How Is Your School District Performing?

A look at

Chicopee

Public Schools

2004–2006

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Chicopee Public Schools, Richard Rege; the school department staff; and the city officials of Chicopee.

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INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

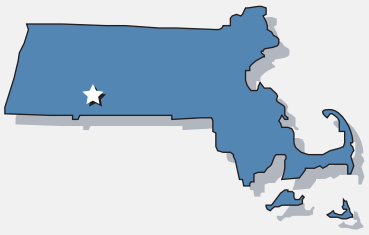
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In March 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Chicopee Public Schools for the period of 2004–2006. The EQA analyzed Chicopee students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Chicopee Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Chicopee, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 54,653
Median family income: $44,136
Largest sources of employment: manufacturing; educational, health, and social services; and retail trade
Local government: Mayor-Council

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 12 members
Number of schools: 15
Student-teacher ratio: 12.8 to 1
Per Pupil Expenditures: $10,305
Student enrollment:
- Total: 7,527
- White: 72.8 percent
- Hispanic: 21.4 percent
- African-American: 3.2 percent
- Asian: 1.3 percent
- Native American: 0.2 percent
- Limited English proficient: 5.4 percent
- Low income: 51.4 percent
- Special education: 14.7 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council voted to accept its findings at its meeting on October 24, 2007.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	67	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	75	84
Math Proficiency Index	59	72

Performance Rating

The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and subgroups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Chicopee participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

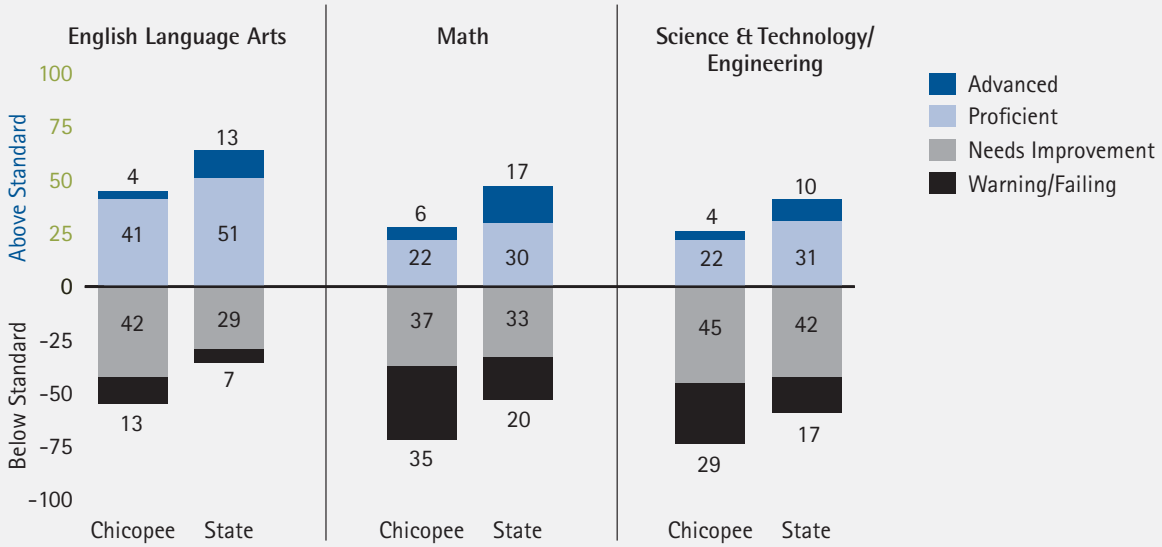
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, slightly more than one-third of all students in Chicopee attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much less than that statewide. Less than half of Chicopee students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), and less than one-third of Chicopee students attained proficiency in math and in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-three percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Chicopee's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 67 proficiency index (PI) points, 11 PI points lower than that statewide. Chicopee's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 33 PI points.
- In 2006, Chicopee's proficiency gap in ELA was 25 PI points, nine PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of three PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Chicopee's proficiency gap in math was 41 PI points in 2006, 13 PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of five PI points per year to achieve AYP. Chicopee's proficiency gap in STE was 40 PI points, 11 PI points wider than that statewide.

