Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School

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

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Review conducted April 11-13, 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

[1]The 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*.

[2]To 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

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*

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.

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.

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School

The site visit to the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School was conducted from April 11–13, 2011. The Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School was identified as a "gap closer" for its 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. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2008 to 2010. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

District Profile[4]

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School is, as its name implies, a regional vocational school. It serves 13 towns in the Blackstone Valley: Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge. The school committee has 13 members, one member from each town. At the time of the review the school offered 17 technical programs. School enrollment in 2011 is 1146 with students in grades 9–12. A large majority (94.5 percent) of the students are white, with additional small representations of African-American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and multi-race, non-Hispanic students. As Table 1 below indicates, 0.6 percent of the students are limited English proficient (LEP), 11.0 percent are in special education, and 17.7 percent are from low-income families, with 11.7 percent qualifying for free lunch, and 6.0 percent for reduced-price lunch.

Enrollment has been gradually increasing in recent years (not shown in Table 1). For example, in 2009 the enrollment was 1103, and in 2010, it was 1136. Demographics have been stable.

[4] Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

Table 1: 2010-11 Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	5	0.4	First Language not English	33	2.9
Asian	7	0.6	Limited English Proficient	7	0.6
Hispanic or Latino	28	2.4	Low-income	203	17.7
Native American	1	0.1	Special Education	126	11.0
White	1,083	94.5	Free Lunch	134	11.7
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0	Reduced-price lunch	69	6.0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	22	1.9	Total enrollment	1,146	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

The present superintendent assumed the position in 1994. Members of his leadership team include the assistant superintendent/principal, the director of business operations, the technology director, the assistant principal/curriculum coordinator, the vocational curriculum coordinator, the coordinator of student discipline and community outreach, the director of student services, and the director of construction management/facilities. The principal was in his first year at the time of the review, having been hired from outside the district. Other personnel on the leadership team have been relatively stable, as have their positions.

Table 2 below compares the state's and the district's subgroup populations. Table 2 shows that Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) has proportionally fewer low-income, LEP, and special education students than the state. Students from low-income families account for 32.9 percent of the state's population and 17.7 percent of the district's population. LEP students make up 7.1 percent of the state's population and 0.6 percent of the district's population. And students receiving special education services account for 17.0 percent of the students in the state and 11.0 percent in the district. The percentage of students receiving special education services has dropped at BVT in recent years; the percentage was 20.6 percent in 2004, and has dropped every year but one since then. According to the superintendent, the decrease has resulted from decisions by the sending school districts.

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

	Total Enrollment	Students from Low-Income Families			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	957,053	32.9	29.1	5.1	7.1	17.0
Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School	1146	17.7	11.7	6.0	0.6	11.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

According to the 2010 End of Year Report, the regional assessments paid by member communities of the Blackstone Valley Regional School District for fiscal year 2011 were projected to be $10,364,813, up slightly (3.0 percent) from the regional assessments for fiscal year 2010 of $10,063,801. In fiscal year 2011, local appropriations by the school committee including Chapter 70 and other state aid were projected to be $18,949,245, up slightly (2.7 percent) from projected school committee expenditures of $18,455,211 in fiscal year 2010. Actual expenditures by the school committee for fiscal year 2010 were $17,016,798. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 was $15,101,849, which was $100,085 less than required net school spending. Budgeted net school spending for 2011 of $16,972,218 would exceed required net school spending including carryover of $16,004,479.

Findings

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

The school leadership team at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) demonstrates key leadership qualities to guide a continuously improving learning organization that helps all students reach their potential, including students from low-income families.

Clarity of Purpose

- In interviews with the superintendent, the principal, and school leaders, it was clear to the review team that under the leadership of the principal and with the support of the superintendent, BVT has assembled a competent and collaborative nine-person leadership team. The team shares clarity of purpose in how to work effectively with each other and with diverse members of the school system to improve learning and teaching. The team takes collective as well as individual responsibility for supporting and managing all academic, career/technical programs. The team also provides stewardship as it helps define programs and support services to meet students' emotional and social needs. Interviewees state that the team is "not complacent with the school's successes" but is willing to harness a "collective dedication to embrace new challenges," always with an operational reference point of "we" rather than "I." As one leader said, "The goal is to improve. Everything is about all of us learning. How can we do better is the key message." In addition, the school has participated in the High Schools That Work (HSTW) school improvement initiative that has contributed to its commitment to high expectations and to a culture of continuous improvement.
- Over time, review team members noted, school leaders have developed the school's internal capacity to meet students' learning and developmental needs and are held accountable for doing so.
- Leadership is strong without being imposing and school leaders are clear about owning their responsibilities and are open to collaboration. For example, when asked "Who is responsible for curriculum?" the principal does not hesitate to accept responsibility and then explains how an intricate system of support for curriculum implementation and development involves multiple layers of educators from the central office to the newest classroom teacher.
- The school is a strong organization. For example, leaders have created multiple opportunities for teachers, leaders, and counselors to talk with each other to define and work on improvement initiatives. For example, according to the superintendent, a summer leadership retreat defines topics for school improvement and helps identify annual performance goals

for school leaders. Also, leaders have carved out dedicated time each day in the form of two common planning periods for teachers in each department to meet, plan, and collaborate. Teachers and others are encouraged to take risks to find more effective ways to work as professionals.

- In interviews leaders note that they encourage the continuous development of a coherent and balanced curriculum to support learning in both the academic and career/technical programs. The expectation to integrate skills and knowledge across academic and career/technical courses enriches the curriculum. For example, expectations for student writing demonstrate equal rigor across the curriculum. A math problem of the month is fused into class work in as many classrooms as possible. A history lesson on the industrial revolution can offer opportunities for a vocational class to discuss how technology can transform the workplace over several centuries. Students use interactive media in multiple ways to present their learning.
- Leaders focus on capacity building to improve "the instructional core,"[5] i.e., the interactions of teacher and student in the presence of content. To do so, leaders set expectations for both internal and external professional development opportunities to produce more effective instructional practice. However, time for professional development to meet schoolwide goals sometimes lags behind identified needs. For example, interviewees pointed to a need for a renewed professional development focus on boosting the teaching of writing; at the time of the review this had not yet occurred, according to interviewees, although it had been targeted over a year before.
- Leaders tell the review team that they use supervision to assist teacher development and focus on instructional improvement. They share a protocol to conduct classroom walkthroughs to be more informed about classroom practice. All members of the leadership team are empowered to conduct walkthroughs and offer teachers constructive feedback orally, in an email, or in a handwritten evaluation. However, the potential for walkthroughs to identify and then monitor topics for professional growth seems a missed opportunity. Evaluation practices and feedback for staff covered by the Unit A collective bargaining agreement are often offered orally rather than in writing; as a result personnel files might not contain written evaluations.

Commitment to Mission and Strategies

- In interviews and documents, leaders demonstrate commitment and belief in the school's mission (reflected in the following <u>underlined</u> phrases). They constantly develop and refine strategies to achieve the mission. The school's mission is visible on posters throughout the school, on its website, and on all printed materials. Leaders ensure that BVT provides a <u>safe learning environment</u> for students in curricular and extracurricular programs. Interviewees said that students noted that the school's climate fosters behaviors that make antibullying programs superfluous. Parents and teachers confirmed this assertion in interviews. Teachers

[5] Richard Elmore's concept of the most important and smallest educational unit: teacher, student, content.

and counselors communicate swiftly and sensitively with students and parents when issues surface, whether related to schoolwork or to student discipline. The enrichment program provides students with consistent contact and communication with their guidance counselors and promotes early interventions when needed. Leaders in interviews articulated their specific roles in ensuring how students' programs and the curriculum integrate academic and career/technical learning and skills. Leaders noted how they collaborate with each other and with teachers to empower students to achieve excellence whether in a classroom, on a playing field, in a state or regional vocational competition, or in a shop. However, in a 2010 HSTW survey, only 33 percent of students surveyed indicated that teachers and guidance counselors often encouraged them to take more challenging English courses; 27 percent of students reported that their teachers or counselors often encouraged them to take more challenging mathematics courses; and 22 percent of students reported that their teachers or counselors often encouraged them to take more challenging science courses. Within the academic programs and the career/technical programs, students are exposed to the knowledge, skills, and cultures of diverse career opportunities and engage in those that link best to their strengths and interests. Through coursework and other opportunities, students can imagine and realize their potential for individual success in an ever-changing global society. Students at BVT have self-confidence and a healthy sense of school pride. According to interviewees, students are consistently given the message that they can achieve their goals and aspirations and the school will support them as they proceed.

