



Attleboro Public Schools

Review of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of Low-Income Students

September 2011

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Overview of Differentiated Needs Reviews: Low-Income Students

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of reviews of school districts to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom there is a significant proficiency gap. (“Proficiency gap” is defined as a measure of the shortfall in academic performance by an identifiable population group relative to an appropriate standard held for all.)¹ The reviews focus in turn on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students (defined as students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), and students who are members of racial minorities. Spring 2011 reviews aim to identify district and school factors contributing to improvement in achievement for students living in poverty (low-income students) in selected schools, to provide recommendations for improvement on district and school levels to maintain or accelerate the improvement in student achievement, and to promote the dissemination of promising practices among Massachusetts public schools. This review complies with the requirement of Chapter 15, Section 55A to conduct district reviews and is part of ESE’s program to recognize schools as “distinguished schools” under section 1117(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows states to use Title I funds to reward schools that are narrowing proficiency gaps. Exemplary district and school practices identified through the reviews will be described in a report summarizing this set of reviews.

Selection of Districts

ESE identified 28 Title I schools in 18 districts where the performance of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch has recently improved. These districts had Title I schools which substantially narrowed proficiency gaps for these low-income students over a two-year period: schools where the performance of low-income students improved from 2008 to 2009 and from 2009 to 2010 in English language arts or mathematics both in terms of low-income students’ Composite Performance Index (increased CPI in the same subject both years and a gain over the two years of at least 5 points) and in terms of the percentage of low-income students scoring Proficient or Advanced (at least one percentage point gained in the same subject each year).² As

¹The term “proficiency gap,” originally coined by Jeff Howard, a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, was adopted in 2010 by the Board’s Proficiency Gap Task Force. BESE Proficiency Gap Taskforce. April 2010. *A Roadmap to Closing the Proficiency Gap*.

²To be considered, a school had to be a Title I school and had to have been recognized as a 2010-2011 Commendation School (for narrowing proficiency gaps, high growth, or exiting NCLB accountability status). In addition to having an increase in CPI and proficiency rate in English language arts or mathematics both years, the school could not have experienced a decline in CPI or proficiency rate either year in either subject; had to meet the 2010 AYP participation rate and attendance or graduation rate requirements; and had to have had at least 40 low-income students tested each year from 2007-2008 through 2009-2010.

a result of having these “gap-closer” schools, districts from this group were invited to participate in this set of reviews aimed at identifying district and school practices associated with stronger performance for low-income students.

Key Questions

Two key questions guide the work of the review team.

Key Question 1. To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

1. School Leadership (CSE #2): *Each school takes action to attract, develop, and retain an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a well-designed strategy for accomplishing a clearly defined mission and set of goals, in part by leveraging resources. Each school leadership team a) ensures staff understanding of and commitment to the school’s mission and strategies, b) supports teacher leadership and a collaborative learning culture, c) uses supervision and evaluation practices that assist teacher development, and d) focuses staff time and resources on instructional improvement and student learning through effective management of operations and use of data for improvement planning and management.*

2. Consistent Delivery of an Aligned Curriculum (CSE #3): *Each school’s taught curricula a) are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and to the MCAS performance level descriptions, and b) are also aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course).*

3. Effective Instruction (CSE #4): *Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs. It also ensures that instruction focuses on clear objectives, uses appropriate educational materials, and includes a) a range of strategies, technologies, and supplemental materials aligned with students’ developmental levels and learning needs; b) instructional practices and activities that build a respectful climate and enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning; and c) use of class time that maximizes student learning. Each school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.*

4. Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time (CSE #8): *Each school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the district ensures that each school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.*

5. Social and Emotional Support (CSE #9): *Each school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.*³ *Students' needs are met in part through a) the provision of coordinated student support services and universal breakfast (if eligible); b) the implementation of a systems approach to establishing a productive social culture that minimizes problem behavior for all students; and c) the use of consistent schoolwide attendance and discipline practices and effective classroom management techniques that enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own behavior and learning.*

Key Question 2. How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews explore six areas: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management**. The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that are most likely to be contributing to positive results, as well as those that may be impeding rapid improvement. Reviews are evidence-based and data-driven. A four-to-six-member review team, usually six-member, previews selected documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a four-day site visit in the district, spending about two to three days in the central office and one to two days conducting school visits. The team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the six areas listed above.

³ The behavioral health and public schools framework was developed by the Task Force on Behavioral Health and Public Schools pursuant to c. 321, s. 19, of the Massachusetts Acts of 2008.

Attleboro Public Schools

The site visit to the Attleboro Public Schools was conducted from May 3-6, 2011. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: Attleboro High (9-12), Cyril K. Brennan Middle (5-8), Wamsutta Middle (5-8), Hyman-Fine Elementary (K-4), A. Irvin Studley Elementary (K-4), and Thomas E. Willett Elementary (K-5). The Brennan Middle (Brennan) was identified as a “gap-closer” for students from low-income families, as described above. Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

District Profile⁴

Located in Bristol County, Attleboro is a city of approximately 46,000 residents governed by a mayor and nine city councilors. The school committee consists of nine members, six elected by ward and three at large. All members are elected every two years. According to the district website, the members elect the chair each January. Attleboro’s 2010-2011 enrollment was 5,855 students among its nine schools: one high school (9-12), three middle schools (5-8), and five elementary schools (K-4). The district also maintains an Early Learning Center for pre-kindergarten students at the Thacher School.

As shown by Table 1 below, white students, constituting 76.6 percent of students in 2010-2011, are the largest racial/ethnic group in Attleboro with Hispanic students, constituting 10.9 percent, the second-largest group. According to the table, 30.8 percent of Attleboro students were from low-income families: 24 percent of Attleboro students qualified for free lunch, and 6.8 percent qualified for reduced-price lunch.

⁴ Data derived from ESE’s website, ESE’s Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

Table 1: 2010-11 Attleboro Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	224	3.8	First Language not English	776	13.3
Asian	277	4.7	Limited English Proficient	278	4.7
Hispanic or Latino	639	10.9	Low-income	1,804	30.8
Native American	16	0.3	Special Education	967	16.4
White	4,485	76.6	Free Lunch	1,403	24.0
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	6	0.1	Reduced-price lunch	401	6.8
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	208	3.6	Total enrollment	5,855	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

According to Table 2 below, the 2011 percentage enrollment of students from low-income families at Brennan of 35.2 percent was third highest of the nine district schools, and exceeded both the district percentage enrollment of 30.8 percent and the state percentage enrollment of 34.2 percent.

Table 2: Comparison of State, District, and All District Schools by Selected Populations: 2010-2011 (in Percentages except for Total Enrollment)

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	955,563	34.2	29.1	5.1	7.1	17.0
Attleboro	5,855	30.8	24.0	6.8	4.7	16.4
Attleboro HS	1,721	32.4	24.2	8.1	1.1	14.0
Brennan MS	586	35.2	26.6	8.5	4.8	16.9
Coelho MS	643	23.5	15.6	7.9	2.3	16.2
Wamsutta MS	559	37.2	28.8	8.4	8.8	15.6
Hill-Roberts Elem.	497	23.5	17.5	6.0	5.6	13.3
Hyman-Fine Elem.	413	32.4	28.3	4.1	6.3	9.2
Studley Elem.	410	37.8	33.4	4.4	16.3	14.1
Thacher Elem.	467	32.1	27.0	5.1	5.4	22.3
Willett Elem.	390	27.7	22.1	5.6	5.4	17.2

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

The superintendent has been in the position since 2006. The leadership team consists of the director of teaching and learning excellence, the special education director, the business manager, the data and accountability coordinator, the coordinator for Title I and K-12 support, and the coordinator for English language learners (ELL) and McKinney-Vento. This position was added in 2010. During the review team's visit, the director of teaching and learning excellence was on leave.

District enrollment is relatively stable. The school district also serves a small number of students who reside in a Department of Social Services facility (nine students in 2010-2011). Attleboro provides numerous substantially separate and integrated special education programs for students under special educational management, including those with significant medical needs. Attleboro High School also provides an evening diploma program for students who have been unsuccessful in meeting the requirements of the traditional day school program. Initiated in 2009-2010, this program has helped to reduce the dropout rate.

The local appropriation to the Attleboro Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$57,446,444, down \$2,345,537 (3.92 percent) from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$59,791,981. School-related expenditures by the city were estimated at \$10,087,814 for fiscal year 2011, up slightly (\$83,960 or 0.84 percent) from the estimate for fiscal 2010 of \$10,003,854. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$58,250,801), expenditures by the city (\$9,790,740), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$9,753,333), was \$77,794,874. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 was \$58,914,865.

Student Performance⁵

As shown in Table 3 below, Attleboro surpassed state proficiency rates in ELA in grades 3, 4, and 5 and for all grades tested in 2010. Attleboro equaled the state proficiency rate in ELA in grade 6 and was one point below in grade 10, three points below in grade 8, and five points below in grade 7. Student growth as measured by median SGP increased for all grades tested from 46 in 2008 to 52 in 2010. The strong median SGP of 69 in grade 4 is noteworthy.

As shown in Table 4 below, in 2010, Attleboro surpassed the state proficiency rates in mathematics in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, while the Attleboro proficiency rate in grade 7 was five percentage points below the state rate.

Student growth in mathematics as measured by median SGP for the district matched or exceeded student growth statewide in all three years, increasing from a median SGP of 53 in 2009 to 60 in 2010. Two grades showed meaningful increases in growth of 10 or more points from 2009 to 2010: grade 6 increased from 45 in 2009 to 68.5 in 2010; and grade 7 from 45 to 57.5.

