How Is Your School District Performing?

A look at

Falmouth

Public Schools

2004–2006

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

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

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Falmouth Public Schools, Dennis Richards; the school department staff; and the town officials of Falmouth.

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INTRODUCTION

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

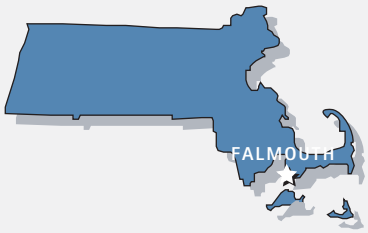
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools,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

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

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

Putting the Data in Perspective

Falmouth, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 32,660
Median family income: $57,422
Largest sources of employment: Educational, health, and social services; manufacturing and retail trade; professional, scientific, management, administrative; and waste management services
Local government: Board of Selectmen/ Representative Town Meeting

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 9 members
Number of schools: 7
Student-teacher ratio: 12.1 to 1
Per Pupil Expenditures: $11,523
Student enrollment:
- Total: 4,144
- White: 88.6 percent
- Hispanic: 3.3 percent
- African-American: 3.5 percent
- Asian: 1.4 percent
- Native American: 1.2 percent
- Limited English proficient: 0.8 percent
- Low income: 16.9 percent
- Special education: 15.8 percent

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

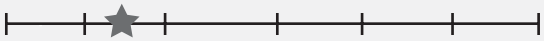
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

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

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	86	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	90	84
Math Proficiency Index	81	72

Performance Rating



Very High | High | Moderate | Low | Very Low | Critically Low

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

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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

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

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

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

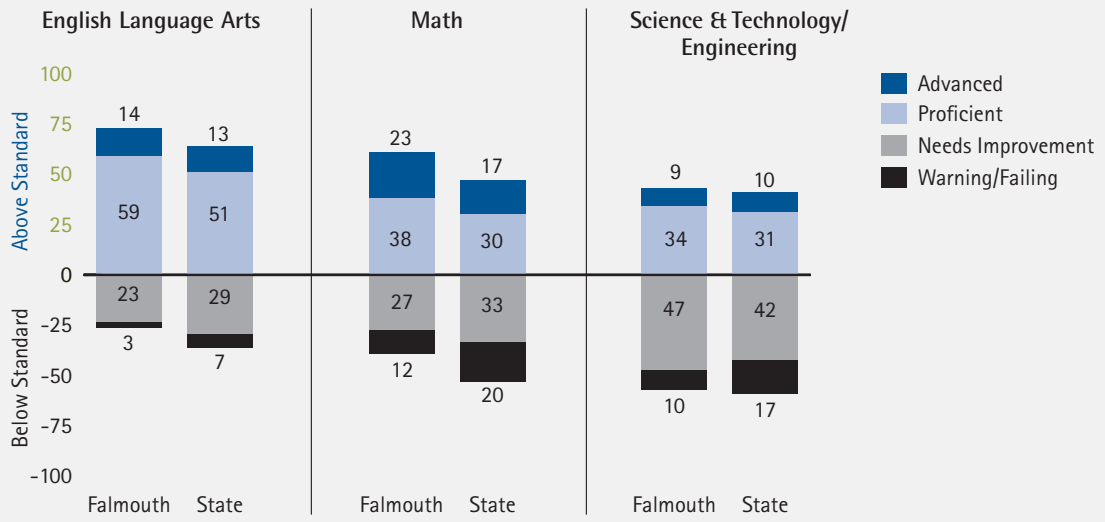
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, approximately two-thirds of all students in Falmouth attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much more than that statewide. Nearly three-quarters of Falmouth students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), more than three-fifths of Falmouth students attained proficiency in math, and more than two-fifths of Falmouth students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-nine percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Falmouth's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 86 proficiency index (PI) points, eight PI points greater than that statewide. Falmouth's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 14 PI points.
- In 2006, Falmouth's proficiency gap in ELA was 10 PI points, six PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improve-

FALMOUTH SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



ment in performance of more than one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Falmouth's proficiency gap in math was 19 PI points in 2006, nine PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two PI points per year to achieve AYP. Falmouth's proficiency gap in STE was 25 PI points, four PI points narrower than that statewide.