Communication

- In documents and interviews, leaders deliver a consistent message to teachers, students, parents, and communities that the school challenges all to attain excellence and reach their potential. To do so, leaders commit themselves to providing the support and resources needed to realize students' academic and career/technical goals, although resources are finite. This reciprocity of accountability almost always ensures that teachers are equipped with the resources, time, and experiences needed prepare their students for success.
- School leaders understand the importance of communicating clearly and consistently to all audiences. The school has developed and promotes the use of a multifaceted media platform, *iPASS*, to enable swift communication across all audiences. Access to *iPASS* is customized by password to meet the needs of diverse members of the school community — students, teachers, leaders, and parents. Leaders empower teachers to share "in-house best practices" through exemplary lessons within departments as well as at full faculty meetings. Leaders use a consistent vocabulary to deliver consistent messages such as "our customer is our student" and "we all have to give our best effort to make it work."

Culture of Trust, Respect, and Care

- Above all, leaders have created and cultivated a school culture built on trust, respect, and care. All members of the school system mention these three words when explaining what makes BVT and all its students successful. Such a mission-driven, value-laden culture transmits a set of beliefs not only about how adults interact with each other, but also about

how all members of the school community interact. And the beliefs are translated into actions. Interviewees refer consistently to "the Valley Tech family" as the community model. As a "family," it projects a cultural model that encourages excellence, promotes safe discourse, accepts differences, offers support when needed, and lets go when appropriate. Finally, the school's culture creates a fertile environment to achieve these goals.

With BVT's strong leadership, the school has become a coherent learning organization focused on teaching and learning. Leaders act on their belief that students' academic and career/technical learning takes priority, but the "everything else" is also well-tended. Accordingly, BVT's students demonstrate impressive successes. Tables C3 and C4 show not only that all grade 10 students at BVT outperform all grade 10 students across the state, but also that the school's students from low-income families have outperformed their peers across the state. [6] The school's leadership has contributed to these successes.

Classroom instruction in almost all observed classes demonstrates strength in lesson organization and management. In some observed classes there were weaknesses in instructional design and delivery, particularly in practices that stimulate higher-order thinking.

In interviews with the review team, administrators expressed a solid understanding of high-quality instruction. They stated that instructional expectations included "best practices, where we look at the whole class, not just the teacher; kids, walls, technology, all pulling together. We want to see high student engagement, student self-discovering, students collaborating with peers and problem solving." Administrators added that they expect teachers to be well organized, with the teacher as facilitator and students processing and discovering on their own. Teachers also indicated a full understanding of strong instruction. They stated that good teaching includes being well prepared with "objectives and lesson plans, as well as ways to engage the students by contextualizing the lessons to fit into everyday life." One teacher specified that 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, along with the use of rubrics, were all part of good teaching. When asked specifically about higher-order thinking, one administrator said, "We have done that in-service for teachers *ad nauseam* and as a result teachers teach to the highest student in the class and provide help to those who need it." However, in another meeting, when asked about higher-order thinking, curriculum leaders suggested that "21st century skills emphasize this . . . the logistics of actually doing that, well there's a little work to be done with that." Review team classroom observations support that statement.

The review team observed 11 randomly selected Career Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) classes, and 12 randomly selected academic classes for a total of 23 classes, usually in 20- to 25-

[6] In 2010, for example, 89 percent of BVT's students scored advanced or proficient on the MCAS test in ELA, compared to 78 percent of the state's grade 10 students. Also, 89 percent of BVT's students from low-income families scored advanced or proficient in ELA, compared to 59 percent of the state's grade 10 students from low-income families. The scores in mathematics were similar: 90 percent of BVT students scored proficient or advanced, compared to 75 percent of the state's grade 10 students, and 89 percent of BVT's low-income students scored in those categories, compared to 57 percent of grade 10 students from low-income families across the state.

minute segments. The review team used an Instructional Inventory Record that includes 14 characteristics of effective instruction grouped under three categories: organization of the classroom, instructional design and delivery, and higher-order thinking. Observers rated the prevalence of these characteristics by indicating S (solid evidence), P (partial evidence), or N (no evidence).

Academic Classes

The review team noted numerous positive instructional characteristics in academic classes.

- In 100 percent of the observed academic classrooms, there was solid evidence of students being treated with respect, speaking to each other politely, and treating the teacher with respect. In one observed class, students were encouraged to practice good audience and listening skills as their peers made PowerPoint presentations; students clapped to show appreciation.
- In 81 percent of the observed classes, teachers linked academic concepts to students' prior knowledge. In one class, a teacher based her writing assignment on previous class work and homework assignments. In another class, the teacher, talking about character, used examples from the writing of T.S. Eliot (the subject of the lesson), but then added details and made a link to *Julius Caesar*, which the students had previously studied.
- There was solid evidence in all the observed classes that teachers were linking the students' developmental levels and the levels of English proficiency.
- In 90 percent of the observed classes, there was solid evidence of the presentation of developmentally appropriate content.
- In 90 percent of the observed classes teachers demonstrated depth of knowledge.

However, in some academic classrooms the review team noted that some key instructional characteristics did not occur as frequently.

- In 33 percent of observed classes, teachers posted objectives on the board or computer screen. The review team noted, however, that even though the focus and purpose of the lesson was not articulated, it seemed clear to the students. Some confusion was noted in this area, as a few teachers had listed an agenda for the class under the title "Objective." However, the team found that learning objectives were clearly stated on most of the syllabi that they reviewed.
- In 25 percent of classes, there was solid evidence that time was maximized for learning. Teacher talk precluded hearing students' voices.
- In 20 percent of observed classes, the review team saw solid evidence of a range of instructional techniques. While this characteristic was infrequently observed, in one class a teacher explained the class assignment; then he and an assistant circulated among the students checking and verifying the work, thus facilitating student learning. In another positive example, the teacher engaged the students with challenging questions and expected students to explain their answers fully. In general, there were only a few

instances of small group and partner work. Too often, teachers allowed students to participate with little more than a one- or two-word response. Observers did see some differentiation in the instructional level of the work. For example, in one class students were presenting their individual science projects/videos to the class and the teacher was coaching them. In many classes, however, all students were observed doing the same academic work at the same pace.

- In 45 percent of the classes observed, there was solid evidence that teachers paced lessons to ensure that all students were engaged. One team member reported that, "A math teacher's pace is brisk and crisp. Students follow directions and the teacher is clear as she steps through the problem solving."
- The team observed a range as to the presence or absence of higher-order thinking. Classes that require students to use higher-order thinking increase the depth and rigor of the students' understanding. Analysis was observed in 41 percent of the classes, evaluation in 33 percent, and application in 41 percent. A clear example of students using higher-order thinking took place when a teacher asked a class to review an advertisement to analyze how it manipulated its audience. In another class, the teacher posed an analytic question about a poem and said, "Look at the question in context, what does that show about his character? Is he a decisive fellow? You are moving from the question to what it means, to what it says about his self-image."

