



Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

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

Review conducted April 25-28, 2011

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This document was prepared on behalf of the Center for District and School Accountability of the
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Date of report completion: November 2012

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Overview of Differentiated Needs Reviews: Low-Income Students

Purpose

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

Selection of Districts

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

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

²To be considered, a school had to be a Title I school and had to have been recognized as a 2010-2011 Commendation School (for narrowing proficiency gaps, high growth, or exiting NCLB accountability status). In

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.*

addition to having an increase in CPI and proficiency rate in English language arts or mathematics both years, the school could not have experienced a decline in CPI or proficiency rate either year in either subject; had to meet the 2010 AYP participation rate and attendance or graduation rate requirements; and had to have had at least 40 low-income students tested each year from 2007-2008 through 2009-2010.

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

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

The site visit to the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, conducted from April 25-28, 2011, included visits to the following district schools: the Ezra H. Baker Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 3), the Laurence C. MacArthur Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade), the Station Avenue Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 3), the Marguerite E. Small School (grades 4-5), the Mattacheese Middle School (grades 6-8), the Nathaniel H. Wixon Middle School (grades 4-8), and the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School (grades 9-12 and pre-kindergarten). The Marguerite E. Small School was identified as a “gap-closer” for its low-income students, 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 on student performance from 2008-2010. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

Note that any progress that has taken place since the time of the review is not reflected in this benchmarking report. Findings represent the conditions in place at the time of the site visit, and recommendations represent the team’s suggestions to address the issues identified at that time.

District Profile⁴

Dennis and Yarmouth sit side-by-side at mid-Cape, bordered to the north by Cape Cod Bay and to the south by Nantucket Sound. Captain John Smith skirted their coastlines⁵ as shown by maps describing his voyages. Colonists from the Plimouth Plantation sent frequent expeditions to explore their territory. By 1638, the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorized a first settlement in the Indian village of Mattacheese, today a section of Yarmouth. In 1639, Dennis’ first settlement followed in the village of Nobscusset. By 1693, the English settlers, mostly farmers, provided for their children’s education in “squadrons” with multiple settlements sharing a teacher — “a fit person,” to teach the children to “read, write, and cipher.” The teacher rotated from squadron to squadron for a few months a year from January to July. Over time, many small village schoolhouses were built, and by the early– nineteenth century several private academies and seminaries. By the late-nineteenth century, both communities supported common graded schools defined by the reforms of Massachusetts’ own Horace Mann. In 1888, there were 18 schoolhouses in Dennis alone.

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

⁵ Historical information about Dennis and Yarmouth and their schools drawn from The History of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, edited by Simeon L. Deyo, 1890, and posted online at <http://capecodhistory.us/Deyo/Yarmouth.html> and <http://capecodhistory.us/Deyo/Dennis.html>.

Common grammar and high schools endured through the middle of the last century and included some sharing of schooling between the two towns which, in the mid-1950s,⁶ led to the establishment of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District. The regional agreement provided for primary and middle schools located in each community and a shared high school for grades 9 through 12 located in Yarmouth, the larger of the two communities. The regional high school opened in 1957 and has been enlarged and renovated twice.

For fifty years, the district expanded and contracted school facilities to meet the changing needs and sizes of the student population. As in many communities, this remains an ongoing phenomenon. Most recently, as a response to declining enrollment, the current superintendent, who was hired in 2005, recommended closing an elementary school in Yarmouth at the end of the 2006 school year. The subsequent reorganization created the current district structure: the Ezra E. Baker Elementary School in Dennis (pre-kindergarten grade 3), the Laurence C. MacArthur Elementary School in Yarmouth (pre-kindergarten- grade 3), the Station Avenue Elementary School in Yarmouth (grades kindergarten grade 3), the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in Yarmouth (grades 4-5), the Mattacheese Middle School in Yarmouth (grades 6-8), the Nathaniel H. Wixon Middle School in Dennis (grades 4-8), and the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School (grades 9-12). There are also pre-kindergarten classes at the high school for children who will enroll in kindergarten at the Station Avenue Elementary School. An open enrollment policy permits students to attend any appropriate district school, although parents must provide transportation to schools other than those assigned.

The central office staff is lean. In addition to the superintendent, key members of the leadership team include a director of instruction who also serves as director of programs for English language learners, the director of pupil services who is also the homeless liaison, and a director of finance and operations. Other district staff include the Title I coordinator, a food service coordinator, and the educational technology director, who also serves as the data coordinator.

The regional school committee is composed of seven at-large members, three elected in Dennis and four in Yarmouth. According to interviews and a review of documents⁷, at the time of the review the citizens of Dennis had mounted an initiative to partially withdraw from the regional district and create a separate kindergarten through grade 8 school system. However, before any modification to the regional agreement, the towns of Dennis and Yarmouth and the commissioner of education must agree to the terms. Interviewees and newspaper accounts⁸ assigned reasons for the potential separation to several years of recurring financial travails between the two towns. Yarmouth officials and some voters were arguing that the town could no longer afford the increased obligation to the district under the state's funding formula. Dennis

⁶ Dennis K-8 School District Assessment Review Committee Final Report, April 12, 2011.

⁷ "Dennis-Yarmouth School Board Votes on Split," *Cape Cod Times*, March 31, 2011 and "Dennis K-8 School District Assessment Review Committee Final Report," Presentation to Dennis Board of Selectmen, April 12, 2011.

⁸ *Cape Cod Times*, February 1, 2011, March 21, 2011, March 29, 2011, and May 11, 2011.

residents took the position that the regional district risked being underfunded and the quality of education was in jeopardy. The financial situation is exacerbated by the fact that nearly 310 district students attend either public or parochial schools in Harwich, Chatham, and Orleans, and another 130 students are enrolled in charter schools elsewhere on the Cape. As a result, more than three million dollars in tuitions follow choice students to other schools at a time when the district finds it difficult to meet its financial obligations. At the time of this review, according to interviewees, school committee minutes, and press reports, Yarmouth was facing a \$488,000 gap between its assessment under the district's latest budget and what town officials had allocated. An override vote was scheduled in Yarmouth for mid-May 2011.⁹

Demographics

Student enrollment has decreased by 1218 students from 2001 to 2011. Since the school closing in 2006, 757 fewer students are enrolled districtwide, prompting new discussions to consolidate and redistrict again - in 2012. One plan describes closing one elementary school, redistricting, and moving grade 8 to the high school campus. In interviews and focus groups, parents and staff members voiced uneasiness over the district's pending reorganization plans, and expressed hope that the next change would stabilize the school system for a longer period of time.

In recent years, the district's demographics have shifted as the Cape's population has adjusted to the economic downturn and its ensuing pressures on residents, businesses, and town/school finances. Table 1 illustrates that 38.1 percent of the district's students in 2010-2011 came from low-income families, with interviewees noting more and more homeless children in the schools, some of them in families placed in local motels. The proportion of students from low-income families in 2011 represents an increase of nearly ten percentage points over the 28.9 percent of children from low-income families enrolled in the district in 2006.

⁹ This override, in the amount of \$488,000, was passed on May 17, 2011. See [Massachusetts Department of Revenue database of override votes](#).

**Table 1: 2010-2011 Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations**

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	176	5.5	First Language not English	281	8.8
Asian	68	2.1	Limited English Proficient	157	4.9
Hispanic or Latino	227	7.1	Low-income	1220	38.1
Native American	54	1.7	Special Education	517	15.9
White	2510	78.5	Free Lunch	1065	33.3
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	2	0.1	Reduced-price lunch	155	4.8
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	163	5.1	Total enrollment	3199	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 2 offers more insights about children from low-income families enrolled in the district. The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, identified as the “gap closer” for this Differentiated Needs Review, enrolls 33.1 percent of its students from low-income families, the lowest proportion in the district. Many district schools, however, enroll a higher proportion of students from low-income families than the state proportion of 34.2 percent. The table also shows the percentage of LEP students and special education students, populations that require specific programs and services at school. The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School shows higher percentages in both categories compared to the state and higher percentages than most schools in the district as well.

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

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	957,053	34.2	27.4	5.6	6.2	17.0
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District	3199	38.1	33.3	4.8	4.9	15.9
Ezra E. Baker, PK-3, (D)	368	49.5	45.1	4.3	4.3	16.8
Laurence C. MacArthur, PK-3, (Y)	269	39.8	34.6	5.2	4.8	21.2
Station Avenue, K-3, (Y)	408	33.6	28.9	4.7	7.8	5.4
Marguerite E. Small, 4-5 (Y)	317	33.1	28.7	4.4	7.6	19.2
Mattacheese Middle, 6-8, (Y)	494	40.3	34.6	5.7	4.3	17.2
N. H. Wixon Middle, 4-8, (D)	473	40.4	37.6	2.7	5.1	18.6
Dennis-Yarmouth Reg. H.S.	870	34.4	28.5	5.9	3.1	11.4

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

Table 3 below shows the proportion of students from different subgroups who are from low-income families. The table compares the proportions of students at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School who are from low-income families to the proportions in the district as a whole and in the state. What is clear from the data is the diversity and intensity of needs represented by students from low-income families at the school, in the district, and in the state. For example, at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, 39 percent of students who require special education services and 50 percent of LEP students are low-income. Fifty-eight percent of students at the school whose first language is not English are low-income. At the district and state levels, the proportions of students from low-income families in the selected populations show the same trends, although to a greater degree.

**Table 3: 2010-2011 Dennis-Yarmouth Enrollment of Students from Low-Income Families
Differentiated by Selected Populations and Race/Ethnicity for
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, District, and State**

	Marguerite E. Small School			Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District			State
Selected Populations	All Students	Low Income	% Low Income	All Students	Low Income	% Low Income	% Low Income
All Students	317	105	33	3199	1220	38	34
Special Education	61	24	39	517	227	44	42
Non-Special Education	256	78	30	2725	980	36	33
LEP	24	12	50	157	98	62	80
Non-LEP	293	90	31	3042	1109	36	32
First Language Not English	38	22	58	281	179	64	72
Race/Ethnicity							
African- American	14	5	36	176	126	72	71
Asian	15	7	47	68	34	50	38
Hispanic or Latino	27	17	63	227	147	65	78
White	231	60	26	2510	794	32	19

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE sources

District Budget

A new director of finance and operations began work in January 2011 and collaborated with the superintendent to prepare the school budget for fiscal year 2012. The Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District's budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$48,387,040, down slightly from the budget for fiscal year 2010 of \$48,711,320. Assessments to the member towns totaled \$38,936,476 in fiscal year 2011, up slightly from budgeted assessments for fiscal year 2010 totaling \$37,877,480. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$46,656,810) and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$5,852,258), was \$52,509,058. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 was \$42,389,030.

Findings

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?

The school principal and her leadership style were the initial factors mentioned by interviewees as to why the MCAS test results for students from low-income families improved from 2008-2010 at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School.

In response to the question, what factors at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in the last two years have contributed to improved MCAS scores for students from low-income families, school committee members, administrators, and teachers mentioned the principal and her leadership style as the first factor. Interviewees said that she had experience working with students from low-income families before being transferred to the school. One administrator stated that the principal “is a champion for low-income kids.” Interviewees indicated that the principal has a vision for the school, where it needs to be for all students, and understands the components needed to attain the vision. Interviewees described the principal as “hardworking,” “energetic,” “caring,” “sets high expectations,” and “a motivator.” Teachers who attended the teacher focus group remarked “The principal is innovative,” “hands on,” “very visible,” “handles discipline,” and “has developed a sense of community.”

According to the staff, discipline was an issue in the school before the principal’s arrival. Immediately upon arrival, she and the part-time assistant principal informed the staff that she and her assistant would handle all the discipline matters in the school, an assignment previously held by the school psychologist. Discipline no longer seems to be an issue in the school.

One aspect of the leadership style of the principal is to seek input from her staff. Teachers said that they were represented on the school council; this representation assisted the principal with the development of the school improvement plan (SIP). Interviewees referred to the following goal in the SIP that deals with students from low-income families, “Marguerite E. Small faculty will continue to positively impact upon fourth and fifth grade MCAS scores in English Language Arts both in the aggregate and identified subgroups.” Teachers were also involved in writing the school’s vision. In addition, when the principal prepared the school budget, the teachers offered suggestions for needed classroom materials and equipment. Furthermore, the principal has sought input from the five teacher-leaders who serve on the school leadership team.

Staff told the review team that the principal successfully built staff cohesion. When the Simpkins School was closed in 2006 and the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School became a grade 4 and 5 school, the staff at the Small school included teachers from three schools, namely, the Simpkins, Station Avenue, and Marguerite E. Small schools. The teachers said that we “came together when the new principal arrived” and “things settled down.” Also, teachers remarked that the principal “helps us to be the best we can be” and “students feel at home at this school.”

Another aspect of the principal's leadership style is to empower teachers. The teacher-leadership structure in the school includes two teacher-leaders for grade 4, (one English language arts (ELA) and one math), two teacher-leaders for grade 5 (also one for ELA and another for math), and a related arts teacher-leader. As part of the professional learning community initiative (PLC) in the district, teachers are able to meet once a week with the teacher-leaders to examine data and to discuss matters such as curriculum, instruction, and teaching strategies. Also, the PLCs allow teachers to meet during common planning time once a week to discuss pertinent educational issues.

The leadership style of the principal also includes a willingness to take advantage of opportunities. She applied for and was awarded a 21st Century grant for the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. The grant, in the amount of \$125,000 for each of the past two years, has enabled the school to provide two hours (one hour of academics and one hour of enrichment activities) after school four days a week primarily for forty-five low-income, fifteen special education, and nine English language learners (ELLs). In addition, the principal changed the school's daily starting and ending times to coincide with those at the nearby Mattacheese Middle School so that the students who stay after school can take advantage of the 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. late busses. Also, administrators reported that the principal has received a \$15,000 planning grant to prepare an Innovation School grant application that will focus on implementing a flextime teachers' schedule; the schedule is intended to increase the amount of instructional time for students each day for the 2011-2012 school year.

According to parents who were interviewed, the leadership style of the principal is to reach out to parents and the community. They mentioned that parents serve on the school council and are active in the PTO. Also, they indicated that the principal is present at all PTO meetings and attends, along with teachers, the various fundraising events sponsored by the PTO, primarily to raise funds for student enrichment programs at the school. Other interviewees commented about the principal's outreach to community groups to assist at the Marguerite E. Small School, especially with the after school program. They cited examples of the recreation department providing sailing, swimming and tennis instruction during a six-week summer program and the cub scouts offering activities for the students.

According to school committee members, central office administrators, other principals, and teachers, the principal and her leadership style have been the driving and supporting forces behind the development of the school vision and the school improvement plan, building a cohesive staff, empowering teachers, and seeking funds that have resulted in a two-hour enrichment program after school for students, especially those students from low-income families. It is essential for a school leader to set the example, motivate staff, provide an atmosphere conducive to learning, and make available to all students the programs and services needed for their success.

Besides the principal and her leadership style, interviewees identified several other structural and cultural factors that helped improve the MCAS results of students from low-income families at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, including the dedication of the staff, an after-school enrichment program, the team leadership structure, and professional learning communities (PLCs).

The principal, assistant principal, and other interviewees cited the hard working and dedicated staff as a contributing factor in the improved MCAS results for its students from low-income families. Administrators and teachers commented about faculty working with students during recess and before and after school. Teachers in a focus group mentioned an attitude at the school of caring about students, and a feeling that all students are the same, “no delineation.” Also, interviewees spoke about the number of teachers who teach, coach, or supervise students in the variety of after-school programs and activities provided through the 21st Century grant.

Another factor repeatedly mentioned by school committee members, central office administrators, principals, and teachers was the after-school enrichment program supported by a 21st Century grant written by the principal. The program takes place each week from Monday through Thursday from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. The first hour of the program provides homework assistance to students from low-income families, special education students, and ELLS. Once each week this first hour is devoted to MCAS remedial assistance. The second hour of the extended day program is devoted to enrichment activities. Some examples of the activities offered from January 31–March 31, 2011 were Quick Start Tennis, Storybook Theatre, Weaving, School Newspaper, Flat Stanley, Wood Crafts, and Volleyball. Administrators and teachers indicated that a second program, a first-come/first served, fee-based, activity program is available to other students at the school who wish to participate.

The school’s team leadership structure, another factor interviewees spoke about favorably, was encouraged by the superintendent and implemented by the principal. This structure has allowed some teachers to assume a leadership role as teacher-leaders in the PLCs in the school. The superintendent and several other administrators said that there are five teacher-leaders (one in English language arts (ELA), one in math at both grades 4 and 5, and one in related arts). Administrators also pointed out that in grades kindergarten through grade 8 in the other elementary and middle schools, there is one teacher-leader per grade. Leadership personnel stated that, in addition to working with the teachers during the common planning periods, the teacher-leaders serve on the District Teaching and Learning Council (DTLC), often referred to as “the team of 60” because it is composed of all teacher-leaders in the district as well as school principals, assistant principals, and district leaders. According to these leadership personnel, examples of topics discussed at the DTLC meetings are understanding, analyzing and using data; common assessments; and examining student work.

Interviewees spoke positively about the professional learning communities (PLCs) as a factor at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. They remarked about the support the principal has

given to their implementation and about their value to the faculty. Teachers indicated that they have six common planning periods a week, during one of which they meet with a teacher-leader in a PLC. At these meetings various educational topics such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, and individual student matters are discussed. Additionally, with one teacher-leader/PLC for ELA and one for mathematics at both grades 4 and 5, teachers have an opportunity at PLC meetings to discuss and share the previously mentioned matters in greater depth than in the other elementary and middle schools. At other elementary schools, PLCs discuss ELA and mathematics in one PLC. Teachers also said that they are encouraged by the principal, assistant principal, and teacher-leaders to share lesson plans and to observe their colleagues teach.

The contributions made by the staff, the after-school enrichment program funded by the 21st Century grant, the team leadership structure in the school, and the PLCs, described in more detail below, are factors, though in varying degrees, that collectively have played a role in the improved student performance by students from low-income families at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. With the writing, submission, and hopefully, approval of the Innovation School grant application, the principal will introduce a flex-time teachers' schedule next year that will increase instructional time each day to benefit all students.

The model of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as practiced at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School is a major contributor to the narrowing of the achievement gap between students from low-income families and non-low-income students at the school.

According to interviews with district administrators and teachers, the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has embraced the use of the PLC structure and philosophy and the staff is highly committed to sustaining a highly functioning model of PLCs throughout the school. Teachers and district administrators expressed their beliefs that with the strong support of the school principal, she and her teaching staff have created a cohesive and continuous improvement system through the PLC structure. According to interviewees, PLCs promote teachers' individual growth as professionals and support a schoolwide determination to increase the achievement of all students.

Interviews with teachers and district administrators indicated that the PLC model at the school and the leadership of the school's principal have been particularly critical to bringing together the staff of the three different elementary schools who merged to form the new grades 4-5 school two years before her appointment as principal. Interviewees considered the resulting shared sense of purpose and expertise fostered by the PLCs and the support from the principal as key elements in the success of the school in serving low-income students as well as other students enrolled in the school during the last three years.

The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School dedicates one learning period each week to PLC meetings, as do most other schools in the district, according to interviews and a review of teachers' schedules. All teachers are expected to attend PLC meetings, and do, according to the

teachers and their principal. In addition, the principal frequently attends these meetings. Teachers reported in interviews that they hold themselves accountable for being active members of their PLCs and use protocols to ensure that such participation is entrenched in the work of these groups. A review of the agendas for the PLCs confirms this focus on teaching and learning and the use of protocols to carefully analyze and reflect upon their work in supporting student achievement.

There are two PLCs for each grade level at the school: one PLC in grade 4 concentrating on ELA and the other one concentrating on mathematics, as noted in administrative and teacher interviews and PLC minutes. The same division of labor is used in grade 5 PLCs. This configuration is unique to this school because other elementary schools only have one PLC per grade to address both ELA and mathematics. PLCs at the Marguerite E Small Elementary School allow for in-depth focus on these two key areas of student learning. This structure also ensures that teachers continue to expand their expertise in the research on better teaching and learning in these areas. In addition, teachers are given time during staff meetings to share what they have learned from their own instruction, the observation of their students, and examination of student work. Monthly staff meetings are a forum to exchange information and insights across PLCs both vertically and horizontally. A review of agendas for these meetings corroborates the information about the meetings gathered from interviews with teachers and administrators.

The teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and other district elementary schools described in interviews what can be characterized as an inquiry cycle to direct the work of the PLCs, i.e., a sophisticated, research-based, and effective means of improving student achievement. During these meetings, they analyze data to discover curricular or instructional areas that suggest areas of weakness. These areas are often ones that have been identified by the school or grade as a whole during regularly scheduled districtwide, grade-level meetings. Subsequently, the district has sometimes provided some in-depth professional development to address the issue(s) as noted in the school's School Improvement Plan and the District Improvement Plan.

Teachers within the PLC then agree to try out some of the strategies they are learning in districtwide courses and in their own professional development and then bring in student work based on lessons that used these strategies. Student work and achievement data such as interim assessments become the new set of data that teachers use to create a new set of expectations or to start the search for strategies that address identified concerns. Teachers have not included peer observations in this cycle, and do not give each other feedback on their teaching.

This cycle of inquiry, a mark of a strong culture of collaboration, a willingness to engage in the intellectual labor of teaching and learning, and a focus on continuous improvement fostered by the PLCs, have had a major impact on narrowing the achievement gap at between students from low-income families and non-low-income students at the school. Teachers recognize and appreciate the importance of collaboration and see each other as resources and allies in

improving their own expertise and student achievement. Research suggests the final and critical step in realizing the power of the PLC model — opening the classroom door and allowing colleagues to observe and discuss a teacher’s teaching — has not been initiated at the school. However, it is the judgment of the review team that leaders and teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School have built a strong foundation for using the PLC model to continue their work in improving student achievement for low-income students from low-income families and all other students and to support the professional growth of teachers and staff.

Although the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School is developing an effective instructional model that contributes to improved achievement for all students, there are weaknesses in differentiating instruction, promoting higher-order thinking, and using explicit content and language objectives, especially for ELL students.

The review team observed 20-minute segments of each of the 18 classes at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. Using the ESE Instructional Inventory Record, the team looked at three major categories of instructional delivery: organization of the classroom, instructional design and delivery, and instructional design and delivery focusing on higher- order thinking. Fourteen characteristics describe effective instructional practices in the three categories of delivery. As team members observed classes at the school, they rated each of the characteristics for solid evidence, partial evidence, or no evidence for the instructional practice. Observers often noted comments for each characteristic to describe in detail the instructional practices observed.

Organization of the Classroom

The team found that in 94 percent of the classrooms observed there was solid evidence of respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. Observers noted that students were on task with students being respectful, raising their hands, and waiting to be called on. Observers noted that routines had been established with students “quickly transitioning from one activity to the next” and that “teachers had a calm presence with clarity in their presentation.” In the area of posting explicit learning objectives with applicable language objectives for English language learners (ELLs) , observers found that in 61 percent of the classrooms there was no or partial evidence of this practice. The team found that in 78 percent of the classrooms there was solid evidence of maximizing classroom time for learning. One observer commented “students were engaged and the teacher called upon every student in the class.” In another classroom an observer noted that “there was no down time” with the teacher keeping the momentum of the class going using “crisp directions.” One class began with a “ten minute math quiz and then broke into two reading groups.”

Instructional Design and Delivery

Observers found that in 89 percent of the classrooms there was solid evidence of linking academic concepts to students' prior knowledge and experience. In one observed reading class, students were developing trivia questions based on a book they had just finished reading. In one mathematic class, when groups of students were getting ready to measure volume, the teacher referred to a previous lesson in which students had measured classroom tiles. Review team members found that in 83 percent of the classes observed, instructional materials were aligned with students' developmental level and level of English proficiency. Observers found that in 72 percent of the classrooms the presentation of content was within the students' English proficiency and developmental level. One observer commented that the "special education teacher modified the lesson, but kept the expectations high."

Observers found that in 56 percent of the classrooms there was solid evidence of a range of techniques such as direct instruction, facilitating, and modeling in place. In other words, in 44 percent of observed classrooms, a variety of instructional techniques or strategies were not firmly embedded in practice.

Solid evidence that lessons were paced to ensure that students were actively engaged in learning was found in 72 percent of the classrooms observed. One observer noted "the lesson was "fast, but not frenetic"; another commented that "all students were engaged with seamless transitions from one activity to another."

In the area of on-the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding and to inform instruction, 78 percent of the classes observed showed solid evidence of this practice in place. The team observed a variety of on-the-spot assessments in classrooms. Teachers were asking questions to check for understanding throughout the lesson; teachers were conferencing with individual students; teachers wrote student responses on whiteboards; students typed in their answers as they worked on computers; and in one grade 4 mathematics class, the teacher moved from student to student examining work.

Instructional Design and Delivery Linked to Higher-Order Thinking

In 72 percent of classrooms, observers found solid evidence that students were communicating their thinking and reasoning in a variety of ways. Observers noted that students were asked to explain their answers. "Defend your answer," one teacher suggested. In a grade 5 reading class students were working together making up questions for a game board they were creating based on a book they had read. In another grade 5 social studies class, students worked in small groups sharing ideas.

However, observers found that in 56 percent of the classrooms no or partial evidence of questioning techniques that promote higher- order thinking, including application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In the area of student engagement in inquiring, exploring, or solving

problems together, in pairs, or in small groups, 55 percent of the classrooms observed showed no or partial evidence of instructional practices promoting more complex thinking.

In interviews, teachers and PLC team leaders at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School said that conversations about teaching and learning take place in weekly PLC team meetings for both mathematics and ELA. Teachers reported that through the PLCs they are “connected as a teaching community” and have opportunities to “focus and work on common goals and share with one another,” including sharing lessons. Interviewees reported “expectations are filtered down through the PLCs.” They share meeting notes on “Google Docs” and all teachers at the school are linked, facilitating communication. In addition, school leaders and teachers stated that the literacy coach, who spends one-third of her time at the school, shares resources and strategies with staff and oversees the Keys to Literacy initiative. Interviewees credited this initiative with bringing unified instructional practices in literacy to the school. In addition, they stated that practices and resources are shared throughout the district through the literacy Moodle, a web-based forum established by the literacy coach.

Table 4 indicates progress over the past two years at closing the achievement gap between students from low-income families and non-low-income students at the school.

**Table 4: 2009-2010 CPI Achievement Gap for Students from Low-Income Families and Non-Low-Income Students in English Language Arts and Mathematics
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School**

	ELA		Mathematics	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
Non Low-Income	84.5	86.2	78.5	84.4
Low Income	69.4	75.2	63.7	70.6
GAP	-15.1	-11.0	-14.8	-13.8

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

PLCs in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss teaching, learning, and instructional strategies leading to improvement for all students at the school. Through the support of PLCs, the staff are developing an effective instructional improvement model. PLC meetings offer teachers regular opportunities to discuss improvements to practice. These meetings are an ideal laboratory for professional learning to promote conversations and controlled experimentation and evaluation of instructional strategies in need of development. And classroom observations at the school reveal some instructional practices requiring further development. Without clarifying teaching and learning objectives for students, using a range of instructional techniques, and fostering the use of higher-order thinking, it will be difficult for the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School to continue to increase student achievement.

The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has not formally implemented a tiered instructional model to address diverse learning needs, but there is evidence of instructional practices in the school that provide for grouping and some interventions based on students' learning needs and achievement.

Interviews with teachers and leaders at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School revealed that the school has not developed a formal Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy or implemented a tiered instructional model to stage the resources and time during which students receive instructional and learning support. In addition, teachers noted that the district has not attempted such a program, although they recalled that the topic is included in the draft District Literacy Plan to be presented to the School Committee after the site visit.

Interviewed teachers noted that at the time of the review, if one were to ask, there would be no agreement in the school or even across the district about what RTI really means and no common language would be used to describe it elsewhere. However, teachers at the school do differentiate instruction, according to interviewees, and work in PLCs to create differentiated learning opportunities and supports for students based on their diverse learning needs. Classroom observations indicated that this pedagogy needs deeper saturation in the school. Several interviewees stated that PLCs had discussed tiered interventions, tried several interventions in their classrooms, and observed a model under development at the Station Avenue Elementary School.

The topic of RTI is clearly on the scan of teachers and leaders at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and the district's literacy planning committee. Without using a data-driven, tiered instructional and intervention model to provide more structured time and additional supports for students in need, it will be difficult for the district to support all students.

The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has implemented an extended-day program with the primary purpose of serving students from low-income families, special education students, and English language learners (ELLs); the program has provided additional academic and enrichment activities to these students.

In interviews with district and school staff, interviewees said that the extended-day program in conjunction with the program offered during regular school hours has contributed to the improved achievement students from low-income families at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. Specifically, the superintendent of schools said that the school's strong leadership and the extended day program supported by funds from the 21st Century Grant have promoted a dramatic change at the school.

In a focus group at the school teachers said that the program provides a "sense of belonging" to students. Teachers stressed that all students at the school are treated in the same way and that, as a result, students know that teachers care for each of them. Other members of the school staff said that the extended day program has helped kids who are under stress feel safer and bond with

teachers. Interviewees said that “everybody knows the kids with problems and they all work together as a team to support students.”

The extended-day program at the school provides activities for approximately 68 students in grades 4 and 5 on Monday through Thursday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. In her grant application the school’s principal specified that the extended day program would be available to students from low-income families, special education students, and ELLs. At the present time, 33 percent of the students at the school are categorized as low-income.

Awarded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 2009-2010 school year, the federally funded grant provides the school \$125,000 annually for three years and is renewable. In the first year of the grant (2009-2010) only grade 4 students participated in the extended-day program, but in the 2010-2011 school year, the program included students in grades 4 and 5.

The school principal explained that since the grant is focused on providing additional academic learning time as well as enrichment activities, the school needed to provide transportation for the many students would not have after-school transportation. The school is conveniently located next to the Mattacheese Middle School where late buses are scheduled at 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. The district, at the principal’s request, was able to adjust school hours so that students attending the extended day program were provided transportation, resolving an important logistical challenge.

In an interview with the coordinator of the extended-day program, the review team was told that school staff members provide the academic support but that school staff and members of community recreational groups may supervise enrichment activities. The schedule for the program includes one hour of academic work from 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. This hour is usually devoted to homework with teachers available to provide assistance. Every child is provided a cubby where classroom teachers place work for students. According to the coordinator of the program and the principal, the after-school staff has access to student records and there is frequent communication between after-school and classroom teachers.

MCAS preparation in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics is also provided to students during two eight-week periods. During one eight-week period students receive two hours each week devoted to ELA preparation and during a second eight-week period, two hours are provided for MCAS mathematics preparation.

Enrichment activities take place from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and include cooking to develop math and reading skills, School Newspaper, Storybook Theatre, and Flat Stanley Activities to develop writing and reading skills. Biking and fitness activities are also available. A soccer clinic and Quick Start Tennis are also offered. In addition, a snack is provided during the two hour extended-day program. Members of the review team were able to visit the after- school program and observed three teachers working with students on homework. They also saw students

engaged in cooking, Flat Stanley activities, and work on the school newspaper. When asked why they liked the program, students said they liked having help with homework and that it was fun to do “other things.” Teachers also said that the program provides an equal opportunity for students as it offers them many activities that “fill in the gaps” and prepares them for success.

The 21st Century grant also provides a six-week summer program from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and provides activities such as sailing and tennis. Yarmouth Recreation provides instruction for these activities. There is also scheduled time for mathematics and reading review but hands-on activities are emphasized. Busing and lunch are also provided for students in the summer program.

In addition to the grant program the school also has a fee-based extended day program from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day. Many of the same enrichment activities are offered in both programs.

The coordinator of the program said that there are no pre- or post-tests using quantitative data to measure the program’s success, but that surveys are conducted with several groups including the students, after-school teachers, and classroom teachers. Questions in the survey relate to the increase of student self-esteem. One of the questions asks students about their like or dislike of reading. Teachers said that growth of student self-esteem was a positive contribution of the program. The school did not have the results of the survey for review by the team, but the coordinator indicated that in general the findings indicated that student self-esteem increased and their regard for reading was for the most part positive.

Table 5 illustrates the academic improvement at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School as measured by MCAS results in ELA and mathematics during the past three years. In interviews, school and district staff members stated their belief that the extended-day program has contributed to this growth. School staff members also believe that the program provides ways for participating students to gain the self-confidence that prepare them not only for success at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School but also for success at the middle school.

**Table 5: 2008-2010 Proficiency Rates in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for Students from Low-Income Families
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School**

	2008	2009	2010
ELA	26	33	43
Math	23	29	36

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

From interviews and observations, the review team concurs that the extended-day program has contributed to improved achievement. The additional homework support that students receive from teachers after school helps reinforce content taught in the classroom and also provides a way for students to develop good study habits. Furthermore, the communication between after-

school teachers and classroom teachers provides important information that contributes to students' success. The enrichment activities designed to strengthen reading and math skills also help improve students' skill mastery. According to the principal, grant funds will be available for three years and, if the program continues to prove successful, for some years after that. The extended-day program is a key component of improvement initiatives at the school for students from low-income families.

The district allocates funding and resources to the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in amounts comparable to those given other district schools; the school has sought additional resources through grants for programs for children from low-income families.

Administrators, including the principal of the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, confirmed that the district budgets and gives the school the same staffing and other resources that it gives other district schools. Administrators reported that class sizes are comparable to those in similar schools and that support services such as psychologists, social workers, ELL teachers, special education, and instructional coaching are also comparable. The fiscal year 2010 End-of-Year Report confirms that in that year, on a per pupil basis, the district allocated \$7,601 to the school compared to per-pupil spending of \$7,728 for all its schools, including grants.

The school initiated successful grant applications to provide its low-income and other students additional services. Administrators reported that the principal initiated the 21st Century Grant application for \$125,000 per year for an after-school program, and the program began in 2009. The school has also been awarded an Innovation Schools Planning Grant, with planning to begin in summer 2011.

The school has achieved its successes in improving low-income students' the achievement of students from low-income families by making effective use of its own resources along with supplementary support from grants. The grant for the after-school program is the only extra funding the school currently gets and was initiated by the school's principal. This program has made additional academic and extracurricular opportunities available to children from low-income families.

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?

Leadership

The Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District has several established and fully operating systems, but it also had some other systems with incomplete segments.

Complete Systems

- The district made available to the review team a draft of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District Improvement Plan (DIP), 2010-2014, which was developed under the leadership of the superintendent. The school committee and administrators verified that the superintendent led the process to develop the DIP. The plan includes four school committee goals, namely, (1) academic excellence; improve student outcomes, reduce the achievement gap; (2) maintain safe, healthy, educationally sound facilities by continuing to address capital needs; (3) build partnerships to extend and improve communication, understanding, support, and engagement; and (4) obtain funding sufficient to support and improve academic excellence. The 39-page draft DIP uses a template consisting of (a) school committee goal, (b) state strategies & goals, (c) strategic goals, (d) action steps, (e) begin date, (f) anticipated completion date, (g) measurement methods, (h) persons responsible for monitoring, (i) educational results, and (j) monitoring dates/timelines. The first strategic goal under academic excellence in the DIP reads “Reduce achievement gap in ELA for low performing subgroups, SPED and low income, as measured by CPI by 25% from 2009-2014. Accelerate the increase in overall achievement on the ELA MCAS by 15% from 2009-2014.” The second strategic goal contains the same wording as the first strategic goal except that ELA is changed to mathematics.
- Each district school has a school improvement plan (SIP) that includes SMART (specific, m measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time-bound) goals that are aligned with the goals in the DIP. Also, all the SIPs use the same template that consists of (a) SMART goals, (b) data sources, (c) rationale, (d) strategies & action steps, (e) responsible persons, (f) timelines, and (g) evidence of effectiveness. In addition, the final section in each SIP is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2009-2010 School Report Card along with the previous two years of MCAS results.
- School committee members, central office administrators, principals, and teachers commented about the innovative roles established by the superintendent to create innovative practices in the district. Roles mentioned by these individuals included the District Teaching and Learning Council, the deans, the teacher-leaders at each grade at

each school, the professional learning communities, the instructional coaches, and the consulting teachers of reading (CTRs).

- Documents provided to the review team and comments from interviewees demonstrate that research serves as a foundation for several recent districtwide proposals made by the superintendent. “Leading the Learning,” a presentation made by the superintendent in March 2011, focused on items such as educational leadership, improving attendance rates, improving student learning, creating the conditions for becoming more data driven and results focused, and creating the conditions for improvement. In her presentation “The Climbing Higher Project: Long-Range and Short-Range Planning,” dated April 13, 2011, the superintendent addressed topics such as understanding change, characteristics of successful schools, structural changes and support 2006-2011, and structural changes proposed for 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. These changes include closing a school, and moving grade 8 to the high school, and general goals.
- Two school committee members and several administrators said that the superintendent has a positive working relationship with the school committee. A review of the school committee’s evaluation of the superintendent confirmed this statement. According to school committee members, the superintendent keeps them informed about educational matters, provides them with the necessary back-up materials, and has made presentations as about subjects such as MCAS test results, annual school department budgets, school closings, and grade reorganizations.
- Interviewees mentioned that the school system has an established recruitment, screening, interviewing, and hiring system. Administrators and teachers indicated that when a faculty position opens up in the district, the position is posted and advertised. After the application deadline, all materials sent by applicants are forwarded by the central office to the principal of the school where the position exists. Then, the principal, at his/her discretion, either screens the applications and interviews selected individuals, or uses a committee to assist in the screening and interviewing process. Administrators mentioned that each interviewed applicant is asked a uniform list of ten questions. After the principal completes reference checks, he/she recommends a final candidate for the position to the superintendent. The superintendent confirmed this process and stated that she interviews final candidates and offers them contracts subject to a successful CORI check.
- Administrators explained that the budget development process begins with the principals preparing budgets for their schools based upon their needs and with input from the teachers. The principals then submit their proposed budgets to the central office. Each principal then meets with the superintendent and the director of finance and operations to justify the proposed budget. After these meetings, the superintendent presents the needs-based budget to the school committee, who, in turn, review the budget requests at

meetings. Administrators said that when adjustments to the budget are necessary, the superintendent schedules a meeting with all the central office administrators and principals to discuss their proposed changes.

- According to the administrators and teachers, the professional development program in the district supports the vision of improving student achievement. Districtwide professional development programs in the school system have centered on the use of data, common assessments, examining student work using specific protocols, and best practices. In addition, these administrators commented that school-level, professional-development offerings are based on the needs at each school. For example, interviewees stated that in preparation for the upcoming high school accreditation process, the high school is devoting its school professional development time this year to prepare for the self-assessment and team visit from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
- Staff recruitment and hiring, budget preparation, and professional development are established systems in the regional school district and address the needs for which each of them is designed.

Incomplete Systems

- During the review process, administrators and teachers said that kindergarten through grade 12 updated curriculum compendia did not exist. Teachers indicated that in some instances such as science, the curriculum guides were over ten years old. Also, teachers mentioned that they either brought their own curriculum with them from a previous school or went online to find lessons that met the standards in the state curriculum frameworks. Several teachers commented that they used lesson plans shared with them by colleagues at common planning time. Also, both administrators and teachers said that there was horizontal articulation about curriculum in each school, but none vertically in the district. Interviewees mentioned the absence of a kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum committee for each subject area in the district. Some administrators stated that a literacy plan was nearing completion and that the upcoming alignment of curriculum goals and objectives with the Common Core standards would soon become a district initiative.
- Leadership personnel and teachers talked about assessment as a work in progress. They mentioned the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition (DRA2), and midyear and final exams as assessments currently administered systematically in the school system. Interviewees also stated that during the last two years their goal was to develop four common assessments in each PLC — two each year. When asked about sharing common assessments, teachers responded that the common assessments developed in each school were not shared with the teachers in the other

schools. As a result, although teachers have developed some common assessments in their schools, assessments are inconsistent in the district. According to district leaders, the common assessment initiative is in its early stages.

- During the review, interviewees expressed concern that the support services for students in the district were not adequate. They noted the absence of staffing needed to provide sufficient services to English language learners. Furthermore, they mentioned that budget constraints prevented the hiring of needed staff and that, in some cases, the elimination of positions was necessary to meet the regional school district budget figure. Some interviewees also expressed concern about the proposed elimination of a number of classroom assistant positions for 2011-2012 and the impact that this reduction in staff would have on the support services available to the students throughout the district.
- Performance evaluation of teachers and administrators was an incomplete system. Although preconferences, observations, and post conferences were conducted as part of the teacher evaluation process, a review of a random sample of teacher personnel files indicated that not all summative evaluations focused on the Principles of Effective Teaching.¹⁰ Also, the evaluations were basically informative with very few recommendations.
- The evaluation process of the central office administrators, other than the superintendent and the principals, included a goals setting conference, periodic informal meetings on progress made toward attainment of the goals, a self-assessment, a written evaluation, and a postconference. A review of the personnel files of the administrators indicated that the evaluations were based upon DIP and SIP goals in addition to the principals of effective leadership. The evaluations written by the superintendent contained both commendations and recommendations. However, these evaluations were not always done yearly, but covered a two-year time span such as February 2009-February 2011. As such, the evaluations did not comply with state law. The superintendent confirmed that she evaluated the administrators every two years, instead of annually as required.
- School committee members mentioned and the superintendent confirmed that she received a yearly evaluation from the school committee. A review of the superintendent's personnel file verified this. The evaluation was based upon criteria agreed to by both parties. Each school committee member, using a five-point performance rating scale (5 = exceptional performance and 1 = unsatisfactory) rated the superintendent in six

¹⁰ The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect for all districts through the 2010-2011 year; on June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

categories. A composite evaluation was then prepared and shared with the superintendent.