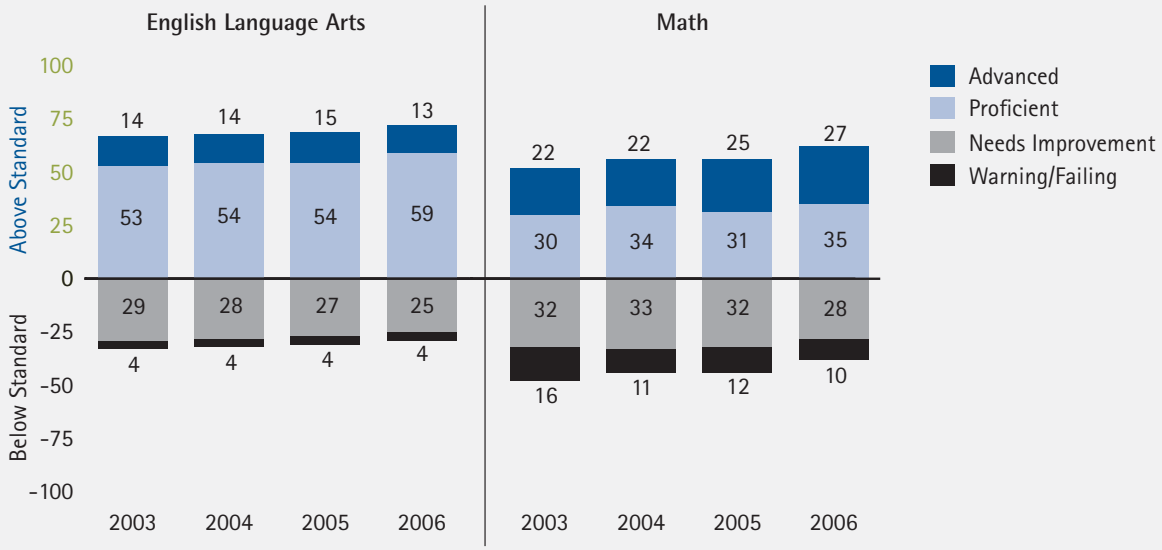
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Falmouth's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall, little improvement in ELA and STE, and some improvement in math.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by eight percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by four percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Falmouth narrowed from 19 PI points in 2003 to 15 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 23 percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Falmouth showed little improvement, at an average of more than one-half PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 14 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Math performance in Falmouth showed more improvement, at an average of more than two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 27 percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Falmouth had little improvement in STE performance, increasing by one PI point over the two-year period. This resulted in an improvement rate of four percent.

FALMOUTH ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS

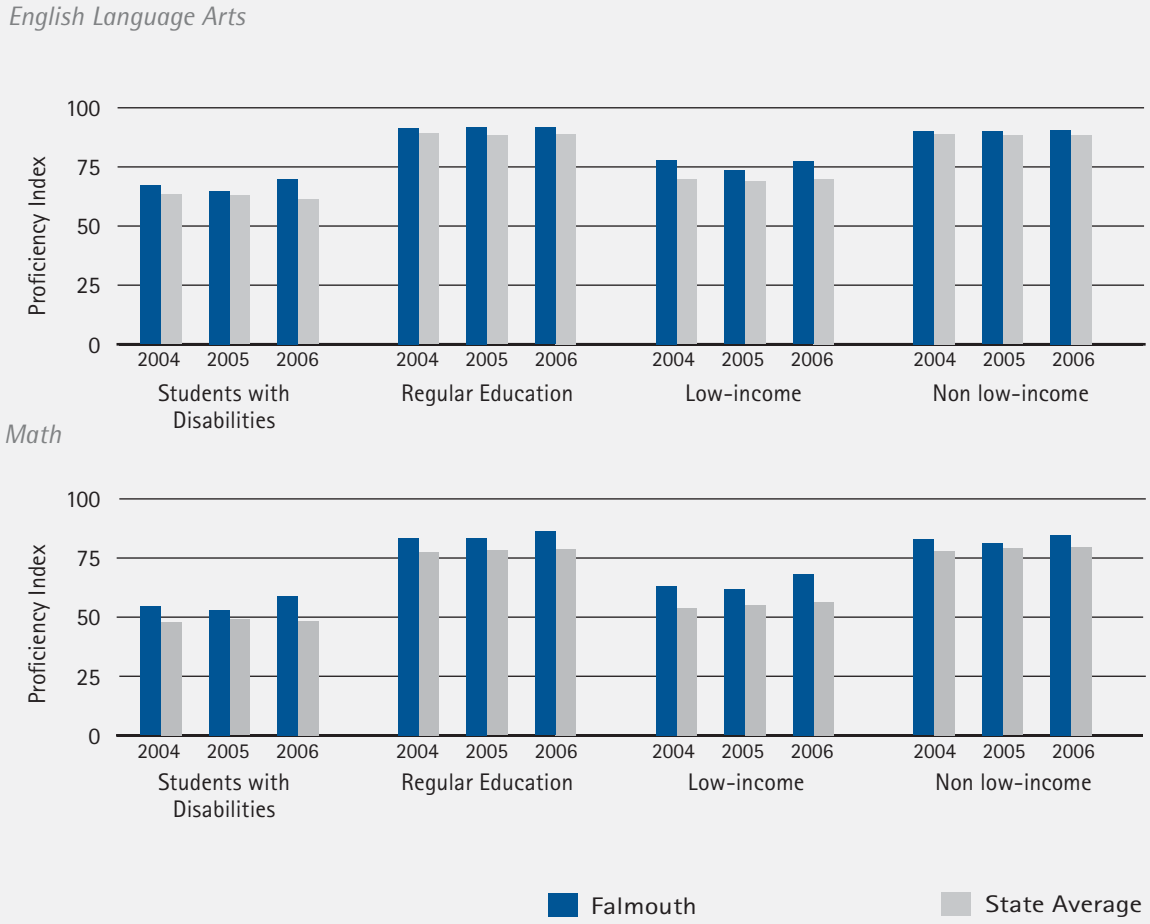


4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Of the eight measurable subgroups in Falmouth in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 20 PI points in ELA and 29 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Falmouth in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, African-American students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than half the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, nearly three-quarters of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA but wider in math. Roughly two-thirds of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

FALMOUTH STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



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

In Falmouth, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 23 PI points in 2003 to 22 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 33 to 27 PI points during this period.