⁵ Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

**Table 3: 2008-2010 Attleboro Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
ELA**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	53	NA*	59	NA*	68	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	44	47.0	57	60.0	65	69.0
Grade 4—State	49	48.0	53	50.0	54	50.0
Grade 5—District	54	45.0	62	48.0	67	52.0
Grade 5—State	61	51.0	63	50.0	63	50.0
Grade 6—District	66	46.0	59	44.0	69	46.0
Grade 6—State	67	50.0	66	50.0	69	50.0
Grade 7— District	64	35.0	62	37.0	67	48.0
Grade 7— State	69	50.0	70	50.0	72	50.0
Grade 8— District	76	59.0	81	54.0	75	51.0
Grade 8— State	75	49.0	78	50.0	78	50.0
Grade 10— District	72	NA*	77	43.0	77	48.0
Grade 10— State	74	NA*	81	50.0	78	50.0
All Grades— District	61	46.0	65	46.0	69	52.0
All Grades—State	64	50.0	67	50.0	68	50.0

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table 4: 2008-2010 Attleboro Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	60	NA*	60	NA*	73	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	45	55.0	55	59.0	54	63.0
Grade 4—State	49	49.0	48	50.0	48	49.0
Grade 5—District	49	59.0	49	50.0	62	55.0
Grade 5—State	52	51.0	54	50.0	55	50.0
Grade 6—District	53	43.0	48	45.0	65	68.5
Grade 6—State	56	50.0	57	50.0	59	50.0
Grade 7— District	44	52.0	48	45.0	48	57.5
Grade 7— State	47	50.0	49	50.0	53	50.0
Grade 8— District	50	61.0	49	57.0	55	62.0
Grade 8— State	49	51.0	48	50.0	51	51.0
Grade 10— District	66	NA*	73	46.0	76	53.5
Grade 10— State	72	NA*	75	50.0	75	50.0
All Grades— District	52	53.0	55	50.0	61	60.0
All Grades—State	55	50.0	55	50.0	59	50.0

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

According to Tables 5 and 6 below, district students from low-income families have shown steadily improving performance. Table 5 shows that from 2008 to 2010, their CPI improved from 78.7 to 80.6 to 83.2 in ELA (a gain of 4.5 points), and Table 6 shows that their CPI improved from 68.7 to 70.0 to 74.8 in mathematics (a 6.1 point gain). These gains were greater than the gains of 3.3 points in ELA and 4.0 points in math made statewide by students from low-income families. At Brennan, in turn, the “gap-closer” school, students from low-income families showed greater improvement in CPIs in both subjects than all district students from low-income families. As Table 5 shows, the CPI for Brennan students from low-income families increased

from 82.9 in 2008 to 86.6 in 2009 to 88.8 in 2010 in ELA (a gain of 5.9 points), and from 66.7 in 2008 to 69.7 in 2009 to 74.3 in 2010 in mathematics (a 7.6 point gain). In 2010, the CPI in ELA for Brennan students from low-income families was more than 5 points higher than the CPI for this subgroup districtwide, which in turn was 6.7 points higher than the statewide subgroup CPI; the CPI in mathematics for Brennan students from this subgroup was slightly lower (0.5 points) than the CPI for the district subgroup, which exceeded the statewide subgroup's CPI by 7.7 points.

Median student growth percentiles were mostly in the moderate range for state, district and school in 2008, 2009, and 2010. In 2010, it is notable that median SGPs were above the moderate range (at 60 or above) for all students in the district and both all students and low-income students at Brennan in mathematics. In both ELA and math, median SGPs in 2010 were higher for the school than for the district and higher for the district than for the state.

**Table 5: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in
Brennan M.S., Attleboro, and State,
Compared to All Students
ELA**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP
State Low-Income Students	41	73.2	45.0	45	75.5	45.0	47	76.5	46.0
State All Students	64	85.2	50.0	67	86.5	50.0	68	86.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	47	78.7	45.5	50	80.6	45.0	55	83.2	50.0
District All Students	61	85.2	46.0	65	87.4	46.0	69	89.3	52.0
Brennan M.S. Low-Income Students	54	82.9	47.5	60	86.6	61.0	66	88.8	53.0
Brennan M.S. All Students	68	88.9	47.0	74	92	56.0	76	92.8	55.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table 6: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in
Brennan M.S., Attleboro, and State,
Compared to All Students
Mathematics**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
State Low-Income Students	33	63.1	45.0	33	64.5	44.0	37	67.1	47.0
State All Students	55	77.7	50.0	55	78.5	50.0	59	79.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	36	68.7	49.0	36	70.0	46.0	45	74.8	59.0
District All Students	52	77.6	53.0	55	79.3	50.0	61	83.5	60.0
Brennan M.S. Low-Income Students	36	66.7	47.5	37	69.7	50.0	48	74.3	63.0
Brennan All Students	49	74.4	50.0	51	77.0	54.0	57	81.3	63.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

As shown by Tables 7 and 8 below, the proficiency rate for Brennan students from low-income families surpassed both district and state proficiency rates for students from low-income families in both ELA and mathematics in each grade subject to MCAS test assessment in 2010. And except in grades 7 and 10 for mathematics, district students from low-income families had a higher proficiency rate in 2010 in every tested grade than the statewide subgroup.

**Table 7: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Brennan M.S., Attleboro, and State
ELA**

Grade	Brennan M.S.	Attleboro	State
3	---	50% (140)	43%
4	---	49% (145)	31%
5	55% (52)	52% (145)	40%
6	69% (64)	52% (165)	48%
7	71% (52)	54% (157)	52%
8	69% (52)	65% (154)	59%
10	---	62% (128)	59%
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.</p> <p>*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.</p> <p>**Data not available.</p> <p>--- School does not include this grade.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

**Table 8: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Brennan M.S., Attleboro, and State
Mathematics**

Grade	Brennan M.S.	Attleboro	State
3	---	54% (140)	45%
4	---	37% (145)	28%
5	48% (52)	47% (146)	33%
6	55% (64)	50% (165)	37%
7	33% (52)	32% (156)	32%
8	51% (52)	35% (153)	30%
10	---	56% (128)	57%
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.</p> <p>*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.</p> <p>**Data not available.</p> <p>--- School does not include this grade.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

Attendance, graduation, and dropout rates in Attleboro compared favorably with the state rates in 2009-2010: According to ESE data, Attleboro had a 2009-2010 attendance rate of 94.7 percent compared with the state rate of 94.6 percent; a graduation rate of 82.2 percent compared with the state rate of 82.1 percent; and a grade 9-12 dropout rate of 2.5 percent compared to the state rate of 2.9 percent. Attleboro graduation and dropout rates have improved substantially: The four-year cohort graduation rate has increased from 74.8 percent in 2007 to 82.2 percent in 2010, and the grade 9-12 dropout rate has declined from 4.4 percent in 2007 (and 5.0 percent in 2009) to 2.5 percent in 2010.

According to ESE data, the graduation and dropout rates for Attleboro low income students have also improved substantially: The four-year cohort graduation rate for Attleboro students from low-income families increased from 52.7 percent in 2007 to 72.1 percent in 2010, and the dropout rate for the cohorts in those years (the percentage of the group that had dropped out within the four years after entering 9th grade) decreased from 24.8 percent in 2007 to 14.5 percent in 2010.

Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

school leadership;

curriculum;

instruction;

tiered instruction and adequate learning time; and

social/emotional support

School leadership

The Brennan principal and leadership team have built a well-developed model of distributive leadership and a collaborative school culture.

The current Brennan principal assumed the role at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year when the successor to a long-term principal left after serving only a year. Teachers and union leaders described the current principal as a much-needed steadying influence following a turbulent period, a compassionate listener, and a strong leader. District leaders described the principal as calm, supportive and a problem-solver.

The principal told the review team that a dedicated school leadership team effectively communicates the school's mission to the staff. The school leadership team consists of the principal, assistant principal, two classroom teachers, an inclusion specialist, a Title I teacher, and the literacy coach. This distributive leadership model has produced a collegial and collaborative culture. According to the principal and leadership team members, the leadership team increases teachers' understanding of strategies to enhance student learning. The school's coaches stated that teachers are validated in their work, and there is constant communication within and across grade level teams. When asked how teachers collaborated in their planning, the principal answered that while they were once tentative and apprehensive about using data, they now rely upon it to help "move all the kids." A central office administrator commented that Brennan teachers are "in it together and without complaint."

The superintendent, teachers' union leadership, and classroom teachers said that the principal is making good use of the district's new teacher evaluation instrument as a tool for generating productive conversations about teaching and learning with and among the staff. Teachers told the review team that the principal's leadership style is characterized by communicating rather than directing. The principal described her style as "quiet but observant." One member of the Brennan support staff stated that a focus on student needs, clear communication, and collaboration among the staff were key factors in improving student performance at Brennan.

The principal provides teachers with opportunities for shared leadership on such committees as the wellness and disciplinary committees. She described the school's coaches as "go-to people,"

checks with them daily, and expressed confidence in their ability to interact constructively with the staff.

According to the principal, the school's 2010-2011 improvement plan was developed through a participatory process including members of the leadership team and school council. The plan makes effective use of student achievement data to drive student achievement goals, provides a focus for professional learning communities, and helps to determine school-based professional development.

The school leadership structure and collaborative culture have allowed the staff to maintain a focus on student needs and conditions for growth despite the turnover in principals since 2008. All of the stakeholders interviewed by reviewers clearly communicated a sense of being part of a team and a can-do attitude. This professional confidence, combined with the principal's leadership style and skills, contributes to the school's ability to meet the academic needs of all students, including students from low-income families.

Curriculum

Brennan has implemented a consistent core academic program based on the state frameworks. Brennan leaders, coaches, and teachers continuously improve the taught curriculum through a collaborative data-driven improvement process.

Brennan uses the district core academic program in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. The mathematics program consists of *Everyday Math* in grades 5 and 6, *Prentice Hall Math Course 3* supplemented by the *Connected Math* program in grade 7, and the *Connected Math* program in grade 8. A first-year algebra course is offered in grade 8. In ELA, the district uses the research-based elementary reading instruction program, *Reading Street*, in grades 5 and 6. This program is designed to differentiate instruction, includes specific instruction for limited English proficient students, and facilitates progress monitoring. The district has developed a literacy program consisting of a collection of units based on the state ELA framework in grade 7 and grade 8. The middle school ELA program includes a writer's workshop program, *Empowering Writers*, and the *Accelerated Reader Program*. The district has developed a program for middle school social studies, and the middle school science program is based on the Prentice Hall *Science Explorer* program.

Currently, the district's documented curriculum for the four core subjects is incomplete, and the format is not common. The mathematics curriculum binders include pacing guides and curriculum maps. The *Reading Street* program pacing guide serves as the ELA curriculum in grades 5 and 6. The grades 7 and 8 ELA curriculum consists of lesson plans developed in units, with standards, assessment suggestions, and resources. The social studies curriculum is available online. Not all curricular information is available online, and not all teachers have online access to curricular information. The November 2010 District/Superintendent Goals acknowledged the need for additional curriculum documentation, in goal 10 under instruction and learning: "Develop standards-based pre-k-12 curriculum documents in all subject areas." The two related

sub-goals state: “Begin to review and revise the district ELA and math curriculum documents to align with the Common Core Curriculum,” and “Develop a plan to review and revise social studies and science curriculum documents to align with the Common Core Curriculum.”