CHICOPEE SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



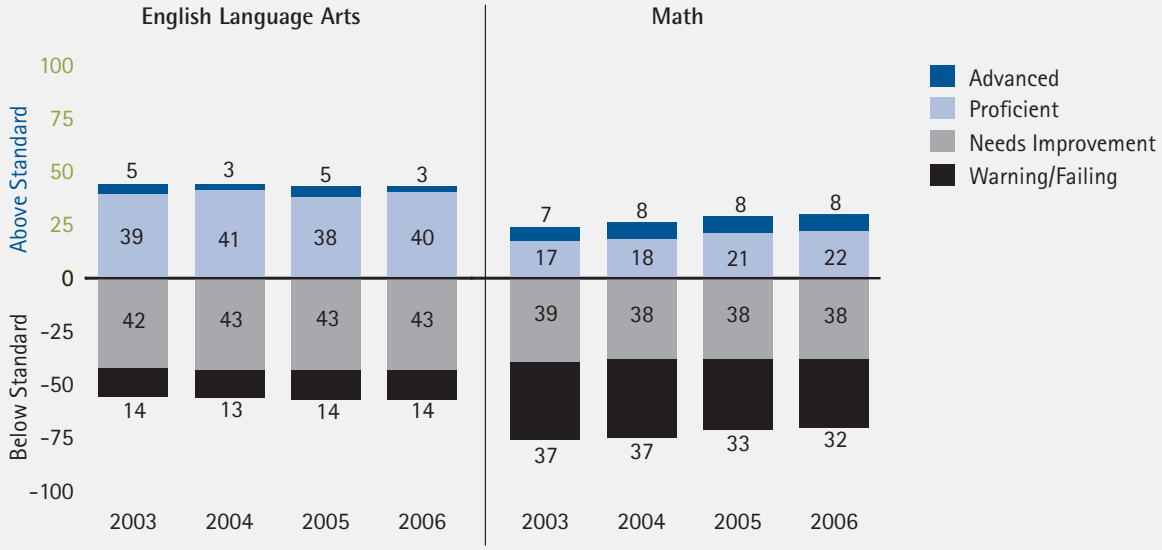
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Chicopee's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall and in STE, more improvement in math, and no improvement in ELA.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by three percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by three percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Chicopee narrowed from 37 PI points in 2003 to 34 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of eight percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Chicopee was relatively flat, improving by less than one-half PI point. This resulted in an improvement rate of two percent, a rate much lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Math performance in Chicopee showed improvement during this period, at an average of more than one and one-half PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 12 percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Chicopee had slight improvement in STE performance, increasing by an average of one PI point annually over the two-year period. This resulted in an improvement rate of five percent.

CHICOPEE ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS

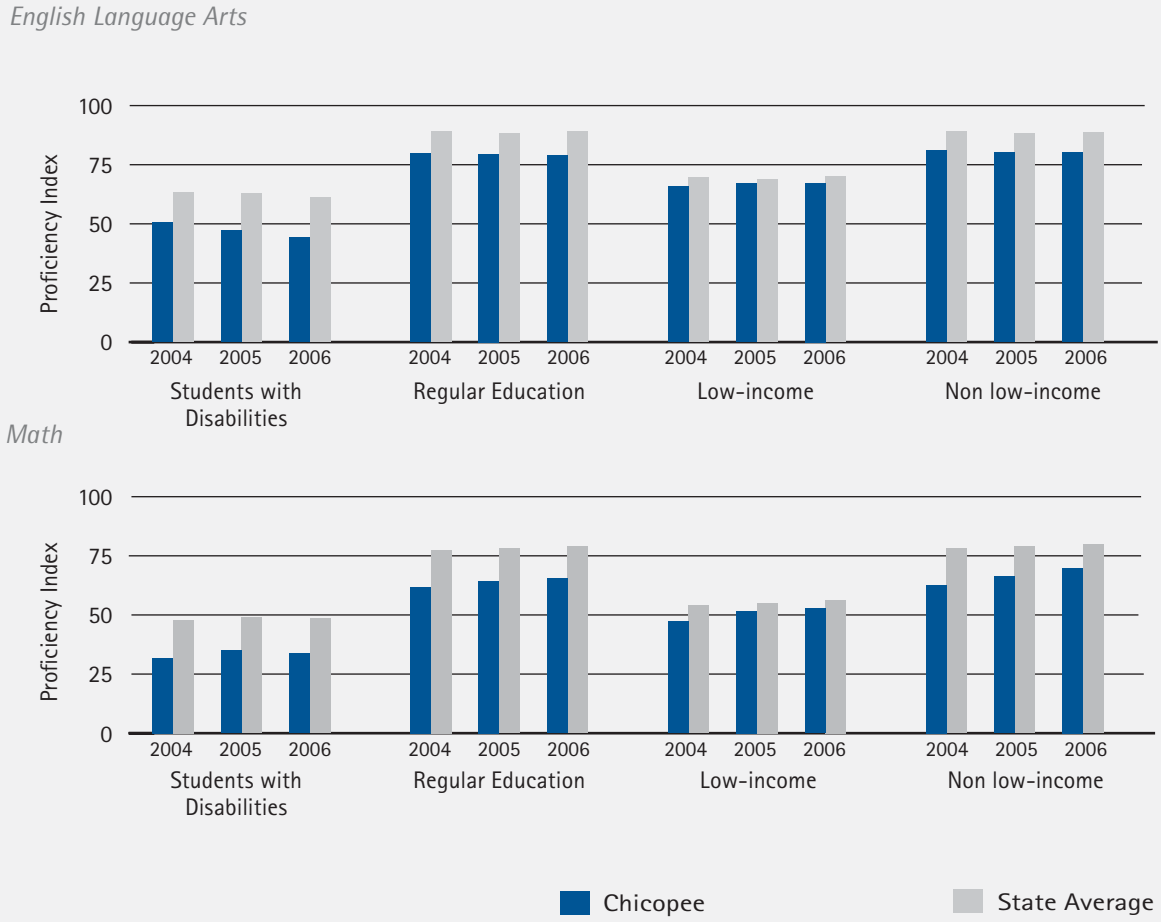


4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Chicopee students. Of the 10 measurable subgroups in Chicopee in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 35 PI points in both ELA and math (non low-income, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Chicopee in 2006 in ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, limited English proficient (LEP) students, Hispanic students, African-American students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than one-tenth of students with disabilities, slightly more than two-fifths of LEP and Hispanic students, and slightly less than one-third of African-American and low-income students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, more than two-fifths of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA and the same as the district average in math, and the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA and the same as the district average in math. More than one-third of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

CHICOPEE STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 46 PI points in 2003 to 36 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 28 to 36 PI points during this period.

