or paraprofessionals in its schools during the 2006-2007 school year, and 71 (or 62 percent) met the federal definition of ‘highly qualified.’

3. In the event of unfilled positions, professional staff were hired on professional waivers and were provided mentoring and support to attain the standard of substantial annual progress toward appropriate licensure.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district provided mentors for first-year teachers hired on professional waivers, and the respective building principal assumed the responsibility of closely monitoring the progress of those individuals in attaining substantial annual progress toward appropriate licensure. Interviewees stated that regular correspondence between the principal and the teacher working on attaining his/her license took place throughout the school year, and that the central administration was kept apprised of the progress.

Interviewees further stated that the district did not provide any specific financial support to the teachers on professional waivers other than the professional development reimbursement stipends given to all teachers. The teachers' contract stipulated that a reimbursement of $450 would be awarded annually to any teacher taking and passing graduate-level courses or participating in appropriate professional development workshops. The assistant superintendent, however, stated in an interview that he has made exceptions to this rule and awarded additional funds to teachers who were close to receiving their appropriate licenses and needed additional funds to complete their requirements.

4. The district provided teachers and administrators who were new to the district or their assignments with coaches or mentors in their respective roles and included an initial orientation that addressed the importance of the assessment and use of student data.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

During the interview process of both the district's administrators and the teachers through the various grade-level focus groups, it was stated and all agreed that the district had an effective mentoring program in place for teachers new to the district and that the program had successfully existed for a number of years.

Teachers were chosen or could volunteer to go through a two-day mentor training program during the summer and/or early fall, and upon successful completion of the training would wait for an assignment from the mentoring coordinator and respective principal. Administrators stated that every effort was made to have a "good match" between the mentor and the new teacher. Teachers assigned to a protégé for a particular school year received a stipend of $300.

All teachers new to the district participated in a daylong orientation program held before the school year began at which they received their textbooks and several other books, including *The Skillful Teacher*. Once the school year began, there were regularly scheduled meetings between the mentor and the mentee and the veteran teacher kept a log. Additionally, the district provided monthly professional development sessions to all first-year teachers.

All interviewees (administrators, mentors, and protégés) agreed that the induction program had been successful during the period under review and that collegiality existed throughout the process. The district had also hired a former superintendent, on a retainer, to serve as a mentor/consultant for administrators new to the district, and it had those new principals regularly meet with the superintendent.

5. The district's professional development programs included development of data analysis skills and the use of item analysis and disaggregated data to address all students' achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district's initials step in addressing the issue of developing data analysis skills for its professional staff was to train all its schools administrators and curriculum specialists in the TestWiz program. The expectation was that upon receiving the training these individuals would then train their respective teachers in data interpretation and use of item analyses to address student achievement and curriculum weaknesses.

Both the district's principals and the teachers interviewed informed the EQA team that training sessions in data analysis occurred throughout the district most often in small group settings (typically grade level and/or departmental in nature). The analysis of both aggregated and

disaggregated data had taken place during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years because of this districtwide initiative, and both teachers and administrators told the EQA team that they were comfortable with data analysis.

Recently, the district created professional learning communities (PLCs) throughout the district in which the professionals gathered would analyze the student achievement data together and discuss that particular grade level's weaknesses and learning gaps and how best to address those areas.

6. The district's human resources policies and practices encouraged professional growth and recognition and placed high priority on retaining effective professional staff and on creating promotional opportunities for effective teachers.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees stated that the district placed high priority on retaining an effective professional staff throughout the period under review. The EQA team learned that the district annual teacher turnover rate was quite low during the period under review, and interviewees indicated that most of those leaving the district had been teachers retiring from the district. Interviewees agreed during the various interview sessions that teachers who worked in Agawam tended to remain there for many years, some throughout their careers. Teachers stated that pleasant teaching conditions and collegiality existed at all the district's schools and the district had a competitive salary schedule.

To recognize outstanding performances by teachers in the district, Agawam has participated in the Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award Program that annually recognizes four veteran district teachers and one first-year teacher for their efforts. The local newspapers and cable television stations extensively covered the awards ceremonies. The district also updated its "Wall of Fame" annually in an effort to recognize other outstanding professionals.

Although the district did not keep any formal data or records on individuals promoted in recent years from the ranks of the teachers, administrators and teachers alike stated that promotional opportunities within the professional staff existed throughout the period under review. Several

administrative positions had been filled by promoting from within the teaching ranks, including all the district's curriculum specialists and assistant curriculum specialists.

7. The district's professional development program was informed by most or all of the following: the instructional program content; student, teacher, and administrator needs as indicated by program assessments; research-based practices; the staff evaluation process; and student achievement data.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees stated that the district's professional development program emphasis changed over the course of the last two years from one that had been mostly districtwide initiatives, often unique in nature, to a program that was more school-, grade-level, and/or department-based. Interviewees stated that the professional development opportunities offered had received input from teachers by means of the districtwide professional development committee. They also stated that the offerings focused more on program assessments and analysis of student achievement data. An example of this change was that the recent failure to meet AYP in mathematics at the lower grades focused the elementary and middle school professional development offerings during 2006-2007 on strategies of teaching mathematics effectively. Prior to the 2006-2007 school year, the emphasis and focus of the elementary and middle school professional development had been on ELA topics.

The district published a professional development handbook that included a mission statement and goals for its professional development opportunities. The handbook also included all of the professional development modules offered to the Agawam teachers during the 2006-2007 school year. Activities included the formation of subcommittees comprised of the high school teachers to work on completing the extensive self-study in preparation for the fall 2008 NEASC visit. Other activities included an MCAS study group in math at both the elementary and secondary levels; teaching in an inclusion classroom for middle school educators; Guided Reading for grades 3 and 4; differentiated instruction in mathematics; and teaching applications of technology to special education students. Other offerings were effective ways to use paraprofessionals in inclusion classrooms; restraint training; web page design training; mentor

training; and many other modules that were either grade or subject matter specific. Administrators all had TestWiz training and/or retraining and goal setting sessions during their weeklong summer retreat.

8. Changes in the expectations for programs and practice were monitored and supported by changed supervision and evaluation standards and in the professional development plans of professional staff.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

The EQA team found through its review of district documents and interviews with district administrators and teachers that the district had not regularly monitored and evaluated its academic programs and no one was accountable for this task. Informal discussions between administrators, curriculum specialists, and teachers concerning program goals and expectations occurred regularly throughout the period under review. Often, these discussions resulted in changes to the instructional programs as well as different offerings in the professional development program. However, there was no set plan in the district to monitor and support these plans.

Building principals assumed the responsibility of monitoring the individual professional development plan of each of their teachers, and they met annually with each teacher to review his/her plan. In its review of the teacher personnel files, the EQA examiners found no evidence that administrators had included professional growth comments in their summative evaluations.

9. The district's evaluation procedure for administrators' performance was aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act and was informative and instructive, and used to promote individual growth and overall effectiveness. Compensation and continued employment were linked to evidence of effectiveness, as measured by improvement in student performance and other relevant school data.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

District administrators stated that their evaluation process annually began with a goals setting conference in the fall with the superintendent and concluded with a self-evaluation at the end of the year. An additional conference was held with the superintendent that included a review of the goals set by the principal and the MCAS scores for that particular school.