The school system has not developed an updated kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum compendium for each subject area, and staff are working to develop a more consistent assessment system. This leads to uncertainty and confusion among the staff. The inadequacy of staff in student support services limits, and in some instances, deprives students of needed services. The evaluation process for some teachers and all central office administrators and principals, other than the superintendent, did not comply with state law. A district will have difficulty improving student achievement without (1) a coherent, aligned and up-to-date curriculum, (2) a consistent and balanced assessment system, and (3) the support services essential for students. The district has an obligation to meet requirements for the evaluation of professional staff members. While there are many fully functioning systems in the district that help it to function well, the incomplete systems slowed progress toward improvement.

Curriculum

At the time of the review the district did not have aligned and up-to-date kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum compendia in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science to inform and guide instruction and assessment. The district often did not have common instructional programs and materials in ELA and common and complete instructional materials in science to support instruction.

Outdated Curriculum Documents

Curriculum documents, for the most part, were outdated and incomplete. Onsite, the review team reviewed 14 teaching and learning documents in the district. Revision dates noted on the documents ranged from 2001 (Science Grade 5) to 2006 (Integrated Language Arts Curriculum). None of the 14 documents reviewed contained the components of a complete curriculum that include objectives, resources, instructional strategies, assessment options, extensions, and pacing guides. In interviews, teachers referred to the current documents as “loose guidelines” and “not living documents” that could be used to inform instruction and assessment. Interviewees stated that in the case of science, it had been “a dozen years since the science kits were prepared and the science curriculum was written.” Teachers and district leaders stated that “work in vertical alignment of science was done in 2009” and that “standards were matched to the curriculum in 2005-2006.”

Curriculum Development Mainly at the School Level

Curriculum development has been mainly delegated to the school level through the work of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In interviews, district leaders and the superintendent reported that prior to 2006, curriculum team leaders met monthly with content leaders to plan

and review curriculum. In 2006, curriculum team leaders and teams were “given up” when the decision was made to move to a PLC model throughout the district. The support role for curriculum was then reassigned to the principals and to the PLCs, “giving teachers a lot of influence, input, and leadership” with curriculum approached in a more “personalized” way in each school. PLCs focused on ELA and mathematics from kindergarten through grade 5; at the middle school level, grades 6 through 8, PLCs are content specific. According to interviewees, the work of PLCs has created more unity in the curriculum at the school level. District and school interviewees described how the PLCs have been trained, follow protocols, and focus on supporting teachers in instructional and curriculum development. For example, at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, there are five PLCs, one for mathematics at each grade level, one for ELA at each grade level, and one for related arts such as music and art. In interviews teachers report that PLCs “take care of gaps and redundancies” in the curriculum and meet to discuss curriculum alignment between grades. Teachers and teacher-leaders reported that vertical and horizontal alignment works well at the Marguerite E. Small School “as teachers communicate with one another.” They also reported that there is “no connection in what happens at this grade 4 and 5 school with grades 4 and 5 in the other school,” i.e., at the N. H. Wixon Middle School where there are also grades 4 and 5. In interviews, Marguerite E. Small Elementary School leaders cited a plan to use Innovation Grant funds to develop ELA, science, mathematics, and social studies curriculum during the summer of 2011; they also said that they intend to share documents with other schools “to make the curriculum better.” At other schools, PLCs fulfill similar roles in developing curriculum and modifying instruction. Coaches and consulting teachers of reading (CTRs) can provide some unity in what is taught.

Since the creation of PLCs, there has been less curriculum review and oversight from the district. In interviews, district leaders and the superintendent reported that although districtwide curriculum leadership is the responsibility of the director of instruction, an established curriculum cycle of review and revision had “fallen by the wayside.” A cycle to conduct a timely review of the curriculum and a mechanism for revisions to the core curriculum is no longer established in the district. In interviews with district leaders, school and teacher-leaders and classroom teachers, the review team was told that curriculum teams were disbanded in 2006 and a conscious effort was made develop teacher-leadership skills in PLCs. As one facet of their work, PLCs would review and revise curriculum. Interviewees stated that there has been no formal curriculum development districtwide in years; curriculum work is school based and grade level based, with direction coming from PLCs.

Multiple ELA Programs and Materials in Use through Grade 5

There are multiple instructional programs and materials in use for ELA through grade 5. In interviews, district leaders, PLC teacher-leaders, and classroom teachers stated that the ELA curriculum was based the state curriculum frameworks, district teaching and learning guides developed in 2004-2005, and Community Books (grades 4-8) for which themes and units have

been developed by grade level with a document packet available for each book. There are no districtwide instructional programs or resources that address ELA teaching and learning. In interviews, district leaders, PLC teacher-leaders, and classroom teachers stated that instructional materials can vary from school to school; all elementary schools having “guided reading closets” that contain leveled books by genre and content. The review team saw no evidence of written curriculum documents for guided reading, but some teachers have been trained in the *Fountas & Pinnell* method.

In interviews, teachers at the Station Avenue Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 3) and MacArthur Elementary School (prekindergarten through grade 3) stated that “they do not have an aligned ELA curriculum.” At Station Avenue Elementary School, teachers use documents drawn from the state curriculum frameworks, Houghton Mifflin basal readers, and guided reading books; at Laurence MacArthur Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 3) teachers use Scott Foresman basal readers and guided reading books. In interviews, teacher-leaders and CTRs stated that the Ezra E. Baker Elementary School did not use a core reading program, but used the guided reading leveled books.

Students arrive in grade 4 at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School from the Station Avenue Elementary and the MacArthur Elementary schools having experienced several different ELA instructional programs and materials but common goals guided mainly by the state curriculum frameworks. Additionally, interviewees stated that the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has a blended faculty as a result of the district’s reorganization in 2007. Instructional materials followed teachers to that school, and in interviews, teachers noted, “We use what we had from our other schools.” As a result, a variety of instructional materials for ELA are also being used at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. These include the Scott Foresman and Houghton Mifflin basal readers and Community Books. By grade 5 students, therefore, experience multiple literacy program transitions.

Interviewees stated that the Community Book list establishes appropriate books at each grade level. Several years ago below-grade-level books were added for students reading at lower levels. One teacher said “we create a lot of our own stuff.” Teachers in focus groups at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School indicated that they also have a Guided Reading Book Club for students to read books targeted to their reading level. The consulting teacher of reading (CTR) has assumed responsibility for checking the alignment for the different basal readers in use at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. In interviews, teacher-leaders, school-leaders, and district leaders said that although Marguerite E. Small students are exposed to three different curricula there is “unity to where we are bringing our students.”

Keys to Literacy as a Unifying Instructional Strategy

In interviews, school leaders and teachers reported one of the mechanisms for creating “unity” was the adoption of the *Keys to Literacy* program in 2009-2010. *Keys to Literacy* is not a curriculum but a research-based program that supports content reading instruction and unifies

literacy strategies. The literacy coach for grades 4 through 8 oversees this program, which brings strategies such as main idea skills, note-taking skills, and summarizing skills to bear on instruction. In addition, interviewees reported that all teachers have access to the district's Literacy Moodle where they can share literacy strategies and lessons in a web-based forum.

Undocumented ELA Curriculum at the Middle Schools

There is little documented, up-to-date curriculum at the middle schools. Teachers in focus groups stated that there is no formal written curriculum for ELA at the middle schools (grades 6, 7, 8) and that they are responsible for aligning what they teach to the state curriculum frameworks. They also reported that there are no department heads at the middle schools and as a result, they do not get content-based feedback in ELA, mathematics, and science. Teachers do meet in PLCs by content. Interviewees reported that curriculum documents for ELA are "loose guidelines" and curriculum maps for ELA are not detailed. Community Books are also used in grades 6, 7 and 8. In these grades teacher-leaders and classroom teachers reported that teachers believe they have sound practices in dealing with Community Books and writing. However, teachers also noted that there is no unified writing curriculum in use throughout the district to guide writing instruction and teachers use what they know and what they have, often sharing materials.

Mathematics Curriculum through Grade 8 is Embedded in Textbooks

Interviews with district leaders, teachers, and teacher-leaders indicated that the mathematics curriculum through grade 8 is based on two standards-based mathematics programs, *Everyday Math* for kindergarten through grade 6 and *Connected Math Project* (CMP) for grades 7-8. In both cases, the textbooks include pacing guides for mathematics and the publisher asserts on its website that the texts are aligned to the Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Framework. Teachers at the elementary level work with the mathematics coach to develop additional mathematics curriculum materials in PLCs, often based on needs identified by an item analysis of MCAS results. When students' mathematics skills demonstrate weaknesses, teachers create new mini-units and assessments to address those weaknesses.

Science Curriculum through Grade 8

In interviews, district leaders, teacher-leaders, and classroom teachers stated that in science, students do not use a textbook through grade 6. Science kits are provided and teachers have discretion on how they will reach their goals. According to teachers in focus groups, the district created science kits a dozen or so years ago and they have not been updated for years. The kits are missing materials and use outdated technology. Interviewees stated that they sometimes find lessons on the Internet and try to match them to topics in the Massachusetts Science Framework.

At the middle school level, students use science textbooks and a content meeting is held once-a-month by grade level; teachers can talk about what they will be teaching and attempt to align materials horizontally and vertically. Individual teachers create units that can be more or less rigorous depending on the teacher, according to interviewees.

At the Marguerite E. Small School, members of a parent focus group expressed concern about the “technology component not being where it should be.” Parent interviewees suggested the need to include “technology as a true part of the curriculum instead of just on the computer in the library.” Technology is included in the MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering tests that all students are required to take in grades 5, 8, and 10.

Curriculum Management at the High School

Individual teachers or collaborative groups of teachers develop high school curriculum, depending on the course and subject or both. District leaders and teachers report that at the high school, PLCs are subject specific and department chairs are the “content experts.” In past years, Grant Wiggins conducted training in *Understanding by Design* (Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe) for high school teachers to learn to create “enduring understandings, essential questions, tasks and timelines for each course and common assessments to calibrate student work.” This curricular and instructional model is followed at the high school, according to a district leader.

Teachers stressed that the culture in the high school is one of collaboration to ensure consistency. At the high school, teachers in focus groups stated that the mathematics curriculum is updated continually and the entire mathematics curriculum posted online. They stated that mathematics teachers “keep it [i.e., curriculum] going,” “with or without pay.” Those present stated that the high school English curriculum is not as consistent. Some English courses have a written curriculum; some have a partially written curriculum; some have none. Focus group members stated that they worked collaboratively to insure consistency in same level courses and that department heads observe teachers and give feedback on curriculum alignment. Science teachers reported that work is being done on common assessments during their common planning time (PLCs), but not all grades have pacing guides and curriculum is often created when teachers prepare for their classes. This is also the case in social studies where teachers reported that they use the state curriculum frameworks as their curriculum and do “what’s best for their students.”

A New Draft Literacy Plan Includes Curriculum Development

Interviews with district leaders, school leaders, and teachers and a review of documents revealed a draft of a new District Literacy Action Plan completed in March 2011 by the district literacy planning committee. The plan is scheduled for presentation to the school committee in May 2011. Created with the assistance of a literacy specialist from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and a member of the southeast region District and School Assistance Team, the overarching theme of the document is to “ensure that all Dennis-Yarmouth students experience high quality, rigorous instruction, delivered with consistency, in all content areas at all grade levels.” Additionally, the draft District Literacy plan is aligned to the literacy goals in the DIP and the SIPs. The first action step outlined in the plan is to “Develop curriculum guides for English Language Arts including literacy in all content areas” aligned to the new Common Core curriculum. Interviews with the superintendent, district leaders, and

teacher-leaders indicate that after the ELA curriculum has been developed, the team will be asked to help with an action plan for mathematics in the fall of 2011.

Impacts and Judgments Related to Curriculum

Horizontal and vertical alignment in the district is fragmented and school based rather than managed clearly and consistently at both the district and school levels. PLCs have taken on curriculum development work, which is appropriate, but the absence of common instructional material in the district compounds the fragmentation and absence of oversight and coherency in the system as a whole. The literacy coaches, consulting teachers of reading (CTRs), and the *Keys to Literacy* program have exerted some leverage to unify instruction; the draft District Literacy Plan can also help, once it has been approved and implemented.

Appendix C details the lower achievement for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics as measured by MCAS results for all students in the district and for students from low-income families compared to those statewide. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) annual yearly progress results summarized in Table 6 underscore these results. All these factors demonstrate that high levels of progress and attainment in ELA and mathematics are not a reality in the district for all students. Without an aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improving curriculum, the district cannot meaningfully and systematically ensure high levels of achievement for all its students.

**Table 6: 2009-2010 NCLB Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District**

		2009	2010	NCLB Accountability Status
ELA	Aggregate	No	No	Improvement Year 1
	All Subgroups	No	No	
MATH	Aggregate	Yes	No	Corrective Action
	All Subgroups	No	No	Sub Groups

Source: School/District profiles on ESE website; accountability data

As described, the district has created PLCs and charged them with addressing the gaps and redundancies in the various curriculum materials used in the district. They are working hard to address alignment, both vertically and horizontally, and sometimes, to create curriculum and other instructional materials. However, this work cannot make up for the absence of comprehensive curriculum guides aligned to state curriculum frameworks that include learning objectives, resources, instructional strategies, assessments, extensions, and pacing guides. A comprehensive, fully developed, and aligned curriculum can contribute to improving achievement for all students in the district, including children from low-income families.

Instruction

The district has established a strong learning and teaching environment in all schools, mainly through the work of PLCs. Although classroom observations revealed instructional strengths in classroom organization and in key aspects of instructional design and delivery, there was a lower incidence of practices challenging students to engage in higher-order thinking and analysis; instruction often consisted of a narrow range of techniques.

The review team observed 20-minute segments of 43 classes in each school in the district, focusing on all classrooms at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and on randomly selected classrooms elsewhere. Using ESE's Instructional Inventory Record, the team looked at three major instructional categories: organization of the classroom; instructional design and delivery; and instructional design and delivery focusing on higher-order thinking. Under each category characteristics describe effective instructional practices for a total of 14 characteristics. As the review team members observed classrooms in each school, they rated each of the characteristics looking for solid evidence, partial evidence, or no evidence of the instructional practice in place. Observers could add comments for each characteristic to describe the observed practice in more detail.

Along with classroom observations, the review team also looked at documents provided by the district and conducted interviews with district and school leaders, teacher-leaders, and teachers to gain a comprehensive picture of instructional practices in the district. The team also examined curriculum documents to determine their completeness and adequacy to inform quality instructional practices in the district.

Organization of the Classroom

Observers found that in 93 percent of observed classrooms, the classroom climate was characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. Team members observed "respectful, purposeful behavior" on the part of teachers and students. One observer noted an elementary classroom characterized by a "good, gentle respectful tone." In a middle school classroom "teachers and students spoke politely, clearly and respectfully" to one another. In one middle school, an observer noted that an excerpt from classical music was typically played over the intercom to start the day and was preceded by a brief introduction sharing highlights of the piece with students. At the high school, an observer noted that the "interaction between the teacher and students was positive and respectful."

In 28 percent of observed classrooms there was solid evidence of the practice of communicating or writing content objectives; yet, in 49 percent of classrooms there was no evidence. In some cases, the team recorded that agendas listing topics were evident, but learning objectives and learning goals — what students would know or could do at the end of the day or class — were not posted. Language objectives aligned to the English Language Performance and Behavioral Objectives (ELPBO) for English language learners) were not posted in any observed classrooms.

The team found that in 72 percent of the observed classrooms there was solid evidence of maximizing time for learning. Observers commented that students were “engaged, focused on learning; everyone is busy, relaxed, focused on tasks that are clear to them” and “students returned to class with a minimal disruption to learning.”

Instructional Design and Delivery

The team found that in 86 percent of observed classrooms there was solid evidence of instructional practices that link academic concepts to students’ prior knowledge. In one grade 2 English language arts (ELA) class, students were creating books about animals using vocabulary they had learned from reading non-fiction books about animals. Observers noted that “students were working on probability and understood concepts and language used by the teacher.” In a middle school class, an observer noted that students were “applying knowledge they learned about slavery to a project they were creating.”

Solid evidence that instructional materials are aligned with students’ developmental level and level of English was observed in 81 percent of observed classrooms. In one first grade class, one group of students at a listening station followed along in a book while another group of students used a computer activity aligned to their English developmental and proficiency levels. The team found solid evidence in 72 percent of observed classrooms that the presentation of content is aligned with the students’ English proficiency and developmental level.

In 77 percent of the classrooms observed there was evidence of the depth of teacher’s content knowledge throughout the presentation of the lesson. In 49 percent of observed classrooms, solid evidence was found of the use of a range of teaching techniques such as direct instruction, facilitating, or modeling. In 74 percent of observed classrooms the team found solid evidence that lessons are paced to ensure that students are actively engaged in learning. In one kindergarten class the teacher used rotating name cards to make certain all students were involved in the activity. Repeated scans by an observer in another classroom showed “all students actively engaged.” At the high school level an observer commented, “once given the assignment all students were actively involved.”

In 63 percent of observed classrooms there was solid evidence of on-the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding to inform instruction; in 26 percent of classrooms, there was partial evidence, showing this practice to be less secure.

Instructional Design and Delivery Linked to Higher-Order Thinking

In 50 percent of the classrooms observed throughout the district there was solid evidence of questioning that requires students to engage in the process of application, analysis, synthesis or evaluation. In 60 percent of observed classrooms there was solid evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning. These are both practices that encourage and reinforce student’s higher order thinking and analysis.

In 47 percent of the classrooms observed in the district, there was solid evidence of students inquiring, exploring or solving problems together, in pairs or in small groups. Review team members found that in 60 percent of the classrooms visited, there was solid evidence of opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content embedded in the lesson.

Observations of Instruction by District Leaders, School Leaders, and Others

In interviews, district leaders and teachers described three observation practices that are in place: instructional rounds, walk-throughs, and learning walks. Principals and district leaders were trained by Sarah Fiarman¹¹ to conduct instructional rounds and have spent time discussing and studying the practice. Principals and directors are divided into three teams of three or four people with the superintendent on each team. Teams conduct instructional rounds once a month, convening before they begin. They select a topic and discuss what to look for. After the visit, the team discusses what they observed. For example, this year the teams are focusing on student engagement, higher-order thinking, and questioning. The instructional rounds are conducted to study and better understand instruction and student learning in the district and to identify possible topics for professional development. No formal feedback on instruction is given to the observed teacher since this is an exercise targeted for observers' learning and to provide a forum for leaders to discuss issues of practice.

In interviews, district leaders and teachers also described "formal walk-throughs" by principals and department heads. Interviewees stated that the "principal monitors instruction" through walk-throughs with informal, non-evaluative feedback, although sometimes no feedback is given or often, teachers report, is a short positive comment. Teachers can also request feedback from instructional coaches such as the mathematics coach in kindergarten through grade 3 and literacy coach in grades 4-8.

The high school teachers' focus group described learning walks as another mechanism for informal feedback about instruction from peers at the high school. According to interviewees, teachers can do learning walks to observe other classrooms or departments. Interviewees stated that "you can get feedback; sometimes you need to ask for it." Learning walks are conducted less often than several years ago, according to interviewees.

Interviewees also described how PLCs attempt to arrange shared opportunities for teachers to see each other teach or find ways to critique instructional practice. However, a number of interviewees noted that PLCs spend much more time discussing students, grouping, curriculum modifications, assessment, and assessment results than probing more deeply about what steps they can take to improve instruction. One interviewee observed, "We spend a lot of time talking about kids and not a lot of time talking about teaching." Colleagues agreed.

¹¹ Elizabeth City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, Lee Teitel, Instructional Rounds: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning, Harvard Education Press, 2009.