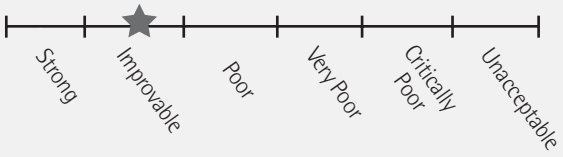
- In Chicopee, all student subgroups with the exception of students with disabilities and non low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the level of improvement for most subgroups was slight. The most improved subgroup in ELA was LEP students.
- In math, all subgroups in Chicopee with the exception of students with disabilities showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was also LEP students.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Chicopee received the following rating:

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

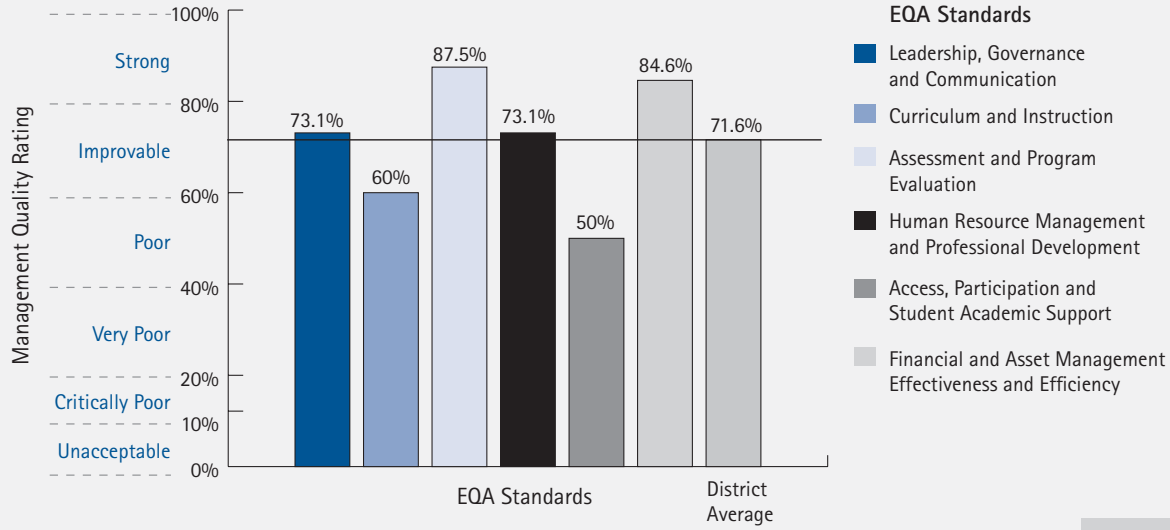
Overall District Management

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness — or quality — of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Chicopee received an overall MQI score of 'Improvable' (71.6 percent). The district performed best on the Assessment and Program Evaluation standard followed by the Financial and Asset Management statndard, scoring 'Strong' in both It was rated 'Poor' on the Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance improved slightly in math but declined slightly in ELA. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Chicopee, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by MCAS test performance, Chicopee ranked among the 'Low' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'Moderate' in ELA and 'Low' in math.

Leadership and Communication

During the review period, the district employed three superintendents. The first accepted a position elsewhere, the second served as an interim superintendent for approximately a year during an unsettled period. After the interim superintendent resigned, the 12-member school committee selected a third individual to assume the role, who served at the time of the EQA site visit. Interviewees mentioned that the district needed stability in administrative leadership, and praised the third superintendent for his success on a number of initiatives. Under his leadership, the district developed a new improvement plan involving an expanded group of stakeholders, began construction of two new high schools, and hired a new assistant superintendent for curriculum. He encouraged expanded use of assessments, support for additional academic coaches, and added focus on dropout prevention and attendance issues.

Administrators reported that they had not received evaluations since 2001. The current superintendent had initiated a districtwide evaluation process for administrators and principals in 2006-2007 that focused primarily on mutually agreed upon goals for personal, school, and student improvement. The superintendent had received approval from the school committee to initiate a merit pay system in conjunction with the evaluation process.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- Four of the elementary schools had improved MCAS ELA and math test scores.
- The district developed a new improvement plan involving an expanded group of stakeholders.
- The district made effective use of grants, including Title I, the Striving Readers program, and the federal Smaller Learning Communities.
- Under the leadership of the current superintendent, the district developed a new District Improvement Plan with broad input, and began construction of two new high schools

Areas for Improvement

- Four of the elementary schools had a decline in achievement; neither middle school made adequate yearly progress (AYP), and both needed to develop corrective action plans.
- School committee members did not recall using student assessment results to make decisions during the budget review process; rather, they relied on the superintendent's recommendations.

Interviewees reported an improvement in communications during the latter part of the review period. Representatives from the teachers' association stated that the number of grievances filed had decreased significantly. Various interviewees remarked that the superintendent had implemented a half-hour briefing session prior to school committee meetings to provide interested staff with background information about agenda items. Also, administrators and teachers in focus groups commented that the district had

instituted a classroom walk-through process for principals and central office administrators to observe the teaching and learning process. Teachers reported receiving informal feedback from the walk-through visits, although this was not part of the teacher evaluation process.

The district had increased the amount of information on its website. Also, from mid-October through January, each of the principals gave "State of the Schools" reports to the school committee presentations, reporting on the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), MCAS test results, accomplishments of the previous year, trends, and initiatives. School committee meetings received coverage from local television and newspapers such as *The Chicopee Herald* and the *Springfield Republican*. Some of the interviewees mentioned that since January 2005, the relationship between city hall and the school district had improved.