In interviews, the superintendent, principal, coaches, and teachers told the review team that the coaches and district academic coordinators have a significant role in ensuring that the taught curriculum is aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improving. All kindergarten through grade 8 teachers use the same programs and teach the same content in a given subject area. The district has also developed common assessments that are administered at the same time throughout the district. Coaches and teachers identify weaknesses through ongoing analysis of student performance results enabling teachers to quickly re-teach, reinforce, or enrich the taught curriculum.

The district ELA and mathematics coordinators and the coaches at each school collaborate with the academic coordinators at the high school to help articulate the taught curriculum from grade to grade. For example, the district kindergarten through grade 8 mathematics coordinator, the Brennan mathematics coach, and the grade 9 through grade 12 mathematics coordinator meet regularly to revise the sequence and content of the taught curriculum and provide continuity. Elementary school and Brennan coaches meet regularly to discuss and revise the taught curriculum and inform teachers of articulation problems. The district kindergarten through grade 8 coordinators assist the coaches in this work. Mathematics and ELA teachers in grades 8 and 9 meet twice each year to improve articulation.

The review team determined that Brennan teachers deliver a highly sequential core curriculum based on the state frameworks. As in the other district schools, not all curricular areas are fully documented. Nevertheless, by articulating and coordinating the taught curriculum in collaboration with their district colleagues, the ELA and mathematics coaches at Brennan support Brennan teachers in delivering a high quality curriculum to all students.

Instruction

Teaching at Brennan can be largely characterized by engaging, well-paced, tiered lessons.

The teachers at Brennan plan lessons with a protocol consisting of seven components: warm up activity, framing of the lesson, posting/discussion of the objectives (linked to the standards), an agenda, the big idea/purpose, learning experiences (instruction), and closure (to help students internalize the learning). Many of these components were evident to the review team in classroom observations. The district offers continuous professional development to help teachers plan more effective lessons.

The review team recorded its observations of 24 classes at Brennan using the ESE instructional inventory record, which includes 14 characteristics of effective instruction and learning grouped under two categories: organization of the classroom and effective design and delivery. Observers rated the prevalence of these characteristics on a three-point scale indicating solid evidence, partial evidence, and no evidence. The observations were of 20 to 25 minutes duration.

In the area of classroom climate, the review team noted that there was solid evidence of respectful teacher-student interaction in nearly all of the observed classes. Students and teachers were friendly and helpful, and students raised their hands before speaking, and transitioned well between activities. In one grade 6 classroom, students applauded a correct answer. One reviewer noted that the grade 7 classroom climate was “very respectful, yet relaxed.” This positive climate was also observed in classrooms with more than one adult, where interactions were seamless and student-focused.

Nearly all teachers in the school posted learning objectives, used graphic organizers, and supplemented their instruction where appropriate to provide opportunities for students of different proficiency levels to participate. The review team found that classroom activities were well-planned and learning time was maximized in 96 percent of the classes observed. Teachers delivered purposeful and well-paced lessons, using activators and a summary, as suggested by the lesson protocol, while students followed clear routines and transitioned smoothly. Objectives were written in student-friendly language. For example, in a grade 5 science lesson, the teacher posted the questions, “Why is soil important? How is the soil in the ground arranged?”

In 96 percent of the classes observed, teachers linked academic concepts to prior knowledge and experience. For example, in one observed class the teacher asked students when they had studied equivalent fractions, and what strategies they had learned from number trees. In another example, the teacher asked students to link forest fires with tsunamis. One teacher complimented a student on using the scientific term, chemical analysis, discussed on the previous day in a question. Activators helped students to make connections. For example, a grade 7 ELA teacher asked students to give examples of the importance of music as an influence on their culture, then played a blues selection while students wrote a short essay on how music influenced them.

The review team found evidence that supplemental materials were solidly aligned with student developmental and language levels in 83 percent of the classes observed. The *Reading Street* “little readers” which are leveled, but have the same covers, encompass a wide range of student abilities. Observers also saw “word walls” with differentiated vocabulary in most classrooms, posters with contextual clues and cues, and a rich variety of learning aids such as charts, and pictures.

Presentation of content was within the students’ English proficiency and developmental level in nearly all of classes observed. In one class, the presentation was scaffolded for struggling learners, and a student used a study guide that he and the teacher had created so that he could work independently. In another classroom, a student drew cartoons to further his understanding and recall of onomatopoeia. When learning needed to be reinforced, scheduled time was provided throughout the week which enabled teachers to re-teach lessons to small groups of students using different materials. During these class periods, referred to as “powerful learning communities” or “Brennan Time,” students were able to re-group to work on specific skills and interest areas.

Observers looked for a full range of instructional methods, such as direct instruction, facilitating, and modeling, and found these solidly evident in 46 percent of classes observed, and partially

evident within a narrower range in 42 percent of the classes observed. The review team's visit occurred during the week before the administration of MCAS mathematics tests and the principal stated that many teachers were conducting whole-class review sessions. However, the review team found evidence of group work in projects on display, group agendas posted on boards, and descriptions of classroom groupings by support staff. In three observed classrooms, students assisted other students on group projects.

The review team found that higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation were solidly evident in 58 percent of the classes observed, and partially evident in 38 percent. In one example, a teacher asked her students to predict what the soil would look like after they added water. In another, a mathematics teacher asked the students to explain why they could not use a cross multiplier, and provided sufficient wait-time for all students to think about the answer. Student engagement was high overall and excellent behavior was observed throughout the school.

There was solid evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning in 63 percent of the classes observed, and partial evidence in 29 percent. Teachers posed questions that pushed students to extend their thinking, such as "Is this our answer?" and "What does this answer tell us?" One observer noted that there were high expectations for student explanations of points of view in a social studies class. In a grade 6 MCAS mathematics review class, students were expected to give reasons to support their answers.

The review team found solid evidence that students were inquiring, exploring or problem solving together, in pairs, or in small groups in nearly half of classes observed, and partial evidence in 30 percent of the classes, usually where there was a blend of whole class instruction and small group work.

Observers found solid evidence of opportunities for students to apply new knowledge in 63 percent of classes observed, and partial evidence in 25 percent. In one ELA class, students who had been working on cause and effect were applying this new concept to many parts of their current reading lesson. They also acted out examples of real-life cause and effect scenarios for their classmates. In a grade 7 ELA class, the teacher asked students to listen to each other using new vocabulary words and determine whether the words were used correctly.

There was solid evidence of on-the-spot checking for understanding in 74 percent of classes observed, and partial evidence in 26 percent. This included students checking in with each other, and teachers using checks such as thumbs up or down, calling on students individually, asking students to re-state concepts in their own words, and using on-the-spot quizzes. In more than one mathematics class observed by the review team, the teacher checked all students' work after each problem was attempted.

The review team found effective instructional practices embedded in most of the lessons observed at Brennan. Teachers were meeting the needs of students from all subgroups with engaging, well-paced, tiered lessons. Effective teaching practices, combined with the use of student performance data to plan instruction described later in this report, have led to

continuously improving student achievement at Brennan, particularly for students from low-income families.

The coaches at Brennan play a significant role by collaborating with teachers in developing and adapting the taught curriculum, modeling instruction to meet the needs of all students, and providing teachers with embedded professional development to improve teaching and learning.

Coaches perform similar functions in all district elementary and middle schools. According to interviews with district leaders, coaches, and teachers, coaches have a significant role in improving curriculum and instructional practice at Brennan and other district schools, and have played a part in bringing about the improvements in student performance. The Brennan principal told the review team that the mathematics and ELA coaches are the instructional leaders in the school, and the “go-to people” for curriculum and instruction. The coaches increase the school’s capacity to respond quickly and effectively to the implications of student assessment results and to implement district initiatives. Coaches help teachers use student performance data to revise and adapt the taught curriculum and introduce new instructional methods through targeted professional development, daily interactions, and demonstration lessons.

In interviews school leaders, coaches, and teachers stated that the Brennan principal expects all staff, including Title I, ELL, and special education teachers, to work collaboratively with the coaches. The coaches help to keep all classrooms to the same standards. For example, coaches work with teachers to ensure that special education students are held to grade level standards, including students in substantially separate programs. To enhance collaboration, the Brennan principal provides a one-hour weekly meeting time for each grade-level team in addition to the teachers’ personal preparation time.

Coaches and principals receive MCAS test results from the central office and collaborate with teachers to analyze the data by subgroup. Following this analysis, the coaches assist the teachers in adapting taught curriculum or their instruction to meet students’ identified needs. When the adaptations include a new instructional method, coaches often model it, or co-teach with teachers attempting to implement it. The Brennan coaches develop common assessments with the district coordinators and the teachers. These assessments are administered at district-determined intervals during the school year, and the results are reviewed by the teachers, coaches, district academic coordinators, and principals.

Coaches design and present after-school professional development sessions for groups of teachers based on patterns and trends observed in classroom visits. All Brennan Title I, ELL, and special education teachers, as well as the instructional learning assistants, participate in the school’s professional development program. The district coordinators provide training for the coaches, and coaches also attend trainings offered by affiliated external providers, such as the Bay State Reading Institutes.

The Brennan coaches work with teachers during scheduled meetings and formal and informal classroom visits. As the Brennan principal stated, “Coaches model lessons, and know when to get into a class.” Working with the coaches allows teachers to target each student’s needs, based on analysis of data, while improving and enhancing their own instructional practice. In the course of these daily interactions, teachers and coaches flexibly adapt the taught curriculum, instruction, and assessments, often adding lessons on a topic when patterns of gaps or weaknesses are found. In one example of such flexibility, the coaches and teachers, as well as the coordinators, reviewed some of their common assessments and found redundancies. According to the coaches, they changed the assessments immediately instead of waiting until the following year because they wanted to avoid wasting time with unnecessary testing. This flexibility in responding to students’ needs enables the school to increase the rate of students’ improvement.

Because they are an integral part of daily instruction, coaches are critical to meeting the needs of teachers and students in a timely manner. By supporting teachers in using data to revise curriculum and adapt instruction, by modeling lessons, and by providing professional development, the mathematics and ELA coaches at Brennan have contributed to improving the achievement of all students, including those from low-income families.

Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

Brennan has created a flexible, tiered-instructional model which provides adequate time for targeted interventions. In support of the model, the school has developed a weekly schedule to provide students with appropriately leveled instruction.