  An example of a teacher missing an opportunity to have the students do the problem-solving occurred when a teacher, after presenting a math problem on the board, proceeded to solve the problem, articulating each one of the steps, the numbers and finally the answer, and then asked the students, "Any questions?" There were none. In several classrooms students were watching movies or videos with varying degrees of participation expected. In some but not all cases, students were provided a series of questions to complete as they watched the video.
- The review team saw solid evidence of students articulating their thinking in only 33 percent of the classes. In some observed classes in which MCAS review was taking place, teachers used class time to transmit information rather than asking students to articulate their thinking or understanding. In another class, after watching presentations by classmates, students did not have an opportunity to respond or give any feedback to the presenters.
- The review team found solid evidence that teachers posed questions requiring students to inquire, explore, or solve problems together in pairs or in small groups, in only 16 percent of observed classes. In one positive example, students in small groups were framing comprehension and interpretation questions.
- Teachers offered opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content in only eight percent of the observed classes. In only 27 percent of all classrooms did teachers use on-the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding and inform instruction. In one good example of this characteristic, a teacher reviewed terms by beginning a

sentence and asking students to finish the definition. She did this review while she walked around the room, passing out assignment papers.

Career Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) classes

In vocational classes, the review team, as in academic classrooms, saw a range in the number of instances of specific instructional characteristics.

- In 81 percent of classrooms, there was solid evidence of students being treated with respect, speaking to each other politely, and students treating the teacher with respect. In one example of this, the teacher in an auto body class asked an upperclassman, "Would you mind helping [a student from a lower grade] get a tool?" Both the manner and wording of the teacher's request and the helpful readiness of the older student to assist the younger one were evidence of a respectful environment.
- Time was maximized for learning in 63 percent of the observed classes.
- In 81 percent of career/technical classes, teachers linked concepts to students' prior knowledge or job experience. During one class, the teacher asked a student to recall how he had threaded a particular wire through a pipe the day before. In another instance, the teacher asked students to recall how it feels to walk into a room painted in a dark color, or with just the ceiling painted in a dark color. He then went on to discuss color theory with the students.
- Rigor and depth of content throughout the presentation of lessons were solidly in place in 63 percent of the observed classes. In one class, the student had to measure the airflow using a transducer, and then place it on a circuit board. The teacher posed a question about the student's diagram/layout. The student then explained his design for the given area, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the steps of his procedure as he worked at the board.
- Solid evidence of the depth of teacher content knowledge was observed in 66 percent of CVTE classes.
- In 60 percent of observed classes, the review team saw solid evidence of a range of instructional techniques. In one such class, the students were learning how to bring wire to an electrical box using conduit pipe. The teacher, working as the facilitator, circulated, observed the work, posed questions, and modeled techniques.
- Teachers offered opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content in 81 percent of the classes.

Other instructional characteristics, however, occurred less frequently.

- In 45 percent of observed CVTE classes teachers posted objectives on the board or computer screen. In these classes, most students were working on individual work plans, following their individual objectives. However, the review team observed that even when objectives were not listed for the students, most teachers had a clear focus for the lesson being taught.

- In 44 percent of the classes observers found solid evidence that teachers paced lessons to ensure that all students were engaged.
- The review team observed teachers using on-the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding and inform instruction, often referring to competencies lists as they did so, in 45 percent of observed classes.
- The review team found solid evidence that teachers posed questions requiring students to inquire, explore or solve problems together in pairs or in small groups, in 36 percent of observed classes.
- In 45 percent of observed classes the team observed solid evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning. An example took place in one class when a review team member asked a student to explain “customer service." The student gave a definition, and then continued, providing her “real world” application, describing her job in a bank the previous summer and why it was so important to “be calm and stay focused on listening to the person in front of you.” Certainly students in many observed classes could explain to review team members what they were doing, as well as why they were doing something in a certain way.

There was ample use of technology in both academic and career/technical classrooms. Teachers and students were using SMART boards, computers, calculators, and more. One teacher noted that the auto body area has an impressive new paint simulator, the first in any school in Massachusetts. Also, several software packages enhance learning in the school; examples are Study Island, Career Cruising, and Kurtzweil.

In the judgment of the review team, instruction at BVT presents a mixed picture for all students as well as for students from low-income families. Where higher-order thinking was observed, instruction was at high levels, but in many observed classes, team members witnessed missed opportunities for elevated student learning. Staff interviews and strong MCAS results provide evidence of high expectations for instruction at this school. However, teacher talk rather than the voices of students prevailed in many classrooms. Without a renewed focus on high-level thinking skills and a commitment to increased levels of student participation, it will be difficult for teachers at BVT to improve their practice in a way that fosters student growth and even greater student achievement.

The assessment system at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) is comprehensive and balanced. It meets the needs of *all* students, including those from low-income families, as well as the needs of professional staff.

In a review of documents and in interviews with teachers and team leaders, the review team found that the assessment system at BVT demonstrates comprehensiveness and balance. It measures the progress of students’ academic and career/technical skills and knowledge. It supports students’ personal growth and development. And it informs school and district decision-making. From admission to graduation, all students are under the watchful eye of staff members who administer multiple assessments in multiple formats to diagnose needs, inform placements,

and evaluate individual student achievement. Assessments also inform decisions for planning, fine-tuning instruction, and developing academic, career/technical, and support programs. In addition, school and district leaders use assessment results to help clarify decision-making for staff deployment and resource allocation. Students, too, are empowered to develop and use self-assessment as a tool for reflection and to communicate to prospective employers or institutions of higher education what they have learned and how they have developed competence and confidence in their chosen career/technical programs.

Assessments to Inform Placement

Interviewees described how the guidance department administers assessments to incoming students to evaluate academic achievement and place them in appropriate levels, courses, and programs. Among the assessments given to new students is the *Stanford-10* (SAT-10), a standardized, norm-referenced achievement test that measures academic knowledge and performance in English language arts (ELA) mathematics, and science. In addition to the initial assessment, the SAT-10 is administered two additional times (December and June) to grade 9 students to assess academic progress during their first year at BVT. Entering students also take a school-developed mathematics assessment and a spelling test modeled on the design used in the Wilson Reading System.

According to guidance counselors and team leaders, guidance counselors share and discuss placement test results with students and parents as they assign students to appropriate classes and levels. Counselors also use placement tests to help identify appropriate support systems and interventions to help students attain academic and career/technical goals. For example, placement tests identify students who could use a boost in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) topics and provisions are made through placement in specific classes or a "boot camp" during the summer prior to entry. Grade 9 students also take the *Harrington-O'Shea Career Decision Making Test* to identify occupational interests, values, and abilities. Considerable time is dedicated to helping grade 9 students think about and link their academic planning to their goals, career interests, talents, and opportunities. In addition, the staff carefully scrutinizes new students' MCAS (the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Test) results to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and inform placement and support. All new students receive this attention.

Interviewees noted that most students in grades 11 and 12 also participate in two batteries of tests that can inform or affirm their career/technical choices and future plans. One, the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery* (ASVAB), is a multiple-aptitude test that measures strengths and weaknesses and assesses potential for success in a career or in higher education. Another, the *Accuplacer* test, administered in conjunction with Massachusetts Bay Community College (Mass Bay), provides students with useful information about academic skills in English, reading comprehension, and mathematics and is used to support academic decision making, especially college readiness. Students who pass the *Accuplacer* test can choose to receive college credit from Mass Bay. Guidance counselors share results with students one-on-one and often discuss the results in employability class, a component of the enrichment curriculum that they teach.

The BVT guidance department also focuses on students' well-being and is ready to intervene when tracked discipline data, behavioral data, or other objective data such as depression screening results, indicate specific needs. In fact, according to interviewees, mental health workers are on site three days a week to provide therapy to students in need.

Assessments to Measure Student Progress and Achievement

All academic and career/technical programs periodically assess students' progress and attainment using multiple assessment formats — both formative and summative. From the outset there is a school-wide expectation for transparency about what successful work looks like in all courses. The school requires weekly published objectives in all syllabi. In addition, teacher-developed rubrics provide students and teachers with clear expectations and guidelines for evaluating writing assignments, projects, and other coursework. According to interviewees, rubrics are "widely used" in both academic and career/technical courses. Writing standards are based on the Collins Writing Program and shared across both the academic and vocational technical classes. Exemplars and anchor papers, samples of excellent student writing, model good work for students and offer them the opportunity to discuss what such work looks like before attempting an assignment and while evaluating it. As one interviewee commented, "Students know what they have to do to get an A and not a B." Teachers publish grading weights by categories (i.e., percent value for homework assignments, class participation, projects, tests, quizzes, and the like) and within each department share common grading schemes that are monitored by grade sampling.