Planning and Governance

During the latter part of the review period, the superintendent led the district leadership team in expanding previous DIP to produce the Chicopee Public Schools District Improvement Plan (DIP) for 2007-2010. Similarly, principals, with the assistance of their school council members, began to elaborate on details in their SIPs, realigning them with the new DIP, and maintaining a focus on improving student achievement.

Administrators acknowledged that both middle schools had not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) and needed to prepare corrective action plans. Also, they understood that half the elementary schools had downward trends in their MCAS ELA and math test results. Furthermore, administrators commented that the district had not addressed the needs of all subgroup populations, especially English language learner (ELL) and low-income students. The elementary and middle schools had begun the process of using more formative and summative assessments to improve student achievement. In addition, the elementary and middle schools started to develop curriculum guides; both levels developed and implemented math curriculum guides, and the middle schools were developing an ELA curriculum guide in 2006-2007.

Assessments used included Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) at grades preK-5, Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) at grades K-12, Galileo Math at grades 6-8, and benchmark tests. Analysis of results led to review and revision of the curriculum guides, time on learning, existing interventions, and teaching strategies.

The district made effective use of grants. With Title I funds, it hired an ELL coach for grades K-8 and two ELA coaches. It also used grants to fund two math coaches. Through the Striving Readers program, a federal initiative aimed at improving reading performance among middle and high school students, the district added a reading coach. The district also received a federal Smaller Learning Communities grant.

The high school administration had established a task force to study the prevalence of dropouts, who began analyzing survey data to determine steps to improve student attendance and minimize dropouts. The district reported high but declining dropout rates, and a high and increasing rate of absenteeism.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Chicopee Public Schools needed improvement in performance in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

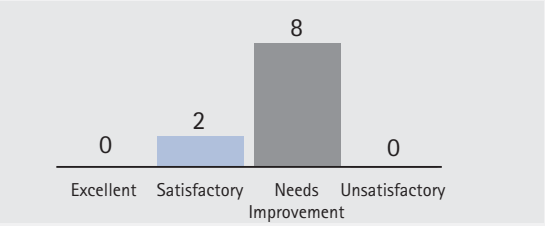
At the beginning of the review period, the district had in place a curriculum that mostly consisted of lists of state framework learning standards, organized into a timeline by term. In 2004, the district hired an assistant superintendent for curriculum and professional development and undertook an ambitious plan for expansion of curriculum documents. At the time of the EQA audit, the district had developed elementary and middle school math curricula and had plans to implement a new middle school English language arts (ELA) curriculum and to begin work on the elementary ELA curriculum. While these curriculum documents contained few references to assessments, the district was administering formative and summative assessments to measure the achievement and progress of all students in elementary ELA and math and in middle school math. Administrators planned to adopt similar assessments in the remaining tested content areas and at the high school level in the future.

The existing curriculum aligned with the state frameworks, but horizontal and vertical alignment within and across schools was only possible in those areas where the curriculum had been revised and expanded. At the elementary level, teachers achieved vertical and horizontal alignment in ELA and math by faithful implementation of the Houghton Mifflin programs in place in both content areas. The Galileo assessment system ensured horizontal alignment of the math curriculum at the middle school level.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The curriculum development process was underway with particular progress in elementary and middle school math and the district planned to continue the work in elementary and middle school ELA.
- The district understood the importance of formative and summative assessments for measuring student progress against standards, and had a full complement of such assessments in elementary ELA and middle school math.

Areas for Improvement

- Assessments in middle school ELA, high school math and ELA, and science at all levels were in need of development.
- Without developed curricula and assessments at several levels, administrators lacked the tools to monitor horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum and the effectiveness of teachers' instruction.
- The district lacked a systemic approach to curriculum development, implementation, evaluation, and revision.

Effective Instruction

The district provided considerable professional development around effective instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction and the three-tiered intervention model, but EQA examiners did not always observe these strategies implemented in classrooms. District personnel reported the availability of instructional technology such as the FastMath, Geometer Sketchpad, and Accelerated Reader software programs, in addition to graphing calculators and SmartBoards. However, EQA examiners observed the use of this technology in fewer than one third of the sample of classrooms that examiners visited.

In addition, while the district promoted effective instructional strategies, they were most often geared to instruction of students in the aggregate. Some of the strategies introduced were appropriate for special education students, including the Lindamood-Bell system and the Read 180 program, and the district increased the use of inclusion during the review period. However, the district was only beginning to address the needs of limited English proficient (LEP) and low-income students. It hired coaches for English language learner (ELL) students, in addition to math and ELA coaches, to support teachers in implementing specific strategies.

In those content areas in which formative assessment data were available, principals facilitated discussions with teachers in grade-level meetings about results disaggregated by classroom. These discussions enabled teachers to gain perspective on the achievement of their own students and to learn from the strengths and successes of their colleagues.

During the review period, ELA and math instructional blocks were 90 minutes long, and the district increased ELA instructional time by 45 minutes to accommodate interventions. It introduced Read 180 to the curriculum at all levels, further adding ELA instructional time.