Brennan provides 90 minute (grade 5 and grade 6) or 60 minute (grade 7 and grade 8) core instruction blocks. These blocks are referred to as learning experiences. Although the 5th and 6th grade schedule varies slightly from the 7th and 8th grade schedule, both provide additional structured intervention time during the school day. This time is referred to as “powerful learning communities” (“PLC’s”), or “Brennan time.”

In this model, in addition to core instructional time all students have opportunities to stretch their learning, work with supportive adults or peers, and receive targeted instruction provided by learning interventionists. PLC’s are scheduled weekly in grade 5 and grade 6 and four times weekly in grade 7 and grade 8. During PLC’s, students break into small inter-classroom groups, using available classroom and open spaces. Students also use this time to work with “buddies” from other classes or programs, or to complete special projects. During PLC time, the review team observed teachers preparing students for a quiz, re-teaching recent lessons, providing time for peer editing, and allowing students to begin homework or complete projects with their assistance. PLC’s also support the superintendent’s goal of providing students from the lowest to the highest levels appropriate opportunities to grow.

Targeted Title I services are delivered through push-in and pull-out models by two teachers and two instructional learning assistants. The June 2010 Title I program evaluation summary stated that at Brennan “the support model varied depending on the context of the learning taking place

and the needs of the students.” For example, interviewees told the review team that when an analysis of assessment data identified a need for extra ELA support for grade 5 and grade 7 students, a Title I teacher and an instructional learning assistant were assigned to work with them during their ELA and social studies classes in order to improve their literacy skills. The principal said that in grade 5 and grade 6 Title I teachers provided pull-out support during the 90 minute “learning experiences” block in rooms adjacent to the classrooms. The school also provides after-school tutoring and summer programs through Title I and other grant funding. Approximately 100 students participated in after-school tutoring in 2010-2011. Limited English proficient students may also participate in a summer tutorial program staffed by ELL or category trained teachers. The Title I coordinator stated that summer instruction is provided by Attleboro staff familiar with the needs of students.

The principal told the review team that inclusion specialists provide special education services mainly within regular education classrooms. Instructional learning assistants and special educators help regular education teachers differentiate instruction and provide additional supervision of small groups and activity centers. Students in substantially separate programs participate in regular education classes when appropriate.

The design and structure of the daily schedule and the aligning of support staff with student needs have resulted in a highly flexible instructional model that is efficient and responsive to all learners. This multidimensional model has enabled the school to provide tiered instruction and adequate learning time to increase the proficiency of low-income students.

Social and Emotional Support

Brennan has a whole-child approach to supporting the successful learner and addressing impediments to student learning.

The Brennan school improvement plan contains a goal to increase support for at-risk students, stating that “At risk students will improve in their abilities to reach their social, emotional and academic goals.” Brennan teachers and the instructional leadership team have developed a collaborative model to identify and address impediments to student learning. Continuous monitoring of data on student performance and behavior enables the instructional leadership team to anticipate problems, quickly identify appropriate service providers, schedule the delivery of an array of services, and monitor their effectiveness.

The principal and instructional leadership team member described a procedure for early identification of the emerging social, emotional, and health needs of at-risk students. In combination with the routine monitoring of performance data to identify potential academic issues, the adjustment counselor, nurse, interns, and assistant principal meet each Monday to discuss students’ social, emotional, and health needs. Additional monthly meetings take place with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families as well as with staff from the juvenile courts.

The ELL coordinator is also responsible for meeting the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, and participates in the monitoring of Brennan students who are homeless. The ELL coordinator told the review team that site visits are made to shelters, and student attendance is carefully monitored.

Brennan has a student support team consisting of teachers and support staff. The team collects information about the success of student accommodations and interventions, and maintains records which follow students as they advance through the grades. The school also has a 504 plan coordinator to insure that appropriate services are provided to eligible students.

The support structures for students are flexible and help to extend the reach of support staff. The superintendent and the principal, for example, explained how two Title I teachers and two instructional learning assistants brought “added value” because they provided support within and outside of the classroom, enabling students to shift as needed from one group to the other. The superintendent and other staff frequently referred to the instructional learning assistants as interventionists, consistent with their active role with students. One ELL teacher also provides continuing services within the classroom for some students exiting ELL programs.

Inclusion specialists working within the classrooms deliver services to students under special educational management and other students with similar skill needs. The daily schedule supports flexible provision of services with both core learning time and PLC’s.

The school also houses three district substantially separate special education programs: the Essential Skills Program for students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 5-8; the Multi Dimensional Adaptive Program for students with multiple disabilities or medical needs in grade 5 through grade 8; and two sections of the Ability for Behavioral and Learning Excellence program_for students with significant emotional disabilities in grades 5-8. These programs provide opportunities for beneficial integration into general education classrooms. Many students from the substantially separate and general education programs interact during PLC periods.

In interviews with the review team, the Brennan principal described actions to ensure the emotional and physical safety of all of students. For example, students in the substantially separate programs are paired with or become best buddies with other Brennan students. The principal said that she used the ESE indicators of future school dropout risk to intervene with identified students, and meets monthly with them to monitor their progress, provide support, and ensure that they are receiving requisite services.

The Brennan principal is strongly committed to engaging parents to support the achievement of their children. The school improvement plan contains three goals related to parent engagement including attendance at family math and literacy nights; improving homework practices; and increasing home-school communication of positive behaviors. There are nine checkpoints for assessing progress toward the goals. When necessary, the principal seeks external support to hold parents accountable. She told the review team that approximately 20 students are currently identified as children in need of services (CHINS). In two instances, the school filed a CHINS petition on a child when the bullying of another child continued despite warnings.

Interviewees described a number of school partnerships with community agencies and groups. For example, the Elks and Lions Clubs arrange and underwrite physical and health services, the community counseling agency of Bristol County provides a range of family and student support services, and through long-standing partnership, a nearby private high school provides Spanish tutoring for Brennan students through the Amigos program. The ELL coordinator said that the local literacy center engages the families of English language learners, informs them of school support programs, and assists them in participating.

According to the assistant principal, Brennan is committed to decreasing the amount of time that students are out of school for rule violations. The downward trend in out-of-school suspension is a result of the social and emotional support, the careful monitoring of at-risk students by the principal and staff, and the timely provision of support within the classrooms. Out-of-school suspensions decreased from 13.3 percent in 2008 to 7.9 percent in 2010; in-school suspensions increased during the same interval from 4.9 percent to 8.8 percent.

Brennan has a whole-child approach to supporting the successful learner and addressing impediments to student learning. The school clearly focuses on students' academic, social, and emotional needs and has developed systems, structures, and procedures to respond to these needs quickly. This approach has helped Brennan students from low-income families make consistent gains in achieving proficiency and narrowed the achievement gap.

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Leadership and Governance

The superintendent has provided highly effective leadership and established systems to enhance teaching, learning, and student achievement.

According to all interviewees, the superintendent's goals and actions have guided the district and contributed to improved student achievement. According to central office administrators and principals, the superintendent expanded the scope of mathematics and ELA academic coaches in all district schools to kindergarten through grade 8 and expanded the roles of academic coordinators. Principals and teachers told the review team that coaches and coordinators have helped to improve the quality of instruction. Under the superintendent's leadership and direction, there is a standard centrally coordinated assessment battery and schedule, and principals and teachers in all schools use student achievement data to plan and adapt instruction.

The superintendent initiated a study to determine the root causes of the district's high dropout and low graduation rates, leading to substantial improvement in both rates. The superintendent requires an examination of enrollment shifts and subgroup needs in determining staffing patterns and resource allocation in annual school budgets. This ensures that district's financial and personnel resources address emerging student needs.

According to interviewees, the superintendent believes that the district curriculum must evolve to meet the needs of students. Principals, coaches, and coordinators told the review team that the superintendent empowers them to make curricular adjustments whenever they determine that change is warranted. Student needs have highest priority. The data analysis procedures at Brennan are an example of the implementation of the superintendent's goals to drive the district. Through careful data analysis, Brennan staff address students' needs and monitor their progress.

The superintendent has changed the perception of many staff members of the value of observation and review of their work with students. According to participants, the establishment of learning walks, where groups of districtwide administrators visit classrooms throughout the district and provide feedback to teachers about what was observed, has raised the quality of professional discussions about teaching and learning and made such discussions routine. In one school, the teachers told the review team that the addition of an art teacher to a learning walk increased collegiality and enriched the experience for everyone.

Teacher union representatives and central office administrators stated that the superintendent facilitated the establishment of a new teacher evaluation procedure with union cooperation and collaboration. The superintendent also developed an instrument for evaluating principals. The review team examined all of the evaluations of administrators and found that they were instructive and based on the superintendent's district goals. These tools have increased the accountability of all professional staff by defining expectations in critical performance areas. Teachers and principals stated that the procedures have generated a higher frequency of

professional conversations among teachers and with principals. Some teachers commented that they have already seen instructional improvements.

The superintendent has established clear expectations for those responsible for enhancing student learning. These expectations are set forth in the district's/superintendent's goals, maintained through effective personnel evaluation procedures, and sustained by clear and consistent communication with all stakeholders. The review team found consensus in the district that the superintendent is the foundation of and driving force behind key initiatives leading to a strong and healthy academic culture.

School committee meetings do not consistently address urgent district matters or school committee priorities identified on the agenda. Some school committee decisions are made without a clear educational rationale and are perceived as having a negative impact on educational progress in the district. The behavior of some members has been perceived as intimidating and a distraction to educational improvement.

The review team interviewed eight of nine school committee members, four onsite during the visit, and four by telephone conference calls during the following week. The team reviewed school committee meeting minutes and viewed videotapes of five recent school committee meetings.

Meetings do not consistently address urgent district matters or items on the agenda

Videotapes of school committee meetings from July 2010 to the time of the review and interviews demonstrated that school committee procedures vary from meeting to meeting, and sometimes from moment to moment within meetings. The inconsistent application of standard meeting procedures, such as adherence to the meeting agenda, has caused ramifications to staff. One example is that the school committee did not take a vote to approve the fiscal year 2011 budget at its June 16, 2010, meeting, even though this vote was on the agenda for the meeting. The impact of this delay was felt at many levels. The superintendent had delivered layoff notices to certain staff that would be effective in two weeks were the budget not to be approved. In order to meet the deadline and prevent unnecessary layoffs, the superintendent called each school committee member three days before the last school committee meeting scheduled in June to answer questions and to stress the importance of a vote of approval at the upcoming meeting. Because the vote on the budget was not taken when it should have been, the district was in a state of confusion and uncertainty until the superintendent was able to get some assurance from school committee members by telephone that the budget would be approved at the last meeting in June.