In the academic subjects, quizzes and tests on classroom-based knowledge and skill development offer one set of measures of achievement. These measures tend to be standards-based to align with the school's standards-based curriculum. In interviews with team leaders and teachers, the review team was told that BVT has a cross-curricular emphasis on open-response questions to help improve MCAS results; teachers have had professional development opportunities to strengthen teaching skills on this topic. Both academic and vocational classes can use and reinforce a "math problem of the month." Tests, quizzes, and worksheet/study guides are teacher-developed, for the most part, and sometimes shared across classes and customized to reflect individual class emphases. However, teachers develop common final examinations for all students in multi-section courses. In addition, the school has developed and communicated test specifications to all teachers, addressing the appropriate balance in test design for open-response, multiple-choice, and true/false questions.

According to team leaders, all students must also pass a sequence of Career and Technical Education (CTE) skills tests in their chosen career/technical program(s). CTE skills tests are given twice yearly (December and June) in addition to the frequent competency frameworks assessments that make up a normal part of daily and weekly career/technical learning. Skills tests have written and authentic/practical components and are standards-based, that is, keyed to state curriculum frameworks or national standards, or both. Often a competency matrix, like a rubric, is used to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and to ascertain need for extra help. Students can also choose to compete at the regional, state, and national *SkillsUSA* competitions

to represent the school and to match their expertise in vocational skills and knowledge with other students. A BVT student most recently placed first in the nation in the *SkillsUSA* metalwork competition and another placed second in the *SkillsUSA* culinary competition. In addition, students must pass an exam to show that they understand and meet federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines. Automotive students seek National Automotive Technicians Educational Foundation (NATEF) certification and culinary students seek SAFE-SERVE certification.

Interviewees described how other standardized tests enrich the school's knowledge of student achievement and performance and how results support students as they build capacity for work or study after high school. For example, teachers and students access data from the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) administered to all grade 10 students and to some grade 11 students. PSAT results not only help students understand their academic strengths and weaknesses in critical reading, writing, and solving mathematical problems, but also indicate appropriate placement in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. PSAT results also identify students' eligibility for National Merit Scholarships and potential for success in higher education.

Interviewees indicated a schoolwide commitment to stretch students by placing them in appropriately challenging course levels. The school encourages qualified students to enroll in AP courses, given in English, biology, calculus, and U.S. history to a small but increasing number of BVT students. In 2008, 13 students took the Calculus AB AP exam, with 7.7 percent scoring 3 or above compared with 71.3 percent of students statewide. In 2009, 30 AP test takers took 38 AP exams in U.S. History and Calculus AB; 27.3 percent of those who took U.S. History scored 3 or above compared with 70.7 percent of their peers statewide, and 3.7 percent of those who took Calculus AB scored 3 or above compared with 68 percent of their peers statewide. In 2010 31 AP test takers took 38 AP exams in U.S. History and Calculus AB; 26.7 percent scored 3 or above in U.S. History and 13 percent scored 3 or above in Calculus AB. The current results are not impressive, but a small but increasing number of BVT students are competing at an advanced level.

Finally, the MCAS tests in English language arts, mathematics, and biology or physics also provide students and teachers with useful data that serves multiple purposes: student placement or shift in course levels, assignment to "help sessions" for class or for MCAS preparation, course modification, adjustments in teaching strategies and topic emphasis, and course redesign. As a result of close monitoring of students' course work and test performance, staff can easily reassign students to different course levels; all leveled sections of a course meet at the same time. The schedule also gives same-subject teachers two common planning periods daily to analyze and discuss student assessment results, design course modifications, develop and review new curriculum, and recommend changes to student placement.

Assessment to Inform Decision Making and Planning

Leaders and teachers noted how they use assessment results while planning curriculum and improving instruction. For example, assessment results figure into identifying real-time course

modifications, fine-tuning instruction, and developing more formal curriculum. An example is the emphasis on teaching students the skills needed to respond well to open-ended questions. Other examples are the decisions to fuse academic skill development with career/technical skill development ("integration"). Teachers reinforce learning by including concepts, skills, topics, and even projects that cross curricular boundaries and often use the same rubrics to evaluate student performance. An interviewee offered the example of how the understanding and use of *sine* and *cosine* in geometry plays an important role in wood shop when students set angles on the lathe to mill wood.

The school also uses student assessment results to determine areas for teachers' professional development. However, interviewees noted that needs are sometimes slower to be met than desirable. Multiple interviewees noted a need for additional professional development in teaching writing skills because of staff turnover since the last school-based training in the Collins Writing Program nearly a decade ago. Based on interviews and a document review, although the Draft Professional Development Plan 2010-2012 makes writing a priority for April 2010, at the time of this review training had not taken place. Other interviewee noted the need for professional development to help teachers learn how to better integrate higher-order thinking in course work.

School and district leaders use assessment results to assign staff and allocate resources. For example, assessments influence how many sections of leveled courses are created and how teachers are assigned. Classroom space can be assigned and even reconfigured to meet the enrollment needs of career/technical programs based on student selections from year to year. According to team leaders, it has not been uncommon to move a wall to make a shop area larger during the summer months to accommodate more students.

The school committee considers MCAS results as part of the data used to set goals and objectives for the school, to allocate resources, and to approve yearly performance objectives for the superintendent, according to interviewees. For example, the school committee might allocate additional resources for remedial help or reshape support services to meet student needs identified in MCAS reports.

Student Self-Assessment, Reflection, and Communication

BVT has also developed strategies for students to own their class work and development as learners. One example is a Student Master Notebook, an organizational tool required of all students. From grade 9 onward, students maintain a notebook to manage their class work by documenting and organizing assignments, projects, feedback, assessments, and class notes. The notebook also serves as a tool for reflection and self-assessment and receives a grade.

The most rigorous example of self-assessment is the requirement that all students complete an employability portfolio in their chosen career/technical program before the end of grade 11 and a career-capstone portfolio before the end of grade 12. Students can store evidence for portfolios in a notebook, in a network folder, or in other digital storage media. The school communicates clear grade-level expectations to both students and parents about the purpose and procedures for completing and evaluating portfolios.

The review team examined several student portfolios and found them creative and thoughtful presentations of students' expertise in their chosen career/technical fields. In an electronic portfolio, a cosmetology student included biographical and personal information such as her awards, certifications, licenses, and career plans. The portfolio contained a cover letter and résumé for prospective employers, a narrative of her career skills and competency assessments, and a photo gallery of her work as a hair stylist. In a narrated video format, a carpentry student's portfolio demonstrated how he built an artificial wall. The student explained the skills he needed and the steps he took using professional vocabulary and offering close-up pictures of key equipment and tools. At the end, the student showed the finished project. An electronics student also presented a digital portfolio in which he included a biographical statement and his academic qualifications including problem solving and research skills. The student also presented an action plan showing two alternative career paths. In one path, after BVT he would enter college or technical school for full-time study; in the other, he would combine work and higher education to reach his career goals — a fine example of reflection and ongoing self-assessment. A dental assistant's portfolio was striking in its frank account of how she grew in both personal confidence and professional competence as she completed her training and internships.

On the whole, assessment at BVT is not just about test results and grades; informative assessment of student work develops an academic partnership among students, educators, and parents. BVT's comprehensive and balanced assessments, designed in several formats, demonstrate multiple uses that help students grow and develop as learners and as young people. Assessments, whether they are formal or informal, formative or summative, help judge performance and achievement, shape instruction, and inform learning. Assessments link freely and naturally to curriculum development and instructional improvement. They provide ample opportunities for students to know and develop their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses. Student assessments at BVT are generative—helping students and teachers grow and learn as they improve their craft. Assessment of student progress and achievement at BVT is not an end in itself, but a beginning to deeper understanding of growth, development, and better instruction.

The school has an extensive, individualized network of support that nurtures the social and emotional needs of its students.