EQA examiners visited 54 classrooms and observed evidence of effective instructional practices, high expectations, and student engagement in the learning process most often at the elementary level and least often at the high school level. Interviewees indicated that curriculum oversight was lacking at the middle and high school levels, where teachers held more autonomy. Assessment data for use in monitoring instruction were not available in middle school ELA and in any content area at the high school level.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

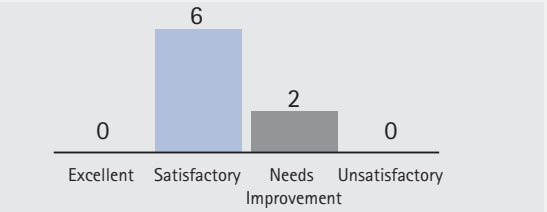
The district's assessment program was beginning to prove its usefulness to instructional delivery. Student assessment was in frequent use at the elementary level, and less so at the middle and high school levels. All district elementary teachers became accustomed to using the DIBELS. In addition, most elementary schools also used the SRI as part of the Read 180 grant to assess student performance in ELA. All schools analyzed students' MCAS test results, with some schools completing the analysis in-house and others receiving their results from district contractors. For the 2007-2008 school year, administrators reported that all schools would complete the analysis in-house. Some schools used additional assessment tools, including the Stanford Achievement Test, to measure progress among at-risk students.

The middle and high schools' approach to assessment was less sophisticated. Schools at both levels focused on the analysis of MCAS test scores, and administrators reported "a real strength" in item analysis. The middle schools used assessments associated with the FastMath curriculum, Houghton Mifflin AYP, and the Galileo Math assessment system. The high schools used the GMADE, but mainly for course and level placement, and the Chicopee Comprehensive High School participated in the High Schools That Work program, which required administering a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) examination to some graduating seniors.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Particularly at the elementary school level, the district used student assessment results to identify students experiencing learning difficulties to provide learning support.
- The district used a number of vehicles, including cable television and web-based parent portals, to provide information about student achievement to parents and community members.
- Following analysis of student MCAS data, the district instituted support programs for some subgroup populations, particularly students with disabilities, and eventually expanded those with the most promising results to all students in need.
- The district conducted two levels of walkthroughs, focusing on supervision of curriculum delivery and instructional techniques, to inform professional development planning at the district level.

Areas for Improvement

- The district's assessment and program evaluation systems were less advanced at the middle and high school levels than at the elementary level.

Program Evaluation

The elementary level also exceeded the other levels in the sophistication of the evaluation of programs. In general, the district was just beginning to evaluate and improve programs by using assessment results to measure program effectiveness. The district evaluated support programs such as Title I and special education using pre- and post-test results, and parent and staff surveys. Few other programs were systematically evaluated, and the district was adopting common examinations at midyear and year end. In the elementary schools, teachers used the DIBELS and SRI formatively to assess student progress. In math, most elementary school program assessment efforts were based upon the use of published assessments accompanying textbook programs. At the middle school level, the district used the Galileo assessment system to determine student achievement in math. All schools relied heavily on analysis of MCAS test results to provide annual snapshots of curriculum effectiveness.

Through participating in the Department of Education's Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process, central office administrators began conducting districtwide walk-throughs of classrooms. Its continued use of this practice helped in planning professional development activities, as well as identifying instructional issues, such as classroom management and curriculum alignment, that school principals addressed. Modifications to curriculum and instructional services as a result of assessment include increased instructional time for ELA, the replacement of a foreign language position with a math teacher at the middle school level, and the reassignment of special education teachers at the high school level.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

During the review period, the Chicopee Public Schools engaged in professional and equitable practices for the identification, recruitment, and hiring of effective educational staff. Central office and school administrators attended job fairs and formed cooperative relationships with local colleges and universities, such as Framingham State College, to identify and recruit the most qualified applicants for teaching positions. They also welcomed student teachers and practicum students from various higher education institutions to work in many of the schools in the district. Despite these efforts, administrators reported that it was still a challenge to find minority candidates and to hire sufficient numbers of certified teachers to fill vacancies, especially in the areas of math, science, and special education. Recent teacher licensure data indicated that of the 674 teachers employed in the district, 54 were uncertified, and fewer than half of these were on waiver. Almost all teachers on waiver made substantial annual progress toward or completed certification requirements. The district reported that 27 of 28 administrators were certified.

Professional Development

The district offered professional development programs that supported the improvement of paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators during the review period. The mentoring program paired first-year teachers with an experienced teacher mentor and provided a two-day orienta-

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- According to district data, 620 of 674 teachers (92 percent) had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.
- In interviews, administrators and teachers generally agreed that the district's mentoring program for first-year teachers was comprehensive, supportive, and effective.
- The district's personnel office functioned efficiently and competently, and the professional development budget and workshop offerings were substantial.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not comply with the Massachusetts General Laws pertaining to the annual evaluation of the superintendent and the principals, or licensure of classroom leaders.
- Little evidence was presented that the district measured the effectiveness of its professional development program in promoting student achievement.

tion before the start of the school year, followed by required monthly meetings and ongoing support from their mentors. Principals matched experienced teachers who were new to the district with a district veteran for support. Central office administrators matched first-year principals with an experienced principal or central office administrator. Additionally at the elementary level, new administrators reported benefiting from the information shared online by all elementary principals through the "e-group." Assistant principals and districtwide administrators reported that they had no mentors.