The EQA team found that during the period under review the Agawam Public Schools used an evaluation instrument for all administrators that aligned with the requirements of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. In its review of all administrative personnel files (26), EQA examiners found that the superintendent had evaluated central office administrators and building principals, and the building principals had evaluated their assistants, in a timely fashion. The instrument used by the superintendent was a checklist that had a numerical equivalent for each element in the evaluation, and at the bottom of the page it had a calculation of the total points accrued. However, none of the administrative evaluations completed by the superintendent included a narrative on the strengths and/or weaknesses of the individual. The team also found no evidence in the administrative folders that student achievement scores were directly linked to salary increases and/or continued employment in the district. Administrators expressed general satisfaction with the evaluation procedure used by the superintendent and other supervisors, and they felt that the process had been conducted with fairness and objectivity. Members of the school committee had evaluated the superintendent each of the years of her tenure in the position, and those evaluations included narratives related to the different standards measured.

10. <u>The district's evaluation procedure for teachers' performance was aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act and was informative and instructive and used to promote individual growth and overall effectiveness. The district provided opportunities for additional professional development and support to struggling teachers. After following due process, the district took action against persistently low-performing teachers.</u>

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

During its visit, the EQA team reviewed all of the district's teacher personnel files, including those of 235 professional status teachers and 90 non-professional status teachers. Examiners

found that the district's respective supervisors observed and evaluated all of the teachers in a timely fashion. Building administrators, principals, and assistant principals accomplished this task despite the fact that contractually the district's department heads and curriculum specialists could not officially observe their respective teachers and could not participate in the formulation of the year-ending summative evaluations written by the principals.

A close examination of the teacher folders revealed that all the summative evaluations possessed and followed the components of the Education Reform Act of 1993. The vast majority of comments written by supervisors in the evaluations had been informative and/or descriptive in nature. Only three of the 325 summative evaluations reviewed included any instructive and/or constructive comments or statements relative to how individuals could improve their professional growth and/or overall effectiveness.

Interviewees stated that the instrument used in the teacher evaluation process had only two ratings for the administrator to check off, 'satisfactory' and 'needs improvement,' and that the receiving teacher interpreted any area rated 'needs improvement' as an "unsatisfactory," so administrators were reluctant to use it. Interviewees stated that the recently completed negotiation process of the teachers' contract has alleviated this situation in that beginning with the 2008-2009 school year administrators will be able to use a new teacher evaluation instrument that has doubled (from two to four) the ratings they may use in evaluating each teaching area.

Although a number of principals stated during the interview sessions that some of their evaluations included instructive comments, the personnel folders of district teachers examined by the EQA team did not show evidence to support those assertions.

11. Administrators in the district used effective systems of supervision to implement district and school programs and goals for improving student achievement in their respective assignments, and used these systems to address the strengths and needs of assigned staff.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

In addition to the formal observation/evaluation system described above, all building principals used an extensive walk-through system of supervision for their teachers. This process began in

earnest in the fall of 2006 after the principals had been trained in effective walk-through methods during their five-day summer retreat. Principals stated and teachers confirmed that they felt the system was effective and afforded each principal a better handle on what was going on in each classroom. Principals stated that they would provide teachers with feedback (mostly verbal in nature) on what they observed during the walk-throughs if the situation warranted direct feedback.

Administrators put this supervisory system in place to supplement the long-standing practice of regularly checking teachers' plan books. At the elementary and middle schools, the principals checked the books weekly to ensure that all teachers were following the curriculum, assessing their students appropriately, and following the goals set for the school in its respective School Improvement Plan. At the junior and senior high schools, the grade 7-12 curriculum specialists had the responsibility of checking the plan books monthly.

Interviewees stated that the supervisory methods in place during the period under review gave them many opportunities to observe and address the strengths and needs of their staff members. However, both the district's administrators and the EQA team have identified as problematic the lack of time and authority for the district's department heads or curriculum specialists to participate actively in the supervisory process.

12. The district's employment (human resources), supervision, and professional development processes were linked and supported by appropriate levels of funding.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Interviewees stated that funding levels for both professional development and the supervisors the district employs had been appropriate during the period under review. One administrator stated, and others in the room agreed in unison, "We have been very fortunate in this regard. If there was a need to provide professional development in a certain area, central administration somehow found the money to fund the activity."

The middle school and junior high school, with approximately 700 students each, have always had a full-time assistant principal, and the high school, with approximately 1,350 students, now

has three assistant principals. Administrators mentioned that the only improvement to make in the supervisory area was to add a stipended lead teacher to manage each of the four elementary schools when the principal was not in the building.

13. The district provided ongoing and regular training in dealing with crises and emergencies to all staff, provided procedures for substitutes, student-teachers, and volunteers responsible for students, and provided opportunities to practice emergency procedures with all students.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

All district schools had all doors locked and a video camera system to identify visitors and/or strangers arriving at the school. The video feedback system in the eight district schools was electronically linked to the superintendent's office.

All schools had crisis response teams that followed a prescribed protocol to deal with certain crises and/or emergencies. The exact composition of the school teams varied from school to school; however, all teams consisted of the building principal, guidance personnel, the school nurse, and head custodian, as well as some teachers. The district had provided training in crisis management to all building principals.

District principals annually reviewed the safety, emergency, and evacuation procedures for their respective buildings with all of their teachers and support staff members. They also reviewed the district's extensive Agawam Public Schools' Safety and Emergency Advisory Handbook. Teachers were instructed to place the charts in easily accessible locations in their classrooms. The district also provided their professional staff members with annual training and/or retraining for restraint procedures as required by regulation. All schools regularly conducted fire drills and school evacuations in concert with the local fire department, and all schools have simulated and practiced school lockdowns. Interviewees stated that substitute teachers, student teachers, and parent volunteers had not been included in the crisis/emergency training sessions and/or reviews, but all were familiar with the district's Safety and Emergency Advisory Handbook.

| Standard V: Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Satisfactory** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | **10** |
| **Needs Improvement** | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | **2** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | **1** |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## V. Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

The district provided quality programs for all students that were comprehensive, accessible and rigorous. Student academic support services and district discipline and behavior practices addressed the needs of all students. The district was effective in maintaining high rates of attendance for students and staff and retained the participation of students through graduation.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- The district provided a menu of support services for all students who required assistance. Students who needed assistance were identified early using a variety of assessment instruments.
- The district had Reading Recovery programs in place at all three Title I elementary schools, and at the fourth elementary school the district employed an additional reading specialist using local funds to mirror the function of the Title I teachers.
- Student attendance exceeded state guidelines for each of the years in the review period. In addition, the faculty attended school at a rate exceeding 93 percent.
- According to data submitted to the Department of Education, the district's out-of-school suspension rates were better than the statewide averages, but in-school suspension rates were worse.
- The district met the needs of its subgroup populations and its homeless students as required by law, and planned and provided effective transitions for students between schools and after graduation.

- The district lacked policies, procedures, or practices to increase subgroup representation in advanced or accelerated programs in order to close the achievement gap.

**Summary**

The district provided supportive services to its student population at all levels. Among the four elementary schools, three were eligible for Title I services. The district funded the hiring of additional teachers at the fourth elementary school to mirror the programmatic offerings of the three Title I schools. The district offered Reading Recovery at all the elementary schools and after-school help from teachers at all levels, for which the district provided late transportation at no cost to the students or their families. Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) were in place at all schools to identify students for whom support services would be helpful. Students at the high school had additional services provided by voluntary peer tutoring by National Honor Society students. High school students who performed at the 'Warning/Failing' level on either the grade 8 or grade 10 MCAS tests had Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) generated for them.