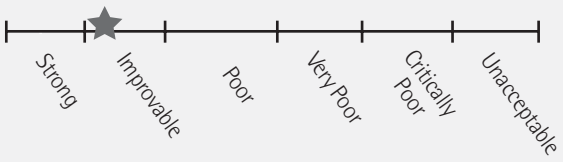
- All student subgroups in Falmouth had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although for most subgroups the improvement was slight. The most improved subgroup in ELA was African-American students.
- In math, all subgroups in Falmouth also showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

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

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

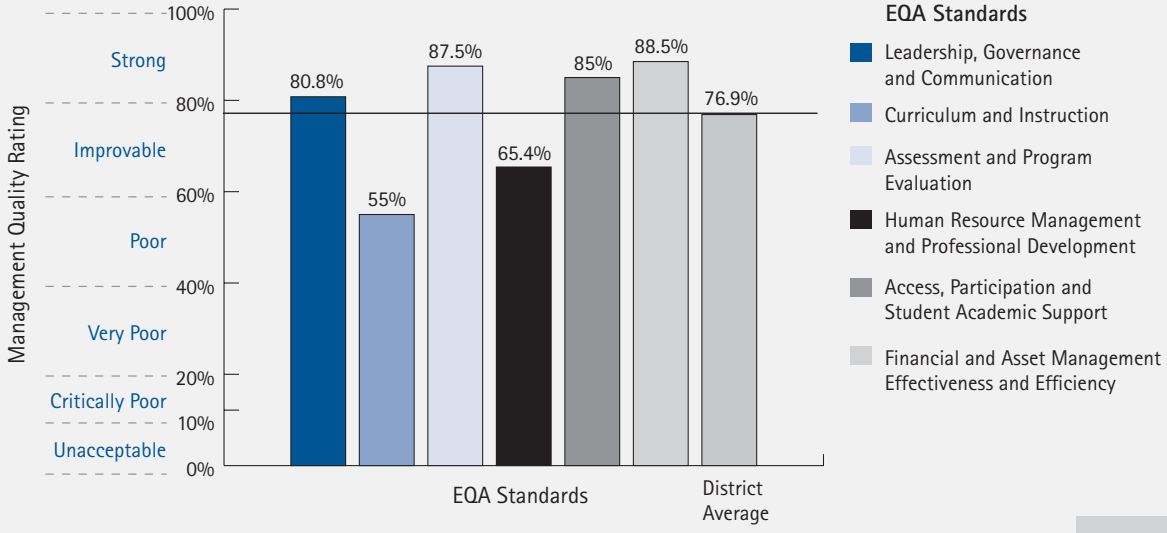
Overall District Management

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

In 2006, Falmouth received an overall MQI score of 'Improvable' (76.9 percent). The district performed best on the Financial and Asset Management standard followed by Assessment and Program Evaluation, scoring 'Strong' on both. It was rated 'Poor' on the Curriculum and Instruction standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing better than expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance improved slightly in both ELA and math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Falmouth, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

Leadership and Communication

The leadership of the Falmouth Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the nine-member school committee. The district's administrative team experienced many changes during the period under review, including a new superintendent, an interim director of curriculum and instruction, and three new principals. By the time of the onsite visit in March 2007, the district also had a new director of curriculum, a new director of pupil personnel, and an interim principal. In addition, the town elected two new members of the school committee to join the seven veteran members. While the committee did not have a formal mentoring program, according to school committee interviewees, veteran members were readily available to offer any needed support for new members.

The superintendent and members of central administration met with newly elected school committee members prior to their first meeting to review school committee operations and its role as a policymaking board and an advocacy group for students. The school committee had subcommittees in the areas of budget, curriculum, grants, negotiations, and policy, and members also participated on ad hoc boards and committees. While there was evidence the school committee had reviewed, updated, and added several policies, some of the policies in the handbook had effective dates in the 1970s and 1980s. The committee has engaged the services of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to update the manual, and it expected to approve the new manual in June 2008.

Overall, the EQA team documented many changes evident in the district during the period under review. By the date of the EQA visit in March 2007, the EQA examiners could trace and

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The entire school district analyzed student data from various sources and assessments to aid in the development and revision of some programs.
- The District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) aligned in the areas of improvement of student achievement and the resolution of student conflicts.
- The regularly updated district website contained a great deal of information, and included the e-mail address of the superintendent to encourage parents and community members to ask questions and/or make suggestions.
- The school committee and the superintendent worked very closely with town officials to ensure the community met the educational needs of all students.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not disaggregate its student data by subgroup population, use the data programmatically, or look at data systematically across grades K-12.

document changes in leadership throughout the district that positively impacted the organizational structure of the district. The examiners also found updated organizational systems within the district, resulting in positive changes in curriculum and instruction.