Another example arose in connection with the frequent practice of the chair, evident in videotapes, of beginning the meeting by speaking at length on matters not on the agenda. According to administrators, during one meeting the chair announced that one of the elementary schools might be closed. The potential closure was not on the agenda, and there was no opportunity for the superintendent to comment. An administrator told the review team that this unexpected announcement heightened parent and student anxiety. In fact, some students were motivated to raise money to keep the school open. Not adhering to the agenda meant in this

instance that an important and sensitive subject was brought up without forewarning to the staff and the community, time for the superintendent to prepare a presentation on the subject, or opportunity for the community to learn what the school department's views on this subject were.

In interviews with the review team, staff at all levels as well as parents indicated discomfort with the demeanor and behavior of school committee members, which they said divert the focus of school staff. Parents and staff members also told the review team that school committee members have challenged or argued with some individuals addressing the committee during the open forum portion of the meeting. In interviews, parents said that this behavior made them wary of speaking during this time.

According to school committee members, staff in interviews, meeting minutes, and videotapes of school committee meetings viewed by the review team, the school committee chair does not consistently use the leadership role to refocus the governing body on the agenda or enforce standard meeting procedures such as Robert's Rules of Order in order to conduct productive meetings.

Decisions are made without clear educational reasons

As an example of decision-making without a clear educational basis, many interview groups expressed confusion and concern about the school committee's decision to ignore the superintendent's recommendation to begin the 2011-2012 school year before Labor Day. Union leaders and the superintendent said that the majority of teachers supported shifting the calendar to provide two additional school days before the administration of the MCAS tests; however, according to school committee meeting minutes, after taking comments from a small number of parents opposed to the change because it interfered with their vacation plans, the committee voted against the proposal without stating an educational reason for their action. Many interviews indicated that the superintendent's recommendations are so often opposed by the school committee that there is a perception that some school committee members reject recommendations only to be oppositional. Some school committee members told the review team that the current school committee only appears to be oppositional because the prior committee approved almost all of the superintendent's recommendations. In any case, when the committee opposes a recommendation from the superintendent without articulating an educational rationale, it contributes to public concern about the decisions made by the governing body of the district.

The above example in which a districtwide decision was made after hearing from a small group of parents illustrates another concern expressed about the basis for school committee decisions. Another example was the school committee's response to complaints by a small group of parents when their children were not selected by lottery for the full-day kindergarten program. The school committee decided to have the superintendent and principals prepare an analysis of the district's kindergarten program in response to these complaints. At the time of the site visit, members of the school committee were proposing a full-day kindergarten program that would be both mandatory and tuition-based. The superintendent was not in favor of this plan because of

the difficulties it would present for low-income families, who constitute almost one-third of the district's families.

Another set of concerns voiced in interviews about school committee decisions being made without clear educational reasons was in the area of policy. Some school committee members and many staff told the review team that policies are often developed without consideration of ramifications to the district's ability to provide educational services to students. The customizing of standard policy language to reflect district needs has been an issue. Many interviewees expressed concern about the amount of time the superintendent has to spend to clarify proposed policies and policy changes and to explain their impact on the district. One example was a proposed policy requiring school committee approval of all grant applications. The superintendent explained how this practice would impede the timely procurement of many important grants. Two school committee members objected that the potential financial implications of some grants for the district justified placing approval under the authority of the school committee. In this instance, according to school committee members and the superintendent, the school committee ultimately accepted a compromise practice proposed by the superintendent. The superintendent developed an informational form to be provided to the school committee when the district applies for a grant. If the grant is awarded, the amount and purpose of the grant are to be placed on the school committee agenda for a vote by the committee on whether to accept the grant.

In summary, there is serious concern that certain school committee practices undermine the work of the school system: meetings do not reliably address identified priorities, conflict distracts from the school department's focus on student achievement, decisions are made and policy set without a clear educational rationale, and the superintendent's leadership has been compromised by spending too much time and too many resources to meet the expectations of a governing body that is often unsupportive of the district's priorities and the superintendent's role. While many interviewees thought that most school committee members are well-intentioned, the functioning of the current school committee as a whole seems to threaten the viability of the many effective systems that have led to improved student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district's taught curriculum is consistently delivered and continuously improved through effective collaboration among district leaders and school-based coaches, but although it is a district goal to develop standards-based curriculum documents in all subject areas, the documented curriculum is currently incomplete. This limits standardization and formal systematic curriculum review and revision.

According to documentation, Attleboro has a flexible, data-driven taught curriculum, coordinated by the director of teaching and learning excellence and school-based coaches. The director reports directly to the superintendent and according to staff "brings consistency to the district." Because the director was on leave, the review team was unable to interview her, but did

interview the kindergarten through grade 8 ELA and mathematics coordinators, school coaches, and high school content area representatives.

Early in her tenure, the current superintendent expanded the roles and responsibilities of the kindergarten through grade 8 ELA and mathematics coordinators so that they would provide more direct service to principals and schools. These positions are the catalysts for dynamic change in the district. In their roles, the coordinators articulate the ELA and mathematics curricula taught in kindergarten through grade 8 with the curricula taught at the high school level to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment. They also collaborate with coaches in using student achievement data to monitor the kindergarten through grade 8 taught curriculum, and in developing assessments. As a result, the coaches are able to respond quickly and efficiently to teacher concerns about student learning. There is a clear chain of command extending from the superintendent to the director of teaching and learning to coordinators, coaches, and teachers.

According to school leaders and teachers, the district practice of providing all schools with ELA and mathematics coaches has helped each school to connect student achievement data with instruction. When asked during interviews, teachers and staff said that the principal and the coaches were the educational experts in their schools. Coaches work with teachers routinely to analyze student performance data and make decisions about programming and instruction. They also provide targeted professional development and help teachers understand and use student data. As one teacher stated, “We are the kings and queens of data . . . now, in the past five years, we are a data-driven system.” Principals told the review team that coaches were the best thing to have happened in the Attleboro Public Schools.

The review team found that the district does not have documented kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum in all subject areas, nor is there a common format for curriculum documents. Some domains include assessments and pacing guides while others do not. Only one curricular area is accessible to teachers online. These weaknesses are addressed in a goal of November 2010 which states: “Develop standards-based pre-k-12 curriculum documents in all subject areas a.) begin to review and revise the district ELA and math curriculum documents to align with the Common Core Curriculum, and b.) Develop a plan to review and revise social studies and science curriculum documents to align with the Common Core Curriculum.”

The districtwide coordinators and coaches help to align the taught kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum vertically and horizontally and to base it on the state frameworks. However, without a fully documented curriculum the quality and consistency of the curriculum are highly staff-dependent—they depend on the continued employment of the coaches and coordinators in the district and their continuous collaboration with teachers. Because the documents are incomplete, the district has limited ability to engage in systematic review of curricula to make sure that they adhere to the state frameworks and are meeting the diverse needs of the learners.

Assessment

The district has established a student assessment program and supports all district schools in collecting, disseminating and analyzing data to inform instruction, monitor student progress, and make educational decisions targeted to the specific learning needs of the students.

Student assessment systems and practices are in place at all levels and within all schools in Attleboro. According to central office administrators, principals, and teachers and a review of documents, the same grade level student assessments are administered in each of the nine schools. The assessment program is led by the director of teaching and learning excellence with the assistance of academic coordinators and coaches. Kindergarten through grade 10 assessment protocols for ELA and mathematics indicate the purpose of each assessment, the month of administration, and the persons responsible. The district has also developed a data management system to provide principals and teachers information on student progress and interventions.

Elementary level: K-4

At the elementary level, school and district administrators stated that the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS) is administered three times a year to assess reading fluency and monitor student progress. Teachers said that the results inform decisions about support, intervention, and small group instruction. All elementary schools administer the *Reading Street* baseline and end-of-unit benchmark tests.

The Thacher and Studley Title I feeder schools for Brennan have received Bay State Reading Institute grants. Interviewees stated that the assessment data from this program is analyzed and compared with all other school-generated data. Both schools have principal reading coaches to assist principals in becoming instructional leaders in the area of reading, in addition to ELA coaches who work daily with classroom teachers. All elementary coaches and principals may attend training sessions on data analysis whether or not their schools are directly involved in the Bay State program.

All elementary schools use the assessment management system associated with the *Everyday Math* program, which allows the district to look at the growth of each class and student. This data is used to develop common mathematics assessments. Common assessment questions have been developed and are constantly being reviewed to ensure mastery and complete understanding. Principals, teachers, and coaches told the review team that when a weakness is detected, coaches and teachers make immediate adjustments in content or instruction to provide students additional support.

Coaches and teachers analyze MCAS test results to identify strengths and areas of need for the school and individual students. In addition, the district has established common standards-based assessments, aligned with specific grade level standards in grade 2, grade 3, and grade 4, consisting of multiple choice questions and one open response question. These assessments are based on end-of-year standards and administered in October and January. Coaches in all elementary schools meet with grade level teachers regularly to review data and make needed

adjustments. The review team determined that student academic history folders are kept in all elementary schools, and while not in a standard form, contain essential information about ELA and mathematics, including interventions received and the dates of service. There was a data wall in each school visited by the review team.

Middle school level: grades 5-8

At the middle school level, interviewees stated that students in grade 5 and grade 6 are assessed with the kindergarten through grade 6 *Reading Street* baseline and end-of-unit benchmark tests to determine level of instructional, support needs, and placement in instructional groups. These tests also assess student understanding of skills and strategies taught throughout the unit, and coaches work with teachers to analyze data and identify trends. Teachers and coaches stated that when an assessment is no longer meaningful for monitoring progress or planning instruction it is either eliminated or modified to meet student needs.

Coaches and teachers stated that all middle school students respond to common writing prompts. The data is used for planning instruction, including interventions and extensions for grade level, class and individual student. They added that students use this data to develop personal writing goals for September through December, and record their progress on an Individual Student Growth Profile. STAR Reader is administered in September, January, and May. Students use the results to set personal goals for September through December. STAR Reader also provides mid-year data on reading comprehension for classes and individual students.

At the middle school level, a common ELA assessment aligned with grade level standards consisting of multiple choice and one open response question is administered in October and January. In addition, a common standards-based mathematics assessment consisting of multiple choice and one or two open response questions is administered in September, December, and March. Principals, coaches and teachers told the review team that these assessments provide important baseline data and identify students who already have met grade level expectations. The district has also developed common assessments in science and social studies at this level. When a need is identified through analysis of this data, schools make appropriate adjustments to materials, pacing guides, instruction, professional development, and student support services.