In 2007, student subgroups in the district participated at acceptable levels in MCAS testing. All students were reported to have participated at rates of 99.0 percent in English language arts (ELA), 99.2 percent in mathematics, and 99.4 percent in science and technology/engineering (STE). Of the district's regular education students, 99.1 percent participated in ELA, 99.3 percent in mathematics, and 99.7 percent in STE. Students with disabilities participated at rates of 99.4 percent in ELA, 99.7 percent in math, and 99.1 percent in STE. Students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) participated at rates of 90.1 percent in both ELA and mathematics, and 99.1 percent in STE.

Student attendance in the district exceeded the state average for each of the years under review. For school years 2004, 2005, and 2006, the district reported student attendance rates of 94.6, 94.7, and 95.0 percent, respectively. Over the same three years, the statewide averages were 94.2, 94.4, and 93.8 percent, respectively. Agawam Middle School reported the highest attendance rate at 96.4 percent, while Agawam High School reported the lowest attendance at 93.1 percent. The district lowered the percentage of students reported as chronically absent from 13.4 percent in 2004 to 12.9 percent in 2005 to 11.6 percent in 2006. The district employed a full-time attendance officer who was also a licensed social worker.

The principal of each building effectively monitored staff attendance, and called violators of the district's attendance policy to the attention of the superintendent for further action. Attendance within the district varied from an average of 2.8 days absent at Agawam Middle School to 4.7 days absent at Granger Elementary School, excluding professional development. The largest single component contributing to the fluctuation was long-term days absent, a factor over which the district had little control.

The district reported rates of out-of-school suspensions, which occurred primarily at the high school, that were better than the state averages, at 3.9 percent in 2004, 3.9 percent in 2005, and 3.4 percent in 2006. The statewide rates during the same period were 5.9, 5.6, and 5.8 percent, respectively. However, in-school suspensions exceeded the state averages during these three years. In 2004, the district reported that it had assigned 10.5 percent of its students to in-school suspension for at least one day, compared to the state rate of 3.6 percent. In 2005, Agawam's in-school suspension rate dropped slightly to 10.1 percent, while the state average declined to 3.1 percent. In 2006, the district's in-school suspension rate was 11.5 percent, while the state average was 3.4 percent. Administrators reported that they were aware of disciplinary referrals but were not able to track them conveniently, and had few programs in place to lower the number of disciplinary referrals or suspensions. They relied on the Instructional Support Teams and the services of the attendance officer to assist in limiting the number of disciplinary referrals.

**Indicators**

1. The district administration and staff used aggregated and disaggregated student achievement data on student participation and achievement to adjust instruction and policies for at-risk populations and provided additional programs and supports to assist their progress and academic achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district began using both aggregated and disaggregated data prior to the examination period and internalized the practice for general use in conducting day-to-day operations. All administrators were trained in TestWiz, as well as curriculum specialists at both the elementary and secondary levels.

In addition, particularly at the elementary level, the district collected and analyzed additional data. Teachers analyzed aggregated MCAS data for their current and past students. They also used disaggregated student achievement data to compare students with disabilities as well as economically disadvantaged students with statewide data. Individual performance results were used for programmatic purposes in determining interventions for particular disabled students.

Interpretation of the student achievement data at the middle school resulted in programmatic changes in math, increasing the number of math periods to seven per week in both grades 5 and 6. Intensive math pullout from homeroom time was provided as well, resulting in up to two additional periods of mathematics per week. At the high school, MCAS remediation was provided during the day. Voluntary peer tutoring was available after school to students requesting it, and Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) were provided to students scoring below 220 on the MCAS tests in grades 8 and 10.

Administration of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the Gates-McGinitie reading assessment, and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test also provided additional data on elementary school students.

2. At each grade level, the district used formative assessments and summative data to identify all students who did not meet expectations and provided these students with supplementary and/or remedial services that resulted in improved academic achievement and MCAS test proficiency.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Formative assessments were routinely used in the elementary grades, but became more infrequent and underused as students progressed through the grades. In kindergarten and grade 1, the district used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to track reading improvement. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was used with some students in grades K-3, and with all students in grades 3 and 4. The Gates-McGinitie reading assessment was used in grades 1-6, and teacher-generated benchmark assessments were used in the elementary schools. Students receiving Title I services were identified using the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, and students receiving Reading Recovery services were tested using

both the DRA and the Observation Survey. Students who received ELL services were assessed with the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) and the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). Summative assessments were limited to the MCAS tests, and common finals in mathematics only at the high school. There were also preschool summative assessments and primary assessments.

According to administrators, the junior high school uses the Gates-McGinitie for reading assessment for some students who were referred as being in need. At the middle school, the DRA was used, but primarily for students on IEPs.

Students identified as requiring additional help were referred to Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) at all levels. Each IST was comprised of a standing team consisting of a principal or assistant principal, adjustment counselor, school nurse, special education teacher, regular education teacher, and others as necessary. At the elementary level, interventions were Reading Recovery, Intensive Reading Support, or instructional modifications. At the junior high school, students scoring below 220 on the MCAS tests were assigned to remedial reading instead of an elective. At the high school, such students were assigned to MCAS preparation class instead of taking an elective.

Administrators also pointed to the teacher help night as an intervention for students requiring assistance, but such assistance was not mandatory, and administrators did not keep or track attendance. Peer tutoring by National Honor Society students was similarly voluntary. The district did provide late buses, however, four days per week.

3. Early intervention programs in literacy were provided at the primary education level to ensure that all students were reading at the 'Proficient' level on the MCAS test by the end of Grade 4.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had Reading Recovery programs in place at all three Title I elementary schools. Each elementary school had at least two reading specialists, and two "primary preventionists" assigned

to grades one and two, providing 10-week sessions of 35 minutes per day, four days per week, of additional reading support.

As cited previously, the district was eligible for Title I support at three of its four elementary schools. At the fourth school, the district employed an additional reading specialist using local funds to mirror the function of the Title I teachers. Language-based programs for special education students at the elementary level were based upon the Lindamood-Bell intensive phonemic system.

On the 2007 MCAS test administration, 62 percent of Agawam students scored at the 'Proficient' level or above on the grade 4 MCAS ELA test, compared to 56 percent statewide. On the 2006 administration, 51 percent of district students had attained proficiency, compared to 50 percent statewide. In 2005, 57 percent of Agawam students had attained proficiency, compared to 50 percent statewide.

4. The district immediately assessed the skills and needs of entering and mobile students when records were not available or accessible, and made educationally appropriate and effective placements.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Administrators reported that the district was proactive in securing previous school records of students entering the district without them. Counselors reported making telephone contacts with prior schools to facilitate the transfer of records. Administrators reported that students without records were admitted to school immediately in the event that records were not readily forthcoming, in order not to inadvertently deny access to necessary special education services for qualifying students. Further, the district employed the services of a licensed social worker as the full-time attendance officer to help ensure that there were no home-related issues preventing students from attending regularly. Administrators reported that the attendance officer made regular and frequent home visits both to encourage student attendance when necessary, and to address social issues that may have interfered with regular school attendance.

