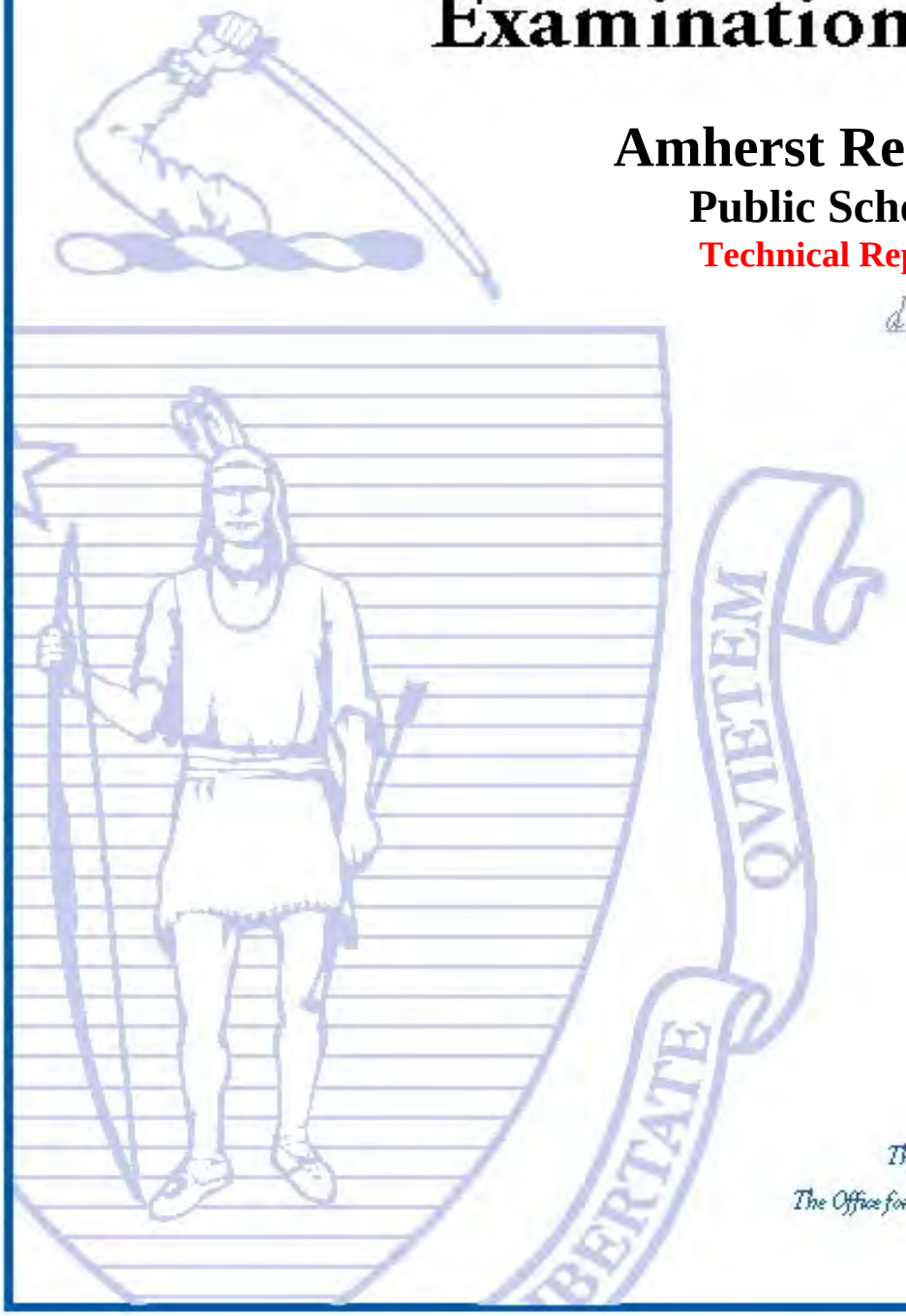
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

School District Examination Report:

Amherst Regional
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

Educational Management Audit Council

Maryellen Donahue, Chairwoman
Irwin Blumer
Ethan d'Ablemont Burnes
Joseph Esposito
Alison Fraser

Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Visiting Examination Team

Dolores Fitzgerald, Coordinating Examiner
Michael Molongoski, Senior Examiner
William Contreras, Examiner
Rose DiOrio, Examiner
Thomas Petray, Examiner
Patricia Williams, Examiner

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council voted to accept its findings at its meeting on March 7, 2008.

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 Amherst Regional Public Schools, Jere Hochman; the school department staff of the Amherst Regional Public Schools; and the town officials in Amherst and Pelham.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Amherst Regional Public Schools in October 2007. With an English language arts (ELA) proficiency index of 93 proficiency index (PI) points and a math proficiency index of 86 PI points based on the 2007 MCAS test results, Amherst Regional is considered a 'High' performing school system based on 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, 81 percent of Amherst Regional's students scored at or above the proficiency standard in ELA and 70 percent did so in math.

District Overview

The Amherst Regional Public Schools (ARPS) is comprised of three individual school districts: the Amherst Public Schools (K-6), the Pelham Public Schools (K-6), and the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District (7-12), all of which share the same superintendent. The Amherst-Pelham Regional School District serves the towns of Leverett and Shutesbury as well as Amherst and Pelham.

The towns of Amherst and Pelham are located in Hampshire County, and the towns of Leverett and Shutesbury are located in Franklin County, in west central Massachusetts. Amherst, the largest town, had an agricultural past but the main industry currently is education due to the University of Massachusetts' main campus and two private colleges located within its limits. However, as a result, the majority of the town's land is tax-exempt, which lowers the town's tax base. Leverett is a rural community with mills, farms, and lumbering as the former mainstays of the economy. Educators are attracted to Leverett by the proximity of several colleges, and the town also boasts many craftsmen, artists, and musicians. Pelham grew as a mill town, with farming, stone quarrying, and leather tanning also important industries. Currently, the town is known for its manufacture of fishing rods. Shutesbury is a rural community and a former lumbering town. The largest source of employment within all of the communities is educational, health, and social services. The towns vary somewhat in their form of municipal government, with a Board of Selectmen/Administrative Assistant/Open Town Meeting form in Leverett and

Shutesbury, a Select Board/Town Manager/Representative Town Meeting in Amherst, and a Board of Selectmen/Open Town Meeting in Pelham.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), the median family income in 1999 in the four towns was $61,237 in Amherst (rank 199), $65,521 in Shutesbury (rank 157), $71,667 in Pelham (rank 111), and $73,333 in Leverett (rank 101), compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the towns had a combined total population of 39,750, with a population of 7,064 school-age children, or 18 percent of the total. Amherst had a total population of 34,874, with a population of 5,993 school-age children, or 17 percent of the total. Leverett had a total population of 1,663, with a population of 339 school-age children, or 20 percent of the total. Pelham had a total population of 1,403, with a population of 286 school-age children, or 20 percent of the total. Shutesbury had a total population of 1,810, with a population of 446 school-age children, or 25 percent of the total.

Of the total households in the member towns, 28 percent in Amherst, 35 percent in Leverett, 35 percent in Pelham, and 45 percent in Shutesbury were households with children under 18 years of age. Sixty-eight percent of the population age 25 years or older in the member towns held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide. Among the towns, the percentage varied slightly from a low of 61 percent in Pelham to a high of 69 percent in Amherst.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2006-2007 the Amherst elementary schools had a total enrollment of 1,448. The demographic composition in the district was: 53.7 percent White, 16.4 percent Hispanic, 12.6 percent Asian, 7.5 percent African-American, 0.1 percent Native American, and 9.7 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 12.3 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 28.0 percent low income, and 17.9 percent special education. The Pelham Elementary School had a total enrollment of 125. The demographic composition in the district was: 85.6 percent White, 4.8 percent Hispanic, 4.0 percent Asian, 0.8 percent African-American, and 4.8 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 0.0 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 8.0 percent low income, and 18.4 percent special education. The Amherst-Pelham Regional middle and high schools had a total enrollment of 1,857. The demographic composition in the district was: 68.0 percent White, 9.6 percent Asian, 9.3 percent Hispanic, 8.3

percent African-American, 0.4 percent Native American, and 4.5 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 3.0 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 16.7 percent low income, and 18.4 percent special education.

In 2006-2007, 96 percent of school-age children in Amherst, 87 percent in Leverett, 98 percent in Pelham, and 92 percent in Shutesbury attended public schools. Amherst does not participate in school choice. Leverett, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham do participate in school choice, and 35, 31, and 111 students, respectively, from other communities attended those districts in 2006-2007. A total of 97 Amherst students, 19 Leverett students, 14 Pelham students, and 14 Shutesbury students attended public schools outside their respective districts, including 52 students who attended Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School, three who attended other charter schools, 21 who attended Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, and 21 who attended other vocational technical high schools.

The Amherst Regional Public Schools has seven schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 12, including five elementary schools (four in Amherst and one in Pelham) serving grades pre-kindergarten through 6, one middle school serving grades 7 and 8, and one high school serving grades 9 through 12. The administrative team includes a superintendent, an executive director of program development, a director of finance and operations, and a director of student services. Three of the elementary schools each have a principal and an assistant principal and the other two each have a principal. The middle school has a principal, co-principal, and assistant principal. The high school has a principal, two assistant principals, two deans of students, and two program coordinators. ARPS has three school committees: the five-member Amherst School Committee for the Amherst elementary schools, the three-member Pelham School Committee for the Pelham Elementary School, and the nine-member Regional School Committee for the middle and high schools.

In FY 2007, Amherst's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $14,410, compared to $11,789 statewide, ranking it 52 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 $17,890,799 to $20,017,863; Chapter 70 aid increased from $4,931,612 to $5,933,998; the

required local contribution decreased from $5,641,820 to $5,563,556; and the foundation enrollment remained at 1,459. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending increased from 28 to 30 percent over this period.

In FY 2007, Pelham's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $12,637, ranking it 84 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 $1,155,969 to $1,316,193; Chapter 70 aid increased from $112,953 to $164,607; the required local contribution decreased from $891,406 to $643,809; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 113 to 101. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending increased from 10 to 13 percent over this period.

In FY 2007, Amherst-Pelham's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $15,154, ranking it 42 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 $20,764,168 to $24,199,097; Chapter 70 aid increased from $9,244,885 to $9,689,857; the required local contribution increased from $6,003,527 to $8,312,731; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 2,048 to 1,930. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 45 to 40 percent over this period.

Context

The Amherst Regional Public Schools are served by three separate school committees, and consist of the four elementary schools located within the town of Amherst, another elementary school located in the town of Pelham, and middle and high schools located in Amherst.

The superintendent in office at the time of the EQA review completed four years in the district as of June 2007. Prior to his arrival there were no districtwide curriculum documents, and each school functioned as a separate entity rather than as part of a unified system. K-12 curriculum documents have been developed and have been in use during the past two years. The superintendent pointed out that while he supports standards-based teaching and learning, he does

not believe that “all [teachers] must be on the same page everyday” and that he believes teachers should be able to maintain autonomy.

The district’s mission, as expressed in the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and other documents, is “Becoming a Multicultural School System (BAMSS).” The district’s slogan, referred to in many interviews, is “Every Student. Every Day.” The district leadership expected that every child would graduate and have the option to attend college. In order to achieve this goal, the district acknowledged the need to narrow the performance gap between its student subgroups and its regular education students. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were generally aligned with the District Improvement Plan, and the superintendent affirmed that all principals were “invested in the goals of the DIP,” which principals affirmed in interviews.

The district recognized that reducing the achievement gap required analysis of data, and the district continued to improve in this area during the review period. The district paid more attention to individual student data and the development of Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs). The Massachusetts Department of Education selected the district to pilot its Educational Data Warehouse project, through which districts will be able to more efficiently manage and analyze student information. In FY 2004, the reduction in Chapter 70 aid had caused the district to cut programs, decrease funding for professional development, eliminate positions, increase class size, and reduce supplies and textbooks. In FY 2007, the district was able to provide additional supports and resources to the specific schools that were responsible for the district’s identification as ‘in need of improvement’ under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law to more effectively meet the needs of those schools’ student subgroups.

Some school committee members acknowledged in interviews that not until the hiring of the current superintendent did they realize that they “didn’t know much about schools” and that they were “stuck in the 70s.” They even cited the fact that there was resistance to the MCAS tests by the staff, the community, and the school committee, but this has changed with the recognition that the students in Amherst Regional must meet the state’s standards, and they welcome that the district now has goals in a District Improvement Plan.

The superintendent believes that much of what is happening in the district is “all new territory” but that it is “all about kids” and that the district will realize its goal of “Every Student. Every

Day." by closing the achievement gap between students in subgroups and regular education students.

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.

- Include the district's mission statement, which is a stand-alone document, in the District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), and standardize the format of the SIPs.
- Address the issues noted in the long-range facilities planning study of the Amherst elementary schools completed by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) in September 2007.
- Develop and implement a long-range capital plan that clearly and accurately reflects the district's future capital development and improvement needs.
- Adopt and implement a district policy on the budget process.

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 Amherst Regional Public Schools (ARPS) 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 ARPS leadership team, school administrators, and teachers, and additional documents submitted while on site. 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, Amherst Regional Pubic Schools is considered to be a 'High' performing school system, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'High' in math on the 2007 MCAS tests. Over the examination period, student performance improved by three PI points in ELA and six PI points in math, which narrowed ARPS's proficiency gaps by 28 percent in ELA and 32 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 Amherst Regional 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, over four-fifths of the students in Amherst Regional Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, over two-thirds of Amherst Regional students attained proficiency in math, and slightly more than three-fifths attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-six percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination.

- Amherst Regional's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 93 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of seven PI points, seven points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- In 2007, Amherst Regional's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 86 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 14 PI points, 10 points narrower than the state's average

proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of two PI points per year to achieve AYP.

- Amherst Regional's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 83 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 17 PI points, 11 points narrower than that statewide.

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

Between 2004 and 2007, Amherst Regional's MCAS performance showed improvement in English language arts, in math, and in science and technology/engineering.

- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Amherst Regional improved at an average of one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 29 percent, a rate equal to that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 74 percent in 2004 to 79 percent in 2007.

- Math performance in Amherst Regional showed more improvement over this period, at an average of two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 32 percent, a rate greater than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math rose from 63 percent in 2004 to 72 percent in 2007.

- Between 2004 and 2007, STE performance in Amherst Regional also improved at an average of two PI points annually, resulting in a narrowing of the proficiency gap by 24 percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE increased from 54 percent in 2004 to 61 percent in 2007.

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Amherst Regional students. Of the nine measurable subgroups in Amherst Regional, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 21 PI points in ELA and 28 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Amherst Regional in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, limited English proficient (LEP) students,

Hispanic students, African-American students, 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, White students, and non low-income students.
- Asian students performed below the district average in ELA and above the district average in math in 2007.

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

In Amherst Regional, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2004 to 23 PI points in 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 33 to 28 PI points over this period.

- All student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroups in ELA were limited English proficient students and Hispanic students.
- In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Amherst Regional with the exception of Asian students improved between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroups in math were Hispanic students and students with disabilities.

Fidelity of Implementation

A characteristic of effective educational organizations (schools and districts) is the strong alignment of goals, plans, processes, and actions—from the boardroom 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 depth of permeation 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.

Amherst Regional district and school leaders had a clearly understood mission of providing "all students with a high quality education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural pluralistic society," expressed as the mantra "Every Student. Every Day." The District Improvement Plan further defined this all encompassing goal through specific objectives, such as: addressing the fundamental teaching and learning needs of the schools that caused the district to be identified as in need of improvement; analyzing a variety of aggregated and disaggregated data in order to fully assess student learning needs; continuing the development of curriculum guides in ELA, math, and science aligned to the state frameworks; employing new instructional strategies and utilizing new research-based materials; and providing the professional development needed to implement the district's improvement objectives. The School Improvement Plans shared the common goal that every student be a successful learner, and each plan provided a general list of goals for improving student achievement. Principals agreed that the district's priority was on "Every Student. Every Day." and the need to close the achievement gaps among student subgroups.

The district ensured fidelity of implementation by encouraging the examination of disaggregated student achievement data, training all principals in TestWiz, and providing opportunities for teachers to become more adept at analyzing student data. Furthermore, walk-throughs by principals were instrumental in providing informal information regarding the quality of instruction in the schools.

The EQA team asked a series of questions to the superintendent, principals, and teachers representing all levels to determine whether the district aligned curriculum development, mandatory professional development, and student assessment to ensure a joint focus on the accomplishment of district priorities. Interviewees across all levels responded with frequent references to the district's slogan of "Every Student. Every Day." Principals elaborated that the means to implement this was having high expectations for students and student achievement, and using inclusion classrooms and differentiated learning strategies to close the achievement gaps among subgroups. Principals further said that teachers needed to continue the work of aligning the curriculum with the state frameworks.

All teachers interviewed were aware that the district's priority was to close the gap in student achievement among the subgroups. They referred to "Every Student. Every Day." as the need to reach every child, every day, and expressed their belief that every child has the potential to become a successful student. Teachers agreed with the principals and superintendent regarding the district's development of curricula in ELA, math, and science. They also agreed with the superintendent that the district needed to continue to focus especially on professional development. Most teachers said that principals monitored fidelity of implementation using walk-throughs, but this was not the case for all teachers, and some teachers expressed their belief that the district's evaluation system was a "big weakness."

In its observations of 42 randomly selected classrooms in all the district schools, the EQA team observed that the fidelity of implementation of district and school goals varied from level to level, and was generally strongest at the elementary level and weakest at the high school level. Examiners found that "[t]he teacher implements instructional strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities" in 94 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, compared to 70 percent at the middle school level and 53 percent at the high school level. Regarding the district's goal of closing the achievement gaps among all subgroups, especially between the English language learner (ELL) students and regular education students, the examiners found that "[t]he teacher incorporates ELA language acquisition and ELA language development in subject area instruction" in 88 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 70 percent at the middle school level, and in just 13 percent at the high school level. Examiners found evidence of high expectations in 85 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 76 percent at the middle school level, and 52 percent at the high school level.

Standard Summaries

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on 11 and 'Needs Improvement' on three of the 14 performance indicators in this standard.

During the examination period, the Amherst Regional Public Schools were served by three separate school committees and a superintendent who had completed four years in the district as of June 2007. School committee members acknowledged that prior to the arrival of current superintendent, schools in the district were managed at the building level, with curricula that were not standardized and aligned across grades K-12.

During the review period, a new direction emerged in the district in response to national and state standards, particularly those related to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. A District Improvement Plan (DIP) was developed that highlighted goals regarding the improvement of achievement for all student subgroup populations, equity for all district students, data analysis and decision-making, and development of curriculum guides in ELA, math, and science/technology aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were developed for all schools, with school goals aligned with district goals and priorities.

The district's policy manual indicated that the three school committees governing the district have the dual responsibilities of meeting statutory requirements pertaining to public education and fulfilling citizens' expectations for the education of the community's youth. School committee members expressed full knowledge of their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993.

The superintendent delegated program and management leadership to district and school administrators. Principals were the designated instructional leaders of their respective schools, assisted by district curriculum directors and department heads. A stated district priority was to hire the most capable administrators and hold them responsible.

The district provided leadership in the standardization of district curricula, which resulted in the adoption of a newly aligned K-12 math program and partial completion of an aligned K-12 ELA curriculum guide. The district worked with a number of agencies and programs to provide support services to at-risk students and economically disadvantaged families. The district consolidated the student services office to centrally coordinate services for English language learning, special education, discipline, health, and safety.

The budget process developed by the superintendent was described by district administrators and school committee members as comprehensive, transparent, and guided by providing equity to students along with addressing student achievement needs. Since the arrival of the present superintendent, allocations for instructional materials, supplies, and teaching resources were made on a per pupil basis, while other funding was allocated based on student needs. School committee members indicated that budget discussions and deliberations frequently focused on the academic preparation of all students for college, equity for all students, making adequate yearly progress (AYP), and having aligned K-12 curricula. Cost-effective in-district programs for special needs students were developed as an alternative to out-of-district placements.

Effective planning was evident in the district to address student achievement. The district prioritized efforts to improve student achievement for the aggregate student population and all student subgroups. Numerous district goals were established for 2005-2006, which were defined with accompanying narrative and statements. These goals were intended to promote quality instruction, raise academic expectations for all students, and meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proficiency requirements by 2014. District planning was also directed toward the goal of making AYP in all schools.

The district's commitment to implementing data analysis practices to become more data-driven in its decision-making was central to its governance and planning processes. School principals and teachers indicated that over the past two years the schools have become more data conscious. The administration presented a model to assist district administrators and teachers in helping all students achieve proficiency and in gathering and interpreting data. The model suggested that teachers and instructional support staff members working together should be able to state: 1) we know our students and how each learns; 2) we know what to teach and how to teach it; 3) we know if each student is learning it; and 4) we know what to do if s/he did not learn it.

The DIP and SIPs were presented and discussed at school committee meetings twice annually, which were aired on local cable access television for public viewing. The district's website, open school committee meetings, coverage by local cable television and newspapers, annual reports, and school council meetings were cited as examples of ways in which the district communicated with its stakeholders.

Curriculum and Instruction

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Needs Improvement' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on five and 'Needs Improvement' on six of the 11 performance indicators in this standard.

Developing and aligning curricula became a priority in the Amherst Regional Public Schools under the direction of the current superintendent. Middle and high school teachers who taught courses in common used professional development time to review and revise their curricula. The elementary schools, previously guided by curriculum guidelines written in 1995, produced a revised elementary English language arts curriculum that listed the content and skills to be addressed, but allowed teachers some autonomy in its implementation.

The district had few common expectations for the required components of a curriculum. The result was that within and across content areas and grade levels, the curriculum content varied widely. The recent curriculum development did lead to some increased horizontal alignment across grade levels and courses. At the same time, however, much of this curriculum development was so recent that some curricula were being implemented for the first time in 2007-2008, after the period under review. Therefore, the district did not yet have an established process for the regular and timely review and revision of its curricula. The elementary math curriculum, however, had been in place for several years and was scheduled for revision at the close of 2007-2008, after a full year of implementation of the new Investigations program.

Assessments were the curriculum component yet to be developed. At the time of the site visit, the math curriculum had beginning and end of year summative assessments. The ELA curriculum included writing prompts and other standardized assessments at the elementary level only. Neither math nor ELA curriculum documentation contained formative assessments. The result was that teachers and principals did not have either periodic or final data as to the extent of students' mastery of the curriculum objectives.

Principals agreed they were the curriculum leaders in their buildings, and several also reported that they delegated some of that leadership authority. At the elementary level, principals delegated authority to school-based reading teachers in ELA. At the middle school, the principal delegated responsibility to departmental curriculum leaders. At the high school, the principal

delegated authority to content area department heads. However, with little assessment information, principals were unable to monitor either students' achievement of the curriculum objectives or teachers' effectiveness in delivery of the curriculum. They tended instead to rely generally upon the overall skill of the teachers.

During the review period, the district trained a large percentage of its teachers in instructional strategies appropriate for English language learners. At the same time, the district did little to provide teachers with strategies for teaching in an inclusive classroom or for differentiating instruction.

Principals and teachers in the district had internalized the concept of holding high expectations for students. However, these high expectations did not appear to be the result of active monitoring of classroom instruction by administrators but rather from repeated reminders from the superintendent to attend to "Every Student. Every Day." The need to hold high expectations for all students became clear to administrators and teachers during the period under review as they began to analyze MCAS scores and recognized the achievement gap between students in the aggregate and those in subgroups. EQA examiners, however, found little evidence that administrators played an active supervisory role in promoting specific, effective instructional strategies in classrooms.

Each of the district's schools met the state time on learning requirements as long as the middle and high schools counted time students spent in directed study. The elementary schools did not have a prescribed amount of time for ELA and math instruction, but each school allocated sufficient time to these areas. At the middle school, each student took one period each of ELA and math. Those in need of remediation, as indicated by MCAS test scores, were scheduled into an additional period of ELA known as Reading/Writing Workshop, or an additional period of math known as Math Plus. The high school offered study centers during the directed study period in which students struggling on MCAS tests were tutored by paraprofessionals with an academic background.

While each math class had a set of graphing calculators and examiners found new LCD projectors in use in some classrooms, based on observations of 42 randomly selected classrooms EQA examiners found that classrooms had a relatively small number of computers available for

student use (average of 9.3 students per computer). For the most part, teachers brought students to computer labs when they wanted to use technology as a tool for instruction**.**

Assessment and Program Evaluation

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Needs Improvement' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on six and 'Needs Improvement' on two of the eight performance indicators in this standard.

Although the Amherst Regional Public Schools had no formal policy regarding student assessment, the district remained committed to improving its analysis of student assessment data. Interviewees said that the schools had become more "data conscious" during the past two years, and in order to close the achievement gap among student subgroups the superintendent included in the District Improvement Plan for 2006-2007 the following statement: "We need to understand how to 'dig down' into available data, mining MCAS down to specific item analysis as well as patterns of performance measured according to state standards." Interviewees acknowledged that data analysis had improved since the superintendent arrived five years prior to the EQA examination.

The district had no specific person assigned to review data, but district leadership and principals reviewed the MCAS data at administrator meetings. Principals and support staff members then presented the data at staff meetings. Further analysis occurred during grade-level meetings as well as at department meetings. There were no data analysis teams at the building level but this remains a district goal. Special education and ELL staff members examined individual student data in an effort to improve achievement of students in these subgroups. Most principals had already received training in the use of TestWiz, and interviewees added that many staff members had an affinity for data analysis and helped others at the building level. The Department of Education chose the district to pilot its Educational Data Warehouse project, and the district is enthusiastic regarding this program's ability to help it organize and analyze a variety of data.

The district's MCAS test participation rates were high for regular education students, but lower for the population of international students, who enter and leave the district with more frequency. Early in the year, schools were proactive in providing parents with the MCAS test dates as well as providing Hispanic parents information in Spanish.

The district has not prepared a comprehensive annual report since 2003-2004, which was done by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but the superintendent said it was too expensive to produce on a yearly basis. However, the superintendent provided the MCAS test results to the school committees and also posted them on the district's website. Additionally, schools sent home reports of individual students' MCAS test performance.

The district mandated the use of two benchmarking assessments for its students. A math assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the year. Teachers said the information gained from the first administration provided them with diagnostic information, and the end of year assessment was beneficial for determining growth. A writing prompt was also administered, but there were no requirements that receiving teachers view student writing folders. The only formal summative assessment that was used in the district was the MCAS tests, and the district used the results to judge the effectiveness of some of its programs. Benchmarks were in place for each of the curriculum guides that the district developed, but a review of them showed that they had limited measurable outcomes. Some of the assessments that the district's schools used included the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The district assessed ELL students with the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) as well as the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). The district did not use student assessment results to assign staff or determine staffing allocations.

The district used MCAS test results to measure the effectiveness of some district programs. One result of this practice was that MCAS test data of ELL students were used as the basis for determining the need to provide training for classroom teachers in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). In addition, a review of the district's MCAS data resulted in a change in its Title I program. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district provided Title I services at both the middle and high schools. A review of the data showed a need for Title I services at the elementary level. Funding was then directed toward the Crocker Farm and Mark's Meadow elementary schools and was discontinued at the middle and high schools.

The district developed a comprehensive evaluation document with a detailed agenda for evaluating its math program. The evaluation was carried out during the 2006-2007 school year,

and committees involved in reporting the results of the evaluation were meeting at the time of the EQA visit. In addition, prior to the period under review, Amherst College students undertook extensive and comprehensive evaluations of two of the district's programs, the MCAS remediation program and the school to work program.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Needs Improvement' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on six, 'Needs Improvement' on three, and 'Unsatisfactory' on four of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

District recruitment practices were extensive and included the use of an online recruiting service, SchoolSpring, that made the recruitment process more efficient and accessible for administrators, allowed for a greater geographical recruitment effort, and, at a fee of two dollars per student, was perceived as cost effective. Applicants were required to complete a multicultural essay component which was consistent with the district's focus on inclusion, appreciation of diversity, and multiculturalism. Extensive minority staff recruiting efforts included presence at job fairs in New York City and Atlanta, and advertising efforts in Denver and Cleveland. Other efforts included advertising in the Asian publication *Sampam*, the *Amsterdam News*, and *The Boston-Bay State Banner*. Online recruitment efforts also included advertising through the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP), the National Employment Minority Network (NEMNET), and the Massachusetts Association of School Personnel Administrators (MASPA).

Twenty-six of the district's 337 teachers and eight of the district's 25 administrators did not hold appropriate Massachusetts certification for their positions, although some were working toward appropriate licensure**.** The superintendent did not hold Massachusetts certification as superintendent of schools but had scheduled an appointment to take the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL). The district did not initiate strict enforcement of the need for its entire professional staff to hold appropriate certification until June 2007. At that point, staff members were notified by the superintendent that if appropriate certification was not in place by August 2008, they would be terminated from employment in the district.

Professional development needs were identified in generating the SIPs, and districtwide trainings were offered in multiculturalism, sexual harassment, anti-bias behavior, and equity. While tuition reimbursements were not offered for college courses taken, overall expenditures for professional development were perceived as adequate. The district's professional development program was described as "ad hoc" by interviewees rather than a formalized process, one that reflected the community and the individuality of the districts' schools. Mandatory professional development in K-8 mathematics, ELA, and social justice occurred on the day before school started and during the two curriculum days scheduled annually. Ten building-based, secondary, two-hour late start and 10 elementary school release days were provided under the direction of the district's principals.

Evaluation of professional development offerings was largely qualitative, with much of the evaluation coming from teachers' ratings of professional development trainings. Quantitative results, such as improved student reading scores and attendance at professional development offerings, were cited as other means of evaluation of professional development trainings. Teachers' association representatives indicated that while pedagogy appeared to be sufficiently covered, content offerings were minimal, particularly for those teachers not in major content areas (e.g., French, physical education). Teacher evaluations largely informed their individual professional development plans (IPDPs).

Only 12 percent of administrator and 24 percent of teacher evaluations reviewed by EQA examiners were timely. Contrary to statute, which requires annual evaluations for administrators, the principals' contract document indicated that the principals were to be evaluated annually by the superintendent during the first three years of employment, and at least every other year thereafter. Prior to the examiners' visit, the superintendent and human resources director had arranged for legal review of all non-unit administrator contract language. Administrator compensation and continued employment were not linked to improved student performance. The superintendent's evaluations were timely, met the components of education reform, and were instructive in that they contained specific recommendations for improvement. A review of the superintendent's contract and evaluation did not, however, reveal a link between his compensation and continued employment to effectiveness or improvement in student performance.

Of the 74 teacher files reviewed, only 18 contained timely evaluations and 13 did not contain any evaluations at all. Supervision strategies that had been implemented included grade-level meetings, timeline checks, walk-throughs (with written or verbal feedback), and staff and department meetings.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on 12 and 'Needs Improvement' on one of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

The Amherst Regional Public Schools had no common assessments to measure student achievement of the standards-based skills and content taught by classroom, special education, and English Language Education (ELE) teachers. Without common formative curriculum assessments, classroom, special education, and ELE teachers had incomplete information about the remediation that students needed at the end of each unit of instruction. Notwithstanding formative assessment issues, the district provided quality support services with the use of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) practices for ELL students in regular and ELE classrooms and with the provision of direct and systematic reading instruction for special education students using the Wilson Reading program.

The district also provided other academic and tutoring support services for students to improve their ELA and math achievement. For example, the district continued the Reading Recovery program for grade 1, with additional "getting ready" support in kindergarten and "follow up" support in grade 2. The middle school offered Reading/Writing Workshop support for at-risk students in ELA, with additional phonetics support for special education students. In the spring of 2007, the district piloted a program for at-risk grade 6-9 students called the Pipeline Project, in which students attended after-school tutoring in ELA and math provided by Amherst College students once a week for five weeks. The district offered summer school to all grade 7-12 students who needed remediation in ELA and math. The high school maintained its Prep Academy for grade 9 students who needed help with ELA, math, and study skills.

Over the last two years of the review period, the district increased its use of summative assessments, including the MCAS tests, to improve curriculum and to identify students in need

of services. In addition, the district purchased Study Island, an elementary and middle school formative assessment and student practice software program, and trained teachers in grades 3-8 in its application. Monthly reports on use and analysis of Study Island were generated and distributed to the principals.

Participation of all subgroups in the 2007 MCAS tests for grades 3-8 and 10 averaged 98 percent or higher for all grades and subjects tested with the exception of LEP students. District staff members reported that the lower participation rate for this subgroup was due to the number of first-year students from foreign countries who did not speak English well and were exempt from taking the MCAS tests according to NCLB guidelines. The district's 2007 NCLB accountability status for grades 3-5 was 'Corrective Action-Subgroups,' as African-American students did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2007. For most district subgroups, however, the percentage of students scoring 'Proficient' or higher exceeded the state average for those subgroups.

Over the previous two years, the district used many approaches to encourage parents and community organizations to be involved in the education of children. For example, teachers held conferences with parents to report on their child's progress and to inform parents about ways to support their child's learning. The district also provided free transportation and childcare for parents to attend events such as early childhood or kindergarten parent orientations and ELE program parent meetings. The district invited community organizations to provide support for low-income students and their families through initiatives such as the "Angel" fund covering the cost of preschool student immunizations, the Lions Club funding new eyeglasses, and Casa Latina to provide translation services when non-English speaking parents took their children to doctors who only speak English. This community support helped students to attend and be successful in school.

The district experienced an improvement in its average attendance rate during the period under review. For the period 2004 to 2006, the average attendance rate was 94.9 percent for the Amherst elementary schools, 95.8 percent for Pelham Elementary School, and 93.5 percent for the regional middle and high schools. The chronic absenteeism rate for the middle and high schools dropped from 20.3 percent in 2004 to 14.8 percent in 2006. A unified district attendance

policy and enforcement of this policy likely contributed to the increase in the average attendance rate and the decrease in chronic absences.

Elementary schools in the district suspended few students during the review period. The rate of out-of-school suspension for the middle and high schools averaged 5.3 percent for the period 2004 to 2006, lower than the state average of 6.0 percent. Middle and high school in-school suspensions averaged 9.0 percent for the period 2004 to 2006, higher than the state average of 3.5 percent during the same period. District staff members attributed the high rate of in-school suspensions to students who repeatedly missed after-school detention. The dropout rate decreased for Amherst Regional High School from 3.3 percent in 2004 to 1.5 percent in 2006, less than half the state's average dropout rate of 3.3 percent in 2006. Dropout prevention programs such as Prep Academy, the Mentoring Program, Reduced Day academic plans, and ELA, math and MCAS tutoring and support likely contributed to the improved dropout rate.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The EQA examiners gave the Amherst Regional Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the system as 'Satisfactory' on nine, 'Needs Improvement' on three, and 'Unsatisfactory' on one of the 13 performance indicators in this standard.

Interviewees and documents provided by the district described the budget process in Amherst Regional as open and participatory. Known cost areas were identified as well as expenses based on student enrollments to maintain the same level of service within mandates and regulations. Principals and program directors submitted staffing and expense requests which the superintendent and administrative team reviewed in order to identify those items that could be defined as level service. Funds for instructional materials and supplies were allocated to each school based on a per pupil formula, and other funding was allocated based on student needs. The superintendent prepared detailed documents that provided information on students, staff, programs, and budget as well as revenue and expenditure assumptions to the three school committees as well as the community. The superintendent, school committees, and town officials held budget sessions from December to April. The superintendent disseminated information

throughout the budget development process prior to the approved school department budget and regional assessments being presented at the annual town meetings for voter approval.

The school committees received quarterly budget reports and did not approve requests for transfers. Principals did not receive budget reports. They had access to the financial accounting system with the ability to control and track their budgets and manage their funds. Central office personnel regularly reviewed and monitored expenditures to ensure spending remained within fiscal budget limits. The district used purchase orders to encumber expenditures from all funds for goods and/or services. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

The three school districts comprising the Amherst Regional Public Schools exceeded their net school spending (NSS) requirement of the Education Reform Act for each of the years in the period under review, and the per pupil expenditure for each district exceeded the state average each year during that period. Interviewees generally stated that the towns provided adequate support for the elementary and regional middle and high schools. Voters in Amherst approved an operational override in FY 2004 totaling $2 million; however a $2 million operational override attempt in FY 2007 failed, and this led town officials to investigate alternate sources of revenue.

The Amherst Education Foundation, Inc., an independent nonprofit education fund, provided community members with direct school funding opportunities either for core needs or for the athletic, performing arts, and library booster clubs at all levels. Interested parties had the opportunity to make tax-deductible donations either online or by check. Teachers submitted proposals for projects and programs to the foundation. The foundation awarded approximately $20,000 each year of the period under review.

The district's schools were clean and well maintained by an in-house staff of custodians and maintenance workers. The district did not have a formal written preventive maintenance schedule but contracted outside vendors each year for elevator, generator, boiler, fire alarm, and fire extinguisher preventative maintenance.