According to team leaders, as soon as grade 8 students have been accepted into the following year's grade 9 at Blackstone Valley Regional Technical Vocational School, the director of student support begins to systematically develop the support system that will follow them throughout their school careers. Each spring, as they have for the past 13 years, the school holds an orientation for the accepted grade 8 students and administers the SAT-10, as well as a local mathematics assessment and a Wilson-based spelling test. With results from these assessments, the school begins its outreach to guidance counselors and special education teachers in its 13 local school districts to gather information about rising grade 9 students. The school then builds a spreadsheet with student MCAS data, information from grades 7 and 8 report cards and from the grade 8 guidance counselor, and the results from the SAT-10, a local mathematics assessment,

and a spelling test. The product is a visual display of the strengths and needs of the individual students entering grade 9 in the fall.

At this point the school begins to build its master schedule for grades 9-12. Courses are scheduled based on the students' strengths and needs as indicated by the spreadsheet. And the schedule is organized for flexibility with all levels of multisection courses taught at the same time so students can move from level to level without additional disruption of their schedules. In addition, two counselors work over the summer to meet incoming grade 9 students and their parents, orient them, and gather information. In addition, the Title I director spends the summer identifying students needing Title I support. And the school offers a summer camp for entering freshmen who need extra support. During the summer of 2010 the camp enrolled 20 students; at the time of the review interviewees expected that during the summer of 2011 40 students would receive this additional support.

Team leaders told the review team that when students arrive at school in the fall, the individualized support continues. Those with IEPs are placed in mainstream, inclusion, or team-taught classes as their IEPs and profiles indicate. In addition, the school has recently revised its DCAP (District Curriculum Accommodation Plan) into a useful and clear list of accommodations and modifications available to all students. When a counselor, teacher, or parent determines that a student is experiencing difficulties, the established DCAP intervention process is set in motion. A group meets to identify strategies to help that student to be successful, and the counselor develops an I-CAP (Individual Curriculum Accommodation Plan) that is implemented and evaluated. If implementation of the I-CAP does not lead to improvement, the student is referred to the Student Review Team (SRT), composed of the director of student services, coordinator of student discipline, counselors, teachers, the school nurse, and the nurse practitioner from the school-based health center.

The SRT meets every other Friday to address the individual needs of students whom teachers, counselors, or parents identify as at risk. The person who identifies the student completes a form documenting the strategies tried to date. The SRT decides upon recommendations. These recommendations are documented, implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

The school also supports students' health needs in a school-based health center, a satellite of Milford Regional Hospital. A nurse practitioner and a nutritionist staff the center. The nurse practitioner works with each student's primary care practitioner and can take care of basic needs such as cultures for sore throats and initial prescriptions for antibiotics. Interviewees reported that their data showed that mental health visits have increased and that, as a result, the school has increased the availability of school adjustment counselors. Also, the school has implemented a national screening for depression with an accompanying curriculum.

Beyond the extensive supports listed above, members of the leadership team report a complex system of communication to stay alert to student concerns and needs. The office of student services is home base, a place where teachers and parents report concerns about students and counselors reach out to various members of the school system to secure support for a student in need. The staff in student services even encourages cafeteria workers to notify them of any

unusual patterns in students' eating behaviors. And administrators are on the lookout for trends in behavior that would cause them to implement a new intervention.

Interviewees also said that in addition to this complex network of social and emotional support for individual students, the school has expectations and requirements that empower students to take charge of their careers in school and beyond. Students are required to maintain a Student Master Notebook to keep themselves organized and in control. In addition, each student has a career plan, and, most important, each student develops a portfolio of accomplishments over the four years of school in both the academic and career/technical areas.

The school's extensive system of support for the social and emotional needs of its students leads to a culture of care and concern for each student as an individual. Students understand this system and respond positively to the school's high expectations for their achievement. The school has built a support system that breeds a collaborative environment for nurturing its students.

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

The leadership of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District has reached out to members of the school system and to the wider community to create a partnership for the continuing support of all its students.

The superintendent, with the support of the school committee, has created a culture of cooperation, respect, and trust with members of the school system and with local governmental entities, businesses, school districts, and the general public in the 13 communities whose students attend the school. There is a collaborative environment within the school to promote excellence in student achievement. School committee members, administrators, and faculty identify the superintendent as the starting point for the challenge to excellence and the vision to be the best. The superintendent describes his role as coach as well as boss, while in interviews faculty and administrators expressed a sense of empowerment as team members whose opinions are welcomed and valued. The attainment of excellence is considered a shared responsibility that requires group ownership for its achievement. Administrators cite a prevailing belief that students can achieve as well as a shared commitment to meeting all students' needs. This belief and commitment engender a strong sense of community among students, parents, faculty, and administration. Interviews with the review team showed that their students' achievements have developed in faculty and administrators a deep pride in the institution.

The superintendent has effectively delegated the operational leadership of the school to the assistant superintendent/principal. The principal stated unequivocally that he has the authority to carry out his duties and responsibilities. He meets with the superintendent at least twice each week using a prepared list of items for discussion. The principal describes the superintendent as his mentor, sharing effective management and leadership techniques. He also acknowledges that he places a profound value on the support and guidance provided by the superintendent. The principal carries out the tasks assigned by the superintendent through a shared leadership model with the leadership team of directors and coordinators working as agents with him. The team includes the superintendent, the principal, the director of business operations, the technology director, the assistant principal/curriculum coordinator, the vocational curriculum coordinator, the coordinator of student discipline & community outreach, the director of student services, and the director of construction management/facilities. Others are invited as needed. A review of the district organizational chart dated February 2011 clearly indicates that the principal and administrative coordinators have the responsibility for the major administrative functions of the school operations. A review of all administrator personnel job descriptions reveals a consistent reporting authority between the job descriptions and the organizational chart.

The principal conducts the leadership team's bimonthly meetings after soliciting agenda items from members, including the superintendent. A review of the agendas for the 2010–2011 school year reveals items that include the calendar of events, operational issues, updates on activities, curriculum, technology, and the fiscal year 2012 budget. Discussion also focuses on preparation for the annual summer leadership retreat. No written minutes are kept for these meetings.

The district, under the leadership of the superintendent and with the support of the school committee, has reached out to form a partnership of support with local governmental entities, businesses, school districts, and the general public in the 13 communities whose students attend the school. The superintendent initiates extensive communication with all public officials at the local and state levels in forms that range from notes of congratulations, appreciation for service, to detailed operational and financial information. The team reviewed samples of these communications as well as the superintendent's binder of contact information with several hundred names including town managers, selectmen, town meeting moderators, town meeting members, finance committee members, and legislators.

The superintendent approaches the business community through regular involvement in the four chambers of commerce that promote commercial interests in one or more regional district towns. The school supports these organizations by activities such as hosting the Milford Chamber Expo in the school's competition center. In addition, each of the 17 career/technical programs has a local advisory committee composed of trade, business, and union representatives who provide suggestions about curriculum, equipment, and funding.

In addition, the superintendent serves as the chair of the Blackstone Valley Superintendents Collaborative, a miniconsortium for the nine school districts, two regional school districts, and one regional vocational district in the thirteen communities. The superintendents rotate monthly meeting sites and share ideas, resources, and support. For example, they share staff professional development opportunities. The BVT superintendent, the senior superintendent of the group, indicated in an interview that he sees his chairmanship as a way to help others and to give back to the profession.

Efforts to reach out to the general public take many forms. An interview with the superintendent and school committee members and a review of the superintendent's fiscal year 2008 public relations goals reveal the many activities included in this outreach. As the spokesperson for the district the superintendent provides testimony and information to television and radio outlets, newspapers, and other public forums. For example, he has been interviewed by local radio stations and newspapers and major Boston television outlets including WCVB-TV, and NECN-Cable. A review of the school committee document "Items for the Good of the Committee" dated April 14, 2011, which the superintendent prepares monthly, reveals more than 75 newspaper clippings about the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District. A school committee member said it very succinctly; the superintendent "gets the word out."

