



Fitchburg Public Schools District Review

Review conducted November 28–December 1, 2011



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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

The goal of district reviews conducted by the Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is to support districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness, efficiency, and integration of systemwide functions using ESE's six district standards: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management.**

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews focused on “districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations.” Districts subject to review in the 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3¹ (in school year 2011 or school year 2012) of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state's six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards (see above). The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that may be impeding rapid improvement as well as those that are most likely to be contributing to positive results. The district review team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards who review selected district documents and ESE data and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to various district schools. The team holds interviews and focus groups with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' union representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classes. The team then meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting the draft of their district review report to ESE.

¹ In other words, as Level 3 is defined, districts with one or more schools that score in the lowest 20 percent statewide of schools serving common grade levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(2)(a).

Fitchburg Public Schools

The site visit to the Fitchburg Public Schools was conducted from November 28 to December 1, 2011. The site visit included more than 37 hours of interviews and focus groups with 70 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 23 elementary, 8 middle school, and 25 high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to all nine of the district's schools: Crocker Elementary School (PK-4), McKay Campus School (PK-4), Reingold Elementary School (K-4), South Street Elementary School (PK-4), Fitchburg Arts Academy (5-8), Longsjo Middle School (5-8), Memorial Middle School (5-8), Fitchburg Alternative Education Program (9-12), and Fitchburg High School (9-12). 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 finding and recommendation statements.

District Profile²

First settled in 1730 and named for settler John Fitch, the city of Fitchburg sits high in the hills of northern Worcester County. Fitchburg was a 19th century industrial center known for its large mills operated by water power from the Nashua River and producing machinery, tools, clothing, firearms and particularly, paper. The mills employed a large segment of the European immigrant population through the early twentieth century. Given its central location on the railroad line between Boston and Albany, the primarily rural city thrived became the region's commercial center.

The erosion of the manufacturing base since the 1960s has led to less prosperity. Over time, the city has added new manufacturing industries such as plastics, medical goods, chemicals and services to promote further economic development, but it has not yet regained the economic success it once knew. More recently, Hispanic, Southeast Asian (Hmong) and African-American families have added to Fitchburg's cultural and ethnic mix.

Fitchburg is proud of its historical links to American education. In 1894, a state normal school was established and by 1910 was known as a trendsetter for programs in education, opening a "school of observation and practice" – one of the nation's first junior high schools. Fitchburg Normal School evolved into Fitchburg State Teachers College which, by 1960, offered degree programs in disciplines other than education. In 2010, the school was included in the state's university system and was renamed Fitchburg State University.

² Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources. Historical information for the city of Fitchburg derived from the City of Fitchburg website, Fitchburg State University website, Yankee Magazine (November-December 2009), and Boston Globe article, "Wong romps for mayor of Fitchburg," November 7, 2007.

In 2007, the election of a young Chinese-American woman as mayor instilled a spirit of optimism and enthusiasm for renewing the city and its economy. The school committee, chaired by the mayor, has supported the school district's strategic planning efforts and implemented a multi-year infrastructure improvement plan to consolidate and renovate school buildings, upgrade educational technology, and make the schools safer for children. In addition, during the mayor's tenure, the school budget has met its Net School Spending threshold and, according to interviewees, current relationships between the school department and the city are solid. Voters reelected the mayor for a third term in 2011. Under her leadership, the school committee has mounted a Capstone of Student Success initiative that promotes the goals in the district's Strategic Plan, 2012-2015.

Table 1 profiles the district's 2011 demographics by subgroup, racial and ethnic composition compared to the state. The district's demographic profile reveals a school system with a sizeable proportion of students in subgroups that typically require specialized academic and other support programs and services. Approximately two out of every three (67.9 percent) of Fitchburg students are from low-income families. This was twice the 2011 state rate of 34.2 percent. Interviewees recognized that the proportion of students from low-income families had increased since the onset of the recent recession. ESE data shows that in 2007 55.5 percent of students were from low-income families compared to 67.9 percent in 2011 (an increase of 12 percentage points over 4 years).³ Almost a third of students (31.6 percent) came from families whose first language was not English. And 12.4 percent of students in the district were identified as limited English proficient (in other words, as English language learners or ELLs), thus requiring targeted instruction to gain proficiency in the English language. More than one in five students (21.4 percent) require special education programs and services, compared to 18.1 percent⁴ in 2007, and surpassing the 2011 state rate of 17.0 percent.

Each of these demographic trends – rising numbers of children from low-income families, increasing percentages of special education students, and the sizeable percentages of students requiring targeted English language instruction and families for whom English is not the first language – requires schools to adapt in order to best serve the needs of their students.

³ ESE Data Warehouse.

⁴ Ibid.

**Table 1: Fitchburg Public Schools and State
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010-2011**

Selected Populations	Number	District %	State %	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	District %	State %
Total enrollment	4,881	100.0	--	African-American/ Black	330	6.8	8.2
First Language not English	1,544	31.6	16.3	Asian	279	5.7	5.5
Limited English Proficient*	606	12.4	7.1	Hispanic/Latino	2,062	42.2	15.4
Special Education**	1,067	21.4	17.0	White	1,985	40.7	68.0
Low-income	3,316	67.9	34.2	Native American	4	0.1	0.2
Free Lunch	2,792	57.2	29.1	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	2	0.0	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	524	10.7	5.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	219	4.5	2.4
*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as "English language learners." **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data							

Like many districts in the state, Fitchburg has been challenged by the reduced resources and financial pressures of the current economic downturn. As shown by Table 2 below, the district is funded by the municipality at close to required net school spending, and actual net school spending was \$75,058 below required in fiscal year 2010. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2011 was \$842,206 above required, but is projected to be \$267,729 below required in fiscal year 2012. Chapter 70 aid is almost three-quarters of actual net school spending. The amounts reported for Chapter 70 aid and expenditures from grants in this time period reflect the state's shifting of aid sources to federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Educational Jobs Act (EduJobs) grant funds. The net amount of aid received by the district including funds from these federal sources as well as Chapter 70 was about \$100,000 higher in fiscal year 2011 than in fiscal year 2010 (not shown in table) in spite of a reduction in Chapter 70 funds. However, in fiscal year 2012 when the federal grants ended, total aid dropped by about \$1,000,000 (not shown in table). Annual debt repayments (not included in net school spending but included in total expenditures) of about \$3,700,000 ended in fiscal year 2011, reducing the amount of local appropriations. Aid from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (included

in the local appropriations) had partially reduced the amount of funds raised from local tax levies for debt repayment.

**Table 2: Fitchburg Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending, Fiscal Years 2010-2012**

	FY10		FY11		FY12
Expenditures	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
From local appropriations for schools					
by school committee	43,555,177	43,555,177	43,531,547	43,533,546	43,800,000
by municipality	19,733,964	19,905,888	20,347,415	16,477,299	20,838,018
Total from local appropriations	63,289,141	63,461,065	63,878,962	60,010,845	64,638,018
From revolving funds and grants	---	12,279,358	---	11,100,355	---
Total expenditures	---	75,740,423	---	74,769,615	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	40,327,289	---	39,281,344	40,477,603
Required local contribution	---	14,039,877	---	14,382,482	14,570,762
Required net school spending**	---	54,367,166	---	53,663,826	55,048,365
Actual net school spending	---	54,292,108	---	54,506,032	54,780,636
Over/under required (\$)	---	-75,058	---	842,206	---
Over/under required (%)	---	-0.1%	---	+1.6%	---

*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.

**Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.

Sources: FY10, FY11 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website (retrieved July 18, 2012).

Student Performance⁵

Table 3 compares Fitchburg's MCAS proficiency rates and median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) in ELA with those statewide from 2009 to 2011 by grade level and for the district as a whole. In every instance, Fitchburg's proficiency rates at grade levels and for the district as a whole were substantially below state proficiency rates. During the three-year period, for the district overall and for every tested grade through grade 6, less than 50 percent of students demonstrated proficiency, ranging from 27 percent to 49 percent proficient. At grades 8 and 10, tested students reached and sustained proficiency rates above 50 percent for all three years, showing an increase in grade 10 from 60 percent proficient in 2009, to 62 percent proficient in 2010, to 73 percent proficient in 2011.

For the district as a whole, the proficiency gap remained relatively flat with cohorts not narrowing the gap substantially from 2009 to 2011. The gap between the district and the state increased by one percentage point, from 21 percentage points in 2009 to 22 percentage points in 2011. At tested grade levels, the proficiency gap between Fitchburg and the state reached 20 percentage points or higher more than half the time (12 of 21 data points). In addition, the proficiency gap between Fitchburg and the state widened from 2009 to 2011 for four of seven tested grade levels: for grade 3, from a gap of 15 percentage points in 2009 to a gap of 18 percentage points in 2011; for grade 4, from a gap of 23 percentage points to 26 percentage points; for grade 5, from a gap of 23 percentage points to 28 percentage points; for grade 8, from a gap of 12 percentage points to 16 percentage points. For two grade levels, the proficiency gap remained relatively flat from 2009 to 2011: for grade 6, from a gap of 21 percentage points to 19 percentage points; for grade 7, from a gap of 25 percentage points to 24 percentage points. For grade 10, the gap narrowed by ten percentage points, from 21 percentage points in 2009 to 11 percentage points in 2011.

From 2009 to 2011, median SGPs for most (11 of 18) grade level tests were below the moderate range of 40 to 60 points and also showed no educationally meaningful change of 15 points or more. The median SGP for the district rose only slightly from 36.0 in 2009 to 39.0 in 2011. The strongest sustained growth occurred at grade 8 where median SGPs remained above 40 points in each of the three years and improved from 46.0 in 2009 to 52.0 in 2011. Notable are the consistently low median SGPs at grade 10: 26.5 in 2009, 35.0 in 2010 and 36.0 in 2011, even though the median SGP did increase from 2009 to 2011 by 9.5 points. Compared to their peers statewide, Fitchburg's grade 10 students did not demonstrate moderate growth; the strongest and most sustained growth in ELA in Fitchburg occurred in Grade 8.

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

**Table 3: Fitchburg Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)⁶
2009-2011 English Language Arts**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	46	36.0	47	41.5	47	39.0
All Grades—State	67	50.0	68	50.0	69	50.0
Grade 3—District	42	NA*	48	NA*	43	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	30	36.0	32	41.0	27	34.0
Grade 4—State	53	50.0	54	50.0	53	51.0
Grade 5—District	40	31.0	42	39.0	39	33.0
Grade 5—State	63	50.0	63	50.0	67	50.0
Grade 6—District	45	31.0	49	43.0	49	40.0
Grade 6—State	66	50.0	69	50.0	68	50.0
Grade 7—District	45	42.0	53	39.0	49	38.0
Grade 7—State	70	50.0	72	50.0	73	50.0
Grade 8—District	66	46.0	52	49.0	63	52.0
Grade 8—State	78	50.0	78	50.0	79	50.0
Grade 10—District	60	26.5	62	35.0	73	36.0
Grade 10—State	81	50.0	78	50.0	84	50.0

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

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 4 compares Fitchburg’s MCAS proficiency rates and median SGPs in mathematics with those statewide for the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 by grade level and for the district as

⁶ “Student growth percentiles” are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student’s MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see “MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide” and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

a whole. For the district overall, approximately one-third of Fitchburg’s tested students attained proficiency during each of the three years: 34 percent in 2009, 37 percent in 2010, and 37 percent in 2011. These proficiency rates were well below state rates and showed proficiency gaps for the district overall of 21 percentage points in 2009, 22 percentage points in 2010, and 21 percentage points in 2011.

**Table 4: Fitchburg Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009-2011 Mathematics**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	34	35.0	37	42.0	37	45.0
All Grades—State	55	50.0	59	50.0	58	50.0
Grade 3—District	43	NA*	45	NA*	47	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	27	28.0	27	37.0	25	42.0
Grade 4—State	48	50.0	48	49.0	47	50.0
Grade 5—District	29	29.0	28	34.5	31	32.0
Grade 5—State	54	50.0	55	50.0	59	50.0
Grade 6—District	36	36.0	45	56.0	40	59.5
Grade 6—State	57	50.0	59	50.0	58	50.0
Grade 7—District	32	53.0	33	43.0	25	40.0
Grade 7—State	49	50.0	53	50.0	51	50.0
Grade 8—District	28	40.0	31	44.0	31	48.5
Grade 8—State	48	50.0	51	51.0	52	50.0
Grade 10—District	51	26.0	62	36.0	67	45.0
Grade 10—State	75	50.0	75	50.0	77	50.0
Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP. *NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website						

As shown in Table 4, proficiency rates were significantly below state rates in every instance and were less than 50 percent until grade 10, when tested students attained and sustained proficiency rates above 50 percent: 51 percent in 2009, 62 percent in 2010 and 67 percent in 2011. In

addition, from 2009 to 2011, the mathematics proficiency gaps between grade levels in Fitchburg and those statewide either widened or remained relatively flat in five of seven grade levels. At grade 3, the gap widened from 17 percentage points to 19; at grade 4, the gap remained relatively flat, from 21 percentage points to 22; at grade 5, the gap widened from 25 percentage points to 28; at grade 7, the gap widened from 17 percentage points to 26; at grade 8, the gap remained relatively flat, from 20 percentage points to 21. At grade 6, the gap narrowed from 21 percentage points to 18 and in grade 10, the gap narrowed even more: by 14 percentage points, from 24 points to 10.