The school committee, new superintendent, and town officials focused on building a collaborative culture to ensure the needs of all students were met throughout the year. The school committee, finance committee, and selectmen met to review the budget needs both of the community and of the schools prior to the adoption of the final budget. The community was invested in the 21st Century Schools initiative Partners in Learning, which encouraged all members of the educational community to focus on qualities associated with schools in which students are academically successful, motivated, and emotionally secure. During the summer of 2006, a two-day school/community meeting, which enabled approximately 50 people to explore the nine qualities associated with the initiative, and a two-day administrators' meeting were held for people to share their insights for district improvement.

The district analyzed MCAS data regularly to determine trends and patterns and individual needs of students. The administration provided the school committee and the community at large with regular reports on the MCAS test results outlining the achievements and areas of weakness across the school district. The district also collected data from local common assessments, quarterly assessments, SATs, and district-created Open-Response Questions (ORQs) to detect noted weaknesses across the district.

Planning and Governance

The superintendent delegated the leadership of schools and programs to the respective principals and directors. Central office administrators met in alternating weeks as a team and met individually on a weekly basis with the superintendent. The full administrative team met once per month, and the superintendent set agendas for these meetings with input from administrators. The district maintained an up-to-date website that provided much information and increased communication with the public. It also encouraged members of the community to ask questions and share their ideas with the superintendent via e-mail.

The district had a strategic plan covering the years 2004-2007 that included nine goals. It also had an annual tactical plan focusing on specific activities, timelines, and expected outcomes. The plan included both the district's vision and mission statements, which were evident in school buildings and student handbooks and on the district website. The school committee formally adopted the plan and discussed it at least three times during the year. Each school had a three-year School Improvement Plan (SIP), which the school committee voted on and reviewed annually, that included accomplishments as well as areas still in need of improvement. Beginning in 2005-2006, the district placed greater emphasis on the full alignment of the district strategic plan and the SIPs.

Curriculum and Instruction

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

Aligned Curricula

In 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the Falmouth Public Schools had begun to make significant strides toward developing its curricula, although it had not yet completed this across all subjects and grades. The math curriculum was the most developed and the science curriculum was the least developed. In 2005-2006, the superintendent hired an interim director of curriculum who established preK-12 curriculum committees for all tested subjects and for technology integration. The interim director organized completed curricula, assessments, and resources and began to organize them into K-12 curriculum and assessment systems that were aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. In 2006-2007, the superintendent hired a new director of curriculum and instruction to complete the remaining work. In this process, all stakeholders shared in the curriculum development, and at the high school a current employee was put into a position dedicated to increased attention to curriculum and instruction, especially at grade 9.

The district held department, team, and professional development meetings and began horizontal alignment across classes and schools. It organized curriculum meetings with representatives of all levels to begin vertical alignment across grade levels, in order to ensure coherence and avoid gaps and redundancies. Although the district had written curricula in ELA and math, they did not contain the following components: written objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines/pacing guides, measurable outcomes, and benchmark assessments. The district had some local assessments, such as the ORQs, but lacked an overall assessment system that would efficiently make the best use of these data and the analysis of them. The district had also not yet fully begun to analyze student subgroup

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- In 2005-2006, the district hired an interim director of curriculum and instruction to oversee curriculum development, documentation, assessment, and selection of instructional materials for grades preK-12; she established curriculum committees in the tested content areas and in technology.

Areas for Improvement

- The availability of educational technology was inequitable throughout the district, according to classroom observations.
- Prior to 2006, the district core curricula were in formative stages; in 2006-2007, the district embarked on a systematic cycle of curriculum revision.
- Although the district had begun to document its curricula in all tested content areas and to align them horizontally and vertically at all grade levels with the state frameworks, this curriculum work was inconsistent and incomplete across all tested content areas.

data for use in monitoring programmatic strengths and weaknesses or in assessing the effectiveness of programs.

Effective Instruction

Through a distributed leadership model, district and school administrators, teacher-leaders, and teachers at each school began to work collaboratively in order to introduce best practices such as differentiated instruction and to raise the expectation for accountability in order to ensure effective instruction. The district had embarked on working toward the goal of raising the level of integration of technology into classroom instruction by creating technology committees. Based on documentation and classroom visits, the district still had a way to go to assure equitable distribution of technology, more consistent use of technology, and alignment of all available software to curricula.

According to interviewees, administrators monitored effective instruction by the use of informal walk-throughs. They conducted formal observations and evaluations twice per year. With respect to professional status teachers, using alternative teacher evaluation options in the district could result in one full formal evaluation every eight years. This would occur with professional status teachers when in year two a formal evaluation was performed, an alternative "focus" or project evaluation was performed two years later, a "formal walk-through" performed another two years later, and another two years passed until a formal evaluation was performed based on actual classroom observation. The "focus" evaluation and "formal walk-through" evaluations were not considered to be aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act.

When classroom observations were done, the Skillful Teacher model was used. Administrators and principals told the examiners that they were all familiar with the language of this model but did not consider themselves to be proficient.