At the time of this review the superintendent was active in several professional organizations and served as president of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. And in 2011

the American Association of School Administrators named him Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year.

This district outreach has helped to create a demand for enrollment in the Blackstone Valley Regional Technical High School, something that is essential for a regional vocational school district. Its academic, career/technical, and extra-curricular program offerings must be attractive to resident students, their parents, and the district's taxpayers. There is no requirement for Massachusetts students to study a vocational subject or to attend a vocational school. Students have a choice whether to participate in this unique form of education.

In the judgment of the review team, the superintendent's outreach to the school's 13 participating districts has been in large part responsible for the significant rise in student enrollment from 703 students in 1994, when the current superintendent was appointed, to 1146 students in 2011.

The district and union have worked together to promote school improvement by rewarding employee achievement and retaining management accountability.

Interviews with union representatives and a review of the collective bargaining agreement in effect at the time of the review make it clear that the language in the collective bargaining agreement makes administrators accountable for establishing and maintaining a continuous quality improvement culture, while providing compensation bonuses to Unit A members who promote the goals of that culture. The collective bargaining language fits well in the school's transparent organizational culture that values ideas, focuses on improving the system through data generation and data management, and continuously targets the needs of students.

The Preamble to the collective bargaining agreement and the management rights article (1a) cite specific areas of responsibility that are the exclusive domain of the administration and its managers. Since these managerial rights are agreed to in the written contract, certain administrative decisions cannot be grieved. In interviews, the review team was told that union members support this model of managerial accountability. There were no grievances beyond level one in the last six years before the review. In addition, several years ago, the custodial union decertified its union with the result that those employees work under School Committee "Support Personnel" policies and individual contracts. All support employees are annually evaluated and their work is rated. Compensation increases are based on these ratings.

In the Unit A collective bargaining agreement, an article lays out the details of a "merit pay" or "bonus" system. Each member of Unit A who meets a certain standard rating in a performance scoring rubric is eligible for a .75 percent triennial bonus, depending on specified graduation, MCAS and Certificate of Proficiency (C.O.P.) thresholds in career/technical disciplines being met. These compensation computations are based on the number of years of employment during a three-year collective bargaining agreement at .25 percent for each of those years. Unit A employees who have been employed for all three years of the collective bargaining agreement during which these benchmarks have been met or exceeded receive .75 of their base three-year salary. At the time of this review negotiations for the next bargaining agreement were underway. Each side had agreed to bring no more than six items to the table. The teacher evaluation process

was to be renegotiated to determine the performance thresholds for the bonus program, but that article was to remain open until the new state evaluation framework had been completed.

The district is ahead of the curve in basing compensation increases on both the individual performance of employees and the school's collective attainment of student learning and competency thresholds. Its experience with this model is an outgrowth of years of trust-building by the superintendent amid thoughtful management/labor relations in a highly collaborative organizational culture. It can serve as a model for other school districts. This is a rare and distinctive achievement that will serve the students well, while strengthening union-management relations.

At the time of the review the district had a negotiated teacher evaluation system that did not provide timely feedback to teachers about their performance in helping students learn at high levels.

The team reviewed 20 randomly selected teacher personnel files. The review yielded the following information.

- Five files were those of newly hired teachers and contained no evaluations, although eight months had passed since their hiring date.
- Only one evaluation, for a teacher without professional status, was timely. It concerned a group project completed in 2008–2009.
- Of the 14 files of teachers with professional status, no evaluations were timely; the most recent evaluations dated from 2007 to 1996.
- A substantial number of the evaluations were done in the early fall of the school year, leaving many school days yet to provide richer information about a teacher's practice.
- Several forms are used in the evaluation process. Under the collective bargaining law in Massachusetts the form of a teacher evaluation process is negotiated, but whatever is negotiated must meet state regulations (603 CMR 35.00).[7] These regulations[8] required that a summative evaluation, based on their "Principles of Effective Teaching," be done at least once every two years for teachers with professional status. This has not been done at BVT, according to a review of personnel files.
- Many files contained a copy of a 1996 notification that the official set of teaching standards used by the district would be those in 603 CMR 35.00, but the district form that was used to implement those regulations did not conform with them.

[7] In June 2011 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations to replace the previous regulations on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and accompanying Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00.
[8] As they appeared before the adoption of the new regulations in June 2011.

- Evaluations done in the period of the early 2000s were done efficiently, on the same form, and were both informative and instructive.[9] They were also timely and were aligned with 603 CMR 35.00.
- The teacher without professional status had only one evaluation on file, although the evaluation handbook (as well as state law) required one for each year as a teacher without professional status.
- No evaluation referred to the need for professional development to improve performance.
- No evaluation document reviewed by the team mentioned earlier evaluation documents.
- In records read by the review team, the summative instrument required by the district's teacher evaluation process was not aligned, in the third year, with the list of effective teaching principles in 603 CMR 35.00.

Administrative evaluation documents reviewed by the team were all timely and were descriptive of the administrator's job accomplishments and needs for improvement. These documents were focused, clearly written, and instructive. Each was tied to a range of possible compensation increases ranging from 3.0 percent to 4.0 percent.

While the review team observed a clear connection among the mission, goals, and objectives at Blackstone Valley Tech, the current evaluation system has not been used as part of that initiative to systematically gather important data about classroom performance. Without timely feedback about performance, teachers will not have the information that they need to improve instruction and help students learn at high levels.

Professional development is not systematically planned and implemented in the district.

The district provided the review team a document entitled Draft Professional Development Plan 2010-2012. It contains analysis of MCAS data and a work plan, with assignments for various staff, to develop over a year of "collaborative problem-solving" the district's professional development priorities. The work plan refers to training in the John Collins Writing Model and in the Higher Order Thinking Skills Program. This document also contains a rubric for evaluating teachers on their use of the Collins Writing Model and higher-order thinking in the curriculum. There are references to topics, meeting dates, and a progression of events and strategies related to the need to improve writing and the use of higher-order thinking in classrooms. This document is a framework for a plan, not a *bona fide* plan. A traditional professional development plan contains scheduled workshop descriptions, dates, logistical and accessibility information, and the staff who should attend the various trainings. Those details were not included in this draft plan.

[9] "Informative" means that the evaluation is factual and cites instructional details such as methodology, pedagogy, or instruction of subject-based knowledge that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. "Instructive" means that the evaluation includes comments intended to improve instruction.

When the team interviewed various staff members and searched out documents that would authenticate the plan's progression, the evidence was oral. There was no written evidence that the proposed meetings had been held or that collaborative decision-making had ripened to final decisions. Also, there was nothing in writing to indicate what stage the process had reached. In addition, there was no written evidence to suggest that any formal action had been taken to move this professional development framework into an action plan.

It may be that the district's emphasis on collaborative problem-solving created some unanticipated delays to scheduling and executing the aforementioned plan. Collaborative problem-solving is a good way to energize thinking, but it may not be the best way to reach a decision on training. Multiple training and professional development events are held in the district each year, but they are neither documented as scheduled events, nor catalogued as an operational management information anthology to guide decision-making about their funding or their value to district priorities.

When asked whether there was a districtwide Professional Development Committee, interviewees told the review team that the leadership team was the Professional Development Committee. The district has an organizational culture that values collaboration in decision-making while centralizing control of certain functions such as professional development. These are competing strategies. The review team also was told that training in the Collins Writing Model had not taken place for a decade and that many new staff members had not received the training. It is not clear why, with such clear needs, the professional development plan, with its comprehensive data, did not promote an immediate scheduling of Collins Writing Program training. Perhaps the collaborative model of problem-solving has created some unnecessary delays in responding to teachers' needs for specific professional development. Without clarifying the way in which professional development is planned, it will be difficult to align professional development with the school's priorities and thus difficult to improve professional practice.

The school's culture of comprehensive support for individual students means that the school has remarkable attendance, discipline, and graduation rates.