Neither the Pelham Public Schools nor the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools had a long-term capital plan; however, a long-term capital plan had been developed in the town of Amherst

by the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC). The JCPC's focus during FY 2007 was to update the town's five-year capital plan for the period FY 2008 to FY 2012 and to develop specific recommendations for FY 2008 for consideration at the 2007 annual town meeting.

The district lacked a system to ensure student safety. School district administrators in interviews indicated the culture of the community could not bear school site buildings being totally "locked down." The district posted notices at the main entrance of each school that directed visitors to the main office to sign in. The EQA team observed visitors to the districts' schools who accessed the building via the main entrance and failed to stop at the main office in order to sign in as directed.

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 Amherst Regional Public Schools 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 Amherst Regional; and comparative analyses of districtwide, 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:

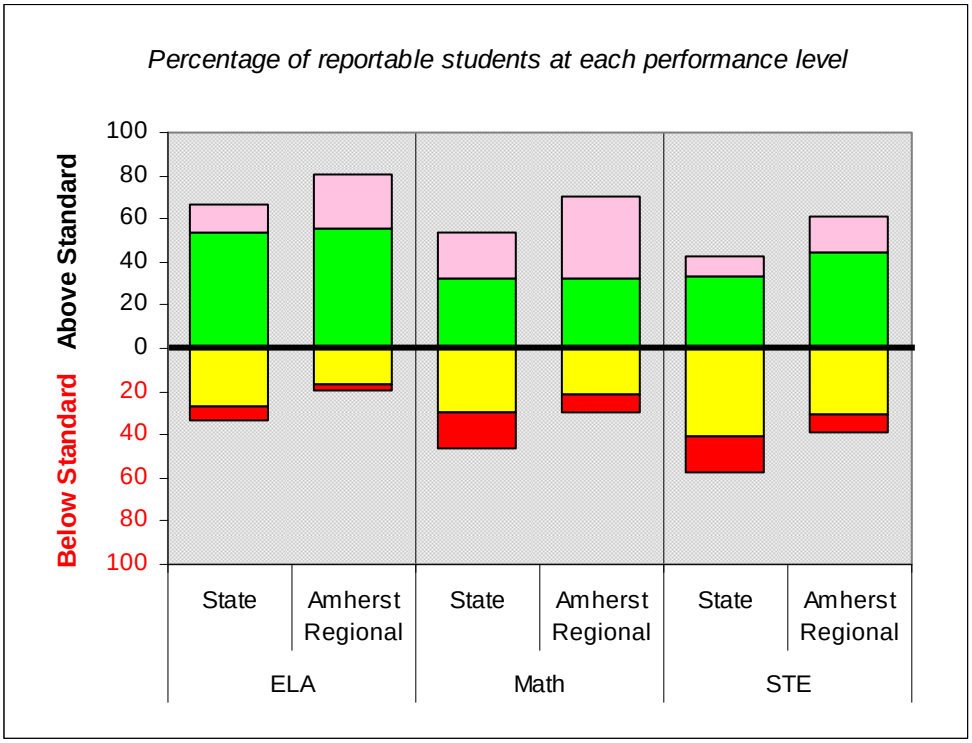
- On average, over four-fifths of the students in Amherst Regional Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, over two-thirds of Amherst Regional students attained proficiency in math, and slightly more than three-fifths attained proficiency in science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

- Amherst Regional's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 93 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of seven PI points, seven points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).

- In 2007, Amherst Regional's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 86 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 14 PI points, 10 points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of two PI points per year to achieve AYP.

- Amherst Regional's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 83 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 17 PI points, 11 points narrower than that statewide.

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



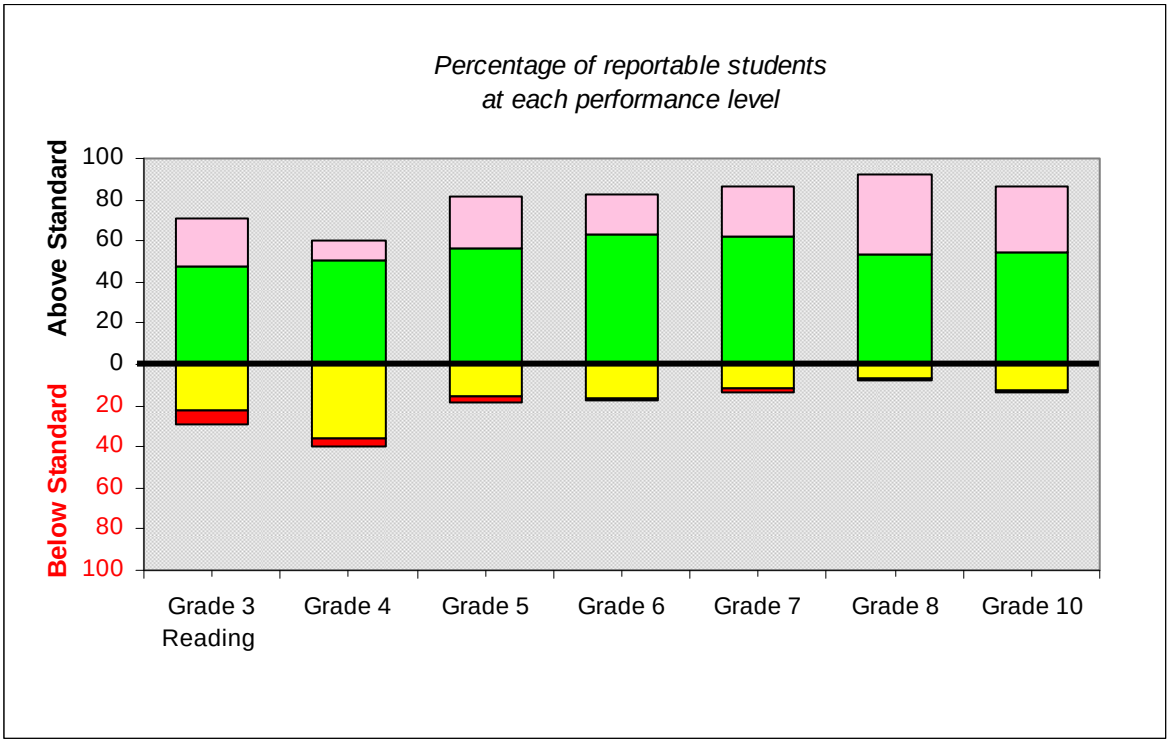
	ELA		Math		STE	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	13	25	22	38	9	16
Proficient	53	56	32	32	34	45
Needs Improvement	27	17	30	22	41	31
Warning/Failing	7	3	17	8	17	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	81	54	70	43	61
Proficiency Index (PI)	85.7	92.5	76.1	86.1	72.1	82.9

In 2007, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was higher in Amherst Regional than statewide. In Amherst Regional, 81 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 66 percent statewide; 70 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 54 percent statewide; and 61 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 43 percent statewide.

The 2007 proficiency index for Amherst Regional students in ELA was 93 PI points, compared to 86 PI points statewide; in math it was 86 PI points, compared to 76 points statewide; and in STE it was 83 PI points, compared to 72 points statewide.

The ELA proficiency gap for Amherst Regional students in 2007 was seven PI points, compared to 14 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of one PI point annually to make AYP. Amherst Regional's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 14 PI points, compared to 24 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of two PI points per year to make AYP. Amherst Regional's STE proficiency gap was 17 PI points, compared to 28 PI points statewide.

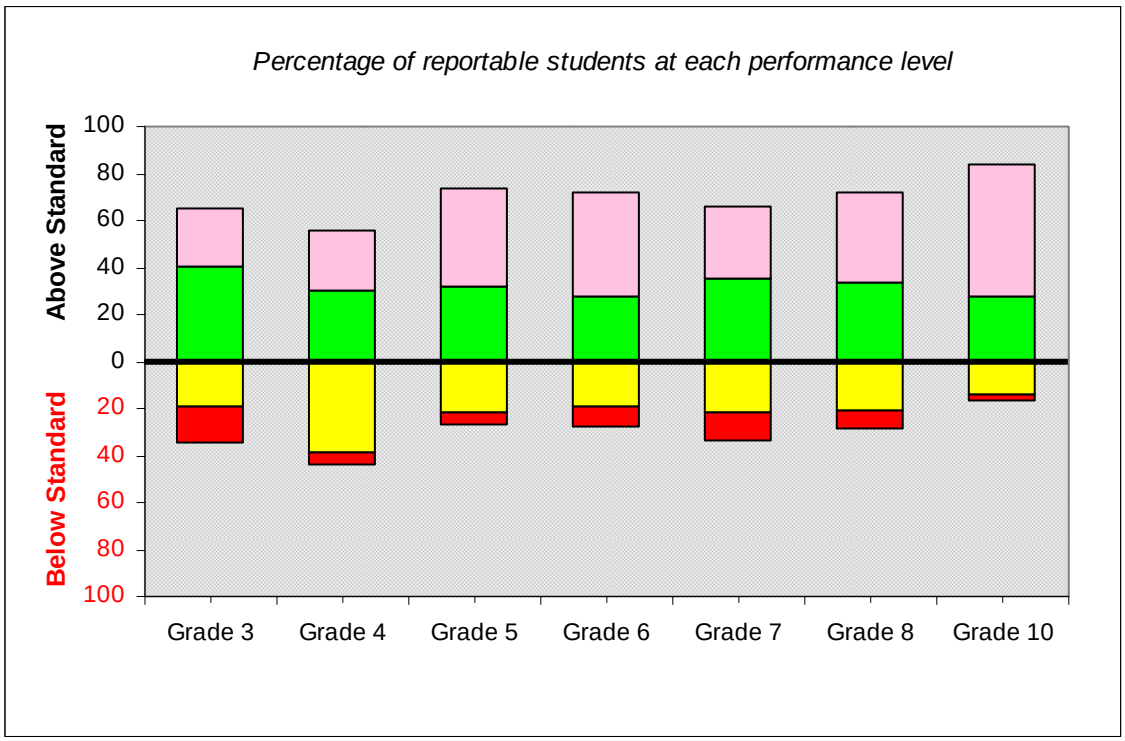
Figure/Table 2: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Grade, 2007



	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	23	9	25	19	24	38	32
Proficient	48	50	56	63	62	54	54
Needs Improvement	23	36	16	16	12	6	13
Warning/Failing	7	5	2	2	2	1	1
Percent Attaining Proficiency	71	59	81	82	86	92	86

The percentage of Amherst Regional students attaining proficiency in ELA in 2007 varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 59 percent at grade 4 to a high of 92 percent at grade 8.

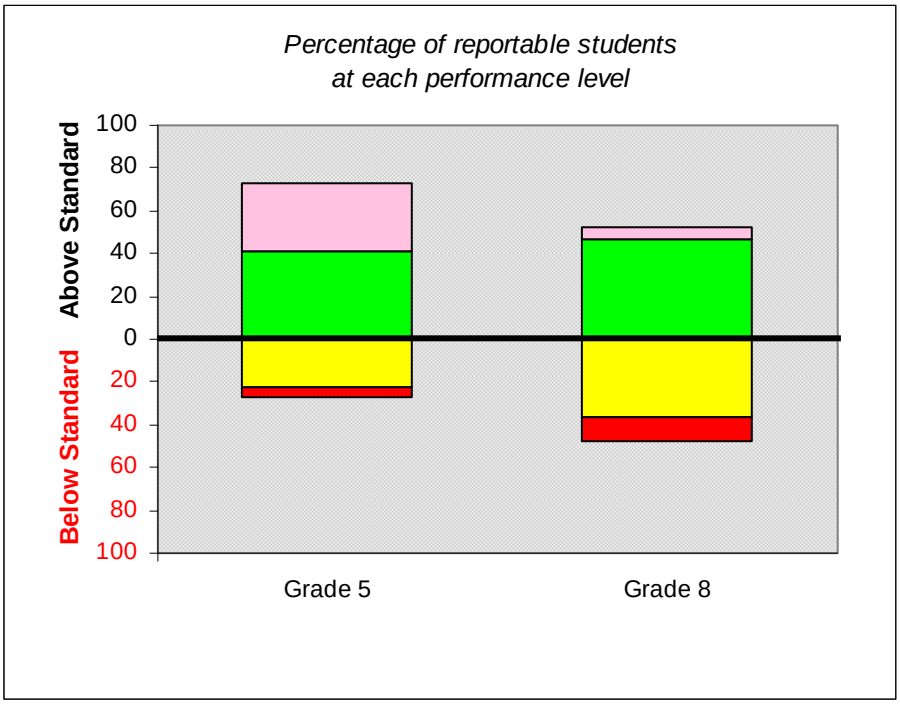
Figure/Table 3: MCAS Math Test Performance by Grade, 2007



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	25	25	41	45	31	38	56
Proficient	41	31	32	28	35	33	28
Needs Improvement	19	38	21	19	22	21	14
Warning/Failing	15	6	5	9	12	7	2
Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	56	73	73	66	71	84

The percentage of Amherst Regional students attaining proficiency in math in 2007 also varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 56 percent at grade 4 to a high of 84 percent at grade 10.

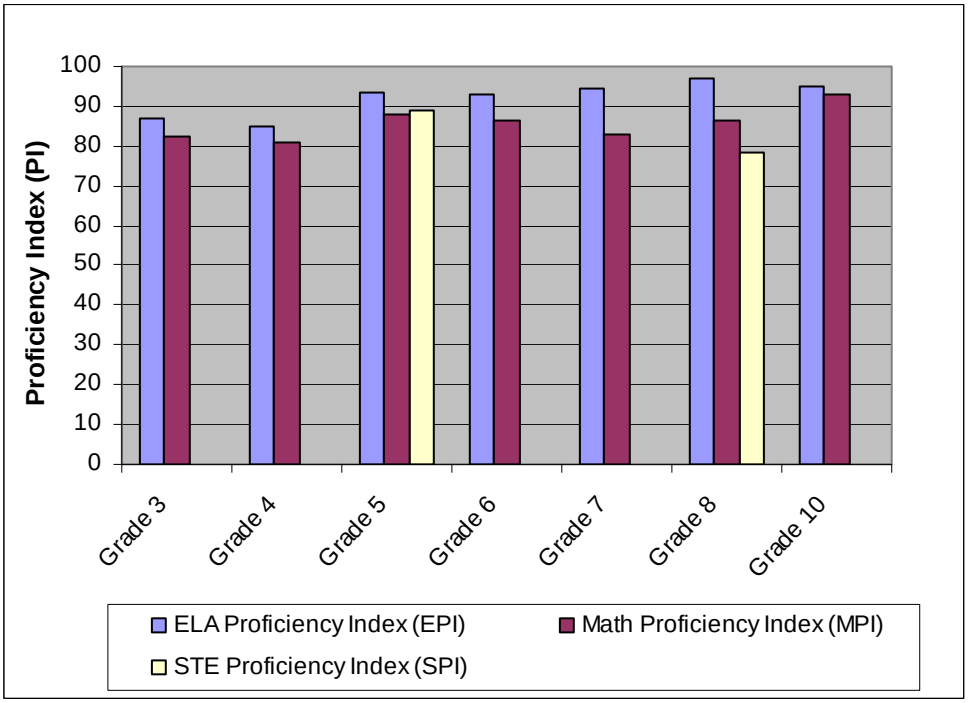
Figure/Table 4: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Grade, 2007



	Grade 5	Grade 8
Advanced	31	5
Proficient	42	47
Needs Improvement	22	37
Warning/Failing	5	11
Percent Attaining Proficiency	73	52

In Amherst Regional in 2007, 73 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 52 percent of grade 8 students did so.

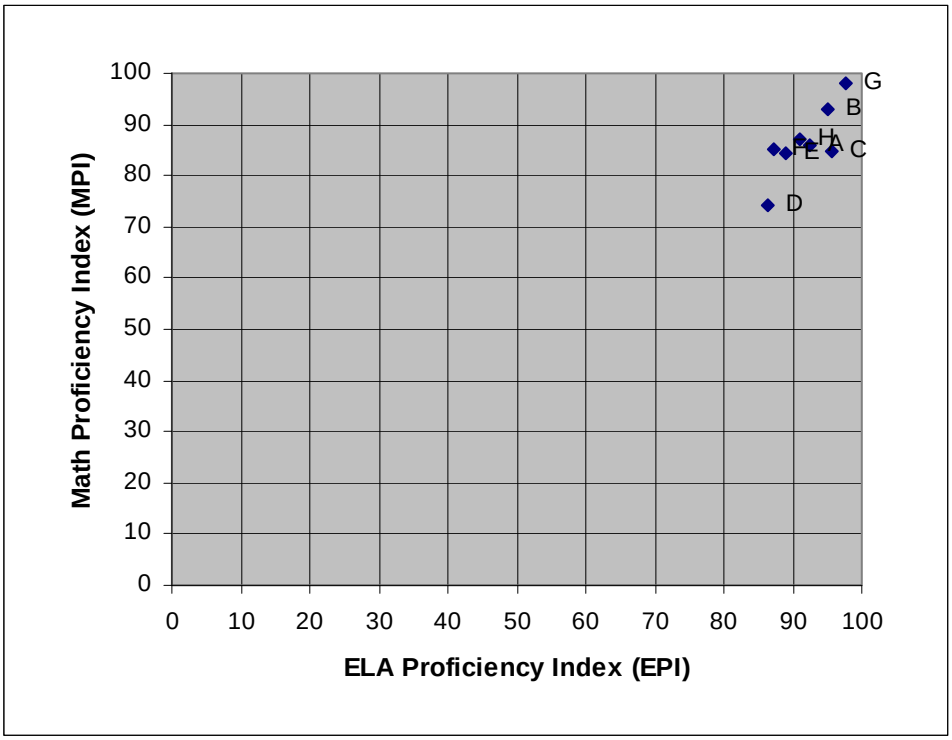
Figure/Table 5: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Grade and Subject, 2007



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	87.0	84.7	93.3	93.2	94.5	96.8	95.2
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	82.5	81.0	88.1	86.6	83.0	86.4	93.0
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			89.1			78.2	

At every grade level, the performance of Amherst Regional students on the 2007 MCAS tests was strongest in ELA. Amherst Regional's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of three PI points at grade 8 to a high of 15 PI points at grade 4. Amherst Regional's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of seven PI points at grade 10 to a high of 19 PI points at grade 4. Amherst Regional's STE proficiency gap was 11 PI points at grade 5 and 22 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	Amherst Regional average	92.5	86.1	3,367
B	Amherst Regional High	95.2	93.0	580
C	Amherst Regional Middle	95.7	84.7	1,051
D	Crocker Farm Elementary	86.4	74.3	303
E	Fort River Elementary	88.9	84.2	588
F	Marks Meadow Elementary	87.3	85.0	211
G	Pelham Elementary	97.7	98.0	150
H	Wildwood Elementary	91.0	87.0	484

Among Amherst Regional's schools, performance in both ELA and math was strongest at Pelham Elementary and weakest at Crocker Farm Elementary. The ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of two PI points at Pelham Elementary to a high of 14 PI points at Crocker Farm Elementary. Amherst Regional's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of two PI points at Pelham Elementary to a high of 26 PI points at Crocker Farm Elementary.

Equity of Achievement

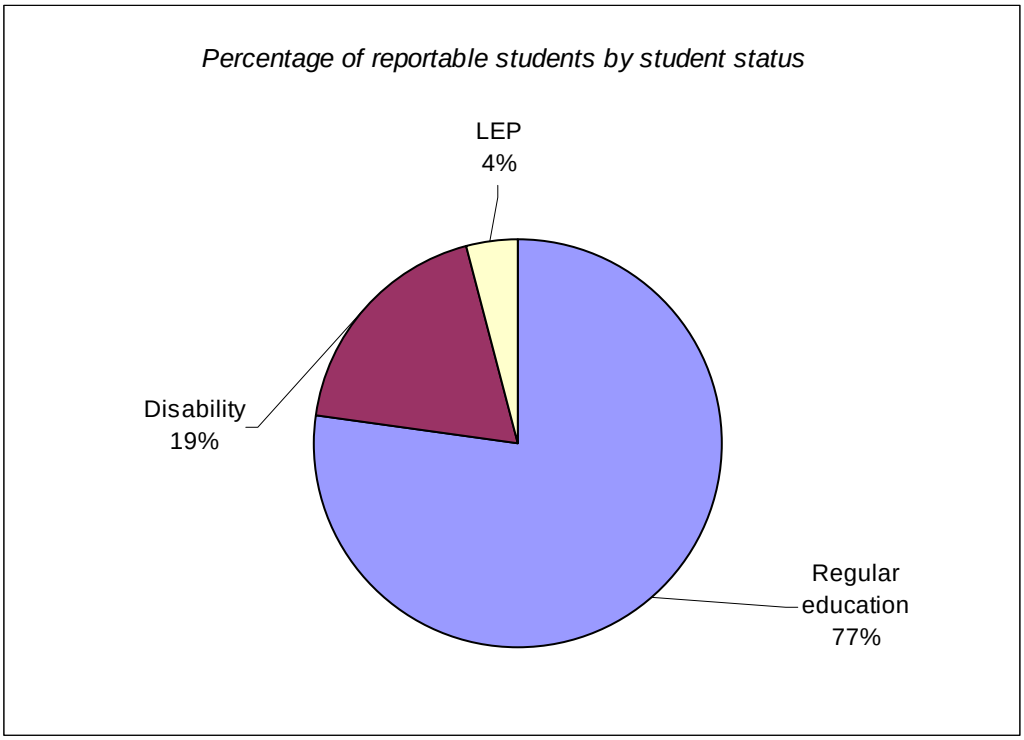
Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

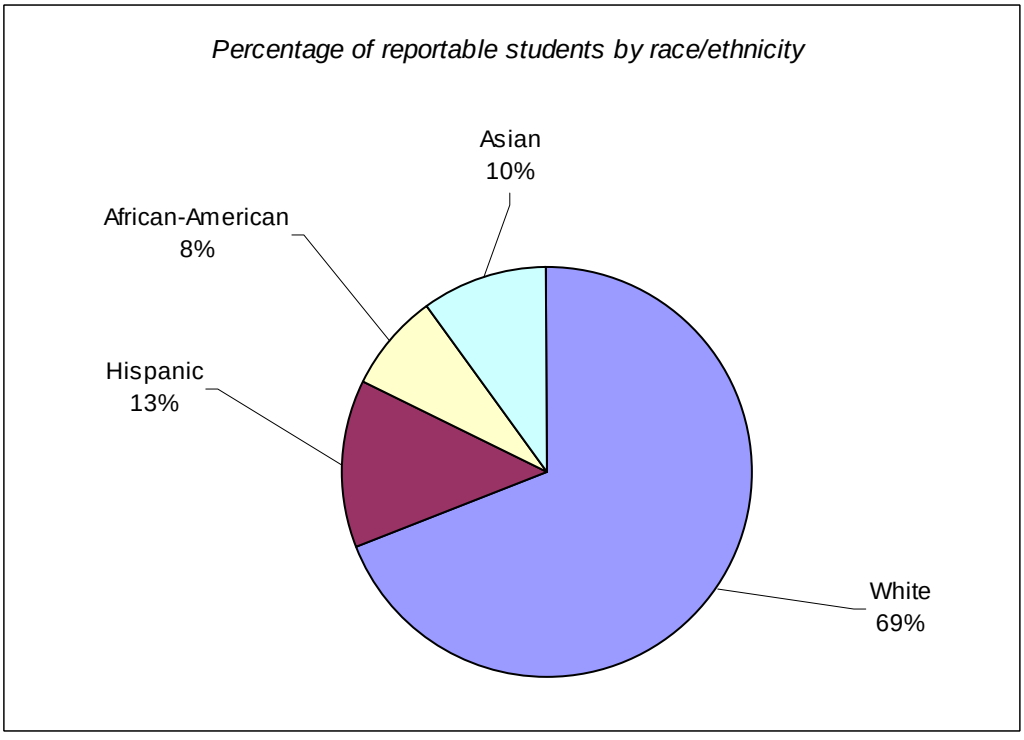
- MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Amherst Regional students. Of the nine measurable subgroups in Amherst Regional, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 21 PI points in ELA and 28 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).
- The proficiency gaps in Amherst Regional in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, limited English proficient (LEP) students, Hispanic students, African-American students, 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, White students, and non low-income students.
- Asian students performed below the district average in ELA and above the district average in math in 2007.

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

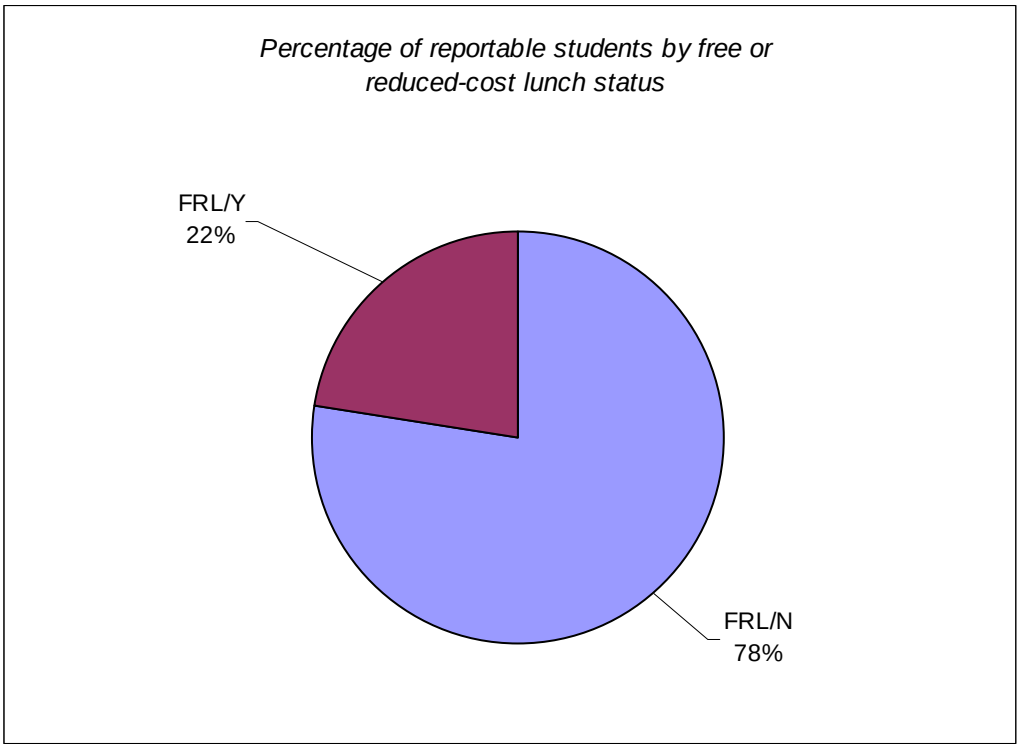
A.



B.



C.

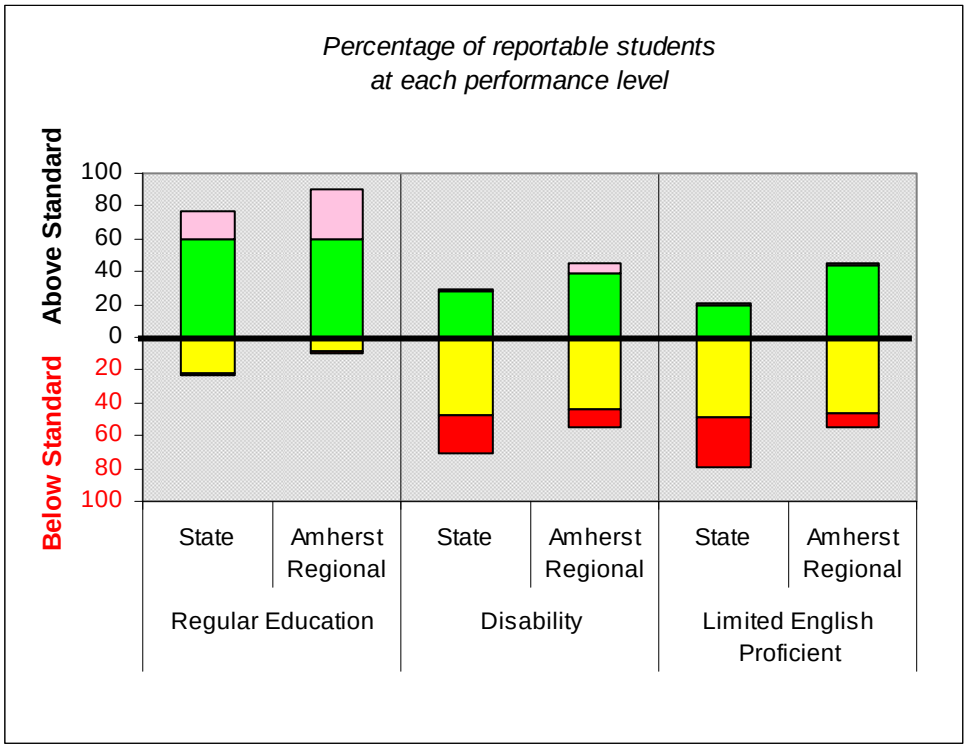


	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	1,327
	Disability	321
	LEP	73
Race/ethnicity	White	1,099
	Hispanic	212
	African-American	125
	Asian	158
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	1,335
	FRL/Y	386

Note: Data include students in tested grades levels only.

In Amherst Regional in 2007, 19 percent of the students tested were students with disabilities and four percent were limited English proficient (LEP) students. Many of the students tested were non-White, including 13 percent Hispanic, eight percent African-American, and 10 percent Asian. Twenty-two 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

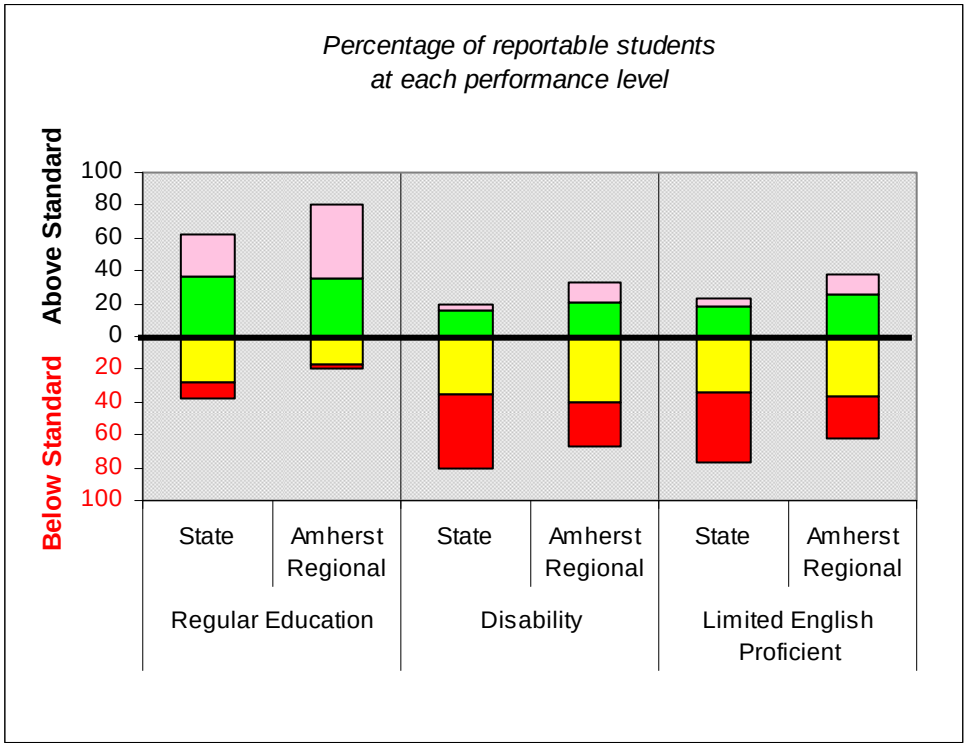


	Regular Education		Disability		Limited English Proficient	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	16	30	2	7	1	1
Proficient	60	60	28	39	19	43
Needs Improvement	21	9	48	43	48	46
Warning/Failing	2	1	22	11	31	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	76	90	30	46	20	44
Proficiency Index (EPI)	91.3	96.9	64.8	76.3	57.3	76.4

In Amherst Regional in 2007, the proficiency rate in ELA of regular education students was over two times greater than that of both students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. Ninety percent of regular education students, 46 percent of students with disabilities, and 44 percent of LEP students attained proficiency in ELA on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Amherst Regional's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 was three PI points for regular education students, compared to nine PI points statewide; 24 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 35 PI points statewide; and 24 PI points for LEP students, compared to 43 PI points statewide. The performance gap in ELA between Amherst Regional's regular education students and students with disabilities was 21 PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it was also 21 PI points.

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

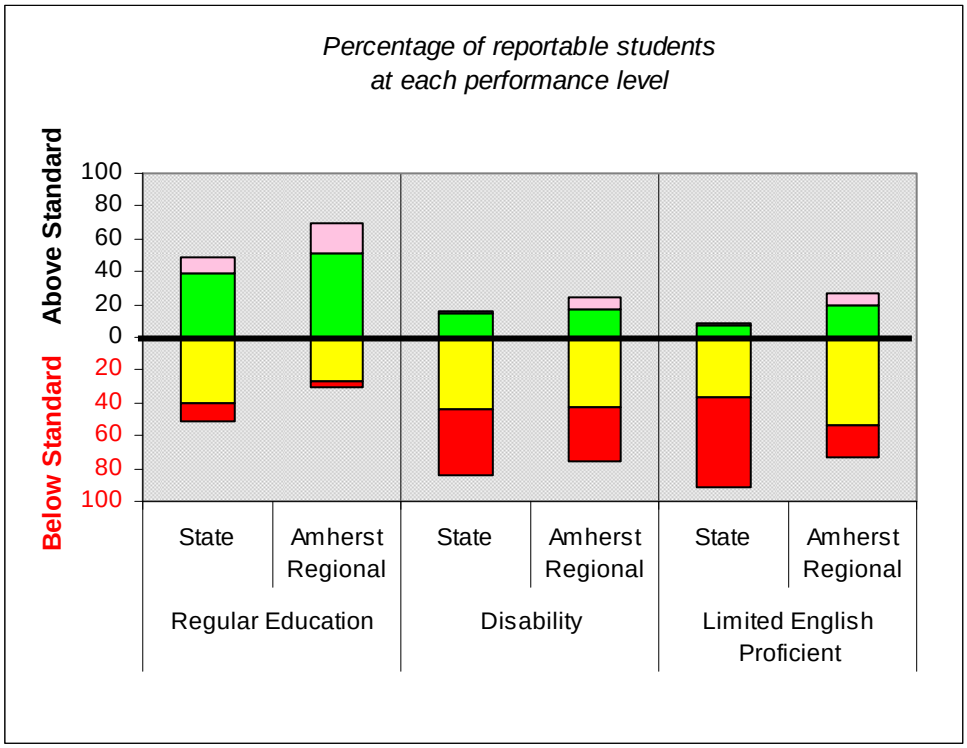


	Regular Education		Disability		Limited English Proficient	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	26	45	4	12	6	13
Proficient	36	35	16	21	18	25
Needs Improvement	28	17	36	41	34	37
Warning/Failing	10	3	44	26	43	25
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	80	20	33	24	38
Proficiency Index (MPI)	82.2	92.0	51.0	64.3	53.0	65.5

In Amherst Regional in 2007, the proficiency rate in math of regular education students was also more than two times greater than that of both students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. Eighty percent of regular education students, 33 percent of students with disabilities, and 38 percent of LEP students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests in 2007.

Amherst Regional's math proficiency gap in 2007 was eight PI points for regular education students, compared to 18 PI points statewide; 36 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 49 PI points statewide; and 34 PI points for LEP students, compared to 47 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between Amherst Regional's regular education students and students with disabilities was 28 PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it was 26 PI points.