During the period under review, the district emphasized accountability by instituting some common exams in some subject areas. In 2005-2006, the district began to analyze the results of these exams for strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum or in teaching and learning. According to interviewees, the majority of teachers did not yet feel sufficiently trained to analyze and use data to their fullest potential in order to drive instruction. The district primarily relied on central office personnel or school-based leaders to analyze the student achievement data.

Interviewees did not regard themselves as knowledgeable in ways of disaggregating MCAS results to improve student achievement, especially for subgroup populations. They stated that they were just beginning to look for trends of strengths and weaknesses in responding to test items. According to MCAS data, the percentage of Falmouth students who attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests was 58 percent in 2003, 61 percent in both 2004 and 2005, and 67 percent in 2006.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

Student Assessment

In 2005-2006, the district began to implement an assessment system for use districtwide. Various schools had piloted or were using a range of assessments at grades K-4, which differed from those in use at grades 5-6 and grades 7-8. When the present superintendent arrived in the fall of 2005, his first priority was to gather information from stakeholders about what the mission of the schools should be and to develop systems to move the district there. In 2005-2006, the new superintendent hired a veteran director of curriculum to work in Falmouth for a year as the interim director of curriculum and instruction to evaluate the status of curriculum development and assessment. The director of curriculum also articulated a long-term plan outlining the necessary steps to create complete preK-12 curricula, with appropriate benchmarks, and a system of assessment. The plan also addressed the kind of technology needed to manage the district's data and the professional training needed for its use. This would enable administrators and teachers to develop proficiency in using data with the hope that their use in making decisions would become a districtwide expectation.

Program Evaluation

The district presented little evidence that it had routinely used analysis of student achievement or other data for program evaluation prior to the arrival of the present superintendent. At the beginning of the period under review, veteran administrators and lead teachers had not had formal training in using TestWiz to analyze MCAS student achievement

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- In 2005-2006, the district was in the process of restructuring at both the lower grades, with horizontal alignment across K-4 schools, and the upper grades, by restructuring the facility, personnel, and programs at the high school.
- The district used the 21st Century Schools initiative Partners in Learning as a structure for reform and for the development of a new district mission statement.
- The district created a system of local formative assessments at each grade level to inform instruction, and began to implement better tools, such as technology, to make data more accessible at the classroom level.

Areas for Improvement

- The curriculum in science/technology was the least well defined, and this area had the lowest rate of improvement in MCAS scores.

data. In contrast, by 2006-2007 the district and school leadership had completed some training, developed a new mission, and developed some updated tools using technology. The district had begun to routinely use the analysis of program evaluations to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services that were not contributing to its newly developed mission. At the beginning of the period under review, the district had not yet considered the effects on student achievement, either positive or negative, of such factors as poor attendance, the use of site-based reading programs at each elementary school, the effect of high chronic absenteeism, or sorting students into gifted and talented programs at an early age. By the end of the period under review, administrators had engaged in considering the potential effect of a wider range of factors on student achievement and were collecting data to study the issues in order to make better decisions.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

Hiring Practices and Certification

The district had hiring practices in place during the period under review that resulted in the employment of an effective teaching staff. Principals were responsible for the hiring and firing of teachers, teacher assistants, and other personnel assigned to their respective school, subject to the review and prior approval of the superintendent. Existing outdated policy and procedural documents were largely ignored. The superintendent was responsible for the employment of principals; however, a school committee representative did participate on the interview committee. Administrators and faculty considered the hiring practices to be open, fair, and effective. A review of the professional licensing found all personnel appropriately credentialed with the exception of two high school teachers.

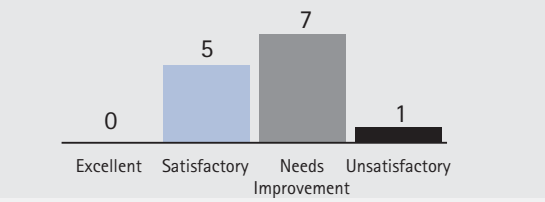
Professional Development

The district provided a broad array of professional opportunities through in-service, graduate courses, curriculum committee participation, mentoring and coaching, professional development providers, and study groups. Goals of the district, schools, and individual educators informed the program. Required training in data analysis was not provided by the district until the 2006-2007 school year. The use of item analysis and analysis of disaggregated data was limited to that which the curriculum office provided.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- District policies and practices for the identification, recruitment, and hiring of professional staff were considered open, fair, effective, and free from outside interference.
- The professional development program, informed by goals of the district, schools, and individual educators, provided an array of offerings to support new knowledge and skills designed for professional growth.

Areas for Improvement

- The district provided no training in data analysis skills until the 2006-2007 school year.
- Teacher and administrator evaluations, although informative, were not instructive or used to promote teacher growth and overall effectiveness. Alternative teacher evaluation options could result in one full formal evaluation every eight years.
- The administrator evaluation system did not address the performance of administrators in their leadership roles in attaining measurable improvement in student achievement.

A formal teacher mentoring program did not exist in the district until the summer of 2006 under the current superintendent. The first group of mentors received six hours of training. The district has not established formal support for staff hired on waiver. According to interviewees, the district did not have a formal mentoring program for new administrators, although they did have the opportunity to meet periodically with retired administrators, which was helpful.