5. The district provided programs and services to alleviate the adverse effects of poverty (including delayed language development, lack of readiness skills, low self-esteem and aspirations, high mobility, and family instability) on students' social, emotional, and intellectual development.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district provided resources for all students in the district to identify those who may have experienced delayed language development, lack of readiness skills, low self-esteem and aspirations, high mobility, or family instability. It provided services that other districts might normally offer only to those displaying special needs to all Agawam students who required them. At the elementary level, each school was assigned a preventionist at least half time who worked with students who tested one standard deviation or more below the average on such measures as the DRA or the DIBELS. The preventionist provided tutoring in reading or math as needed. In addition, the district provided a Reading Recovery program to all elementary schools, assigning two reading specialists to each elementary school in the district. Intensive math and reading support were provided at the middle school as well. Further, counseling services provided by the district used the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs. This model, developed by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA), was described by student services representatives to be "data-driven and results focused." Results were tracked using a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) system, stressing decision-making and helping students who had difficulty in making successful choices. In addition, the district provided bus transportation at all levels without additional cost to parents, and there was an active peer counseling program at the high school.

The district reported 19 percent of its students as receiving free or reduced-cost lunch. During the 2007 administration of the MCAS tests, the Agawam Public Schools had 52 percent of its students in this subgroup scoring at the 'Warning/Failing' or 'Needs Improvement' level, compared to the state average of 63 percent.

6. The district directly involved parents and community organizations in the education of their children through their regular communication and outreach, and facilitated their participation by such means as holding meetings and events at convenient times and locations and providing translators, transportation, and child care.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district made plans to involve parents at every opportunity. The district created a new website in July 2007, posting substantial information for parents as well as including a parent portal to allow access to student classroom grades. In addition, each school had an individual website linked through the district site.

During the EQA visit, the high school was widely advertising a parent tea. At elementary schools, parents provided school support for holiday activities involving Halloween, and they seemed quite accustomed to being in the school buildings and the classrooms. All schools in the district had scheduled evening meetings for parents on the school calendar. Each school had back-to-school meetings in the fall. The back-to-school meeting was designed to provide parents with an introduction to all of their students' teachers and practices, and was not to take the place of parent conference meetings. Each school scheduled a parent conference evening as well, and administrators at all schools reported that parent requests for appointments with teachers and administrators were routinely honored.

Public message boards outside each school in the district advertised meetings for parents or community members. At the elementary and middle schools, parents were invited to have lunch with their children several times per year. Administrators and teachers reported frequent contacts both to and from parents using e-mail messages. Also, principals mentioned the use of newsletters that were mailed home and posted on the individual school websites.

7. District administration and staff helped all students make effective transitions from one school, grade level, or program to another. This assistance was focused on maintaining or improving levels of student performance.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Beginning with pre-screening for kindergarten, the district assisted students in making effective transitions at all levels. Kindergarten administrators used the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development-II as a screening tool. In general, there were three options for each young person: a re-screening in the fall prior to attendance, a special education referral, or standard admission to kindergarten.

Administrators reported that each school conducted evening meetings during the spring prior to school transition. Students received tours of the new school. The district provided school bus transportation from elementary schools to the middle school, and counselors met face to face to answer questions about the incoming students. Bus transportation was similarly provided to bring middle school students to the junior high school, and to bring junior high school students to the high school.

Guidance counselors managed transition from the high school to further education for students. Counselors planned a career day for students exploring alternatives to post-secondary education, and college fairs and financial planning nights for students and parents of students planning on further education.

Special education students participated in transition planning team meetings as required by law and as confirmed by the Coordinated Program Review (CPR) conducted by the DOE in February 2007. Administrators also reported that appropriate referrals were made to adult and social agencies for special education students who would benefit from them beginning in grade 9, or occasionally earlier if appropriate.

Student records were transferred between schools in a far less formal method. Administrators reported that the records were “cleaned” before being hand-carried between schools, although they were not able to specify which items were deleted and which were retained. Teachers were encouraged to look at student cumulative files, but they reported that they only did so when they were experiencing problems with particular students.

8. The district had fair and equitable policies, procedures, and practices to reduce discipline referrals, grade retention, suspension, and exclusion.

**Rating: Unsatisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district did not use a readily accessible system to track disciplinary referrals, suspensions, or exclusions. As a result, it was not able to provide a detailed record of disciplinary infractions and interventions over the past three years, although it had reported aggregate numbers to the Department of Education. In 2006, it experienced a rate of 11.6 percent in-school suspensions that was higher than the state rate of 3.4 percent, according to data provided to the Department of Education.

In September 2007, the district began using a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support system at the middle school and two elementary schools. Initial results appeared to be encouraging, although the old disciplinary referral system remained in place at the other schools. As mentioned earlier, the district was using the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs designed by the MASCA.

During 2006, the superintendent requested school committee approval to purchase a new computerized data management system that would track discipline as well as more efficiently manage student records. According to the superintendent, the committee requested presentations from several vendors, and she complied. At the time of the EQA visit, plans were in place for the school committee presentation and funds were budgeted for the eventual purchase.

Grade retention was handled using a so-called "Class D system." Students who failed to earn sufficient credits were placed in a "Class D" status and were retained there until they made up sufficient credits to matriculate in summer school or adult education. Administrators reported that the Instructional Support Team managed students who were in the class D program, but in 2007 the district reported a retention rate of 3.2 percent, higher than the state rate of 2.5 percent.

9. The district had policies, procedures, and practices to prevent or minimize dropping out, and to recover dropouts and return them to an educationally appropriate placement.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

Administrators cited summer school as one vehicle used to limit the number of dropouts. Counselors were very active in meeting with students who had expressed a desire to drop out. Administrators reported that it was common practice to attempt to hold parent meetings with students considering terminating their education to explore other options. The high school student handbook stated, "Every effort will be made to encourage potential dropouts to remain in school. Guidance counselors and school administrators will develop programs to encourage students to remain in school. An annual report will be submitted to the school committee by June 30 regarding numbers and reasons of dropouts."

Administrators also cited both the summer school and evening school programs as ways to assist students in making up credits. In addition, they described efforts sometimes used to encourage students to explore vocational education programs offered through the collaborative. Administrators reported that they were "very creative," however, in assisting special education students who found themselves in credit trouble in order to prevent them from dropping out. There was no evidence presented that there was a formal program to encourage dropouts to return to school, although counselors sometimes made a telephone call on their own.

10. <u>The district implemented policies and programs that addressed the needs of transient and homeless students and provided them with timely and equitable access to quality programs.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district reported very few transient or homeless students. The district had a homeless coordinator in place as required by law. Interviewees reported that in the infrequent instances when students became homeless or transient, the district provided transportation and was very aggressive in making certain that students began school with or without records. Immunization records were the exception, but interviewees reported that the district did its utmost to ensure that all students were allowed into schools with appropriate special education services as soon as possible. The district stood ready to provide tutoring, school supplies, money for enrichment activities, duplicate textbooks, and other necessary services whenever required.

11. District and school policies and practices promoted the importance of student attendance, and attendance was continuously monitored, reported, and acted upon.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Student handbooks stressed the need for students to attend school and the high school handbook describes the types of documentation required of students returning from absence. Administrators also described an attendance policy for the high school that was first put in place during the 2005-2006 school year. This policy called for the loss of credit upon reaching five days of unexcused absence in a semester course or 10 days in a full-year course. Unexcused absence was defined as absence for reasons other than doctor or dentist appointment, court appearance, bereavement, religious observance, suspension, Department of Social Services (DSS) commitment, Department of Youth Services (DYS) commitment, or "any other reason that the Administration deems appropriate." There was an appeal policy in place.