Median SGPs through grade 5 mostly remained below the moderate range of 40 to 60 SGP. For grades 6, 7 and 8, median SGPs were above 40 in all instances but one (36.0 for grade 6 in 2009). For grade 10, median SGPs were below the moderate range in 2009 at 26.0 and in 2010 at 36.0 and rose to a median SGP of 45.0 in 2011.

Table 5 below compares the Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) and median SGPs for selected subgroups in the Fitchburg Public Schools with those of the same subgroups in Massachusetts based on 2011 MCAS results in ELA. Overall, the district's CPI of 75.8 was 11.4 points lower than the statewide CPI of 87.2. The district's median SGP of 39.0 also just failed to reach the moderate range of 40 to 60.

**Table 5: Fitchburg Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

	Fitchburg		State	
	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students (2,539)	75.8	39.0	87.2	50.0
African-American/Black (182)	77.3	40.0	77.4	47.0
Asian (164)	76.8	54.0	90.2	59.0
Hispanic/Latino (1,088)	69.7	37.0	74.2	46.0
White (1,004)	81.7	37.0	90.9	51.0
ELL (279)	54.6	40.0	59.4	48.0
Formerly ELL (140)	70.4	52.0	81.7	54.0
Special Education (605)	53.2	28.0	68.3	42.0
Low-Income (1,867)	72.1	38.0	77.1	46.0
Notes: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different. 2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. 3. "ELL" students are English language learners. 4. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.				

CPIs for each subgroup shown in Table 5 also lagged behind those of statewide peers, some more substantially than others. The gap in CPIs between Fitchburg's subgroups and those of the

state were greater than 10 points for three subgroups: for Formerly English Language Learners (FELLs), a gap of 11.3 points; for Asians, a gap of 13.4 points; for special education students, a gap of 15.1 points. For other subgroups, the gap ranged from a low of 4.5 points for Hispanic/Latino students to a high of 9.2 points for white students. The CPI of 77.3 for African-American/black students was almost equal to the state CPI of 77.4.

Median SGPs for several selected subgroups in 2011 were within the moderate range of 40 to 60: at 40.0 for African-Americans and ELL students, at 52.0 for FELLs and at 54.0 for Asian students. Other subgroups' median SGPs were below the moderate range of 40 to 60: special education students at 28.0, Hispanic/Latino and white students at 37.0, and low-income students at 38.0.

Table 6 below compares CPIs and median SGPs for selected subgroups in Fitchburg with those of the same subgroups statewide based on 2011 MCAS results in mathematics. In mathematics, the district as a whole showed a CPI of 66.5 vs. 79.9 statewide, a gap of 13.4 points, and all subgroups lagged behind statewide peers in terms of both CPIs and median SGPs. However, median SGPs for the district as a whole and for all subgroups were within the moderate range of 40 to 60 with the exception of special education students, who had a median SGP of 32.0. In summary, Table 6 demonstrates that CPIs in mathematics for subgroups in Fitchburg lagged behind those of the same subgroups statewide, often substantially. Subgroups showed moderate growth in mathematics, with the exception of special education students.

**Table 6: Fitchburg Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics**

	Fitchburg		State	
	CPI	Median SGP	CPI	Median SGP
All Students (2,535)	66.5	45.0	79.9	50.0
African-American/Black (185)	62.3	41.0	65	47.0
Asian (165)	69.5	56.5	89.5	64.0
Hispanic/Latino (1,087)	59.9	42.0	64.4	46.0
White (998)	73.8	45.0	84.3	50.0
ELL (279)	50.7	47.0	56.3	52.0
Formerly ELL (140)	59.3	43.0	75.1	53.0
Special Education (603)	45.5	32.0	57.7	43.0
Low-Income (1,869)	62.9	43.0	67.3	46.0
Notes: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different. 2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. 3. "ELL" students are English language learners. 4. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website				

The demographic profile data and MCAS-based student performance data above describe a student population needing a high level of academic and language-based support and, perhaps, even social-emotional support. This report explores the extent to which the district has developed systems and practices that are strong enough to provide the education its students need.

Findings

Leadership and Governance

Since 2005, the significant decrease in positions and reordering of responsibilities for district and middle level administrators and support staff combined with both the elimination and turnover in administrative positions at the school building level have led to a constantly shifting organizational structure and changes in administrative personnel in the district.

Interviewees mentioned that as a result of the fiscal situation in Fitchburg, in recent years the district has significantly reduced and shifted duties and responsibilities for leadership personnel, especially district and school building administrators and support staff. This shift in staffing has contributed to inconsistency in leadership at all levels. At the request of the review team, the superintendent provided a list of the district level administrator and support staff reductions since 2005 and a list of the changes in the personnel holding the positions of principal and assistant principal at the various schools.

Table 7 shows the changes to district level administrator positions from the 2005 to 2011 school years. During this time, twelve administrator positions were eliminated; namely, Title I Director, Director of English Language Learners, Director of Grants, Early Childhood Director, Transportation Director, Attendance Supervisor, Social Studies Professional Development Developer, ELA Professional Development Developer, Math Professional Development Developer, Director of Adult Basic Education, Science Professional Developer, and Instructional Management Specialist. With the elimination of these twelve administrative positions, their responsibilities were often reassigned to another district administrator. For example, the elimination of the positions of Title I Director and Director of Grants resulted in reassigning those responsibilities to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum. In fact, the district's website lists the responsibilities of the Assistant Superintendent as also including, "After-school and Out-of-School Time Coordinator, Professional Development Director, Reading First Director, Title I Director, Educator Preparation Director, and MCAS Test Coordinator." With these multiple added responsibilities, the educational leadership functions for curriculum and instruction have become diluted. Thus the sense of urgency and the real potential of meeting responsibilities for all matters related to curriculum and instruction have been diminished due to competing demands. The review team believes that this has resulted in less than thorough oversight of the most crucial educational systems in the district – curriculum and instruction. In other instances, when administrator positions were eliminated, the responsibilities for those positions were not reassigned, as indicated in the table. Examples of these positions were Transportation Director, Director of Adult Basic Education, Science Professional Developer and Instructional Management Specialist.

During this same time period, one key central office position was eliminated for a few years and then restored. This was the position of Human Resources Director which existed in the 2005 school year, was eliminated prior to the start of the 2006 school year, and three years later, in the

**Table 7: Changes in Central Office Administrator Positions and Responsibilities,
Fitchburg Public Schools, by School Year, 2005-2012**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Superintendent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assistant Superintendent/Curriculum	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Business Manager	X	X	X	X	New	X	X	Asst Super of Finance
Director of Human Resources	X	Eliminated			Reinstated	New		
Title I Director	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities moved to .5 each to Asst. Super and Grants Director '06-'10, '11-'12, 1.0 to Asst. Superintendent					
Director of Pupil Personnel/Special Education Director	X	New	X	Interim to Dec.	New	X	X	Interim to Dec.; New 11/22/11
Assistant Dir. of Pupil Personnel	X	X	X	New	X	X	X	X
Assistant Dir. of Pupil Personnel				New	New Oct.	X	X	New Dec.
Director of ELL Programs	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities moved to Dir. of Enrollment and ELL					
Director of Grants	X	X	.5 Title I	X	X	X	X	Eliminated
Early Childhood Director	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities assigned to Director of Pupil Personnel Director of Special Education					
Technology Director	X	Eliminated				New .5	X	X
Arts Director	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Athletic Director	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Director of Food Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Director of Adult Basic Education	X	X	Position eliminated					
Transportation Director	X	X	Position eliminated					
Attendance Supervisor	X	X	Position eliminated					
Instructional Management Specialist	X	X	Position eliminated					
ELA Professional Development Developer	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities moved to Asst. Super and Tech Director					
Math Professional Development Developer	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities moved to Asst. Super and Tech Director					
Science Professional Development Developer	X	X	Position eliminated					
Social Studies Professional Development Director	X	X	Position eliminated, responsibilities moved to Asst. Super and Tech Director					

Table provided by the Fitchburg Public Schools, December 2011.

2009 school year, the position was reinstated. Three school years later in 2012, the district has a new person serving as Director of Human Resources. During the period when the Human Resources position was vacant, there was minimal or no oversight of administrator and teacher evaluations. Until this position was reinstated, the superintendent and the business administrator were overburdened with these responsibilities.

Table 7 also shows that in the six school years from 2005 to 2011, the district reported having six different individuals serving as the Administrator of Pupil Personnel Services and Director of Special Education. The first individual held this position for several years, ending in 2005; the second from 2005-2007; the third was an interim serving in December 2007; the fourth worked from 2008-2011; the fifth was an interim that served in December 2011 and the sixth was new as of November 22, 2011. The person responsible for pupil personnel services and special education also undertakes the role of Director of Guidance according to the district's website. Continuity and focus of leadership in this important area of defining, managing, and monitoring

the education of some of the district's most vulnerable students was consistently disrupted from 2005 to the current school year.

Nine other central office support positions were eliminated besides those represented in Table 7. These included four secretarial positions: one for Title I/Reading, one for Early Childhood, and two for Special Education. Also eliminated were the superintendent's secretary (assistant), an Early Childhood bookkeeper, a data specialist clerk, and support staff for professional development/Title I, and personnel/business.

At the school building level, there have also been quite a few changes in the personnel holding the positions of principal and assistant principal since the 2005 school year as demonstrated in Table 8 below. Over the past seven years, six school-level administrator positions were eliminated reportedly due to the closing of four schools and budget constraints. The positions eliminated included a Fitchburg High School Assistant Principal for Curriculum, Academy Middle School Principal (school closed and reconstituted as Longsjo Middle School), Academy Middle School Assistant Principal (Academy/BF Brown schools combined to form Longsjo Middle School), BF Brown Middle School Assistant Principal (school closed to become Longsjo Middle School), Fitchburg Arts Academy Principal (principal's role combined with role of principal of McKay Elementary School), and Goodrich/South Early Childhood Fitchburg Principal (combined with elementary schools).

**Table 8: Changes in Building Level Leadership Positions
Fitchburg Public Schools, by School Year, 2005-2012**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Fitchburg High School Principal	X	New	X	X	X	X	X	New
FHS Assistant Principal for Curriculum 1	X	X	Position Eliminated					
FHS Assistant Principal 2	X	X	X	New	X	X	X	X
FHS Assistant Principal 3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Academy Middle School Principal	New	X	New	X	Eliminated, school closed, becomes Longsjo M. S.			
Academy Middle School Asst. Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X	Becomes Longsjo M.S	
BF Brown Middle School Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
BF Brown Middle School Asst Principal	X	X	X	X	Eliminated, school closed, becomes Longsjo M. S.			
Fitchburg Arts Academy Principal	Program, not School		New	X	New	X	X	Eliminated*
Memorial Middle School Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Memorial Middle School Asst Principal	X	X	New	Interim mid-yr	New	X	New	X
Fitchburg Alternative High Principal	Program, not School		New	X		X		X
Crocker Elementary School Principal	X	X	New	X	X	X	X	X
Crocker Elem School Asst Principal	X	New	X	New	X	X	X	X
Reingold Elementary School Principal	X	Interim	New	X	X	New		X
Reingold Elem School Asst Principal	X	New	Left mid-yr.	New	X	X	X	X
McKay Elementary School Principal	X	X	X	X	X	New	X	New*
McKay Elem School Asst Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
South Street Elem School Principal	X	X	X	Interim	X	New	X	X
South Street Elem School Asst Principal	Interim	New	X	New	X	New		X
Goodrich/South Early Childhood Principal	X	X	Eliminated and combined with elementary schools					

Table provided by Fitchburg Public Schools, December 2011

*Position of Principal of Fitchburg Arts Academy eliminated in 2012 school year and role combined Principal of McKay Elementary School

A review of the documents made available to the review team and interviewees indicated that there has been considerable turnover in administrator positions at the building level. Only one principal remains in his position since the arrival of the superintendent in 2005. Two principals began their assignments in the 2007 school year, three started in the 2010 school year, one in the current 2012 school year and one when the Longsjo Middle School was recently formed by the closing of two other middle schools in the 2009 school year.