The Iowa Algebra Test is administered in grade 8 to determine placement in grade 9 mathematics classes. The district also produces a mathematics common assessment summary for each middle school comparing prior year MCAS proficiency percentages with spring common assessment proficiency percentages. The sample summaries furnished to the review team compared the results on the two tests in number sense, patterns and relationships, algebra, geometry and measurement, and highlighted the areas of concern for each school.

Administrators, coaches and teachers stated that the results of the MCAS tests in ELA, mathematics, and science are analyzed thoroughly by the principal, coordinators, and coaches in each middle school and shared with the staff.

High school level: grades 9-12

At the high school level, administrators and coordinators informed the team that the standardized tests include the MCAS tests, Preliminary SAT (PSAT) SAT Reasoning Test (SAT) and ACT test (ACT).

District common assessments, classroom-based formative assessments and portfolio essay questions with scoring rubrics are used in ELA. Grade 8 students are assessed in May to identify those with skill weaknesses. These students are recommended for READ 180, in grade 9, a program intended to strengthen reading strategies, and develop vocabulary. Interviewees told the review team that all departments have created rubrics for scoring responses to open-response type questions on the MCAS tests, SAT and Advanced Placement tests.

Interviewees said that teachers are gaining in understanding of formative assessments, and using them more to improve student achievement. When an analysis of MCAS tests results in ELA showed that improving writing should be a major goal, the high school provided teachers professional development to increase the rigor of written language instruction. Data analysis showed that students were not doing well in topic development, and the ELA coordinator created rubrics for topic development, argumentation, and use of evidence with the assistance of staff members. Interviewees also stated that students are expected to write in all of their classes with an emphasis on topic development and content specific vocabulary. According to documents provided to the review team, common assessments, short MCAS-like tests, and common writing prompts are administered throughout the year. All final examinations are common, and the results are reviewed regularly in combination with relevant MCAS test data.

The mathematics coordinator and high school assistant principal said that they review MCAS tests results, common assessments, and unit tests to identify programmatic strengths and weaknesses. The results of the grade 8 IOWA Algebra Test determine ninth grade placements in mathematics. Mathematics teachers also analyze subgroup performance and student growth indicators. These results are analyzed by department rather than by class as at the elementary and middle school levels. Interviewees stated that the high school is developing standards-based pre-assessments and common formative assessments for high school mathematics courses. Professional development has been planned on using this data to inform instruction.

Conclusion

The district has implemented a comprehensive plan to collect, analyze, and disseminate data to inform instruction and improve student learning. The analysis of data is strongest at the elementary and middle school levels, but systems and processes are well underway at the high school level. Districtwide practices and coordination among the schools in the district support the use of data at Brennan. Furthermore, assessment practices in the feeder elementary schools identify students from low-income families who will likely need added support at Brennan, increasing their chances of success.

The commitment of the district to systematically analyze multiple sources of data has led to a more complete understanding of the needs of all students, including those in subgroups.

The Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) report of 2006 stated that the district routinely used MCAS test student performance data and local assessments to review and make changes in programming and to improve instructional programs. The only areas noted for improvement were that “the district did not annually evaluate its special education program; and, it did not annually evaluate its Title I program.” Since that time the district has actively taken steps to ensure that all programs and the performance of all subgroups are evaluated regularly.

The district has provided personnel for facilitating data analysis, including the kindergarten through grade 8 ELA and mathematics coordinators and grade 9 through 12 department coordinators as well as the ELA and mathematics coaches who are assigned to each elementary and middle school. The district also has a Title I coordinator, an English language learner (ELL) coordinator, and a data/accountability coordinator.

Interviewees stated that one of the main areas of focus for each of these positions is to review and analyze data for the entire student population, including all subgroups, and share this information with administrators and all staff members in order to make necessary improvements. In one example of this type of district attention the team reviewed the Brennan Title I program evaluation summary of June 16, 2010, which contained an analysis of student performance on the MCAS tests, STAR Readers, Accelerated Reader, Study Island, and mathematics unit assessments followed by evaluations of what was effective and what was not.

In another document provided by the school, the district asked itself: “What data do we need, to know if we are making progress as a district, a school or a classroom?” Interviewees stated that a district plan was created in response, with the input of coordinators, coaches and teachers. The plan clearly outlined the data to be collected and the need for district and school data teams.

Interviewees stated that the district data team meets regularly, and also meets with school data teams. Data is disaggregated by subgroup at both the district and school levels. Interviewees stated that elementary and middle school data teams meet to determine how to close proficiency gaps for subgroups.

According to interviewees, data analysis led to the realization that changes needed to be made. For example when data showed that high achieving students were not being given rigorous challenges teachers created an additional curriculum component with the help of coaches to meet the needs of “stretch students.” At the high school level in mathematics, program offerings were expanded so that students could choose to be enrolled in a one- or two-semester (“short or long”) algebra course. Through follow-up monitoring it was determined that students from both algebra courses could successfully participate in calculus.

The review team observed the impact of the use of data in the district at all levels. Because directors, coordinators, coaches, and teachers analyze and make use of data efficiently, the system is nimble in responding to learning issues at all levels, conscientious about closing proficiency gaps for subgroups, and committed to continuous program improvement. While most

closely examined at the Brennan, a data-driven, student-centered culture appears to be embedded throughout the district. The district has provided effective leadership and developed systems and practices in the use of data to improve student achievement and school programs.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Learning walks and the teacher evaluation instrument adopted in 2009 provide teachers with constructive feedback. Evaluations for administrators are similarly constructive and comprehensive. These practices have led to greater accountability for both administrators and teachers.

The review team examined the personnel files of all 22 of the district's administrators and 46 randomly selected teachers including some from Brennan. All teachers were appropriately licensed.

The superintendent stated that the summative evaluations of all administrators, including central office personnel, principals, and the assistant principals at the middle and high schools, are based on goals set annually, before the beginning of the school year. The review team found an exemplary process that not only was timely, but resulted in comprehensive and instructive evaluations.

Each administrator set goals, called SMART Goals, listing in detail what was intended to be accomplished during the school year. The final evaluation was a comprehensive four or five page narrative by the superintendent assessing the administrator's level of performance on each established goal and overall performance under each of the *Principles of Effective Leadership*. Every evaluation concluded with a list of recommendations for the succeeding year. The review team also found that the file of any new administrator hired during the tenure of the superintendent contained a comprehensive evaluation written by the superintendent after the first 90 days of that individual's tenure in the district. According to a review of the comments in the evaluations, the superintendent sets high performance standards for all administrators, and holds them accountable.

The supervision and evaluation model principals, assistant principals and department heads use to evaluate teachers closely follows the superintendent's format and protocol. Teachers are also required to set annual Smart Goals, and these goals are reviewed and assessed by principals in summative evaluations. The superintendent set a goal of having each supervisor in direct contact with each teacher as much as possible during the process in order to focus on improving the achievement of all learners. All interviewees agreed that the model was standard in the district's schools, and that it enhanced each teacher's professional growth.

Administrators and teachers told the review team that the new teacher evaluation instrument adopted in 2009 had improved communication between supervisors and teachers. The district also made extensive use of learning walks conducted by groups of districtwide administrators, and walkthroughs conducted by school principals to augment supervision. Giving teachers constructive feedback was an important element of both protocols. Similar to the comprehensive

summative evaluations of administrators by the superintendent, teacher summative evaluations were informative and instructive in nature and typically included a number of recommendations.

The strong evaluation procedures in the district have led to greater accountability for both administrators and teachers resulting in improved student achievement. Looking to the future, Attleboro is one of 11 districts in Massachusetts selected to be an “early adopter” of the Commonwealth’s new educator evaluation system approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2011.

Teachers and instructional learning assistants have been provided with high quality professional development based on both district initiatives and school needs.

The district’s professional development program is overseen by a professional development committee composed of administrators and teachers at various grade levels. Instructional learning assistants also participate in the programs, ensuring that all instructional staff receive training. According to teachers and coaches interviewed by the review team, the district’s comprehensive professional development program has been effective in improving instruction.

The review team examined Attleboro’s professional development handbook. According to the handbook, the district surveys teachers every spring in order to base the professional development topics for the next school year on their needs. During the last two school years the district emphasized writing across the curriculum using the “Empowering Writers” program as a guide, and effective analysis and use of data to make adjustments and correct weaknesses in the curriculum. The district’s professional development handbook states that a major goal is “to use data from a variety of state, district and school sources to provide targeted instruction that will accelerate and sustain achievement gains for all students.” In the two years prior to 2009, the district focused on differentiated instruction.

The district recently offered a number of other topics including: “Teaching Strategies-Sharing Best Practices,” “Developing Common Assessments,” “Integrating ELA into the Science and Social Studies Curriculum,” “Using Technology in the Mathematics Classrooms,” “Developing Writing Rubrics That Are Teacher Friendly and Effective,” and “Use of the 90-Minute Block.”

The district has made a strong commitment to enhancing the achievement of limited English proficient students, and there has been a high rate of teacher participation in category training. At the time of the review, according to information provided by the district, more than 70 percent of teachers were trained in one or more categories and more than 50 percent were trained in two or more categories. Interviewees said that the district goal was to train all of the professional staff. Although limited English proficient students constitute less than five percent of the student population, when asked in a focus group why so many teachers enrolled in the training teachers responded that the techniques for instructing these students were beneficial to all students. They added that they had learned techniques for motivating struggling students, and using visuals and manipulatives in category training.

Interviewees said that the district uses its own teachers, academic coaches and administrators as presenters whenever appropriate. This practice allows the district to present training efficiently

and effectively, in a way that is relevant to the needs of the district and its schools. Also, the district has consistently applied for and received supplemental state and federal professional development grants.

Since 2009-2010, the Attleboro professional development calendar has consisted of two full days, four half-days and an additional fifteen hours distributed throughout the school year for school-based opportunities determined by school principals. Interviewees agreed that the time allotted for professional development activities was sufficient.

Attleboro provides sufficient time for effective professional development. District professional development is systematic, focuses on the needs of all of the district's students, and is effective in helping to raise the achievement of all students, including students from low-income families.

Student Support

The district's systems for support and intervention are comprehensive, accessible, rigorous, and characterized by collaboration and accountability. Support services are aligned horizontally and vertically throughout the district. The district has substantially increased its graduation rate and decreased its dropout rate for all students and students from low-income families through effective student support services.