In interviews, teachers and district leaders described the teacher evaluation process as the formal procedure for principals or other evaluators to give feedback on instruction. Interviewees stated that professional status teachers are evaluated every other year, teachers without professional status once a year. According to interviewees, formal feedback on instruction takes place during the evaluation process: teachers submit lesson plans, the observation takes place, and a discussion follows. A review of randomly selected teacher evaluations revealed informative comments describing teachers' practices and how they met predetermined goals; few evaluations used feedback as an instructive tool to improve practice. (For a more detailed description of the evaluation process, please refer to findings in the Human Resources and Professional Development section.)

Classroom visits conducted by the review team revealed strengths in instructional practice. Teachers' classroom organization skills were strong, with one area of need evident in either the presence or completeness of how teachers articulated and explained lesson goals and objectives to students. Instructional design and delivery was also fairly well grounded: teachers linked lessons to students' prior knowledge, students were engaged in lessons, and materials were aligned with students' developmental level. Observed instruction was less robust in practices requiring students to engage in higher-order and analytical thinking. In addition, although in interviews teachers and teacher-leaders describe their attempt to group students and differentiate instruction, in less than 50 percent of observed classrooms students were working in pairs or groups, and in 51 percent teachers were using a range of techniques. Observed instructional practices demonstrate that good practices are gaining traction in the district. While there are multiple opportunities to provide feedback to teachers about instruction, however, interviewees noted that feedback is often not very profound and, especially, not highly conducive to promoting improvements to practice. Improvement occurs mainly as a result of professional conversations in PLCs. A continued emphasis on improving instruction by teachers as well as leaders can help make teaching and learning even more effective in the district for all students, especially for students from low-income families.

Assessment

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) collect, analyze, and use assessment data as a key component of their improvement work and are *de facto* agents for change at the school and classroom levels at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and at all district schools.

On the whole, evidence from documents and interviews confirms that the district has centered data-driven improvement initiatives at the school level and empowered PLCs to be change agents. Interviews with teachers and leaders at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and from other district schools confirm that this improvement strategy has been important and the collection, analysis, and use of assessment data has been a key component of the strategy.

The third action step in the current District Improvement Plan (DIP) outlines a multifaceted academic excellence goal that focuses on the use of standardized literacy assessments to guide literacy instruction, improve student achievement, and help reduce achievement gaps. To meet this goal, PLC teacher-leaders, having participated in specific professional development initiatives early in their training to learn to analyze and use multiple forms of assessment data for improvement, made extensive use of data analysis with their PLCs. Also, during the 2010-2011 school year, consulting teachers of reading (CTRs) provided professional development to classroom teachers in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of the Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition (DRA2), and other literacy assessments.

Leaders and teachers assiduously ensure that assessments are administered and analyzed in a timely way. Data from aggregate and disaggregated MCAS results and from a broad range of formative, benchmarked, and summative assessments —some, standardized and others, teacher-developed — make up most data sets used by PLCs through grade 8. According to interviewees, teachers also use samples of student work, and sometimes their observations of students at work constitute informative data. Interviewees and teachers in focus groups also described how they consider the whole child and are expected “to meet students where they are and help take them to a higher level.” In that sense, teachers’ knowledge of particular students’ social and emotional needs as they relate to learning provide additional data. In interviews with Marguerite E. Small Elementary School staff, teachers’ knowledge of students’ social and emotional needs and how they address the needs of all students stand out.

The PLC structure promotes data-driven decisions. PLCs collect and disseminate data among themselves and use data analyses to monitor student progress and group students for instruction. They also use data to create and adjust curriculum and assessments and make decisions about how to improve instruction— all with an eye toward improving student achievement. Others also use assessment data in their decision making. Principals analyze and disseminate MCAS results to teachers and a few sometimes attend PLC meetings to understand data use firsthand. Principals also monitor MCAS results and other assessments to define professional development needs throughout the district and the improvement goals and action steps they include in School Improvement Plans (SIPs). At the district level, when grade-level teams or subject-level teams meet to discuss progress, they develop and share understandings about common assessments and MCAS data. But the focused locus for improvement centers on PLCs as they collect, disseminate, analyze, and use data to inform decisions.

English Language Arts Assessments, Kindergarten through Grade 8

Aggregated and disaggregated MCAS results provide important data for PLCs to understand students’ learning needs and teachers’ instructional needs in English language arts (ELA) as they plan for improvement in elementary and middle schools. In addition, standardized formative and diagnostic assessment data abounds for students in kindergarten through grade 8. Most of these assessments are administered multiple times a year. Struggling readers are tested more

frequently. Data for students through grade 3 includes results from the *Clay Letter ID* and *Concepts about Print* to assess kindergarten students' early language skills, the benchmarked *Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition* (DRA2) for students in kindergarten through grade 5, and the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) for students in kindergarten through grade 3. Title I students placed in Reading Recovery also take *Fountas & Pinnell* benchmark assessments and *Leveled Literacy* assessments as part of the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program. Dictions are given frequently in the lower grades.

Wixon Middle School students (grades 4 through 8) and Mattacheese Middle School students (grades 6 through 8) take the *Scholastic Reading Inventory* (SRI) three times each year to measure reading comprehension. Interviewees noted that struggling middle school readers (grades 6 through 8) may also take either the DRA2 or DIBELS assessments at the teacher's discretion. Assessments differ at the Marguerite E. Small School (grades 4 and 5) where students take the DRA2 and may take DIBELS and the DAZE — the DIBELS version of the maze procedure to measure comprehension; DIBELS is not required. The SRI will be administered to Marguerite E. Small students for the first time in May or June 2011. Struggling readers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School take the *Gray Oral Reading Test* (GORT).

PLCs use their analyses of standardized ELA assessment data to inform instruction by creating flexible reading groups and modifying lessons and assessments. They also use information gleaned from item analyses of MCAS results to expand or create curriculum and assessments to fill content gaps. Often the absence of an aligned and up-to-date ELA curriculum generates these gaps, which are identified in lower MCAS scores. For example, when MCAS results indicated weaknesses in figurative language and vocabulary, a grade level PLC at one school created a common assessment on poetry and then developed curriculum and resources for instruction. As another example, the DRA2 and DIBELS data not only informs grouping students for reading instruction, but also helps teachers monitor progress in comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary development, and identifies needed interventions to help students read at grade level. The literacy coach for grades 4-8 and consulting teachers of reading (CTRs) through grade 6 support teachers' work and provide some unity across schools.

Interviewees describe the assessment process as iterative. Teachers discuss, create, and try new materials in class; share results in PLCs, often with coaches or CTRs; refine their strategies and materials; try them again and share them with colleagues. According to interviewees and a review of documents, the process produces many important and interesting professional conversations and stronger classroom materials. It provides structure for improvement initiatives. However, interviewees also described duplicated efforts and time spent closing gaps in content and instructional priorities that could already have been clarified in a complete and annotated curriculum. A complete curriculum would free PLCs to focus on improving instructional strategies, a topic interviewees stated they want to address more. In interviews, teachers noted that conversations in PLCs focused a great deal on children, grouping, and missing content and

less on how to improve instruction. However, data analysis has been used to define professional development choices that focus on instruction in the elementary grades such as the course Teaching Struggling Readers and several offerings on implementing *Keys to Literacy*. Interviewees said that they would like more time in PLC meetings to process and share lessons learned and applied from these courses.

Writing Assessments, Kindergarten through Grade 7

Interviewees indicated that instructional strategies to teach and assess writing vary by school and even by classrooms within a school. According to interviewees, without a common writing curriculum or instructional method, teachers use what they know or can find to teach writing. While instructional materials and methods may differ, teachers use similar formats to assess writing skills. An item analysis of MCAS results indicated that open response questions were a weakness. Now all students in kindergarten through grade 5 write a reader's response to literature based on MCAS-type writing prompts. Students demonstrate their critical understanding of text by writing responses to a prompt such as a question or a graphic organizer about elements of plot, character, or setting. Kindergarten students respond using picture writing. In interviews, teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School described designing the response to literature assessment to include complex thinking skills so that students could demonstrate deepening levels of understanding of text when using Community Books.

Interviewees described how students in grades 4, 5, and 7 write at least one long composition modeled after MCAS-type prompts, often using released MCAS questions. Some teachers ask students to score the prompt using the six-point MCAS writing rubric. Students typically write this composition in January to give timely information about students' writing strengths and weaknesses to prepare for MCAS tests. Students in kindergarten through grade 5 also undertake several process writing pieces, some using Writers Workshop. The draft District Literacy Plan (DLP), which will be presented for approval to the school committee in May 2011, identified the curriculum and writing instruction as two of many topics needing more clarity and consistency.

Mathematics Assessments, Kindergarten through Grade 8

Many mathematics assessments are embedded in the instructional program; others are developed by teachers and teacher leaders in PLCs. Teachers use data from these assessments and from MCAS results to evaluate student progress and inform decisions to modify instruction and create curriculum mini-units. The district uses the University of Chicago's *Everyday Mathematics* as the instructional program through grade 6 and the corresponding *Connected Mathematics Program* (CMP) in grades 7 and 8. Again, there are no up-to-date, aligned, curriculum documents to guide mathematics instruction through grade 8— just the text and the district's older guidelines set to state curriculum frameworks which, according to interviewees, “hardly anyone uses.” Although the publisher states on its website that the program is aligned to state curriculum frameworks, teachers at various schools said that they have had to realign it based on

MCAS results to prioritize topics and focus on specific state standards for instruction and assessment.

Both the elementary and middle school mathematics programs embed formative pre- and post-tests (exit sheets) and summative unit tests to assess student progress and achievement. Interviewees mentioned using the Recognizing Student Achievement (RSA) checklists from *Everyday Mathematics* to monitor students' progress in mastering the program's learning goals which, on the whole, correspond to state curriculum standards. In kindergarten through grade 3, students complete an interview protocol one-on-one with the teacher and score it on a rubric. Using this and their observations, teachers believe they are better prepared to address students' mathematical understanding.

PLCs also use data from classroom mathematics assessments to further refine lessons, reorder priorities, create supplemental lessons, and group students in flexible groups similar to reading groups. MCAS analyses also provide data to prompt the creation of supplementary mini-units with corresponding assessments, for example, new units on symmetry, geometry, and numeracy. Grade 3 PLCs created new mini-units to teach fractions. Grade 5 PLCs created a mini-unit in measurement. Districtwide, there are common mid-year and final mathematics assessments that provide summative data for analysis and application to improvement initiatives.

In addition, interviewees described an emphasis to reinforce and assess mathematics vocabulary, since the instructional programs through grade 8 are literacy based and rely on students' ability to read and write to learn mathematics. At the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, interviewees reported that PLCs have developed formats for teachers to evaluate students' ability to think mathematically. In addition to using the program's paper and pencil assessments, the school's teachers reported designing observation protocols to watch students solve problems, gathering data to help group or individualize instruction. The teachers also noted they are developing assessments requiring students to explain their thinking as they solve problems.

The common instructional programs and assessments in mathematics indicate that teachers and leaders have common assessment data available to develop clearer understandings about student progress and achievement within grade levels and within and across schools. However, the review team did not see evidence that all these categories are closely examined or tracked in the district. Interviewees noted that all mathematics teachers meet five or six times a year for professional development and to assess progress. Data analysis also informs decisions about professional development topics in mathematics as it does for English language arts (ELA) such as, the decision to offer a course on the Foundations of Number Sense to elementary teachers.

School leaders stated that while they are aware of some classroom-based data in addition to MCAS results and may review it to gain a sense of progress at their school, principally MCAS data paints the picture of student achievement and progress in mathematics at the school and district levels. MCAS data also informs their data presentations to teachers and others and decisions about planning for improvement and goal setting.

Science Assessments, Kindergarten through Grade 8

There is no recently reviewed science curriculum to guide science instruction and assessments. According to interviewees and information gleaned from focus groups, science kits were developed and revised 10 to 15 years ago by former curriculum teams for kindergarten through grade 5. Teachers reported that science kits are old and only one of each kit is available per school. Some kits have missing or outdated pieces and teachers expressed a need for newer resources. Also, since some science kits require obsolete technology, important topics may not be taught and assessed. In addition, there are more individual kits available than time to use them, so teachers and PLCs sometimes pick and choose which science topics will be taught. Science assessments are task oriented and aligned to topics in each kit. PLCs try to decide to cover roughly the same topics, but do not always do this since there is little monitoring of science instruction and assessment, given the focus on ELA and mathematics in the lower grades. The science kits include tasks based on state curriculum standards and the assessments evaluate student understanding and mastery of processes and the scientific method. Alignment is an issue and assessment data about what students know and can do in science may vary by grade level across schools and even sometimes by classroom within grades at the same school. There is no formal monitoring or benchmarking of science achievement data apart from occasional discussions in PLCs; so, tracking progress is unclear. There is, however, integration of science into the ELA block. The *Keys to Literacy* framework is overlaid onto science lessons; for example, this framework requires students to use two-column notes and other *Keys to Literacy* strategies in their study of science topics. As noted above, interviewees reported that through grade 5, there is minimal discussion of science teaching and learning and there has been no recent review to assess the effectiveness of the science program and its materials.

A science textbook is used in grade 6 and above. Instruction and assessments are more content based according to a district leader and focus groups. High school science courses follow the expected sequence and materials are more up-to-date. In addition, grade 8 students take a placement test for grade 9 biology.

According to interviews and teacher focus groups, science teachers in grades 6 through 12 use PLC time to discuss and align science instruction and assessments. However, middle school science teachers noted that without a department head they need to rely mainly on themselves to make judgments about modifications to instruction and assessment.

Given the status of the science curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the review team wonders whether the program is serving students well. Evidence from MCAS Science and Technology results from 2009 and 2010 shown in Table 7 indicate more attention needs to be given to science in the district as a whole, particularly in the lower grades. The table indicates that students' proficiency rates and CPIs fall below state rates for grade 5 in 2009 and 2010. Grade 8 students exceeded state proficiency rates and CPIs in 2009, but not in 2010. However, by grade 10, results exceed state proficiency rates and CPIs.

**Table 7: 2009-2010 Comparison of MCAS Science Proficiency Rates and CPIs
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School,
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, and State, Grades 5, 8 & 10**

	Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District		State	
	Advanced and Proficient	CPI	Advanced and Proficient	CPI
Grade 5 - 2010	43	74.5	53	79.7
Grade 5 - 2009	38	73.9	49	77.7
Grade 8 - 2010	34	67.8	40	71.0
Grade 8 - 2009	44	75.7	39	70.2
Grade 10 - 2010	82	92.1	65	84.6
Grade 10 - 2009	80	90.1	61	83.1

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

Assessment at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School

During the four-day differentiated needs review that focused on systems and practices that support the education of children from low-income families at the Marguerite E. Small School (grades 4 and 5), the review team did not have the opportunity to examine assessment in depth at the district's highest grade levels, 9 through 12. However, a focus group composed of 16 high school teachers reported the use of common assessments when appropriate in all subjects to calibrate instruction and content delivery, and identify students for help in the Student Support Center.

Participants in the focus group also indicated that the content departments function as PLCs and typically use meeting time to address curricular, instructional, and assessment issues about specific courses and course development. In addition, rubrics developed in multiple subjects enable teachers to use common measures in evaluating student work and students to use in self-assessment. Some English teachers have also created anchor papers, samples of excellent student writing, to ensure commonality in scoring writing assignments, sometimes sharing these with students. Students take common final examinations at the high school in all subjects. Teachers analyze final grades and discuss them by department to modify curriculum and adjust instruction. Teachers also examine SAT and AP results as indicators of effectiveness. Currently, however, much PLC time is being spent in self-study to prepare for the high school's ten-year accreditation visit in 2011-2012.

The Common Assessment Initiative, Kindergarten through Grade 12

Interviews with leaders and teachers described a major districtwide initiative that began in the 2009-2010 school year for PLCs to develop and use common assessments. To launch the initiative, the district offered professional development on assessment for the 60 members of the District Teaching and Learning Council (DTLC). During 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, district leaders charged PLCs with creating and implementing two common assessments, either formative or summative. “Common assessment” in this case means an assessment that PLC members will design for use in their own classrooms by all students. The intent of the exercise is to deepen teachers’ knowledge about the multiple formats and uses of assessment and familiarize them with the collection, management, analysis, and use of common assessment data. Interviewees noted that most PLCs have completed the two common assessments; however, some have not designed or implemented any.

A review of the district’s common assessment binder revealed assessments that range in type — some multiple choice, some short answer/open response, some highly creative, some very simple. Assessments also vary in the kind of data or information they yield to guide improvement initiatives. For example, the Marguerite E. Small PLC described designing and implementing common summative end-of-the-year mathematics assessments in 2009-2010. Grade 9 English PLCs created reader response logs. Grade 10 English PLCs created a paraphrasing exercise based on students’ reading a non-fiction article and using Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation. High school social studies teachers designed a map and graph analysis for grade 9 students and a primary document assessment tool for grade 11 students to differentiate fact from opinion and to summarize main ideas.

District leaders have purposefully kept a distance from the initiative for the time being and have not yet focused on the common assessments, according to interviewees. Leaders believe that these initial attempts should be experimental and not generate stress for teachers at this early stage of implementation. According to district leaders, the common assessment initiative will be developed in the future, especially as the district designs curriculum and assessments to implement the Common Core standards.

In summary, for the most part teachers and teacher-leaders collaborate in PLCs to use assessment results and other data to better understand students’ progress, achievement, and learning needs. They also use assessment data to better understand and improve the taught curriculum, assessments, and instructional programs and strategies. This is particularly true for ELA and mathematics through grade 8 where there is ample rich data to analyze. PLCs hold productive and professional discussions of the implications of data analyses —conversations that engage teachers in school improvement at the classroom and student levels and extend their role as change agents in their schools. PLC meetings and districtwide grade-level meetings also promote teachers’ professional growth in providing more insightful forums to explore students’ needs and

their own needs for professional development. This collaborative model has great strength and promise.

However, there are also challenges evident in the district. There are no recent, comprehensive curriculum documents to guide instruction and assessment in ELA through grade 8. Although several standardized tests and common assessments provide some consistency, teachers use multiple ELA programs across and sometimes within schools so there is incoherence and inconsistency in what is taught and in how it is taught and assessed across schools. Data often points to the need to create mathematics mini-units and assessments because textbooks cannot substitute for a complete curriculum through grade 8. These conditions sometimes produce duplications of effort across and within schools. When coaches and CTRs collaborate in developing new materials, benefits are shared at grade level meetings, sometimes across schools. Yet, sometimes, newly created materials are not shared or are irrelevant at another school. In addition, science kits are inadequate and outdated. Without an updated curriculum to guide science instruction through grade 8, assessments can vary and assessment results can receive less attention.

Teachers expressed a need for more time using data to focus on improving instructional practice and refining instructional strategies. However, interviewees described how teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and other schools spend much time using data to create content, realign topics, and develop accompanying new assessments. Time spent on these initiatives is useful and an inevitable component of teachers' work. Wonderful materials are created. Yet, these initiatives take time away from improving instruction. The absence of a comprehensive curriculum in all subjects, as well as consistent instructional programs and materials and assessments to implement that curriculum, prevents assessment and other data from being put to use at a higher and more far-reaching level, focusing more effectively on instructional improvement so as to improve student achievement throughout the district.

The district needs greater technological capacity to more effectively manage data-driven improvement initiatives, including easier access to data to monitor and improve student performance, to share and use data for decision making, and to ascertain progress toward improvement goals.

The review team was told in interviews and focus groups that the current student information management system, Rediker, stores most student data at each school, although some is located at the district level. The Rediker software mainly stores attendance data and other pertinent student profile information such as tardiness, truancy, and discipline data. According to interviewees, Rediker is cumbersome and only licensed personnel have access, usually the principal and the district's technology director.

Standardized assessment data, including MCAS results, are kept in Excel spreadsheets at each school. Principals have access to assessment data on spreadsheets, but do not always enter all relevant data or ensure that enter it. Consulting teachers of reading (CTRs) also have access to

Excel spreadsheets. Excel spreadsheets can interface with the Rediker software; however, because access is limited to licensed users, it is, for all intents and purposes, inaccessible to most professional staff. Once a student moves to the next school, there is a complicated process to move that student's data to the new site. Overall, leaders, teachers, students, administrators, parents, and other members of the school system cannot easily access assessment data or other pertinent student or school information.