Interviewees have opined that at the central office level, the five main administrators – the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Title I, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Special Education and Guidance and the Director of Human Resources are all multi-tasking and performing, to one degree or another, the responsibilities and duties previously assigned to multiple former administrators whose positions have been eliminated. Also, some of the leadership personnel expressed concern that, as a result of various administrative reductions, the district currently lacks a middle level of management between the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Title I and the instructional coaches in each school. Comments included, “We have generals and foot soldiers” but “no middle-level people,” “subject coordinators are missing,” and “there is a need for curriculum personnel to be the go-between

with principals to establish a more collaborative structure.” It appears that key functions and positions are missing in the district such as roles assigned to develop and update curriculum documents, coordinate and evaluate curriculum, help develop instructional capacity, oversee the linkages between curriculum, instruction and assessment, and oversee the horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum throughout the school system.

Another concern registered by staff was that as administrator positions were eliminated and some school principal positions turned over, there were inevitable changes in leadership style and priorities. Some of the initiatives started by previous principals were suddenly abandoned and new ones initiated with the arrival of a new principal and, at times, this included a shift in priorities. In addition staff discussed system-wide inconsistencies in processes and procedures used in certain key areas such as supervision, walkthroughs, expectations for teachers in classrooms, and staff evaluations. The superintendent and administrators stated that principals have a great degree of autonomy to determine school emphases, procedures and expectations, so they were frequently different from school to school.

The number of central office administrator positions and support personnel that have been eliminated in the district has placed an extra burden on several of the remaining administrators and support staff who now not only perform the duties and responsibilities of positions for which they were hired but also assume additional responsibilities previously performed by those who held eliminated positions. In some instances, responsibilities ended with the elimination of the position and it is unclear whether the responsibilities have been assumed by other staff members or have remained unaddressed. The loss of district administrator positions has caused decentralization to increase and inconsistencies to occur. The added roles assigned to administrators have reportedly left many feeling overburdened leading to a diminished capacity and focus on meeting their primary educational duties. It is important for the school committee and the superintendent to provide a supervision and administrative leadership structure to meet the needs of the school system.

Also, with each building principal having much autonomy in leading and managing his/her school, the district often seems to be operating as nine separate schools rather than together as a coherent school system with shared priorities. An appropriate balance between autonomy/innovation and consistency/ coherence has not been established in a way that ensures effective leadership throughout the system.

School Improvement Plans were not sufficiently user-friendly, used to inform staff about progress made towards attaining school goals, or used to hold principals accountable in the evaluation process.

The superintendent explained how he and the school committee, working together, developed a multiple year strategic plan which established priorities for the district. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) was a yearly extension of the strategic plan with specific goals. Each school used an aligned template to develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs). SIPs consisted of (a) the goal, (b) data, (c) causality, (d) student learning and/or instructional change objectives,

along with [1] benchmark, [2] measurement/evidence, and [3] responsibility/timeline, and (e) resources.

A review of the nine 2011-2012 SIPs showed a wide range in the level of detail. SIPs ranged in length from 24 to 75 pages, averaging 46 pages. Also, the number of goals in the SIPs ranged from 6 to 25 with an average per SIP of 12 goals.

Detailed SIPs

A number of the goals in some SIPs were lengthy and contained several parts. For example, in the South Street Elementary School SIP under Curriculum and Instruction English Language Arts, Goal #1 reads:

To improve overall achievement in English Language Arts:

1. To improve student performance on measures of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in the early grades (K-2) and increase rates of growth for struggling readers in upper grades.
2. To improve performance on measures of oral reading fluency in grades one through four.
3. To increase performance on measures of vocabulary development and listening comprehension in all grades, with significant gains made by English Language Learners.
4. To improve performance on open responses in grades 3 &
5. To improve performance on writing benchmarks across grade levels through targeted instruction on topic development word choice.
6. To improve in all areas of Reading and Language specifically in poetry, nonfiction, theme and style and language in grades 3 and 4 for all students.
7. Prepare preschool students entering kindergarten in early literacy skills.

Along with this, goals are eight student learning objectives and ten instructional change objectives.

Another example of a lengthy goal with several components is the Fitchburg High School SIP, Curriculum & Instruction Goal which reads:

Further develop specific course-wide rubrics in all subject areas that support our school-wide academic expectations for student learning and move us towards adherence to the NEASC Standards of accreditation. Begin using course-specific rubrics and school-wide rubrics within curriculum departments to evaluate student progress and growth. Develop course-specific benchmark assessments and rubrics to help provide data for determining curriculum strengths and weaknesses, similar to Galileo assessments already being implemented in Mathematics. Begin evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of current school-wide rubrics to determine if they support the high school mission, our common instructional frame-work, as well as, the new NEASC Standards for accreditation.

Accompanying this goal are three student learning objectives and five instructional change objectives.

Although these objectives are important for teachers and administrators, their details and objectives may be better suited for inclusion in curriculum documents as opposed to the SIPs.

In addition, the SIP goals contain information about data, causality, and resources. For example, the Memorial Middle School's ELA Goal #1 is: to "increase the percentage of students scoring in the Advanced Proficient category by an average of 5% across all grades by increasing student literacy and communication skills..."

The data accompanying this goal reads:

The lack of students scoring in the Advanced category relative to math suggests that a focus strictly on fluency may be flawed. Most of our students can read from a phonetic standpoint; comprehension and critical thinking skills are lacking. Students' lack of word recognition/function suggests a language acquisition approach, as opposed to a concentration on improving fluency and speed. In addition, the Common Core places a heavy emphasis on informational text.

The causality statement for this goal is,

Both poverty and second language backgrounds create a smaller working vocabulary for many of our students. As reading/spelling/grammar is [sic] not explicitly taught in any one content area, there is not a systematic approach to increasing academic vocabulary.

The resources identified for this Memorial Middle School goal are a Humanities Vertical Team, common planning time, adherence to ELA benchmarks, access to and better use of assessment data, and exploring vocabulary-building programs. Resources needed, but not requested, are an adjustment counselor, textbooks, and additional support staff. In addition, it is important in the district that the data, causality, and resources associated with every SIP goal be included and integrated in the improvement plan.

Usefulness of SIPs

Some interviewees found the SIPs to be documents that were not easy to use. One school leader stated that "I see our document is not teacher friendly or reader friendly, when I hand it to them [teachers] they don't look at it unless I point it out in an activity." Another mentioned that a difficulty with the SIP is that things do not fit in and mesh together since there was also a need to deal with issues such as compliance, Title I and targeted assistance in the SIP.

During the review, a teacher in a focus group said that some teachers were aware of SIP goals, but other teachers responded that they were not aware of them. Also, teachers expressed different opinions about whether or not they were informed throughout the year about progress made towards attainment of the SIP goals. Some teachers mentioned that their principals had kept them informed about the status of achieving their SIP goals, a few acknowledged rarely and other teachers responded negatively about receiving any information from their principal about the progress being made to reach the SIP goals.

The superintendent said that SIP goals were not reflected in the principal's performance evaluations specifically. He indicated that this year the principals have three goals, one of which is improving student achievement, along with the other items listed on the administrator's evaluation form. The principals agreed with the superintendent's comment about the three goals

for the 2012 school year and also indicated that there were no statements made by the superintendent in last year's evaluations that pertained directly to achieving the goals in their SIPs. A review of the 2011 evaluations of the principals prepared by the superintendent confirmed this matter.

The topic of meeting SIP goals is typically a part of a principal's yearly evaluation. SIPs can be used as the driving force of continuous improvement of student achievement. At this point, Fitchburg is losing an opportunity to use the School Improvement Plans across the district as powerful levers for uniting staff around improving the schools.

Curriculum and Instruction

Fitchburg's curriculum documents are incomplete in all core subject areas. Some core subject areas are undocumented at certain grade spans. The district does not have an established process for curriculum development and renewal.

Fitchburg's curriculum is most fully documented in mathematics and least fully documented in science and social studies. The kindergarten through grade 8 mathematics curriculum consists of the district's benchmark planners. Based on the strands and standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the benchmark planners contain mathematical practices, explanations, teaching examples and vocabulary. Administrators and teachers told the review team that the planners were developed by teachers and coaches to serve as pacing guides for the district's core programs: *Math Investigations II* in kindergarten through grade 4 and *Connected Mathematics* in grades 5 through 8. However, they are devoid of certain essential curricular elements such as supplemental resources and the district's mathematics assessments.

The taught English language arts (ELA) curriculum in kindergarten through grade 4 is undocumented. Fitchburg adopted *Reading Street* as its core literacy program in 2007. According to district administrators, principals wanted to give teachers time to understand and implement the program as conceived prior to documenting it as part of the curriculum. Administrators and teachers told the review team that in the absence of a documented curriculum, teachers base their instruction on the ELA Framework and the *Reading Street* program, which aligns with the Framework according to the publisher. According to the principals and elementary level School Improvement Plans, the district utilizes a wide range of literacy interventions in addition to the provisions in the *Reading Street* program for English language learners, students with special needs, and remedial students, but these interventions are also not documented in a curriculum.

The ELA curriculum for grades 5 through 8 consists of benchmark planners with the same components as the mathematics benchmark planners. The current planners do not include the district's middle school level ELA assessments and supplemental programs such as *Word Generation*, which is intended to develop academic vocabulary through a study of target words and terms common to a range of settings and subject areas. The ELA planners are currently being revised to satisfy Common Core requirements and expanded to include missing essential elements. The revised and expanded ELA benchmark planners will be composed of the Common

Core standards, the Common Core standards in student-friendly language, vocabulary, big ideas/essential questions, Bloom's taxonomy of competencies and skills, curricular resources, core novels, and assessments.

Teachers and coaches met in groups during the summer of 2011 to begin the revision. The grade 8 ELA benchmark planner has been completed in draft and the planners for grades 5 through 7 are in progress. The work is scheduled to be completed during the summer of 2012.

The 2011-2014 Strategic Plan recognizes the need for a "more coherent writing curriculum." While written language is not currently a formal element of the documented ELA curriculum, Fitchburg has adopted two instructional formats intended to improve student writing. According to administrators, the district introduced the *Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop* approach at the elementary level and provided related professional development for teachers. The Longsjo Middle School has instituted *The Collins Writing Program* and this program is currently under consideration for adoption at the Memorial Middle School.

The science and social studies curricula in Fitchburg are largely undocumented in kindergarten through grade 8. Administrators and teachers told the review team that the district discontinued an experiential, kit-based approach to science at the elementary level because of the need to provide more instructional time in ELA and mathematics. According to elementary principals and school schedules, the district allocates an average of only 45 minutes weekly for science and social studies as compared with 450 minutes for ELA and 300 minutes for mathematics. Fitchburg phased introduction of an approach combining literacy skills instruction with scientific discovery, *Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading*, at the elementary level, beginning with two schools in the 2010 school year. All four elementary schools will offer the program by the 2013 school year. At the middle school level, the science program consists of survey life science courses in grades 5 through 7 and biology in grade 8. In addition, interviewees explained that the *Reading Street* program contained readings with embedded science and social studies content.

High school mathematics, English, science, and social studies courses are described generally in the program of studies and in greater detail in course syllabi posted on-line. The course syllabi vary considerably in format and comprehensiveness. The more fully elaborated syllabi include standards, benchmarks, essential questions, resources and assessments, but most consist primarily of chronological lists of units and topics related to standards. Benchmark planners in Algebra and geometry supplement the course syllabi. The planners have the same components as the kindergarten through grade 8 mathematics benchmark planners. According to the principal and documentation, high school teachers are developing and revising the curriculum under the leadership of departmental facilitators using an Understanding by Design approach that begins with consideration of "what is worthy and requiring of understanding" and culminates in the design of "learning and teaching experiences that promote understanding, interest and excellence."

According to administrators and documentation, Fitchburg lacks sufficient personnel and a systematic process for curriculum development and renewal. The district leadership team for

curriculum consists of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction who has acquired a number of competing responsibilities, including oversight of the Title I program and Grants and the directors of technology and assessment/STEM, language acquisition and enrollment, and special education who have other primary responsibilities. There is no districtwide curriculum steering committee. The high school facilitators teach fulltime and are not assigned typical department head responsibilities. And, the district lacks a systematized cycle for curriculum development and renewal.

Fitchburg does not have a fully documented curriculum in all core subject areas that is aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms of the same grade level and across sections of the same course. A heavy reliance on textbook programs, no matter how closely based on the standards, limits teachers' awareness of and access to supplementary instructional materials for diversifying content and providing for a range of individual differences in how students learn. This weakness is especially evident in kindergarten through grade 8 where textbook programs and standards essentially serve as the curriculum.