In an articulated system, Attleboro's five elementary schools feed into three middle schools, and the middle schools feed into the high school. In interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents, it was evident that central office, program and school leaders, are committed to setting high expectations for all learners, understanding and meeting the needs of each subgroup, and engaging in constructive collaboration to ensure continuous growth and high achievement for all students.

Three staff members provide district leadership in student services: the Title I coordinator/grants coordinator, the ELL coordinator, who also oversees services for transient and homeless students, and the special education director. In interviews, it was evident to the review team that these staff members provide consistency of implementation and quality throughout the district, working collaboratively so that students and teachers experience programs seamlessly. They stated that they depend on and use analyses of student performance data to determine eligibility for services, identify appropriate interventions, and evaluate programs.

The Title I coordinator is responsible for administering Title I programs in two elementary and two middle schools with a staff of 10 Title I teachers and 7.5 instructional learning assistants. In addition, the coordinator is responsible for seeking, writing, and managing MCAS academic support grants for students in grades 3 through 10, a "work and learning" tutorial program grant serving 30 students in grade 11 and grade 12, and a private grant supporting students at-risk of dropping out. The Title I coordinator collaborates with the special education director and high school assistant principal to secure additional grants, and coordinates all summer and tutorial programs for students in grades 3 through 12. In interviews with the review team, the coordinator gave numerous examples of collaboration with the special education director, the ELL

coordinator, and the high school assistant principals to ensure that all students in need of support have access to appropriate services. The Title I coordinator closely monitors the progress of Title I students as they progress through the grades.

The ELL coordinator administers both the ELL and McKinney-Vento Act programs for transient and homeless students. A staff of nine ELL teachers serves eligible students: two at the high school level, two at the middle school level, and five at the elementary school level. In 2010-2011, 286 district teachers received category training provided by four district trainers and two trainers from Brown University

The special education director administers programs and services for students between the ages of 3 and 22. The special education staff includes two coordinators, one at the elementary level and one at the middle school level who is also responsible for out of district placements. (Thirty students are currently in out of district placements.) At the high school, an assistant principal coordinates special education and academic support, facilitating classroom support for students under special educational management. The district also provides several substantially separate programs housed at certain elementary and middle schools, including programs for students with significant behavioral problems that interfere with learning, and students with cognitive or medical impairments. According to the director, student progress is carefully monitored to ensure continuous growth and appropriateness of services. In addition to specific special education assessments, special educators administer and interpret the results of the same assessment battery as classroom teachers.

According to the two high school assistant principals, one responsible for curriculum and instruction and the other for student support, district concerns about high dropout and low graduation rates were addressed in a study approximately five years ago in 2005-2006. This study revealed the unexpected finding that 80 percent of dropouts had passed the MCAS tests, contrary to the assumption that MCAS tests failure caused students to leave school. The study determined that students retained in grade 9 were at high-risk of dropping out, concluding that their needs were not being met. Following the study, the high school developed both an alternative day program, and an evening program entitled the Attleboro Evening Diploma Program (AEDP), and plans are now in place for a grade 9 program. In its first year, 2009-2010, AEDP graduated 20 students, and 34 were expected to graduate in 2010-2011. Both assistant principals told the review team that, they are now receiving inquiries from dropouts interested in returning to complete graduation requirements.

The district found that some students dropped out to seek employment, and developed support programs to assist these students with academics while they were working; including a summer work and tutorial program for upperclassmen. All high school students participate in an advisory program and high school teachers are assigned 12 students with whom they meet to discuss concerns. Teachers at the high school told the review team, that they discuss the implications of the achievement gap, and are more aware of accommodations for students at risk of dropping out and not graduating.

These programs have helped to produce a substantial improvement in the district four-year cohort graduation rate and dropout rate. The four-year cohort graduation rate for all district students increased from 74.8 percent in 2007 to 82.2 percent in 2010, and the grade 9-12 dropout rate decreased from 4.4 percent in 2007 to 2.5 percent in 2010. The four year cohort graduation rate for district students from low-income families increased from 52.7 percent in 2007 to 72.1 percent in 2010, and the dropout rate for the cohorts in those years (the percentage of the group that had dropped out within the four years after entering 9th grade) decreased from 24.8 percent in 2007 to 14.5 percent in 2010.

The provision of high quality and well-aligned and coordinated programs to support students in Attleboro has led to continuous progress for all students, and specifically to the narrowing of the achievement gap for students from low-income families. This model of support observed and consistently described throughout the district is also a major contributor to the achievement growth of students from low-income families at Brennan.

Financial and Asset Management

The district's budget development practice of matching resources to students' needs supports continuous improvement in student achievement.

According to district documents and interviews with district leaders, central office administrators meet with school principals, individually and as a group to initiate the annual budget-building process. Interviewees told the review team that changes in enrollment and subgroup needs lead to adjustments in personnel and resource allocations. One example of matching resources to needs was the placement of more instructional learning assistants at Brennan than at either of the other two middle schools from fiscal year 2006 through fiscal year 2010.⁶ This was confirmed by a higher allocation in the line item for instructional learning assistants at Brennan than at the other two middle schools in each year from fiscal year 2006 through fiscal year 2011.

The comparative allocations for instructional learning assistants at the three middle schools from fiscal year 2006 through fiscal year 2010 follow:

⁶ More instructional learning assistants were placed at Brennan during this time even though the student populations at all of the schools were similar in size, with Brennan's population being the smallest in all of these years except fiscal year 2008.

**Table 9: Allocations for Instructional Learning Assistants
at Attleboro Middle Schools
Fiscal Years 2006-2010**

	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10
Brennan M.S.	\$197,438	\$215,556	\$210,899	\$241,460	\$274,483
Coelho M.S.	\$107,452	\$119,366	\$158,170	\$140,798	\$162,108
Wamsutta M.S.	\$166,788	\$170,225	\$142,391	\$159,348	\$197,110

Source: Documentation supplied by the Attleboro Public Schools

Central office administrators explained that the higher allocations to Brennan were made in part to support the school's twelve-month special education program.

The business manager cited another example of matching resources to needs when an additional ELL teaching position was projected to be added to the Hyman Fine Elementary School budget to address a projected increase in the school's ELL population in fiscal year 2012. The district's practice of basing individual school budgets on enrollment and subgroup needs gives principals the opportunity, ability, and authority to ensure adequate personnel and resources to address the educational needs of all students.

In an interview with the review team, a municipal official stated that the district's financial practices are conducted transparently and with a spirit of cooperation. Through interviews and an examination of documents, the review team found evidence of trust, respect and excellent communication between the city and the school financial departments.

The district's budget-building practices have played a significant role in contributing to increased student performance, particularly at Brennan. Furthermore, by allocating and focusing its resources on identified areas of instructional need across all subgroups, the district enhances the likelihood of continual improvement for all district students, including those from low-income families.

Recommendations

The district should continue to

- **maintain the coaching model as currently implemented throughout the district.**

District leaders and teachers told the review team that the steady increases in student performance have resulted in part from the coaches' role in the schools. The coaches at Brennan, and throughout the district, help to improve instruction. Coaches increase each school's capacity to respond quickly and effectively to student assessment data and implement district initiatives. Coaches help teachers analyze and use student performance data to revise and adapt the taught curriculum. They also engage and instruct teachers in new methods of instruction through embedded professional development; daily interactions, and demonstration lessons.

Coaches are critical to meeting the needs of teachers and students quickly and effectively in order to enhance student achievement and promote continuous improvement. Principals told the review team that coaches were the best thing to have happened in the Attleboro Public Schools. By maintaining the current model and staffing level of coaches, the district will be able to continue to improve curriculum, instruction, and student performance.

- **document a standards-based pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum for all subject areas.**

The district should accomplish the superintendent's goal of developing standards-based curriculum documents for all subject areas in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Currently the curriculum documents are incomplete, the format is inconsistent, and teachers have limited access to the documents that exist. Once developed, the documents should be maintained electronically as well as in hard copy. Documentation of the curriculum will ensure consistency within the district, particularly during personnel transitions, and will improve the district's ability to engage in systematic review of curricula. Documentation will ensure that staff are informed of content area expectations for their specific disciplines and will also serve to inform the wider community.

- **support tiered instruction, ensure adequate learning time, and increase social and emotional support by implementing districtwide a model of service provision for all students similar to the one at Brennan.**

Brennan teachers and the instructional leadership team have developed a cooperative and collaborative support model to identify and address impediments to student learning. Continuous monitoring of student progress and behavior enables the instructional leadership team to quickly anticipate problems, identify appropriate service providers, schedule delivery of a range of appropriate services, and monitor the effectiveness of these interventions. The structures for providing support to students are flexible, respond quickly when student needs are identified, and encompass students in need who do not qualify for Title I or special education services. The district's assignment of responsibilities at other levels, for example the high school assistant

principals' division of responsibilities between curriculum and instruction and student support, indicates a commitment to meet the needs of the whole child regardless of the child's subgroup or category or the cause of the needs. Extending Brennan's successful model districtwide would be both beneficial to students and cost-effective.

- **collect, disseminate, and analyze data for students in all subgroup populations to identify achievement gaps and improve programs.**

The district currently has in place both a data plan and an assessment protocol that clearly outline the specific types of data to be collected and the intended purposes. The analysis of data collected has led to needed modifications to improve instructional strategies and ensure that the educational needs of all students are met. The review team observed the impact of the use of data in the district at all levels. In particular, the ability of the directors, coordinators, coaches, and teachers to efficiently analyze and make use of the data revealed a system that is nimble in responding to student learning needs, conscientious about closing achievement gaps, and committed to continuous program improvement. While most closely examined at Brennan, a data-driven, student-centered culture appears to be embedded throughout the district. The district has provided effective leadership and developed systems and practices, including district and school data teams, to use data to improve student achievement and school programs. Continued implementation and regular review of these systems and practices will ensure continued improvement in achievement for all students.

- **provide teachers and instructional learning assistants with systematic, high-quality professional development, both school-based opportunities and districtwide offerings planned on the basis of district surveys of teachers' needs.**

The district's professional development is planned in response to the results of surveys of teachers' needs by a professional development committee with representation from administrators and teachers from various levels. It is focused, uses district administrators, coaches, and teachers as presenters when appropriate instead of external presenters, has adequate time devoted to it and, according to teachers and coaches, has helped improve instruction. The district has created an effective system of professional development as opposed to the unfocused, overly broad and therefore ineffectual professional development activities offered by many districts. It should maintain this system.