In addition to its mandatory attendance policy, the district employed a full-time licensed social worker in the role of attendance officer. The attendance officer sent letters warning students who approached the unexcused absence limit described above and conducted attendance hearings when they were required.

12. District and school policies and practices promoted and tracked the importance of staff attendance and participation, and appropriate provisions were made to ensure continuity of the instructional program.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The principal of each building effectively monitored staff attendance, and called violators of contracted attendance policy to the attention of the superintendent for further action. A substitute coordinator received absentee calls from staff members anticipating a day of absence, and the district assigned a daily substitute.

The district employed several building substitutes for daily assignments. They would be used first, because of their familiarity with the students and school procedures. Administrators

reported that they had not had to advertise for long-term substitutes, since they had been able to use recently retired teachers to fill that role when necessary. The district made an effort to employ licensed substitutes when possible, but agreed that this was not always possible.

Attendance within the district varied from an average of 4.7 to 9.8 days absent, including professional development. The largest single component contributing to the fluctuation was long-term days absent, a factor over which the district had little control. Agawam Middle School had the highest rate of faculty attendance at 95.8 percent, while Robinson Park Elementary School was lowest at 90.2 percent. Both fall within the EQA guideline for adequate faculty attendance of 90 percent. The following table provides a detailed explanation of staff attendance, based upon information provided by the district.

**Staff Attendance**

| School | Number of Teachers | Days Absent Long-term | Days Absent Short-term | Prof. Days | Jury Duty or Military Leave | Other | Average Days Absent incl. Prof. Dev. | Average Days Absent excl. Prof. Dev. | Rate of Attendance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agawam ECC | 22 | 0 | 101 | 51 | 1 | 40.5 | 4.7 | 3.6 | 95.2 |
| Agawam HS | 27 | 52 | 130.8 | 62.3 | 5 | 55 | 6.2 | 3.9 | 93.8 |
| Agawam JHS | 24 | 0 | 106 | 47.5 | 2.5 | 38 | 4.4 | 3.4 | 95.6 |
| Agawam MS | 19 | 0 | 78 | 50.5 | 0 | 17 | 4.1 | 2.8 | 95.8 |
| Phelps Elem | 30 | 99 | 160 | 103.5 | 6 | 53 | 7.1 | 3.5 | 92.9 |
| Granger Elem | 34 | 94 | 230 | 165.9 | 4 | 50.1 | 8.6 | 4.7 | 91.3 |
| Clark Elem | 31 | 0 | 192.5 | 156 | 5 | 37.5 | 6.8 | 4.2 | 93.2 |
| Robinson Park | 34 | 169 | 211 | 175 | 9 | 52.5 | 9.8 | 4.5 | 90.2 |
| **Total** | **221** | **414** | **1179.25** | **814.7** | **32.5** | **343.6** | **6.8** | **3.8** | **93.2** |

13. <u>District and school leadership implemented policies, procedures, and practices to increase proportionate subgroup representation in advanced and/or accelerated programs, in order to close the achievement gap.</u>

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

Administrators were unable to describe policies, procedures, or practices to increase proportional subgroup representation in advanced or accelerated programs in order to close the achievement

gap, beyond reporting that they were “supportive” to students with identified special needs. Counselors were identified as the staff members who would bear most of the individual responsibilities in this area, but administrators were unable to detail specific instances where such efforts were initiated or success attained. Administrators reported that the district had no records of the numbers of students with identified special needs or of economically disadvantaged students attending advanced or accelerated programs.

| Standard VI: Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ratings▼ Indicators►** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **Total** |
| **Excellent** | | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | **1** |
| **Satisfactory** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | **10** |
| **Needs Improvement** | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ | | **2** |
| **Unsatisfactory** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## VI. Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The district engaged in a participative, well-documented, and transparent budget process that used student achievement as a factor in the overall budget. The district acquired and used financial, physical, and competitive capital resources to provide for and sustain the advancement of achievement for all students enrolled in the district. The district regularly assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of its financial and capital assets and had the ability to meet reasonable changes and unanticipated events.

**Standard Rating: Satisfactory**

**Findings:**

- The district's budget development process informed and included all stakeholders, and the final document provided clear and comprehensive information regarding the district's financial position and budget needs.
- Salaries for school nurses, custodians, and maintenance personnel were included in the municipal rather than the school district budget, and municipal administrators supervised these personnel.
- The school district's energy costs were also included in the municipal budget, enabling the district to expend more of it's budget on educational costs.
- The EQA saw evidence that the district implemented an evaluation review process to determine the cost effectiveness in its special education programs, but not it's regular education programs.
- The district had a formal preventative maintenance program, administered by the town's director of maintenance, to maximize and prolong the effective use of the district's capital and major facility assets, and the district's schools were well maintained.

- Examiners found no evidence that the district had a formal long-term capital improvement plan that was updated annually and included the estimated replacement costs of building systems.
- The district had updated security systems in its schools to ensure student safety.

**Summary**

The Agawam Public Schools had a formal budget process with a comprehensive schedule that began in November of the current budget year with administrators discussing priorities and guidelines. The process concluded the following April with a completed budget presentation at the annual town meeting. Examiners learned in interviews that the process was open and participatory with many stakeholders involved. The school committee, central office administration, school administrators, teachers, parent councils, and municipal boards and administrators had the opportunity to provide input and guidance.

Interviews with building administrators indicated that the process was collaborative and included their meetings with staff members and parent councils and a number of meetings with administrators. Principals prepared building-based budgets that incorporated staffing requests and maintenance and capital improvements to their schools. The final budget document provided clear and accurate information and tables, and was it comprehensive in that it contained all funding and expenditure categories by cost centers utilized in the district. The district provided evidence that the budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data, although written evidence of this process was limited in the budget preparation documents, budget meeting minutes, or the budget document itself.

Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators and staff members, and the public. The assistant superintendent for business met with the school committee's budget subcommittee every two weeks, and the full school committee received financial reports regularly at their meetings. School committee policies relative to financial reports were general in nature and did not include a number of the practices in effect in the district. Principals stated in interviews that they could obtain their

budget status at any time. Local, state, and federal financial reports and statements were accurate and filed on time.

The school district budget increased each year of the period under review, and the district exceeded its net school spending requirements by an average of over $5 million, or more than 15 percent, during the review period. The district did not have to reduce staff members in order to meet other budget needs. Salaries and materials for nurses, custodians, and maintenance personnel were included in the municipal rather than the school district budget. Energy costs were also included in the municipal budget, and therefore rising energy costs did not result in reductions in other budget categories. The district and town had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district budget by the town.

The mayor, who chaired the school committee, stated to examiners that the community valued education and that no layoffs or reductions in staff members or services to the schools had been necessary. School personnel stated in interviews with examiners that they had adequate supplies and materials. The district had not established any fees for transportation or student activities such as athletics. In addition, the district continued to provide transportation for secondary school students, despite the state no longer requiring this practice.

The district's facilities were clean, well maintained, safe, and secure. The district had completed a number of projects in recent years, including the installation of six modular classrooms at elementary schools to accommodate programs for special education and to reduce class size. The Massachusetts School Building Authority, after reviewing the conditions of all the district's schools, rated all in the top category, which indicated that the buildings were in good condition with few or no building systems needing attention.