The many interventions and supplements to the core literacy program in kindergarten through grade 4 are undocumented, jeopardizing the consistency and continuity of programs and services across grade levels and across schools. The district also lacks capacity for curriculum development and renewal. Under current conditions, it is difficult to ensure that all Fitchburg students are receiving high-level standards-based instruction at all grade levels in all core subject areas. A fully elaborated and documented curriculum is foundational to improving proficiency rates, interpreting the results of student and programmatic assessments, holding teachers accountable, and identifying professional development needs.

Classroom observations demonstrated an overall positive climate conducive to teaching and learning at the elementary and middle schools. Instructional practices observed were not strong enough to support Fitchburg students in attaining high levels of proficiency. Instructional objectives were often unclear, expectations for student performance were not high and a range of teaching techniques to support student proficiency was not widespread.

The review team observed instruction in 87 district classrooms: 29 at the elementary level, 25 at the middle school level and 33 at the high school level. These classes included 21 ELA and 8 mathematics classes at the elementary level; 10 ELA, 10 mathematics, 2 science, and 3 social studies classes at the middle school level; and 13 ELA, 10 mathematics, 8 science and 2 social studies classes at the high school level. Three of the classes were ELL and two of the classes were special education classes.

The observations averaged 20 minutes in length. Observers used a standard record form including 37 characteristics of effective instruction and learning grouped under two categories: Organization of the Classroom and Instructional Design and Delivery. Observers rated these characteristics as Observed or Not Observed.

Under the category of Organization of the Classroom, the review team found evidence of students and teachers having positive and respectful relationships in 93 percent of the elementary level and 92 percent of the middle school level classes observed. Elementary and middle school

teachers made their behavioral expectations clear and checked for student understanding, often by asking them to restate or explain expectations. Teachers used countdowns, hands-up and other cues to remind students of the expectations and handled off-task behavior unobtrusively. Many teachers used proximity to enforce expectations in a silent manner as they circulated among small student groups during independent work time.

Positive and respectful relationships were less frequent at the high school, at a rate of 77 percent of the classes observed by the review team. For example, in one class, the teacher asked a student to leave the room for making a comment the teacher found unacceptable, depriving the student of the benefit of instruction. In another, the teacher argued with a student about homework completion, delaying the start of the lesson by several minutes. In a third class, the teacher attempted to conduct a lesson by shouting over students' loud private conversations.

However, the review team found that the expectations for student learning across the district were far too often unacceptably low. In the classrooms observed by the review team, the content appeared to be appropriate to the grade level in only 26 percent of the elementary level, 21 percent of the middle school level, and 22 percent of the high school classes observed.

Even given a level of content that was often low, the review team found that teachers set appropriately high expectations for student learning in the content area covered in only 55 percent of the elementary level, 48 percent of the middle school level, and 33 percent of the high school classes observed. For example, in a fourth grade class the teacher read a humorous fable aloud to the students in a monotone voice, pausing occasionally to pose literal comprehension questions without commenting on any of the answers. In a middle school mathematics class, students worked independently to complete the same worksheet on multiplication of fractions while the teacher sat at her desk, sometimes raising her head to monitor. Expectations were the lowest in the high school level classes observed by the review team. For example, one teacher conducted a redundant review of concepts and skills, without making it clear why the material was being repeated at such a slow pace. Another teacher discussed the results of a quiz based on students' factual recall without elaborating on their responses or allowing them to provide further explanations. In an English class, the teacher discussed students' responses to literal comprehension questions and did little to address students' misconceptions. Another teacher illustrated a basic concept at the board with her back to the students, without eliciting any student participation. Several students rested their heads on their desks during the entire explanation without encouragement or prompting from the teacher.

Although not widespread enough, there were examples of learning expectations that were appropriately high such as a first grade class drawing objects according to dimensions prescribed by a teacher. An example at the middle school level followed the viewing of a video on colonial Williamsburg featuring an historian and two students. The teacher helped the class differentiate between and understand the value of primary and secondary sources through skillful questioning that created broad involvement and common understanding. In a high school class, students read about the evacuation of British children during the Second World War on a British website, and then engaged in essay writing in response to teacher prompts based on the content in a way that

created context for their study of *Lord of the Flies*. The teacher went on to ask the students to describe character traits and predict actions.

Instructional purposes were unclear in many of the elementary level and high school level classes observed. A clearly posted, explained or referenced learning objective was evident in 55 percent of the elementary level classes and 48 percent of the high school level classes observed. On the other hand, learning objectives were posted and recurrently referenced in 80 percent of the middle school level classes observed.

The large majority of instructional periods observed were not effectively developed or delivered using well-selected instructional strategies. Techniques prompting higher order thinking were evident in fewer than 20 percent of the classes observed at each level, such as students forming predictions, students developing arguments and evaluating information; students reflecting on their own thinking, progress, and approach; students generating questions related to the goals of the lesson; students using various means to represent their ideas and thinking; and students inquiring, exploring and problem solving together in small groups or pairs. For example, in one elementary class observed by the review team, the teacher asked students to predict how the protagonist in a story might react when he discovered that his dog was missing based on his prior behavior. The teacher used probing questions such as “What told you that he loves his dog?” and “How did you know that he doesn’t give up?” to elicit students’ reasoning. While none of the students predicted the actual resolution of the story, the teacher validated the class by stating that having good reasons was just as important as being correct. In a more typical class, the teacher read a story aloud, pausing periodically to pose comprehension questions. However, the teacher allowed insufficient wait time for students to formulate deeply thoughtful responses and hastily provided many of the answers while the students listened passively. In one observed classroom, students used pictures, numbers and words to solve problems involving volume and area and explained their approaches to each other. In a more typical observed class, students worked independently on a worksheet using a teacher-directed strategy.

Similarly, the following indicators of the use of student assessments were evident in fewer than 20 percent of the classes observed at each level: informal assessments aligned to the lesson goals to check for understanding or mastery; instructional adjustments based on on-the-spot or informal assessment; students receiving feedback that tells them where they are in relation to the learning goals; and students revising their work based on feedback. For example, in one observed class, the teacher conditioned students’ “tickets to leave” for lunch on their automaticity with multiplication facts. The teacher skillfully adjusted the level of difficulty to ensure that every student succeeded. Another teacher conducted an impromptu whole group lesson when it became apparent through observation that students were having common difficulties with learning center tasks. Following the lesson, the teacher altered some tasks to render them more appropriate to students’ evident strengths and needs. At the beginning of the lesson in another class, a teacher told the students “what they would be able to do today that they couldn’t do yesterday” and compared samples of their earlier writing with their current writing to demonstrate their progress. More typically, however, teachers in observed classrooms taught presumptively without explicitly and regularly checking for student understanding. For example, in one observed class,

the teacher expressed the need to “move on,” even when a number of students objected that they still “didn’t get it” and began asking each other for help.

According to data collected from classrooms observations in Fitchburg, although the climate and student-teacher relationships were highly conducive to teaching and learning, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, instruction was not always clearly purposeful, except at the middle school level where the learning objectives were more explicit. The expectations for student learning were strikingly low throughout the district and there was little promotion of such higher order thinking skills as evaluation, analysis and synthesis. The quality of the instruction observed by the review team at all levels was too weak to result in improved student achievement.

The instructional model varies from level to level and from school to school at the same level, creating inconsistencies in the quality of instruction. The district does not have a common format for lesson design and a systematic process for lesson plan review.

According to central office administrators and principals, lesson design varies widely in the district. The superintendent told the review team that the district does not prescribe lesson components, which was consistent with the belief that these decisions should be school-based. When asked by the review team, principals described different models of lesson design. One middle school principal described a format consisting of a Do Now; launch of the lesson with an introduction to the objective; 20 minutes of whole group instruction, including active student participation through such strategies as turn-and-talk and pair-and-share; two activities involving small group and independent practice; and a wrap-up with a simple informal assessment such as thumbs-up or down. The principal added that teachers should also incorporate routines and rituals such as SLANT (sit-up, listen, ask questions, nod your head, track the teacher) in their instruction.

According to central office administrators and the principal, Fitchburg High School is adopting an instructional framework through its partnership with the University Park Campus School in Worcester consisting of collaborative group work, writing-to-learn, literacy groups, questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk. This framework is not yet in place. One elementary principal said that she expected students to be excited and engaged about learning in student-centered rather than teacher-centered classrooms. Most principals said that they left lesson design to grade level or departmental teams, or even individual teachers. They added that it was each teacher’s professional responsibility, since the collective bargaining agreement requires them to write lesson plans, but does not specify the format.

In interviews with the review team, an elementary principal and a middle school principal said that they reviewed and commented on teachers’ lesson plans weekly. The other principals said that they reviewed teachers’ lesson plans prior to an observation, adding that they also reviewed the lesson plans of teachers on improvement plans or upon a teacher’s request. In interviews with the review team, most teachers concurred that there was no prescribed lesson plan format at their schools and that their plans were not reviewed, except prior to an observation. In classroom observations, the review team found little consistency in the design and quality of instruction.

The instructional objective was often unclear and it was difficult to determine the purpose for the learning. Lessons were more teacher- than student-centered, even at the elementary level, and student engagement was low, especially at the high school level.

Fitchburg does not have a common format for lesson plan design and a systematic process for lesson plan review. As a result the district cannot ensure fidelity of implementation of research-based practices to improve student achievement.

Assessment

The instructional coaching model has promise as a key improvement strategy but the impact of coaches is hindered by an inadequate number of coaches and an inadequate foundation of district-wide expectations for practice that coaches could reinforce in their work.

The district has developed and continues to refine a coaching model that relies on coaches to be key agents for improvements in the schools to which they are assigned. At coaching meetings, coaches and grade-level or subject-level teacher teams typically discuss formative and benchmark assessment data to monitor student progress, improve student achievement, guide instructional decisions, and determine students' remedial, intervention and enrichment requirements.

There were many positive aspects attributed to the coaching model in the district by interviewees. Coaches and district leaders described the coaching model with great detail, commitment, enthusiasm, and sensitivity. Given their role and responsibilities and the expertise they gained from professional development, coaches promoted and engaged teachers in meaningful discussions about student learning and pedagogy. Meeting agendas and packets supported this claim. However, not all schools benefitted from coaching meetings since coaches were either not deployed in a school or were not deployed frequently enough given student achievement and progress in the district. In addition, the capacity of teachers to analyze and use data varied across schools and levels. Furthermore, some teachers lacked trust and/or respect of the coaching process and feared that coaches would not be supportive in a supervisory sense, but rather, would pass on descriptions of teaching weaknesses and other vulnerabilities to principals who would then use the information in evaluations. As a result, some teachers, perhaps those most in need, were reluctant to engage fully in the teacher-coach collaboration required to promote the benefits of the model. Also, some principals were unclear about some aspects of the coaching model, including the line of supervision for coaches. These principals reported wanting more influence in interviewing, choosing, and evaluating the coaches assigned to their schools.

A further complication about the potential for the coaching model to be successful was found in the lack of a consistent, fully documented and aligned system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As noted above, the district had no firmly understood instructional model in place and each school defined instruction autonomously. In addition, data from 87 classroom observations by the review team documented in the Curriculum and Instruction Finding above

indicate that at all levels there are weaknesses in the delivery of basic as well as more complex instructional practices.

The Role of Coaches

District leaders explained that coaches are district employees reporting to a district leader but are assigned to a specific school or schools. Some coaches were appointed from within the district's teaching ranks while others were hired from outside. All coaches meet together monthly along with their district leaders to review data, share progress, plan for team meetings, and discuss other coaching responsibilities. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and Title I is responsible for supervising literacy and AALI coaches and the Technology Director works with the mathematics coaches. The Assistant Superintendent is also responsible for evaluating all coaches and to do so, she consults with principals and the Technology Director. In an interview, some principals agreed that they should be more involved in evaluating coaches and two commented that they actually did evaluate them.

According to district administrators, the coaching model has evolved incrementally over the past five years, although literacy support for teachers dates back to 1999 with the Lesley Literacy Coordinators. As described in the job description for mathematics coaches, the coaching role is designed to have coaches spend 60 percent of their time working directly with teachers and 40 percent in other support, research, and development activities. The job description aligns with the roles and responsibilities described by interviewees. Basically, coaches were expected to:

- Model research-based lessons and teach demonstration lessons
- Collaborate with teachers to determine instructional and intervention approaches
- Observe lessons and provide feedback to teachers in implementing changes in instruction
- Provide other ongoing professional development to their teachers
- Assist teachers in aligning instruction with standards, curriculum and assessments
- Provide assessment support through collaborative analysis of student work and formal and informal assessments
- Collaborate with teachers to monitor the progress of struggling students and offer suggestions for intervention
- Facilitate teacher inquiry groups to discuss current research
- Support the district leadership team in creating the school's professional development program.