Evaluation

Administrator and teacher evaluations were informative but not particularly instructive, nor did they promote growth and overall effectiveness. The failure of administrators to provide specific recommendations for professional growth prevented the teacher accountability system from influencing the professional development program. The administrative evaluation system did not address the attainment of measurable improvement in student achievement but did stress improvement, growth, and collegial relationships in conversation and practice. A connection between effective administrator performance and compensation was still under deliberation by the superintendent because of the complexity of the issue.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

Services

The Falmouth school district offered a variety of human and instructional resources to provide quality programs characterized by rigor and accessibility. The administration assigned school psychologists and school adjustment counselors to all buildings in the school system. The district housed math and literacy specialists at each building for grades K-6, while grades 7-12 had department chairs for each of the tested content areas.

The district utilized summative and formative assessments to identify students in need of services and to adjust or modify the K-12 curriculum for them. Assessments dealing with literacy at grades K-4 included the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). At the middle school, common assessments in the content areas and the MCAS tests provided formative and summative assessment data, which staff could use to make adjustments and accommodate students' needs. At the high school, the district used common assessments, the MCAS tests, Advanced Placement (AP) exams, and SATs to provide information on student achievement.

Each school had a referral process to enroll students into support programs, combined with an Instructional Support Team (IST) that thoroughly evaluated each request. Specific programs such as Reading Recovery at the primary level, MCAS support at the middle school level, and teaming at grade 9 provided support and direction for many students and enabled the district to identify students who might be at risk academically or emotionally. The district looked at data of low-performing students and closely monitored subgroup participation and achievement on the MCAS tests and provided support services for students who might be in danger of failing. A host of psychological

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The Falmouth Public Schools had assessments and programs in place to support literacy in the elementary classrooms.
- The district used common assessment and MCAS results to adjust and modify curriculum, as well as to accommodate students who might be at risk.
- The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and special education programs provided specific remedies to increase student achievement, serving the special education, low-income, minority, transient, and homeless students.
- The district had grade-level and building transition programs to help students make the necessary adjustments both academically and emotionally.
- The district used the inclusion model at grades K-6 and teaming at grades 7-9 to provide a safe and stimulating environment for all students.

Areas for Improvement

- Though student chronic absenteeism exceeded the state average, the district had only begun to examine attendance issues in 2006-2007.
- The district did not view staff absenteeism as a problem, despite the fact that it exceeded state averages, according to district data.

services for testing and emotional diagnosis, along with student resource teams (SRTs) at each building, provided the infrastructure for subgroups participation The district attempted to teach all students using an inclusive model with identified special education personnel.

A gifted and talented program existed at grades 3-6 that provided additional rigor for those students who had completed the general curriculum. At the middle school, within the team concept, accelerated classes in ELA and math enabled the district to raise the bar for those students who desired a more academically challenging curriculum. The high school offered advanced and college prep classes at each level. In addition, a problem-solving team in the sophomore year enabled students who might be in danger of failing the MCAS tests to get the required support in a small team format, with special education personnel assigned.

Attendance

According to DOE data, the district experienced above average student chronic absenteeism. Interviewees explained to EQA examiners that there were a variety of causes for this absenteeism, but also admitted that the district needed to take a closer look at this problem. According to data on teacher absences submitted to the EQA by the district, the EQA examiners found that staff absenteeism also exceeded state averages. High numbers of absences of students and staff, when considered together, impacts the number of days that students are taught by their regular classroom teacher. When asked about staff absences, interviewees did not feel that staff absenteeism represented a problem in the district. The district viewed days absent in excess of the contractual sick and personal days (18 days) as being a potential problem, but stated in interviews that teachers rarely exceeded that limit, with the exception of teachers on maternity leave or with long-term illness.

Discipline and Dropout Prevention

The district had a system-wide policy for discipline procedures at each school and included the discipline codes in student handbooks. The policy clearly spelled out consequences for the violation of school rules, including detention, suspension, and exclusion. The district required that teachers verbally explain these rules during the first days of school in the fall. The district had a process for in-school and out-of-school suspensions including parental conferences, letters sent home, and an appeal process.

According to interviewees, the district worked hard to prevent grade-level retentions and student dropouts. A. variety of support systems existed at each building to prevent retentions, while the high school had a series of support programs to prevent dropouts. If a student did drop out of school, the system provided the student and his or her parent/guardian with a list of alternatives that would enable the child to receive a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, at a minimum.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

Budget Process

The district's well documented budget process included a definitive timeline and preparation procedures as well as clear directions for all participants. The process involved the participation of school committee members, administrators, teaching staff, parents, and town officials throughout the entire budget period. Principals developed their budgets online and submitted them electronically to central administration. School and municipal administrators and officials met often during the budget preparation period to review and estimate available revenues. After the school committee approved budgets and the finance committee and board of selectmen reviewed them, the school administration made them widely available by placing copies in public places such as libraries and mailing copies to all town meeting members. The completed budget document contained a detailed narrative, prepared by the administration, which included the financial condition of the school and community, budget history covering the prior eight years, and sources of state aid and revenues to the school district.