- **allocate resources to schools based on enrollment projections and specific subgroup needs, and maintain a productive and strong partnership with town officials.**

The district's practice of having administrators meet with principals to initiate development of the budget and basing resource allocations on identified student needs has contributed to increased student achievement. Each principal has the opportunity, ability, and authority to ensure that adequate staff and resources are available to address the educational needs of all students in all subgroups in their schools. For instance, Brennan has had a proportionately greater number of instructional learning assistants, in part to support its twelve-month special education program, and the Hyman Fine Elementary School has been allocated an additional ELL position in response to a projected increase in its ELL population. Maintaining and continuing these

strategies for budget development and resource allocation will provide principals with the support necessary to meet the needs of all Attleboro students.

In addition, the district's financial practices are conducted transparently and cooperatively, and mutual trust, respect and excellent communication exist between the city and school financial departments. This strong relationship should also be maintained.

The district should ensure that exemplary elements of its personnel evaluation model are maintained as the district moves to align its personnel evaluation procedure to be consistent with the new regulations on Evaluation of Educators at 603 CMR 35.00, approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2011.

The review team found an exemplary evaluation procedure that has resulted in timely, comprehensive, and instructive evaluations. The superintendent sets high performance standards for all administrators and holds them accountable. The evaluation model used throughout the district by supervisory personnel to evaluate teachers closely follows the format and protocol established by the superintendent. These evaluation practices have led to greater accountability for administrators and teachers, enhanced professional growth, and improved achievement for all students, including students from low-income families. The district should continue its exemplary record on evaluation by applying the same high standards in adopting and implementing a new evaluation system consistent with the new evaluation regulations, as required by 603 CMR 35.11. As one of the 11 districts in Massachusetts selected to be an "early adopter" of the new educator evaluation system, Attleboro could be well poised to build upon its current exemplary model.

Attleboro needs a school committee whose members hold each other accountable for focusing on the priorities identified for the district, making decisions and setting policy with a clear educational rationale, and working with each other, the staff, and the public cooperatively and respectfully. In other words, it needs a school committee whose members understand their own roles and responsibilities and those of the superintendent.

Though many interviewees thought that most school committee members are well-intentioned, the review team found serious concern that certain school committee practices undermine the work of the school system:

- meetings do not reliably address identified priorities, such as voting on the annual budget;
- conflict among members and challenges by members to individuals addressing the committee distract attention from those priorities;
- the school committee chair does not consistently use the leadership role to refocus members on the agenda or enforce standard meeting procedures such as Robert's Rules of Order in order to conduct productive meetings;

- decisions are made and policy set without clear educational reasons—for instance the decision on when to begin the school year; and
- the superintendent's leadership has been compromised by the necessity of spending too much time and too many resources to meet the expectations of the committee, which is often unsupportive of the district's priorities and the superintendent's role—for instance by developing policies without consideration of their ramifications for educational services in the district.

In order to better understand their role and responsibilities as well as the superintendent's, school committee members should receive regular training, such as the training provided by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), and coaching on becoming a more effective governing body focused on supporting and improving the school district.

To oversee the system effectively, the committee should focus more attention on student achievement data and other performance indicators, as well as presentations by the superintendent and her staff on district needs and priorities, in order to arrive at a better understanding of issues in the district and to make sure that the decisions are made and policy set for sound educational reasons.

In addition, the school committee should adhere to standard norms and procedural rules, such as Robert's Rules of Order, so that meetings are kept orderly and controlled and so that the chair can carry out the agenda. All members should support the chair and hold each other accountable to the agreed-upon norms and procedures. This will assure that every member has the opportunity to participate and that the majority rules. It will also assure that all issues of importance to the school committee are addressed in an orderly and timely manner.

Finally, once the committee has received training and coaching, and has established agreed-upon norms and procedures that allow it to be more effective, it should consider developing a self-assessment that committee members could use to hold the committee publicly accountable for maintaining improved practices.

The current practices of the school committee jeopardize the district's ability to encourage all stakeholders to work together to improve student achievement. The committee must take action to restore public confidence and allow school leaders and staff to focus on the mission and goals of the district in order to sustain the promising trend of improvement in student performance.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Attleboro Public Schools was conducted from May 3-May 5, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Richard Smith, Leadership and Governance

Mary Eirich, Curriculum and Instruction

Rena Shea, Assessment

William Wassel, Human Resources and Professional Development

Christine Brandt, Student Support , Review team coordinator

William Contreras, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Attleboro Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Attleboro financial personnel: City auditor
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Attleboro School Committee: chairman and 7 additional members
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Attleboro Education Association: president, treasurer, 3 officers, and 3 additional members.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Attleboro Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, special education director, business manager, Title I and K-12 academic support coordinator, ELL/McKinney-Vento coordinator, data and accountability coordinator
- The review team visited the following schools in the Attleboro Public Schools: Attleboro High School (9-12), Brennan Middle School (5-8), Wamsutta Middle School (5-8), Hyman-Fine (K-4), Studley (K-4), and Willett (K-4).
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with the principals and focus groups with teachers.
 - During school visits, the review team also conducted 43 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data
 - District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)
 - Data from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
 - Latest Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report and any follow-up Mid-cycle Report
 - Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report
 - Any District or School Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) or ESE in the past three years
 - Teacher's contract, including the teacher evaluation tool
 - Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
 - Long-term enrollment trends

- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - Organization chart
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School Improvement Plans
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Videotapes of recent school committee meetings
 - Social media page posting
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - Selected K-12 ELA, mathematics, and science curriculum documents
 - High school program of studies
 - Matrix of assessments administered in the district
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Program evaluations
 - Student and Family Handbooks
 - Faculty Handbook
 - Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
 - Teacher certification and qualification information
 - Teacher planning time schedules
 - Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
 - Classroom observation tools not used in the teacher evaluation process
 - Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
 - Teacher attendance data
 - All administrator evaluations and certifications
 - Randomly selected teacher personnel files

- The review team reviewed the following documents at the Brennan School visited because it was identified as a “gap-closer” for low-income students:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Calendar of formative and summative assessments for the school
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in the school
 - Descriptions of student support programs at the school
 - Teacher planning time/meeting schedules at the school
 - Classroom observation tools/Learning walk tools used at the school

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Differentiated Needs (Low-Income) Review of the Attleboro Public Schools, conducted from May 3-6 ,2011.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
May 3 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association	May 4 Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; visit to Brennan Middle School	May 5 Interviews with town or city personnel; school visit(s): Brennan, Attleboro HS, Wamsutta MS, Studley; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; focus groups with parents; school committee interviews	May 6 School visits: Willett, Hyman-Fine; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principal

Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Brennan Middle School Review Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

School Leadership

1. The Brennan principal and leadership team have built a well-developed model of distributive leadership and a collaborative school culture.

Curriculum

2. Brennan has implemented a consistent core academic program based on the state frameworks. Brennan leaders, coaches, and teachers continuously improve the taught curriculum through a collaborative data-driven improvement process.

Instruction

3. Teaching at Brennan can be largely characterized by engaging, well-paced, tiered lessons.
4. The coaches at Brennan play a significant role by collaborating with teachers in developing and adapting the taught curriculum, modeling instruction to meet the needs of all students, and providing teachers with embedded professional development to improve teaching and learning.

Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

5. Brennan has created a flexible, tiered-instructional model which provides adequate time for targeted interventions. In support of the model, the school has developed a weekly schedule to provide students with appropriately leveled instruction.

Social and Emotional Support

6. Brennan has a whole-child approach to supporting the successful learner and addressing impediments to student learning.

Attleboro District Review Findings

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Leadership and Governance

1. The superintendent has provided highly effective leadership and established systems to enhance teaching, learning, and student achievement.
2. School committee meetings do not consistently address urgent district matters or school committee priorities identified on the agenda. Some school committee decisions are made without a clear educational rationale and are perceived as having a negative impact on educational progress in the district. The behavior of some members has been perceived as intimidating and a distraction to educational improvement.
 - Meetings do not consistently address urgent district matters or items on the agenda
 - Decisions are made without clear educational reasons

Curriculum

3. The district's taught curriculum is consistently delivered and continuously improved through effective collaboration among district leaders and school-based coaches, but although it is a district goal to develop standards-based curriculum documents in all subject areas, the documented curriculum is currently incomplete. This limits standardization and formal systematic curriculum review and revision.

Assessment

4. The district has established a student assessment program and supports all district schools in collecting, disseminating and analyzing data to inform instruction, monitor student progress, and make educational decisions targeted to the specific learning needs of the students.
5. The commitment of the district to systematically analyze multiple sources of data has led to a more complete understanding of the needs of all students, including those in subgroups.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. Learning walks and the teacher evaluation instrument adopted in 2009 provide teachers with constructive feedback. Evaluations for administrators are similarly constructive and comprehensive. These practices have led to greater accountability for both administrators and teachers.
7. Teachers and instructional learning assistants have been provided with high quality professional development based on both district initiatives and school needs.

Student Support

8. The district's systems for support and intervention are comprehensive, accessible, rigorous, and characterized by collaboration and accountability. Support services are aligned horizontally and vertically throughout the district. The district has substantially increased its graduation rate and decreased its dropout rate for all students and students from low-income families through effective student support services.

Financial and Asset Management

9. The district's budget development practice of matching resources to students' needs supports continuous improvement in student achievement.

Attleboro District Review Recommendations

1. The district should continue its work in curriculum and instruction to
 - maintain the coaching model as currently implemented throughout the district.
 - document a standards-based pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum for all subject areas.
 - support tiered instruction, ensure adequate learning time, and increase social and emotional support by implementing districtwide a model of service provision for all students similar to the one at Brennan.
 - collect, disseminate, and analyze data for students in all subgroup populations to identify achievement gaps and improve programs.
 - provide teachers and instructional learning assistants with systematic, high-quality professional development, both school-based opportunities and districtwide offerings planned on the basis of district surveys of teachers' needs.
 - allocate resources to schools based on enrollment projections and specific subgroup needs, and maintain a productive and strong partnership with town officials.
2. The district should ensure that exemplary elements of its personnel evaluation model are maintained as the district moves to align its personnel evaluation procedure to be consistent with the new regulations on Evaluation of Educators at 603 CMR 35.00, approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2011.
3. Attleboro needs a school committee whose members hold each other accountable for focusing on the priorities identified for the district, making decisions and setting policy with a clear educational rationale, and working with each other, the staff, and the public cooperatively and respectfully. In other words, it needs a school committee whose members understand their own roles and responsibilities and those of the superintendent.