Central office leaders explained that one rationale for instituting the coaching model was to provide curricular and instructional leadership between the central office and the school and classroom levels. The district had been functioning without middle level leaders grounded in the academic disciplines. When the district had middle level leaders, their role was to promote, support and coordinate curricular and instructional improvement through regular and close interaction with principals, teachers and district leaders. The district had also been without department heads or head teachers at the secondary level for about ten years. Their role was to work as curriculum leaders and supervisors during released time. Given these leadership gaps and the lack of funds to sustain subject-based leaders, the district created the role of literacy and

mathematics coaches, funded mainly through grants. Coaches were assigned to elementary and middle schools to work with teachers during common planning time twice monthly and more recently, a coach was assigned at the high school to work with Algebra I and geometry teachers.

In addition, this school year the district appointed four Advanced Academic Learning Initiative (AALI) coaches. One is assigned to each elementary school to support the development of talented students. AALI coaches help classroom teachers plan lessons and enrichment projects for students both in- and out-of-class. The district hoped to extend the AALI coach role to grade 5 in the 2013 school year.

At the time of the review, there were 16 people serving as coaches. As Table 9 below indicates, the deployment of coaches varies. Interviewees explained that coaching assignments had been allocated by need, based on student achievement data and one school had decided not to have a literacy coach under a previous principal – a decision the new principal was currently reconsidering. One school had no coaches. A combination of funds from Title I, other grants and local funds supports coaching positions. There have not been enough funds allocated to deploy fulltime literacy and mathematics coaches to all schools; although, recent trends in student achievement as measured by MCAS results and the variations in the quality of instruction gleaned from the review team’s observations of 87 classrooms would indicate that teachers at all levels could benefit from the support a strong coaching model could provide.

**Table 9: Distribution of Coaching Assignments
Fitchburg Public Schools, 2012 School Year**

School (2011 Enrollment)	ELA	Mathematics	AALI
Crocker Elementary (513)	1.0	.4	1.0
McKay Elementary (408)	1.0	.5	1.0
Reingold Elementary (583)	1.0	.6	1.0
South Street Elementary (591)	1.0	.75	1.0
Fitchburg Arts Academy (232)	--	.5	--
Memorial Middle School (689)	1.0	.25 grade 5 & .20	--
Longsjo Middle School (553)	1.0	1.20	--
Fitchburg High School (1146)	--	1.0	--
Fitchburg Alternative High School (166)	--	--	--

Data derived from interviews with district and school personnel.

Instructional Coaches Need District Tools

Coaches do not have a strong set of district-wide tools to promote consistency and improvement in teacher practice. Leaders and coaches explained that fundamentally, learning and teaching in the district were centered on a standards-based system organized around Massachusetts

Curriculum Frameworks and eventually will include the Common Core Standards. (The district has begun to integrate the Common Core Standards into its system.) The goal was to improve student achievement, demonstrated in one way by stronger proficiency in MCAS results. However, a review of documents and information from interviews revealed that the three key educational components – curriculum, instruction and assessment – were not well documented in an interrelated system to drive teaching and learning. Examples of tools absent or insufficient include comprehensive curriculum documents, instructional expectations clarified on a rubric, instructional strategies that teachers were expected to master, and protocols to guide processes for data analysis, professional learning communities, and discussing student work.

As a strength, coaches and teachers interviewed generally did demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationship between curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices for literacy and mathematics for grades K-8. Without a complete curriculum, coaches and teachers sometimes use standards-based benchmark planners or course syllabi that show various degrees of complexity and completeness. In addition, instructional materials such as textbook programs and other texts or worksheets are also used as the foundation of lessons. While some schools have requirements or a lesson plan model to guide instruction, others do not. And, there is no clear districtwide instructional model in place. Formative and benchmark assessments are administered at designated intervals, derived either from textbook programs or from online resources, to assess students' mastery of standards. Coaching meetings, especially in grades K-8, concentrate on understanding the link between student achievement and assessment and/or instruction. And, although discussions typically focus on improvement, the coaches and teachers lack important tools in their work – an enhanced and enriched curriculum with embedded assessments linked to curriculum as well as standards and a rigorous instructional model to guide teaching.

Inconsistencies in coaching use across schools

There were variations by school in how completely coaches were able to meet their designated responsibilities. For the most part, according to interviewees and a review of coaching meeting agendas, most elementary and middle school coaches played an integral role in initiating and leading discussions about teaching and learning at their schools. In some schools, interviewees explained, there were lingering issues related to trust and respect of coaches that were not fully resolved. For example, leaders, coaches and teachers noted that coaches were viewed by some as “spies for the administration.” As a result, some teachers were either reluctant to share their practice with them or invite them into their classes. According to interviewees, some teachers were concerned that principals would use information they gleaned from coaches as evidence to influence their performance evaluations.

In general, coaches observed lessons when they were welcomed into the classroom by the teacher. This aligns with research-based designs of coaching programs which recommend that coaches only work with teachers who want their intervention; or, “if you insist, they will resist.” Thus, coaches cannot always intervene when achievement data indicates a need for a coach's knowledge and support. In addition, at the high school there was a grievance procedure in

process related to when and how the mathematics coach could debrief assessment results with Algebra I and geometry teachers. These factors had the potential to thwart the very collaboration with coaches that could benefit student achievement and teachers' instructional practice the most. District and school leaders explained in interviews that these were ongoing struggles that continued to improve, albeit slowly.

Interviewees in leadership roles and coaches alike expressed appreciation and understanding of the sensitive nature of the coaching role. Literacy and mathematics coaches and their district leaders have participated in professional development sessions with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to improve their skills for data analysis and to learn to conduct professional debriefs with teachers. This has sharpened their ability to gain teachers' trust and respect – in their view, an ongoing process.

Although the coaching model has been implemented with increasing intensity for five years, principals and coaches noted that teachers' use of data and their capacity to analyze data well to inform decision-making still “ran along a continuum.” Coaches and leaders agreed that it was strongest at the elementary level, became more varied at the middle schools, and was weaker at the high school level. The high school faculty has also had very limited opportunities to work with coaches and to explore achievement data in a systematic way. Its improvement plan identified a goal to develop benchmark assessments and rubrics to help provide data for determining curriculum strengths and weaknesses. Interviewees and teachers in a focus group noted that until this year, there had been uneven school-wide initiatives to engage high school teachers in the use and analysis of assessment data as a means to improve curriculum and instruction.

Principals did not share common perspectives of their role in the coaching process and did not engage with the coaches in their schools in consistent ways. In an interview, principals indicated that they had not been consulted by the district leadership about the coaching model prior to its implementation and some were still unclear about the roles and responsibilities of coaches. Most indicated that their understanding about coaching derived from their experiences in the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training offered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). Also, since it was a district function to appoint coaches, principals also raised the idea that they too should be involved in interviewing coaches for positions in their schools.

According to interviews with coaches, principals and district leaders, although coaches interacted with building principals, the nature of these interactions varied depending on the school. Some principals stated that coaches regularly participated in meetings of their schools' Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT) but there was no evidence that this was a districtwide expectation or that all principals did so. Some principals occasionally attended grade-level meetings with coaches; yet, this too varied across the district. Only a few principals spoke as if they and their coaches worked in close collaboration with each other, acting as true partners in their school's improvement efforts. In addition, coaches are supervised and evaluated by the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and principals have only informal input into the evaluation of the

people who exert solid leverage on instructional improvement in their school. Whether or not principals were collaborators or supervisors of coaches had not been fully addressed, even though it is at the school level that they spend most of their time.

Principals also explained that when coaches were pulled from their schools, sometimes for weeks at a time, either to offer professional development workshops in district or to work on other assignments at the central office (for example, scoring and analyzing data – a key responsibility for coaches) the coaches' absences jeopardized the continuity of their working relationships with teachers.

Overall Impact of the Coaching

Coaching is one important strategy to promote continuous improvement but improvement strategies need to be systemic, consistent, and appropriately resourced. The power of instructional coaching is that it can develop teacher capacity to meet district expectations for delivery of the district's curriculum and for the strategies expected of every teacher. There are limitations to the impact of coaches without a more systemic improvement effort grounded on strong, interrelated and commonly understood components (such as a common research-based instructional model for the district, a complete and enriched documented curriculum in all core subjects, clarity and clear communication about districtwide expectations for how coaches and principals will interact) and without an adequate coaching staff or other support for teachers to grow in their practice to meet the learning needs of all their students.

The district has improved its use of assessment data to use in teaching students what they need. Assessments and assessment data are used more comprehensively at the elementary and middle schools and less so at the high school.

During the past five or six years, the district has worked to develop a more balanced and data-centered assessment system characterized by the use of both formative and benchmark assessments to measure student progress in meeting state standards. The intent is for assessment data to be collected, disseminated, analyzed and used at all school levels as evidence of student progress and achievement. In addition, assessment data is intended to inform teaching decisions. Apart from test data, teachers and coaches sometimes use student work samples to better understand both teaching and learning. While these are all appropriate and important functions of a comprehensive assessment system and informed decision making, they were not yet firmly embedded in practices across all schools and core subjects.

Most data was derived from a broad array of skill-based and standards-based formative and benchmark assessments used mainly in grades K-8 and from MCAS results. Many were commercial assessment products administered several times a year. Other assessments accompanied textbooks or intervention programs. Teachers also developed classroom assessments, but interviewees indicated that they relied most on commercial assessments.

Assessments and Assessment Data at Elementary and Middle Schools

There was a broad range of assessments and data in use in grades K to 4. Teachers used DIBELS tests to assess a range of reading skills. They conducted progress monitoring using GRADE and DIBELS to assess reading growth, diagnose reading skill development and helped identify students for remediation and intervention. Added to these were the summative unit tests that accompanied the ELA and mathematics instructional programs, *Reading Street* and *Investigations*, as well as the assessments accompanying intervention programs. Kindergartners also experienced ELA and mathematics screening two- or three-times a year to monitor their progress. ELL and Special Education students also took batteries of standardized tests to assess progress and achievement and inform planning for further placement and instruction. Teachers in kept Data Binders, but in one school, according to an interviewee, this “fell apart when the building level administrator changed.”

The district also used the *Galileo Comprehensive Assessment System* which interviewees noted was aligned to state frameworks and generated and managed online by Assessment Technology Incorporated (ATI). *Galileo* assessments were given in grades 5-8 in ELA, in grades 3-8 in mathematics and in grades 9 and 10 for Algebra I and Geometry. Teachers generated *Galileo* assessments from ATI’s online test item bank, creating pretests, posttests, and also performance tests. *Galileo*-sourced “quarterly” exams were also given three times a year. At the middle school level, other ELA assessments included the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measurement assessments given two or three times a year to measure reading fluency and the unit tests from textbook programs, *Connected Mathematics* and *Language!*. Open-response writing prompts that replicated MCAS open response items were also given two or three times a year along with the multiple writing samples for the *Lucy Calkins Writers’ Workshop* (grades K-4) and *John Collins Writing Program* (grades 5-8).

Assessment and Assessment Data at the High School

In addition to MCAS tests, SAT1, ACT, and AP exams, high school students typically took course-based assessments developed by teachers or departments or instructional programs. Seniors also took the Accuplacer tests. High school students took placement, benchmark, progress monitoring and summative assessments that accompanied the *Language!* textbook series, according to the high school’s Assessment Matrix. In an interview, the new high school principal expressed interest in expanding the use of *Galileo* assessments in English at the high school.

Mid-year and final exams were given at the high school but until recently, there had been no requirement for common mid-years and finals for multi-section courses, although some were administered. The NEASC Report (2009) identified assessment and the use of schoolwide and coursewide rubrics and achievement data as priorities for improvement. Interviewees and information in two NEASC Progress Reports provided evidence that only modest action on designing rubrics had occurred by the time of the review.

The new high school principal viewed the Writing-to-Learn strategy as important in improving how students performed in thinking about and writing open responses – key abilities needed not only to learn and communicate well but also to succeed in MCAS tests and in classroom learning. While the new principal was aware of MCAS achievement trends and other achievement data, he also expressed concern that the faculty’s access and use of achievement data had been lacking in recent years. This was confirmed by high school teachers in a focus group. The impression given was that data use by high school teachers had been fractured and not carefully tracked by school leaders over the last several years.