Expectations for student behavior at BVT are high. Review team members found students to be respectful and orderly. And the data supports this positive assessment of student behavior. Attendance is strong. In the 2009-2010 school year, the school's attendance rate for all its students was slightly higher than the state's, with the school at 94.9 percent and the state at 94.6 percent. The school's students from low-income families also had a higher attendance rate than students from low-income families across the state, with the school at 93.3 percent and the state at 92.8 percent.

There are similar positive behavior indicators for out-of-school suspensions. In the 2009–2010 school year, the school suspended 2.6 percent of its students, while the state rate was 6.0 percent. Similarly, the school suspended 2.2 percent of its students from low-income families while the state rate was 6.1 percent.

Finally, the contrast between the four-year graduation rates at BVT and in the state is even more remarkable. In 2010, the school's graduation rate was 97.0 percent, in comparison to 82.1 percent across the state. In addition, the school's 2010 four-year graduation rate for students from low-income families was 95.0 percent, while the rate for the state's students in that subgroup was 67.9 percent.

These behaviors do not appear to spring from the exacting application of school rules. Rather, they can be traced to the students' understanding that each one of them is respected and that with that respect come expectations for appropriate behavior. The result is a school where there are minimal distractions, and the teachers and the students can focus on their mission —improved student achievement.

The Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District budget is developed through a participatory process that results in a clear and detailed document that meets the school's financial needs.

The district budget process is framed by a policy document, which describes the need to make student welfare and the school district's goals and objectives priorities in the budgeting process. Three principles serve as guidelines for the school committee: fairness, quality, and planning. The document summarizes the budget development process in 15 steps from initial department level preparation to the presentation of the school committee's approved budget for acceptance by the regional member towns at their annual town meetings.

The superintendent, working with the budget subcommittee, has overall responsibility for preparing the budget and establishing the budget process calendar. The budget subcommittee includes members of the school committee, the superintendent-director, the district treasurer, the director of business operations, and the assistant superintendent-director/principal. Interviews with school committee members, the superintendent, the director of business operations, the principal, coordinators, teachers, and finance committee members from three communities confirmed that the actual process mirrored the policy document.

The budget development process begins in September with the vocational team leader, the academic team leader, the vocational curriculum coordinator, the assistant principal/curriculum coordinator, the coordinator of student discipline and community outreach, the director of student services, and the director of construction management/facilities. These individuals submit requests with written rationales about the needs of their program areas. In addition, the vocational advisory committees, which include over 300 individuals, review the requests for the 17 vocational programs to ensure that industrial standards are maintained before the vocational curriculum coordinator and the assistant principal/curriculum coordinator review and compile requests and present them to the principal.

According to interviewees, the principal makes decisions about budget requests after reviewing staffing, salaries, and building use, as well as student achievement data relative to established goals and benchmarks. The 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan provided to the review team had a draft of the budget plan being developed.

The director of business operations compiles and verifies all the budget requests, and this draft budget is presented to the budget subcommittee. A review of line items, rationales, and other information occurs between November and February at approximately 15 meetings. Central office and school administrators make presentations to subcommittee members and respond to questions and requests for additional information. At the regularly scheduled monthly meetings the budget subcommittee updates the school committee on its progress. Prior to the March public hearing, the subcommittee provides a consensus final budget with all line items and estimated state aid and local assessments. After the open hearing, the full school committee votes to approve the budget at the regularly scheduled school committee meeting. The 13 member towns receive the approved budget for review by their finance committees and for approval at their annual town meetings. Nine of the 13 towns must approve the budget for final passage.

The budget document provided to the team for review was professionally printed by the students of the graphics program. It was 30 pages, including a summary, data about graduation rates and MCAS results, charts and diagrams analyzing current and past costs, and the entire chart of accounts in summary and in detail with explanatory notes. The superintendent made a five-minute video in the school studio to introduce the budget on the school website and cable outlets, and the document was available on the school website and in hard copy at the district office.

The review team held interviews about the budget process with finance committee members from three communities and school committee members from 6 of the 13 member towns. These individuals expressed considerable confidence and trust in the superintendent as a result of the clear and well documented budget process. According to interviewees, a request for additional information is always honored and questions are anticipated to ensure accurate response. The budget is considered realistic and responsive to the needs of the school. The member communities have approved the district budget each year since 1994 when the superintendent assumed his position.

In the judgment of the review team, the shared and open budget process and clear documentation of that process have built a level of trust that the superintendent and the school committee can be relied upon to present an educationally sound annual budget that meets the needs identified by the participants. The success of the school and its students further reinforces this belief.

Recommendations

Leaders and teachers should continue to build on the strengths of the school's assessment and data collection practices to attain even higher levels of excellence.

Interviews with team leaders, teachers, and students gave ample evidence that leaders, teachers, and students benefit from the school's balanced assessment system. Professional staff in each program, academic and career/technical, use multiple assessment formats to assess student work. They also use assessments and data to better understand their own practices and to drive decision-making for curricular planning, personnel and resource allocation, course development, and professional development. Students, too, engage in a number of self- and peer-assessments. This assessment process encourages them to reflect, see the benefits and value of good work, and develop good habits of mind. Rubrics communicate good practice in a format that clarifies expectations and sets high standards. Because the school's internal accountability system shows such strength, students can demonstrate proficiency and competence in external accountability systems such as MCAS and the competency examinations tied to the career/technical programs.

The review team recommends that teachers and leaders continue to explore the potential of assessment and the use of assessment and other data to improve both achievement and professional practice. Professional learning communities (PLCs)—with teachers and administrators sharing learning and then acting on what they learn—can provide a useful forum for deeper conversations about how curriculum can be linked to instruction and to assessment and about how data can serve all members of the school system even more profoundly. PLCs can also develop more effective techniques for using formative assessments to check students' understanding in real time.

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School should continue its extensive system for supporting individual students and refine it as necessary.

Team leaders reported that from the moment the school has completed its admission process, the director of student support begins to ascertain the academic, social, and emotional needs of the incoming students. At the same time, the director lists interventions that the school offers to address the various student needs. Staff at all levels undertake to provide students with the necessary interventions. The school is alert as to which students need support, and the nature of the support available is constantly evolving. The school should maintain the dynamic and fluid nature of its student support system, refining it as necessary so as to make it as responsive as possible to the social and emotional needs of its students.

As it aligns its evaluation systems with the new Educator Evaluation Framework, the district must ensure that all educators are evaluated regularly and should link its evaluation and professional development systems; it should retain its performance award program while working closely in the future with the union to consider refinements to it.

The district has a successful, pace-setting record of tying compensation to institutional goals. This extraordinary accomplishment arises out of an organizational environment that is characterized by trust across departments and among all members of the school system. This connection of employee contributions and satisfactions to a business model that is one of equity is both entrepreneurial and rare in public education.

At the time of the review, however, the district did not carry out teacher evaluations regularly as required by law; of the 20 randomly selected files reviewed, only one had a timely evaluation, and none of the files contained as many evaluations as required. Also, the content of the evaluations was not always aligned with the Principles of Effective Teaching contained in 603 CMR 35.00 as then in effect.

In June 2011 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations to replace the previous regulations on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and accompanying Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00. As the district brings its evaluation system into alignment with the new Educator Evaluation Framework, it must ensure regular and timely evaluation of teachers as well as administrators, as well as ensuring that evaluators provide instructive comments and specific recommendations for professional development and that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals. Compensation should be tied to analysis of current data on performance from regular and up-to-date evaluations. When the opportunity presents itself, the review team recommends that stakeholders consider refining the district's performance award program, or "bonus" program, by identifying and differentiating various performance standards across the career/technical skill families and academic departments, making room for different levels of performance scrutiny.

The district should also analyze the impact of district professional development on performance. At the time of the review there was no link between the evaluation system and professional development; no teacher evaluation document referred to the need for professional development or referred to an earlier evaluation. These two important activities should be joined so that both employees and the district can systematically gather data on progressive, job-related performance improvements and so that evaluation results can inform the planning of professional development.

Although the review team found a commitment at BVT to a culture of continuous improvement, the evaluation system was not fulfilling its potential to contribute to this culture. Improving the system while retaining the extraordinary accomplishment of its performance award system will improve professional practice and student achievement while continuing the district's

recognition of its staff's contributions, fostering the pride of affiliation that is so obvious among all members of the school system.