District administrators had placed a strong emphasis on building security. The district planned and installed state of the art equipment and monitoring systems, and engaged a consulting firm to evaluate all schools. The district's schools had cameras and monitors in numerous locations, and all entrances were secured and numbered. Computerized school floor plans have been made available to the police department; however, they have not yet been installed in police vehicles.

**Indicators**

1. The district's budget was developed through an open, participatory process, and the resulting document was clear, comprehensive, complete, current, and understandable. The budget also provided accurate information on all fund sources, as well as budgetary history and trends.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district developed its budget through an open, participatory process. Examiners reviewed a district budget schedule that indicated the formal process began in November, when central office administrators and the mayor met to discuss "budget parameters." In early December, the superintendent and central financial administrators met with school administrators to review the process, timelines, and appropriate budget preparation forms. In late December, building principals submitted their budgets to the superintendent. In early January, the central administration discussed new staffing and capital maintenance requests with building administrators. Central administrators then met with the school committee's budget finance committee to discuss the requested budget. In late February, the superintendent's requested budget was presented to the full school committee. The final approved budget was presented at a public hearing in April and to the city council in May. The schedule called for the city council to adopt the budget in June. The mayor chaired the school committee and was involved throughout the development process.

Examiners reviewed budget preparation documents prepared by the central office administration. The budget included a letter of introduction by the superintendent to budget preparation personnel. The superintendent directed them to submit a building-based budget in two distinct phases, with Phase I for services and supplies and Phase II for personnel and programs. The district had developed a budget allowance per pupil for basic supplies, and total budget amounts were allocated to each school with a formula that incorporated projected enrollment, grade levels, and a dollar amount per pupil.

The superintendent's budget message, which served as an introduction to each year's budget presentation, stated that the budget preparation process included numerous meetings with principals, directors, teachers, curriculum specialists, school councils, school committee

members, and town officials. The superintendent stated that the budget meetings were collaborative in nature, with all participants cooperating and engaging in open communication. Examiners reviewed minutes of school committee meetings and observed that budget items were on most agendas. School administrators indicated that the process was also collaborative at the school level and involved staff members and school councils.

The final budget document was clear, comprehensive, complete, current, and understandable. The budget documents contained an introductory letter from the superintendent that explained the changes from the present to requested budget; the monetary differences between the current and requested budget in all major categories; a chart of historical data displaying state and town aid for the past 13 years; a school-based budget for each school with historical data covering seven years; a profile of each school's accomplishments and goals; all grants with a description of and the name of the contact person for each; the school choice budget; student activity account information; and capital project request information. The total district budget and all major budget categories contained financial information for the previous budget year, the current budget year, and the requested budget. The total district budget did not contain historical data before the previous budget year in major summary categories. The superintendent's introductory message for the 2006 budget indicated that the district had been improving its budget format by adding more detailed and descriptive tables in an effort to effectively communicate the budget to the school committee and community at large.

2. <u>The budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of aggregate and disaggregated student assessment data to assure the budget's effectiveness in supporting improved achievement for all student populations.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district provided evidence that the budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data, although written evidence of this process was limited in the budget preparation documents, budget meeting minutes, or the budget document itself.

Central office administrators provided examples of the use of student achievement data to inform the allocation of resources. When analysis of disaggregated student assessment data showed that special needs students in grades 7-12 who received resource room instruction were not meeting standards in ELA and math, the district implemented an inclusion model at the secondary level and hired 6.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) additional staff members for the 2007-2008 school year. According to administrators, the review of math assessment data resulted in the hiring of two new math teachers in the middle school. Administrators also explained that as a result of evaluating student assessment data, the district added a remedial reading teacher at the junior high school in 2005 to support students entering grade 7 with an less than a grade 4 reading level.

Administrators further stated that the district hired two "primary preventionists" in 2006 as a result of evaluating data to determine if student deficiencies were instructional or curricular. The superintendent stated that data on attendance and dropouts were presented to the school committee to obtain its approval to add an attendance officer to the budget. School committee members explained that the data furnished from a pilot program in two schools led to implementation of Reading Recovery at some schools. Following an analysis of the increasing needs in specific areas of the special education program, the district purchased modular classrooms and hired staff members to establish autism programs and other programs within the district. This allowed cost savings compared to prior years when such students were placed in private programs at additional cost, and the savings were used to address the educational needs of all students in the district.

3. The district's budget and supplemental funding were adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and to provide for adequate operational resources. The community annually provided sufficient financial resources to ensure educationally sound programs and facilities of quality, as evidenced by a sufficient district revenue levy and level of local spending for education.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district's budget and supplemental funding were adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and adequate operational resources. The community annually provided sufficient financial resources to ensure educationally sound programs and facilities of quality.

The district's budget increased by 1.58 percent or $445,936 from FY 2004 to FY 2005, and 3.49 percent or $999,192 from FY 2005 to FY 2006. The district's budget increased by 4.18 percent or $1,237,980 from FY 2006 to FY 2007, and by 4.11 percent or $1,123,115 from FY 2007 to FY 2008. The district exceeded its net school spending requirement in 2004 by 21.1 percent, in 2005 by 12.7 percent, in 2006 by 17.3 percent, and in 2007 by 17.2 percent. However, according to DOE data, the district's FY 2006 per pupil expenditure for the 11 major categories of the budget was less than the state average in all categories except payments to out-of-district schools. The district's total per pupil expenditure in all categories was $9,902, compared to the state average of $11,211. The district's overall spending of the budget from its general fund was 88.6 percent, while the balance of expenditures came from grants and other receipts. The certified free cash for the district as of July 1, 2007 was $4,753,178.

The mayor stated to examiners that there had been no cuts to schools and services and no layoffs during the period under review. Additional staff members had been added as required. Examiners were told in interviews with teacher association representatives that the schools had sufficient supplies and materials but they could use more computer labs. The budget was not frozen during any operational year for the period under review.

The budgets for school custodial and maintenance personnel, maintenance and ground supplies, and all energy costs were not included in the school district budget but were in the operational budget of the municipality. Therefore, escalating energy costs that often result in reductions to the operations of schools in other districts was not a factor in the budget allocations of Agawam Public Schools. Academic programs were not reduced to accommodate non-academic budget requests.

The district had not established any student fees such as those for transportation or athletic participation. In addition, the district continued to transport secondary school students despite the state no longer requiring this.

Agawam had two major sources of revenue in the community, Berkshire Power and Six Flags, as well as an industrial park and other smaller businesses. The community did not have a stabilization fund.

4. The district, as part of its budget development**,** implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of all of its programs, initiatives, and activities. This process was based, in part, on student performance data and needs.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

The district, as part of its budget development**,** implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of all its special education programs, initiatives, and activities, but not its regular education programs. The district commissioned a number of studies to evaluate its delivery of special education services, in part because it found that costs had escalated. The review indicated that the district could provide more effective programs both from a cost and student performance perspective if they brought certain programs back to the district. The district purchased modular classrooms and hired staff members to establish an autism program and other programs in the district.

As a result of its evaluations, the district also created an in-district program in elementary life skills, an elementary resource program, a middle school intensive learning program, a junior high school pre-vocational program, a secondary life skills program, and a secondary alternative learning program. These programs were incorporated into the budget after an evaluation review process that included a component to measure cost effectiveness.

5. The district and community had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district budget by the community.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district and community had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district budget by the community.

Examiners reviewed the written agreement, which was executed in a timely manner by both district and municipal officers. The document contained descriptions of the formulas used to calculate allowable indirect charges expended by the community in behalf of school operations. A district administrator stated to examiners that school district personnel reviewed these assessed costs annually.