Assessment System Integrated into Curriculum Design and Documents

The assessment system was not clearly delineated in writing and integrated into a documented curriculum. The benchmark planners and course syllabi reviewed by the review team did not include assessment sections that linked specific assessment options to the standards they addressed or to topics or units for classroom study. Teachers knew when to give assessments because they were given at critical intervals in instruction. Assessments were often constructed by downloading items that tested a specific state standard from the *Galileo* or AIMSweb websites or chosen from among the assessments that accompanied textbooks and interventions.

There was no updated, documented curriculum for science and social studies in grades K to 8. In fact, district leaders and other interviewees noted that these subjects had been allocated minimal instructional time, perhaps two days a week if at all, at the elementary level, due to the emphasis on literacy and mathematics. Systematic assessments and assessment data, rubrics, and knowledge of student progress, other than MCAS results for science, were non-existent for these two core academic subjects and were not tracked methodically. MCAS science proficiency rates were also low: science proficiency for grade 5 was at 30 percent in 2010 and 21 percent in 2011; for grade 8, it was 12 percent in 2010 and 16 percent in 2011; and for grade 10 was 60 percent in 2010 and 51 percent in 2011 – all below state proficiency rates.

The Use of Assessment Data

In interviews and in documents submitted by the district, there was plentiful evidence that the assessments described above were in use, were scrutinized and shared among coaches, teachers and leaders in elementary and middle schools. For example, data reports shared with the review team showed how teachers used DIBELS and GRADE to monitor literacy progress, *Galileo* reports showed school-based, classroom-based, and individual student-based data reports that identified at-risk students. *Galileo* reports also indicated the proportion of students in a school or classroom who met specific standards, approached meeting the standard, or fell below the standard. Interviewees referred to specific targets they set using *Galileo* tests to define improvement. Sample teachers’ Data Binders demonstrated how teachers tracked student progress using assessment data, especially for grades K-4. Samples of ALEKS reports offered data describing student and classroom-based progress in mathematics. Coaches and leaders described how these were all used in school meetings, with the caveat that there was still work to be done for all teachers to be highly skilled in data analysis and application.

Formative and benchmark assessment data provided key evidence to form flexible groups in literacy and mathematics, to identify at-risk populations and individuals, and to choose appropriate interventions. However, the Planning and Evaluation Tool used to self-assess the district's reading program in October 2011 indicated that not all students received enough time in small groups or the Tier III interventions they needed. Interviewees also described how START and child-find teams also used achievement data in their deliberations to develop appropriate interventions or IEPs for special education students.

Leadership and responsibility for data was dispersed throughout the district. The Technology Director took the lead at the district level and did considerable analysis and sharing of achievement data with coaches and at the school level. The superintendent stated that there was one person responsible for data at each school. Other interviewees noted that, in practice, principals and coaches usually shared responsibility for data. For example, this past fall, each principal presented an analysis of MCAS data to the school committee. Principals also typically shared MCAS results with teachers, although at some schools, coaches participated in the process. Although there were no formal data teams at the schools, the coaches and their teacher teams acted like mini-data teams, spending considerable meeting time collecting, analyzing and communicating about data. Coaches also monitored vertical and horizontal alignment and data trends in their schools and compared alignment across schools at monthly districtwide coaches meetings.

At the high school, there was only one coach in mathematics and no department heads with released time responsible for convening faculty to discuss achievement data and student progress. This tended to happen loosely at the teachers' initiative or when MCAS scores were presented in a faculty meeting or in discussions moderated by a facilitator. Based on comments from the teacher focus group, in recent years there had been little follow-up discussions to these data presentations. The new high school principal supported a Learning Circle strategy with one goal focused on engaging teachers more in using rubrics and assessment data, once rubrics were more fully developed at the school.

However, a central office leader described how there was still recognition of the need for more sophisticated data analysis in the district, even a need for a "data analyst who could track performance trends over time and conduct a more psychometric analysis of literacy data to better understand student progress, triangulate data and interpret the interactions" that make an impact on both teachers' and students' work. In an interview, the central office leader described that most data was "still collected, sorted and analyzed at a granular level" at the district office by the Technology Director and then shared with coaches who also analyzed it and shared that analysis at team meetings.

Teacher Capacity to Use and Apply Assessment Data

Interviewees agreed that teachers' capacity to engage in and analyze data well and use data analyses for decision making varied within and across schools, as noted above. Explanations included the fact that new teachers might be untrained or inexperienced in data analysis and needed to develop skills. Some principals, particularly in the past, did not provide schoolwide

forums and consistent, rigorous standards and expectations emphasizing the importance of understanding how to analyze and use multiple assessment formats and assessment data for improvement. This has changed, according to interviewees, with the arrival of four new principals in the last two years. Some teachers have been hesitant to fully engage in a data-centered approach. They were suspicious of the motives of those who made classroom achievement data so public. Some were also reluctant to expose their practice if their classroom's data did not show good progress. And yet, at some schools, a good number of teachers had proficient analytical skills because they had been trained and supported by their coaches and leaders and they were engaged in the work. One good example was provided in an observation of a coaching meeting at one elementary school. At other schools, according to interviewees, teachers were willing to learn more about data analysis and their skills were developing, although this now was most often done in "real-time." And for others, continued training was needed for teachers to demonstrate strong competence in the analysis and use of assessment data to inform decision making. Yet, teachers in a focus group noted a lack of in-depth professional development in data analysis and other topics.

Steps have clearly been taken in the district to develop and implement a more data-rich system of assessments. This has promoted data-based discussions by coaches and teachers and data has heightened awareness and activity of many stakeholders related to teaching. As described earlier, the district's proclivity towards autonomy, its lack of complete curriculum documents in all subjects, its lack of a districtwide instructional model, and the variability of teachers' expertise in data analysis have also had a role in how well the assessment system and its data can be harnessed for improvement. Without strong systems, clear procedures, and more shared districtwide requirements and capacity building, the review team found variations across schools in expectations and in practice for how assessment data is used. With more consistency, the assessment system can be a stronger level for improvement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Teachers did not generally receive sufficient feedback through administrator supervision or evaluation to support their continued growth as education professionals. Less than half of professional teacher evaluations reviewed were completed within two years as required by law, and some evaluations were not completed even in the four years allowed under the district's collective bargaining agreement.

The district's process for supervising teachers varied greatly from building to building. In interviews, principals informed the review team that a supervision model did not exist in the district so they were free to adopt any method that they believed could be effective for their school. Most principals, however, stated that finding the time to effectively supervise their teachers was, at best, difficult. Some elementary principals stated that they used different types of "walkthroughs." Some stated that their walk-through procedures were informal in nature and feedback was given only on an "as needed basis." Other elementary principals stated that their

walk-through procedures were more formal and included feedback, in either written or oral form, typically given within a few days of the classroom visit.

At the Memorial Middle School the principal supervised more than 50 teachers without utilizing the assistance of any other administrators, challenging the ability to regularly visit all classrooms and provide the level of supervision needed to sufficiently support teacher skill development. At the high school the two assistant principals spent the majority of their time working with and disciplining students which left the supervision of more than sixty faculty and staff to the principal. The principal stated that he had department “facilitators” but all were full time teachers and had no supervisory responsibilities.

When asked if lesson plans were regularly checked to understand what was happening in a particular classroom, principals responded that the requirement to turn in lesson plans did not exist in any of the district’s schools (the exception is the Longsjo Middle School, where staff is required to submit lesson plans to the principal). What principals did state in this regard, however, was that each used and depended on their academic coaches to work with teachers to ensure that their scope and sequence calendars were appropriate.

In examining the personnel folders provided by the district for 47 randomly selected teachers, the review team found that timeliness of written evaluations was problematic. Fewer than half of the 47 teachers had written evaluations in their folders that were timely. Some had had their last evaluation written as much as five, seven, or nine years before. There were five folders in which the review team could not find any written evaluations.

Furthermore, the evaluation process (see Appendix I of the collective bargaining agreement with teachers in effect at the time of the review) includes a four-year evaluation cycle for professional status teachers that allows them to substitute a peer coaching model or collegiate project for the summative evaluation in the third of the four years, in which case four years would go by between summative evaluations. State law requires summative evaluations for professional status teachers at least every two years. Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 38. This same four-year cycle was described and said to need improvement in the report of the 2005 review of the district by the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).⁷ The instrument used for teacher evaluations was basically a checklist of items based on the Principles of Effective Teaching. In addition, in the reviewed evaluations the team found that virtually every teacher was rated as meeting district expectations and very few instructive comments were included. Again, this finding parallels the finding of the EQA team in 2005.

When the topic of teacher evaluations was introduced in interviews, everyone from the superintendent and the district’s principals to the teachers and union representatives agreed that they were looking forward to implementing the new evaluation process mandated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for districts participating in the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative. Interviewees anticipated that the new evaluation system would make a positive difference in a districtwide system that very few people thought had been effective in

⁷ See pp. 46-48 of the report, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=F-J>.

the past. The new evaluation process will be introduced in the spring of 2012 and fully implemented during the 2013 school year.

It is the judgment of the review team that without a clearly defined and communicated supervision model that can be used effectively by building-level administrators, it is difficult for supervisors to understand teaching strengths and weaknesses in general and to identify instructional topics needing improvement. In addition, because there are few supervisory personnel, given the allocation of duties and roles at the school level, especially at the high school, supervising administrators have limited time to implement an effective supervisory process. The impact of a more effective model could inform and improve teaching at all grade levels and contribute to improvements in student achievement. Furthermore, the new evaluation system that will be implemented in the fall of 2012 can improve the timeliness of the evaluation process and also has the potential to improve instruction at all levels.

Teacher absenteeism throughout the district is very high and interrupts the continuity of classroom instruction for Fitchburg students.

In a review of teacher attendance data, the review team found that teacher absenteeism in the district was problematic. Table 10 describes major categories of teacher absence for 2011 by school, by school level and districtwide and includes (1) “sick days” or short-term illness, (2) personal days, (3) professional development and/or jury duty, and (4) long-term illness and (5) the total days absent. The second to last column indicates the percentage of days absent per teacher by school, by school level and districtwide. Data that authenticates the finding statement above, that “attendance is problematic,” is found in the last column which depicts average days absent per teacher by school, by school level and districtwide.

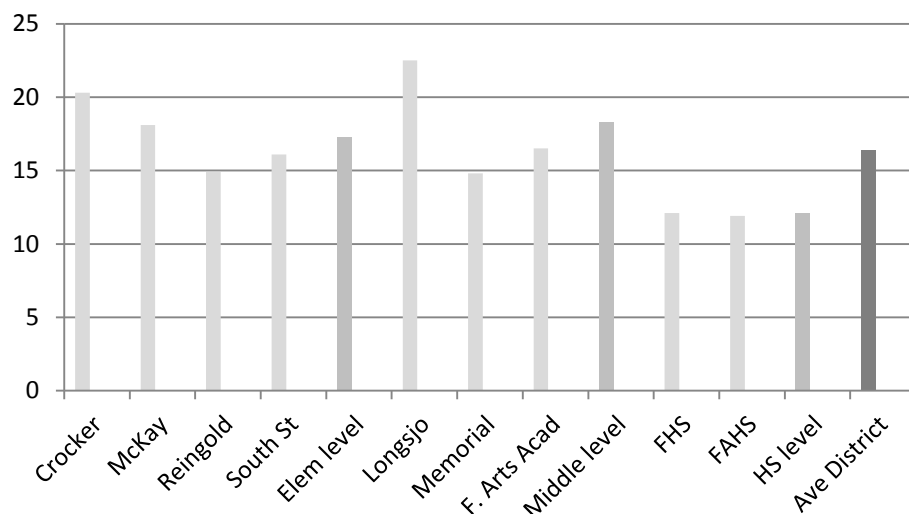
Table 10 shows that the average absentee rate for the year at the four elementary schools was 9.6 percent; this translated to approximately 17.3 days absent per elementary teacher per year. The rate at the district’s three middle schools was 10.24 percent or approximately 18.4 days absent per teacher for 2011. The high school rate was 6.7 percent or 12.1 days per teacher. Districtwide, the average rate of teacher absenteeism for 2011 was 9.2 percent of 16.5 days per teacher. Several of these absentee rates almost meet the definition of chronic absenteeism for students, defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as students absent more than 10 percent of their days in membership or, in a given school year, absent more than 18 of 180 school days. The data points in the last column in Table 10 are highlighted in Chart 1.