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School should clarify its process for planning professional development; it should then develop and implement a complete, written professional development plan to address, among other topics, the need to increase the amount of instruction that fosters higher-order thinking skills.

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School is accomplished in many areas: for instance, in focus on students, flexibility, relevant and integrated courses, and successful career/technical and academic programs. But classroom observations by the review team revealed that next steps to instructional improvement should be in the area of increased student engagement and more frequent occurrence of instruction that requires higher-order thinking. Such instruction develops cognitive processes that progress from simple recall to understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and ultimately synthesis. These last three cognitive processes require that students acquire complex skills such as thinking critically and solving problems. When such thinking is evident, teachers are developing students' habits of the mind. They use essential questions and teach for understanding, almost always asking students to demonstrate knowledge or create new knowledge.

In interviews with the review team, administrators described professional development that had already taken place in the area of higher-order thinking. In classes observed by the review team, however, the use of instructional techniques that elicit higher-order thinking was inconsistent. The district's Professional Development Plan 2010–2012 provides the skeleton of a plan for improving higher-order thinking skills, among others. However, at the time of the review the district had not provided details to flesh out the plan.

The leadership team, which is the district Professional Development Committee, supervises staff training in an organizational culture that values shared leadership as well as centralized decision-making. These are competing strategies. The team should establish guidelines about which professional development decisions are best made through collaboration and which best addressed by the leadership to meet the needs of the school. This clarification will help the district provide the professional development necessary to meet the needs of all students.

Once that clarification has been made, the district should develop a written plan for needed professional development, including offerings and dates and indicating the staff who should attend the various trainings, and then implement that plan. Carefully planned professional development focused on higher-order thinking skills will help teachers improve their practice in a way that fosters student growth and even greater student achievement, and having a clear planning process for professional development and a detailed, written professional development plan will help ensure that district training needs in this area and others are met.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School was conducted from April 11-13, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Wilfrid Savoie, Leadership and Governance

Mary Eirich, Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Linda Greyser, Assessment

Dr. Thomas Johnson, Human Resources and Professional Development

Patricia Williams, Student Support, Review Team Coordinator

Dr. Wilfrid Savoie, 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 Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Blackstone Valley financial personnel: business director, business operations assistant, treasurer, and facilities manager.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School Committee: chair, vice-chair, and four members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Blackstone Valley Tech Teachers Association: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, board member, and grievance chair.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School central office administration: superintendent, assistant superintendent/principal, vocational curriculum director, academic curriculum director/assistant principal, director of student support, human resources manager, dean of students, business director, and technology director.
- The review team visited the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (grades 9-12).
    - During this school visit, the review team conducted interviews with the leadership team and teacher focus groups.
    - During this school visit, the review team also conducted 23 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
    - Collective bargaining agreement with teachers' association, 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 committee policy manual
  - School committee minutes for the past year
  - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
  - Curriculum guide overview
  - Grades 9-12 ELA, mathematics, science, and vocational department 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
  - Student and Family Handbooks
  - Faculty Handbook
  - Draft Professional Development Plan
  - Teacher certification and qualification information
  - Teacher planning time schedules
  - Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
  - 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 Changing Face of Career and Technical Education

- Teaching Learning Integration at BVT
- Schools Need Partners to Prevent Bullying (2010)
- Mr. Freitas/Daily Overview
- Stylistic Aspects of Film Noir
- Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School/Summary of Longer School Year Process
- Summary of Superintendent-Director's Goals FY10
- Summary of Superintendent-Director's Goals FY09
- Summary of Superintendent-Director's Goals FY08
- Freshman Employability Curriculum Standards
- Sophomore Employability Curriculum Standards
- Junior Employability Curriculum Standards
- Senior Employability Curriculum Standards
- Senior Survey for Scholarship Committee
- Items for the Good of the Committee
- BVRVTHS Annual Report 2010
- Administrative Goal Setting and Evaluation Calendar and Process 2011
- Annual Tickler List
- Miscellaneous School Committee In-Service, Faculty School Council
- Administrative Team Agenda
- BVRVSD Audit FY10
- BVRVTHS 2010–2011 Agenda
- Blackstone Valley Tech: Your Guide to Progressive Discipline
- District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP)
- BVRVTHS Master Schedule
- BVRVTHS Student Review Team Guidelines

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Differentiated Needs (Low-Income) Review of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, conducted from April 11-13, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
April 11 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principal; review of documents; interview with teachers' association.	April 12 Interviews with district staff and principal; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents; school committee interviews; interview with teachers association; classroom visits; interviews with town or city personnel.	April 13 Classroom observations at BVT; interviews with school leaders; preview emerging themes meeting with superintendent; emerging themes meeting with leadership team.

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2008-2010

Table C1: 2008-2010 Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), Compared to State
ELA

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*
Grade 10— District	**80**	***---***	**86**	***45***	**89**	***50***
Grade 10— State	74	---	81	*50*	78	*50*

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.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C2: 2008-2010 Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), Compared to State
Mathematics

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*
Grade 10— District	**77**	***---***	**84**	***53***	**90**	***62***
Grade 10— State	72	---	75	*50*	75	*50*

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.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C3: 2008-2010 Achievement Trends for Grade 10 Students from Low-Income Families in Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, 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	53	81.2	*NA**	62	84.4	*45.0*	59	84.1	*46.0*
State All Students	74	90.3	*NA**	81	92.2	*50.0*	78	91.9	*50.0*
Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School Low-Income Students	74	89.4	*NA**	89	96.5	*45.0*	89	96.7	*45.0*
Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School All Students	80	93.3	*NA**	86	95.4	*45.0*	89	96.9	*50.0*

*NA: Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C4: 2008-2010 Achievement Trends for Grade 10 Students from Low-Income Families in Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School and State, Compared to All Students Mathematics

	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	51	75.2	*NA**	54	77.7	*46.0*	57	78.9	*47.0*
State All Students	72	86.7	*NA**	75	88.1	*50.0*	75	88.8	*50.0*
Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School Low-Income Students	75	87.8	*NA**	79	91.3	*63.0*	89	95.6	*62.0*
Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School All Students	77	91.0	*NA**	84	93.5	*53.0*	90	96.6	*62.0*

*NA: Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

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

1. The school leadership team at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) demonstrates key leadership qualities to guide a continuously improving learning organization that helps all students reach their potential, including students from low-income families.
2. Classroom instruction in almost all observed classes demonstrates strength in lesson organization and management. In some observed classes there were weaknesses in instructional design and delivery, particularly in practices that stimulate higher-order thinking.
3. The assessment system at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) is comprehensive and balanced. It meets the needs of *all* students, including those from low-income families, as well as the needs of professional staff.
4. The school has an extensive, individualized network of support that nurtures the social and emotional needs of its students.

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?

1. The leadership of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District has reached out to members of the school system and to the wider community to create a partnership for the continuing support of all its students.
2. The district and union have worked together to promote school improvement by rewarding employee achievement and retaining management accountability.
3. At the time of the review the district had a negotiated teacher evaluation system that did not provide timely feedback to teachers about their performance in helping students learn at high levels.
4. Professional development is not systematically planned and implemented in the district.
5. The school's culture of comprehensive support for individual students means that the school has remarkable attendance, discipline, and graduation rates.

6. The Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District budget is developed through a participatory process that results in a clear and detailed document that meets the school's financial needs.

Recommendation Statements:

1. Leaders and teachers should continue to build on the strengths of the school's assessment and data collection practices to attain even higher levels of excellence.
2. Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School should continue its extensive system for supporting individual students and refine it as necessary.
3. As it aligns its evaluation systems with the new Educator Evaluation Framework, the district must ensure that all educators are evaluated regularly and should link its evaluation and professional development systems; it should retain its performance award program while working closely in the future with the union to consider refinements to it.
4. Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School should clarify its process for planning professional development; it should then develop and implement a complete, written professional development plan to address, among other topics, the need to increase the amount of instruction that fosters higher-order thinking skills.