There had been no school or district data teams in the district until one was formed in March 2011. Its role and scope of activities are not yet fully developed. Interviewees explained to the review team that data analyses, for example, arraying data trends by subject and grade level over time, are done at the district or school levels principally to display MCAS and AYP results. A review of PowerPoint presentations indicate that the analysis is typically similar to those found in ESE's data warehouse. Proficiency and SGP data are used to define and track goals in the DIP and report on press to the school committee on MCAS and AYP results. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) examined by the review team include performance levels and CPIs but no SGPs¹², and current SIPs are current only to 2009 MCAS results.

Some interviewees described using Moodle, a web-based virtual learning environment. Moodle is a free, shared web application that teachers use to create online learning sites or course forums. At the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and at other schools, teachers post and share lessons, comments, and data, making the improvement process ongoing between meetings of PLCs and offering opportunities to share course materials and ideas. Teachers throughout the district are using Moodle more and more frequently.

The review team's exploration of the school's website revealed that district and school information is sparse. Sometimes information is outdated and often, inaccessible or cumbersome to access. Trying to locate school improvement plans and district improvement plans on the site was an unwieldy exercise for review team members. Information about the academic program, courses, and teaching and learning and student achievement at each school is either nonexistent or is impossible for parents and other "outsiders" to access.

In a state-of-the-art data management system, teachers, leaders, and other stakeholders can easily access relevant data and other important school and district information. Such a system can promote team learning, school learning, and district learning about the progress of improvement efforts. Strong and transparent data analysis carried out using a current educational data management system can strengthen the analysis, dissemination, and use of data at all schools in the district, including the Marguerite E. Small School, and is a useful tool for improvement.

¹² Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) represents the rate of change in a student's or group of students' MCAS scores compared to the change in scores for another student or group of students with a similar achievement profile. Median SGP reports median growth for a group; or, the middle score if the group's individual growth percentiles are ranked from highest to lowest.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and all other district schools have strongly benefited from the vision and structure of embedded professional development designed by the district, especially the creation and continuous support of highly functioning Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

The PLC model implemented by the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District focuses on establishing and facilitating highly functioning PLCs in every school for every group of classroom teachers. This form of “embedded” professional development, as described in teacher-leader and administrator interviews, has become an integral part of the culture of most district schools. It is seen by interviewees as the principal means within the district and the schools of disseminating and discussing key professional development initiatives provided by the district, as well as encouraging teachers to share their professional expertise in supporting the achievement of all students.

The vision of professional development expressed in the district’s professional development plan for the PLCs is characterized by both breadth and depth, as well as by insights into adult learning theory and the need to foster a healthy view toward change within a large system. Interviews suggest that this model has fostered among teachers and their PLCs a strong focus on improving student achievement at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and other schools.

The key component of the PLC model is the use of teacher-leaders, mostly classroom teachers, who serve as the facilitators for the PLCs and are, in effect, the drivers and leaders of the PLCs within their schools. Interviews with staff indicated a strong district emphasis on providing intensive professional development for the teacher-leaders before PLCs were introduced to the schools and every year since that introduction. Interviewees also indicated that the district carefully planned the progression of the teacher-leader professional development initiatives, starting in the summer of 2006, soon after the arrival of the current superintendent. A core group of 60, called the District Teacher and Learning Council (DTLC), is drawn from the teacher-leaders in every school and grade level in the district and includes all school administrators and key district administrators. This group participates in the summer institutes.

In the first summer, the DTLC participated in a week-long institute to better understand the nature and work of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and to prepare teacher-leaders to assume leadership roles. Sessions focused on the philosophy, purpose, and roles of PLCs to prepare teacher-leaders to establish themselves in their schools with some fidelity to the chosen model. The idea was to introduce and gradually institutionalize the agreed-upon expectations and standards for PLCs in every school. The summer trainers followed up the trainings with bimonthly meetings with all teacher-leaders and administrators. These sessions provided more in-depth work and troubleshooting as new teacher-leaders introduced the focus of that year’s summer institute to their respective PLCs.

Each subsequent summer institute has introduced a new topic. Topics have included analyzing student achievement data, developing common assessments, using protocols to examine student and teacher work, and on dealing with challenging situations in the PLCs. Using a “train the trainers” model, teacher-leaders have passed this vision and its practice to other teachers in the district through their work in their PLCs.

The majority of teacher-leaders, particularly in the elementary schools, have remained in their positions as leaders since the PLCs were initiated. Their schools benefit from the increasingly sophisticated and varied professional development the teacher-leaders have received in meeting the demands of that role. Elementary school teachers, in their interviews, reported a strong “buy in” to the PLC model of providing professional development that is embedded into the life of the school and that is grounded in the specific needs and interests of the teachers of that school or grade level.

As noted in agendas and minutes reviewed by the review team, PLCs set their own agendas, unless their principals ask to discuss schoolwide concerns. PLCs spend time focusing on teaching and learning for the most part, with “administrivia” not allowed to dominate the agenda. According to interviewees, PLC members use the meeting time to discuss with support staff the needs of individual students.

The establishment of the PLC model, and its active support by the district, has played an important role in focusing Dennis-Yarmouth staff on improving student achievement for all students. Teachers have embraced the principle of continuous professional growth as a necessity for the improved achievement of *all* students in their schools. In the judgment of the review team, the district, through its strong support of the model and the practice of PLCs, has contributed to the commitment of teachers to supporting the achievement of all students in the district.

The district provides teachers high quality, content-focused professional development that targets challenges discovered in the analysis of student achievement data at particular grade levels.

The second type of professional development that is offered to all teachers in the district, depending upon the targeted grade level, is more content based and concentrates on either English language arts (ELA) or mathematics. This type of professional development follows a similar model to that offered to the teacher-leaders, as noted in a review of professional development agendas and corroborated in interviews with district and school staff. This second type, which has been characterized by depth and breadth, is sustained over many sessions; it requires participants to try out the work, publicly share their results, and bring back the learning to their PLCs so that the focus of the course becomes part of every teacher’s expertise as well as part of their responsibility to use these strategies in their classrooms. The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, and the other elementary schools, have particularly benefited from the districtwide professional development courses since the major focus of such courses in the past

few years has been at the elementary school level. Meanwhile, the high school is focusing its professional development on preparing for an upcoming accreditation visit.

Most of the major professional development initiatives at the elementary level have been chosen based on an analysis of test data, primarily from MCAS but also from DIBELS and DRA2 in the elementary grades, as discussed in each school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the District Improvement Plan (DIP). For example, the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and other schools analyzed their school's DRA2 results and noted a weakness in retelling and in writing summaries. These weaknesses, seen as not meeting expectations either for a subgroup or for the general student population, were matched with an appropriate professional development initiative, Teaching Struggling Readers. This match between a student need and professional development generally has taken the form of an extended course offered to teachers in the district. All schools that are the focus of the particular professional development opportunity are well represented. Each professional development initiative is an extensive, in-depth experience that lasts an entire semester or part of a summer and requires a great deal of teacher preparation and follow-up. The courses are universally regarded as being of very high quality by the teachers, the administrators, and support staff; they fill up quickly and generally have waiting lists.

As with the training provided to the teacher-leaders, the district contracts with the group or person providing the professional development for continued support throughout the school year. The trainers generally provide such follow-up by working monthly with small groups of teachers, sometimes modeling the teaching strategies highlighted in the course or meeting with PLCs or individual teachers to offer additional support, clarification, and continuation of work beyond the course. Trainers' notes read by the review team include their reflections on working in the district: they are impressed by the level of commitment that the district demonstrates to each initiative as well as by the level of commitment shown by the teachers taking the courses.

Recent major professional development initiatives include Keys to Literacy Comprehension for grades 4-8, Foundations of Number Sense for primary teachers, especially those teaching grades 1 and 2, Teaching Struggling Readers for elementary school teachers, Leveled Literacy Intervention, and Improving Math learning for LD Students. Teachers spoke in focus group interviews with great enthusiasm about these courses and when asked for examples, were able to present very specific classroom discussions, dialogues, and examples of student understanding based on the work they had learned in the courses.

Based on interviews with teachers and administrators, it is clear to the review team that most teachers are enthusiastic participants in the professional development offerings and that most teachers in the elementary grades and many in other levels participate in these courses regularly. Teachers also attend numerous short-term and long-term courses offered by in-house instructional coaches, the director of technology, and other district personnel.

The district has also invested a good deal of money and effort in sending out key personnel to courses so that they can become experts in a content area that the data has suggested needs improvement. Courses such as Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) training and courses in reading and mathematics ensure that the district has a relatively low-cost way of bringing up-to-date and quality pedagogical knowledge to the district. Given the financial constraints of the district, this is a wise and effective way of maintaining a focus on pedagogy while keeping the budget as trim as possible. Sending key personnel to courses also helps solve the problem of the isolation of the Cape from any colleges or universities that have schools of education, and from most other educational organizations that provide such training.

The district, however, acknowledged the absence of SEI trainers and the need to increase the ability of district teachers to work effectively with English language learners. In addition, the in-depth nature of these courses restricts the areas in which the district can invest its professional development funds. There were no professional development offerings, for example, in social studies, science, and writing. Given the absence of up-to-date curriculum in these areas, the absence of professional development courses becomes all the more problematic, according to interviewees. Also, there were insufficient offerings in some critical areas such as developing aligned and comprehensive curricula in all subject areas and meeting the needs of English language learners and students with special needs. The district professional development offerings in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District have created among district teachers a sense of professionalism, an interest in the pursuit of learning within the profession, and the willingness and culture of searching out best practices and reflecting upon their own practice in raising student achievement.

At the time of the review, the district's performance evaluation system had both strengths and weaknesses in terms of the feedback provided by the evaluations and the timeliness with which they were completed.

The review team reviewed the evaluations of all district administrators (seven school principals and five directors of districtwide programs) conducted by the superintendent. It also reviewed the school committee's evaluation of the superintendent. The team also reviewed a random selection of teacher evaluations from all the schools in the district.

Evaluation of the Superintendent

The school committee evaluates the superintendent yearly in the key areas of her responsibilities. These evaluations draw upon public documents, interactions at meetings, goals established by the school committee for the superintendent, and student achievement information. The school committee's comments are detailed as well as qualitative, and include a numerical score between 1 and 5. Most of the scores were in the high "3s" or low "4s" and none was below a mid-range "3".

The evaluations summarize the judgments of all of the members, dividing their comments into two groups in every category: the majority of the members who rate the superintendent highly and one member in the minority who disagrees with these assessments. All members' comments about the superintendent are respectful. The evaluations indicate that the members of the committee are well apprised of the work of the school district, its strengths and its weaknesses; they also indicate how plans for the future fit into the larger vision, the needs of the district, and the goals established by the school committee for the superintendent.

Administrator Evaluations

The superintendent, in turn, evaluates all district administrators, using the same process and written format for all administrators, as reported by the administrators and confirmed by an examination of their evaluations. Principals noted in interviews that they meet with the superintendent during the summer to go over their individually chosen goals, which must follow SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) guidelines and be aligned with the current District Improvement Plan, all schools' School Improvement Plans, and the state's Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership.¹³ A review of administrative evaluations confirmed that all such evaluations met this requirement.

Following up on the summer meetings, the superintendent visits the schools and meets with the principals over the course of the year to discuss their progress in meeting goals. Principals are asked to give their reflections on the goals, and to sit down and discuss them and their written evaluation with the superintendent. Principals, like other staff members, have the right to include a rebuttal of all or any part of the evaluation they receive from the superintendent, and such a rebuttal was included in at least one administrative file.

The review team found that the superintendent provided extensive written feedback in all the administrators' written evaluations and directly connected this feedback to the goals chosen by the administrators. Her reviews demonstrated a thorough familiarity and understanding of each administrator's area of responsibility. No evaluation was similar to another; each attended carefully to the specific responsibility of the administrator, the chosen goals, and the relationship to the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The evaluations cited the critical programs or initiatives for which each was responsible, the progress made in each of them, and continuing impediments or possible ways of moving forward. Interviews with administrators, in general, indicated their respect and appreciation for the depth of knowledge with which the superintendent evaluates their work and the feedback they receive.

¹³ The Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership accompanied the state regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect for all districts through the 2010-2011 year. On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

The comments in the evaluations were instructive; they demonstrated the depth and breadth of the superintendent's knowledge of the roles of each of the administrators and ways to move forward in the face of challenges. The evaluations were clear about areas of strengths and, in some cases, areas of need. Missing, however, were comments relating to the principals' use of the evaluative process to improve instruction; an exception was a principal who used that process to directly address particular strengths and weaknesses in the classroom instruction of the teachers in his school.

State law (at MGL c. 71, s. 38) requires that superintendents evaluate administrators every year. The review team documented a pattern of filing such evaluations every other year for every school principal and administrator, and the superintendent acknowledged that she did not formally evaluate district administrators yearly, rather every other year.

Teacher Evaluations

Teacher evaluations, conducted and written by school principals, adhere to the same process used in the evaluation of administrators and are required to include some of the same key components. For example, as outlined in the teachers' bargaining agreement, principals and teachers meet in the fall to discuss the individual, professional goals by which teachers will be evaluated. The teachers' bargaining agreement mandated that these goals be connected to the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and to the state Principles of Effective Teaching.¹⁴ One of these goals must be in the area of instruction, one in contributing to the professional learning community of the school, etc. Some of these goals, as noted by the review team, are measurable, others are more holistic. In a number of schools, the evaluations also refer to the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and student achievement data.

There is no districtwide standard format used to evaluate teachers. Some schools include the school's SIP goals in the beginning of the evaluation, others do not. Some include a list of the main tenets of the Principles of Effective Teaching (another component of the evaluation required by the teachers' bargaining agreement), others do not. Some written evaluations include extensive reflections from the teachers; others do not include any reflections or teacher input. All schools followed a similar format in providing oral feedback to teachers, adhering to the requirements in the teachers' bargaining agreement for such feedback, according to interviews with teachers and administrators.

The emphasis in both the administrators' and teachers' evaluations on developing their own goals, although connected to the school and district's improvement plans and the Principles of Effective Teaching, shows a districtwide value of respect for the professionalism of all educators in the district. Teachers and district administrators reported that this value for individual choice and respect for the individual learner is a hallmark established by the superintendent and the

¹⁴ The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the regulations on the evaluation of teachers and administrators at 603 CMR 35.00 until they were replaced by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2011.

culture she has fostered within the district. Providing controlled choice and individual paths to reaching agreed-upon goals is noted in district documents as central to the development of a strong learning community and among the best guarantees of individual and collective high-level achievement. The teachers' bargaining agreement [shown below] requires such goal-setting for teachers and establishes a procedure if an administrator and a teacher cannot agree upon a set of goals.

Article XXIV Bargaining Unit Member Evaluation

Evaluation policy should focus on practical professional growth and the purposes of evaluation are to provide information for improving performance and to provide a record of facts and assessments for personnel decisions. The process ends in an evaluation report written by the evaluator. Central to the process is the dialogue which comes from the bargaining unit member and evaluator working together to improve instruction.

Teachers meet with school principals by October to choose their individual goals, and work together to make sure that their goals, like those of administrators, follow SMART criteria. In addition to the formal written feedback provided by their evaluations, teachers reported receiving frequent informal feedback and holding discussions with their principals to discuss such feedback throughout the school year. Some principals noted that a number of teachers have had difficulty formulating their goals along these guidelines. As a result, the principals held school-based professional development on writing SMART goals to help teachers refine their understanding.

State regulations (at 603 CMR 35.06) require that teachers without professional status and newly hired teachers must have a completed evaluation placed in their folder by the end of each year of their provisional status. Those with professional status must be evaluated at least every other year. Five of the randomly selected teachers whose files were reviewed by the review team, professional status teachers all employed in one school, were at least one year, sometimes two years behind, in having evaluations placed in their folders. In one such folder for a professional status teacher, the last evaluation was completed in 2007; four others were from 2008. One teacher in another school was a year behind in being evaluated. All other teachers' evaluations had been completed in a timely fashion.

Four teachers within the district did not have evidence in their folders of current certification in their area of teaching.

State standards for teacher evaluations also outline the components of teacher evaluations: they should be descriptive, informative, instructive, and contribute to professional growth. The review team used the criteria described in state guidelines in reviewing the evaluations in each category. Thirty-two out of the thirty-seven randomly selected teacher evaluations reviewed by the team

were those of teachers who have been working in the system long enough to require a current evaluation. These evaluations were descriptive; that is, they gave evidence from specific observation about classroom climate, norms, and routines.

Of the 32 teachers who have been working in the system long enough to require a current evaluation, all received an “informative” component in their evaluation that mentioned some element of the instructional strategies used by the teacher during the lesson, as well as the type of assignment on which the students were working. Teachers who were commended in this section were not given the details of what they were doing well, making it difficult to understand from the written evaluation what they should continue or reinforce.

Two of the thirty-two evaluations reviewed included comments that were “instructive;” that is, comments “intended to improve instruction and contribute to the professional growth of the employee.” Most of the comments were of a generic nature, with little specific information as to exactly how the teacher might improve instruction and enhance student achievement. The many positive evaluations in the overall portfolio did not have specific information; it was difficult for the review team to find the justification for rating one teacher as “Exceeding expectations: and another for “Meeting expectations.”

Four of thirty-two evaluations included feedback “that encourages them to engage in continuous learning and opportunities for growth.” Most comments in this area began with “continue to lead by example,” or “continue to collaborate.”

The review team noted that written comments in the teacher evaluations are highly respectful and supportive of the teachers in almost all cases, mentioning the principals’ appreciation for the hard work, and leadership and dedication with which teachers approach their work. At the same time, there is less emphasis in the comments on teaching and learning in the classroom than on collegiality, contributing to a positive culture in the school, and participation in PLCs and professional development activities. The majority of the evaluations reviewed did not focus on the teachers’ teaching; most comments refer to their work with colleagues, curriculum development, and classroom activities. When teachers were asked about the nature of feedback they receive about instruction, they agreed with the review team’s observation.

The review team also noted that most evaluations did not include information or feedback that would help teachers know their specific strengths and ways they need to improve their instruction for specific groups of students or the class as a whole. Few specific examples of the use of the Principles of Effective Teaching were cited in any of the schools’ evaluations, despite the notation in the teachers’ bargaining agreement as well as on some schools’ evaluation forms that teachers’ performance in mastering these principles should be used to evaluate teachers. Also, no mention was made of higher-order thinking, drawing out all students, creating rich instructional activities or meeting the needs of English language learners.

Administrators reported being constrained by the teachers' bargaining agreement for including such feedback in the written evaluations, although teachers reported receiving such feedback in their discussions with principals throughout the school year. (See language within teachers' bargaining agreement cited above). One principal specifically mentioned in an interview giving specific written and oral feedback when teachers are not meeting expectations. The interview with the superintendent noted this principal's effective use of providing such critical feedback as a way of improving instruction.

The evaluation of the administrative and teaching staff in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District is uneven, not always in compliance with state regulations, and is not cited in interviews with teachers or administrators as contributing to the professional growth of district personnel or to student achievement. The district recognized many of the problems with the present system of evaluation and was in the process of working on a major overhaul of its teacher evaluation process, following the new state regulations¹⁵ and guidelines for such evaluations.

Student Support

The district is providing supports to improve student attendance at all its schools, especially the *Keep Them Coming* initiative, established at all schools.

A review of attendance data displayed in Table 8 on the next page shows that the district's attendance rate has decreased slightly from 93.3 percent in 2008 to 93.1 percent in 2010, after a very slight up-tick to 93.4 percent in 2009. Initiatives to improve attendance over the 2008 rate had not been successful by 2010. In addition, the high school attendance rate declined from 89.9 percent in 2008 to 89.5 percent in 2010.

¹⁵ On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new regulations on Evaluation of Educators at 603 CMR 35.00 to replace the regulations on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and accompanying Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership adopted in 1995. The new regulations are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr35.html>.

Table 8: 2008-2010 Attendance Rates and Grade 9-12 Dropout Rates for State, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, and Dennis Yarmouth Regional High School

	2008	2009	2010
Attendance			
State	94.6	94.6	94.6
District	93.3	93.4	93.1
D-Y Regional High School	89.9	89.6	89.5
Grade 9-12 Four-Year Dropout Rate			
State	3.4	2.9	2.9
D-Y Regional High School	4.1	3.7	2.6

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

In interviews with district and high school staff there was concern that the attendance rate had negatively influenced the dropout rate. The current District Improvement Plan 2010-2014 set a goal to reduce the dropout rate to 3.0 percent by 2011. Based on 2010 data in Table 8, the district has already met that goal, with a lowered high school dropout rate of 2.6 percent in 2010, below the state dropout rate of 2.9 percent. The challenge is to lower it even further.