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

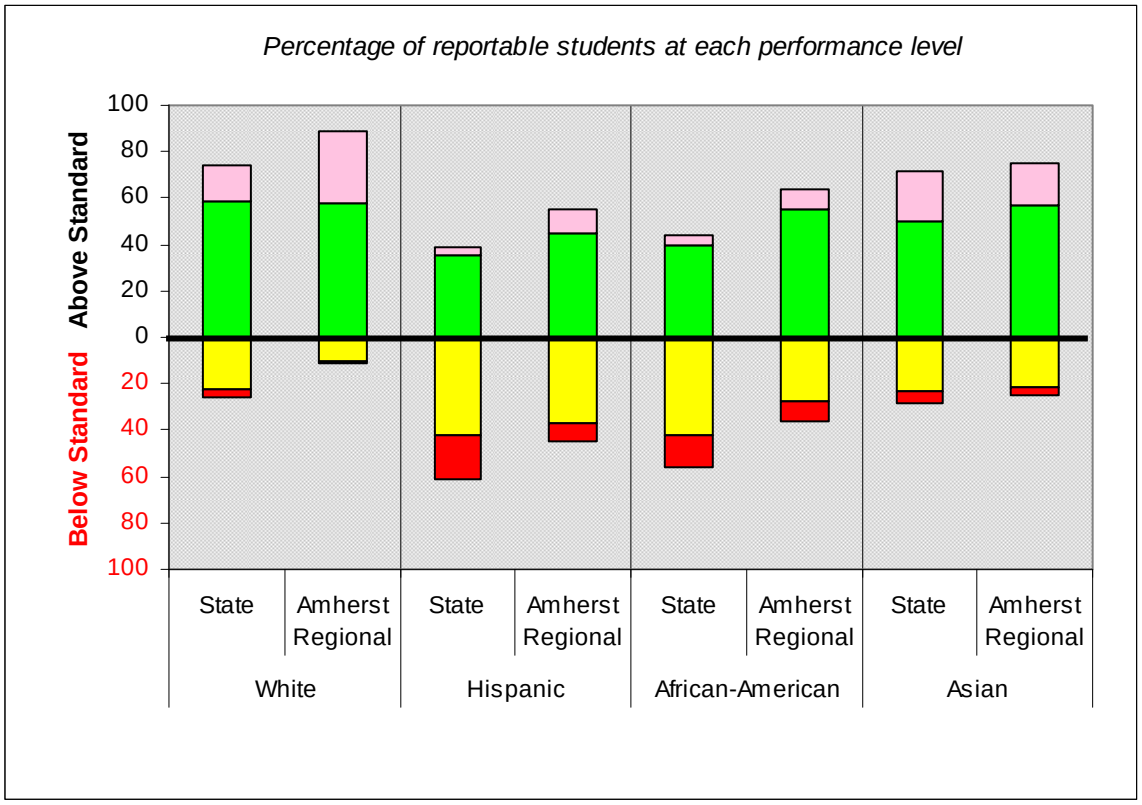


	Regular Education		Disability		Limited English Proficient	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	10	18	2	8	1	7
Proficient	39	51	14	17	8	20
Needs Improvement	41	27	44	42	36	53
Warning/Failing	10	3	40	33	55	20
Percent Attaining Proficiency	49	69	16	25	9	27
Proficiency Index (SPI)	77.5	88.7	51.8	58.6	42.2	61.7

In Amherst Regional in 2007, the proficiency rate in science and technology/engineering of regular education students was nearly three times greater than that of both students with disabilities and LEP students. Sixty-nine percent of regular education students, 25 percent of students with disabilities, and 27 percent of LEP students attained proficiency in STE on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Amherst Regional's STE proficiency gap in 2007 was 11 PI points for regular education students, compared to 22 PI points statewide; 41 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 48 PI points statewide; and 38 PI points for LEP students, compared to 58 PI points statewide. The performance gap in STE between Amherst Regional's regular education students and students with disabilities was 30 PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it was 27 PI points.

Figure/Table 11: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

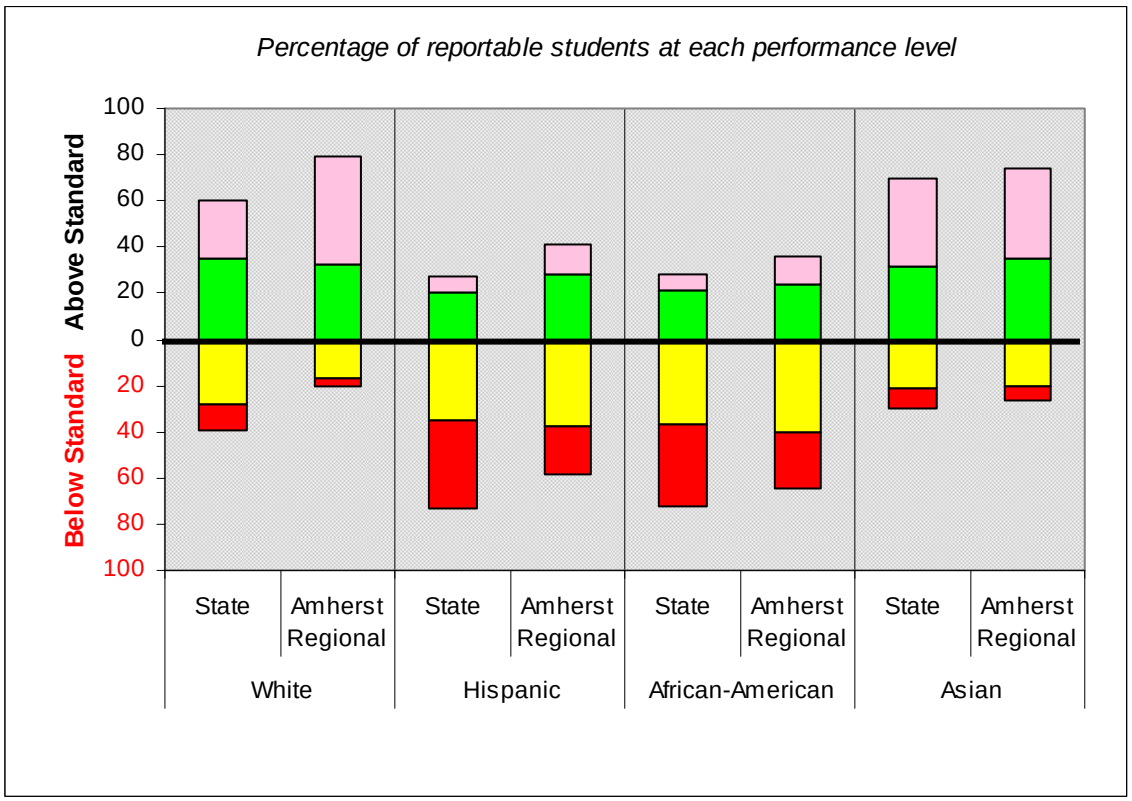


	White		Hispanic		African-American		Asian	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	16	31	3	10	4	9	21	18
Proficient	58	57	35	45	40	55	50	57
Needs Improvement	22	10	43	37	42	27	23	22
Warning/Failing	4	1	19	8	14	9	5	3
Percent Attaining Proficiency	74	88	38	55	44	64	71	75
Proficiency Index (EPI)	89.8	96.2	69.8	81.3	73.9	83.1	87.7	90.0

In Amherst Regional in 2007, performance on the MCAS ELA tests varied widely by race/ethnicity, as 88 percent of White students, 75 percent of Asian students, 64 percent of African-American students, and 55 percent of Hispanic students attained proficiency in ELA on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Amherst Regional's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 was four PI points for White students, compared to 10 PI points statewide; 10 PI points for Asian students, compared to 12 PI points statewide; 17 PI points for African-American students, compared to 26 PI points statewide; and 19 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 30 PI points statewide. The performance gap in ELA between Amherst Regional's White and Hispanic students was 15 PI points, between White and African-American students it was 13 PI points, and between White and Asian students it was six PI points.

Figure/Table 12: MCAS Math Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

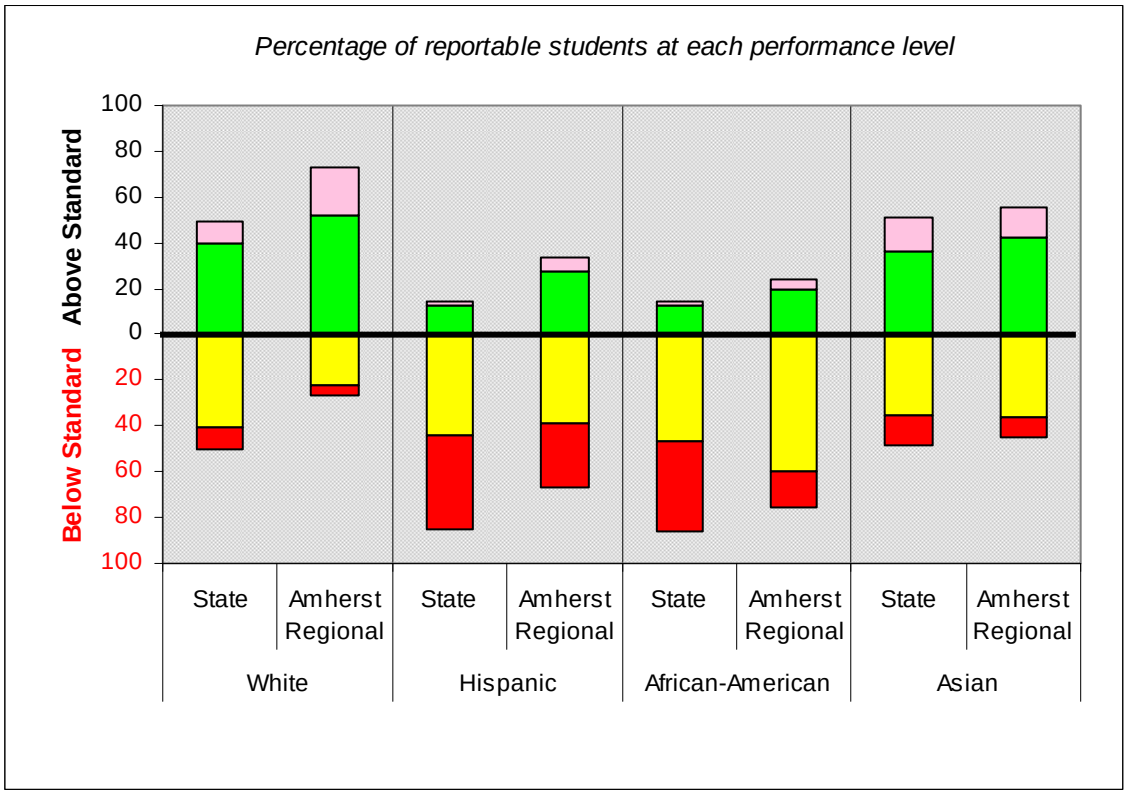


	White		Hispanic		African-American		Asian	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	25	47	7	13	7	12	39	39
Proficient	35	32	20	28	21	24	31	35
Needs Improvement	28	17	35	38	37	40	21	20
Warning/Failing	11	4	37	21	35	24	9	6
Percent Attaining Proficiency	60	79	27	41	28	36	70	74
Proficiency Index (MPI)	80.9	91.1	56.9	69.4	58.4	66.7	85.4	88.4

In Amherst Regional in 2007, performance on the MCAS math tests also varied widely by race/ethnicity, as 79 percent of White students, 74 percent of Asian students, 41 percent of Hispanic students, and 36 percent of African-American students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests in 2007.

Amherst Regional's math proficiency gap in 2007 was nine PI points for White students, compared to 19 PI points statewide; 12 PI points for Asian students, compared to 15 PI points statewide; 31 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 43 PI points statewide; and 33 PI points for African-American students, compared to 42 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between Amherst Regional's White and African-American students was 24 PI points, between White and Hispanic students it was 22 PI points, and between White and Asian students it was three PI points.

Figure/Table 13: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

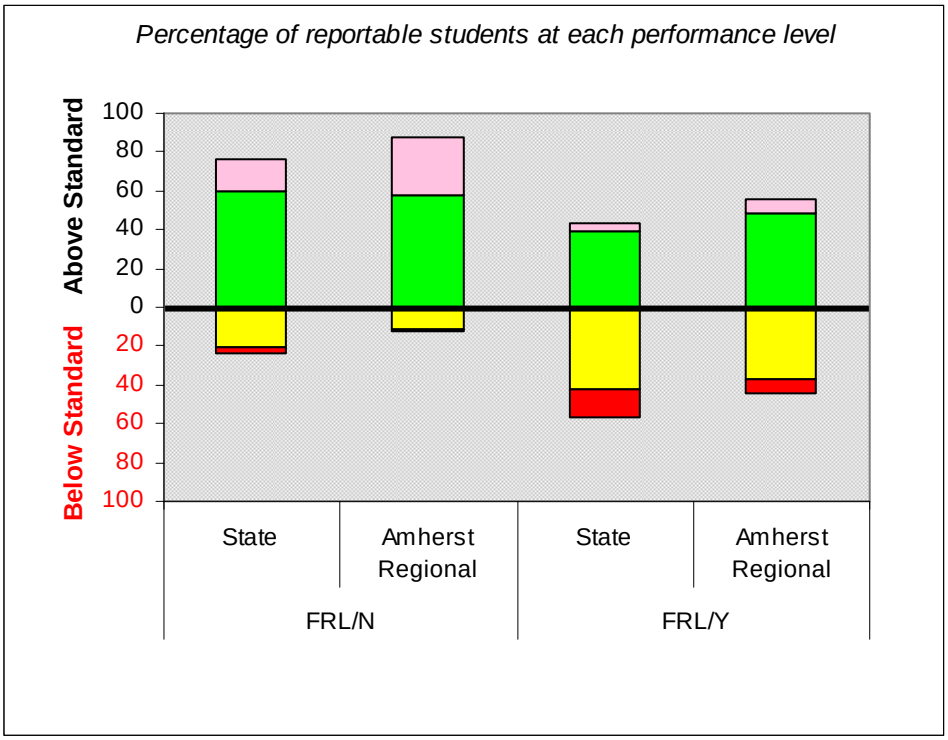


	White		Hispanic		African-American		Asian	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	10	21	2	6	1	4	15	13
Proficient	39	52	13	28	13	20	36	43
Needs Improvement	40	22	44	39	47	60	35	36
Warning/Failing	10	5	41	28	39	16	14	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	49	73	15	34	14	24	51	56
Proficiency Index (SPI)	78.0	89.3	50.6	65.3	51.3	63.9	76.8	79.3

In Amherst Regional in 2007, performance on the MCAS STE tests likewise varied widely by race/ethnicity, as 73 percent of White students, 56 percent of Asian students, 34 percent of Hispanic students, and 24 percent of African-American students attained proficiency in STE on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Amherst Regional's STE proficiency gap in 2007 was 11 PI points for White students, compared to 22 PI points statewide; 21 PI points for Asian students, compared to 23 PI points statewide; 35 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 49 PI points statewide; and 36 PI points for African-American students, compared to 49 PI points statewide. The performance gap in STE between Amherst Regional's White and African-American students was 25 PI points, between White and Hispanic students it was 24 PI points, and between White and Asian students it was 10 PI points.

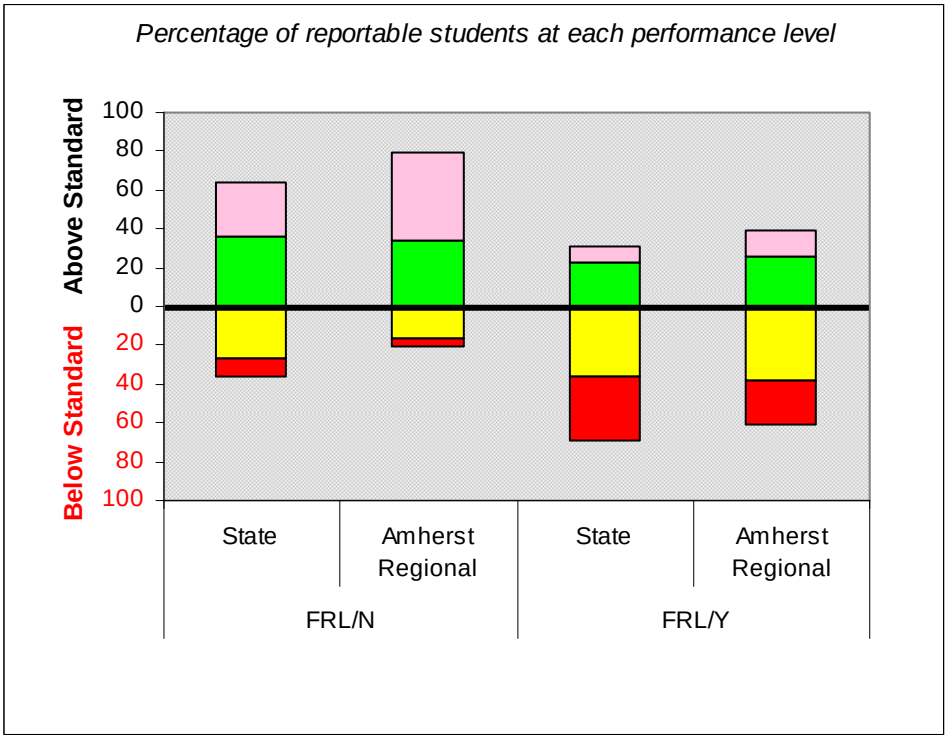
Figure/Table 14: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



	FRL/N		FRL/Y	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	17	30	4	8
Proficient	59	58	39	48
Needs Improvement	20	11	42	37
Warning/Failing	3	1	15	7
Percent Attaining Proficiency	76	88	43	56
Proficiency Index (EPI)	91.0	95.5	73.4	81.9

In Amherst Regional in 2007, 56 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in ELA on the MCAS tests, compared to 88 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The ELA proficiency gap was 18 PI points for low-income students, compared to 27 PI points statewide, and five PI points for non low-income students, compared to nine PI points statewide. Amherst Regional's performance gap in ELA between the two subgroups was 13 PI points.

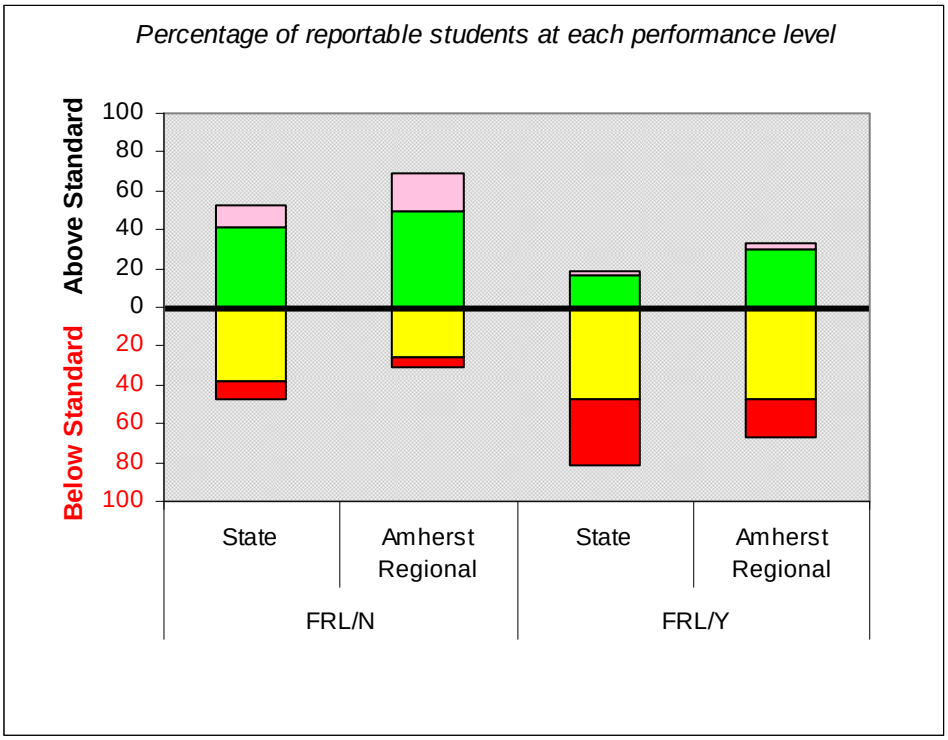
Figure/Table 15: MCAS Math Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



	FRL/N		FRL/Y	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	27	45	8	13
Proficient	36	34	23	26
Needs Improvement	27	17	37	38
Warning/Failing	10	4	33	22
Percent Attaining Proficiency	63	79	31	39
Proficiency Index (MPI)	82.7	91.2	60.3	68.2

In Amherst Regional in 2007, 39 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests, compared to 79 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in math was 32 PI points for low-income students, compared to 40 PI points statewide, and nine PI points for non low-income students, compared to 17 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between the two subgroups in Amherst Regional was 23 PI points.

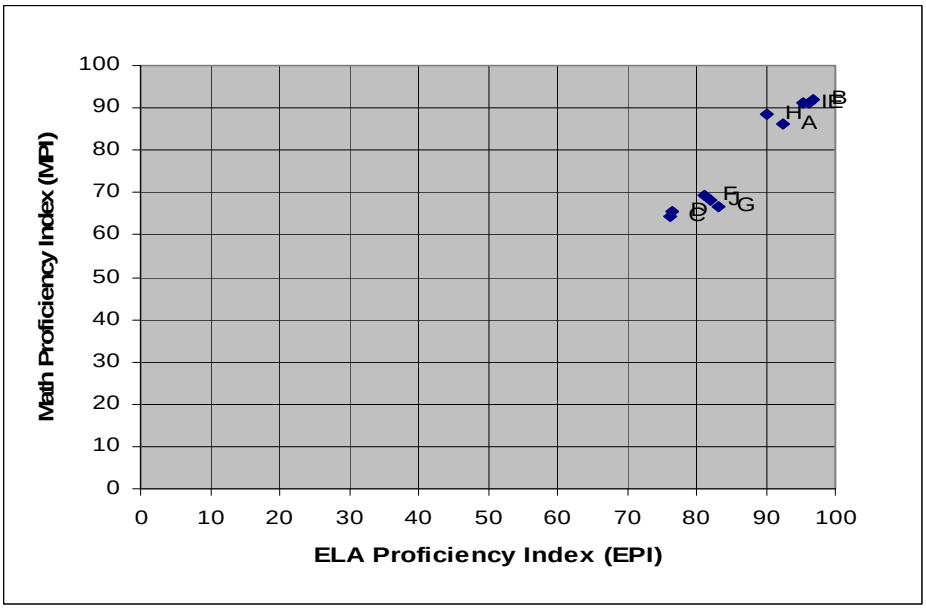
Figure/Table 16: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



	FRL/N		FRL/Y	
	State	Amherst Regional	State	Amherst Regional
Advanced	11	20	2	4
Proficient	41	49	17	30
Needs Improvement	39	26	47	48
Warning/Failing	9	6	34	19
Percent Attaining Proficiency	52	69	19	34
Proficiency Index (SPI)	79.4	87.2	55.2	68.1

In Amherst Regional in 2007, 34 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in STE on the MCAS tests, compared to 69 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in STE was 32 PI points for low-income students, compared to 45 PI points statewide, and 13 PI points for non low-income students, compared to 21 PI points statewide. Amherst Regional's performance gap in STE between the two subgroups was 19 PI points.

Figure/Table 17: MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index by Subgroup, 2007



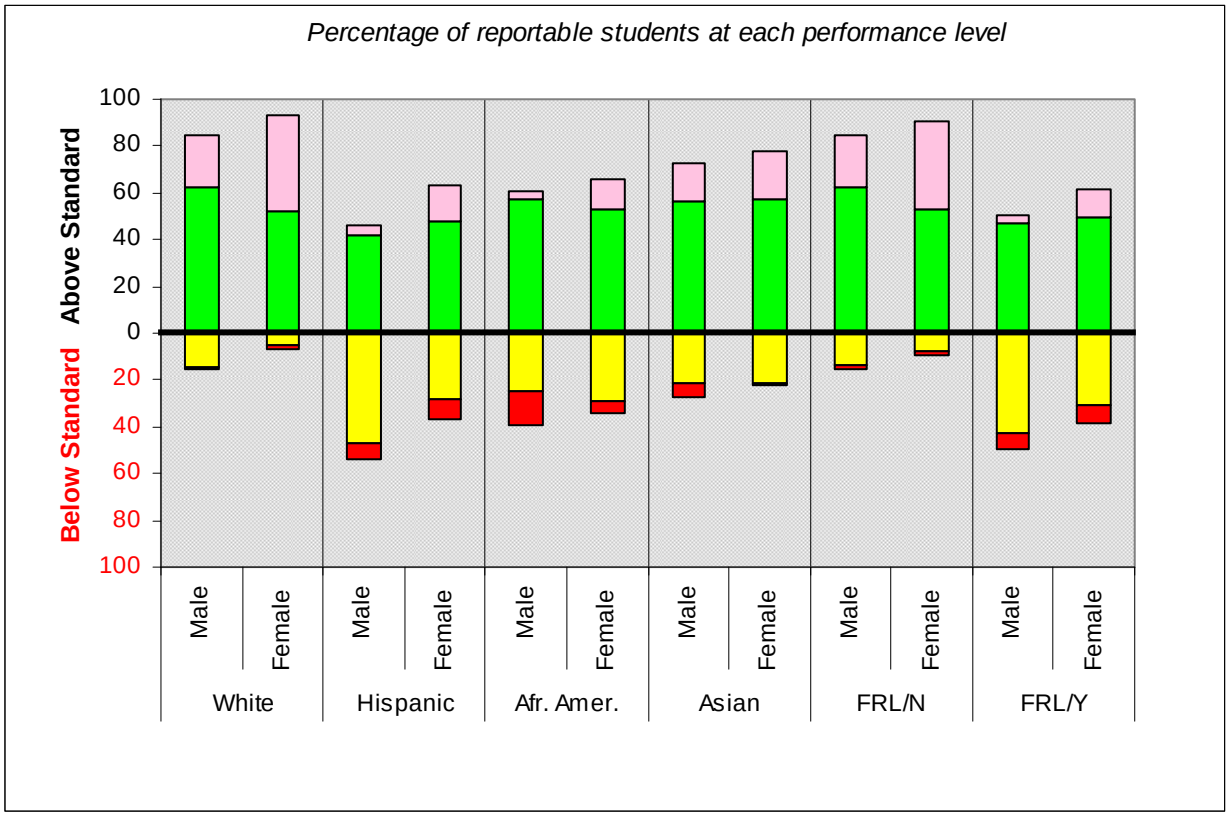
		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Amherst Regional	92.5	86.1	3,367
B	Regular Education	96.9	92.0	2,641
C	Disability	76.3	64.3	586
D	LEP	76.4	65.5	140
E	White	96.2	91.1	2,152
F	Hispanic	81.3	69.4	407
G	African-American	83.1	66.7	247
H	Asian	90.0	88.4	315
I	FRL/N	95.5	91.2	2,616
J	FRL/Y	81.9	68.2	746

The gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in Amherst Regional in 2007 was 21 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 28 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

Regular education students, White students, and non low-income students in Amherst Regional performed above the district average in both ELA and math in 2007, while students with disabilities, LEP students, Hispanic students, African-American students, and low-income students performed below the district average in both subjects. Asian students performed below the district average in ELA and above the district average in math.

Each subgroup in Amherst Regional had stronger performance in ELA than in math on the 2007 MCAS tests. While the gap between performance in ELA and math for regular education students, White students, Asian students, and non low-income students in Amherst Regional was five PI points or less, this gap was 11 PI points or more for students with disabilities, LEP students, Hispanic students, African-American students, and low-income students.

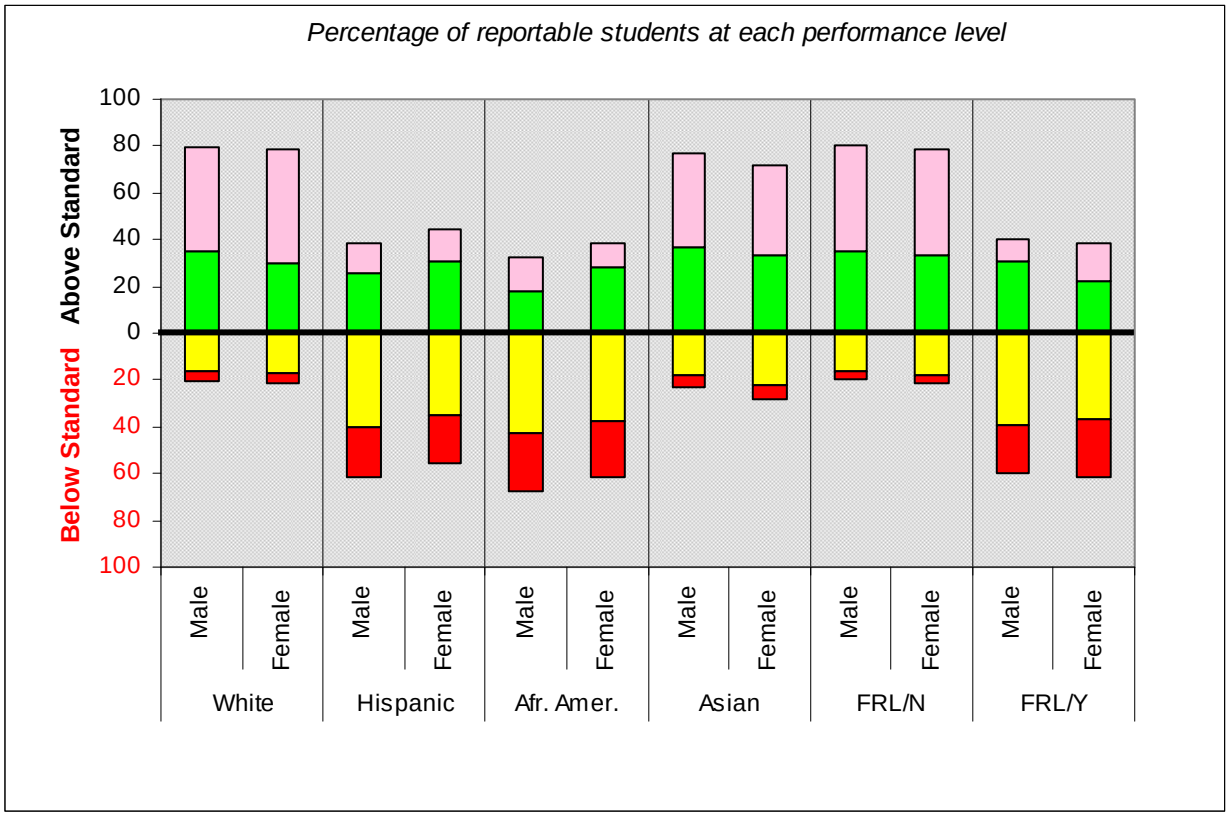
Figure/Table 18: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007



	White		Hispanic		Afr. Amer.		Asian		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	22	41	4	15	4	13	16	20	22	38	3	12
Proficient	63	52	42	48	57	53	57	57	63	53	47	50
Needs Improvement	14	5	47	28	25	29	22	21	14	8	42	31
Warning/ Failing	1	1	7	9	14	4	5	1	2	1	7	7
Percent Attaining Proficiency	85	93	46	63	61	66	73	77	85	91	50	62
Proficiency Index (EPI)	94.9	97.5	78.6	83.9	78.6	86.8	88.9	91.1	94.3	96.6	79.8	84.0
Number of Tests	553	524	98	104	56	68	74	84	653	656	191	181

On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, Amherst Regional's female students outperformed male students in all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups. The performance gap in ELA between female and male students was narrowest for Asian students and non low-income students (two PI points) and widest for African-American students (eight PI points).

Figure/Table 19: MCAS Math Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007



	White		Hispanic		Afr. Amer.		Asian		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	45	49	13	13	14	10	40	38	45	45	10	17
Proficient	35	30	25	31	18	28	37	33	35	33	30	22
Needs Improvement	16	17	40	35	43	37	18	23	16	18	39	37
Warning/ Failing	4	4	21	21	25	24	5	6	4	4	20	25
Percent Attaining Proficiency	80	79	38	44	32	38	77	71	80	78	40	39
Proficiency Index (MPI)	91.3	90.9	68.4	70.3	63.4	69.4	89.4	87.5	91.5	90.9	68.8	67.6
Number of Tests	551	524	99	106	56	67	73	84	650	657	191	183

On the 2007 MCAS tests in math, Amherst Regional's male students outperformed female students in the White, Asian, non low-income, and low-income subgroups, and female students outperformed male students in the Hispanic and African-American subgroups. The performance gap in math between female and male students was narrowest for White students (one-half PI point in favor of males) and widest for African-American students (six PI points in favor of females).

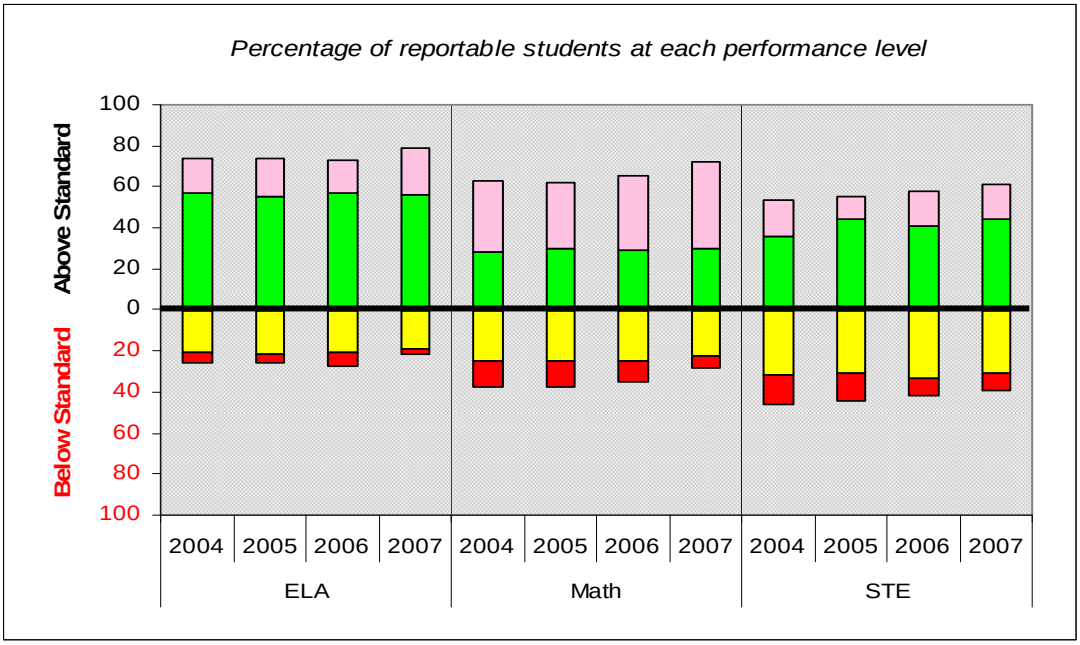
Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2004 and 2007, Amherst Regional's MCAS performance showed improvement in English language arts, in math, and in science and technology/engineering.
- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Amherst Regional improved at an average of one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 29 percent, a rate equal to that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 74 percent in 2004 to 79 percent in 2007.
- Math performance in Amherst Regional showed more improvement over this period, at an average of two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 32 percent, a rate greater than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math rose from 63 percent in 2004 to 72 percent in 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2007, STE performance in Amherst Regional also improved at an average of two PI points annually, resulting in a narrowing of the proficiency gap by 24 percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE increased from 54 percent in 2004 to 61 percent in 2007.

Figure/Table 20: MCAS Test Performance by Subject, 2004-2007



	ELA				Math				STE			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Advanced	17	18	15	23	34	32	36	42	18	11	17	16
Proficient	57	55	57	56	29	30	29	30	36	44	41	45
Needs Improvement	21	21	21	19	25	25	25	22	32	31	33	31
Warning/ Failing	6	5	7	2	13	12	10	6	14	14	9	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	74	73	72	79	63	62	65	72	54	55	58	61
Proficiency Index (PI)	88.7	88.9	88.1	92.0	81.1	81.2	82.8	87.2	77.4	78.2	81.4	82.9

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 Amherst Regional students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 74 percent in 2004 to 79 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in ELA narrowed from 11 to eight PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 29 percent, a rate equal to that required to make AYP.

The percentage of Amherst Regional students attaining proficiency in math increased from 63 percent in 2004 to 72 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 19 to 13 PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 32 percent, a rate greater than that required to make AYP.

The percentage of Amherst Regional students attaining proficiency in STE increased from 54 percent in 2004 to 61 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in STE narrowed by 24 percent over this period, from 23 to 17 PI points.