A review of the written agreement indicated that budget expenditures for energy costs, nurses, school custodians, maintenance personnel, and supplies for the maintenance of the schools were included in the agreement as an indirect charge from the municipality to the school district. This amount was in excess of $4 million, and a review of the school district's End of Year Pupil and Financial report by examiners indicated that these charges were not reported as expenditures from the school district's budget.

6. The combination of Chapter 70 Aid and local revenues, considering justified indirect charges, met or exceeded the Net School Spending (NSS) requirements of the education reform formula for the period under examination.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The combination of Chapter 70 Aid and local revenues, considering justified indirect charges, met or exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirements of the education reform formula for the period under examination. In each year of the period under review, the district exceeded its NSS requirement.

Chapter 70 aid for the district in FY 2004 was $9,470,219, and the district exceeded its NSS requirement by $6,110,139 or 21.1 percent. In FY 2005, Chapter 70 aid was $9,966,288, and the district exceeded its NSS requirement by $3,850,658 or 12.7 percent. In FY 2006, Chapter 70 aid was $10,826,098, and the district exceeded its NSS requirement by $5,586,351 or 17.3 percent.

In FY 2007, Chapter 70 aid was $12,524,413, and the district exceeded its NSS requirement by $5,954,557 or 17.2 percent .

7. Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators and staff, and the public. In addition, required local, state, and federal financial reports, and statements were accurate and filed on time.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators and staff members, and the public. Examiners were told at a school committee interview that the budget subcommittee of the school committee met with the assistant superintendent for business every two weeks, and that the full committee received a financial report at every meeting. Examiners reviewed school committee policies relative to financial reports and determined that they were general in nature and did not include a number of the practices in effect by the district, such as how often the administration must submit financial reports to the school committee.

Principals stated in interviews that they received a paper report from central administration once a month but could obtain their budget status at any time.

Local, state, and federal financial reports and statements were accurate and filed on time. Examiners reviewed independent audit reports for the period under review and did not see any findings relative to the district's late submission of reports. The End of Year Pupil and Financial Report was accurate and filed in accordance with DOE requirements.

8. The district used efficient accounting technology that integrated the district-level financial information of each school and program, and the district used forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure that spending was within fiscal budget limits. District administrators were able to regularly and accurately track spending and other financial transactions.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district used efficient accounting technology that integrated the district-level financial information of each school and program. The district used the MUNIS financial program that, along with the supplementary use of district-developed Excel software programs, provided the district the means to account for district- and school-level programs properly. The district had not established the ability for school administrators to access their budgets electronically on computers at their schools. The procedures for school administrators to both review their budgets and forward purchase order requests to the central administration were paper processes.

The district used forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure that spending was within fiscal budget limits. Examiners reviewed the forecast mechanisms and control programs, developed by the district in either MUNIS or Excel, which allowed it to ensure spending was within budgetary limits. However, although the district had a policy, titled DBJ Budget Transfer Authority, regarding transfers in the school budget during the budget year operation, it was general in nature and not as restrictive as the practice in place.

The municipality and the school district both used the MUNIS system and could exchange data electronically. The municipality could read the district's MUNIS ledgers from its office.

9. <u>The district had a system in place to pursue, acquire, monitor, and coordinate all local, state, federal, and private competitive grants and monitored special revenue funds, revolving accounts, and the fees related to them to ensure that they were managed efficiently and used effectively for the purposes intended.</u>

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had a system in place to pursue, acquire, monitor, and coordinate local, state, and federal grants. Each grant had a specific academic professional staff member responsible for program administration, and the central administration finance office administered the financial portion. The annual school district budget contained a financial accounting and description of each grant as well as the name of the responsible program administrator.

Food services, athletics, and early childhood, summer school, adult education, and before- and after-school programs were the revolving accounts that were the responsibility of the central office finance personnel. District administrators stated that the town's independent auditing firm audited these accounts. They also stated that there was no principal student activity account and all requests and expenditures went through the warrant process. There were no student-paid fees in the district. Examiners reviewed a written procedure for the collection of fees, developed by the district, that required accurate financial records to be kept for all activities.

10. The district had a system in place to ensure that state procurement laws were followed, that appropriate staff had MCPPO credentials, and that all assets and expenditures were monitored and tracked to insure efficient and maximum effective utilization. The district also competitively procured independent financial auditing services at least every five years, shared the results of these audits, and consistently implemented their recommendations. All procurement, tracking, monitoring systems, and external audits were accurate, current and timely.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had a system in place to ensure adherence to state procurement laws. A central office administrator had MCPPO credentials. The town administered major bid solicitations placed by the school administration. The district used state bid lists and collaborative bid awards for major purchases.

Examiners reviewed the independent audits for the period under review and did not observe any distinctive findings. Examiners reviewed correspondence from the district's independent auditor to a central office financial administrator that stated that for fiscal years 2005 and 2006 there were no reportable conditions identified during their audits in Agawam, and as a result no management letters were issued for those years.

11. The district had a formal preventative maintenance program to maximize and prolong the effective use of the district's capital and major facility assets, to ensure that educational and program facilities were clean, safe, well-lit, well-maintained, and conducive to promoting student learning and achievement.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had a formal preventative maintenance program to maximize and prolong the effective use of the district's capital and major facility assets. The town's director of maintenance administered the program. Documents reviewed indicated that some routine maintenance projects, such as HVAC belt inspection, were conducted, and a list of maintenance projects had recently been completed. Examiners were told in interviews that roofs and boilers were inspected on a routine basis, but no documented evidence was presented.

Examiners conducted walk-throughs of the educational and program facilities and concluded that the facilities were clean, safe, well maintained, and conducive to promoting student learning and achievement. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) reviewed all schools in the district in January 2006 to gather data on the structure and condition of the facilities. The MSBA rated the building conditions of all schools as category 1, the highest rated category, which indicated the buildings were in good condition with few or no building systems needing attention.

The Coordinated Program Review (CPR) of January 2007 reported that "the special education and related services in the district's elementary schools are provided in spaces that do not meet some or all of the four criteria listed." Examiners observed that modular classrooms were installed at all four elementary schools to provide additional special education and related service facilities to resolve this problem.

12. The district had a long-term capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected the future capital development and improvement needs, including educational and program facilities of adequate size. The plan was reviewed and revised as needed with input from all appropriate stakeholders.

**Rating: Needs Improvement**

**Evidence**

The district did not have a long-term capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected the future capital development and improvement needs of its educational facilities. The principals, as part of their budget development, each year submitted requests for capital needs in their respective schools. In an interview with district and town personnel, it was stated that a five-year capital improvement plan existed; but a formal plan was not available for examiner review. The town director of maintenance administered capital plan projects for the schools. The district has completed a number of capital projects in recent years, such the addition of six modular classrooms to elementary schools and wiring for Internet access. However, there did not appear to be a long-term capital plan that addressed the anticipated life of all building systems, such as boilers, HVAC, and roofs, that appropriate stakeholders reviewed, reevaluated, and cost-adjusted on an annual basis.

13. The schools were secure and had systems to ensure student safety.

**Rating: Excellent**

**Evidence**

The schools were secure and had systems to ensure student safety. The superintendent had determined that the district needed a comprehensive safety plan. Interviewees stated that the superintendent sought input from all principals and other staff members as well as from the police and fire chiefs and the emergency director. The district also contracted with a private firm that specialized in building safety and security to develop a detailed safety plan for every school, which was made available to EQA examiners. The school committee reviewed and accepted the plan.