Chronic absence is a problem in the district according to ESE attendance data shown in Table 9. In 2010 the percentage of chronically absent students was especially high in grades 9-12 where it ranged from 26.6 percent in grade 9 to 37.6 percent at grade 11.

Table 9: 2010 Chronic Absence Rates by Grade Level in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, Compared to State
(State percentages in italics)

K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
16.1	11.8	7.6	6.9	10.1	7.6	16.0	18.0	17.9	26.6	28.8	37.6	36.4
14.2	9.6	7.8	6.8	6.8	6.9	8.9	10.7	12.9	20.0	18.5	19.5	21.4

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

From 2008 to 2010, the rate of chronic absence at the high school for all four grades was close to 33 percent; i.e., one of every three high school students has been chronically absent in each of the past three years, with a slight improvement in 2010 noted in Table 10.

**Table 10: 2008-2010 Chronic Absence Rates at
Dennis Yarmouth Regional High School**

	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Students Chronically Absent	33.8	34.8	32.4

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

The district is aware of the problematic attendance rate and chronic absence rate and has undertaken initiatives to improve attendance at all grade levels including at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School. The district instituted a truancy reduction initiative called *Keep Them Coming*. Sponsors of the initiative include the Cape and Islands Workforce Investment Board, the Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition, and the Cape & Islands District Attorney's Office. Introduced in September 2008 as a pilot program at the Station Avenue Elementary School, the plan is established at all schools, kindergarten through grade 8, and components are used at the high school. According to the superintendent the purpose of starting the plan at the primary and early elementary level was to build good habits early. She went on to say that a lot of parents in the district live in poverty and that through the initiative communication is established and the school can get students back to school. However, in interviews the review team was told that implementation of the initiative is more comprehensive from kindergarten through grade 8 than at the high school, where attendance is more problematic. Administrators at the central office said that the district has also provided each school with a full-time social worker and nurse and, in most cases, a full time psychologist who work with the principal students, and parents to improve student attendance.

In interviews the principals of all schools serving students from kindergarten through grade 8 described *Keep Them Coming* as a five-step program. In step 1, when a child is absent for the fifth time, the classroom teacher calls the parent or guardian to find out why the child is not in school. However, during these same interviews, principals and social workers said that all schools have a phone attendance line and if a parent does not call in on the first day of absence, the nurse calls the home to determine the cause for the absence.

Step 2 calls for a letter to be sent to the child's parents inviting them to a meeting and step 3 triggers a second meeting with parents. If these steps fail, another letter is sent; if poor attendance continues a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition is filed as a last resort. According to interviewees, four quarterly meetings are held throughout the year with all principals, central office staff, social workers, and sponsors of the program. Meetings are held at the school district office and discussions center on best practices and ways to improve student attendance.

In interviews social workers in kindergarten through grade 8 said that they seldom reach the CHINS level as the communication with parents starts much earlier. During interviews with the

Marguerite E. Small staff, the review team was told that in some cases, teachers call and it is not uncommon for the school's social worker to go to a student's residence to bring a child to school. The social worker further explained that many students from homeless families are absent because they have no way to get to school if they miss the school bus. According to interviews with principals from the district's kindergarten through grade 8 schools, social workers very often go to a student's residence to bring the child to school. Staff members and the principal at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School stressed that it is an all-school endeavor to get children to attend school; the school's attendance rate at the time of the review team visit was 96 percent. Interviewees said that the Extended Day Program, which students are eager to attend, may have helped attendance reach 96 percent at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School.

An administrator at the high school acknowledged that the attendance rate at the high school was a concern but said that it was difficult to implement all parts of the *Keep Them Coming* initiative. One reason given was that the school's social worker who makes the calls is also the attendance officer. The administrator said that attendance would improve if teachers were to call as this would personalize the communication and students might feel that a teacher cared enough to call and determine why the student was not in school. However, the administrator said that a limited number of teachers made calls. The administrator also said that the chronic absence rate was due to the fact that many ELL students returned to their homes in other countries for months at a time without formally withdrawing from school. When these students returned they were counted as absent during the time they were away. The same administrator also told the review team that at present there is no other formal plan to improve student attendance at the high school but believed that there should be. The administrator did say that parts of the *Keep Them Coming* initiative were followed and that they do reach CHINS level at the high school.

The four-year graduation rate for the high school in 2010 was 78.7 percent compared to the state's 82.1 percent graduation rate for the same year. The graduation rate has also been a target for improvement and since 2008 has shown some improvement, as seen in Table 11. Although the four-year graduation rate is still lower than the state average rate, the gap has been narrowing.

**Table 11: 2008-2010 Comparison of Four-Year Graduation Rates
State and Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School**

	2008	2009	2010
State	81.2	81.5	82.1
D-Y Regional High School	74.0	78.0	78.7
Gap	-7.2	-3.5	-3.4

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

The high school has two alternative programs to support students who are at risk of dropping out generally because of attendance and discipline problems. According to a school administrator one of the programs has two teachers and 25 students who attend school during the day. Many of

the students are not special education students and there are no grade 9 students in this program. Students attend an Outward Bound program in Maine for one week before beginning the full-day, semester-long program. They are provided with counselors, psychologists, and any other necessary support. Once they have completed the program they mainstream back into the regular academic program. The administrator said the program has been in existence for 20 years and 70 percent of the students who participate do graduate.

The other alternative program is a night program and has been in existence for seven years. Students attend school from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. and work with one teacher. There are generally about 16 students in the program and the goal is for them to graduate. Only juniors are eligible and according to a district administrator two-thirds attend on their own volition while one-third receive “pressure” from the high school staff. Quite a few of the students are homeless and independent and for many of them it is their fifth year in high school. There is not a lot of movement from this program to the regular academic program as many of the students have jobs earlier in the day. A high school administrator told the review team that the program, which has a 70 percent success rate, always has a waiting list.

According to the superintendent, there are many homeless students in the district and the number is high enough for the district to qualify for McKinney-Vento ARRA funds. According to data provided by ESE, in 2008, 30.6 percent of the district’s students were identified as coming from low-income families, some of whom are homeless. In 2011 that percentage grew to 38.1 percent. In addition, according to the superintendent, chronic absence for students from low-income families is particularly high. Because of the number of homeless families in the district it is difficult to communicate with them, but the district continues to try to establish a connection. In an interview, the McKinney-Vento homeless coordinator described the latest initiative by the district, a family resource center. The center, recently opened at the time of this review, is located in the Wixon Middle School and is open to all families in the school district. According to the brochure describing the center, it provides information that can help families access community resources. In addition, during scheduled times at the center, parents can receive one-on-one information from social workers in the district. There is also a lawyer on site one day a week to provide legal advice. The district was not able to provide the number of homeless families in the district but relies on general information provided by support staff in the schools to identify and contact families.

In summary, the district is providing supports to improve attendance but the initiative has not been successful across all levels as shown by Table 12, which charts the attendance rate for all schools for a three-year period and compares them to the state rate. Only two schools achieved an attendance rate of 95 or above, but for most of the schools, the rate did improve from 2009 to 2010. The Marguerite E. Small School maintained an attendance rate of 95 percent or above for all three years. Interviewees at all schools indicated they were implementing all or parts of the *Keep Them Coming* attendance initiative, but it is evident that not all schools are succeeding in

improving attendance. As a result, students are missing instructional time that makes an impact on academic achievement, particularly at the high school.

**Table 12: 2008-2010 Attendance Rate for
All Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District Schools, State and District**

School	2008	2009	2010
Ezra Baker Elementary	93.5	94.3	94.0
MacArthur Elementary	94.9	94.9	94.6
Marguerite E. Small Elementary	95.0	95.3	95.7
Station Ave. Elementary	94.7	95.4	95.2
Mattacheese Middle School	95.1	94.9	94.0
N.H. Wixon Middle School	94.3	94.5	93.8
High School	89.9	89.6	89.5
District (all grades)	93.3	93.4	93.1
State (all grades)	94.6	94.6	94.6

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

Although the district had increased the number of ESL-certified teachers from one to six from 2006 to 2011, at the time of the review the district's ELL program did not have enough staff to deliver the recommended amount of instruction, classroom teachers did not receive adequate SEI training, and the ELL coordinator did not have enough time to monitor ELL instruction and provide leadership to the ELL program.

The District Improvement Plan, 2010-2014, notes that although the overall enrollment is declining, the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students enrolled in ELL programs is rising with a substantial percentage of students whose English language ability is at the beginning or early intermediate levels of proficiency. A review of the data provided by ESE,

Table 13 on the next page shows that, in 2008, 7.6 percent of the district's students were identified as first language not English (FLNE) and by 2011 that percentage had increased to 8.8 percent. In 2008, 3.7 percent of the district's students were identified as limited English proficient (LEP) and by 2011 that percentage had increased to 4.9 percent. While the district's percentages of FLNE and LEP students are still below statewide percentages, these percentages have increased each year since 2008.

**Table 13: 2008-2011 Percentages First Language Not English and Limited English Proficient Students
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District and State**

	2008	2009	2010	2011
District FLNE	7.6	7.7	8.1	8.8
State FLNE	15.1	15.4	15.6	16.3
District LEP	3.7	4.0	4.4	4.9
State LEP	5.8	5.9	6.2	7.1

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

Using 2010 MCAS results, Table 14 below illustrates that the ELA proficiency rate for the district's LEP students was 23 percent, slightly higher than the 22 percent rate for LEP students statewide. But the median SGP for the district's LEP students was 38.0 percent, below the moderate range of 40.0 to 59.9..

Mathematics proficiency for the district's LEP students was 15 percent compared to 24 percent for LEP students statewide, with a median SGP of 41.0, in the moderate range

**Table 14: 2010 Comparison of ELA and Mathematics Proficiency Rates and Median SGPs for LEP Students in
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District and State**

	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP
District LEP Students in ELA	23	38
State LEP Students in ELA	22	50
District LEP Students in Mathematics	15	41
State LEP Students in Mathematics	24	53

Source: School/District Profile on ESE website.

In an interview, the ELL coordinator, who teaches four classes at the high school, said that the number of ELLs had not changed much between 2006 and 2011. However, in 2006 the district had one teacher and several elementary certified teachers who were serving as tutors in the ELL program. At the time of this review there were six certified ELL teachers to serve the district population of ELLs, who spoke nineteen different languages. Despite the progress made in ensuring additional staff assigned to each school, the district still cannot provide the recommended amount of instruction.

Because of the ELL coordinator's teaching schedule, it is not possible for her to visit schools and discuss concerns with teachers as much as she needs to. However, two of the interviewed ELL

teachers said that they were able to email the coordinator with their concerns. Still, all ELL staff as well as principals said that there was not enough staff to provide the two and one-half hours of instruction daily recommended for many of the students. Instead, teachers try to pull out students for a period of time and sometimes go into classrooms to work with them. Yet, in almost all instances they do not provide adequate instructional time.

According to the coordinator, she does meet with all staff monthly but there is no regular representation at the district level. Rather, the coordinator communicates with central office staff when issues or questions arise. The director of instruction is the district leader responsible for ELL. The visiting team was able to review agendas from monthly teacher meetings as well as agendas from five parent meetings held during the 2010-2011 school year.

Interviewees at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School told the review team that there is one teacher and an assistant to provide the state-recommended instructional time to the school's 27 ELLs. Whenever possible, the school has grouped its ELLs in a few classrooms. Even with this configuration, according to staff, it is not possible to provide the recommended instruction. Instead, the ELL teacher and assistant provide some instruction in the classroom and also pull students out for instruction. During the visit to the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, the review team was able to observe a pull-out group of 4 ELLs receiving instruction for 30 minutes. The review team also was told that the district does not monitor its formerly limited English proficient (FLEP) students; no data was available for this group.

ELL teachers said that the *Home Language Survey* is given to all entering students and when necessary, a translator is provided either at the time of registration or later. The *Idea Proficiency Test* (ITP) is administered to all students registering in kindergarten through grade 3; *Language Assessment Scales* (LAS) is administered to students in grades 4 through 8. The *Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral* (MELA-O), the *Cambridge Step-by-Step Assessment to Language Dominance* (SSLAD), and the *Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment* (MEPA) are administered during the year to determine language acquisition and whether or not a student is ready to exit the ELL program. A review of the ELL documentation revealed that all student scores were recorded and provided to classroom teachers.

Data provided to the team indicated that 141 teachers of 278.4 FTE had participated in Category I training and 49 teachers had participated in Category 2 training. Three teachers have had training in Categories 3 and 4. A central office administrator told the review team that the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School had more SEI- trained teachers than other schools. The superintendent told the review team members that it is difficult to get training on the Cape, but that the district partners with the Barnstable School District in offering SEI training. The review team was also told that ELL teachers at the elementary level are first-time teachers without master's degrees so they are not qualified to offer the training for the district. Classroom observations yielded little evidence of SEI training. For example, teachers made few references to vocabulary development by referring to word walls and there was little extra wait time for

student responses. The review team examined the district's English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO)¹⁶ but found little evidence of their implementation in the classrooms. Also, language objectives for ELLs were not posted in classrooms.

All interviewees including the central office staff acknowledged that the district was not providing its ELLs the recommended instructional time. Further, not enough regular classroom teachers were receiving the SEI training that is necessary for ELLs to make academic progress and be able to exit the program. The district was not monitoring its FLEP students and therefore did not have knowledge of their success or failure. The important role of ELL coordinator was limited in that the person responsible was teaching for a good part of the day at the high school and was not able to monitor ELL instruction in the district's schools. Also, the coordinator's teaching schedule limited the amount of time that she could devote to vital coordinator activities. There was also no scheduled representation at the district level that would inform on a continuing basis the needs and issues of the ESL program. Without providing the recommended instructional time, providing training in Sheltered English Immersion for classroom teachers, and expanding the time the ELL coordinator has available to monitor ELL instruction and provide leadership to the ELL program, it will be difficult for the district to deliver the high-quality instruction necessary to meet the needs of its English language learners.

Financial and Asset Management

Complex financial and political factors have created uncertainties and difficulties between the two towns and among town and regional district leaders, resulting in budget cutbacks to school programs and possibly the restructuring of the regional district.

The district's budgets have been consistently above the required Net School Spending (NSS) level: the fiscal year 2011 NSS budget of \$44,088,604 is 23.7 percent over the required level, and previous spending exceeded the requirement by 16.6 percent to 20.6 percent, based on ESE data. Administrators reported that the schools provide many strong programs and support services, including music, art, and athletics; Reading Recovery teachers for grade 1; teacher-leaders; high school department heads; literacy and math coaches; sufficient classroom supplies and materials; co-teaching with special education teachers; and psychologists and social workers at each school. They stated that the district does not impose financial constraints on new hires and some teachers have been brought in at the top salary step.

However, the district has had difficulties getting its budget approved in recent years. Administrators and school committee members reported that in 2009 Yarmouth voted down its assessment and the district had to call a joint meeting of the two towns to vote to approve the

¹⁶ The use of these in Massachusetts has now been replaced by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English language development standards.

budget.¹⁷ In 2010 Yarmouth rejected an override for the schools and the district had to cut its budget accordingly; and, again in 2011 the town of Yarmouth had to seek an override for \$488,000 to fund its full share of the proposed district budget.¹⁸ A sticking point in the negotiation to approve the fiscal year 2012 budget was that while school officials reported and budget documents confirmed that the currently proposed budget increase for fiscal year 2012 was only 1.74 percent, based on the terms of the regional agreement Yarmouth's assessment increased by 4.14 percent, while Dennis' assessment increased by only 1.45 percent. School officials explained that after Yarmouth opted to reject the district agreement's funding formula and instead be governed by the state's statutory funding formula, the result in the short run was assessments that were perceived as more fair, but in the long run was different rates of increase for the two towns.¹⁹

Administrators also reported that the district faced the loss of federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, which helped the state offset state and local budget cuts for education. The superintendent's fiscal year 2012 budget message described the district's loss of \$845,000 as a "funding cliff," though the funds had a sunset period known from the beginning, and the money had been used primarily for new services such as instructional coaches and technology rather than for direct instruction.

Administrators and union officials reported that in fiscal year 2011 the district had to negotiate a 0.5 percent reduction in salaries and the loss of a professional day. Both parties hoped that the fiscal year 2012 budget could restore the reduction, although they did not expect enough funding for raises. The administrators reported expected program reductions for fiscal year 2012 would include all kindergarten through grade 8 librarians, some athletics and extracurricular programs, fees for middle school athletics, 11 teaching positions, and the replacement of 19 paraprofessionals with 6 reading teachers. Union officials noted that the district had 22.6 percent fewer teachers since 2004, and 20.4 percent fewer students.

Administrators also reported unmet needs for improved programs such as compliance with ELL requirements, funds for teachers to engage in curriculum development, and teaching materials and books, and the 2002 NEASC report noted the need for additional courses and programs for low achieving and ELL students at the high school. Because of declining enrollments and funding, administrators reported that the district planned to close a school and to reconfigure the

¹⁷ A two-town regional district can convene a joint meeting to approve its budget, at which the majority of all present, regardless of which town they reside in, can vote to approve. This favors the town that can get the most attendance.

¹⁸ This override was passed on May 17, 2011.

¹⁹ In a two town region, if both towns do not accept the regional agreement funding formula, then the state's statutory funding formula must be used. Yarmouth thought that it would fare better with the state's formula, so chose at Town Meeting not to accept the regional agreement funding formula. Adjustments under the state formula, however, continued to require increases to the amount of Yarmouth's required contribution.

grade structure in the district to pre-kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4-5, grades 6-7, and grades 8-12.

Parents and some teachers voiced concerns over “lots of change,” “shuffling teachers,” and the absence of stability. Some administrators speculated that these uncertainties contributed to the loss of students to choice, charter, and private schools. According to End-of-Year Reports and the district’s fiscal year 2012 budget, the district spent \$2,546,994 on choice and charter tuitions in fiscal year 2008, but budgeted \$3,156,374 for fiscal year 2011 and \$3,556,265 for fiscal year 2012, a 40 percent increase from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2012.

School committee members and administrators indicated that the uncertainties over funding and the imminent changes in grade configurations were among the reasons that some residents of Dennis were proposing to partially separate from the regional district by creating a separate district for the town’s kindergarten to grade 8 students. The town would then be a member of the regional district and contribute to its assessments only at the high school level. At the time of this review, a proposal to set in motion the process of withdrawing kindergarten through grade 8 was scheduled for a vote at a fall 2011 Town Meeting.

Although there has been conflict about assessments levied on the towns, the development of the district budget has been transparent and inclusive of all members of the school system, with opportunities for public participation as well.

According to administrators, the budget process begins in October with input from principals and other administrators about their needs. Principals stated that they include their teachers, teacher-leaders and department heads, PLCs, and other staff members in the preparation of the budget requests. In November they meet with central office administrators to review their proposals. When cuts have to be made to meet school committee and town guidelines, administrators stressed that they work together as a team. The superintendent stated that there has been a great deal of give-and-take in making cuts, and, for example, that secondary principals were willing to make cuts at their schools to save the full-day kindergarten program. School committee minutes show that the fiscal year 2012 budget was presented to the school committee at a public hearing in January, when administrators were asked by the committee to cut \$479,000 to bring the increase down to 2.5 percent. The administrators and school committee reduced the budget by \$847,139 more when it was approved in March, resulting in an increase of only 1.74 percent over the fiscal year 2011 budget.

Town officials are included in the development of the district budget. Central office administrators and school committee members stated that school committee members and the superintendent meet with town managers, selectmen, and finance committees to review district needs and available town funds. In 2011, town managers stressed the need to hold assessment increases to 2.5 percent and budget documents showed that in March the superintendent reviewed with town officials the district budget proposals, the formulas for the calculation of town assessments, and the projected assessment for each town. In April 2011 the district budget

document showed three drafts to date ranging from \$50,519,759 down to \$48,228,734. The increase for Yarmouth's assessment, as noted previously, is still 4.14 percent, considerably more than the 2.5 percent hoped for, and administrators reported that an override vote was scheduled for May 17, 2011.²⁰

The budget document includes expenditures budgeted from revolving funds in addition to local appropriations, but does not include projected grants expenditures. It is organized by both function and location, with two summary pages highlighting town assessments and budgets by school that compare the current budget and fiscal year 2010 expenditures. The superintendent prepared PowerPoint presentations for school committee meetings, the public hearing, and the town finance committees. The presentations highlighted student achievement, program features, and budgeted costs, and showed notable reductions and additions to current school programs and staffing. School committee minutes, however, included a suggestion from one member about improving the budget documents.