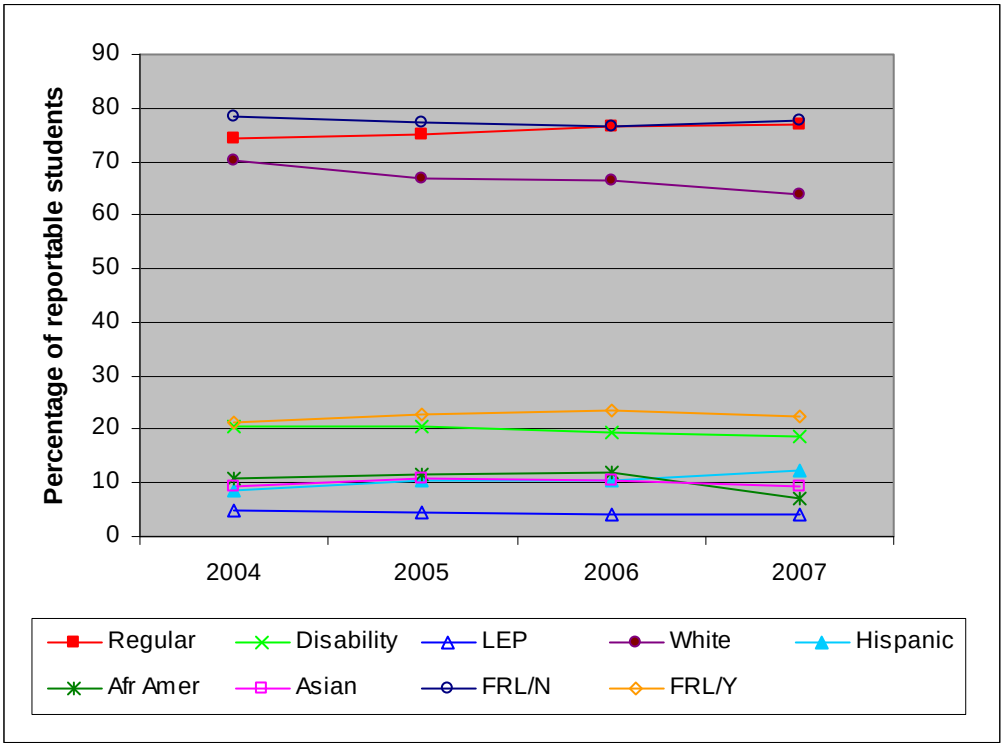
Equity of Improvement

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

Findings:

- In Amherst Regional, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2004 to 23 PI points in 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 33 to 28 PI points over this period.
- All student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroups in ELA were limited English proficient students and Hispanic students.
- In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Amherst Regional with the exception of Asian students improved between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroups in math were Hispanic students and students with disabilities.

Figure/Table 21: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2004-2007



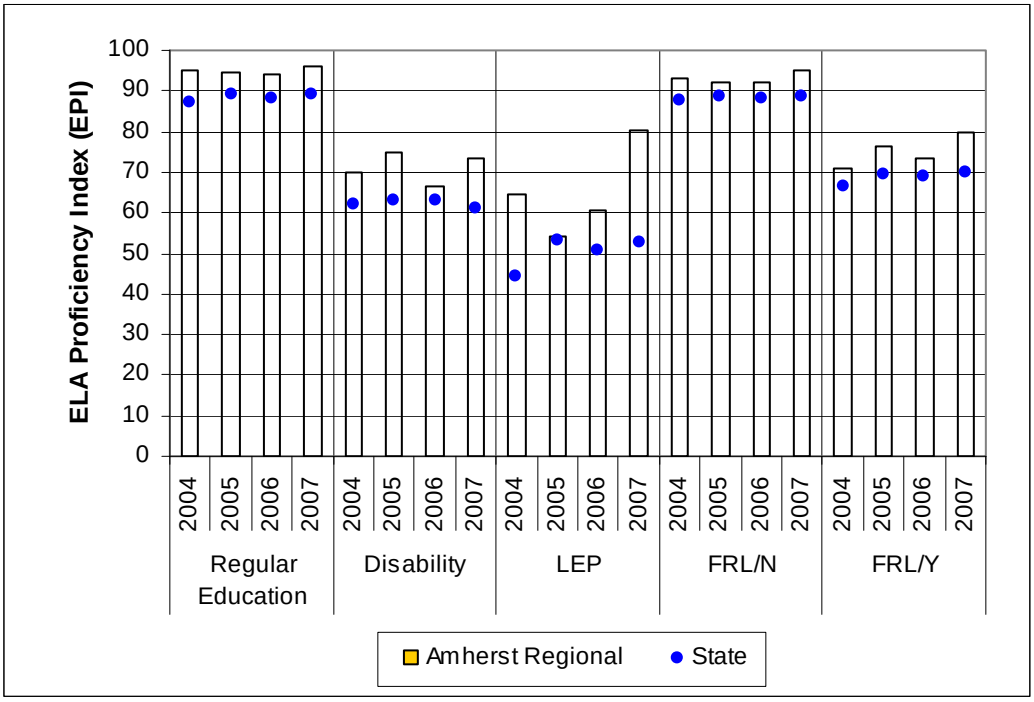
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**
Amherst Regional	1,505	1,518	1,765	1,721	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	1,121	1,141	1,352	1,327	74.5	75.2	76.6	77.1
Disability	309	310	341	321	20.5	20.4	19.3	18.7
LEP	75	67	72	73	5.0	4.4	4.1	4.2
White	1,057	1,016	1,170	1,099	70.2	66.9	66.3	63.9
Hispanic	130	156	186	212	8.6	10.3	10.5	12.3
African-American	165	173	212	125	11.0	11.4	12.0	7.3
Asian	142	163	183	158	9.4	10.7	10.4	9.2
FRL/N	1,182	1,175	1,352	1,335	78.5	77.4	76.6	77.6
FRL/Y	323	343	413	386	21.5	22.6	23.4	22.4

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.

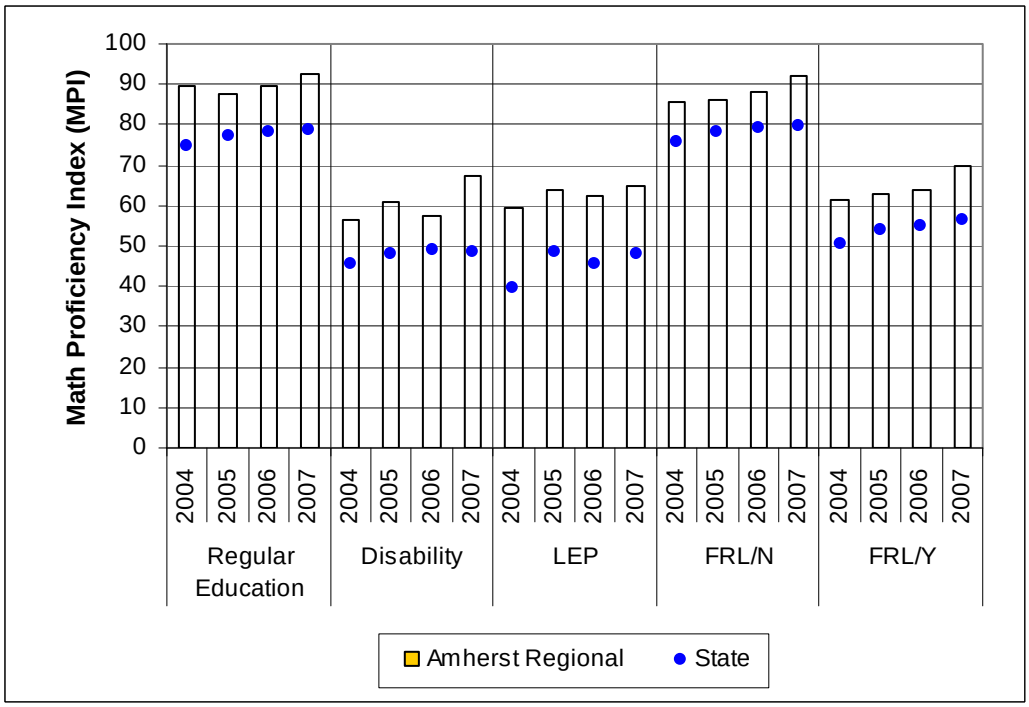
Between 2004 and 2007 in Amherst Regional, the proportion of regular education students increased by two and one-half percentage points, students with disabilities decreased by two percentage points, and LEP students decreased by one percentage point. The proportion of White students decreased by six percentage points, Hispanic students increased by four percentage points, African-American students decreased by four percentage points, and Asian students stayed about the same. The proportion of low-income students increased by one percentage point.

Figures 22 A-D/Table 22: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Subgroup, 2004-2007

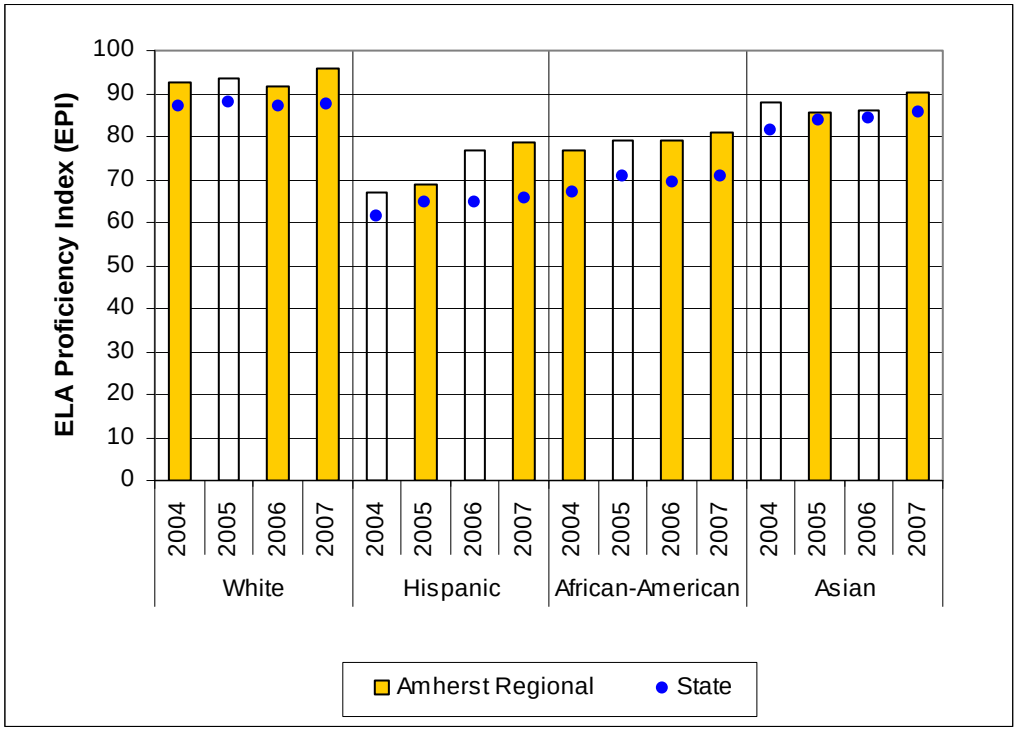
A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



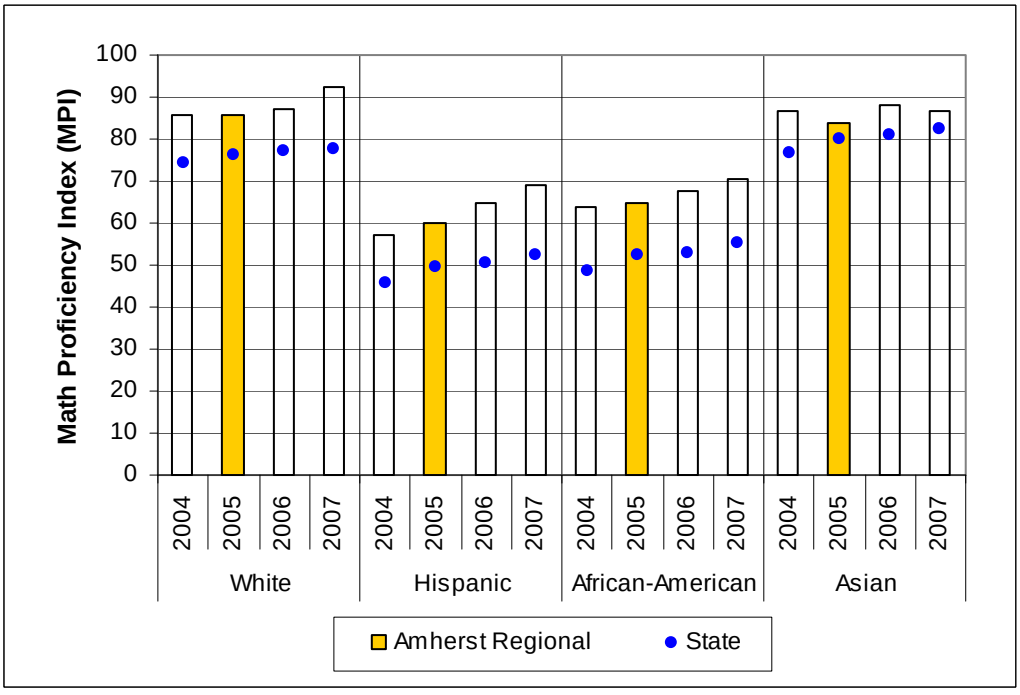
B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



C. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup



D. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup



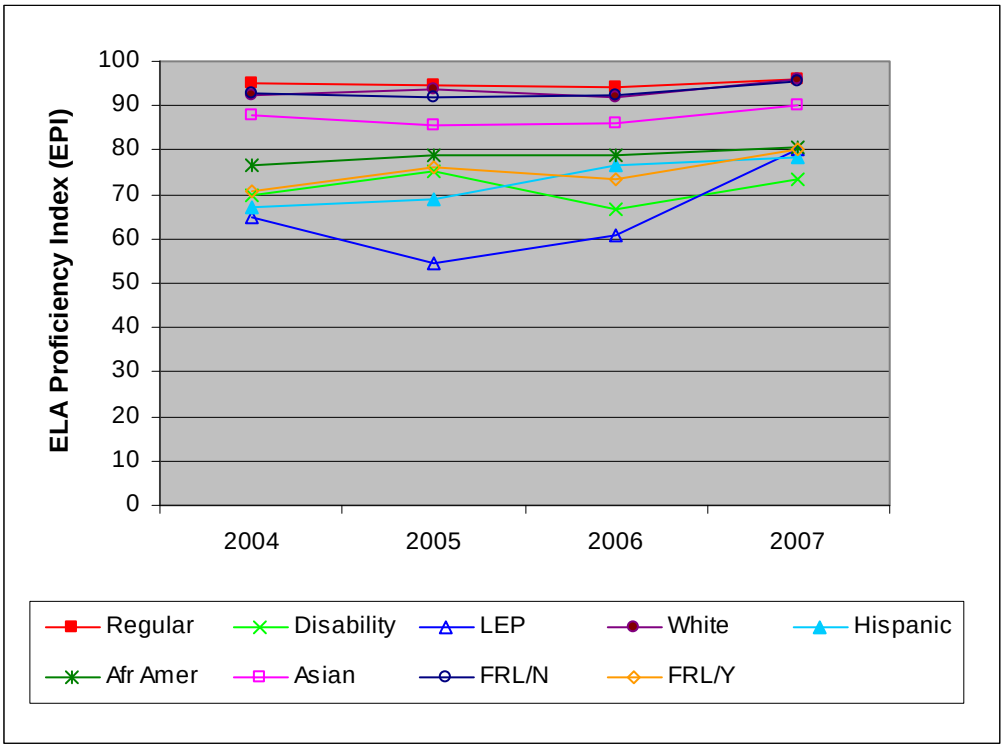
State				Amherst Regional			
Subgroup	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**	**Subgroup**	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**
Regular Education	2004	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2004	95.1	89.4
	2005	89.2	77.4		2005	94.8	87.5
	2006	88.3	78.2		2006	94.2	89.6
	2007	89.0	78.9		2007	96.1	92.6
Disability	2004	62.1	45.3	Disability	2004	69.8	56.4
	2005	63.3	47.9		2005	75.1	61.1
	2006	62.9	49.0		2006	66.7	57.4
	2007	61.2	48.4		2007	73.3	67.2
LEP	2004	44.4	39.6	LEP	2004	64.7	59.6
	2005	53.4	48.4		2005	54.4	63.8
	2006	50.9	45.6		2006	60.6	62.5
	2007	52.9	47.9		2007	80.4	64.7
FRL/N	2004	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2004	92.9	85.8
	2005	88.9	78.1		2005	92.1	85.9
	2006	88.3	79.0		2006	92.2	88.3
	2007	88.6	79.7		2007	95.3	91.9
FRL/Y	2004	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2004	70.9	61.6
	2005	69.7	53.9		2005	76.3	63.1
	2006	68.8	55.0		2006	73.3	64.1
	2007	70.0	56.3		2007	80.0	69.7
White	2004	86.9	74.4	White	2004	92.4	85.7
	2005	87.7	76.2		2005	93.5	85.9
	2006	87.1	77.2		2006	91.7	87.1
	2007	87.4	77.8		2007	95.9	92.5
Hispanic	2004	61.4	45.7	Hispanic	2004	67.1	57.3
	2005	64.8	49.3		2005	69.0	60.1
	2006	64.6	50.6		2006	76.6	64.6
	2007	65.8	52.2		2007	78.6	69.0
African-American	2004	67.1	48.4	African-American	2004	76.6	63.6
	2005	70.5	52.3		2005	79.0	64.9
	2006	69.4	52.8		2006	79.0	67.8
	2007	70.9	55.2		2007	80.7	70.7
Asian	2004	81.2	76.6	Asian	2004	87.7	86.8
	2005	83.7	80.2		2005	85.4	83.9
	2006	84.3	81.0		2006	85.9	88.0
	2007	85.5	82.5		2007	90.3	86.8

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, 12, 14, and 15.

In Amherst Regional, 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 three PI points in math. The performance of students with disabilities increased by three and one-half PI points in ELA and by 11 points in math. The performance of LEP students improved by 16 PI points in ELA and by five points in math. The performance of non low-income students improved by two and one-half PI points in ELA and by six PI points in math, and the performance of low-income students improved by nine PI points in ELA and by eight points in math.

Also during this period, the performance of White students improved by three and one-half PI points in ELA and by seven points in math. The performance of Hispanic students improved by close to 12 PI points in both ELA and math. The performance of African-American students improved by four PI points in ELA and by seven points in math. The performance of Asian students improved by two and one-half PI points in ELA and stayed the same in math.

Figure/Table 23: 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
Amherst Regional	88.7	88.9	88.1	92.0	74	74	73	79
Regular	95.1	94.8	94.2	96.1	86	86	83	88
Disability	69.8	75.1	66.7	73.3	38	45	35	38
LEP	64.7	54.4	60.6	80.4	24	12	27	46
White	92.4	93.5	91.7	95.9	82	83	80	88
Hispanic	67.1	69.0	76.6	78.6	37	35	50	48
African-American	76.6	79.0	79.0	80.7	45	51	54	55
Asian	87.7	85.4	85.9	90.3	70	68	71	74
FRL/N	92.9	92.1	92.2	95.3	82	81	81	86
FRL/Y	70.9	76.3	73.3	80.0	40	47	43	50

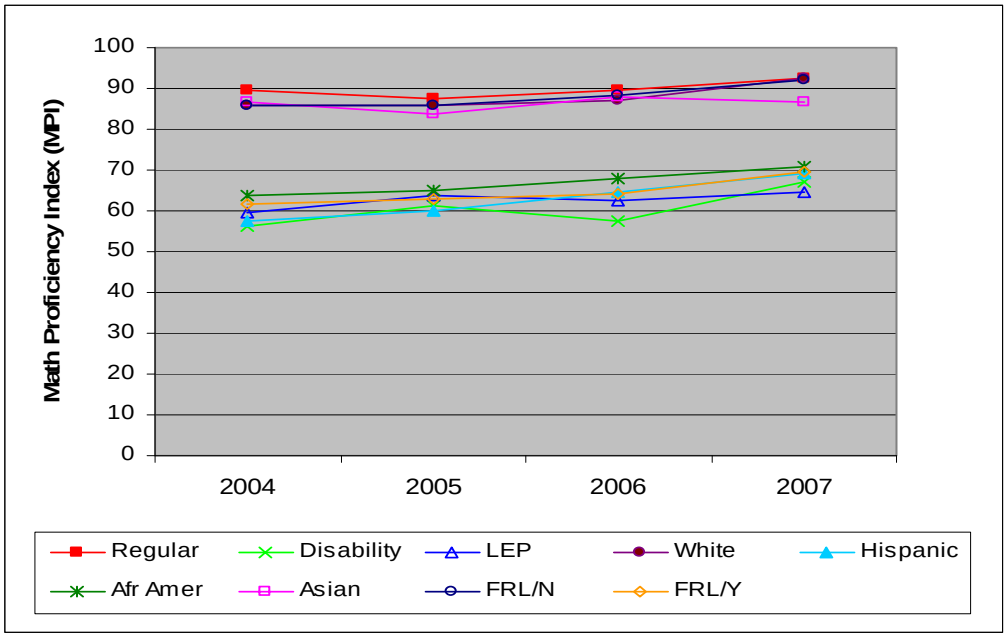
Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 8, 11, and 14.

All student subgroups in Amherst Regional had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The ELA proficiency gap for Amherst Regional's regular education students narrowed from five to four PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 20 percent; for students with disabilities it narrowed by 12 percent from 30 to 27 PI points; and for LEP students it narrowed from 35 to 20 PI points, an improvement rate of 45 percent. The proficiency gap in ELA for White students narrowed from eight to four PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 46 percent; for Hispanic students it narrowed from 33 to 21 PI points, an improvement rate of 35 percent; for African-American students the gap narrowed by 18 percent from 23 to 19 PI points; and for Asian students it narrowed from 12 to 10 PI

points, an improvement rate of 21 percent. The ELA proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed from seven to five PI points, an improvement rate of 34 percent, and for low-income students it narrowed from 29 to 20 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 31 percent.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in ELA between regular education students and students with disabilities narrowed by two and one-half PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it narrowed by 15 PI points. The ELA performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by eight PI points, between White and African-American students it narrowed by one-half PI point, and between White and Asian students it widened by one point. The performance gap in ELA between non low-income and low-income students narrowed by seven PI points over this period.

Figure/Table 24: MCAS Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007



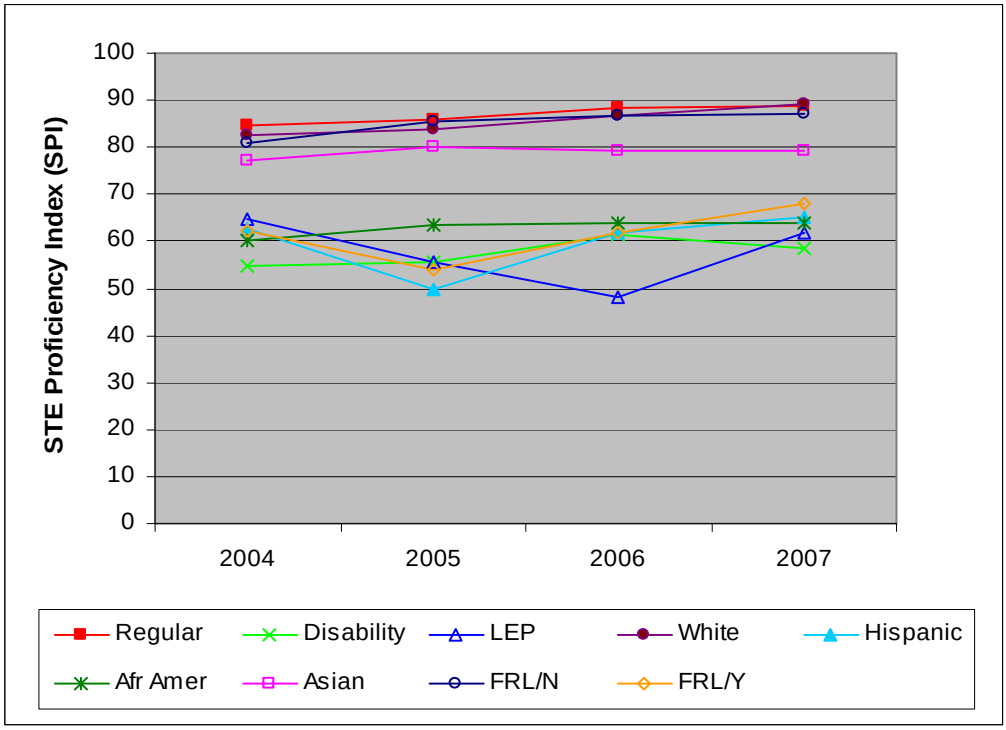
	Math Proficiency Index (MPI)				Percent Attaining Proficiency			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Amherst Regional	81.1	81.2	82.8	87.2	63	62	65	72
Regular	89.4	87.5	89.6	92.6	75	72	76	81
Disability	56.4	61.1	57.4	67.2	27	32	28	37
LEP	59.6	63.8	62.5	64.7	30	36	29	36
White	85.7	85.9	87.1	92.5	70	70	73	82
Hispanic	57.3	60.1	64.6	69.0	27	27	34	39
African-American	63.6	64.9	67.8	70.7	37	37	37	39
Asian	86.8	83.9	88.0	86.8	70	68	75	71
FRL/N	85.8	85.9	88.3	91.9	69	70	75	80
FRL/Y	61.6	63.1	64.1	69.7	35	33	34	40

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, 12, and 15.

In math, the performance of all student subgroups except Asian students in Amherst Regional improved between 2004 and 2007. The math proficiency gap for Amherst Regional's regular education students narrowed from 11 to seven PI points over this period, resulting in an improvement rate of 30 percent; for students with disabilities it narrowed from 44 to 33 PI points, an improvement rate of 25 percent; and for LEP students it narrowed from 40 to 35 PI points, an improvement rate of 13 percent. The proficiency gap in math for White students narrowed from 14 to eight PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 48 percent; for Hispanic students it narrowed from 43 to 31 PI points, an improvement rate of 27 percent; for African-American students the gap narrowed from 36 to 29 PI points, an improvement rate of 20 percent; and for Asian students it remained at 13 PI points. The math proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed from 14 to eight PI points, an improvement rate of 43 percent; and for low-income students it narrowed from 38 to 30 PI points, an improvement rate of 21 percent.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in math between regular education students and students with disabilities narrowed by seven and one-half PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it narrowed by two PI points. The math performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by five PI points, between White and African-American students it stayed the same, and between White and Asian students it widened by seven PI points. The performance gap in math between non low-income and low-income students narrowed by two PI points over this period.

Figure/Table 25: MCAS STE Proficiency Index (SPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007



	STE Proficiency Index (SPI)				Percent Attaining Proficiency			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Amherst Regional	77.4	78.2	81.4	82.9	54	55	58	61
Regular	84.8	85.7	88.2	88.7	64	66	68	69
Disability	54.6	55.5	61.3	58.6	23	25	29	25
LEP	64.6	55.4	48.3	61.7	38	22	7	27
White	82.5	83.8	86.6	89.3	61	64	66	73
Hispanic	62.8	50.0	61.7	65.3	33	18	22	33
African-American	60.0	63.5	64.0	63.9	30	28	26	24
Asian	77.0	80.0	79.3	79.3	52	60	64	55
FRL/N	80.9	85.6	86.9	87.2	59	66	67	69
FRL/Y	62.4	54.0	61.8	68.1	31	21	25	33

In science and technology/engineering, all student subgroups in Amherst Regional with the exception of LEP students had improved performance between 2004 and 2007. The STE proficiency gap for Amherst Regional's regular education students narrowed from 15 to 11 PI points over this period, an improvement rate of 26 percent; for students with disabilities it narrowed by nine percent from 45 to 41 PI points; and for LEP students it widened by eight percent from 35 to 38 PI points. The proficiency gap in STE for White students narrowed by 39 percent from 18 to 11 PI points; for Hispanic students it narrowed from 37 to 35 PI points, an improvement rate of seven percent; for African-American students the gap narrowed by 10 percent from 40 to 36 PI points; and for Asian students it narrowed from 23 to 21 PI points, also an improvement rate of 10 percent. The STE proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed by 33 percent from 19 to 13 PI points; and for low-income students it narrowed from 38 to 32 PI points, an improvement rate of 15 percent.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in STE between regular education students and students with disabilities stayed the same, and between regular education students and LEP students it widened by seven PI points. The STE performance gap between White and Hispanic students widened by four PI points, between White and African-American students it widened by three PI points, and between White and Asian students it widened by four and one-half points. The performance gap in STE between non low-income and low-income students widened by one-half PI point 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 Amherst Regional 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
Amherst Regional	ALL LEVELS	**1,683**	**1,684**	**468**
	Advanced	421	642	76
	Proficient	937	543	209
	Needs Improvement	279	364	143
	Warning/Failing	46	135	40
Regular Education	Advanced	400	597	69
	Proficient	794	463	193
	Needs Improvement	120	219	103
	Warning/Failing	7	41	12
Disability	Advanced	20	36	6
	Proficient	113	62	13
	Needs Improvement	127	119	32
	Warning/Failing	33	76	25
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	1	9	1
	Proficient	30	18	3
	Needs Improvement	32	26	8
	Warning/Failing	6	18	3
White	Advanced	339	505	62
	Proficient	619	348	154
	Needs Improvement	108	178	65
	Warning/Failing	11	44	14
Hispanic	Advanced	20	27	3
	Proficient	91	58	15
	Needs Improvement	75	77	21
	Warning/Failing	16	43	15
African-American	Advanced	11	15	2
	Proficient	68	29	9
	Needs Improvement	34	49	27
	Warning/Failing	11	30	7
Asian	Advanced	29	61	6
	Proficient	90	55	20
	Needs Improvement	34	32	17
	Warning/Failing	5	9	4
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	393	592	72
	Proficient	755	444	178
	Needs Improvement	142	220	93
	Warning/Failing	19	51	20
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	28	50	4
	Proficient	180	98	31
	Needs Improvement	137	142	50
	Warning/Failing	27	84	20
Male	Advanced	148	314	31
	Proficient	499	284	117
	Needs Improvement	170	179	58
	Warning/Failing	27	64	21
Female	Advanced	273	328	45
	Proficient	436	258	92
	Needs Improvement	109	183	85
	Warning/Failing	19	71	19

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2004-2007

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2004	216	0	0
	2005	207	0	0
	2006	214	213	0
	2007	213	214	0
Grade 4	2004	215	217	0
	2005	222	222	0
	2006	213	214	0
	2007	211	213	0
Grade 5	2004	0	0	233
	2005	0	0	220
	2006	226	226	227
	2007	202	202	202
Grade 6	2004	0	226	0
	2005	0	242	0
	2006	220	221	0
	2007	241	240	0
Grade 7	2004	319	0	0
	2005	283	0	0
	2006	277	277	0
	2007	258	257	0
Grade 8	2004	0	326	323
	2005	0	313	313
	2006	281	283	285
	2007	268	268	266
Grade 10	2004	289	293	0
	2005	342	340	0
	2006	314	314	0
	2007	290	290	0
All Grades	2004	1,039	1,062	556
	2005	1,054	1,117	533
	2006	1,745	1,748	512
	2007	1,683	1,684	468

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 20-25 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 Findings and 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															
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	**11**
Needs Improvement								✓		✓	✓				**3**
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:

- In order to address national and state standards for teaching and learning, Amherst Regional Public Schools evolved from offering building-based curricula to developing standardized, aligned curricula across grades K-12.
- Under the direction of the current superintendent, the district created and disseminated standardized procedures for safety and security for all district schools.
- The district implemented data analysis and data warehouse training for its administrators to become more proficient in data-driven decision making.
- The goals in the aligned DIP and SIPs were presented and discussed at open school committee meetings twice annually.
- Stakeholders in the district participated as search committee members in the screening process to fill administrative vacancies.

- In addition to striving to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the district established a goal to prepare all students for college whether or not they planned to attend.
- Not all administrators and principals were evaluated on an annual basis to assess their job performance. Only 46 percent of the administrative personnel files reviewed contained evaluations, and most of the evaluations that did exist were not timely.

Summary

During the examination period, the Amherst Regional Public Schools were served by three separate school committees and a superintendent who had completed four years in the district as of June 2007. School committee members acknowledged that prior to the arrival of current superintendent, schools in the district were managed at the building level, with curricula that were not standardized and aligned across grades K-12.

During the review period, a new direction emerged in the district in response to national and state standards, particularly those related to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. A District Improvement Plan (DIP) was developed that highlighted goals regarding the improvement of achievement for all student subgroup populations, equity for all district students, data analysis and decision-making, and development of curriculum guides in ELA, math, and science/technology aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were developed for all schools, with school goals aligned with district goals and priorities.

The district's policy manual indicated that the three school committees governing the district have the dual responsibilities of meeting statutory requirements pertaining to public education and fulfilling citizens' expectations for the education of the community's youth. School committee members expressed full knowledge of their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993.

The superintendent delegated program and management leadership to district and school administrators. Principals were the designated instructional leaders of their respective schools, assisted by district curriculum directors and department heads. A stated district priority was to hire the most capable administrators and hold them responsible.

The district provided leadership in the standardization of district curricula, which resulted in the adoption of a newly aligned K-12 math program and partial completion of an aligned K-12 ELA curriculum guide. The district worked with a number of agencies and programs to provide support services to at-risk students and economically disadvantaged families. The district consolidated the student services office to centrally coordinate services for English language learning, special education, discipline, health, and safety.

The budget process developed by the superintendent was described by district administrators and school committee members as comprehensive, transparent, and guided by providing equity to students along with addressing student achievement needs. Since the arrival of the present superintendent, allocations for instructional materials, supplies, and teaching resources were made on a per pupil basis, while other funding was allocated based on student needs. School committee members indicated that budget discussions and deliberations frequently focused on the academic preparation of all students for college, equity for all students, making adequate yearly progress (AYP), and having aligned K-12 curricula. Cost-effective in-district programs for special needs students were developed as an alternative to out-of-district placements.

Effective planning was evident in the district to address student achievement. The district prioritized efforts to improve student achievement for the aggregate student population and all student subgroups. Numerous district goals were established for 2005-2006, which were defined with accompanying narrative and statements. These goals were intended to promote quality instruction, raise academic expectations for all students, and meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proficiency requirements by 2014. District planning was also directed toward the goal of making AYP in all schools.

The district's commitment to implementing data analysis practices to become more data-driven in its decision-making was central to its governance and planning processes. School principals and teachers indicated that over the past two years the schools have become more data conscious. The administration presented a model to assist district administrators and teachers in helping all students achieve proficiency and in gathering and interpreting data. The model suggested that teachers and instructional support staff members working together should be able to state: 1) we

know our students and how each learns; 2) we know what to teach and how to teach it; 3) we know if each student is learning it; and 4) we know what to do if s/he did not learn it.

The DIP and SIPs were presented and discussed at school committee meetings twice annually, which were aired on local cable access television for public viewing. The district's website, open school committee meetings, coverage by local cable television and newspapers, annual reports, and school council meetings were cited as examples of ways in which the district communicated with its stakeholders.

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 Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional District Improvement Plan (DIP) for 2006-2007 focused on nine areas directed toward the improvement of achievement for all district students. These areas were: 1) district improvement plan questions; 2) current year action/improvement plan by initiative and funding sources; 3) student success plan; 4) district leverage points for student achievement; 5) improvement plan blank form; 6) improvement plan district details; 7) improvement plan strategies by central office departments and schools; 8) FY 2007 district continuous improvement plan; and 9) FY 2007 district goals.

The mission statement for the district, as indicated by the superintendent and written in student and parent handbooks, was "Becoming a Multicultural School System (BAMSS)." As stated in the district's 2001-2005 strategic plan and in section 130.09 of the district policy manual, "The mission of our schools is to provide all students with a high quality education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural, pluralistic society. We seek to create an environment that achieves equity for all students and ensures that each student is a successful learner, is fully respected, and learns to respect others."

The district goals for 2005-2006 listed approximately 50 goal types under the categories of early childhood, ELL, student services, teaching and learning, and special education accompanied by goal statements, the majority of which were aimed to promote continuous improvement of instructional practices, high expectations for all students, and improved achievement for all student subgroups.

Central to the district's DIP was the analysis of student achievement data to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and address the teaching and learning needs of district schools, specifically the poor academic performance of low-achieving students in the subgroups that caused the district to be identified as 'in need of improvement.' One of the eight district goals in the DIP, listed in the section entitled Pursuing Adequate Yearly Progress, was to define measurable achievement goals and targets for each of the student subgroups through the use of disaggregated student assessment data. The DIP included a goal of reaching the AYP cycle IV composite proficiency index (CPI) target in 2008.

District goals and task statements listed program modifications, confirmed by administrators and teachers in interviews, that were prompted by a review of the standards in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and by analysis of district and school MCAS results. Examples included the publication, distribution, and implementation of a K-6 aligned math curriculum guide using Math Investigations (revised) and Scott Foresman/Addison-Wesley, the partial completion of an aligned K-6 ELA curriculum guide, training and implementation of a research-based approach to reading instruction for elementary level special education students, and implementation of coordinated plans for students learning English.

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 Amherst-Pelham District Policy Manual, Section 110.01, Purposes and Responsibilities, approved in 1982 by all member towns, indicated that the three school committees governing the district have the dual responsibilities of meeting statutory requirements pertaining to public

education and fulfilling citizens' expectations for the education of the community's youth. Three additional areas of responsibility were listed in the policy manual pertaining to keeping the public informed, establishing policies and making decisions on the district's educational philosophy and goals, and acting as bodies representing community members in matters involving public education.

Section 130.09 of the policy manual listed nine goals approved by the three school committees in 2001. These goals were directed toward high standards and student success; up-to-date, innovative, multicultural, and academically challenging curricula; elimination of the achievement gap between students from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds; technology; hiring and retaining high quality teaching and administrative staff members; sustaining a physically and emotionally safe environment in schools for students and staffs; making all students feel fully welcome in the district's schools regardless of race, social class, gender, culture, language, religion, sexuality, academic success, or physical abilities; and increasing communication and collaboration among the district's stakeholders.