Examiners observed that all exterior doors in all schools were locked and individually numbered or lettered. Admittance to all schools was through a single door that required a buzzer entry and had a camera monitor. All visitors were required to sign in at the main office and to wear a visitor's badge. Secondary schools had security personnel. Each school had a number of cameras and monitors and exterior lighting. The superintendent had a monitor in her office with which she could observe a number of locations in all schools. Computerized school floor plans have been made available to the police department; however, they have not yet been installed in police vehicles.

The district had crisis report teams and all requisite safety and security manuals, and it conducted fire drills, safety drills, and lockdown drills in all its schools. Staff members had received professional development in all areas of safety and security.

# Appendix A: Proficiency Index (PI)

The proficiency index is a metric used to measure and compare all schools and school districts regarding their performance on the MCAS tests. The proficiency index is a measure of the level of achievement a district, school, grade, or subgroup has made in relation to the 'Proficient' achievement level on the MCAS tests. There are three indices: the English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI), the Math Proficiency Index (MPI), and the Science and Technology/Engineering Index (SPI).

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Percentage of students scoring 200-208 on test | x 0 = A |
| Percentage of students scoring 210-218 on test | x 25 = B |
| Percentage of students scoring 220-228 on test | x 50 = C |
| Percentage of students scoring 230-238 on test | x 75 = D |
| Percentage of students scoring 240 or more on test | x 100 = E |

The proficiency index equals the sum of A + B + C + D + E = PI

*Example*: The Anywhere High School had the following results on the 2007 MCAS tests in a given content area:

| | |
|---|---|
| 12 percent of all students scored 200-208; therefore, | 12 percent x 0 = 0 |
| 15 percent of all students scored 210-218; therefore, | 15 percent x 25 = 3.75 |
| 21 percent of all students scored 220-228; therefore, | 21 percent x 50 = 10.5 |
| 34 percent of all students scored 230-238; therefore, | 34 percent x 75 = 25.5 |
| 18 percent of all students scored 240 or more; therefore, | 18 percent x 100 = 18.0 |

The proficiency index is calculated by adding: 0 + 3.75 + 10.5 + 25.5 + 18 = 57.75. The proficiency index for the Anywhere High School would be 57.75.

The EPI is calculated using the ELA results for all eligible students taking the ELA exam. The MPI is calculated using the math results for all students taking the math exam. The SPI is calculated using the STE results for all students taking the STE exam.

| **Proficiency Category** | **Proficiency Index** |
|---|---|
| Very High (VH) | 90.0-100 |
| High (H) | 80.0-89.9 |
| Moderate (M) | 70.0-79.9 |
| Low (L) | 60.0-69.9 |
| Very Low (VL) | 40.0-59.9 |
| Critically Low (CL) | 0-39.9 |

# Appendix B: Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1998 – FY 2007

| | Foundation Enrollment | Pct Chg | Foundation Budget | Pct Chg | Required Local Contribution | Chapter 70 Aid | Pct Chg | Required Net School Spending (NSS) | Pct Chg | Actual Net School Spending | Pct Chg | Dollars Over/Under Requirement | Percent Over/ Under |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FY98 | 4,440 | 4.5 | 24,210,002 | 6.5 | 13,978,064 | 9,216,376 | 15.5 | 23,194,440 | 14.9 | 24,271,576 | 7.0 | 1,077,136 | 4.6 |
| FY99 | 4,409 | -0.7 | 25,237,036 | 4.2 | 14,677,195 | 10,049,037 | 9.0 | 24,726,232 | 6.6 | 26,304,490 | 8.4 | 1,578,258 | 6.4 |
| FY00 | 4,222 | -4.2 | 24,079,113 | -4.6 | 14,843,698 | 10,682,337 | 6.3 | 25,526,035 | 3.2 | 27,344,798 | 4.0 | 1,818,763 | 7.1 |
| FY01 | 4,236 | 0.3 | 25,233,380 | 4.8 | 15,668,423 | 11,423,637 | 6.9 | 27,092,060 | 6.1 | 28,841,457 | 5.5 | 1,749,397 | 6.5 |
| FY02 | 4,177 | -1.4 | 26,478,127 | 4.9 | 17,569,842 | 11,837,774 | 3.6 | 29,407,616 | 8.5 | 30,959,460 | 7.3 | 1,551,844 | 5.3 |
| FY03 | 4,222 | 1.1 | 27,909,559 | 5.4 | 18,630,116 | 11,837,774 | 0.0 | 30,467,890 | 3.6 | 32,341,553 | 4.5 | 1,873,663 | 6.1 |
| FY04 | 4,258 | 0.9 | 28,917,953 | 3.6 | 19,493,735 | 9,470,219 | -20.0 | 28,963,954 | -4.9 | 35,074,093 | 8.4 | 6,110,139 | 21.1 |
| FY05 | 4,337 | 1.9 | 30,403,520 | 5.1 | 20,437,232 | 9,966,288 | 5.2 | 30,403,520 | 5.0 | 34,254,178 | -2.3 | 3,850,658 | 12.7 |
| FY06 | 4,392 | 1.3 | 32,319,935 | 6.3 | 21,493,837 | 10,826,098 | 8.6 | 32,319,935 | 6.3 | 37,906,286 | 10.7 | 5,586,351 | 17.3 |
| FY07 | 4,403 | 0.3 | 34,566,079 | 6.9 | 22,041,666 | 12,524,413 | 15.7 | 34,566,079 | 6.9 | 40,520,636 | 6.9 | 5,954,557 | 17.2 |

| | Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment | | | Percentage of Foundation | | | Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Foundation Budget | Ch 70 Aid | Actual NSS | Ch 70 | Required NSS | Actual NSS | |
| FY98 | 5,453 | 2,076 | 5,467 | 38.1 | 95.8 | 100.3 | 38.0 |
| FY99 | 5,724 | 2,279 | 5,966 | 39.8 | 98.0 | 104.2 | 38.2 |
| FY00 | 5,703 | 2,530 | 6,477 | 44.4 | 106.0 | 113.6 | 39.1 |
| FY01 | 5,957 | 2,697 | 6,809 | 45.3 | 107.4 | 114.3 | 39.6 |
| FY02 | 6,339 | 2,834 | 7,412 | 44.7 | 111.1 | 116.9 | 38.2 |
| FY03 | 6,611 | 2,804 | 7,660 | 42.4 | 109.2 | 115.9 | 36.6 |
| FY04 | 6,791 | 2,224 | 8,237 | 32.7 | 100.2 | 121.3 | 27.0 |
| FY05 | 7,010 | 2,298 | 7,898 | 32.8 | 100.0 | 112.7 | 29.1 |
| FY06 | 7,359 | 2,465 | 8,631 | 33.5 | 100.0 | 117.3 | 28.6 |
| FY07 | 7,851 | 2,845 | 9,203 | 36.2 | 100.0 | 117.2 | 30.9 |

Foundation enrollment is reported in October of the prior fiscal year (e.g., FY07 enrollment = Oct 1, 2005 headcount).
Foundation budget is the state's estimate of the minimum amount needed in each district to provide an adequate educational program.
Required Net School Spending is the annual minimum that must be spent on schools, including carryovers from prior years.
Net School Spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures and transportation.