With the exception of 2004-2005, during the period under review the school committee's operational budget requests presented to the annual town meeting were in agreement with the recommendation of the finance committee and the board of selectmen. The town approved the budget at the town meeting, as requested; however, the town voted down a school committee request at the 2006 annual town meeting to place a $750,000 operational override on the ballot for the purchase of additional textbooks, technology, and full-day kindergarten.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The school committee's operational budget requests presented to the annual town meeting were in agreement with the recommendation of the finance committee and the board of selectmen, and the town meeting approved the budgets requested.
- The district's budget development process included all stakeholders, and the final document provided clear and comprehensive information regarding the district's financial position and budgetary needs.
- It was evident in interviews with school and town administrators and officials that by 2006-2007, a culture of cooperation existed in the community, and all parties shared the goal of providing students with a quality education in well-maintained facilities.

Areas for Improvement

- The town voted down a school committee request at the 2005 annual town meeting to place a $750,000 operational override on the ballot for the purchase of additional textbooks, technology, and full-day kindergarten.

Financial Support

The school district had experienced reductions and level funding in Chapter 70 aid and reductions in state and federal grant receipts in Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006. It began to receive increases in Chapter 70 aid in fiscal years 2006 and 2007. From FY 2003 to FY 2007, the school committee's operating budget experienced an average annual increase of 3.1 percent. According to the district's End of Year Pupil and Financial Reports, expenditures were relatively level for professional development, textbooks and related media, and general educational supplies during the period under review. Student enrollment in the district, according to Department of Education October 1 data, decreased from 4,578 students in 2003 to 4,144 students in 2006, a reduction of 434 students.

Facilities and Safety

Falmouth High School was undergoing a major renovation project during the period under review. The construction project occurred while school was in session and the district had 16 portable classrooms in place to accommodate students. In the district's facilities inventory the district had self rated every school as being in 'good condition.' Except for the high school and one elementary school, all schools had been renovated between 1988 and 2003. The Massachusetts School Building Authority in its 2006 building needs survey rated the schools in the first category: "Building is in good condition with few or no building systems needing attention."

Although the district made efforts to have protocol manuals, procedures, and some practices in place to address student safety and security, it did not have security systems such as cameras, monitors, and entrance buzzer systems in place, and in some schools sight lines to the main entrances were lacking.

CONCLUSION

The Falmouth Public Schools was considered to be a 'High' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in ELA and 'High' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. Two-thirds of Falmouth's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Improvable,' with the highest ratings in Financial and Asset Management and Assessment and Program Evaluation, scoring 'Strong' on both, and the lowest in Curriculum and Instruction.

During the period under review, the district's administrative team experienced many changes, including a new superintendent, an interim director of curriculum and instruction, and three new principals. By the time of the EQA visit in March 2007, the district also had a new director of curriculum, a new director of pupil personnel, and an interim principal. Under the leadership of the new superintendent, the district engaged the 21st Century Schools initiative Partners in Learning as a district change model and successfully pursued a grant from the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy to restructure the high school. The Partners in Learning initiative encouraged all members of the educational community to focus on qualities associated with schools in which students are academically successful, motivated, and emotionally secure. In 2006-2007, in addition to a renovation of the building facility, which required the use of 16 portable classrooms, Falmouth High School was undergoing a change in principal leadership and a restructuring of its service delivery models and the division of labor within the school.

The district had a strategic plan covering the years 2004-2007 that included the district's vision and mission statements and nine goals, and an annual tactical plan that focused on specific activities, timelines, and expected outcomes. Each school had a three-year School Improvement Plan (SIP) that included accomplishments and areas in need of improvement. Beginning in 2005-2006, the district placed greater emphasis on the full alignment of the district strategic plan and the SIPs.

In 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the Falmouth Public Schools had begun to make significant strides toward developing its curricula, although it had not yet completed this across all subjects and grades. The math curriculum was the most developed and the science curriculum was the least developed, despite the district enjoying a unique local situation in which it has a well established parent and community volunteer program and a large number of parents employed in the field of scientific research at the Woods Hole marine research facility and related indus-

tries in Falmouth. In 2005-2006, the superintendent hired an interim director of curriculum who established preK-12 curriculum committees for all tested subjects and for technology integration. The interim director organized completed curricula, assessments, and resources and began to organize them into K-12 curriculum and assessment systems that were aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. In 2006-2007, the superintendent hired a new director of curriculum and instruction to complete the remaining work. In this process, all stakeholders shared in curriculum development. Through a distributed leadership model, district and school administrators, teacher-leaders, and teachers at each school began to work collaboratively in order to introduce best practices such as differentiated instruction and to raise the expectation for accountability in order to ensure effective instruction.

In 2005-2006, the district began to implement an assessment system for use districtwide. It developed local formative assessments at each grade level to help inform instructional practice, and was in the process of implementing the use of better tools, such as technology to make data accessible, at the classroom level. The district analyzed MCAS data on a regular basis to determine trends and patterns and individual needs of students. Additional data collected to detect weaknesses across the district included those from local common assessments, quarterly assessments, SATs, and district-created Open-Response Questions (ORQs). Further, by 2006-2007, the district had begun routine use of the analysis of program evaluations to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services that were not contributing to its mission; administrators considered the potential effect of a wide range of factors on student achievement and were collecting data to study the issues in order to make better decisions.