During the interview process, school committee members expressed full knowledge of their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993. They described their roles in budget review and approval procedures, establishment of policy, hiring and evaluating the superintendent, participating on school committee subcommittees, upholding the regional school district agreement, and collaboratively developing contracts with district employees. Equity among all students, high expectations for student achievement, educationally sound class sizes, adhering to national and state standards, and student achievement data were mentioned as factors considered by school committee members in policy and decision-making.

Section 110.05 of the district policy manual, entitled New School Committee Member Orientation, listed the requirement under MGL Chapter 71, Section 36A that newly elected members of the school committee complete at least eight hours of orientation directed toward school committee responsibilities. During the interview process, a school committee member indicated receiving at least 16 hours of orientation after being newly elected.

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

A majority of principals were trained in TestWiz, which was utilized as a tool to conduct MCAS test item analyses for the aggregate and subgroup student populations. District and school administrators and teachers interviewed acknowledged that working toward the NCLB proficiency goal would require continuous analysis of student assessment data, particularly for the district's subgroups not making AYP. The district initiated procedures and practices to use student assessment data in its effort to promote and maintain high standards of achievement for all district students. During the period under review, MCAS results were analyzed at the district level and by each school principal.

School principals and teachers indicated that over the past two years the schools have become more data conscious. During interviews, administrators and teachers often repeated the mantra "Every Student. Every Day." The administration presented a model, adapted from Richard DuFour, to assist district administrators and teachers in helping all students achieve proficiency and in gathering and interpreting data. The model suggested that teachers and instructional support staff members working together should be able to state: 1) we know our students and how each learns; 2) we know what to teach and how to teach it; 3) we know if each student is learning it; and 4) we know what to do if s/he did not learn it.

Principals and teachers indicated that MCAS data analysis and interpretation informed goals in the SIPs and were agenda items discussed at faculty, grade level, and department staff meetings. In 2006-2007, the district's director of information systems provided data warehouse training to district and school administrators. Central administration indicated that staff training in the interpretation and use of data would be an ongoing district goal. The DIP enumerated expectations of the staff under "Knows what to teach and how to teach it," including: 1) performs MCAS test item analyses to determine which strands/objectives need more attention; 2) knows what is on the test: has examined past tests, questions, and stems; and 3) develops strategies and plans to differentiate and individualize instruction.

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

A review of the goals listed in the district's 2006-2007 SIPs showed alignment with the 2006-2007 DIP. Central to the DIP and SIP goals were district and school expectations related to the improvement of student achievement, expressed through slogans such as "Learning for All," "Every Student. Every Day." and "Becoming a Multicultural School System (BAMSS)." During interviews, principals, teachers, parents, and teacher association members indicated that annual school MCAS results and AYP status influenced the formulation of school and district goals. Central administration and school principals presented and discussed the goals in the DIP and SIPs annually at two open school committee meetings. The school committees formally approved district and school plans on an annual basis.

The DIP included guidelines for SIPs related to pursuing adequate yearly progress by addressing the teaching and learning needs of students, particularly low-achieving students; defining measurable achievement goals and targets for each of the student subgroups; and, if appropriate, including a determination of why the district's previous plan did not improve academic performance. Although the district's SIPs were not written following a standardized format, a review of the seven school plans showed that student achievement for all students was a priority. The seven plans collectively referenced high expectations for students, the principal as the instructional leader, student achievement goals, diversity and community, inquiry-based learning, core beliefs and guiding principles, objectives and activities, curriculum maps, peer observation, and communicating clear and high expectations to students.

5. 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.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

District and school administrators and school committee members described the budget process as open, transparent, and guided by providing equity to students along with addressing student achievement needs. Prior to the current superintendent's tenure, district schools were managed at the building level. Allocations for instructional materials, supplies, and teaching resources were not equitable. During the review period, since the arrival of the present superintendent, these budgetary items were allocated on a per pupil basis, while other funding was allocated based on student needs.

District administrators and school committee members indicated that the budget was developed, deliberated on, and approved based on priorities important to the district. They mentioned a goal to maintain educationally sound class sizes and teacher-student ratios. Providing after-school academic assistance to district students necessitated funding for after-school transportation. The district prioritized maintaining and appropriately revising a curriculum and instructional program directed toward social justice. The district hired two autism specialists to assist classroom teachers through a consultation model. It added special education and ELL teaching positions to meet identified student needs.

The district implemented a major change to consolidate the student services office. As a result, the related services of ELL, special education, student information, discipline and intervention, health services, early childhood, academic intervention, student support and services, and safety and security became centrally administered and coordinated. District administrators indicated that this organizational change under the leadership of the director of student services has resulted in more efficiently expedited services to students in need. This reorganization was accomplished with a net increase of one administrator. The number of executive directors in the district was reduced from two to one.

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

During the review period, the Amherst Regional Public Schools were served by one superintendent and three separate school committees. Interviews with the superintendent and school committee members indicated that the budget development and deliberation process was transparent. Members indicated that budget discussions at open budget meetings held separately by the district's three school committees focused on maintaining educationally sound class sizes, eliminating the achievement gap, providing the instructional resources needed for teachers, teaching an appropriate social justice curriculum, maintaining school facilities, ensuring equity among all students, meeting national and state standards, forecasting available funds, and adhering to the regional agreement.

School committee members indicated that the superintendent, with the assistance of district and school administrators, presented budget documents that were comprehensive, detailed, and appropriately addressed the needs of schools in member towns. Budget forecasting was initiated in September and October of each school year by the Amherst finance director based on a regularly updated five-year forecast of local and state revenues. During the same period, the superintendent, district administrators, and the district's business office staff discussed budget priorities and prepared budget documents delineating personnel, student support services, and instructional and building needs. Two comprehensive budget documents entitled Data and Direction and Assumptions were published. These budget documents contained district department abstracts on the business office, facilities and transportation, human resources, information and audio/visual systems, pupil personnel services, capital plans, program development, ELL, and special education. The two budget documents contained data related to demographics, enrollments, participation in the free and reduced-cost lunch program, budget trends, grants, out-of-district tuitions, and vocational school placements. Each department abstract had a narrative that included an overview and an executive summary. The executive summaries addressed such areas as recommended needs, responsibilities, recent accomplishments, and current initiatives. Needs and new initiatives requested were defined in narrative form and, where appropriate, referenced student needs. For example, in 2006-2007 a personnel request for an intense needs teacher was made to address the increase in students diagnosed on the autism spectrum who needed specialized assistance.

In accordance with available funds and recommendations of the superintendent, the three school committees approved the budget, held the required open budget hearings, and presented the final recommended budget to the town meetings of member communities for approval. The superintendent and school committee chairs addressed the annual budget requests at the open town meetings. Prior to the school committees' approval of the budget, the superintendent held meetings with individual town selectmen, managers, finance personnel, and other community groups as requested. During the period under examination, the district exceeded its net school spending requirements, and per pupil expenditures exceeded the state average.

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

School committee members indicated during the interview process that the DIP and SIPs were discussed at school committee meetings twice annually. At the initial presentation, district administrators and school principals discussed the goals in the plans, how they were developed, and how progress toward them would be measured throughout the school year. Stakeholders in the district indicated that high expectations for student achievement were paramount in the plans. School committee members also saw that the DIP and the SIPs were in alignment with the philosophy and nine goals in the district's policy manual. The second presentation to the three school committees was made by principals near or at the end of the school year. Progress toward goal attainment and modification of goals for the following year were matters of discussion. Except in Pelham, the majority of school committee meetings were televised on the local access channel for public viewing.

Throughout the school year, the *Amherst Bulletin* featured a weekly school news column. All schools in the district were able to submit articles that highlighted school programs, goals, events, and accomplishments. The district's website had numerous links that provided information about the district and its schools, including the SIPs. The NCLB link showed

mission statements, MCAS test results for aggregate and subgroup student populations in all subjects and grades tested, AYP data, and accountability status.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The action/improvement plan in the DIP indicated that the district needed to "dig down" into available data, mining MCAS data for specific item analyses as well as patterns of performance measured according to the state standards. The plan further stated that the district's greatest challenges were to address the instructional needs of the special education and ELL student populations. It was indicated that strategies for inclusion and differentiated instruction were needed for both student groups. During interviews, teachers and administrators indicated that grade-level, faculty, and department meetings served as the means to discuss MCAS test item analyses and to identify those standards and strands in the curriculum frameworks the teaching of which needed to be strengthened in classroom instruction. In ELA, answering open-response questions was one example cited. Those interviewed indicated that analysis of student assessment data became more of an expectation for administrators and staff members during the period under examination. Most principals were trained in TestWiz and were designated as the instructional leaders in their schools with responsibility for the implementation of the data analysis process with teachers. The superintendent indicated that data analysis practices in the district were ongoing and that schools were becoming more proficient in looking at aggregated and disaggregated student data. Teachers and principals said that MCAS-like questions were incorporated into classroom instruction. Principals also received training in Cognos, the software underlying district's newly implemented data warehouse.

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 goals listed in the DIP and SIPs were discussed annually at two open meetings of the school committee. Progress toward attainment of the goals as monitored by principals and teachers was presented. The superintendent indicated that bimonthly meetings were held with district principals and that agenda items were devoted to school goals and discussion of progress toward their attainment.

During interviews, school and district administrators said that the DIP was viewed as the district's guiding document. Procedures related to the monitoring of student achievement were listed in the DIP. Under the section entitled Pursuing Adequate Yearly Progress, eight action steps were recommended. One of the steps was directed toward defining specific measurable achievement goals and targets for each of the student subgroups whose disaggregated results were included in the district's AYP report. Another step was related to using improvement strategies, based on scientifically based research, that address the causes of poor student performance and making the necessary changes in district practices and programs to meet improvement targets. A district policy stipulated that a student success plan was to be written for each student who scored in the 'Warning/Failing' or 'Needs Improvement' categories on the MCAS tests.

The DIP listed goals related to academic achievement of all students under the section District Leverage Points for Student Achievement. These points were intended to serve as measurable indicators of progress. They were: all students will read and write at or above grade level by the end of third, sixth, eighth, and tenth grade; every student will graduate and be prepared to attend college; and all students will successfully complete at least three years of preparatory math including Algebra I and Geometry at least by the end of tenth grade.

10. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, the superintendent was annually evaluated, but a review of the personnel files of administrators and principals showed that they were not.

The superintendent's narrative and rating instrument included seven categories: 1) educational/professional leadership; 2) personnel/relationships/management; 3) community relations; 4) business, finances, and operations; 5) BAMSS goals; 6) accomplishment of the superintendent's goals and objectives; and 7) relationships of the school committees and the superintendent. Ratings used by school committee members to evaluate the superintendent on the seven categories were: 1) met expectations; 2) exceeded expectations; or 3) failed to meet expectations. School committee members indicated that they took into consideration in evaluating the superintendent the goals contained in the DIP and SIPs that related to MCAS performance and AYP accountability status.

The superintendent's evaluations of the three school principals were unsigned during the review period. One evaluation was for school year 2005-2006, and two evaluations were for 2006-2007. There was one unsigned evaluation for a district administrator for 2006-2007. These evaluations were given to an EQA examiner during the site visit for review. They were written in narrative form, and although the narrative was not written in strict accordance with each of the six categories listed in 603 CMR 35.00, many of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership were addressed, as were curriculum alignment, school and district goals, high student and staff expectations, and student achievement.

11. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The superintendent delegated program and management leadership to district and school administrators. During an interview, the superintendent indicated that the most qualified administrators were sought and hired, and they were subsequently held responsible for the prescribed job functions of the position. However, not all program administrators and principals

were annually evaluated, as required by statute, to assess the success of their leadership. During the site visit, 26 administrator personnel files were reviewed. Twelve files (46 percent) contained no evaluations. Of the evaluations reviewed in the remaining 14 files, three (12 percent) were timely, and 11 (42 percent) were not timely. However, district and school administrators did acknowledge their responsibilities related to goals enumerated in the DIP and SIPs and in particular those goals addressing AYP and improved student achievement for all students.

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

During interviews, the superintendent, school committee members, and members of the teachers' association acknowledged that the goals listed in the DIP were priorities for the Amherst Regional Public Schools. The superintendent and the association president met on a monthly basis to discuss items from the association and items of mutual concern. Interviewees indicated that the superintendent and the teachers' association had enjoyed a good working relationship on a long-standing basis.. The negotiated contract agreement for the district expired in June 2007 and was extended for one year. In 2007-2008, subcommittees have been working on the district's teacher evaluation system and the district's professional development program.

School councils existed in every school in the district, and parents who were members indicated that there was collaboration between the school and parent community focused on school achievement, equity, and providing enriching student programs. The district's website was mentioned as a vehicle to enhance understanding of district and school priorities and to provide educational information to all stakeholders in the district. The site's numerous links included individual schools, AYP and accountability data, SIPs, mission statements, district information, and minutes of school committee meetings.

During interviews and focus group discussions, stakeholders mentioned recurrent themes of high student expectations, the "Every Student. Every Day." slogan, equity among students, aligned K-

12 curricula, and an educationally balanced program. Stakeholders expressed pride in the school district and its commitment to the community's children.

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 had affiliations with several human service agencies and worked closely to provide referral and support services to students and families in need. The Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth (SPIFFY) focused on a long-term plan related to youth substance abuse prevention. Objectives were established to reduce alcohol and marijuana use by youth in the partner communities. The Hampshire Collaborative and the Strategic Planning Initiative published and distributed *A Parents' Guide for Raising Healthy Children* (September 2007).

The district worked with the following agencies and programs: Head Start, the Northwest District Attorney's Children's Advocacy Center which started a child abuse task force, the Children's Rural Outreach Program (CROP) which assisted in matters related to domestic violence, the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Youth Crime Watch Program in conjunction with the Amherst Police Department, Partnerships with Amherst Children and Teens, the Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities, and, through the Amherst Health Department, the Amherst Drug Free Community Partnership. The Amherst Police Department sponsored the Adventure Based Ropes Course that was incorporated into the high school physical education curriculum.

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district developed a safety and emergency preparation plan which enumerated three major categories: crisis review team planning, training and communications, and drills and prevention strategies. Each school principal submitted specific components of the plan to the superintendent. The plan required that the principals accomplish the following tasks: reconfirm off-campus relocation site, develop and distribute emergency phone lists, check and distribute land line numbers, schedule annual safety preparation plan, and provide a card in every room and every setting. The superintendent maintained a checklist for each school in the district to track whether each met the requirements of the plan. Each component of the plan was month-dated for completion. The completion dates of the 2006-2007 plan spanned October 1 to January 31. The district and school plans were developed in conjunction with the police and fire departments.

Each school developed safety and emergency plans that were aligned with the district's preparation plan. When school principals were interviewed, they indicated that fire, bus, and lockdown drills were practiced. It was further indicated that each staff member had a copy of the safety plan, crisis plan, or the response to emergencies card. Principals indicated that professional development on the district's and schools' safety plans was provided to staff members new to each school, and to substitute teachers and school volunteers.

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

Findings:

- In 2006-2007, the district developed curriculum overviews for all grades and courses in the tested content areas. The district's math curriculum had been in place for several years, but the English language arts curriculum, particularly at the elementary level, was in place for the first time in 2007-2008.
- Curriculum writers in the district sought to strike a balance between specifying the required objectives and allowing teachers freedom in the implementation of the curriculum.
- With few common curriculum assessments, teachers across grades, schools, and courses lacked the diagnostic information that might drive instructional adjustments and measure the extent to which they had successfully addressed the written curriculum.
- The superintendent and the principals had effectively communicated the district's vision. However, due to the district's lack of focus on supervision, administrators did not necessarily equip the teachers with instructional strategies to realize this vision.
- The district was implementing some curricula for the first time in 2007-2008, and it was therefore premature to discuss revision of those curricula. But at the middle and high schools, teachers used professional development time to review and revise curricula for courses they taught in common. Elementary curriculum days were most often devoted to curriculum alignment.

- Principals and teachers provided additional instructional time to support students who were unsuccessful on MCAS tests.
- Few middle and high school classrooms had computers available for student use within the classroom. Instead, teachers could bring whole classes to the schools' computer labs.
- Principals and teachers expressed high expectations for student achievement; however, this was the result of district priorities and did not appear to result from active administrative supervision.

Summary

Developing and aligning curricula became a priority in the Amherst Regional Public Schools under the direction of the current superintendent. Middle and high school teachers who taught courses in common used professional development time to review and revise their curricula. The elementary schools, previously guided by curriculum guidelines written in 1995, produced a revised elementary English language arts curriculum that listed the content and skills to be addressed, but allowed teachers some autonomy in its implementation.

The district had few common expectations for the required components of a curriculum. The result was that within and across content areas and grade levels, the curriculum content varied widely. The recent curriculum development did lead to some increased horizontal alignment across grade levels and courses. At the same time, however, much of this curriculum development was so recent that some curricula were being implemented for the first time in 2007-2008, after the period under review. Therefore, the district did not yet have an established process for the regular and timely review and revision of its curricula. The elementary math curriculum, however, had been in place for several years and was scheduled for revision at the close of 2007-2008, after a full year of implementation of the new Investigations program.

Assessments were the curriculum component yet to be developed. At the time of the site visit, the math curriculum had beginning and end of year summative assessments. The ELA curriculum included writing prompts and other standardized assessments at the elementary level only. Neither math nor ELA curriculum documentation contained formative assessments. The result was that teachers and principals did not have either periodic or final data as to the extent of students' mastery of the curriculum objectives.

Principals agreed they were the curriculum leaders in their buildings, and several also reported that they delegated some of that leadership authority. At the elementary level, principals delegated authority to school-based reading teachers in ELA. At the middle school, the principal delegated responsibility to departmental curriculum leaders. At the high school, the principal delegated authority to content area department heads. However, with little assessment information, principals were unable to monitor either students' achievement of the curriculum objectives or teachers' effectiveness in delivery of the curriculum. They tended instead to rely generally upon the overall skill of the teachers.

During the review period, the district trained a large percentage of its teachers in instructional strategies appropriate for English language learners. At the same time, the district did little to provide teachers with strategies for teaching in an inclusive classroom or for differentiating instruction.

Principals and teachers in the district had internalized the concept of holding high expectations for students. However, these high expectations did not appear to be the result of active monitoring of classroom instruction by administrators but rather from repeated reminders from the superintendent to attend to "Every Student. Every Day." The need to hold high expectations for all students became clear to administrators and teachers during the period under review as they began to analyze MCAS scores and recognized the achievement gap between students in the aggregate and those in subgroups. EQA examiners, however, found little evidence that administrators played an active supervisory role in promoting specific, effective instructional strategies in classrooms.

Each of the district's schools met the state time on learning requirements as long as the middle and high schools counted time students spent in directed study. The elementary schools did not have a prescribed amount of time for ELA and math instruction, but each school allocated sufficient time to these areas. At the middle school, each student took one period each of ELA and math. Those in need of remediation, as indicated by MCAS test scores, were scheduled into an additional period of ELA known as Reading/Writing Workshop, or an additional period of math known as Math Plus. The high school offered study centers during the directed study period

in which students struggling on MCAS tests were tutored by paraprofessionals with an academic background.

While each math class had a set of graphing calculators and examiners found new LCD projectors in use in some classrooms, based on observations of 42 randomly selected classrooms EQA examiners found that classrooms had a relatively small number of computers available for student use (average of 9.3 students per computer). For the most part, teachers brought students to computer labs when they wanted to use technology as a tool for instruction**.**

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

During the period under review, the district initiated the development of curricula in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. These curricula contained some of the components of a complete curriculum. As a first step, teachers at all levels created a curriculum overview for each of the grades or subjects in the tested content areas; these were brief summaries of the concepts, topics, content, and essential agreements to be addressed. Next, teachers developed curriculum maps intended to provide a more detailed guide for teachers in curriculum implementation. The district did not prescribe a common format; as a result, the components of curriculum documents in ELA, math, and science differed from one another and varied somewhat between the elementary, middle, and high school levels. For example, the elementary ELA curriculum map included ELA strands; timeframe/length; content, skills, and strategies; methods of assessment; and references to the Massachusetts frameworks. In contrast, the grade 8 English language arts curriculum map included units; grammar and writing agreements; state and national standards; and content/skills for literature. The grade 10 ELA curriculum reverted to a format similar to that of elementary ELA.

Elementary ELA had separate writing, language, and reading/literature curricula. The writing curriculum had objectives and instructional strategies, but no references to how the attainment of the content and skills was to be measured or to alignment with the state framework. The language and reading/literature curricula available to teachers for the first time in 2007-2008 contained objectives and a reference to the state learning objective being addressed. But, in the column which referenced methods of assessment, the documents listed a number of possible strategies for assessment rather than one which all were to use and which would then indicate levels of student achievement of a specific objective. In the timeframe/length column, the guidance was simply a certain length of time; this allowed teachers a great deal of latitude as to when content was to be addressed. In interviews, elementary principals varied as to how they interpreted that latitude. Some said that teachers might address specific content at any time of the year, while others said that for developmental reasons there was an optimal order in which ELA content was to be introduced. However, the curriculum document did not provide guidance as to this order.

The middle school ELA curriculum maps had a clear and specific list of objectives to be covered and of the state standards to be addressed. These were organized under specific units. Timeframes such as six to eight weeks were listed. However, the document lacked references to assessments which would indicate the level of student achievement of these objectives. The high school ELA curriculum referred to the length of a particular unit, contained a detailed list of content and skills, and had a long list of options for assessment. These were not common assessments, but rather options for possible assessment.

The district had developed the elementary math curriculum when teachers used a combination of Investigations and Scott Foresman/Addison-Wesley. The document referenced specific objectives and resources to be used. However, during 2007-2008 teachers were using the new Investigations publications which did not require the same degree of supplemental work. Presumably, once the new Investigations program had been in use for a year, the district would charge teachers with revising the curriculum to address the new resource. In addition, references to assessments were vague. However, in interviews principals and teachers agreed that they used the Investigations unit tests as common assessments. It was not clear whether teachers and administrators examined the results of these to determine areas of instructional need. In addition,

interviewees indicated that the district administered a common math assessment at the end of each year of elementary school, but the curriculum did not reference this common assessment.

The middle school math curriculum was rich with objectives and referenced framework alignment with an abbreviated notation. But assessments included for each unit were generic lists of possible methods. Interviewees indicated that there was a common final assessment for grades 7-8 math. The course curricula for high school math closely resembled those of the middle school.

The district had substantially revised the elementary science curriculum for initial use in 2007-2008. At the time of the site visit, the document provided a generic list of possible assessments. For the middle school, there was an ample list of objectives and full statements of the state framework learning standards. The document included a specific list of activities leading to assessments, but it was not clear whether all teachers were to use each assessment or whether they had the option of selecting certain ones. At the high school, the science curricula included a detailed list of content and skills to be addressed, but a generic list of assessments to be used.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Some district curricula were aligned horizontally and vertically, and some were not. The math curriculum was aligned horizontally and vertically. At the elementary level the alignment was a result of a curriculum map which had been in place for several years and which detailed the objectives to be taught and the specific sections of the Investigations and Scott Foresman/Addison-Wesley programs that addressed those objectives. At the middle school, teachers followed the Connected Math program sequentially. At the high school, math teachers of like courses met during delayed opening time to examine and adjust their courses' curricula. Also, math courses at the elementary, middle, and high school had common end of year assessments which further enforced alignment across the grades.

The district had produced a written curriculum overview for elementary ELA for 2006-2007 and implemented new elementary ELA curriculum maps in 2007-2008, with separate ones for

writing, language, and reading/literature. These curricula identified content, skills, and strategies for each ELA strand in the state framework, but the timeframe for implementation of these units was loose (for example, at least once a year) and assessments were generic. As a result, common assessments did not ensure alignment of what was taught, and teachers had the freedom to introduce content at any time during the year. Interviewees did not agree as to whether teachers followed a developmental progression for teaching elementary ELA content; several characterized the alignment as "loose."

At the middle school, teachers presented a certain number of units in common during each year. Also, the teachers had agreements as to the content and skills to be addressed. Frequent ELA grade-level meetings facilitated by the curriculum leader brought teachers into close alignment as to how content was to be taught. However, there were no common assessments to measure student achievement of the agreed upon content and skills. Regular administration of common writing prompts occurred, but these were not necessarily connected to the written curriculum. At the high school, teachers again worked together on courses they taught in common, but administrators relied on the skill and professionalism of the teachers as assurance that students had mastered the course objectives.

In science, teachers were implementing a new curriculum in the elementary grades and there were not yet common assessments to determine whether teachers had taught and students had learned the curriculum content. At the middle school, interviewees indicated that the grade 7 biology curriculum was closely aligned, and teachers had been working for several years to ensure similar alignment in grade 8 physical science. At the high school, teachers arrived at vertical alignment across courses through a sequencing of skills. In addition, interviewees described teachers doing concentrated work to align courses taught in common.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Principals in the district agreed that they were the curriculum leaders in their buildings, and several also reported that they delegated some of that leadership authority. At the elementary level, principals delegated authority to school-based reading teachers in ELA. At the middle school, the principal delegated responsibility to departmental curriculum leaders. At the high school, the principal delegated authority to content area department heads. However, principals and curriculum leaders at all levels spoke often of the importance of finding the balance between the need to standardize curriculum and the importance of allowing teachers the freedom to use their own judgment as to what and how they taught. When questioned as to whether they had the tools to determine whether individual teachers effectively delivered the district's curriculum, they referred to a variety of possible indicators such as looking at student work, discussions in meetings, and classroom observations. But without the quantitative evidence that would come from analysis of formative and summative assessment results, curriculum leaders lacked hard information concerning teacher effectiveness. They tended instead to rely generally upon the overall skill of the teachers. In the case of math, where curriculum leaders had annual summative assessment results, they tended not to use the data to measure teacher effectiveness. Despite the district's stated priority of closing the achievement gap between subgroups, a substantial gap continued between the performance of regular education students and both students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency.

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

When questioned about instructional priorities, principals and teachers at all levels referred to the district's mantra of "Every Student. Every Day." They cited instructional strategies that addressed this vision: increased movement toward inclusion, differentiated instruction, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training, review of student work, and backward design. These strategies addressed improved achievement for all students, but aside from concentrated attention to SIOP training, there was little evidence of professional development to extend

teachers' repertoire of skills for teaching in an inclusive classroom or for differentiating instruction.

However, in conversations with teachers it became clear that the district made time for teachers to meet, whether in grade-level, department, or content area meetings. Teachers reported that meaningful discussions about instructional strategies occurred in these meetings. However, there was little evidence that administrators played an active supervisory role in promoting specific, effective instructional strategies.

5. 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.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not have an established process for the regular and timely review and revision of its curriculum. Administrators agreed that they only recently began developing a standardized curriculum to be implemented across classrooms and schools. This meant that some curriculum items, such as the new elementary ELA curriculum maps, were being implemented for the first time in 2007-2008. The elementary math curriculum, however, had been in place for several years and was scheduled for revision at the close of 2007-2008, after a full year of implementation of the new Investigations program. The elementary science curriculum was brand new and would undergo informal revision after teachers had used it for one year.

At the middle and high schools, curriculum development and revision were dynamic processes that took place during regular teacher professional development time. At both levels, teachers who taught courses in common met often to discuss the implementation of the written curriculum and adjustments necessitated by a review of MCAS scores. Teachers came to these discussions fully aware of the district's commitment to address the achievement gaps of its subgroups.

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

During the period under review, administrators and teachers had begun to analyze student achievement data, particularly from the MCAS tests. To address student needs, each of the district schools met the state requirements for time on learning as long as the middle and high schools counted time students spent in directed study. The elementary schools did not have a prescribed amount of time for ELA and math, but each school allocated sufficient time to these areas. At the middle school, each student took one period each of math and ELA. Those in need of remediation, as indicated by MCAS test scores, were scheduled into an additional period of math, known as Math Plus, or an additional period of ELA, known as Reading/Writing Workshop. The high school offered study centers during the directed study period where students struggling on MCAS tests were tutored by paraprofessionals with an academic background.

MCAS test results for special education students and English language learners improved. The Crocker Farm School was removed from 'corrective action' status.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Instructional technology was primarily available in schools in the form of computer labs. Each elementary school had one lab and a technology teacher. The middle and high schools both had 3.5 computer labs and computers available in the library. In addition, each math teacher at the middle and high schools had a classroom set of graphing calculators. At the middle school each team had an LCD projector, and examiners saw several in use at the high school as well. Teachers reported in interviews that science teachers used instructional technology for web simulation. For the most part, each secondary classroom had one computer, but it was for teacher and not student use. In observations of randomly selected classrooms, examiners found that teachers used technology to deliver instruction in 44 percent of the classrooms observed. However, examiners found students using available technology in 26 percent of the classrooms observed.

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

Staff members in the district had internalized the concept of holding high expectations for students; however, these high expectations did not appear to be the result of active monitoring of classroom instruction by administrators. Rather, this came from repeated reminders from the superintendent to attend to "Every Student. Every Day." Also, since his arrival the high school principal made clear his vision that each student have access to "high status knowledge." This term evoked some discussion among interviewees as to its exact meaning, but it represented an expression of high expectations for all. In addition, administrators, rather than expressing satisfaction that the district's subgroups scored significantly higher than their peer subgroups across the state, instead reported concerns about the achievement of the district's Hispanic and African-American students compared to that of the other students in the district. The need to hold high expectations for all students became clear to administrators and teachers during the period under review as they began to analyze MCAS scores and recognized the achievement gap between students in the aggregate and those in subgroups.

For several years, special education students had been included in regular education classrooms to a high degree, a practice that reflected high expectations for those students. In addition, in compliance with the state mandate, the district had worked for several years to offer every teacher SIOP training to better accommodate English language learners in regular education classrooms.

Middle school classrooms and high school English classes were heterogeneously grouped. In these classrooms, high achieving students could elect to work at the honors level by completing extensions for each unit. At the same time in these heterogeneous classrooms, low achieving students were offered modifications to accommodate their learning needs. This initiative came from the teachers themselves, and was not prompted by administrators' supervision of classroom instruction.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The student services director reported that the practice of including special education students in regular education classrooms was in place when she came to the district five years ago. Inclusion took several forms, including co-teaching, team teaching, in-class support, and pull-out instruction. During the period under review, the district focused on adding staff members, such as an autism specialist, to offer a more complete continuum of services for its students. Having the specialists on staff enabled the district to offer a wider range of support. It also allowed the district to reduce the number of students in out-of-district placements from 40 to 15. However, even though the district was focused on improved achievement for all students and the district had a number of limited English proficient students, the district did not place a person in charge of supporting English language learners until 2007-2008.

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

The district had some summative assessment data but little formative assessment data. Math courses at the elementary, middle, and high school levels had beginning and end of year summative exams. Many high school courses had common end of year assessments; in ELA, these took the form of a written product. These summative assessments functioned to bring greater alignment across grades and courses since teachers worked to cover the material included in the assessments. However, interviewees did not report that the district used the assessment results as measures of teacher effectiveness, or that they planned professional development or allocated resources based upon needs which the assessments identified.

Some standardized summative assessment data were also available. Elementary teachers gave the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at the beginning and end of each school year, as well as periodically throughout the year for students who were struggling. Elementary students also took the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) every year, although principals and teachers reported varying estimates of the usefulness of this assessment. Entering middle school students took the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) at the beginning of grade 7 and again at the end of grade 8.

Several principals reported that the development of formative assessments was a goal. Teachers at the high school were working toward this goal since they spent much of their professional development time fine tuning the curricula of courses they taught in common. Also, formative assessments were a possibility in K-12 math since teachers either followed certain programs in common, such as Investigations and Connected Math, or worked closely with teachers of like courses. But at the time of the site review the development of formative assessments in math did not seem to be a priority.

A factor that contributed considerably to the reluctance of administrators and teachers to design formative assessments was the district's commitment to allowing teachers the freedom to address curriculum objectives as they saw fit. They indicated that administering formative assessments periodically over the course of the year posed a threat to teacher autonomy.

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 42 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 seven schools as follows: 17 at the elementary level, 10 at the middle school level, and 15 at the high school level. In total, the EQA examiners observed 16 ELA classrooms, 15 math classrooms, eight science classrooms, and three classrooms of other subjects. 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.

Generally examiners found that in each of the five areas they rated, the elementary schools received the highest ratings, the high school scores were consistently the lowest, and middle school scores generally were lower than but in the range of the elementary scores with an occasional indicator rated close to the lower high school scores. The expectations category followed this pattern, as examiners found evidence of the indicators in this category in 85 percent of the elementary classrooms observed but in only 52 percent of the high school classrooms observed. A specific indicator of note in this category, whether "[i]nstructional time was focused on helping students produce high quality work based on curriculum standards," followed this pattern. In the area of instructional practice as well, overall ratings were strong at the elementary and middle school levels, while high school scores showed a need for improvement. Concerning whether "[t]he teacher increases the level of learning by using a variety of instructional techniques," the high school was almost 30 percentage points below the elementary schools. With regard to classroom management, overall scores were consistently high at the elementary and middle school levels, but in need of improvement at the high school. In particular, a wide range of scores was recorded regarding whether "[a]dditional teachers, aides, and assistants have an instructional role in the classroom and are actively involved in the learning process." The one category in which the scores for all three levels clustered together was student activity, work, and behavior, although none of these scores were high.

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 89 percent of the classrooms

observed districtwide, with 99 percent at the elementary level, 96 percent at the middle school level, and 74 percent at the high school level.

At the elementary and middle schools, the only indicator observed in less than 100 percent of the classrooms was whether additional teachers and aides have an instructional role in the classroom. This was found in 91 percent of the observed classrooms at the elementary level and in 60 percent at the middle school level. At the high school, additional teachers and aides had an instructional role in only 33 percent of the observed classrooms. The highest scoring indicator in this area at the high school was that the teacher models and promotes respectful behavior, found in 93 percent of the classrooms observed. In contrast, "transitions from one activity to another maximize instructional time" was found in only 60 percent of the observed classrooms.

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 79 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 90 percent at the elementary level, 80 percent at the middle school level, and 66 percent at the high school level.

Teachers were found to "increase the level of learning by using a variety of instructional techniques" in 80 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 60 percent at the middle school, and 53 percent at the high school. At the same time, examiners noted teachers checking for understanding in 100 percent of the classrooms observed at both the elementary and

middle school levels and 87 percent at the high school level. This was an instructional strategy frequently mentioned by interviewees as important.

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 71 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 85 percent at the elementary level, 76 percent at the middle school level, and 52 percent at the high school level.

Examiners found that "instructional time is focused on helping students produce high quality work based on the state curriculum frameworks" in 88 percent of the classrooms observed in the elementary schools, 70 percent in the middle school, and 53 percent in the high school.

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 75 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 79 percent at the elementary level, 77 percent at the middle school level, and 68 percent at the high school level.

Examiners found students demonstrating "ownership of learning by asking their own questions" in 82 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 90 percent at the middle school level, and 73 percent at the high school level. Also, students were perceived to be "actively engaged in learning and observed to be purposeful and productive" in 94 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 100 percent at the middle school level, and 80 percent at the high school level.

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 88 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 95 percent at the elementary school level, 96 percent at the middle school level, and 73 percent at the high school level.

Examiners saw teachers creating "an inclusive environment in which all students belong" in 100 percent of the classrooms observed at all levels. In addition, examiners found that "space is used flexibly to accommodate a range of learning activities" in 100 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary and middle school levels and 73 percent at the high school level.

Summary of Classroom Observations

	Number of Classrooms				Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Computers		
	ELA	Math	Science/ Other	Total			Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Elementary	8	7	2	17	15.5	0.4	51	51	5.2
Middle	3	3	4	10	20.2	0.4	29	22	9.2
High	5	5	5	15	21.5	0.3	26	12	26.8
Total	16	15	11	42	18.7	0.4	106	85	9.3

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity, Work, and Behavior	Classroom Climate for Learning
Elementary					
Total observations	74	160	71	91	79
Maximum possible	75	177	84	115	83
Avg. percent of observations	99%	90%	85%	79%	95%
Middle					
Total observations	43	88	38	54	48
Maximum possible	45	110	50	70	50
Avg. percent of observations	96%	80%	76%	77%	96%
High					
Total observations	51	109	39	71	55
Maximum possible	69	165	75	104	75
Avg. percent of observations	74%	66%	52%	68%	73%
Total					
Total observations	168	357	148	216	182
Maximum possible	189	452	209	289	208
Avg. percent of observations	89%	79%	71%	75%	88%

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

Findings:

- The district did not have a formal policy regarding the assessment of student achievement.
- The District Improvement Plan for 2006-2007 included references to the need for improvement in analyzing the performance of the district's student subgroups.
- The Department of Education chose the district to pilot the Educational Data Warehouse project, and the district is optimistic regarding its potential to improve management and analysis of a variety of data.
- The district used many methods to inform the community regarding student achievement.
- The district developed local benchmarks but they were not effective in measuring student achievement as they did not contain measurable outcomes.
- The district had expectations, but no mandates, regarding appropriate instructional time for the content areas.
- During the review period, the district developed a comprehensive plan for evaluating its math program.