In the context of budget constraints and declining enrollments the district has reviewed its space needs and associated grade configurations; this process of exploring options has included all members of the school system. Administrators and school committee members reported that the committee formed a facilities subcommittee to consider future options to meet school needs. The subcommittee deliberated for several months, and administrators reported that they had input into the process and proposed options which have been presented publicly at school committee meetings. The proposal at the time of the review was to close one elementary school and change the configuration of grades in the remaining schools to pre-kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4-5, grades 6-7, and grades 8-12. Administrators noted that under the regional agreement the proposal was subject to approval by both towns as well as the school committee. School committee minutes showed that as a first step toward the implementation of this plan the committee voted to open a pilot program for approximately 45 volunteer grade 8 students to go to the high school in September 2011; administrators reported that 90 students had already signed up. School committee members as well as administrators have taken steps to reduce the exodus to school choice and charter programs by instituting choice of schools within the district, advertising the district's advantages, and instituting the pilot program for grade 8 students to attend the high school.

The participation of principals and teachers in the process of developing a budget and a long-range facilities plan are indications of collaboration and inclusiveness. Principals believe that schools and programs get their fair share of resources. The process further includes input from town officials and opportunities for public participation.

²⁰ The override was successful.

The district manages its funds carefully, with strong control systems in place and attention to cost-effective practices and policies. Financial reports are submitted to the school committee regularly and are available electronically to administrators.

The district separates revenue and expenditure functions and has a system of checks and balances to ensure effective controls over school funds. According to business office staff and the assistant treasurer, the treasurer and his assistant have overall responsibility for the finances of the district and all revenues are submitted to them. They deposit revenue; are responsible for borrowing and debt service; approve payments and sign checks; monitor the district's cash flow; reconcile accounts to the bank; and provide monthly financial reports to the school committee. The district business office is responsible for preparing the budget, processing payroll and invoices, preparing bids and contracts, and preparing warrants for school committee approval. Student activity receipts are given to the assistant treasurer for deposit, as required by law, and she checks receipts before reimbursing the account controlled by the principal. Under these systems, every payment is checked and paid by the treasurer or his assistant after being processed by the business office.

The business office staff reported that the district uses *Budget Sense* software to track budgets, revenues, and expenses. They encumber all predictable expenses, including payroll, contracts, and purchase orders. Purchase orders cannot be processed unless adequate funds remain in the account and the principal or other appropriate administrator and the business manager must approve purchase orders before they are mailed to the vendor. Late in the school year, the business office monitors unspent purchase orders, calling the responsible administrator to see if the encumbered funds will be needed. The district follows Chapter 30B for purchasing goods and services, and requires three quotes for purchases over \$1000 and bids for purchases over \$25,000. The school committee approves bids and contracts, as evidenced in meeting minutes. A receiving slip or packing slip is necessary for payment of invoices to ensure receipt of the goods or service. Payroll payments require an appointment by the superintendent and are based on individual and collective bargaining agreements. The appropriate administrator must approve extra payments for stipends and extra time. Administrators prepare applications for grants and manage those that are awarded. For example, the principal of the Marguerite E. Small School applied for and received a 21st Century Grant for the school's after-school program and a planning grant to be an Innovative School; she manages both grants. The district reported \$2,893,771 in federal and state grants on its fiscal year 2010 End-of-Year Report and administrators reported receiving other private "mini" grants of a few hundred dollars each. A similar procedure of approvals is followed for revolving funds such as school lunch, athletic gate receipts, and day care.

Administrators reported that the business manager is certified, and a staff member has Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official (MCPPO) certification; the business manager is working on MCPPO certification as well.

An independent auditor provides an annual audit. The fiscal year 2010 audit noted that there were “no deficiencies in controls ... [and]... no instances of non-compliance.” The auditor’s management letter contained some recommendations, such as more careful verification of free and reduced school lunch recipients and the documentation of financial procedures, and administrators reported that they plan to implement the recommendations. The audit confirmed that the fiscal year 2010 recommendation to reconcile cash monthly has been implemented.

The district has taken steps to reduce its expenses by implementing several cost effective measures. Administrators reported that they participate with other schools in collaborative purchasing of some items, e.g., paper supplies. They use state contracts when appropriate and cost effective; for example they have contracted for custodial services under a state contract. A few years ago, contracting out custodial services generated considerable savings. An energy manager on staff keeps energy expenses at a minimum by carefully monitoring such energy uses as temperature and lighting. The Cape Cod Compact assisted the district with an energy survey and upgraded light fixtures in schools. The district switched boilers to gas to reduce heating costs. It has its own special education buses, which it can use more efficiently than contracted buses. Administrators noted that the district’s health insurance plan is cost effective: a 60/40 percentage split for a rate-saver plan.

Administrators reported that they give the school committee monthly reports on the district’s financial activity, including a balance sheet and detail for each line item with year to date balances, encumbered funds, and unencumbered balances. Similar and more detailed reports are available to principals and other administrators online and the business office gives them printed reports as needed to be sure they are informed about their accounts. The reports include all funding sources, local appropriations, revolving funds, and grants. In addition to encumbering purchase orders, payroll, and other predictable expenses, the business office reported estimating other needs (such as the costs of unpredictable maintenance expenses, coaches, and substitute teachers) to ensure they can be covered. If an account such as substitutes or school choice is overspent, the business manager has the authority to transfer funds within certain groups of accounts and requests school committee approval for transfers from others. The district has not had a deficit in recent years, and surpluses are transferred to the Excess and Deficiency (E & D) account for use in reducing town assessments in subsequent years. Administrators reported that a budget subcommittee of the school committee has recently been formed and expects to look at making financial reports easier to understand.

The district manages its funds carefully, with effective financial control systems in place and attention to opportunities for saving costs. Despite the difficult financial situation in the district, its financial systems help keep it viable, and ensure to the extent possible the continuation of strong programs and services for students. The district’s financial reports help to forecast expenses and provide year-to-date expenses.

Recommendations

The priorities identified by the review team at the time of its site visit and embodied in the recommendations that follow may no longer be current, and the district may have identified new priorities in line with its current needs.

Both communities that make up the district should explore whatever means are available to address their disagreements and work together for the benefit of the students of both Dennis and Yarmouth.

As a result of disagreements over the fairness of the regional school district funding formula and its impact on the two towns, the district has had difficulties getting its budget approved in recent years. Administrators and school committee members reported that in 2009 Yarmouth voted down its assessment and the district had to call a joint meeting of the two towns to vote to approve the budget²¹. In 2010 Yarmouth rejected an override for the schools and the district had to cut its budget accordingly; and, again in 2011 the town of Yarmouth was forced to seek an override for \$488,000 to fund its full share of the proposed district budget. Citizens of Dennis were concerned that the district risked being underfunded because of the financial situation in Yarmouth. This has been a continuing source of tension for several years.

The review team and the Department recognize both the complexity and the importance of the issues facing the two communities. Student enrollment decreased by 1218 students from 2001 to 2011. At the time of the review nearly 310 district students attended either public or parochial schools in Harwich, Chatham, and Orleans and another 130 students were enrolled in charter schools elsewhere on the Cape, with more than three million dollars in tuitions following choice students to other schools at a time of difficulty for the district in meeting its financial obligations. In such circumstances, the school district's ability to continue to provide high quality educational opportunities to its students is affected. School committee members and municipal officials must agree to work together, enlisting professional assistance when necessary, to address the financial disagreements, come to a mutually agreeable resolution (renegotiating the district agreement if appropriate to reflect consensus), and stabilize the fiscal foundation on which the district is built. Such a foundation is necessary for solid student achievement.

The district leadership should revisit the 2010-2014 District Improvement Plan and using the same template include goals for curriculum, assessment, student support, and staff evaluations.

The superintendent and her directors should reopen the 2010-2014 District Improvement Plan (DIP) and add goals that focus on addressing the concerns expressed by interviewees about

²¹ A two-town regional district can convene a joint meeting to approve its budget, at which the majority of all present, regardless of which town they reside in, can vote to approve. This favors the town that can get the most attendance.

curriculum, assessment, student support, and staff evaluations. The district leadership should use the same DIP template for the goals; namely, action steps, begin date, anticipated completion date, measurement methods, persons responsible for monitoring, education results, and monitoring dates/timelines.

Curriculum

School administrators and teachers expressed a sense of urgency about the need to update the kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum, especially with the advent of the new Massachusetts curriculum standards. During the review team visit, administrators and teachers repeatedly mentioned that there were no up-to-date curriculum guides for any subjects; teachers said that they were on their own to decide what to teach, and often went on the Internet to find lessons to teach that met state curriculum standards.

It is essential that district leaders develop curriculum compendia aligned with the new state frameworks so that teachers know what they are expected to teach, what is expected to be taught in the previous grade, and what will be taught in succeeding grades. Once the curriculum has been developed and shared with the faculties, it needs to be implemented through quality instruction. In addition, the review team recommends that districtwide curriculum committees be re-established with representatives from each school in each subject to review, evaluate, revise, and vertically articulate the curriculum in the district.

Assessment

At the time of the review the district administered assessments such as MCAS, DIBELS, and the second edition of DRA. It also used other summative and formative assessments. Administrators and teachers reported that in the previous two years, teachers in PLCs were asked to prepare and use two common assessments each year for their schools. However, interviewees commented that most common assessments had not been shared or discussed outside of the school or grade level in which they were developed. Thus, it is recommended that district-level administrators prepare a plan to develop, use, and integrate common assessments throughout the district and to integrate common assessments into the development of the curriculum.

Student Support

Due to budget limitations and the elimination of staff positions, the need for support services for students is not being fully met. One example is in services for ELLs: as a result of an inadequate number of staff, students are receiving less than the recommended amount of ESL instruction. It is essential that district-level administrators ascertain which needed services for students are not being supplied and develop goals in the DIP to address them.

Evaluation

An examination of random teacher evaluations prepared by principals indicates that only in a few instances were portions of the Principles of Effective Teaching followed in the evaluations. Also,

the evaluations were primarily informative, with little or no evidence of recommendations to ensure professional growth and development.

The evaluations of the district-level administrators and principals prepared by the superintendent contained both commendations and recommendations. These evaluations included information about progress made toward attainment of the DIP and SIP goals and incorporated the indicators Principles of Effective Leadership. However, the evaluations were not always done yearly as required, but rather every two years.

The superintendent and the principals should make use of the guidance provided by the new educator evaluation model provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, negotiate contract modifications where necessary, and ensure that all principals are current with the new guidelines for conducting educator evaluations. Taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the new model will mean that teachers and administrators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback.

With goals for up-to-date curriculum guides, the development, use, and integration of common assessments throughout the district, sufficient support to meet students' needs, and an evaluation system revamped in accordance with the new state model, the DIP will be a more useful tool to enhance the quality of instruction for all students.

The district should continue with its plan to create aligned, up-to-date K-12 curriculum guides for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies to inform and guide instruction; these guides should include standards aligned with the new frameworks, objectives, resources, instructional strategies, assessments, extensions for enrichment and interventions, and timelines. Furthermore, the district needs to adopt districtwide ELA instructional program materials, K-5 and -8.

A review of documents and interviews with teachers and school leaders- indicated that in 2006 the district decided to discontinue curriculum committees. Additionally, the review team was told that the district does not have current, comprehensive curriculum documents to ensure that the curriculum for each subject is aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improved. Interviews and a review of documents showed that curriculum-related materials had not been recently updated at the time of the review. Curriculum documents reviewed on-site were incomplete and did not have the necessary elements to inform instruction comprehensively. There is no districtwide instructional program or resources that address ELA teaching and learning. The district adopted *Everyday Math* for kindergarten through grade 6 and *Connected Math Project* for grades 7 and 8; the district considers these curricula to be aligned to state curriculum standards. Professional learning communities (PLCs) were established in 2006. One expectation for the work of the PLCs, in the absence of curriculum committees, is to ensure curriculum alignment across grades and between grades. With the assistance of a literacy specialist from the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC), the district drafted a *District Literacy Plan* with an initial action step to develop curriculum guides for English language arts

in kindergarten through grade 12, beginning in the summer of 2011. Another goal was to create an action plan for mathematics in the fall of 2011. With these actions under consideration, the review team recommends that the district accelerate its commitment to create curriculum guides for kindergarten through grade 12 in all content areas: ELA, mathematics, science/technology/engineering, and social studies. It further recommends that the curriculum guides for all content areas be complete and include standards, objectives, resources, instructional strategies, assessments/evaluation activities, extensions for enrichment and interventions, and timelines to inform and guide instruction. The district should ensure that all curriculum is aligned to the new state curriculum frameworks and to MCAS performance level descriptions.

Concurrently, the district needs to research and adopt a common ELA instructional program across schools for kindergarten through grade 5 and grades 6-8. With multiple instructional materials, books, and web-sourced curriculum, as is currently the case, content and pedagogy do not have unity and focus. This recommendation is not a mandate for “cookie-cutter” instruction or lessons. Rather, it is a recommendation that can facilitate excellence by ensuring that teachers at all schools and grade-levels share common goals and common tools for teaching and learning.

Once complete curriculum documents are in place, time currently devoted to school-based curriculum work in PLCs can be more focused on teaching and learning, although curriculum documents will always evolve in a process of continuous improvement. An aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improved curriculum and common instructional materials will aid students in attaining high levels of achievement.

The district should establish a curricular/instructional model that includes the articulation of explicit, grade-level content and learning objectives and goals, especially language and learning objectives for English language learners.

The review team observed 43 classrooms focusing on three major instruction categories: classroom management, instructional design and delivery, and instructional design and delivery focused on higher-order thinking. In addition, the review team examined documents and conducted interviews with teachers, team leaders, and district leaders to gain a comprehensive view of instructional practices. The review team also examined documents about instruction to determine their effectiveness in supporting high-quality instruction. In their review, the team found incomplete and outdated curriculum documents as described earlier. Among the missing resources in curriculum documents were learning and language objectives targeted to the specific needs of English language learners (ELLs).

ELLs represent a growing subgroup in the district (see Table 13) whose MCAS proficiency rates in 2010 were only 23 percent in ELA and 15 percent in math (just about equal to that of their peers statewide in ELA and below their peers statewide in mathematics). Clearly written and articulated instructional objectives connected to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks can more effectively support student learning and achievement. All students should know what

they will learn and be able to do as a result of the lesson. ELLs require more support. Language objectives that are clear and give a rationale for learning support their achievement.

To this end, the review team recommends that the district redefine the elements of an effective instructional model focusing particularly on the practice of describing and articulating learning objectives and goals for all students, including language objectives that are consistent with the new Massachusetts English language development standards, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards.²²

As teachers and leaders work to create new curriculum documents, the district should include additional appropriate assessment resources and options to ensure that the assessment system and the use of assessment data are more effective, comprehensive, and balanced.

The district's teachers and teacher-leaders working in professional learning communities (PLCs) use assessment data insightfully. They clearly have made great strides as change agents in their schools and classrooms. Assessment initiatives and data abound in the district. Teachers and PLCs for kindergarten through grade 8 use a broad selection of scheduled, standardized, formative, benchmarked, and summative assessments to monitor progress and evaluate what students know and can do in ELA and mathematics. Task and project-based assessments inform teachers and students of students' knowledge and skills in science through grade 8, although the implementation of the curriculum is not well monitored. This deficiency of monitoring makes science assessments less reliable sources of data. High school teachers are developing and using common assessments to evaluate student progress and performance in multisection courses and to monitor results of SATs and AP tests. As a result, assessment results and data inform numerous curricular and instructional decisions, mainly at the school and classroom levels; less so at the district level. At the time of the review a districtwide and ongoing common assessment initiative had only just begun to deepen teachers' and leaders' knowledge of how to use common assessment and assessment data well. The District Teaching and Learning Council (DTLC) has participated in professional development to support this initiative, but many teachers are unsure of its goals and some have not yet taken advantage of the early experimentation. The district is making progress in putting together the components of a comprehensive and balanced assessment system.

Although shared understandings about alignment to state curriculum standards exist, there are replications of efforts to ensure curriculum alignment because of the absence of complete curriculum. And the multiple programs and instructional materials used to implement lessons in the elementary and middle grades make it even more difficult to ensure consistent emphasis and depth in looking at instructional practice and, by extension, in assessing student learning. As a result, there is inconsistency in the system. Teachers and teams are constantly making

²² For information on WIDA, see the commissioner of elementary and secondary education's memorandum of June 7, 2012, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=6889>.

adjustments and accommodations at different schools; sometimes these are aligned, sometimes they are not. Much of this work is appropriate and promotes breadth and depth in the work of the PLCs. However, more consistency is needed in what is taught and assessed across schools, especially in the lower grades, though instruction and materials need not be identical for every lesson in a subject/grade level. In addition, teachers note that they would like to spend more time collaborating to improve instructional practice, and could do so if the curriculum were in more solid shape.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are often referred to as the three legs of the instructional stool. In best practice, there is strong alignment and coherency among all three legs. However, in kindergarten through grade 5, the instructional stool has many, many legs because of the variety of instructional programs and materials. In best practice, an aligned core curriculum is implemented with shared instructional materials that include most, but not all, assessments. An aligned core curriculum helps create a more coherent instructional system and a more coherent assessment system. Such a system also allows for deeper understandings of districtwide and school-based progress because it uses data that is grounded in a common instructional core. Yet teachers can still make individual choices and supplement lessons. In addition, with a coherent and aligned curriculum, teachers can have more time to probe deeper into the instructional system to better meet students' differentiated learning needs and improve their own practice.

At the time of the review the review team was aware of plans for the district to align its curriculum with the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, especially plans to participate in writing model units. The team was also aware of the district's intent to implement a new literacy plan and, potentially, a new mathematics plan in the near future. As the district develops these initiatives and others, and designs a process and criteria for developing and renewing curriculum to guide instruction, it can concurrently develop a comprehensive and balanced assessment system, no doubt using many of the materials it already uses. This system would balance formative, benchmark, and summative assessments to guide instruction and determine individual enrichment and intervention requirements. It would also include common summative assessments to monitor progress and guide curriculum development and improvements to instruction.

The district should research, choose, and implement a new educational data management system that will offer all stakeholders—leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members—access to appropriate student and school data, assessment data, and school and district information; this system should facilitate and support improvement initiatives at the school and district levels.

The data team should research and recommend an educational data management system for the district. A new state-of-the-art data system can facilitate multiple educational and support activities in the district. These can be accessed by multiple stakeholders using a password protected system. A few potential uses for a more effective data management system for both the

district and school levels are listed below. Other lists can be created and considered for other stakeholders.

- Easy access to all student educational and profile data
- Ability to generate reports that track student, classroom, and school academic progress and compare and contrast trends
- Disseminate data reports widely and efficiently
- Target improvement needs for subgroups, systems, and practices
- Shed light on trends in discipline, attendance, dropout and graduation rates, and participation
- Provide graphic presentations to generate discussions and identify priorities
- Place students in appropriate courses and levels and track trends and progress
- Provide an interface for classroom forums and sharing of lessons, assessments, and curriculum
- Post complete curriculum
- Post school and district improvement plans
- Give parents access to school reports and their children's records

The potential is almost boundless. With a more current data management system, teachers and leaders can use data more effectively and more efficiently to make better decisions, track progress, and communicate more effectively.

The well-developed system of professional learning communities (PLCs) flourishing in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District should be expanded to include an emphasis on increasing teachers' instructional expertise, cited in research as the major contributor to improved student achievement.

Interviews with district teachers and administrators reveal a strong commitment to and a belief in the PLC model for improving student achievement. Teachers reported that they have established a strong sense of collaboration, mutual respect, and an intense focus on teaching and learning in their work in PLCs. Teachers use a variety of assessment data to analyze students' strengths and weaknesses and to seek out and develop curriculum and instructional strategies to address those weaknesses. Teachers also speak highly of the content-based professional development courses in which they have enthusiastically participated.

Clearly, the district and its teachers have invested a great deal of money and effort in professional development since 2006 with the expectation that it would result in a steady increase in student achievement, given much research into the connection between providing quality professional development to teachers and improved student achievement. Yet district proficiency rates showed almost no improvement in 2010 over 2008 in either in ELA or mathematics, and the district's rate lagged the state rate by 5 percentage points in ELA and 10 in math (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C). Also, MCAS results point to difficulties in working effectively with English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. In 2010 ELLs

showed a 15 percent proficiency rate in math compared to their peers statewide with a 24 percent proficiency rate. Students with disabilities showed a 19 percent proficiency rate in English language arts and an 11 percent proficiency rate in mathematics compared to their peers statewide with respective proficiency rates of 28 percent and 21 percent.