Central office administrators assessed professional development needs by surveying teachers and paraprofessionals, reviewing district and school improvement plans, and auditing grant requirements. They compiled this information each school year to form a Staff Development Plan along with an activities calendar that met the district's professional development goals while also meeting the needs of individuals and schools. The district offered training for teaching content, using support strategies, and implementing schoolwide initiatives or grants. Topics included TestWiz, Performance Improvement Mapping, AIMSWeb Progress Monitoring and Response to Intervention System/DIBELS, Galileo, Lindamood-Bell, and SRI. Administrators explained that the district trained almost all teachers and paraprofessionals in approaches to use with special education students, and they acknowledged that many staff members working with ELL students received no training during the review period in sheltered English immersion and other programs. Content coaches supported embedded professional development in the elementary and middle schools. During the review period, the district adequately supported professional development offerings, but it relied excessively on unpredictable grant funding for this purpose.

Evaluation

During the review period, district administrators completed teacher evaluations according to the teacher contract and two central office administrators received evaluations. Administrators described the teacher evaluation as a checklist they completed in a timely fashion, and expressed displeasure with their inability to measure the teacher's impact on student achievement with the current instrument. In examining a random sample of 42 personnel folders, EQA staff found 37 teacher evaluations completed. Almost all were informative, but only two were conducive to professional growth or overall effectiveness. The remaining five folders belonged to first-year teachers whose evaluations were not yet completed. Superintendents completed no principal evaluations during the review period. The superintendent and principals stated during interviews that principals submitted goals and participated in two goal conferences with the superintendent during the 2006-2007 school year. A central office administrator completed one subordinate central office administrator's evaluation in 2005, and the school committee completed one evaluation of the current superintendent in 2006.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

Services

The Chicopee Public Schools used data on student achievement, attendance, and behavior to design policies, procedures, and programs for at-risk students. Data analysis was systematic, continuous, and broadly based at the elementary and high schools, but the middle schools lacked a comparable process. Chicopee used formative and summative assessments regularly and systematically to identify students making unsatisfactory progress and provided a range of supplemental and special education services to help targeted students improve performance.

The district had well articulated student identification procedures and many specially designed instructional programs, especially in early literacy at the K-5 level. Chicopee provided early intervention programs in literacy to ensure that students achieved proficiency in reading by the end of grade 4, but the results were inconsistent across schools because of differences in leadership, staffing, and the manner of implementation of the intervention model. The district did not effectively coordinate its English language learners' programs and services, and many teachers were not fully trained in the sheltered English immersion model.

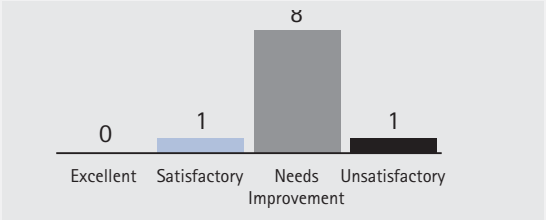
Chicopee had numerous special education programs and services, ranging from assistance rendered to students within their regular education classrooms to substantially separate programs. Yet, special education student performance was low and declining in grade 3 reading, grades 4 and 7 ELA, and grade 4 math.

Four district schools, Bowe, Litkin, Selser, and Streiber, did not meet AYP targets in ELA. Interestingly, the four schools that did achieve AYP enrolled larger populations of low-income and English language learner students than many of the schools that did not. Administrators told the EQA that faithful implementation of the reading intervention model, introduced by the assistant superintendent for instruction and

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district responded to external recommendations, conducted self-studies, adopted research-based programs, and increased services to students at risk.
- Access to programs resulted in improvements in student achievement in some schools at certain levels, increased student attendance, and lower dropout rates.

Areas for Improvement

- The results of early literacy intervention programs varied at the elementary schools because of differences in leadership, staffing, and the manner of implementation.
- District analysis of subgroup achievement and needs was minimal and limited to the special education population.
- Teacher absenteeism rates remained high in Chicopee, and very high in some schools.
- The ELL program lacked direction and not all teachers were trained in the sheltered English immersion model.

accountability, partly accounted for the disparity in achievement among the eight schools. Additionally, teacher absenteeism was above the district average in the two middle schools that failed to meet AYP targets in ELA and math in 2006. Union representatives stated that the buy-back provision in the teacher contract served as an incentive to use sick days.

Subgroup analysis was minimal and limited mostly to the special education population. While the district collected and categorized data on disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and retentions by subgroup, there was no formal analysis to determine whether subgroups were overrepresented.

Chicopee did not have policies, practices, or procedures to increase proportionate subgroup representation in honors and accelerated programs. The district did not systematically track the enrollment of students in honors and Advanced Placement courses by subgroup, and lacked programs at the elementary and middle schools to identify promising minority students and prepare them to succeed in accelerated high school programs.

Attendance

Chicopee had policies and practices promoting attendance, an attendance supervisor, and a software program for recording, reporting, and tracking absences. The monitoring of attendance was systematic at the high school level, but inconsistent at the elementary and middle school levels, where interventions were not always timely. Practices varied from school to school because the K-8 policy did not contain intermediary limits and required actions. The K-8 absenteeism limit of 20 days was two days in excess of the state standard for chronic absenteeism, and students with chronic attendance problems were not identified routinely as part of the transition to ensure appropriate intervention at the next level. Rates of chronic absenteeism were high and increasing in each grade at the middle and high school levels.

Discipline and Dropout Prevention

Chicopee had documented policies and procedures for disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Out-of-school suspensions were well in excess of statewide averages, but declining at the high schools while increasing at the middle schools. Alternatives to suspension instituted at the high schools stemmed an increase in out-of-school suspension rates, but more alternatives were needed at the middle schools.