Summary

Although the Amherst Regional Public Schools had no formal policy regarding student assessment, the district remained committed to improving its analysis of student assessment data. Interviewees said that the schools had become more "data conscious" during the past two years, and in order to close the achievement gap among student subgroups the superintendent included in the District Improvement Plan for 2006-2007 the following statement: "We need to understand how to 'dig down' into available data, mining MCAS down to specific item analysis as well as patterns of performance measured according to state standards." Interviewees acknowledged that data analysis had improved since the superintendent arrived five years prior to the EQA examination.

The district had no specific person assigned to review data, but district leadership and principals reviewed the MCAS data at administrator meetings. Principals and support staff members then presented the data at staff meetings. Further analysis occurred during grade-level meetings as well as at department meetings. There were no data analysis teams at the building level but this remains a district goal. Special education and ELL staff members examined individual student data in an effort to improve achievement of students in these subgroups. Most principals had already received training in the use of TestWiz, and interviewees added that many staff members had an affinity for data analysis and helped others at the building level. The Department of Education chose the district to pilot its Educational Data Warehouse project, and the district is enthusiastic regarding this program's ability to help it organize and analyze a variety of data.

The district's MCAS test participation rates were high for regular education students, but lower for the population of international students, who enter and leave the district with more frequency. Early in the year, schools were proactive in providing parents with the MCAS test dates as well as providing Hispanic parents information in Spanish.

The district has not prepared a comprehensive annual report since 2003-2004, which was done by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but the superintendent said it was too expensive to produce on a yearly basis. However, the superintendent provided the MCAS test results to the school committees and also posted them on the district's website. Additionally, schools sent home reports of individual students' MCAS test performance.

The district mandated the use of two benchmarking assessments for its students. A math assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the year. Teachers said the information gained from the first administration provided them with diagnostic information, and the end of year assessment was beneficial for determining growth. A writing prompt was also administered, but there were no requirements that receiving teachers view student writing folders. The only formal summative assessment that was used in the district was the MCAS tests, and the district used the results to judge the effectiveness of some of its programs. Benchmarks were in place for each of the curriculum guides that the district developed, but a review of them showed that they had limited measurable outcomes. Some of the assessments that the district's schools used included the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The district assessed ELL students with the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) as well as the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). The district did not use student assessment results to assign staff or determine staffing allocations.

The district used MCAS test results to measure the effectiveness of some district programs. One result of this practice was that MCAS test data of ELL students were used as the basis for determining the need to provide training for classroom teachers in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). In addition, a review of the district's MCAS data resulted in a change in its Title I program. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district provided Title I services at both the middle and high schools. A review of the data showed a need for Title I services at the elementary level. Funding was then directed toward the Crocker Farm and Mark's Meadow elementary schools and was discontinued at the middle and high schools.

The district developed a comprehensive evaluation document with a detailed agenda for evaluating its math program. The evaluation was carried out during the 2006-2007 school year, and committees involved in reporting the results of the evaluation were meeting at the time of the EQA visit. In addition, prior to the review period, Amherst College students undertook extensive and comprehensive evaluations of two of the district's programs, the MCAS remediation program and the school to work program.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

While the district lacked a policy that specifically addressed student assessment, it had informal practices in place. Although interviewees agreed that data collection and analysis had occurred over the years, the practice had become more systemic only during the past three years. The fact that the district continues to improve its practices regarding data analysis was reflected in the District Improvement Plan (2006-2007). The DIP contained the following statement by the superintendent: "We also need to understand how to 'dig down' into available data, mining MCAS down to specific item analysis as well as patterns of performance measured according to state standards." In interviews, ELL and special education staff members said that they were analyzing student assessment data and sharing information with all staff members who work with these students. Interviewees attributed this improvement to the fact that the superintendent was intent on obtaining answers to specific questions and following the state mandates, and the overall feeling that the district needed an "updating" regarding data analysis. While the district had not assigned anyone the responsibility for collecting data, the central office leadership team examined data as they arrived and shared them with the principals at a meeting. In turn, the principals shared the data with their staffs at staff and grade-level meetings.

At the elementary level, math intervention and ELA support personnel also viewed the data and discussed them with teachers. Interviewees said that in 2006-2007 the superintendent instructed principals to begin building data analysis teams. According to information provided to the EQA, formal teams were not in place at the building level, but data analysis occurred at all levels at school staff and department meetings at both the high school and middle school.

Further, the district mandated that those students who scored in the 'Needs Improvement' and 'Warning/Failing' categories on the MCAS tests must have a student success plan. While such plans were already in place for some students, interviewees said that prior to 2007-2008 the

focus had not been on student success plans, and many were still being developed at the time of the site review.

School principals said that if they needed more information regarding data, they could contact a technical support person at central office or the executive assistant to the superintendent. Also, the EQA team heard from interviewees that an administrative assistant at the central office was trained in TestWiz and was available as a resource. Most principals in the district had already received training in TestWiz through the DOE, but as of the time of the EQA review there had been no training in data analysis for the teachers. Interviewees added that many staff members had an affinity for data analysis, and thus their skills were available at the building level.

Recently the district was selected to pilot the DOE's Educational Data Warehouse project, and the central office staff said it is very optimistic regarding this program and its ability to improve data analysis in the district.

ELL and special education staff members responded to the district's priority of closing the achievement gap between regular education and subgroup populations by choosing to examine student achievement on a pupil by pupil basis. The district's 2007 MCAS ELA and math test results showed a large achievement gap between ELL and LEP students and their regular education peers.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Participation rates of regular education students on the MCAS tests were high, but interviewees voiced concern regarding participation rates of some subgroups such as LEP students. These students' lower MCAS participation rates reflected the district's concern about the "big influx/outflux" of international students who did not take the test due to state mandates regarding student enrollment dates and length of U.S. residency. Even so, LEP student participation rates at grade 10 were 94 percent in both math and ELA. Participation rates for regular education students averaged 99 percent in the Amherst elementary schools and was 100 percent in the

Pelham Elementary School; the participation rate at the middle school was 97 percent. To encourage participation , the district provided test dates to parents and the community as early as possible, and Hispanic parents received testing information in Spanish. Since attendance was an issue at the alternative school, interviewees said that the school worked especially hard to ensure that all students attended school on testing days.

Schools also sent letters home reminding parents of MCAS test administration dates, and reminders were posted on the district's website. A free breakfast was provided and noisy maintenance routines such as lawn mowing were discontinued during MCAS testing.

3. Through the use of district-generated reporting instruments and report cards, district 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

The district had not developed an annual report since 2003-2004. That report, prepared by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, was comprehensive and contained data regarding student achievement and demographics. In interviews, the superintendent said that the district could not afford to produce a report of that caliber on a yearly basis. Documents from 2005-2006 showed that while the information contained in the budget and planning documents was extensive, they did not include any information regarding student achievement.

The parent center of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District produced a well prepared and informative document entitled *Guide to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Budget* for distribution. This document contained the district philosophy as well as a guide to the budget process. There was a component that discussed grade 10 MCAS test results of the district's regular education students. These results were compared to those of high schools in three other districts in the state, Brookline, Newton, and Northampton, as well as to the state average.

Even though the district did not produce an annual report regarding student achievement after 2004, data were presented to the school committee on an annual basis. Since school committee

meetings were televised to the public, the community was made aware of student achievement. Student achievement data were also available on the district's website, and the mandatory NCLB report was also on the district's website. NCLB reports were available for all schools in the district, as was as a comprehensive report for the regional district. In addition, schools mailed home MCAS results to parents, and teachers were prepared to discuss MCAS test data as well as other measures of student progress at reporting times. Title I teachers were available during parent meetings to discuss student progress. Student success plans, developed for students scoring in the 'Needs Improvement' and 'Warning/Failing' categories, were also mailed home to parents.

At the elementary level, parents received two report cards during the year as well as an end of year report. In addition, 30 to 40 minute meetings were held twice a year for parents.

Report cards were prepared electronically at the middle and high schools. Parents of high school students received grades every 12 weeks with a six-week progress report. At the middle school, a report was sent home every nine weeks.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Benchmarks existed for each curriculum guide that the district had developed. A writing team developed these benchmarks for each curriculum area during the two or three years prior to the site review. According to interviewees, at the high school the benchmarks aligned with each specific course. A review of the benchmarks showed that they had limited measurable outcomes and indicated expectations for student mastery by the end of the grade level. Interviewees said that "the way that ELA is measured is to see how students are doing on the MCAS." Curriculum documents contained some references to assessments but this was not a consistent practice. Assessments were listed as options.

While the district's schools administered some formative assessments, the only ones that were systemic were the writing prompt and the math assessment. Interviewees said that assessment results were discussed at department meetings at the high school as well as at grade-level meetings at the elementary schools.

The Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning-Revised (Dial-R) was administered to all students entering pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and interviewees said these students received ongoing assessments to ensure proper placement as well as appropriate instruction.

A districtwide mandated writing prompt was administered at the beginning and end of the school year. The district took a holistic approach in scoring the prompt, and the scorers were not the students' classroom teachers. The scorers passed on the prompts to the next grade level, but the receiving teachers were not required to review the writing prompts.

The district administered a math assessment at the beginning and end of the school year, but one principal said that the assessment was "outdated" and that a pilot assessment was being used at an elementary school at the time of the site review. In interviews, some teachers said the beginning of the year math assessment was valuable in identifying student needs, but that the end of year assessment only provided achievement information.

All students in grades 3-6 were assessed using the QRI. This provided information regarding word recognition as well as reading comprehension levels. The one-on-one assessment took over an hour to administer, and a few interviewees stated that it was too time consuming in relation to the assessment information received.

Teachers at the elementary level also administered the DRA as well as end of unit tests provided by the Investigations Math program, but interviewees were unable to provide information as to how the data were used to impact instruction.

The district's elementary schools were just beginning to use the DIBELS. At the middle school, students were administered the Degrees of Reading Power. During 2005-2006, the district started to use Study Island to assess student needs at the middle school as well as to prepare students for

the MCAS tests. At the high school level, students took common exams in ELA, math, and science.

The district experienced an increase in the ELL student population during the past several years, and following state mandates district students were assessed using the MELA-O for their language proficiency and the MEPA for their reading and writing proficiency.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district has a Reading Recovery program at grades 1-2. The program at grade 1 was one-on-one, while grade 2 used Reading Recovery strategies with additional instruction provided by a teacher serving one to three students. Interviewees said that a review of the MCAS data at the grade 3 level showed that these students scored well on the grade 3 MCAS ELA test. Results were disaggregated for special education and ELL students, but no data were provided to the EQA team.

A review of the district's MCAS data resulted in a change in its Title I program. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district provided Title I services at both the middle and high schools. A review of the data showed a need for Title I services at the elementary level. Funding was then directed toward the Crocker Farm and Mark's Meadow elementary schools and was discontinued at the middle and high schools.

The district's stated priority of closing the subgroup achievement gap provided further incentive for special education and ELL staff members to examine student data. Interviewees said that while special education teachers had specific skills, they wondered if they had enough exposure to instruction in the regular classroom. As a result, the district provided extra funding for materials to "make sure that the there was access to the general curriculum for all students" as well as for professional development for implementation by special education teachers. Because the district's classrooms included many ELL students, it provided Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training to regular education teachers. During interviews, many

teachers told the EQA that they found this training valuable in providing instruction to all students. The SIOP model provided a framework for ensuring that effective instructional practices were provided to all students.

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees were not able to name any audits that took place on a voluntary basis but cited several mandatory audits.

A Coordinated Program Review (CPR) by the DOE took place in the spring of 2007. At the time of the EQA visit, the district had not received the results of it. But the mid-cycle report from the previous audit was shared with all staff members. School administrators reviewed each item in detail, and made 20 changes that were reflected in the 2007 report.

The Early Childhood Accreditation Report contained a 'commendable' rating for the district's program, and the staff continues to examine the program especially in the way it provides instruction to ELL students. Interviewees said that the annual Title I report reflected improvements the district had made in its Title I program during the prior five years.

7. 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.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees said that the examination of student assessment data had not resulted in the reallocation of staff members. Further, an administrator said that before moving staff members to another grade or level, the district offered professional development to them to address weak areas.

A review of the assessment data for the Crocker Farm Elementary School resulted in the addition of a .4 ELL staff member to implement extended day services for students. A review of the ELA data for regular education students resulted in the district training three of its staff members in the "coaching model." Funding for this training was provided through a grant. All interviewees agreed that at budget time student assessment data were used to determine if schools were receiving adequate resources to meet the needs of their students. Interviewees also said that since the arrival of the present superintendent, supplies and materials have been allocated on a per pupil basis, and other funding was allocated based on student needs.

Teachers were expected to teach at all levels at the high school. This included Advanced Placement (AP) courses, honors courses, college prep courses, and courses for students not currently working at grade level. This practice did not preclude the assignment of the most qualified teachers to AP courses.

According to interviewees, there were no mandated times for instruction but the district expected that appropriate time would be allocated to the content areas. Some students identified as needing extra math instruction received "double time" in that subject.

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

The EQA team was provided with two studies that Amherst College students carried out during the two years prior to the EQA review. These comprehensive studies were *The Remediation Programs for MCAS at the Amherst Regional High School* and *Evaluating Amherst Regional High School to Work Internship Program*.

The district developed a comprehensive evaluation document with a detailed agenda for evaluating the district's math program. The evaluation was carried out during the 2006-2007 school year, and according to interviewees, committees that were involved in the evaluation were

meeting in 2007-2008 to discuss the results of the evaluation. Interviewees said that further evaluation of the district's program would take place using the same comprehensive approach.

The district combined services offered by the student services office to improve efficiency and effectiveness of delivery. These services included ELL, special education, student information, discipline and intervention, health services, early childhood, academic intervention, student support services, and safety and security.

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	✓			✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	**6**
Needs Improvement					✓		✓					✓		**3**
Unsatisfactory		✓	✓						✓	✓				**4**

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: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district's focus on inclusion and its appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism were supported by its widespread recruitment efforts to secure minority staffing, including advertising in major urban centers such as New York City, Atlanta, Denver, and Cleveland.
- The superintendent, two principals, and six of the 25 district administrators were not licensed for the positions that they held at the time of the examination.
- The district did not initiate strict enforcement for its entire professional staff to hold appropriate certification until June 2007. At that time, staff members were notified by the superintendent that if appropriate certification was not obtained by August 2008, their employment in the district would be terminated.
- Training for mentors was provided only at the secondary level. Veteran teachers served as mentor coaches at the elementary school level, but did not have formal training. Administrator mentoring was largely informal with peers.
- The district's professional development program was described as "ad hoc" rather than a formalized process.

- The district did not offer tuition reimbursement for graduate coursework. The professional development budget decreased during the review period, overly relied on grants, and was perceived as focused primarily on literacy training.
- Of the 26 administrator personnel folders reviewed, only three contained timely evaluations and 12 contained no evaluations. Of the 74 teacher files reviewed, only 18 contained timely evaluations and 13 contained no evaluations.
- Trainings in lockdown procedures were conducted at the high school, and bomb threat protocols were in place in all schools.

Summary

District recruitment practices were extensive and included the use of an online recruiting service, SchoolSpring, that made the recruitment process more efficient and accessible for administrators, allowed for a greater geographical recruitment effort, and, at a fee of two dollars per student, was perceived as cost effective. Applicants were required to complete a multicultural essay component which was consistent with the district's focus on inclusion, appreciation of diversity, and multiculturalism. Extensive minority staff recruiting efforts included presence at job fairs in New York City and Atlanta, and advertising efforts in Denver and Cleveland. Other efforts included advertising in the Asian publication *Sampam*, the *Amsterdam News*, and *The Boston-Bay State Banner*. Online recruitment efforts also included advertising through the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP), the National Employment Minority Network (NEMNET), and the Massachusetts Association of School Personnel Administrators (MASPA).

Twenty-six of the district's 337 teachers and eight of the district's 25 administrators did not hold appropriate Massachusetts certification for their positions, although some were working toward appropriate licensure. The superintendent did not hold Massachusetts certification as superintendent of schools but had scheduled an appointment to take the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL). The district did not initiate strict enforcement of the need for its entire professional staff to hold appropriate certification until June 2007. At that point, staff members were notified by the superintendent that if appropriate certification was not in place by August 2008, they would be terminated from employment in the district.

Professional development needs were identified in generating the SIPs, and districtwide trainings were offered in multiculturalism, sexual harassment, anti-bias behavior, and equity. While tuition reimbursements were not offered for college courses taken, overall expenditures for professional development were perceived as adequate. The district's professional development program was described as "ad hoc" by interviewees rather than a formalized process, one that reflected the community and the individuality of the districts' schools. Mandatory professional development in K-8 mathematics, ELA, and social justice occurred on the day before school started and during the two curriculum days scheduled annually. Ten building-based, secondary, two-hour late start and 10 elementary school release days were provided under the direction of the district's principals.

Evaluation of professional development offerings was largely qualitative, with much of the evaluation coming from teachers' ratings of professional development trainings. Quantitative results, such as improved student reading scores and attendance at professional development offerings, were cited as other means of evaluation of professional development trainings. Teachers' association representatives indicated that while pedagogy appeared to be sufficiently covered, content offerings were minimal, particularly for those teachers not in major content areas (e.g., French, physical education). Teacher evaluations largely informed their individual professional development plans (IPDPs).

Only 12 percent of administrator and 24 percent of teacher evaluations reviewed by EQA examiners were timely. Contrary to statute, which requires annual evaluations for administrators, the principals' contract document indicated that the principals were to be evaluated annually by the superintendent during the first three years of employment, and at least every other year thereafter. Prior to the examiners' visit, the superintendent and human resources director had arranged for legal review of all non-unit administrator contract language. Administrator compensation and continued employment were not linked to improved student performance. The superintendent's evaluations were timely, met the components of education reform, and were instructive in that they contained specific recommendations for improvement. A review of the superintendent's contract and evaluation did not, however, reveal a link between his compensation and continued employment to effectiveness or improvement in student performance.

Of the 74 teacher files reviewed, only 18 contained timely evaluations and 13 did not contain any evaluations at all. Supervision strategies that had been implemented included grade-level meetings, timeline checks, walk-throughs (with written or verbal feedback), and staff and department meetings.

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

During the period under review, the district had effective policies and practices in place relative to the employment of professional staff. Recruitment practices were coordinated through the office of human resources and included the use of SchoolSpring, an online recruiting service. Interviewees said that SchoolSpring had proven to be a convenient means of recruitment in that all application materials could be transmitted online and accessed by principals from their homes. Candidates who did not have online access were provided with hard copy application materials. Interviewees reported to EQA that this tool made the recruitment process more efficient, allowed for a wider geographical recruitment effort, and, at a fee of two dollars per student, was cost effective. Part of the application process included the completion of a multicultural essay component, which was consistent with the district's focus on inclusion and appreciation of diversity.

The district expanded its efforts at recruiting minority staff. Those efforts included attending job fairs in New York City and Atlanta, and advertising in Denver, Colorado and Cleveland, Ohio. Interviewees indicated that these expanded efforts had not proven to be successful. Other efforts to recruit minority candidates included advertising in the Asian publication *Sampam*, *The Amsterdam News*; and the *Boston-Bay State Banner*. Online minority recruitment efforts included advertising through the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP), the National Employment Minority Network (NEMNET), and the Massachusetts Association of School Personnel Administrators (MASPA). EQA examiners were told that the contractually required posting procedures for filling teacher vacancies had impeded the district's

efforts to employ persons of color. In addition, representatives of the teachers' association indicated in an interview that there had been some concern in 2006-2007 about the timeliness of posting and hiring, although the human resources director was not aware of any delay. Recruitment efforts also included traditional advertising in newspapers such as the *Amherst Bulletin*, *The Daily Hampshire Gazette*, *The Republican* of Springfield, *The Hartford Courant*, and the Worcester *Telegram & Gazette*.

Interviews and a review of the district's affirmative action report indicated that over half of the 40 teachers hired for the 2007-2008 school year were needed to fill vacancies due to retirement. Interviewees indicated that as a result of budget reductions during the review period, most of the reductions in teacher staffing had been absorbed through attrition. The number of paraprofessionals was reduced as well.

For administrative vacancies other than the superintendent or assistant superintendent, district policy 210.07 prescribed that the school committee establish a screening committee responsible for reviewing applications, selecting and interviewing candidates, and recommending at least two candidates (or an alternate number as determined by the school committee) to the superintendent for interview and final selection. To fill the positions of pupil personnel services director, principal, elementary curriculum director, and instructional director, the screening committee routinely included representatives of the teaching staff, secondary level students, parents, administration, and, at the option of the school committee, a committee member. The school committee determined the final screening and selection committee composition for each position. Conscious efforts were made to ensure diverse representation on each screening committee. For the selection of other administrative positions, the superintendent established an appropriate screening and selection committee.

The process of filling administrative vacancies included advertising and an initial screening of applications by the superintendent and human resources director to create a candidate pool. The screening committee reviewed the applications and determined which of the candidates in the candidate pool to interview, and the committee and superintendent interviewed candidates on the same day. Candidates were also asked to complete a written exercise in which they were asked how they would respond to a given situation. The screening committee recommended two to

three finalists to the superintendent. Finalists were invited to spend a full day in the district touring the schools, meeting with staff members and students, observing classes, and meeting with parents. On the evening of that same day, the candidates met with school committee members. The superintendent and school committee then discussed the candidates. A site visit to the candidates' home districts followed, and the district conducted background checks through the Amherst Police Department and the National Criminal Records Check (NCRC). Following the background checks, the superintendent made the selection. In hiring the superintendent, the district used a consultant such as the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) to conduct the search.

The district's human resources office used the Kronos system to electronically file job descriptions for all positions in the district. A review of a sampling of administrative job descriptions showed that qualifications, responsibilities, and goals constituted the major job description categories. The majority of job descriptions were current and routinely reviewed when positions opened due to resignation or attrition.

District administrators indicated that the district was focused on student achievement. Furthermore, they said that with the introduction of the human resources department approximately three years prior to the EQA review, close attention was being paid to selecting applicants who would support the district's focus on achievement.

2. <u>All professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.</u>

Rating: Unsatisfactory

Evidence

For the review period, not all teachers or administrators held appropriate Massachusetts certification for positions that they held. Most of the district's teachers, 311 of 337, were certified, and five taught out of field for one or more periods per day in the areas of early childhood education (1), middle school English (1), English as a second language (1), and special education (2). The remaining 26 teachers held certification from other states, held certification in other areas, or had submitted all requirements to the Massachusetts Department of Education and were categorized as being "ready for review" or "pending."

Not all district administrators held appropriate certification for the positions that they held. Two-thirds, or 17 of 25, of the district's administrators were certified for their positions. Of the eight administrators lacking appropriate certification, seven were categorized by the DOE as "pending," and one held certification in another state. Additionally, at the time of the EQA site visit, the superintendent did not hold Massachusetts certification as superintendent of schools but indicated that he had scheduled an appointment to take the MTEL.

In interviews, administrators indicated that the district had a liaison at the DOE's Bureau of Certification with whom the district's human resources department communicated directly and frequently. Additionally, the attorney for the school district had indicated to the human resources department that all professional education staff members must comply with certification regulations and legislation. A review of district records indicated that on June 18, 2007, the superintendent mailed letters to all uncertified professional personnel informing them that if they did not hold full certification by August 1, 2008, their employment with the school district would be terminated. The letter also mentioned the need to comply with the 'highly qualified' teacher status regulations of federal and state law. In monitoring the process, the superintendent required that each impacted individual present a detailed plan to the human resources assistant by August 1, 2007 that described the steps to be taken to achieve full certification by June 2008. Further, the letter indicated that failure to submit this plan by August 1, 2008 would be interpreted as a voluntary resignation from the position held. EQA examiners were informed in an interview that the principal who held certification in another state had scheduled appointments to take the MTEL. The paraprofessional whose salary was funded by the Title I program 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: Unsatisfactory

Evidence

As stated above, the district did not initiate strict enforcement of the need for its entire professional staff to hold appropriate certification until June 2007. At the end of the review

period, the superintendent notified all uncertified professional personnel in writing that if they did not hold full certification by August 1, 2008 they would not be further employed by the Amherst Regional Public Schools. The superintendent required all non-certified personnel to present a plan to the human resources office that detailed the steps to be taken to achieve full certification by June 1, 2008. It was only upon receipt of the plan that the district would apply for a 2007-2008 waiver for those individuals.

For most of the period under review, interviews and a review of district records indicated that the district's human resources department actively sought waivers for, provided mentoring, and monitored progress toward acquisition of appropriate licensure for professional staff members hired without certification. After the district had successfully acquired DOE waivers for staff members without licensure, those who sought second waivers were denied by the DOE. Additionally, support for uncertified staff members came in the form of districtwide trainings for grades K-5, grades 7-12, or grades K-12. Support was also provided through building-based meetings conducted by the principals at the elementary level and by mentors at the secondary level. The district encouraged and approved requests for professional development activities that would lead to the receipt of certification. During the review period, the district expended $680,000 in the 2005-2006 school year and $440,000 in the 2006-2007 school year in support of professional development.

Interviewees added that the human resources department closely monitored progress toward licensure through frequent and direct communications with its liaison at the DOE's Bureau of Certification and through the setting of progress reporting deadlines of October 1, December 1, February 1, and the end of the school year. Letters were written and placed on file stressing the importance of acquiring certification, and the individual professional development plans (IPDPs) of teachers were used to track progress made toward attainment.

4. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the review period, district administrators indicated in interviews that the district had trained mentors only at the secondary level and mentor coaches at the elementary level. Personnel new to the district were assigned mentors or mentor coaches for the first year of their employment. Second- and third-year teachers also received mentoring support upon request of their building principal. Mentors were in place at the middle and high school, and mentor coaches, who were veteran teachers, were in place in the elementary schools. Mentors were paid a stipend of $1,500 at the middle school, and at the high school they were paid at the rate of 10 percent of the individual's full time equivalency (FTE) compensation. Mentor coaches also were paid stipends. In interviews, representatives of the teachers' association said that the mentor practice in the district was somewhat disjointed. Interviewees indicated that at the high school new teachers only met with their mentor approximately once per month. Mentor coaches met with their new teachers throughout the year and were required to log their meeting times. Interviewees attributed this to a reduction in the number of mentors over several years due to decreased budgetary revenue. The district relied heavily on Title IIA funding to support its mentor efforts during the review period. Trainings for mentor coaches were offered districtwide at grades K-5, 7-12, and K-12. New elementary teachers were also mentored by their principals through building-based and individualized meetings.

A two-day orientation was provided for new teachers and teachers new to Amherst. Electronic training modules were provided for staff members starting after the beginning of the year and tracked through Kronos software. The initial orientation days included meeting the mentor or mentor coach and reviewing the employee handbook, emergency procedures, and other routine start of the year procedures. New staff members were presented with an overview of the district's philosophy and the operational strategy of including "Every Student. Every Day." This was reinforced by stressing the importance of reviewing student achievement data.

Orientation for district administrators took place in August. Administrators indicated that during the orientation days the superintendent provided training to all administrators in sexual harassment, anti-bias behavior, and equity. In addition, administrators indicated in interviews that informal mentoring took place through frequent communications between veteran and new

administrators. Interviewees added that the superintendent had given increased attention to mentoring new administrators during the review period.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, the district moved from what interviewees described as a set of unfocused professional development offerings relative to the development of data analysis skills that emanated from individual school site requests to one that was, at the time of review, becoming more centrally driven through the leadership of the superintendent. The District Improvement Plan for 2006-2007 contained goals related to in-depth data analysis. It was reported that at the central office team meetings held every Tuesday, the superintendent kept the focus on data analyses to get to the level of "specific answers" rather than remaining at a "broad-brush" level. The more in-depth analyses took place at the individual school sites and were discussed with the superintendent at biweekly principal meetings. The central office staff and the school principals or their designees were trained in data analysis using TestWiz. Interviewees said that the district's participation in the DOE's Educational Data Warehouse project, allowing access to a variety of data, would enhance the likelihood of the district's attainment of its goals.

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

During the review period, the district's practices were inconsistent in encouraging continued professional growth. While the district did offer trainings in areas such as multiculturalism, sexual harassment, anti-bias behavior, and equity to all staff members, a review of district documents indicated that it did not offer tuition reimbursement for courses taken at area colleges.

The district had agreements with area colleges and universities allowing education majors to do pre-practicum work with veteran teachers and administrators in the schools. Tuition waivers were provided for such mentorships. The district encouraged continued professional growth through its fiscal support of professional development activities. District expenditures for professional development totaled $680,000 in the 2005-2006 school year and $440,000 in the 2006-2007 school year. Trainings were also offered during the day before school opened, during the two curriculum days of the school year, in elementary schools during the early release days held every Wednesday, and at the high school during the two-hour late start days held 10 times per year. Additionally, professional development requests were developed at the school sites and supported by the district administrators. These were offered within the district, after school, and during the summer hours and were, to the extent possible, aligned to staff requests, the goals of the district, and the requirements of the administration. Interviewees also told EQA examiners that individuals in the administrators' association were offered at least one professional growth program each year, and that the school committee supported that effort by budgeting $2,000 per year for that purpose.

Interviewees perceived the district's efforts to retain staff members as successful. A review of the district's affirmative action report indicated that over half of the 40 teachers hired for the 2007-2008 school year filled vacancies due to retirement, and most of the reductions in teacher staffing had been absorbed through attrition. Administrators stated that the district had made attempts to retain staff members through recognition practices that included "Year Four Celebrations" recognizing teachers who attained professional status. Those teachers had lunch with the superintendent at the high school and took a tour of the town. Administrator interviewees reported other recognition strategies that included end of year recognitions by the principals in each school; $500 awards for teachers distributed at the Grinspoon Award Recognitions, held annually; administrator nominations such as "Outstanding Classics Teacher"; acknowledgements in the *News You Can Use* newsletter; the annual Frost Award presented to two high school teachers; and Amherst Education Foundation mini-grants and scholarships. During interviews, the EQA team learned from teachers that the district did not have a recognition process in place to identify and recognize individual teacher accomplishments.

Promotional opportunities served to retain personnel in the district as well. Interviewees cited internal promotions such as the co-principal model in place at the middle school, and the creation of the Latino Achievement Teacher at the middle or high school.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviewees told the EQA team that during the period under review, the district's professional development program was informed through a multi-faceted, loosely connected process that included coordinated, district-level student achievement data analyses; coordinated districtwide curriculum needs; individual site-based student achievement data analyses and needs determinations; and individual teacher needs determinations. The process was guided by the district's six professional development guiding principles: 1) results oriented and transformative; 2) collaborative and collegial; 3) closely connects current theory to practice; 4) responsive to students' ever changing needs preK-12; 5) sustained, continuous, and ongoing; and 6) designed to promote active learning and a range of opportunities.

Professional development that occurred during the review period due to the district's data analyses included training in K-8 mathematics, ELA, and the district's social justice program. Those trainings were provided during the district's mandatory professional development time. These occurred on the day before school opened for the year, and during the two curriculum days held each year. Ten building-based, secondary, two-hour late start and 10 elementary school release days were provided under the direction of the principals.

A review of the district's SIPs indicated that they did not follow any standardized format or organization, but were connected to the DIP through the collective goals in the SIPs. District administrators indicated that it was in the development of the SIPs that school sites developed their goals and resultant professional development needs. They also indicated that the process varied by school site, that school targets were set based upon site needs as determined by using

all student data available and coming to staff consensus. Further, administrators perceived that the SIP development process at each site should be unique in that each site reviewed its MCAS data, student attendance, and other variables.

Representatives of the teachers' association indicated that the district had produced a professional development booklet that contained course offerings, but that the practice ended approximately two years earlier (2005-2006) due to fiscal reasons. Electronic notifications have been used to replace the booklet. When asked about teacher input into the professional development process, interviewees indicated that both professional development and evaluation were, at the time of the review, subjects of bargaining in contractual negotiations. They indicated that professional development at the school sites was largely "ad hoc," with apportionment being an unknown in that each school has a single budget line for professional development. Interviewees perceived site-based professional development as being determined in a "top-down" manner. Teachers were encouraged to request professional development.

Administrator interviewees indicated that evaluation of professional development offerings was largely qualitative, with much of the evaluation coming from teacher assessment of the benefits arising from the professional development trainings. Quantitative results, such as improved student reading scores, were cited as indicative of evaluation of professional development trainings as well. Other means of evaluating professional development were surveys administered immediately following the activity, and attendance at professional development offerings.

Interviewees cited teacher evaluation, which largely informed IPDPs, as another vehicle for informing professional development. Although many evaluations were untimely, sometimes comments made and recommendations by principals for professional development activities led to offerings during the review period. The district has pursued training in evaluation techniques through Research for Better Teaching (RBT). Administrators did indicate, however, that as a large percentage of the professional development funding had gone to support literacy, not enough funding was left to meet individual teacher needs. Association representatives indicated that there did not appear to be sufficient professional development offerings to support recertification of all of the staff members. They said that while pedagogy appeared to be

sufficiently offered, content offerings were minimal, particularly for those teachers not in major content areas (e.g. French, physical education).

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district supported changes in programmatic offerings by providing professional development opportunities through trainings and grade-level meetings. These trainings were designed to equip teachers with the appropriate skills to effectively deliver programs, but there was a lack of supervision and evaluation. During the examination period, the district acquired Investigations-Revised for use at the elementary level. Interviewees indicated that principals at grade-level meetings only provided professional development relative to implementation in the form of reviewing the assessment components of Investigations.

The district's focus on literacy was supported during the review period by training in writing through a consultant. To monitor the district's program performance in terms of literacy, a record keeping spreadsheet was designed to track students' performance on each unit test. Other efforts at monitoring and supervising the implementation of new and revised programs were accomplished through analyses of the MCAS and other assessment data, informal walk-throughs of classrooms, and only minimally through teacher 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: Unsatisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district's administrator evaluation practices did not comply with MGL Chapter 71, Section 38, which requires all administrators be evaluated on an annual basis. Of 26 administrator personnel folders reviewed, only three (12 percent) of the evaluations were found to be timely; 11 (42 percent) of the evaluations were not timely; and 12 (46 percent) folders contained no evaluations. Further, the principal's contract document indicated that the evaluation of the principal is to be performed annually by the superintendent during the principal's first three years of employment, and at least every other year thereafter. However, the superintendent and human resources director indicated that the contract document for principals was currently under review by district counsel. Comments made on the three timely evaluations were instructive and provided specific direction as to goal attainment. A review of the evaluations failed to produce evidence that the superintendent and/or principal specifically linked improved student performance to district administrators' compensation and continued employment. This was confirmed in an interview with the superintendent.

The superintendent's evaluation was aligned with the requirements of education reform in that he was evaluated in compliance with MGL Chapter 71, Section 38, which prescribes that all administrators shall be evaluated every year. The superintendent's contract called for annual evaluation; and, in accordance with school committee policy 210.06, the superintendent was to annually develop a set of written performance goals. Included were indicators and a specific timeframe for each goal. Evaluation was to be performed in open session by the three school committees with the superintendent. The superintendent's evaluation included seven categories: 1) educational/professional leadership; 2) personnel relationship/management; 3) community relations; 4) business, finance, and operations; 5) BAMMS goals; 6) accomplishment of the superintendent's goals and objectives; and 7) school committee and superintendent relations. Ratings on the superintendent's evaluation were as follows: 1) met expectations; 2) exceeded expectations; and 3) failed to meet expectations. Sections were provided for comments which were to include commendations and recommendations. In the 2003-2004 school year, the committee implemented a pilot "360 degree evaluation" process that incorporated evaluation surveys of the superintendent by supervisors, employees, and clients (i.e., students). Additionally, the committees and the superintendent could agree on an additional annual

evaluation format that would provide a more general and overall evaluation of the superintendent in an open session in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, MGL Chapter 39.

During the review period, the superintendent's evaluations were timely, met the components of education reform, and were instructive in that they contained specific recommendations for improvement. A review of the superintendent's contract and evaluation did not reveal a link between his compensation and continued employment to effectiveness or improvement in student performance.

10. 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.

Rating: Unsatisfactory

Evidence

The district's evaluation practices for teachers did not comply with statutory requirements as specified in MGL Chapter 71, Section 38. Review of a random sampling of 74 teacher files indicated that only 18 (24 percent) evaluations were timely, 40 (54 percent) were untimely, and 13 (17.5 percent) of the files did not contain any evaluations. The remaining three (4.2 percent) files were of employees newly hired in the district and who did not require a performance evaluation at the time of the EQA visit. Of the 58 evaluations reviewed, 32 (55 percent) were signed, 42 (72.4 percent) contained the components of education reform, most were informative, but only 11 (18.9 percent) were instructive containing recommendations for improvement.