**Table 10: Teacher Absenteeism Data
Fitchburg Public Schools, 2011 School Year**

	# of Teachers	Sick Days	Personal Days	Average # Discretionary Days Absent <small>(not including PD, jury or long term absences)</small>	Total Days Absent <small>(including PD, jury or long term absences)</small>	% Days Absent per Teacher	Average # Days Absent per Teacher
Crocker	42	318	127	445	853	11.3%	20.3
McKay	37	275	120	395	669	10.1%	18.1
Reingold	41	237	92	329	611	8.3%	14.9
South St.	52	318	148	466	836	8.9%	16.1
Elementary	172	1148	487	1635	2969	9.6%	17.3
Longsjo	52	568	118	686	1173	12.5%	22.5
Memorial	52	270	138	408	772	8.3%	14.8
Arts Academy	22	116	52	168	362	9.1%	16.5
Middle Schools	126	954	308	1262	2307	10.2%	18.3
FHS	86	588	225	813	1039	6.9%	12.1
F Alt. HS	7	58	25	83	83	6.6%	11.9
High Schools	93	646	250	896	1122	6.7%	12.1
District	391	2748	1045	3793	6398	9.2%	16.4

Source: Report of Instructional Staff Attendance provided by district

**Chart 1: Average Number of Days Absent per Teacher
by School, by School Level and Districtwide
Fitchburg Public Schools, 2011 School Year**



Source: Report of Instructional Staff Attendance provided by district

When asked at the high school teachers' focus group why this attendance situation existed in the district, the consensus was that low teacher morale was a contributing factor. In fact, when the review team visited the high school to observe classes on December 1, 2011, the team was informed that eight of 84 teachers (close to 10 percent) were absent that day. Most of the students of the absentee teachers were directed to the cafeteria for a study hall during their 85-minute instructional block because with only three permanent substitute teachers, there were not enough substitutes to cover all the classrooms.

When asked to comment on this topic at various interviews, all constituencies in the district agreed that teacher absenteeism was problematic and had been for a number of years. This sentiment was voiced by school committee members, the superintendent, the principals and even teachers in their respective focus groups. There also seemed to be a cultural component on the part of most teachers in the district that they were entitled to take all three personal days, at least in 2011, i.e., a "take them or lose them" mentality seemed to be prevalent. This is evidenced by the data in Table 10 which indicates that at almost every school, all or nearly all of the three personal days per teacher were taken in 2011. In addition, many teachers regularly took sick days in 2011 despite the district's liberal sick day buy-back policy. The collective bargaining agreement with teachers specifies that every teacher will be awarded 15 sick days per year accumulating to a maximum of 180 days. Upon retirement, the district will buy-back any unused sick days at the rate of \$25 per day which could amount to a payment of \$4500. A provision in the collective bargaining agreement further stipulates that any teacher who was employed in the district before the 1990 school year can accumulate his/her sick days without a limit and the buy-back figure upon retirement could go as high as \$10,000. In this regard, the superintendent

informed the team during an interview that he had dismissed three teachers in the recent past because of their “flagrant misuse of their sick and/or personal days.”

What further complicated the rate of teacher absenteeism in the district was the rate of student absenteeism, particularly the rate of chronic absenteeism for high school students. This trend is described in greater detail in the Student Support Findings which follow. The crux of the attendance matter, however, is the combination of problematic attendance for both teachers and students at the high school – a critical level for teaching and learning. The combined lack of presence in school endangers meaningful continuity of instructional time and instructional support time, especially for students who are most in need of both.

It is the judgment of the review team that the high rate of teacher absenteeism has had negative effects on the continuity and quality of education and on the level of student achievement in the district. It has also presented a poor model for students of the importance of being in school. In fact, on average, teachers are absent nearly one day for every ten days of instructional time. This has also unveiled a negative cultural component in the district. Without both administrators and teachers addressing the important topic of regular attendance at school so that teachers can better meet teaching responsibilities and other duties, they cannot adequately meet their professional obligations to students, to their colleagues, to their school and to the district as a whole. As a result, poor teacher attendance has contributed to holding back student learning and progress.

School-level professional development programs, which constitute the majority of professional development in the district, are not coordinated by the district to ensure alignment to district priorities.

The district’s Professional Development Plan indicated that the district had a current and comprehensive plan for implementing professional development. The document enumerated the vision and mission for professional development in the district and stated that the entire process would be overseen by a Professional Development Steering Committee. The committee was structured to meet monthly throughout the school year and would have representatives from all the district’s schools and district-level departments as participants. The plan specified that the committee would:

- Review professional development needs identified through evaluation of student performance data
- Review professional development session evaluation forms
- Address on-going issues to improve the quality of district sponsored professional development activities
- Facilitate communication among staff throughout the district

When the review team asked about the work of the professional development committee, interviewees reported that the committee had only met sporadically in the last two years and had yet to meet this school year. Interviewees also noted that a request to identify members for the committee had been posted in all schools just prior to the site visit and that the committee would schedule its first meeting sometime in December.

During an interview with principals, one principal stated and all others present agreed that professional development in the district lacked central office leadership and much of what happened in professional development in the district was planned and generated at the building level.

For example, during the four full-days of professional development in the district during this school year (three days in August before school started and one day in November), much of the professional development offered to teachers was generated by each building principal, often assisted by the academic coaches of that building for kindergarten through grade 8.⁸ (An exception was the districtwide professional development on the November day on “Understanding by Design,” created by district staff as a common framework for curriculum and lesson planning, in alignment with ESE Race to the Top initiatives.) This was apart from time for professional development in compliance topics such as bullying, restraint training and 504 updates initiated and managed by the central office. Building-based professional development topics were often followed-up at the school level and new topics were often introduced at building meetings that took place every other week after school. Also, at the Longsjo Middle School where there was an extended-day schedule, there was one early release day for students every month. This allowed Longsjo’s teachers to have equivalent professional development time during their regular school day that colleagues at other schools took during after school meetings.

Many of the professional development topics offered at the various schools are grade- and/or department-specific and often the same topics were offered at multiple schools such as differentiating instruction, creating a positive learning environment and providing tiered instruction in literacy. Another example of a school-generated professional development opportunity was the high school’s efforts in implementing professional learning circles in collaboration with Fitchburg State University. The program, which is in its second year, is aimed at enhancing the professional culture of the instructional staff and has included such topics as co-teaching models and teaching effectively with inclusion.

Other examples of building-based professional development opportunities took place during the 2011 school year. For example, the South Street Elementary School utilized the Bay State Reading Initiative Coaches (BSRIC) to provide professional development in such topics as differentiated instruction, 6+1 Trait Writing, and Keys to Vocabulary. South Street Elementary School’s upper grade-level paraprofessionals were trained in Read Naturally; three teachers have taken Voyager U. training and a grade 4 teacher participated in a math technology seminar. At the Longsjo Middle School all teachers were immersed in both the John Collins Writing Program and in Developmental Design strategies so that full implementation of both programs could take place. These are just a few examples of building-based professional development opportunities that were offered recently in the district.

⁸ The three days of professional development in August also included a school orientation session and time for teachers to set up their classrooms (each of which lasted for one afternoon).

Without some district level participation in leadership and oversight, building-based professional development initiatives and programs appeared disjointed and had little direction or traction in the district as a whole. At two of the teacher focus groups, teachers noted that many professional development opportunities in the past had been “one shot deals” with no follow-up programs and that colleagues in other buildings were having learning opportunities that were not available to them. It was also unclear whether or not building-based professional development opportunities were planned in alignment with goals on either the DIP or the SIPs.

It is the judgment of the review team that the current trend of decentralized professional development has weakened the district’s implementation of district priorities other than those targeted to meeting compliance issues. In addition, several school-based topics for professional development were not always available to those outside the individual school setting and could have been beneficial to meeting individual and school-based goals to improve teaching and learning. In addition, there has been insufficient implementation of the procedures outlined in the district’s Professional Development Plan in terms of not meeting regularly each year. These practices limit the participation of educators from across the district in guiding the planning for professional development. By design in the Professional Development Plan, professional development should be a shared responsibility between district and building-level personnel. The impact of that would be that all teachers in the district will have more equitable opportunities in his/her professional development, district-level as well as school-level priorities can be addressed, and students can be the beneficiaries of those efforts.

The district has made concerted districtwide effort to have professional development in the four categories of Sheltered English Immersion.

For three years prior to the 2011 school year, the district did make a concerted effort to train many professional staff in the four categories used for Sheltered English Immersion (SEI). The success they have had in providing SEI training is laudable. Almost all of the district’s 380 teachers had completed the Category 1 training by the fall of 2010. Another 146 had undergone Category 2 training (Sheltered Content Instruction) and over 200 teachers had experienced Category 3 training (Administering the MELA-O). Over 100 had taken Category 4 training (Reading and Writing) and 40 teachers had completed all four Categories. However, even with so many teachers in the district having experienced one or more categories of SEI training, the review team observed limited use of sheltered immersion and sheltered content instruction during the 87 classroom observations. Bringing all teachers to proficiency in using instructional practices that benefit Fitchburg students is what is needed for all areas of professional development that should be a focus in the district.

Student Support

The district recognizes the need to provide students with academic supports and supplemental instructional programs to improve achievement. Mainstream students in pre-kindergarten through grade 4 and in the high school have a range of supports.

In the 2011 school year, more than 67 percent of Fitchburg's students were from low-income families, 21 percent of students needed special education services, and 12 percent were identified as English language learners (ELLs). Table 11 below shows that special education students and ELLs performed at a rate far below that of their peers statewide based on attaining proficiency on the 2011 MCAS in ELA and mathematics. Special education students in the district have not shown gains in ELA proficiency in the past three years and, in fact, have shown a decline in mathematics proficiency since 2009. ELLs have demonstrated some improvement in proficiency for both ELA and mathematics, but lag well behind their peers statewide in both subjects.

**Table 11: Comparison of Proficiency Rates for
Special Education and ELL Subgroups for
Fitchburg and State, All Grades for
ELA and Mathematics MCAS, 2009-2011**

	ELA			Mathematics		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
Fitchburg Special Education	12%	13%	12%	10%	11%	9%
State Special Education	28%	28%	30%	20%	21%	22%
Fitchburg ELLs	13%	11%	15%	12%	13%	16%
State ELLs	19%	22%	22%	22%	24%	26%

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

A comprehensive, accessible and rigorous system of supports is needed to respond to the academic and language needs of the student population in Fitchburg. The district has put a number of programs and services in place to support students.

Universal Kindergarten

The district ensures that its students have access to a kindergarten program by providing a full day universal kindergarten program at each elementary school, which began in 2006. Pre-K programs offered in the district are targeted for preschoolers with special needs including programs targeted for autism students and hard-of-hearing students.

There is an issue with consistency in the practices and programs throughout the district's schools. Although there is a range of academic supports for students in the district, not all students are benefiting as not all students are receiving an equitable amount of services and academic supports. While the district is responding to the needs of its students by developing programs and practices designed to give them additional academic support, the lack of a coherent and consistent plan for equitable delivery is impeding the effectiveness of the supports needed to improve student achievement, especially for students most in need of support.

Elementary Level, Kindergarten through Grade 4

District leaders and teachers described the system to monitor student progress and to identify students not performing at grade level in interviews. Screening at the elementary level begins in kindergarten when benchmark testing is initiated. Interviewees stated that students are monitored continuously with multiple assessments given in ELA and mathematics from kindergarten through grade 4. Also, teachers keep a data binder to record and track students' progress and to help identify at-risk students. Additionally, students not performing at grade level are identified through a team-based child study process.

Teachers and school leaders described the role of the child study team, known as the START team, at the elementary level. The START team is comprised of a Title I teacher, an intervention teacher, a counselor and a classroom teacher. Once the team identifies a student for study and gives consideration to academic and/or social/emotional needs, the team identifies appropriate interventions and often, ELA and mathematics coaches help teachers implement the interventions. When a student is referred to the START team because of behavioral issues, the team looks at the student's permanent record, interviews prior teachers, consults with the student's counselor and tries to determine whether or not the behavior is the result of instructional delivery and takes appropriate action. The team reviews the effectiveness of interventions after six to eight weeks. If no gains are made after six to eight weeks, the student is usually referred to the special education staff for further review.

In interviews, district and school leaders outlined a number of academic supports at the elementary level. In addition to Title I support in ELA and mathematics at all elementary schools, a Response to Intervention (RTI) model of instruction is implemented with Tier I being the classroom teacher and class and Tier II, the classroom teacher and the Title I teacher. Tier III involves the special education staff and the mathematics and ELA coaches who help teachers implement interventions. Additionally, the Advanced Academic Learning Initiative (AALI) coaches also work with elementary teachers on tiered instruction and differentiated instruction. AALI coaches also provide direct services and enrichment to students at advanced levels. Numerous programs for interventions are used at all four elementary schools, many funded by grants. Examples in ELA include *My Sidewalks*, *Read Naturally*, *Foundations* and *progress monitoring*. Special Education students receive additional time-on-learning using the Wilson Reading System, Orton-Gillingham, *Read 180* and *System 44*. Software programs such as *Education City* and *LEXIA* provide added support for non-proficient students.