To address its high retention rate, the district created a fifth-year senior program for credit-deficient juniors as an incentive to remain in school. The dropout rate in Chicopee was high but declining. Chicopee had practices and procedures to prevent dropping out but not a formal policy. There were no procedures or practices to track dropouts and return them to school, and the district lacked personnel to track such students. Chicopee conducted a self-study resulting in recommendations for identifying and assisting students at risk of dropping out through credit recovery efforts and partnerships with other agencies, and tracking and recovering students who had left school without graduating.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

Budget Process

The Chicopee school district's budget development process was open and participatory. Principals and administrators with budget authority built their budgets and then defended them at an administrative team meeting. The school district allocated the budget on a per pupil basis by level, without regard for subgroup needs. No student data were incorporated into the budget allocation process, although the district funded numerous enrichment programs to improve student performance.

Once the budget was finalized at the administrative level, the administration forwarded this recommendation to the school committee's finance subcommittee. Deliberations continued regarding budget requests. The subcommittee forwarded a recommended budget to the full committee, then to the mayor, and finally to the board of aldermen.

The administration made reductions in areas that had the least negative impact on the classroom, primarily in the area of maintenance. Supplies, materials, and textbooks were level funded in FY 2006. The district maximized resources through cooperative purchasing with the city and with the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative.

At the time of the EQA site visit, the central office was restructuring its personnel management system by consolidating this operation with the business office. The district funded most of its professional development programs through grants, and established the Chicopee Academy, an in-district special education program, to maintain enrollment.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Chicopee received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- The city supported the schools with additional revenues by contributing above the minimum required local contribution each year, by allocating additional funds from supplemental sources, and by allowing the district and each school to use accounts once prior year invoices were paid.
- The district used MUNIS for its financial accounting system, resulting in improved communication regarding school finances.
- Despite significant turnover in the position of school business administrator, the current staff maintained the operations of reporting and managing the overall budget.
- Capital planning was done both with building-based needs and districtwide needs. The city had a capital planning committee with school representation.
- The district managed its grants effectively.
- The school facilities were safe and had appropriate plans at the district and city level. Classrooms in the district's schools had the plan.

Areas for Improvement

- Despite access to medicare/medicaid and cable contract funds from the city, the district lacked adequate educational and operational resources.

Financial Support

The city contributed above the minimum required local contribution in FY 2006 and the previous three fiscal years. The city used approximately $1.7 million in Medicaid receipts to support the school district, and used $250,000 from a local cable contract for technology in the schools. In December 2004, the city provided over $500,000 for nurses' salaries and funded the construction of two new schools through capital requests. The school district had accounts for prior year invoices that the city did not close after invoices were paid, so that the schools could tap the funds with school committee approval.

Facilities and Safety

In the budget development process each school presented its capital requests. In addition, the school district had a list of capital projects for FY 2006. The city built a new high school, and the new Chicopee Comprehensive High School was under construction at the time of the EQA site visit. Overall, the facilities were clean and safe, although some began to show their age with worn doors and mechanisms. The school district and city had a safety plan and a city-wide crisis management plan.

CONCLUSION

The Chicopee Public Schools was considered to be a 'Low' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Moderate' in ELA and 'Low' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. Slightly more than one-third of Chicopee's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Improvable', with the highest rating in Assessment and Program Evaluation, and the lowest in Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support.

In both of the EQA visits (in 2003 and 2005), examiners noted that the district had made slow progress in improving student achievement scores. In its 2007 visit, the EQA once again noted that the district had made progress, but not at an acceptable rate until the most recent superintendent assumed leadership. The district leadership had previously fostered a culture of independence among the individual schools, without much accountability to the central office and districtwide coordination of support services and monitoring of instructional practices. That culture appeared to be changing under the tenure of the superintendent and leadership staff serving during the EQA site visit in 2007. The district central office still needed to clarify roles and responsibilities, but administrators appeared to be asserting their authority over the schools.

Chicopee's district and school improvement plans were comprehensive and detailed but had not yet been fully implemented. Chicopee's DIP for 2007-1010 was developed with input from an expanded group of stakeholders. Principals began the process of adding detail to their SIPs and aligning them to the DIP. Administrators were more visible among the schools and had begun conducting classroom walk-throughs. The superintendent hired a new assistant superintendent for curriculum and professional development and expanded the use of assessments and academic coaches. He also implemented a districtwide evaluation process in 2006-2007 for administrators and principals, who had not been evaluated during the review period, and received school committee approval to provide merit-based salary increases. Both the new administration and the school committee expressed hope that the district had addressed the problems that had resulted in managerial turnover, in order to reverse the trend.

The district's curriculum and instructional services continued to require improvement. At the time of the EQA site review, the district had developed elementary and middle school math curricula, and had plans for a middle school ELA curriculum. Curricula were aligned in elementary ELA and in elementary and middle school math, but not in other subjects and levels. The dis-

trict has not yet addressed expectations for science and social studies performance, as those subjects will become tested areas over the next few years. The district was administering formative and summative assessments at all levels. During the review period, the district increased instructional time for ELA and introduced Read 180 to the curriculum at all levels, further increasing time on learning. EQA classroom observations revealed high academic standards and effective instructional practices, including increasing use of differentiated instruction, at the elementary level but not at the high school level.

Chicopee's two middle schools had not made AYP and required corrective action plans, and four of eight elementary schools did not meet AYP targets in ELA. Interestingly, the four elementary schools that achieved AYP enrolled larger populations of low-income and English language learner students than many of the schools that did not. Administrators told the EQA that faithful implementation of the district's reading intervention model, introduced by the assistant superintendent for instruction and accountability, partly accounted for the disparity in achievement among the eight schools.. The district's efforts to improve achievement among subgroup populations remained limited, and the district needed to improve its delivery of services to the English language learner and low-income populations.