Throughout the review period, the district provided professional development opportunities for all teachers within budgetary constraints. Also, approximately five professional status teachers either resigned or were dismissed for cause.

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

While district administrators reported that they had implemented supervision strategies that included grade-level meetings, timeline checks, walk-throughs (with written or verbal feedback), and staff and department meetings, interviews with other district personnel indicated that there was little that they perceived as ongoing supervision taking place in the district.

District documents indicated that the district had developed and implemented a model illustrating academic tasks and responsibilities for individualization of instruction to meet student academic needs. It referred to this model as "PRISM." The "P" stood for planning, preparation, prevention; the "R" stood for response; the "I" stood for intervention; the "S" stood for student support; and the "M" stood for monitoring progress.

A stated goal was to continue to create professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals, van/bus drivers, ELL tutors, and various staffing groups. Also, the district planned to create and arrange for mandated trainings for school staff members on mandatory reporting, confidentiality, de-escalation/physical restraint policy, and AED/first aid, EpiPen, and universal precautions. Digital formatting was to be provided with the intent of researching and designing a training sequence that would match the new DOE requirements. The timeline for completion of this project was June 2007. District personnel other than administrators indicated in interviews that they did not perceive ongoing supervision systems as being present in the district.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the period under review, interviewees indicated that the district's employment, supervision, and professional development processes were somewhat linked, but they were not perceived to be supported by appropriate levels of professional development and funding. An example cited by interviewees was that many teacher were not reimbursed for external conferences, workshops, or tuition for college courses taken for the purposes of professional development. However, each year some teachers and administrators were sent to regional and national conferences, with partial or full reimbursement. Further, it was indicated that almost 75 percent of district funding for professional development, outside of salaries, came from grant funding. The district had policies in place relative to the employment of both teaching and administrative professional staff members, and expended approximately $150,000 per day on released time days in professional development salaries for teachers. Interviewees indicated that this necessitated a heavy reliance upon grant funding. Further, EQA examiners were told that the district's focus on literacy at the elementary level required most of the professional development funding, leaving little to meet individual teachers' needs.

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

In the 2004-2005 school year, the Amherst Police Department conducted "table top" lockdown drills at the high school. In the drill, every zone at the high school had a safety captain and the "dry run" drill was conducted with an Amherst police "presence." In March 2007, the district conducted a "real time" drill facilitated by the Amherst Police Department. In interviews, district administrators indicated that there was a need to practice a "shelter in place drill" with students being present. Bomb threat protocols were in place districtwide, with trainings being initiated at the high school and repeated in all schools districtwide. It was further indicated that the district was working toward securing grant funding to ensure training in all the district's schools.

Interviewees indicated that both the Amherst and Pelham police and fire departments had reviewed the district model, and that Connect-ED was purchased and implemented in the 2007-

2008 school year. The district had emergency kits and district nurses were able to access students' health records by school electronically.

Trainings were provided for all personnel, including having buses running with teachers on board, nurses accessing all health records electronically, food services being prepared to serve food as necessary, principals using Connect-ED, and central office administrators being present.

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	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**12**
Needs Improvement		✓												**1**
Unsatisfactory														

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:

- Teachers in Amherst Regional had few assessment tools to provide them with timely information about student remediation and service needs based on recent instruction.
- The district provided and coordinated effective outreach services for transient, low-income, and homeless students and their families and operated a quality English Language Education program, all of which supported minority student achievement.
- The district saw an increase in the average attendance rate and a decrease in the chronic absenteeism rate for students between 2004 and 2006.
- The district's 2006 out-of-school suspension rate was lower than the state average, but it's 2006 in-school suspension rate was higher than the state average; the district's 2006 dropout rate was less than half the state average.
- High school students in the district performed extremely well on Advanced Placement exams, with almost all students scoring a '3' or higher. Project Challenge intended to increase the number of students in underrepresented subgroups in honors classes.

Summary

The Amherst Regional Public Schools had no common assessments to measure student achievement of the standards-based skills and content taught by classroom, special education, and English Language Education (ELE) teachers. Without common formative curriculum assessments, classroom, special education, and ELE teachers had incomplete information about the remediation that students needed at the end of each unit of instruction. Notwithstanding formative assessment issues, the district provided quality support services with the use of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) practices for ELL students in regular and ELE classrooms and with the provision of direct and systematic reading instruction for special education students using the Wilson Reading program.

The district also provided other academic and tutoring support services for students to improve their ELA and math achievement. For example, the district continued the Reading Recovery program for grade 1, with additional "getting ready" support in kindergarten and "follow up" support in grade 2. The middle school offered Reading/Writing Workshop support for at-risk students in ELA, with additional phonetics support for special education students. In the spring of 2007, the district piloted a program for at-risk grade 6-9 students called the Pipeline Project, in which students attended after-school tutoring in ELA and math provided by Amherst College students once a week for five weeks. The district offered summer school to all grade 7-12 students who needed remediation in ELA and math. The high school maintained its Prep Academy for grade 9 students who needed help with ELA, math, and study skills.

Over the last two years of the review period, the district increased its use of summative assessments, including the MCAS tests, to improve curriculum and to identify students in need of services. In addition, the district purchased Study Island, an elementary and middle school formative assessment and student practice software program, and trained teachers in grades 3-8 in its application. Monthly reports on use and analysis of Study Island were generated and distributed to the principals.

Participation of all subgroups in the 2007 MCAS tests for grades 3-8 and 10 averaged 98 percent or higher for all grades and subjects tested with the exception of LEP students. District staff members reported that the lower participation rate for this subgroup was due to the number of

first-year students from foreign countries who did not speak English well and were exempt from taking the MCAS tests according to NCLB guidelines. The district's 2007 NCLB accountability status for grades 3-5 was 'Corrective Action-Subgroups,' as African-American students did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2007. For most district subgroups, however, the percentage of students scoring 'Proficient' or higher exceeded the state average for those subgroups.

Over the previous two years, the district used many approaches to encourage parents and community organizations to be involved in the education of children. For example, teachers held conferences with parents to report on their child's progress and to inform parents about ways to support their child's learning. The district also provided free transportation and childcare for parents to attend events such as early childhood or kindergarten parent orientations and ELE program parent meetings. The district invited community organizations to provide support for low-income students and their families through initiatives such as the "Angel" fund covering the cost of preschool student immunizations, the Lions Club funding new eyeglasses, and Casa Latina to provide translation services when non-English speaking parents took their children to doctors who only speak English. This community support helped students to attend and be successful in school.

The district experienced an improvement in its average attendance rate during the period under review. For the period 2004 to 2006, the average attendance rate was 94.9 percent for the Amherst elementary schools, 95.8 percent for Pelham Elementary School, and 93.5 percent for the regional middle and high schools. The chronic absenteeism rate for the middle and high schools dropped from 20.3 percent in 2004 to 14.8 percent in 2006. A unified district attendance policy and enforcement of this policy likely contributed to the increase in the average attendance rate and the decrease in chronic absences.

Elementary schools in the district suspended few students during the review period. The rate of out-of-school suspension for the middle and high schools averaged 5.3 percent for the period 2004 to 2006, lower than the state average of 6.0 percent. Middle and high school in-school suspensions averaged 9.0 percent for the period 2004 to 2006, higher than the state average of 3.5 percent during the same period. District staff members attributed the high rate of in-school

suspensions to students who repeatedly missed after-school detention. The dropout rate decreased for Amherst Regional High School from 3.3 percent in 2004 to 1.5 percent in 2006, less than half the state's average dropout rate of 3.3 percent in 2006. Dropout prevention programs such as Prep Academy, the Mentoring Program, Reduced Day academic plans, and ELA, math and MCAS tutoring and support likely contributed to the improved dropout rate.

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

Amherst Regional administrators and teachers had access to student achievement information including aggregated and disaggregated MCAS test data and data from other assessments. During interviews, teachers and administrators reported that they reviewed aggregated MCAS data to determine strengths and weaknesses in various subjects and grade levels; however, they also noted that for the two years prior to the EQA site visit they had closely studied disaggregated MCAS data to identify the subpopulations performing poorly. They identified Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and low-income students as the subgroups with the largest gaps in ELA and math achievement. In addition, they conducted an item analysis of the MCAS data using TestWiz to determine the content and types of questions that gave students difficulty. Several teachers described how this analysis affected changes in the content of instruction or the time of year in which they taught a concept, such as the realignment of the elementary math curriculum over the last two years. Other teachers reported that they focused on areas such as MCAS test-taking skills, factual writing, math vocabulary, or a particular type of question, such as open response.

Large achievement gaps still existed for students with disabilities, LEP students, Hispanic students, and low-income students. For example, data indicated that on the 2007 MCAS ELA test, 55 percent of the district's LEP students scored in the 'Needs Improvement' category

compared to 10 percent of regular education students. The district's 2007 MCAS math results indicated that 62 percent of the LEP students scored in the 'Needs Improvement' and 'Warning/Failing' categories compared to 20 percent of regular education students.

During the period under review, the district started additional programs or maintained programs to support student progress and achievement at all levels. The district continued the Reading Recovery program for grade 1, with additional "Getting Ready" support in kindergarten and "follow up" support in grade 2. In some schools, Reading Recovery teachers sometimes found that grade 3 students needed their support. For special education students in all grades, the district adopted the Wilson Reading program three years prior to the site visit to provide direct and systematic reading instruction to students with disabilities and strengthen the district's special education program. At one elementary school, the staff expanded the after-school Homework Club and initiated the Saturday Scholars program to support ELA and math achievement.

Middle school staff members offered Reading/Writing Workshop support for at-risk students in ELA, with additional phonetics support for special education students. The district started a pilot program for at-risk grade 6-9 students called the Pipeline Project in the spring of 2007. Pipeline Project students attended after-school tutoring in ELA and math provided by Amherst College students once a week for five weeks. The district continued the program for four weeks, five days a week, during the summer and planned to continue the program in the 2007-2008 school year. The district offered summer school to all grade 7-12 students who needed remediation in ELA and math. The high school maintained its Prep Academy for grade 9 students who needed help with study skills, as well as ELA and math skills.

2. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

District and school staff members gathered limited formative assessment data. The student success plans designed by elementary and middle school staff members were formative. The districts' primary common formative assessment to measure student understanding of the district's curriculum and to inform instruction was Study Island, used in mathematics and ELA at the elementary and middle school levels and science at the middle school level. The District Improvement Plan listed the development of local assessments as one of the next challenges for the district.

Teachers used some summative assessments at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, including standardized summative assessments, to gather data on students. District and school staff members used the Developmental Inventory and Assessment of Learning-Revised to determine the literacy needs of all preschool and kindergarten students. The standardized summative assessments used for literacy in grades 1-6 at the elementary schools varied from one school to the other. Some schools administered the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) to assess literacy while other schools used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) for summative literacy assessment. For math in grades 1-6, teachers administered district-constructed beginning of the year summative math assessments. District-generated writing prompts assessed writing ability for all grade 1-6 students at the start of the school year. At the middle school level, teachers gave the Degrees of Reading Power to all students to assess literacy. Counselors based most of the placement decisions for high school students on transcripts. The absence of consistent, districtwide literacy assessments and procedures at the elementary level appeared to contribute to inconsistent identification of at-risk students, especially transient or mobile students. Teachers administered end of year summative assessments for math and writing.

Supplementary and remedial services provided by district staff members included Reading Recovery, the Wilson Reading program, the Pipeline Project, Prep Academy, and summer school. District staff members intended for these programs to improve student achievement and help students pass the MCAS tests.

A review of Amherst Regional's MCAS test results indicated a small increase occurred in 2007 in the overall percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA, math, and science and technology/engineering. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA was 74 percent in 2004, 73 percent in 2005, 72 percent in 2006, and 79 percent in 2007. In math, the percentage of students attaining proficiency was 63 percent in 2004, 62 percent in 2005, 65 percent in 2006, and 72 percent in 2007. In science and technology/engineering, the percentage of students attaining proficiency was 54 percent in 2004, 55 percent in 2005, 58 percent in 2006, and 61 percent in 2007. Large achievement gaps existed for students with disabilities and LEP students relative to regular education students, for low-income students relative to non-low-income students, and for Hispanic and African-American students relative to White students. However, Amherst Regional's subgroup performance exceeded the state averages.

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

During the period under review, the district provided all early childhood services in one location, Crocker Farm Elementary School. These services included early intervention programs in literacy for all pre-kindergarten students. The intention of the Amherst and Pelham early childhood and literacy programs was to have all students scoring at the 'Proficient' level or above by grade 4 with a target date of 2014.

Well over half of Amherst and Pelham grade 4 students scored 'Proficient' or higher on MCAS ELA tests during the review period. A review of the Amherst Public Schools' grade 4 MCAS ELA test results during the review period revealed the following percentages of students scoring 'Proficient' or higher: 65 percent in 2004, 58 percent in 2005, 51 percent in 2006, and 59 percent in 2007. The district was placed in corrective action status for grades 3-5 subgroup performance under NCLB, as its African-American students did not make AYP in 2007. The superintendent spoke of the elimination of race and class as predictors of student success in the "leverage" points section of the 2006-2007 District Improvement Plan. A review of MCAS ELA test results

for Pelham's grade 4 students during the review period revealed the following percentages of students attaining proficiency: 67 percent in 2004, 58 percent in 2005, 83 percent in 2006, and 68 percent in 2007. The Pelham data showed significant fluctuations in the percentages of students scoring 'Proficient' or higher due to the small number of grade 4 students tested each year. The district had no NCLB accountability status in 2007.

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

During the review period, Amherst Regional used a number of assessments to determine the needs of newly entering students, taking into account mobility when it was a factor. According to interviewees, district and school staff members screened all students eligible for preschool in the spring to determine individual needs and gather data for balancing classes. Staff members assessed any new students arriving after the spring screening as soon as possible and assigned them to classes. District staff members always reserved preschool classroom spaces for any potential new students coming from homeless or transient situations. District and school staff members also conducted spring screening for all students entering kindergarten to assess needs and balance classes. For all other new students entering Amherst or Pelham elementary schools, teachers administered published reading assessments, district math assessments, and a district writing prompt after a reasonable wait time, using the assessments given to all students in that teacher's classroom at the start of the school year. The results of these assessments along with student records, if available, formed a baseline to determine how the teacher would meet new students' needs.

At the secondary level, middle school staff members assessed reading for all new grade 7-8 students using the Degrees of Reading Power and considered the students' records for placement. If new students had no math performance records, middle school staff members administered Key Math to determine their needs. At the high school level, staff members conducted intake interviews with new students and their parents. Following interviews, counselors reviewed

school transfer records, if available, and determined the appropriate level of ELA and math classes to place a new student in. School staff members used English, math, science, and social studies department placement exams, when necessary, to determine the most appropriate placement.

In all cases at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, staff members did their best to find out if new students were previously in ELL, special education, or 504 programs and made appropriate placements.

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 offered numerous programs to support students and their families who lived in difficult economic circumstances during the period under review. For immigrant students with little or no experience in a school setting, interviewees cited the placement of these students in an English Language Education (ELE) setting for the majority of the school day. As an example at the high school level, counselors assigned newly arriving students from El Salvador to at least three periods in classes with ELE staff members. The ELE department at the high school also embraced many students from undocumented families. Staff members said that they "held the hands" of all these students in a more protected classroom setting for at least the first trimester until they were ready for the regular school setting. All high school students participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program could sign up for the "Benefits Package" with parental approval. This program enabled students with limited monetary resources to participate in any club or athletic activity at the high school with the fees covered by "scholarships" or "gifts" agreed to by parents before staff members provided them. Parents could pay for fees or services on a sliding scale and students could work to pay for the cost of participation if they chose to do so.

Elementary interviewees explained the importance of entering routines for students and their families, especially those living in poverty. District and elementary school staff members provided orientation meetings for early childhood and kindergarten parents to let them know what school would be like for their children. Parents learned what they could do to help their children perform well in school. The district also produced a parent handbook translated into several languages that included basic procedures important for parents to know about. District and school staff members at the elementary, middle, and high school levels helped all new students and their families when they arrived to register. They also assisted individual students and their families when they were in crisis by providing counseling and connecting them to support services.

The district also had outreach staff members who took the initiative to help students and their families who lived in chaotic environments. Outreach staff members arranged for school transportation so that low-income students could remain at their current school even though the family moved. Outreach staff members also coordinated transportation and medical services for needy families to meet students' medical needs. In cooperation with local agencies, outreach staff members connected low-income families to assistance for housing and other basic needs.

6. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Over the previous two years, the district used many approaches to encourage parents and community organizations to be involved in the education of children. School and district staff members communicated with parents by providing registration information, parent letters, school newsletters, parent/student handbooks, report cards, and fliers announcing parent meetings. When notified, student services staff members arranged for translation of these parent documents into several different languages, based on parent need. Teachers also held conferences with parents to report on their child's progress and to inform parents about ways to support their

child's learning. The district also provided free transportation and childcare for parents to attend events such as early childhood or kindergarten parent orientations and ELE program parent meetings. ELE staff members shared that ELE teachers made numerous home visits, especially to homes of at-risk students. The district invited community organizations to provide support for low-income students and their families through initiatives such as the "Angel" fund covering the cost for preschool student immunizations, the Lions Club funding new eyeglasses, and Casa Latina working with Cooley-Dickinson Hospital to provide translation services when non-English speaking parents took their children to doctors who only speak English. This community support helped students to attend and be successful in school.

District and school staff members made it easier for parents to participate in school activities by using several strategies. ELE staff members mentioned as one approach they used to increase parent participation the scheduling of ELE parent meetings during different times of the day to make it more convenient for parents who work. Community outreach staff members shared how they helped low-income parents connect to in-district resources such as free transportation for homeless children to attend school or to out-of-district resources such as free medical services. In other examples cited, outreach staff members transported parents and their child to the doctor when they missed the previous appointment or drove parents to the school if they did not want to ride several buses to attend their child's parent conference. Recently, outreach staff members helped parents, if they requested it, in completing the complicated MassHealth insurance forms. The student services office arranged for translators and/or child care for parent conferences or other parent meetings when requested.

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

During the review period, the district had several procedures in place to assist students transitioning into district schools for the first time and from one district school to another. Many students entered school for the first time in preschool or kindergarten. According to district

documents, all identified special education or ELL preschool students from Amherst and Pelham attended Crocker Farm Elementary School, with identification based on the results of language, readiness, and other screening tests conducted in the spring. Before attending the preschool program at Crocker Farm, each potential student's parent(s) met with school and district staff members to determine eligibility for the preschool program and, if eligible, to obtain parent permission for their child to enter the program. Preschool staff members held an orientation for all preschool parents in the spring to describe school procedures and expectations as their children entered school. In similar fashion, all elementary schools held an orientation for kindergarten parents in the spring. Screening of most kindergarten students took place in the spring, with the goal of ensuring that staff members screened all kindergarten students by October 1. Early childhood and kindergarten teachers worked to gently ease all preschool and kindergarten students into the daily routines of their programs to ensure a successful start of the year for each child.

In interviews, staff members shared the procedures they followed for the large transition of students from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Amherst Regional Middle School (ARMS) staff members offered several activities to support a smooth transition for grade 6 students and their parents. ARMS counselors organized field trips for each elementary school's grade 6 students, which included a tour of the middle school, a presentation by grade 7 students regarding what to expect in middle school, followed by a question and answer session. ARMS staff members also conducted a parent orientation night to help parents prepare their children for middle school. ELE staff members at the middle school provided Spanish translation services during a second parent orientation night for parents who needed this support. Grade 6 teachers also completed a form for each student indicating academic, behavioral, and any other important information that middle school staff members should know. Middle school staff members intended for this form to prevent or quickly solve any problems with student achievement or behavior. Grade 6 teachers submitted these forms along with every student's choice slip for grade 7 classes. The transition for grade 8 students moving into grade 9 was similar to the middle school transition, except that incoming grade 9 students toured the high school with counselors one week before the start of the school year.

District staff members also provided examples of the strategies they used to support smooth transitions and success for special needs students moving from one school or program to another. In moving ELL or special education students from the early childhood program to kindergarten, district and school staff members used common vocabulary, developed during pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teacher meetings, to describe to parents how service delivery would change in the new setting. In a similar fashion, school and district special education and ELE staff members supported meetings for effective transition from grade 6 to 7 and from grade 8 to 9 for all of their students. Middle school ELE staff meetings provided a breakfast for ELE parents and students at the beginning of the school year. Students, parents, and teachers sat by advisory group to become better acquainted. After breakfast, the principal introduced the ELE teachers and paraprofessionals, dismissed the students to return to class, and shared tips with the parents on how to support their children at the middle school.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of the district's policies and procedures for discipline revealed that they were fair and equitable. Central office staff members reported that the district began the preK-12 unifying process for its discipline policy and procedures about four years prior to the EQA site visit through team discussion of the issues. These unified discipline policies and procedures became part of the "District Pages" placed in all of the district's parent handbooks. During the review period, the district also firmly established the "PRISM" model to promote equitable responses to discipline infractions. As mentioned earlier, the "P" in PRISM stood for planning, preparation, prevention, the "R" stood for response, the "I" stood for intervention, the "S" stood for student support, and the "M" stood for monitoring progress. District staff members provided examples of the practices and programs used to reduce discipline referrals for students at all grade levels. According to the "District Pages" in parent/student handbooks, administrators took one or more actions to address a report of inappropriate student behavior. These actions included withdrawal of privileges or time out, notification of parent, lunch or after-school detention, in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension. The district provided the STEP program, in an off-site

structured setting, for secondary students suspended out of school for five or more days. Additional actions cited in the handbooks were verbal warnings, community service, peer mediation, and expulsion. In some cases, district staff members recommended student placement in an alternative educational setting to support improved behavior in school. One such option was South Amherst, a program for students who needed a smaller school building.

According to the DOE, the percentage of Amherst elementary school students suspended out of school one or more times during the school year averaged 0.3 percent from 2005 to 2006, much less than the state's average of just under 6.0 percent during the same period. In-school suspensions for one or more times during the school year averaged a rate of approximately 0.3 percent from 2005 to 2006, lower than the state's average of approximately 3.5 percent during the same period. Pelham Elementary School suspended no students in 2005 or 2006. The percentage of Amherst Regional grade 7-12 students suspended out of school one or more times during the school year averaged 5.3 percent from 2004 to 2006, less than the state's average of just under 6.0 percent during the same period. In-school suspensions for one or more times during the school year averaged a rate of approximately 9.0 percent from 2005 to 2006, higher than the state's average of approximately 3.5 percent during the same period. District staff members attributed the high rate of in-school suspensions to students who repeatedly missed after-school detention. The three-year rate for out-of-school suspensions was 7.3 percent for Amherst Regional Middle School and 4.2 percent for Amherst Regional High School (ARHS). The three-year rate for in-school suspensions was 10.3 percent for ARMS and 8.4 percent for ARHS. The district recorded increases in the out-of-school suspension rate and the in-school suspension rate for the middle and high schools in 2005 and 2006. District staff members attributed these increases to repeat offenders. Based on a review of the documents examined and on information provided by teachers and administrators during interviews, the district had practices in place to reduce discipline referrals and suspensions.

The district's promotion and retention policies were also fair and equitable and staff members intervened in several ways before retaining students. All schools used a team approach for teachers to refer struggling students. The team offered recommendations that the teacher used to help the student's achievement improve. If the teacher implemented the recommended strategies for a reasonable length of time without success, the team could consider providing additional

reading or math support or begin the process of making a referral for a special education evaluation.

Elementary and middle schools sent report cards home quarterly with teachers being encouraged to send progress reports mid-quarter. High school teachers sent trimester report cards and mid-term progress reports. The district offered summer school for grade 7-12 students who needed remediation in core subject areas. Additional interventions and supports available for struggling students at the high school included counseling, the Math Study Center and the English Study Center for periodic or daily academic support, Prep Academy for small class academic support for grade 9 students, and three-trimester MCAS preparatory and academic support programs for math and/or English skills development. The district used the honor roll for 'B-' or higher averages in grades 7-12 to encourage and recognize student achievement.

The district retention rate for Amherst elementary schools during the review period was 0.6 percent in 2004, 0.2 percent in 2005, and 0.3 percent in 2006. The retention rate for Pelham Elementary School was 1.0 percent in 2006, with no students retained in 2004 or 2005. The district retention rate for the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District during the period under review was 2.0 percent in 2004, 2.8 percent in 2005, and 1.2 percent in 2006. The state's average retention rate was 2.6 percent in 2004, 2.6 percent in 2005, and 2.5 percent in 2006, with district schools below the state average in every year except for the middle and high schools in 2005. The district seldom retained students.

9. <u>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.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to interviewees and the 2006-2007 Program of Studies, Amherst Regional High School had several programs to prevent, minimize, and recover dropouts during the period under review. The high school offered student support through academic study centers for math and English. With counselor and parent permission, students accessed the study centers when they needed help with math or English classes. Based on test scores, grades, and teacher recommendations, counselors assigned struggling students to one or both study centers on a daily

basis. ARHS offered a variety of programs to improve student skills, content knowledge, and test-taking readiness through MCAS preparatory and academic support programs. One option allowed students to take a three-trimester program in math and/or English during their freshman or sophomore year. Another choice involved academic tutors working with students both during the school day and after school. Students also had the option to take summer school classes in English and/or math to help them acquire the skills necessary to be successful in high school and pass the MCAS tests. Summer school classes also afforded students the opportunity to pass core academic subject classes they failed during the school year and made it possible for the students to move on to the next grade level. Counselors designed Reduced Day academic plans, less than five periods a day, to allow students to complete high school at a slower pace, with the assistant principal's approval. High school staff members offered this program for students completing their fifth year of high school, living independently and needing to work (work study), and having documented health issues. Outreach staff members from the student services office worked with pregnant students to support and encourage them to finish high school.

For grade 9 students who might have "problems transitioning to the rigors of high school life," counselors recommended Prep Academy with parent approval. Prep Academy offered academic support in a small class setting with individual attention from two academic teachers. Teachers worked with students to improve "study skills, sharpen academic weaknesses," and cultivate "mindfulness for the future." In another effort to assist students who underachieved in middle school, high school students mentored grade 7-8 students through the Mentoring Program. This program, developed through the district's involvement in the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN), targeted students of color to enable them to make a more successful transition to high school.

The DOE defines a dropout as a student in grades 9-12 who leaves school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school, and did not re-enroll before the following October 1. The dropout rate at Amherst Regional High School decreased from 2004 to 2006 and was less than half the state average of just over 3.3 percent for 2006. According to DOE summary statistics, the dropout rates for ARHS were 3.3 percent in 2004, 2.2 percent in 2005, and 1.5 percent in 2006. The aforementioned programs were instrumental in reducing the ARHS dropout rate over the prior three years.

10. 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.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the review period, the Amherst Regional staff provided numerous programs to meet the needs of transient and homeless students and advocated for these students and their families. The district budgeted funds to pay for transportation, at parent request, to and from the school that a homeless student attended. This assured families that their children could continue to attend the school that they had been attending, regardless of where they were living after becoming homeless. Student services office and school staff members also reported that they worked with the Department of Social Services (DSS) as they recruited foster parents so that homeless students could stay in their school. Staff members used the district's "open enrollment" policy to appeal to the superintendent to allow these students to stay. Their goal was continuity for each student's educational services. District staff members shared that a parent organization raised funds to pay for rent for temporary housing outside the district. Outreach staff members from the student services office coordinated services for homeless families through the Amherst Family Center, the Women's Center, and other social service agencies. Homeless students were eligible for all other programs and services offered to any other student, including but not limited to school nutrition programs, Title I services, school nurse services, testing and assessment programs, before- and after-school programs, and summer programs.

During the 2006-2007 school year, there were 12 homeless students in Amherst elementary schools, with 10 of those students in shelters and two students awaiting foster care. Pelham Elementary School had no homeless students. The Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools reported 12 homeless students, with seven of those students living in shelters and five students awaiting foster care. Findings from the DOE's McKinney-Vento Program Review Report found that the three districts "implemented the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act."

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

All Amherst Regional school handbooks contained unified "District Pages" explaining a consistent district attendance policy and expectations. District and school staff members expected students to attend school regularly and to make up work missed due to excused absences. District staff members accepted a parent/guardian note to excuse all absences and counted all absences including illnesses, family plans, field trips, and athletic competitions. The district considered absences without parent notes to be unexcused. Students with unexcused absences received no credit for make-up work, received disciplinary consequences, and district staff members called to notify their parents. At the high school level, students received a grade but lost credit for courses if they exceeded the "absence limit total of 8." High school staff members computed a student's "absence limit total of 8" by dividing the number of tardies by three and adding their absences. Teachers notified parents by phone if they were concerned and sent "Comment Appraisal Reports" home to parents when a student reached the absence limit total of five. The district had an attendance policy waiver for students who lost credit in a class to appeal, with the help of their parents, to the administration for restoration of credit. The district's high school tardiness policy allowed two free tardies each trimester, with discipline consequences following the third tardy.

The district had several practices in place to monitor and encourage consistent student attendance. School staff members tracked daily attendance using an attendance monitoring system called PowerSchool and expected parents to call in or send a note to the office each time their child was absent. Parents who called in used a telephone system aligned with PowerSchool that tracked the parents who notified the school of their child's absence. Each school then used PowerSchool to produce a list of absent students whose parents did not call. After removing the names of students whose parents sent a note, office staff members at each school called the parents of all remaining absent students to make sure the parents knew about their child's absence. Translators, available in Spanish, notified parents who did not speak English by telephone. If parents provided email addresses, office staff members notified parents of their child's absence by email. The district also encouraged good student attendance by including tardy and absence information on student report cards. The alternative school used merits for good attendance. At times, outreach or ELE staff members went to homes and brought students to school. Assistant principals called parents when student absences were excessive and

principals sent letters home to parents of students with more than 10 absences. The district filed Child in Need of Services (CHINS) reports when parents allowed excessive absences to continue.

According to the DOE, from 2004 to 2006 the Amherst elementary schools' attendance rate averaged 94.9 percent. The Pelham Elementary School's average attendance rate for the same period was 95.8 percent. The average attendance rate for the middle and high schools was 93.5 percent from 2004 to 2006 with a slight increase over the last two years. The 2006 DOE attendance data for the secondary schools indicated a drop in the percentage of students chronically absent (students absent more than 10 percent of their days in membership) with a chronic absence rate of 20.3 percent in 2004, 15.2 percent in 2005, and 14.8 percent in 2006. The subpopulation with the highest 2006 secondary school chronic absence rate was Hispanic students with 32.2 percent, with other subgroups averaging close to the district average. Chronic absence rates at the high school in 2006 were 13.3 percent in grade 9, 15.5 percent in grade 10, 19.0 percent in grade 11, and 18.9 percent in grade 12. Chronic absence rates in 2006 averaged close to 10 percent.

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

District administrators stated that the district developed practices and policies that promoted and tracked staff attendance. To promote good attendance, the district conducted a Health Fair for all staff members in November providing free flu shots and booths encouraging a healthy lifestyle. The district also provided a Wellness Program through employee health insurance. Staff members reported their absences to a recorded absence phone system. School office staff members recorded daily staff attendance, which they reported to central office for payroll purposes. The district required any staff member who was absent for three continuous days to provide the school administration with a note explaining the absence. When requested by a school administrator, school office staff members produced an attendance history, which

administrators used to determine if there were attendance issues for any staff member. District and school administrators shared that they used a progressive discipline approach to deal with staff attendance problems. In the first step, principals held a conference with the staff member to determine the reason for the absences and, if necessary, gave a verbal warning about the staff member's excessive absences. Interviewees reported that most often the reasons given by a staff member for their absences were legitimate. The district had an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available for all staff members who needed help with family or personal issues. During the second and third steps, principals used a "Staff Counseling Report" to provide written warnings about the staff member's poor attendance. In the fourth step, principals worked with the human resources director to begin the dismissal process for the employee. Central office staff members reported that verbal warnings usually improved a staff member's poor attendance and that principals used the progressive discipline approach more frequently with paraprofessionals.

Interviewees shared several ways they endeavored to ensure instructional continuity when staff members were absent. District and school administrators expected that teachers provide substitutes with lesson plans for each day of the teacher's absence. The district required all persons hired to substitute to sign and return a form indicating that the substitute received the district's *Substitute Handbook – A Survival Guide* and that they would review it before their next substitute assignment. The substitute handbook was also accessible online and contained information to help the substitute achieve success in the classroom. School administrators said that they attempted to arrange for substitutes whom the students knew. For long-term absences of more than two weeks, district administrators tried to fill substitute teacher vacancies with retired teachers who performed well. In an effort to entice these retirees to substitute, the district was "flexible" with the daily rate of pay for them, using $125 per day as a "rule of thumb."

Administrative staff members reported that staff attendance was generally good and that the district provided incentives for good attendance. For paraprofessionals and clerical/media contract employees who completed 20 or more years of service in the district, voluntarily terminated their employment, and had an accumulated sick leave balance of at least 140 days at retirement, the district paid $15 per day for their remaining sick leave days. For teachers who completed 20 or more years of service in the district, voluntarily terminated their employment, and had an accumulated sick leave balance of at least 140 days at retirement, the district paid $25

per day for their remaining sick leave days. Human resources staff members shared that 100 percent of retiring teachers received this benefit over the prior two years.

District and school 2006-2007 teacher attendance data provided by the district, which included attendance data on long-term illness, short-term illness, military and jury duty, professional development, and days absent for other reasons, showed that 390 classroom teachers averaged approximately 12.3 days absent. Excluding long-term illness, military and jury duty, and professional development days, teachers averaged approximately 8.7 days absent.

13. 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.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, Amherst Regional High School offered advanced and accelerated programs for students who were college bound. District and high school staff members made efforts to increase the number of minority and other subgroup students in these challenging courses. The ARHS Program of Studies described the district's approach to grouping students for instruction. Heterogeneously grouped classes were open to all students, had high expectations, and contained a wide range of student abilities and interests. High school staff members considered these heterogeneously grouped classes to be college preparatory classes along with honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes; in fact, some of the heterogeneously grouped classes offered the honors option within the class. Using accelerated pacing, honors courses required students to engage in "substantial independent work, extensive use of supplementary materials, and sophisticated analysis and synthesis of ideas and information." AP courses were similar to honors courses in their expectations, but they also used college-level curricula. Students finishing AP courses took Advanced Placement examinations for college credit or advanced standing. ARHS did not weight grades for honors or AP classes.

ARHS students performed very well on AP exams during the period under review. According to ARHS Profile 2005-2006, in 2005, 42 percent of the students who took AP exams scored a '5,' 25 percent scored a '4,' and 22 percent scored a '3'; 89 percent of the district's high school

students scored a ‘3’ or higher. Of the students who took AP exams in 2005, 11 were AP Scholars, one was an AP Scholar with Honors, and one was an AP Scholar with Distinction. According to ARHS Profile 2006-2007, in 2006, 43 percent of the students who took AP exams scored a ‘5,’ 36 percent scored a ‘4,’ and 19 percent scored a ‘3’; 98 percent of the district’s high school students scored a ‘3’ or higher. Of the students who took AP exams in 2006, 13 were AP Scholars, two were AP Scholars with Honors, and two were AP Scholars with Distinction. A review of SAT data in ARHS Profile 2005-2006 for the Class of 2005 revealed that 291 students, or 90 percent of the class, took the SAT exam. The mean verbal score was 564 and the mean math score was 583. A review of SAT data in ARHS Profile 2006-2007 for the Class of 2006 revealed that 273 students, or 90 percent of the class, took the SAT exam. The middle 50 percent critical reading score was 520-660, the middle 50 percent math score was 510-660, and the middle 50 percent writing score was 490-650. AP and SAT scores showed continuous high achievement of college-bound students at ARHS. The district offered a full complement of honors and AP classes through the English, math, science, social studies, and foreign languages departments.

Besides offering heterogeneously grouped college preparatory classes, the ARHS also provided Project Challenge, intended to increase the number of students in underrepresented student groups in honors classes. In addition, Project Challenge gave priority to students taking an honors class for the first time. Academic teachers nominated most Project Challenge students for the program, but interested students and parents had the option to talk to a guidance counselor without nomination. Project Challenge students met with their Project Challenge mentor and a small group of peers one period a day to work on class assignments and develop academic success strategies useful in upper level classes. The program focused on “personal responsibility and the skills of time management, goal setting and communication with teachers.” Students discussed the social and cultural issues encompassed in the underrepresentation of students of color in honors classes. Mentors watched the academic progress of students and established continuous communication with parents and classroom teachers. The district did not provide the EQA team with data showing the extent of success for Project Challenge students in honors classes.