The district looked at data of low-performing students, and closely monitored subgroup participation and achievement on the MCAS tests and provided support services for students who might be in danger of failing. The district attempted to teach all students using an inclusive model with identified special education personnel. A gifted and talented program existed at grades 3-6 that provided additional rigor for students who had completed the general curriculum. At the middle school, within the team concept, accelerated classes in ELA and math enabled the district to offer a more academically challenging curriculum for students who desired it. The high school offered advanced and college prep classes at each level.

The school district had experienced reductions and level funding in Chapter 70 aid and reductions in state and federal grant receipts in Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006. It began to receive increases in Chapter 70 aid in fiscal years 2006 and 2007. The town voted down a school committee request at the 2006 annual town meeting to place a $750,000 operational override on the ballot for the purchase of additional textbooks, technology, and full-day kindergarten.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

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

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

Data-Driven Assessment

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

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

Standards-Based Examination

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

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

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis

ADA: Average Daily Attendance

ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment

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

ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress

CAP: Corrective Action Plan

CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures

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

CMP: Connected Math Program

CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information

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

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

CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test

CSR: Comprehensive School Reform

DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIP: District Improvement Plan

DOE: Department of Education

DPDP: District Professional Development Plan

DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment

ELA: English Language Arts

ELL: English Language Learners

EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index

ESL: English as a Second Language

FLNE: First Language Not English

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

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

FTE: Full-Time Equivalent

FY: Fiscal Year

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

GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board

GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

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

IEP: Individualized Education Program

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

IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan

IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan

ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan

LASW: Looking at Student Work

LEP: Limited English Proficient

MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials

MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

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

MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official

MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral

MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment

MPI: Math Proficiency Index

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

MUNIS: Municipal Information System

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NRT: Norm-Referenced Test

NSBA: National School Boards Association

NSS: Net School Spending

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

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

PIM: Performance Improvement Management

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

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

QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory

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

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

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

SIMS: Student Information Management System

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPED: Special Education

STE: Science and Technology/Engineering

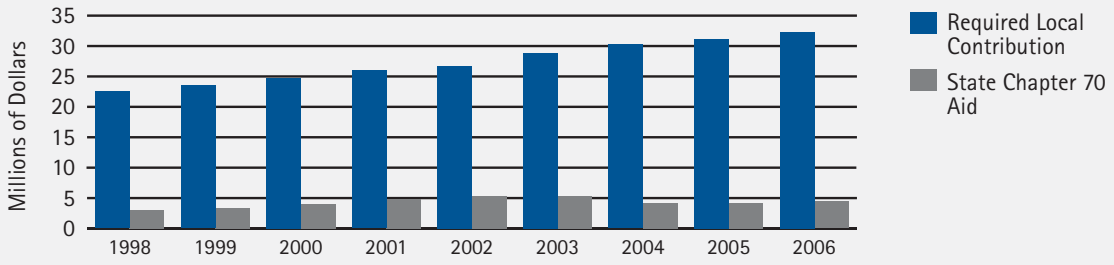
TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

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

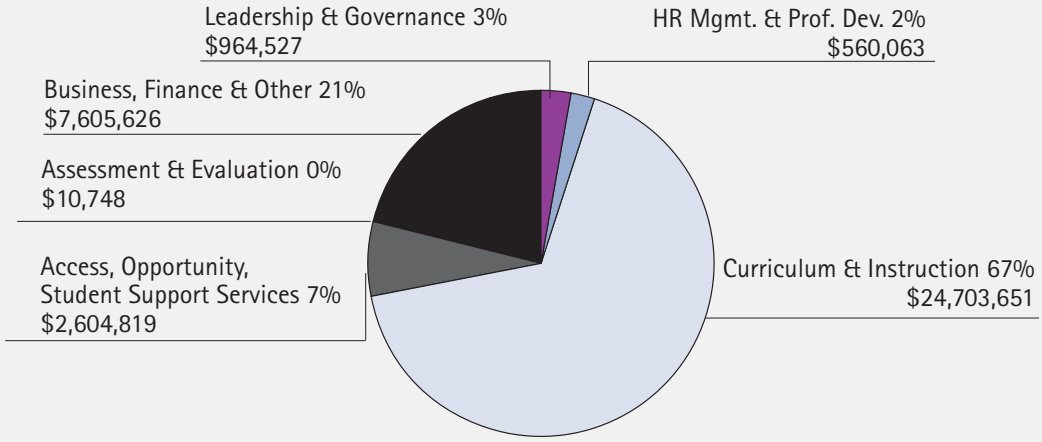
The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $38,039,171 to $41,952,187; Chapter 70 aid increased from $4,231,106 to $4,439,706; the required local contribution increased from $30,202,519 to $32,265,939; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 4,464 to 4,172. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 11.1 to 10.6 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 67 to 66 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR FALMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR FALMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

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



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