During the review period, teacher use of sick and leave time declined by nearly 20 percent, a change that administrators attributed to more active monitoring and follow-up. Teacher absenteeism in both middle schools was significantly higher than the district average, and the school reporting the lowest rate of teacher attendance had been declared underperforming. Student attendance in the district varied from school to school, but the absence limit of 20 days exceeded the 10 percent limit set by the state. Rates of chronic absenteeism were high and increased during the review period at the middle and high school levels. Chicopee's rate of out-of-school suspension exceeded the state average and was increasing at the middle school level. The district established a task force to study reasons for the high dropout rate, which was high although declining.

Despite exceeding net school spending (NSS) requirements, and despite the city's allocation of reimbursements from cable television revenue and Medicaid billing fees to the district, it has struggled financially and has been unable to meet expenses. It made very effective use of grants for services such as professional development to compensate for its inadequate financial support, but these funding sources were unpredictable. While some textbooks were brand new, others were approaching 20 years of service. The city supported the construction of two new high schools even as it was forced to close an elementary school.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts — those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education — received an even more detailed review.

Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis

ADA: Average Daily Attendance

ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment

API: Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)

ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress

CAP: Corrective Action Plan

CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures

CD: Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates

CMP: Connected Math Program

CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information

CPI: Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)

CPR: Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE

CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test

CSR: Comprehensive School Reform

DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIP: District Improvement Plan

DOE: Department of Education

DPDP: District Professional Development Plan

DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment

ELA: English Language Arts

ELL: English Language Learners

EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index

ESL: English as a Second Language

FLNE: First Language Not English

FRL/N: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No

FRL/Y: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes

FTE: Full-Time Equivalent

FY: Fiscal Year

Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency

GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board

GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADU: The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry

IEP: Individualized Education Program

Improvement Gap: A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time

IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan

IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan

ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan

LASW: Looking at Student Work

LEP: Limited English Proficient

MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials

MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS-Alt: Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency

MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official

MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral

MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment

MPI: Math Proficiency Index

MQI: Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system

MUNIS: Municipal Information System

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NRT: Norm-Referenced Test

NSBA: National School Boards Association

NSS: Net School Spending

Performance Gap: A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district

PI: Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency

PIM: Performance Improvement Management

PQA: Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process

Proficiency Gap: A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency

QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory

Rate of Improvement: The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap

SAT: A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

SIMS: Student Information Management System

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPED: Special Education

STE: Science and Technology/Engineering

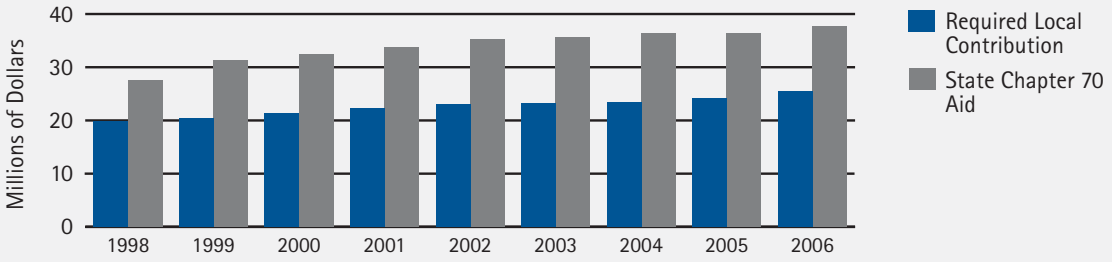
TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program — the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Chicopee's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute.

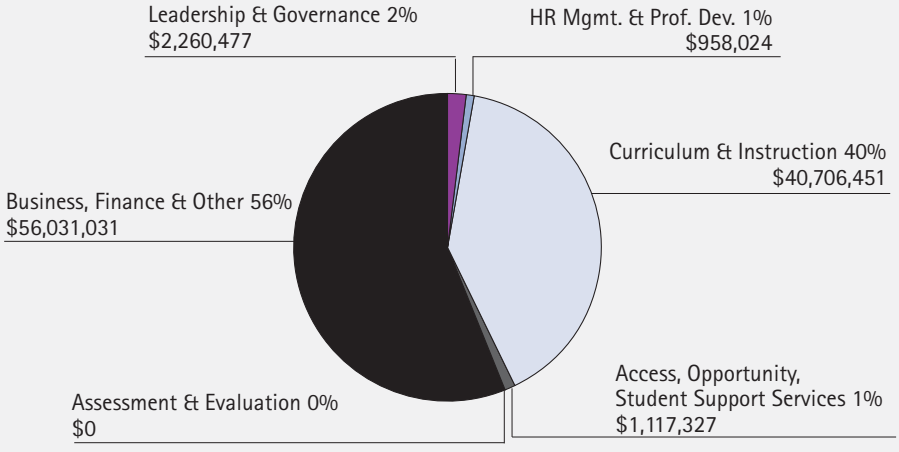
The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $60,556,625 to $63,253,146; Chapter 70 aid increased from $36,376,295 to $37,613,808; the required local contribution increased from $23,330,217 to $25,483,093; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 7,747 to 7,513. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 60.1 to 59.5 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending increased from 65 to 66 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR CHICOPEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR CHICOPEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

FY05 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)



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