District administrators, principals and teachers were aware of these weaknesses and had included specific goals to improve student achievement in the District Improvement Plan and in School Improvement Plans. Through their analysis of multiple forms of assessment data, staff members know in which areas students are strong and in which areas students are weak. What is missing, however, is data on *why* they are not succeeding —what happens in the classroom that enhances or hampers each student’s ability to learn. Research into student achievement cites teachers’ pedagogical expertise as the main determinant of student achievement: the higher the level of teachers’ pedagogical expertise, as demonstrated in observations of lessons taught in teachers’ classrooms, the better students achieve in those classrooms on a range of student assessments. In observing classrooms, the review team noted a relative weakness in teachers’ expertise in asking questions that require students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. However, a focus on improving teachers’ pedagogical expertise was not as great a part of the PLC model in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District as is needed; nor did district or school improvement plans—except for the Wixon Middle School—include any such goals, despite the fact that at the time of the review teachers were required to link their own goals each year with the Principles of Effective Teaching.

A system of peer observations focusing specifically on instruction and using protocols created for PLCs to incorporate this practice respectfully and supportively could provide such a mechanism. Such a system should include developing agreed-upon descriptors of good teaching, multiple opportunities to try out and master the effective teaching practices chosen by the PLC to focus on to address identified student weaknesses, and a system of observing and recording how students respond to these practices in the classroom. The final critical step in this process would be for PLC members to give each other high-quality feedback in a supportive setting to ensure their mastery of these practices.

The PLC model as nurtured by the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District is well poised to expand to include such a focus on instruction. PLCs have built collaboration, trust, and a sense of shared commitment— all critical components to using peer observations as a vehicle for increasing student achievement. In the “Leading the Learning” slide-show prepared by the district, one sentence reads, “In order to improve student learning, you have to watch student learning.” The review team agrees and recommends that the district provide training and support for a system of peer observation with detailed feedback linked to teachers’ mastery of effective teaching practices.

The review team further recommends that the district, using its present model of training teacher-leaders, train the teacher-leaders in how to give specific, detailed feedback during observations

of other teachers to develop expertise among all teachers. This work would build upon the strong foundation that the PLCs have developed in the district. Including a focus on improving teachers' pedagogical knowledge and execution as part of the district's and the schools' improvement plans would further support the work of the PLCs in this critical area, and lead to improved student achievement. It would honor the work at the heart of a school— the moment-to-moment interaction between teachers and students in the classroom.

As it continues its work aligning its evaluation system with ESE's new model system for educator evaluation, the district should ensure that all educators, both teachers and administrators, have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback, and that professional development is aligned with the evaluation system.

A review of 37 randomly selected teachers' evaluations by the review team found evidence of considerable feedback to teachers in many areas of their work as teachers—on their collaboration with other teachers, on their leadership within the school or district, and on their work with parents—but little feedback aimed at the improvement of pedagogical practices. And administrators were evaluated every other year, rather than every year as required by law. The district recognized many of the problems with the system of evaluation in effect at the time of the review and was in the process of working on a major overhaul of its teacher evaluation process, cognizant of the new state model evaluation system being developed at the time of the review.

The new educator evaluation model provides opportunities for school districts to develop and implement

- Professional development for evaluators;
- Training to develop meaningful professional practice and student learning goals;
- Systems to ensure
 - that evaluators have the time and support to carry out the new system with fidelity and
 - that district and school goals are aligned with administrator goals
- Professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the goal-setting and evaluation process.

Taking advantage of these opportunities will address the areas the review team identified for improvement in the educator evaluation system in use in the district at the time of the team's visit.

To lower the chronic absence rates and improve attendance rates at the middle and high schools, the district should continue to analyze the internal and external forces that contribute to student absence, reviewing current initiatives and considering additional supports.

The district introduced the *Keep Them Coming* program as a pilot program in 2008 at the Station Avenue Elementary School; it was adopted by all schools from kindergarten through grade 8 in 2009. The high school's use of the initiative was not as comprehensive as in kindergarten through grade 8. However, in spite of the fact that the review team was told that all levels concerned are working to improve attendance, the overall rate for the district decreased slightly in 2010 after a very slight increase in 2009 (see Table 8). And from 2008-2010, about one-third of students at the high school were chronically absent (see Table 10), with high rates of chronic absence at grades 6-8 also (see Table 9).

The high school's 2010 attendance rate of 89.5 percent was 3.5 percentage points lower than the statewide attendance rate for the high school level, 93 percent. The attendance at the high school was recognized as a problem by high school administrators, who expressed the belief that much more could be done to improve the rate of attendance. However, at the time of the review, according to administrators, there was no formal plan in place to improve attendance at the high school.

The district included as a goal in the District Improvement Plan to increase attendance to 93 percent at the high school, but specific action steps were not included with this goal. The high school should analyze the chronic absence data to determine whether the rate is related to specific populations. The district should also review the established supports and identify levels, grades, or populations in which attendance is not showing the needed improvement and focus specific analysis and supports on the identified students. By improving attendance, the district will increase instructional time and make an impact on student achievement.

The district should increase the amount of instructional time for English language learners (ELLs) to meet state recommendations,²³ provide more SEI training for classroom teachers, and expand the time that the ELL coordinator has available to monitor instruction of ELLs and provide leadership to the ELL program.

In interviews personnel throughout the district told the review team that the district was not meeting the state-recommended instructional time for English language development for ELLs. While at the time of the review the district had six certified ESL teachers to instruct the 168

²³ The recommended amounts are:

Levels 1 and 2: daily minimum of 2.5 hours to a full day

Level 3: daily minimum of 1-2 hours

Levels 4 and 5: weekly minimum of 2.5 hours

ELLs, increased from one in 2006, this corps did not meet the instructional needs of that population of ELLs.

The efficacy of education for ELLs was further reduced because not enough classroom teachers in the district had been trained in Sheltered English Immersion. At the time of the review team visit, 141 teachers had been trained in category 1; 49 teachers trained in category 2; and only 3 teachers trained in categories 3 and 4. The review team was told that the insufficiency of this training had left many teachers without the skills to provide appropriate instruction to ELLs, making them reluctant to have ELLs placed in their classrooms.

The ELL coordinator also taught at the high school, and her schedule did not allow for school visits to monitor instruction and to handle the administrative aspects of the ELL program. Instead, most teachers emailed the coordinator with concerns or waited for the monthly ELL meeting, which is attended by teachers, assistants, and the director of instruction who is ultimately responsible for the program.

To meet state recommendations and requirements and provide adequate and appropriate instruction, the district should increase its capacity to provide ESL instruction by ESL-certified teachers and provide increased SEI training, aligned with ESE's RETELL²⁴ initiative, for classroom teachers. Furthermore, to ensure that the ELL program is effectively supervised and led, the district should provide additional time for the ELL coordinator to oversee the program, represent it to district leadership, and perform such functions as monitoring students who have exited the ELL program.

²⁴ Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District was conducted from April 25-28, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

John Kulevich, Ph. D., Leadership and Governance

Suzanne Kelly, Curriculum and Instruction

Linda L. Greyser, Ed. D., Assessment, Review Team Coordinator

Sara Freedman, Ed. D., Human Resources and Professional Development

Dolores Fitzgerald, Student Support

George Gearhart, Ed. D., 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 Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the assistant treasurer of the regional school district.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School Committee: four school committee members including the chairman.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Dennis-Yarmouth Educators Association: the president, the vice-president, the chair of the committee on professional rights and responsibilities, the chair of the grievance committee, and four union representatives from the Marguerite E. Small School.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District central office administration: the superintendent, the director of instruction, the director of special education, and the director of finance and operations.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District: the Ezra H. Baker Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 3), the Laurence C. MacArthur Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 3), the Station Avenue Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 3), the Marguerite E. Small School (grades 4-5), the Mattacheese Middle School (grades 6-8), the Nathaniel H. Wixon Middle School (grades 4-8), and the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School (grades 9-12 and pre-kindergarten).
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with principals, assistant principals, coaches, coordinators, directors, a social worker, a grant coordinator; it also conducted four focus groups with teachers.
 - During school visits, the review team also observed 43 classrooms 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, 2002
- District Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) in 2007
- District Curriculum Accommodation Plan, 2005
- Teachers' bargaining agreement, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- 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):
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School Improvement Plans
 - Organization Chart
 - Town Reports
 - Final Report of the Dennis K-8 School District Assessment Review Committee, presentation to Dennis Board of Selectmen, 12 April 2011
 - PowerPoint presentations: Leading the Learning, The Climbing Higher Project: Long-Range and Short-Range Planning, April 2011
 - Superintendent's outline of Administrative Changes Timeline and District Teaching and Learning Council (Team Leader) Training and Planning, 2005-2012
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying PowerPoint presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - FY10 Audit, December 15, 2010
 - List of staff
 - Financial Report, January 10, 2011
 - Progress Report of *Keep Them Coming* initiative, September 2008- December 2010
 - Teaching and Learning Guides
 - History and social studies, 2004 revised

- Grades 4-6 mathematics, 2005
- Kindergarten through grade 5 mathematics, 2005
- Draft of Dennis-Yarmouth District Literacy Action Plan, April 2011
- Kindergarten through grade 12 ELA and mathematics curriculum documents
- Grade 4 science curriculum documents
- Documents related to identifying power standards, grade 1 mathematics, 2009
- Improving Math Learning with Disabilities, grades 6-8, 2005
- School District Examination Report
- Instructional Rounds Notebook
- Integrated Language Arts Curriculum, grades 3-6, grade 4, 2006
- High school program of studies
- Three different matrices of assessments administered in the district
- Professional Development Binder on Assessment and Common Assessments
- Three Binders on Teacher Leadership
- Binder of sample common assessments in ELA, mathematics, science, social studies
- Memos and minutes of PLC meetings dealing with assessment and mini-unit creation
- Protocols for Looking at Student Work
- Sedita, Joan. *The Key Comprehension Routine*. Keys to Literacy, 2011.
- Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
- Descriptions of student support programs
- Student and Family Handbooks
- Faculty Handbook
- Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
- Graduate course syllabi for courses on instructional technology
- Mentoring Notebook
- District Professional Development Plan
- Professional Development Binder (agendas, syllabi, schedules, course descriptions, and lists of workshop participants)
- Teacher certification and qualification information
- Teacher planning time schedules
- Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals

- Evaluation documents for superintendent and central office administrators
- Draft of Plan to Revise Dennis-Yarmouth District System of Teacher Evaluation
- Classroom observation tools used in the teacher evaluation process
- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Thirty seven randomly selected teacher personnel files
- History of Barnstable County: Yarmouth and Dennis documents
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, visited because it was identified as a “gap-closer” for low-income students:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Calendar of formative and summative assessments
 - Copies of data analyses/reports
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Student and Family Handbooks
 - Teacher planning time/meeting schedules
 - Classroom observation tools/learning walk tools
 - Samples of Leadership Team Initiative Work
 - Agendas and minutes of leadership team meetings
 - Flyers for fee-based after-school initiative
 - Faculty meeting agendas
 - PLC meeting agendas and minutes
 - Documents about a special education initiative
 - Outline of the Innovation School initiative
 - PowerPoint presentation to faculty about the Innovation School initiative

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Differentiated Needs (Low-Income Students) Review of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, conducted from April 25-28, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
April 25 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association.	April 26 Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; interview with chairman of the school committee; classroom visits at Marguerite E. Small Elementary School.	April 27 Interviews with town or city personnel; school visit(s) (Marguerite E. Small Elementary School); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; observation of PLC team meeting; teacher team meetings; focus group with parents from commended school; school committee interviews; meeting with teachers association representatives.	April 28 School visits at Station Avenue Elementary School, Laurence C. MacArthur Elementary School, Mattacheese Middle School, N.H. Wixon Middle School, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principal.

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2008-2010

**Table C1: 2008-2010 Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
ELA**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP
Grade 3—District	52	NA*	58	NA*	53	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	38	38	43	37	47	44
Grade 4—State	49	48	53	50	54	50
Grade 5—District	54	49	54	45	54	48
Grade 5—State	61	51	63	50	63	50
Grade 6—District	69	58	63	53	64	50
Grade 6—State	67	50	66	50	69	50
Grade 7— District	77	65	69	49	67	50
Grade 7— State	69	50	70	50	72	50
Grade 8— District	75	48	85	57	77	39
Grade 8— State	75	49	78	50	78	50
Grade 10— District	74	NA*	82	38	84	57.5
Grade 10— State	74	NA*	81	50	78	50
All Grades— District	62	51	65	48	63	48
All Grades—State	64	50	67	50	68	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.

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C2: 2008-2010 Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	51	NA*	60	NA*	51	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	35	38	38	42	41	38
Grade 4—State	49	49	48	50	48	49
Grade 5—District	44	45.5	40	44	47	51.5
Grade 5—State	52	51	54	50	55	50
Grade 6—District	50	56	47	48	45	49
Grade 6—State	56	50	57	50	59	50
Grade 7— District	50	52	40	40.5	41	45.5
Grade 7— State	47	50	49	50	53	50
Grade 8— District	50	46	50	46	42	45
Grade 8— State	49	51	48	50	51	51
Grade 10— District	69	NA*	76	40	79	38
Grade 10— State	72	NA*	75	50	75	50
All Grades— District	49	46	50	43	49	46
All Grades—State	55	50	55	50	59	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.

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C3: Achievement Trends for Students from Low-Income Families in the
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District,
and the State,
Compared to All Students
ELA**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP
State Low-Income Students	41	73.2	45.0	45	75.5	45.0	47	76.5	46.0
State All Students	64	85.2	50.0	67	86.5	50.0	68	86.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	49	77.5	46.0	49	77.0	42.0	50	77.3	44.0
District All Students	62	84.2	51.0	65	85.0	48.0	63	84.2	48.0
Marguerite E. Small Low-Income Students	26	67.7	38.5	33	69.4	35.0	43	75.2	44.0
Marguerite E. Small All Students	45	76.7	41.0	51	79.3	41.0	55	81.2	46.5

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C4: Achievement Trends for Students from Low-Income Families in the
Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District,
and the 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	33	63.1	45.0	33	64.5	44.0	37	67.1	47.0
State All Students	55	77.7	50.0	55	78.5	50.0	59	79.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	35	65.8	43.0	33	65.5	40.0	34	66.0	43.0
District All Students	49	75.1	46.0	50	75.3	43.0	49	74.5	46.0
Marguerite E. Small Low-Income Students	23	60.3	34.0	29	63.7	43.0	37	70.6	48.0
Marguerite E. Small All Students	41	72.8	39.0	42	73.4	48.0	50	78.2	49.5

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C5: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Students from Low-Income Families in the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School,
the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, and the State
ELA**

Grade	Marguerite E. Small School	Dennis- Yarmouth	State
4	35 (70)	30 (114)	31
5	51 (80)	43 (133)	40
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.</p> <p>*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

**Table C6: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School,
the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, and the State
Mathematics**

Grade	Marguerite E. Small School	Dennis- Yarmouth	State
4	27 (69)	22 (113)	28
5	45 (79)	34 (133)	33
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.</p> <p>*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

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 principal and her leadership style were the initial factors mentioned by interviewees as to why the MCAS test results for students from low-income families improved from 2008-2010 at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School.
2. Besides the principal and her leadership style, interviewees identified several other structural and cultural factors that helped improve the MCAS results of students from low-income families at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, including the dedication of the staff, an after-school enrichment program, the team leadership structure, and professional learning communities (PLCs).
3. The model of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as practiced at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School is a major contributor to the narrowing of the achievement gap between students from low-income families and non-low-income students at the school.
4. Although the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School is developing an effective instructional model that contributes to improved achievement for all students, there are weaknesses in differentiating instruction, promoting higher-order thinking, and using explicit content and language objectives, especially for ELL students.
5. The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has not formally implemented a tiered instructional model to address diverse learning needs, but there is evidence of instructional practices in the school that provide for grouping and some interventions based on students' learning needs and achievement.
6. The Marguerite E. Small Elementary School has implemented an extended-day program with the primary purpose of serving students from low-income families, special education students, and English language learners (ELLs); the program has provided additional academic and enrichment activities to these students.

7. The district allocates funding and resources to the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in amounts comparable to those given other district schools; the school has sought additional resources through grants for programs for children from low-income families.

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 Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District has several established and fully operating systems, but it also had some other systems with incomplete segments.
2. At the time of the review the district did not have aligned and up-to-date kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum compendia in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science to inform and guide instruction and assessment. The district often did not have common instructional programs and materials in ELA and common and complete instructional materials in science to support instruction.
3. The district has established a strong learning and teaching environment in all schools, mainly through the work of PLCs. Although classroom observations revealed instructional strengths in classroom organization and in key aspects of instructional design and delivery, there was a lower incidence of practices challenging students to engage in higher-order thinking and analysis; instruction often consisted of a narrow range of techniques.
4. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) collect, analyze, and use assessment data as a key component of their improvement work and are *de facto* agents for change at the school and classroom levels at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and at all district schools.
5. The district needs greater technological capacity to more effectively manage data-driven improvement initiatives, including easier access to data to monitor and improve student performance, to share and use data for decision making, and to ascertain progress toward improvement goals.
6. The teachers at the Marguerite E. Small Elementary School and all other district schools have strongly benefited from the vision and structure of embedded professional development designed by the district, especially the creation and continuous support of highly functioning Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
7. The district provides teachers high quality, content-focused professional development that targets challenges discovered in the analysis of student achievement data at particular grade levels.

8. At the time of the review, the district's performance evaluation system had both strengths and weaknesses in terms of the feedback provided by the evaluations and the timeliness with which they were completed.
9. The district is providing supports to improve student attendance at all its schools, especially the *Keep Them Coming* initiative, established at all schools.
10. Although the district had increased the number of ESL-certified teachers from one to six from 2006 to 2011, at the time of the review the district's ELL program did not have enough staff to deliver the recommended amount of instruction, classroom teachers did not receive adequate SEI training, and the ELL coordinator did not have enough time to monitor ELL instruction and provide leadership to the ELL program.
11. Complex financial and political factors have created uncertainties and difficulties between the two towns and among town and regional district leaders, resulting in budget cutbacks to school programs and possibly the restructuring of the regional district.
12. Although there has been conflict about assessments levied on the towns, the development of the district budget has been transparent and inclusive of all members of the school system, with opportunities for public participation as well.
13. The district manages its funds carefully, with strong control systems in place and attention to cost-effective practices and policies. Financial reports are submitted to the school committee regularly and are available electronically to administrators.

Recommendation Statements:

1. Both communities that make up the district should explore whatever means are available to address their disagreements and work together for the benefit of the students of both Dennis and Yarmouth.
2. The district leadership should revisit the 2010-2014 District Improvement Plan and using the same template include goals for curriculum, assessment, student support, and staff evaluations.
3. The district should continue with its plan to create aligned, up-to-date K-12 curriculum guides for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies to inform and guide instruction; these guides should include standards aligned with the new frameworks, objectives, resources, instructional strategies, assessments, extensions for enrichment and interventions, and timelines. Furthermore, the district needs to adopt districtwide ELA instructional program materials, K-5 and K-8.
4. The district should establish a curricular/instructional model that includes the articulation of explicit, grade-level content and learning objectives and goals, especially language and learning objectives for English language learners.
5. As teachers and leaders work to create new curriculum documents, the district should include additional appropriate assessment resources and options to ensure that the assessment system and the use of assessment data are more effective, comprehensive, and balanced.
6. The district should research, choose, and implement a new educational data management system that will offer all stakeholders—leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members—access to appropriate student and school data, assessment data, and school and district information; this system should facilitate and support improvement initiatives at the school and district levels.
7. The well-developed system of professional learning communities (PLCs) flourishing in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District should be expanded to include an emphasis on increasing teachers' instructional expertise, cited in research as the major contributor to improved student achievement.
8. As it continues its work aligning its evaluation system with ESE's new model system for educator evaluation, the district should ensure that all educators, both teachers and administrators, have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback, and that professional development is aligned with the evaluation system.

9. To lower the chronic absence rates and improve attendance rates at the middle and high schools, the district should continue to analyze the internal and external forces that contribute to student absence, reviewing current initiatives and considering additional supports.
10. The district should increase the amount of instructional time for English language learners (ELLs) to meet state recommendations,²⁵ provide more SEI training for classroom teachers, and expand the time that the ELL coordinator has available to monitor instruction of ELLs and provide leadership to the ELL program.

²⁵ The recommended amounts are:

Levels 1 and 2: daily minimum of 2.5 hours to a full day

Level 3: daily minimum of 1-2 hours

Levels 4 and 5: weekly minimum of 2.5 hours