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														
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				**9**
Needs Improvement					✓						✓	✓		**3**
Unsatisfactory													✓	**1**

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 FY 2004 reduction in Chapter 70 aid impacted the school district. The district did not cut programs but eliminated positions, increased class size, and reduced supplies and textbooks.
- The ongoing analysis of student assessment data, primarily those from the MCAS tests, influenced budget decisions and allocation of funds.
- Although state statute restricted the unencumbered surplus funds in the excess and deficiency account at the end of any fiscal year to five percent of the budgeted operating and capital costs for the succeeding year, the regional school agreement restricted the unencumbered surplus funds in the excess and deficiency account to 3.5 percent.
- Funds received by the district in federal and state entitlement grants declined with the exception of the 94-142 special education allotment, which increased. Based on the analysis of data, the district incorporated into the local budgets positions that no longer could be funded by grants.
- The district implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of its programs, initiatives, and activities.

- The towns of Amherst and Pelham and their respective school districts did not have appropriate written agreements 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 elementary school budget by the communities.
- In FY 2007, Amherst town meeting members approved expenditures totaling $408,978 for the purchase of capital equipment for the school district recommended by the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC).
- The district did not have a formal written preventive maintenance plan. The Pelham Public Schools and the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools did not have long-term capital plans.
- All front doors of the elementary school buildings as well as the middle and high school buildings remained unlocked during the school day.

Summary

Interviewees and documents provided by the district described the budget process in Amherst Regional as open and participatory. Known cost areas were identified as well as expenses based on student enrollments to maintain the same level of service within mandates and regulations. Principals and program directors submitted staffing and expense requests which the superintendent and administrative team reviewed in order to identify those items that could be defined as level service. Funds for instructional materials and supplies were allocated to each school based on a per pupil formula, and other funding was allocated based on student needs. The superintendent prepared detailed documents that provided information on students, staff, programs, and budget as well as revenue and expenditure assumptions to the three school committees as well as the community. The superintendent, school committees, and town officials held budget sessions from December to April. The superintendent disseminated information throughout the budget development process prior to the approved school department budget and regional assessments being presented at the annual town meetings for voter approval.

The school committees received quarterly budget reports and did not approve requests for transfers. Principals did not receive budget reports. They had access to the financial accounting system with the ability to control and track their budgets and manage their funds. Central office

personnel regularly reviewed and monitored expenditures to ensure spending remained within fiscal budget limits. The district used purchase orders to encumber expenditures from all funds for goods and/or services. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

The three school districts comprising the Amherst Regional Public Schools exceeded their net school spending (NSS) requirement of the Education Reform Act for each of the years in the period under review, and the per pupil expenditure for each district exceeded the state average each year during that period. Interviewees generally stated that the towns provided adequate support for the elementary and regional middle and high schools. Voters in Amherst approved an operational override in FY 2004 totaling $2 million; however a $2 million operational override attempt in FY 2007 failed, and this led town officials to investigate alternate sources of revenue.

The Amherst Education Foundation, Inc., an independent nonprofit education fund, provided community members with direct school funding opportunities either for core needs or for the athletic, performing arts, and library booster clubs at all levels. Interested parties had the opportunity to make tax-deductible donations either online or by check. Teachers submitted proposals for projects and programs to the foundation. The foundation awarded approximately $20,000 each year of the period under review.

The district's schools were clean and well maintained by an in-house staff of custodians and maintenance workers. The district did not have a formal written preventive maintenance schedule but contracted outside vendors each year for elevator, generator, boiler, fire alarm, and fire extinguisher preventative maintenance.

Neither the Pelham Public Schools nor the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools had a long-term capital plan; however, a long-term capital plan had been developed in the town of Amherst by the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC). The JCPC's focus during FY 2007 was to update the town's five-year capital plan for the period FY 2008 to FY 2012 and to develop specific recommendations for FY 2008 for consideration at the 2007 annual town meeting.

The district lacked a system to ensure student safety. School district administrators in interviews indicated the culture of the community could not bear school site buildings being totally "locked

down." The district posted notices at the main entrance of each school that directed visitors to the main office to sign in. The EQA team observed visitors to the districts' schools who accessed the building via the main entrance and failed to stop at the main office in order to sign in as directed.

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

A review of documents provided to the EQA examiners indicated there was no evidence of formal school committee policies that established procedures for the development and adoption of Amherst Regional's budgets. A color-coded budget document entitled 2006-2007 Budget Timeline delineated a budget development schedule that began in November. The schedule listed dates during the budget process, including hearings and final town meetings. Information in yellow sections represented the Amherst schedule, blue sections represented the Pelham schedule, and green sections represented the regional schedule. Central business office personnel explained the complexities of the schedule to the EQA examiners.

District administrators and school committee members described the budget development process as open and transparent. Documents submitted by the district described the process for the development of Amherst Regional's budgets. The staff and school committees began the process of budget development in December. The levels of staffing and support necessary to maintain the current year level of service in the subsequent fiscal year were identified and calculated. Known cost areas such as salary projections, contracts for transportation services and for facilities and equipment, and anticipated increases in utilities and insurance were identified as well as expenses based on student enrollments to maintain the same level of service or compliance with mandates and regulations.

Principals and program directors submitted staffing and expense requests that were generated in part by input from teachers and school councils. The superintendent and the administrative team reviewed the requests and identified those items that could be defined as level service. The

district placed requests for staffing, equipment, and supplies beyond those justified as essential in the back of the budget. The district provided examples of items to be included in the back of the budget. For instance, the addition of a classroom teacher because of increased enrollment would be included in the level services budget; but a request for increased funding due to cuts in textbooks and supplies at the end of the prior year's budget process would be included in the back of the budget.

The superintendent prepared detailed documents that provided information to the school committees on students, staff, programs, and budget. The school committees also received information about revenue and expenditure assumptions for the upcoming fiscal year. The superintendent and school committees held budget sessions from December to April. The superintendent, along with the chair of the each respective school committee, met with individual town selectmen, town managers, finance personnel, and other community groups prior to the school committee approval of the budget. Each school committee approved its budget and conducted the required open budget hearings.

In addition to newspaper articles, the district provided information on its website throughout the budget process to keep the communities informed on the budget's status and to encourage people to become involved, to contact legislators to express concern about funding for education, and to support the school budgets and regional assessments.

The final budget document provided neither the information on all fund sources, budgetary history and trends, nor the superintendent's narrative. Amherst town officials indicated in an interview with EQA examiners that they had urged the school department to include grant information in the budget document and to develop a matrix indicating DOE accounts.

The Amherst Regional High School Parent Center prepared and disseminated a brochure entitled *Guide to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Budget*. The introduction stated the guide was designed to explain the regional school budget in terms of funding sources and expenditures, and to provide achievement data compared to other districts. The authors of the brochure used information gathered from DOE reports. Where possible, the data presented spanned a five-year period in order to show trends. The Parent Center printed a disclaimer that it provided few

interpretations or conclusions about the data in its role as a source of information and to stimulate involvement.

2. 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.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated that the ongoing analysis of student assessment data influenced budget decisions and allocation of funds, and that the district allocated its resources based primarily on reviews of MCAS math and ELA test scores. In response to needs identified through data analysis, Amherst Regional's budgets included new materials, increased remediation, and provided professional development services to address all students' needs. The district allocated funds to purchase supplemental math materials, additional materials for special needs students, Study Island, and Wilson Reading materials and training. The district instituted a homework club at Wildwood Elementary School staffed by two tutors and volunteers. The district provided funds for the Prep Academy at the high school and hired tutors who provided support to students identified at grade 8 as needing more support in math and ELA.

At the preschool level, the district allocated funds in the local budget to hire a consultant when the grant funding ended. The decline in Title I funds each year caused the district to closely examine the MCAS student achievement data. The district included funding in the local budget for two paraprofessionals at the high school and one teacher at the middle school when Title I funds declined. As the Title I funds declined, the percentage of low-income students increased. Data analysis indicated the need to target the lower elementary grades. The district directed funds to the Crocker Farm Elementary School, where MCAS data analysis indicated the highest need existed.

District administrators as well as school committee members stated that providing equity to students as well as addressing student achievement needs guided the budget process. Since the arrival of the current superintendent, during budget development district administrators and directors reviewed student achievement data and allocated resources based on the needs of those

to be served, although funds for supplies and materials were allocated on a per pupil basis. Interviewees stated the district routinely looked to reallocate staff members based on needs. Since the arrival of the current superintendent, principals had become aware of where resources were allocated. In prior years, resources were allocated to those schools whose principals were most vocal about their needs. Interviewees said that equity now existed in the allocation of resources. The district could move staff members across buildings. Funds for supplies and materials became allocated on a per pupil basis, while other funding was allocated based on student needs. Central office personnel interviewed could not provide EQA examiners information as to how the formulas were derived or if the allocations were weighted.

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

Reductions in Chapter 70 aid in FY 2004 impacted Amherst Regional. A review of the DOE document entitled Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1998 Through FY07 (updated as of 7/10/2007) indicated that Chapter 70 aid to Amherst decreased by 18.6 percent, or $1,090,936, in FY 2004. Chapter 70 aid to Pelham decreased by 20.0 percent, or $28,238. The decrease to the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools amounted to $174,303, or 1.9 percent. Each of the three districts, however, exceeded its net school spending (NSS) requirement of the Education Reform Act in each of the years under examination.

In FY 2005 Chapter 70 aid to Amherst increased by 3.5 percent, or $167,893; in FY 2006 by 13.0 percent, or $641,175; and in FY 2007 by 6.5 percent, or $361,211. Pelham received no additional Chapter 70 funds in FY 2005, receiving $112,953 in both FY 2004 and FY 2005. Total Chapter 70 aid amounted to $118,053 in FY 2006 and $164,607 in FY 2007, or increases of 4.5 percent and 39.4 percent, respectively, each year. Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools received no additional Chapter 70 funds in FY 2005, receiving $9,244,885 in both FY

2004 and FY 2005. Chapter 70 aid increases of $98,900 in FY 2006 and $346,072 in FY 2007 amounted to increases of 1.1 and 3.7 percent, respectively.

The total per pupil expenditure in each of the three districts comprising Amherst Regional exceeded the state average in each of the years under review. Interviewees stated that the towns provided adequate financial support for the schools. Central office administrators told EQA examiners that principals "get what they need."

Interviewees indicated budget cuts during the period under review resulted in inadequate professional development funding. The district did not reimburse teachers who paid out of pocket to attend workshops, seminars, conferences, or engaged in other professional development activities.

Some interviewees expressed concern that at the beginning of the fiscal year information was not received in a timely fashion from the business office, and the building budget was not readily available. The lack of information relative to allotment of funds hindered the ability to order supplies and materials, and teachers did not receive supplies and materials needed before the beginning of classes in September.

Interviewees expressed concern that the district at the end of FY 2006 returned $120,000 in unexpended funds from the elementary school budget to the town of Amherst. Town officials interviewed in Amherst indicated money returned from the school department budget to the town's general fund was not a common occurrence. The uncertainty of health insurance costs curtailed the processing of purchase orders. Once the insurance issue had been resolved, it was too close to the end of the fiscal year to process the purchase orders.

District documents indicated that in FY 2006 the regional school district utilized $600,000 in excess and deficiency (E&D) funds. End of year pupil and financial reports submitted by the regional school district for the years included in the period under review did not indicate the use of funds from the excess and deficiency account in any other fiscal year. Interviewees were unable to provide a definitive answer to EQA examiners as to the reason for the use of these funds in FY 2006.

The FY 2004 reduction in Chapter 70 aid impacted the entire school district. All schools, as well as the central administrative office, were affected by the reduction in state aid. Interviewees indicated the district did not cut programs but eliminated positions, increased class size, and reduced supplies and textbooks. Athletic user fees were charged, ranging from $160 to $190 per season of participation. The district maintained a fee reduction program for students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch as well as families with two or more students participating in the same season. The district charged students $25 per trimester for a parking permit for maintenance of the high school parking lots. The district also charged fees for its summer school and preschool programs.

According to the Department of Housing and Community Development, Amherst suffered financially from having over half its land tax-exempt. A January 2007 finance committee report on overrides presented to the citizens of Amherst stated that the voters consistently paid taxes above the state average for the services provided by the town. The report indicated the Amherst average single family tax bill grew at the rate of six percent per year from 1993 to 2005 whereas the statewide average for the same period grew at about five percent per year. Town officials interviewed by EQA examiners stated that the voters understood the value of education and supported the schools, as they believed that good schools helped property values and led to community wealth.

In FY 2004 the Amherst voters approved an operational override totaling $2 million, but a $2 million operational override attempt in FY 2007 failed. Town officials indicated there was surprise when the latest override failed but indicated there was a vocal segment of the population that believed the town was overly relying on property taxes. The override failure resulted in attempts by town officials to investigate alternate sources of revenue. The town recently completed negotiations and reached agreement with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, whereby UMass will pay the town between $420,000 and $430,000 for fire protection and ambulance services. The arrangement would realize approximately $120,000 in additional revenue for the Town of Amherst. The town finance director was a member of a committee that included members from other cities and towns which supported a hotel and meals tax that would be available for local use and which sought alternate funding sources.

The Amherst town officials stated the tax levy limit was at the allowable levy. According to the Department of Revenue, Amherst's FY 2007 unified tax rate was $15.68. The report listed other available funds as follows: 7/1/2006 Free Cash $2,216,935; FY 2006 Stabilization Fund $1,801,720; and FY 2007 Overlay Reserve $312,089.

EQA examiners did not interview Pelham town officials. The Department of Revenue reported that Pelham's FY 2007 unified tax rate was $18.36. The report listed other available funds as follows: 7/1/2006 Free Cash $61,838; FY 2006 Stabilization Fund $191,766; and FY 2007 Overlay Reserve $16,784. Town officials from Amherst stated in an interview with EQA examiners that the most difficult financial situation of the four member towns comprising the regional school district existed in Pelham; however, there had been no contentiousness as in other towns in the area.

The regional school agreement restricted the unencumbered surplus funds in the excess and deficiency account (E&D) at the end of any fiscal year to 3.5 percent of the budgeted operating and capital costs for the succeeding fiscal year, although state statute restricted the balance to 5.0 percent.

In FY 2006 a regional assessment task force, comprised of members drawn from each member town's select board and finance committee as well as the regional school committee, met to agree on an assessment model that was equitable and easy to explain. Documents submitted by the district included e-mail correspondence between task force members that indicated the education reform formula had been misapplied to the towns for years and had become a detriment to the smaller towns. Correspondents stated that certain school administrators in prior years had creatively, but needlessly and mistakenly, developed a hybrid. Under that hybrid, the administrators first added together each of the minimum contributions mandated by the state for the respective towns, deducted that sum from the total amount needed from assessment, assessed to each town the difference on the per student basis, then added back the minimum contribution of each town to the town's modified per student amount. This resulted in increasingly illogical and widely fluctuating assessments for the individual towns, often with significant disparities between towns regarding what they paid for their students. Representatives from the DOE provided technical assistance to the task force during its discussions. The group examined the

pros and cons of five models in detail and returned to the formula specified in the regional agreement. Each town voted that the regional school district would calculate its assessment to the member towns by using the regional agreement essentially based on the average number of enrolled students from each town. In addition, for FY 2008 only, the towns of Leverett and Shutesbury would contribute an additional $62,000 each to reduce the amount assessed to Amherst in order to help Amherst transition to this assessment model.

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: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of documents submitted and interviews revealed the district implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of its programs, initiatives, and activities. In a document prepared for Amherst town meeting members intended to provide background information, the superintendent stated the district routinely evaluated student and adult work, monitored progress, and assessed program effectiveness.

Student performance data and needs were used as the basis of a cost effectiveness review process in budget development. The district hired in-house autism specialists instead of using the services of outside providers. The district hired an additional administrator in student services and additional educational team leaders.

Interviewees indicated the district conducted several reviews and examined its transportation costs, out-of-district placements, school lunch program, and heat and utility costs. The district reduced its out-of-district placements from 40 to 15 as a result of its review.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The towns of Amherst and Pelham and their respective school districts did not have appropriate written agreements 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 elementary school budget by the community. The regulations of 603 CMR 10.0 do not pertain to a regional school district and so do not apply to the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools.

District and Amherst town officials interviewed indicated the indirect charges levied were reasonable. Town officials in Amherst stated a willingness to develop a written agreement. EQA examiners did not interview Pelham town officials.

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

Each of the three districts comprising Amherst Regional exceeded the its NSS requirement of the Education Reform Act in each of the years under review. A review of the Department of Education document entitled Chapter 70 Trends, FY 98 Through FY07 (updated as of 7/10/2007) indicated that Amherst exceeded the NSS requirement in FY 2004 by 3.3 percent, or $6,682,463; in FY 2005 by 4.0 percent, or $7,317,367; and in FY 2006 by 7.5 percent, or $8,117,960.

Although the required NSS declined each year during the period under review, Pelham exceeded the NSS requirement in FY 2004 by 3.2 percent, or $84,825; in FY 2005 by 0.5 percent, or $151,610; and in FY 2006 by 10.8 percent, or $402,619.

The Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools exceeded the NSS requirement in FY 2004 by 1.4 percent, or $5,069,797; in FY 2005 by 6.0 percent, or $5,515,756; and in FY 2006 by 11.0 percent, or $6,432,208.

Information reported on Schedule 19 of the FY 2006 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report indicated that Amherst, Pelham, and the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools budgeted sufficient funds to exceed the FY 2007 NSS requirement.

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

The three school committees received quarterly budget reports during the period under review, in accordance with policy 500.02, approved in 1985 by the committees. Interviewees stated reports on grant and revolving funds were not regularly provided to the school committees but made available upon request.

The business office did not distribute budget status reports to the principals or directors. Principals were held accountable for their building's budget. According to the central office administrator interviewed by EQA examiners, the district provided training to the principals on the use of the MUNIS financial accounting system. Since they had read-only access to the financial accounting system, principals had the ability to control and track their budgets and manage their funds. Although it was stated to EQA examiners that "MUNIS was king" when a principal's account balance differed from the business office account balance, central business office personnel indicated that discrepancies were resolved when the business office generated a detailed report of transactions charged to the account. Principals submitted budget transfer requests to the director of finance and operations during the year for transfers between their site-based line item accounts. Salary accounts were not considered site-based accounts.

A review of the documents submitted by the district indicated lack of a school committee policy that detailed the process for budget transfer authority. In addition to the receipt of quarterly budget reports, the school committees were kept informed monthly of escalating fuel costs and the resultant increase in utility costs.

The district requested an extension for the submission of the FY 2006 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report and final financial grant forms. During the period under review, the district hired a new director of finance and operations. The district submitted end of year reports in January 2007. The director of finance and operations indicated the district had obtained an extension for the submission of the FY 2007 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report that would

normally be submitted to the DOE before the end of November 2007. The district submitted the FY 2007 financial grant forms within the timeframe designated by the DOE.

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

Amherst Regional maintained financial information on MUNIS. The district and the Town of Amherst accounting systems were connected and both maintained financial information on MUNIS. The MUNIS software used by the district to maintain financial records differed from that used by the Town of Pelham to maintain the town's financial records. Payroll for Pelham employees was maintained and processed by the district business office. According to interviewees in the business office, the incompatible systems led to inefficiencies and errors in processing vendor payments.

Interviewees stated that personnel in the district as well as in the Amherst town hall received adequate training on the use of the MUNIS financial software. Interviewees indicated technical support from MUNIS representatives could be improved; however, interviewees from both the district and the Town of Amherst stated they were satisfied with the ability to produce necessary reports.

The district used a fund-based accounting system that was in compliance with all financial reporting requirements. The district's business office processed all payroll and accounts payable warrants that were reviewed by the director of finance and operations. The district prepared a manual that included but was not limited to procedures for submission of documentation for payroll and for procuring goods and services.

The school committees approved policy 500.04, which outlined purchasing procedures, in 1985. The district used purchase orders to encumber expenditures for goods and/or services. In

accordance with section E of policy 500.04, the business procedures manual provided instruction to staff members outlining the purchase order process from initial submission to final payment. The district utilized the purchase order system not only for expenditures from the local budget but also from grants and revolving accounts. Building principals and program directors authorized and managed all business transactions for their respective buildings and programs and submitted purchase orders to the business office. The director of finance and operations reviewed purchase order requests and verified the availability of funds and correctness of information prior to approving the purchase orders and processing requests. The school committee policy specifically stated in section F that any purchase made without approval would become the responsibility of the person who made the purchase. The director of finance and operations stated that staff members adhered to the purchase order process. If a staff member made an unapproved purchase, the business office sent a "nasty gram." The director of finance and operations stated the business office allowed one infraction.

The business office did not distribute cost center reports to principals and appropriate personnel. They had read-only access to the financial accounting system and were able to transfer funds within their non-salary accounts. They tracked their budgets and directed questions concerning the status of their budget to the director of finance and operations.

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 school committees adopted policy 500.07 in 1985 that encouraged the administration to seek and secure all possible sources of state, federal, and other special funds that would enhance the educational opportunities for the school children. The policy stated the superintendent would stay informed of all possible funds available to the school district under various state and federal programs and the manner in which these funds could best be utilized in the school system. The policy further stated the superintendent would be responsible for seeking out and coordinating

the development of proposals for all specially funded projects and for submitting the proposals to the committees for approval.

The district employed an executive director of program development whose responsibilities included the pursuit of new grants. Central office administrators provided EQA examiners with a list of private, state, and federal grants the district received.

The Amherst Education Foundation, Inc. (AEF), an independent nonprofit education fund, was created in 1994 to stimulate excellence, promote equity, enhance diversity, and mobilize broad community support for the public schools of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury by raising money and funding grant proposals. A "Make It Happen" fundraising campaign was organized by AEF providing community members with two direct school funding opportunities: 1) for core needs at the elementary schools; and 2) for athletics, performing arts, and library booster clubs at both the elementary and regional school levels. Interested parties could make tax-deductible donations either online or by check. The AEF website listed projects or programs that needed funding. Teachers submitted proposals for projects and programs to the foundation. During the period under review, the foundation awarded approximately $20,000 yearly.

Based on a review of district documents, anticipated and continuing private, state, and federal grants received by the Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools in FY 2006 totaled $2,670,048. The FY 2007 district documents indicated the three school districts combined received $2,718,242. The special education 94-142 allocation received by the regional school district increased 16 percent from $743,219 in FY 2004 to $861,034 in FY 2007. The regional school district received Title I funds during the same period, but the amount declined 30 percent from $616,658 in 2004 to $429,521 in 2007.

The Medicaid reimbursement received by the Town of Amherst was directly deposited into the general fund of the town and not available to the school district. The Medicaid reimbursement received by the regional school district averaged approximately $155,000 during the period under review and was included as an expense line in the regional budget and a revenue offset in the assessment computation.

During the review period, the district accepted school choice students in Pelham and at the regional middle and high schools. Amherst did not participate in the school choice program. Department of Education documents indicated a school choice enrollment at the regional schools during the period under review which ranged from a low of 100.4 FTEs to a high of 108.4 FTE. In Pelham school choice enrollment increased from 4.0 FTEs in FY 2004 to 29.0 FTEs in FY 2007. The district maintained revolving accounts for school choice tuition received, which at the regional school district totaled approximately $700,000 yearly during the period under review. In FY 2007 Pelham received $299,834 in school choice tuition. Fewer than 20 FTE students opted out of Pelham and the regional school district yearly. Interviewees stated to EQA examiners that the Town of Pelham was financially strapped. Due to budget reductions Pelham relied upon school choice funds to support the budget and upon parents to purchase supplies. Amherst experienced an increase in students who opted out from 14.2 FTEs in FY 2004 to 24.4 FTEs in FY 2007.

The Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools each received circuit breaker reimbursement which the district deposited and expended without further appropriation.

The business office reviewed and monitored all supplemental expenditures prior to approval. The business office controlled and monitored all grant and revolving funds and the student activity accounts. The district utilized the purchase order system for the expenditure of funds for goods and services from the grants and revolving accounts.

The business office processed all grant and revolving account payroll and vendor payments for inclusion on warrants. The director of finance and operations reviewed all warrants to ensure expenditures were appropriate. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

Measures existed to ensure complete or accurate deposits in revolving accounts and to ensure the expenditures were for the purposes the account intended. Procedures existed for the handling of cash and for preparing and processing the student activity deposits and expenditures. According to school district personnel interviewed, procedures existed which corrected exceptions noted in the auditor’s management letter dated June 30, 2006 for two of the Amherst elementary school student activity fund accounts

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

Central office administrators stated the district required no fewer than three quotes for items $5,000 and above and formally bid goods and services above $25,000 in accordance with the provisions of MGL Chapter 30B. A review of vendor activity by EQA examiners indicated the district followed state procurement laws. The district advertised invitations to bid in local newspapers and, when applicable, in the *Central Register* and the *Goods and Services Bulletin*. The district also participated in cooperative purchasing and procured goods from state contracts.

The director of finance and operations was certified as a school business administrator and attempted to enroll in required courses in order to obtain MCPPO credentials. Classes had reached maximum enrollment and were closed to additional applicants.

Neither the towns nor the regional school district acquired the services of an audit firm through the bidding process and each utilized a different firm. The audit firms used during the period under review had been the firms used prior to the period under review. The Town of Pelham contracted with Thomas J. Scanlon & Associates. The Town of Amherst contracted with Melanson Heath & Company, PC, while the regional school district contracted with the firm of Polombo & Kulas. The regional school district did not formally solicit bids for audit services during the period under review but did investigate the services provided by other audit firms. Analysis of the information submitted resulted in the continued presence of Polombo & Kulas. Little evidence was presented to EQA examiners that provided information as to how long these firms had provided audit services.

School district interviewees indicated they had been hired during the review period and therefore were unable to provide specific information. Town officials in Amherst were also hired during the period under review.

A review of audit documents indicated findings pertaining to the school department were shared and corrected.

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: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not have a written school preventative maintenance schedule, although developing a formal plan was one of the goals of the director of facilities for summer 2008. It contracted each year for boiler, generator, elevator, fire alarm, and fire extinguisher preventative maintenance.

Retirements from the Town of Amherst and the region led to the creation of a shared maintenance position. The district hired a director of facilities and maintenance during the period under review whose salary was shared with the Town of Amherst, which funded 25 percent of the salary. The facilities department maintained the Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools. Responsibilities included but were not limited to HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and carpentry as well as grounds maintenance.

The director of facilities and maintenance also supervised the transportation department, which operated and maintained the district-owned school buses and vans. The district maintenance employees also served as drivers for the school buses and vans. The custodians in the schools reported directly to their respective principals.

The long-range facilities planning study of the Amherst elementary schools completed by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), dated September 2007, cited overcrowding conditions at the elementary schools. The study also indicated air quality concerns

due to mold at Fort River, Wildwood, and Mark's Meadow elementary schools. In interviews, district personnel acknowledged the mold problem and indicated the district addressed the issue and "baked the buildings." Both school district personnel and town officials stated that letters of intent had been submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for the Fort River and Wildwood elementary schools.

After visiting all district buildings, the EQA examiners determined the elementary schools as well as the regional middle and high schools were generally clean and well maintained.

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

Interviewees stated the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools did not have a long-term capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected future capital development and improvement needs, including educational and program facilities of adequate size. No evidence was presented to EQA examiners that a long-term capital plan existed for the Pelham Public Schools.

A long-term capital plan had been developed for the Town of Amherst by the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC), which was composed of two members each from the select board, the school committee, library trustees, and finance committee. The JCPC's focus during FY 2007 was to update the town's five year capital plan for the period FY 2008 to FY 2012 and to develop specific recommendations for FY 2008 for consideration at the 2007 annual town meeting. The group met over the winter and spring to evaluate and prioritize requests from the town, schools, and libraries for major capital expenditures that have an estimated useful life of at least five years and cost at least $5,000.

During the period under review, Moody's investment firm favorably cited JCPC's goal to allocate 10 percent of the tax levy to capital needs, but the town's operating budget needs prevented this. In FY 2006 voters at the annual town meeting approved a capital budget for FY

2007 using 8.2 percent of the tax levy. Due to the failure of the operational override in May 2007, only 7.0 percent of the tax levy was used instead of the 8.2 percent the JCPC voted to support if the operational override passed. Expenditures for capital equipment recommended by JCPC and approved by town meeting in FY 2007 included $75,000 to replace a 1995 school bus; $75,000 to replace three special education school vans; $14,000 for energy catalyst devices to improve school heating system efficiency; $15,000 for school department phone upgrades; $25,000 for school copier/printers; $45,096 to replace/repair school audio-visual equipment; and $159,882 to replace/upgrade school computers and related equipment.

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

Rating: Unsatisfactory

Evidence

Amherst Regional lacked a system to ensure student safety. Interviewees stated the district had struggled with how to present a welcome environment to the community while maintaining safe school buildings. School district administrators in interviews indicated the culture of the community could not bear school site buildings being totally "locked down." Discussions had taken place in which some suggested that locked doors created for students either a false sense of security or a sense of being in a "fortress."

All front doors of the elementary school buildings as well as the middle and high school buildings remained unlocked during the school day. The district posted notices at the main entrance of each school that directed visitors to the main office to sign in. Notices posted at the main entrance directed visitors to the main office to sign in; however, EQA examiners observed visitors who accessed the school building via the main entrance and proceeded to their destinations without stopping at the main office.

The long range facilities planning study of the Amherst elementary schools completed by the New England School Development Council noted security issues at the Fort River and Wildwood schools. Visitors at both schools passed through an unsupervised hallway by the art room, classrooms, and hallways before reaching the main office to sign in. The study also indicated inconsistent monitoring at the preschool entrance at Crocker Farm. Interviewees indicated the district did not utilize video surveillance cameras.

The district provided visitor badges to the EQA examiners. EQA examiners observed staff members without visible identification badges.

The district obtained a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check on all employees, volunteers, and chaperones.

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

Amherst (008)

	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	1,697	-3.7	9,947,074	-2.3	5,657,412	4,890,008	11.0	10,547,420	3.6	12,906,552	7.8	2,359,132	22.4
FY99	1,668	-1.7	9,950,556	0.0	5,132,448	5,337,146	9.1	10,469,594	-0.7	13,589,977	5.3	3,120,383	29.8
FY00	1,627	-2.5	9,769,611	-1.8	4,963,014	5,478,292	2.6	10,441,306	-0.3	14,726,392	8.4	4,285,086	41.0
FY01	1,572	-3.4	9,845,490	0.8	5,348,013	5,753,392	5.0	11,101,405	6.3	15,186,145	3.1	4,084,740	36.8
FY02	1,564	-0.5	10,317,784	4.8	5,582,222	5,854,709	1.8	11,436,931	3.0	16,323,675	7.5	4,886,744	42.7
FY03	1,538	-1.7	10,503,180	1.8	5,819,846	5,854,709	0.0	11,674,555	2.1	16,654,505	2.0	4,979,950	42.7
FY04	1,510	-1.8	10,520,686	0.2	5,756,913	4,763,773	-18.6	10,520,686	-9.9	17,203,149	3.3	6,682,463	63.5
FY05	1,459	-3.4	10,573,432	0.5	5,641,820	4,931,612	3.5	10,573,432	0.5	17,890,799	4.0	7,317,367	69.2
FY06	1,468	0.6	11,114,274	5.1	5,541,487	5,572,787	13.0	11,114,274	5.1	19,232,234	7.5	8,117,960	73.0
FY07	1,459	-0.6	11,497,554	3.4	5,563,556	5,933,998	6.5	11,497,554	3.4	20,017,863	4.1	8,520,309	74.1

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
FY98	5,862	2,882	7,606	49.2	106.0	129.8	37.9
FY99	5,966	3,200	8,147	53.6	105.2	136.6	39.3
FY00	6,005	3,367	9,051	56.1	106.9	150.7	37.2
FY01	6,263	3,660	9,660	58.4	112.8	154.2	37.9
FY02	6,597	3,743	10,437	56.7	110.8	158.2	35.9
FY03	6,829	3,807	10,829	55.7	111.2	158.6	35.2
FY04	6,967	3,155	11,393	45.3	100.0	163.5	27.7
FY05	7,247	3,380	12,262	46.6	100.0	169.2	27.6
FY06	7,571	3,796	13,101	50.1	100.0	173.0	29.0
FY07	7,880	4,067	13,720	51.6	100.0	174.1	29.6

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.

Pelham (230)

	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	145	-0.7	755,225	1.5	676,037	64,150	43.3	740,187	11.7	879,622		139,435	18.8
FY99	143	-1.4	738,061	-2.3	736,966	78,450	22.3	815,416	10.2	901,340	6.3 2.5	85,924	10.5
FY00	145	1.4	749,570	1.6	795,345	100,200	27.7	895,545	9.8	984,805	9.3	89,260	10.0
FY01	129	-11.0	719,339	-4.0	849,209	122,775	22.5	971,984	8.5	1,034,547	5.1	62,563	6.4
FY02	130	0.8	769,695	7.0	916,180	141,191	15.0	1,057,371	8.8	1,075,118		17,747	1.7
FY03	125	-3.8	792,080	2.9	952,205	141,191	0.0	1,093,396	3.4	1,114,464	3.9 3.7	21,068	1.9
FY04	111	-11.2	726,348	-8.3	952,420	112,953	-20.0	1,065,373	-2.6	1,150,198	3.2	84,825	8.0
FY05	113	1.8	766,859	5.6	891,406	112,953	0.0	1,004,359	-5.7	1,155,969	0.5	151,610	15.1
FY06	102	-9.7	709,807	-7.4	760,482	118,053	4.5	878,535	-12.5	1,281,154	10.8	402,619	45.8
FY07	101	-1.0	749,940	5.7	643,809	164,607	39.4	808,416	-8.0	1,316,193	2.7	507,777	62.8

	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	5,208	442	6,066	8.5	98.0	116.5	7.3
FY99	5,161	549	6,303	10.6	110.5	122.1	8.7
FY00	5,169	691	6,792	13.4	119.5	131.4	10.2
FY01	5,576	952	8,020	17.1	135.1	143.8	11.9
FY02	5,921	1,086	8,270	18.3	137.4	139.7	13.1
FY03	6,337	1,130	8,916	17.8	138.0	140.7	12.7
FY04	6,544	1,018	10,362	15.6	146.7	158.4	9.8
FY05	6,786	1,000	10,230	14.7	131.0	150.7	9.8
FY06	6,959	1,157	12,560	16.6	123.8	180.5	9.2
FY07	7,425	1,630	13,032	21.9	107.8	175.5	12.5

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.

Amherst-Pelham (605)

	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	2,024	12.1	11,872,050	13.9	5,214,176	6,281,307	8.5	11,495,483	4.7	14,538,609	7.8	3,043,126	26.5
FY99	1,970	-2.7	11,918,988	0.4	4,903,725	6,807,156	8.4	11,710,881	1.9	15,614,729	7.4	3,903,848	33.3
FY00	2,059	4.5	12,315,324	3.3	4,199,296	8,283,407	21.7	12,482,703	6.6	17,232,843	10.4	4,750,140	38.1
FY01	2,103	2.1	13,223,944	7.4	4,783,198	8,651,432	4.4	13,434,630	7.6	18,459,047	7.1	5,024,417	37.4
FY02	2,189	4.1	14,442,536	9.2	5,023,348	9,419,188	8.9	14,442,536	7.5	19,156,210	3.8	4,713,674	32.6
FY03	2,074	-5.3	14,257,193	-1.3	5,182,187	9,419,188	0.0	14,601,375	1.1	19,332,181	0.9	4,730,806	32.4
FY04	2,050	-1.2	14,527,849	1.9	5,282,964	9,244,885	-1.9	14,527,849	-0.5	19,597,646	1.4	5,069,797	34.9
FY05	2,048	-0.1	15,009,370	3.3	6,003,527	9,244,885	0.0	15,248,412	5.0	20,764,168	6.0	5,515,756	36.2
FY06	1,978	-3.4	15,073,351	0.4	7,265,229	9,343,785	1.1	16,609,014	8.9	23,041,222	11.0	6,432,208	38.7
FY07	1,930	-2.4	15,860,056	5.2	8,312,731	9,689,857	3.7	18,002,588	8.4	24,199,097	5.0	6,196,509	34.4

	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	5,866	3,103	7,183	52.9	96.8	122.5	43.2
FY99	6,050	3,455	7,926	57.1	98.3	131.0	43.6
FY00	5,981	4,023	8,370	67.3	101.4	139.9	48.1
FY01	6,288	4,114	8,777	65.4	101.6	139.6	46.9
FY02	6,598	4,303	8,751	65.2	100.0	132.6	49.2
FY03	6,874	4,542	9,321	66.1	102.4	135.6	48.7
FY04	7,087	4,510	9,560	63.6	100.0	134.9	47.2
FY05	7,329	4,514	10,139	61.6	101.6	138.3	44.5
FY06	7,621	4,724	11,649	62.0	110.2	152.9	40.6
FY07	8,218	5,021	12,538	61.1	113.5	152.6	40.0

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.