High School Level, Grades 9 through 12

In interviews, district and school leaders described Fitchburg High School's procedure to identify at-risk students using an intervention team comprised of all personnel involved in the student's learning to develop and implement an appropriate intervention. For example, if a student has attendance problems, he or she would receive counseling and be assigned to the *Academic Success Center*. The center was originally developed for students on IEP's, but it is now accessible to all students requiring academic support and intervention. Interviewees stated that the Center, which has been in operation for two years, focused on student support, including,

but not limited to students on IEP's. The Center features advanced assistive technology, including *Kurzweil 3000* and *Dragon Naturally Speaking*. In addition the Center offers students learning accommodations, if required, and peer tutoring. It is considered a Tier II intervention at the high school. Interviewees stated the general support students are receiving has resulted in better MCAS scores and grades. District documents indicated that although the high school is not a Title I school, it is a "targeted" school and offers academic supports to its low-income students. The ALEKS, described earlier, is also used at the high school for mathematics intervention.

Supplemental Instruction

The district provides an array of supplemental instruction to support students academically during school, after school and in the summer. In interviews, district and school leaders cited a successful partnership with Mt. Wachusett Community College (MWCC) called Gear-UP. Gear-up targets grades 6 through 12 at four schools in the district: Memorial Middle School, Arthur M. Longsjø Middle School, Fitchburg High School, and Fitchburg Arts Academy. Four full-time staff from MWCC focus on college awareness and MCAS tutoring in mathematics and biology during the school day along with offering academic advising. In addition, the program provides after school enrichment programs including PLATO, an on-line interactive learning program that meets students' learning styles. Interviewees saw the Gear-UP program as very effective and successful since it consists of many elements for student support including creating pathways for post-secondary education. As noted above, the district also provides after school tutoring for grades 3-8 through Title I Supplemental Educational Services. School and district leaders also reported the success of the 21st Century After School Program offered in grades 2-12 in all schools. Students are given snacks and offered academic enrichment and support as well as arts-based activities. A summer program is also available for grades 2-8 including a four-week MCAS summer program for grade 8 students. In interviews, district and school leaders also cited the partnership McKay Elementary school has had with Fitchburg State University. Math majors from FSU tutor students at McKay twice-a-week. In addition, the university operates a teachers' center at McKay where FSU students can help meet student-teacher requirements.

Academic supports for middle school students, and for special education and English language learners at all levels, are not solidly in place in all of the district's schools during the school day.

The district's lowest growth for any grade in 2011—33 median SGP in ELA and 32 in math—occurred for both subjects at grade 5, Fitchburg students' first year in middle school. Although there are some after-school and summer enrichment opportunities available, middle school students do not have a sufficient level of academic support during the school day targeted to their needs. Special education students' growth also showed that they did not benefit from the level of academic support and inclusive practices that would support their academic success; they had the lowest median SGPs of any subgroup shown in Tables 5 and 6 above in ELA and mathematics (28 and 32 respectively). *Middle School Level, Grades 5 through 8*

Although the district's three middle schools share common support programs, there was a lack of consistency in practice at the middle school level creating inequities across all three middle

schools. In interviews, district and school leaders described the continuation of the child find teams, START, at the middle schools to identify at-risk students and provide them with appropriate interventions. Title I services were in place for mathematics and ELA at all middle schools. District leaders and teachers interviewed stated that ongoing benchmark assessments with multiple forms of assessments and teacher grades were used to identify students not performing at grade level. At the Longsjö Middle School, where there is an extended-day schedule, students receive 300 additional hours of learning time per year. This is not the case at the Fitchburg Arts Academy or at the Memorial Middle School. Interviewees stated that Longsjö has established a strong RTI model with an intervention team deciding needed support services and then implementing the services with appropriate personnel. Interviewees stated that student files are regularly perused by several people to ensure that each student has been given support and is progressing. In addition, in the fall of 2011, Longsjö Middle School launched an *Academic Success Center* (see below for a complete explanation) that is also considered a Tier II intervention. All middle schools are also using ALEKS, a web-based mathematics assessment program used for MCAS remedial intervention.

Inclusion is inconsistently implemented

While there are examples of full inclusion in the district, it is not consistently implemented across the district. Teachers and school leaders stated that the special education model in the district varies from school to school with the goal being that all schools are progressing toward a full inclusion model of integrating students as much as possible toward a regular education classroom. At Longsjö Middle School teachers have been trained in a co-teaching inclusion models, whereas Memorial Middle School uses a more traditional pull-out model for special education with professionals in the classroom assisting students. In interviews, school leaders and teachers reported that several high school special education teachers and classroom teachers are co-teaching using a full inclusion model.

Resources to Support English Language Learners are not Consistently Maximized

There is a strong need for support for English language learners (ELLs) in the district, where 12.4 percent of students are classified as ELLs and 31.6 percent of students come from homes where English is not the first language. Interviews with district leaders, teachers and a review of district documents provided a description of academic support to ELLs through instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL). To meet the mandate for ESL instruction, the district has recently added a curriculum integration specialist who collaborates with teams of mathematics teachers using ESL as a vehicle to teach math. ESL teachers pre-teach the content vocabulary in both Spanish and English the week before ELLs are presented with the lesson in their math classes. The goal is to improve learning outcomes for all ELLs as well as to improve their understanding and use of English. Interviewees stated this approach it is happening in all schools in the district. All schools with the exception of Fitchburg Alternative High School have ESL teachers. Beginners to intermediate ELLs at the middle school level attend Memorial Middle School where they receive intensive ESL instruction and remain until they test out of the

intermediate level. Interviewees stated that the goal for ELLs at the high school level is to integrate them into regular classroom instruction.

Interviewees and district documents report that 90 percent of teachers at the middle and high school levels were trained in Category 1 (Second Language Learning and Teaching) while a significant number of teachers at all levels were trained in all three other categories, as noted in a Finding above. However, again, in the 87 classrooms observed during the site visit, the review team did not see solid SEI practices in place.

The district recognizes the need to develop solid practices that will lead to increased student attendance and continue to improve graduation rates, especially for at-risk student populations.

In interviews, school leaders cited practices and programs used to monitor and report student attendance, but the practices to improve student attendance throughout the district are not realizing results. Table 12 below examines three-year trends of specific indicators related to students being present in school: attendance rates, average number of days absent, in-school suspension rate, out-of-school suspension rate, retention rate and graduation rate. In reviewing Table 12 it is noteworthy to point to the average number of days absent for high school students. It is on the rise and stood at 19 days absent per year in 2011 while the rate for the district as a whole was 12.2 days in 2011 and the rate for the state held steady at 9.3 days in 2009 and 2010, decreasing to 9.1 in 2011. Other data from ESE's Data Warehouse indicates that the proportion of Fitchburg High School students chronically absent⁹ during the last three years was 38.2 percent in 2009, 36.2 percent in 2010, and 38.6 percent in 2011 – a trend that did not show improvement (data not in a table).

Additional data from ESE's Data Warehouse indicated that chronic absenteeism at Fitchburg High School by grade level in 2011 reached 44.3 percent for grade 9 students, 37.5 percent for grade 10 students, 32.4 percent for grade 11 students, and 36.9 percent for grade 12 students (data not in a table). In other words, more than one-third of high school students were chronically absent in 2011, with the rate for freshmen approaching 45 percent. When this is combined with the rate of teacher absenteeism noted earlier, there is a meaningful lack of continuity in instruction, often for students most in need of support. Table 12 also shows that the high school's out-of-school suspension rate increased from 9.0 in 2010 to 15.2 in 2011. The in-school suspension rates also rose, from 30.8 percent in 2009 to 34.9 percent in 2010 and 35.1 percent in 2011. This data indicated that significant numbers of students in the district and particularly at the high school were not benefiting from instruction because they were either absent by choice or because they were suspended either in-school or out-of-school.

⁹ The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defines chronically absent as a student absent more than 10 percent of their days in membership.

**Table 12: Comparison of Three-Year Trends for Selected Indicators
Fitchburg High School, Fitchburg Public Schools, State, 2009-2011**

Indicators	Fitchburg High School			Fitchburg Public Schools			State		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
Attendance Rate	88.9	88.8	88.4	92.5	92.4	92.4	94.6	94.6	94.7
Average # of Days Absent	17.7	18.2	19.0	12.0	12.1	12.2	9.3	9.3	9.1
In-School Suspension Rate	30.8	34.9	35.1	10.7	14.4	15.0	3.3	3.7	3.3
Out-of-School Suspension Rate	13.9	9.0	15.2	9.9	6.4	11.1	5.3	6.0	5.6
Retention Rate	6.3	10.6	8.9	3.0	3.9	3.8	2.3	2.1	2.1
Graduation Rate	79.6	79.6	81.5	69.4*	68.7*	71.5*	81.5	82.1	83.4
*Includes Fitchburg Alternative High School For more information on attendance, suspension, retention, and graduation rates see http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx#indicators under Indicators and Graduation Rate. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website									

In Table 13, we notice that the four-year graduation rate in district for all students showed a downward trend from 72.0 percent in 2008 to 68.7 percent in 2010, before rising again to 71.5 percent in 2011. The state graduation rate rose incrementally each year, from 81.2 in 2008 to 83.4 percent in 2011. The graduation rates of the district subgroups shown fluctuated between 2008 and 2011, but, encouragingly, in all cases were substantially higher in 2011 than in any of the previous three years. The four-year dropout rates for each of the selected district subgroups improved every year from 2008 to 2011, as did the dropout rate for all students. In 2011 the dropout rate for the district's ELL, low-income, and Hispanic subgroups dropped below the rate for their state counterparts.

**Table 13: Fitchburg Public Schools Four-Year Graduation and Dropout Rates
Compared to State
2008-2011**

	2008		2009		2010		2011	
	District	State	District	State	District	State	District	State
Four-Year Graduation Rate								
All Students	72.0	81.2	69.4	81.5	68.7	82.1	71.5	83.4
ELL	60.0	55.8	54.5	57.5	61.1	57.8	70.5	56.2
Special Ed.	49.3	64.1	54.9	64.9	48.4	64.0	63.3	65.6
Low-Income	63.4	64.8	64.4	66.9	61.7	67.9	69.9	69.8
Hispanic	55.4	58.3	58.7	59.7	57.0	61.2	63.4	61.9
Four-Year Dropout Rate								
All Students	18.6	9.9	17.4	9.3	14.8	8.2	12.3	7.2
ELL	30.6	25.4	28.6	22.9	22.2	21.5	18.2	19.0
Special Ed.	31.3	17.0	23.2	16.1	18.3	14.7	15.6	13.2
Low-Income	26.3	19.7	22.3	17.3	18.9	15.3	12.6	13.5
Hispanic	28.1	24.6	25.8	22.6	20.4	20.2	17.6	18.3

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Student Attendance at Fitchburg High School

District leaders, school leaders and teachers recognized the urgency of addressing student attendance and other practices related to educational continuity and student participation in school. In interviews, the superintendent, school leaders and teachers all reported that attendance was a serious problem, especially at the high school. Interviewees stated that the largest cohort of retained students is in grades 9 and 10. In 2011, data from ESE's Data Warehouse indicated that the retention rate for grade 9 students at Fitchburg High was 19.2 percent with 22.1 days being the average number of days absent for a grade 9 student. In interviews it was reported that the district does not have a full time attendance officer since the elimination of the Attendance Supervisor in the 2007 school year, as noted earlier. Instead, those responsibilities have shifted to the Athletic Director.

Listed as a goal in the 2011-2012 District Improvement Plan is the creation of a transition program for students moving from grade 8 to grade 9. The program will focus on high risk students using a variety of indicators such as attendance, grades, MCAS results and disciplinary records to identify candidates. Further, the goal stated the plan will provide incoming high risk students with the "necessary structure and supports to ensure improved attendance and academic success beginning on day 1 of the school year." In September of 2011 the newly appointed principal established a school-wide advisory program matching students with staff at a 15:1

student-teacher ratio. Additionally, 33 faculty members selected two to three chronically absent students to mentor. Their goal is to build relationships with the students, focusing on attendance and academic progress. The high school is now tracking attendance on a daily basis with the goal of reaching 92 percent. The high school has applied for a *MassGrad Implementation Grant* for the 2013 school year to establish a freshman academy targeting 72 rising grade 8 students from the district's three middle schools who are most at-risk of dropping out. The program, which is yet to be titled, proposes to use indicators to assess a student's risk of dropping out including: age, low MCAS scores, low grade 8 GPA, history of being held back, poor attendance and tardy records as well as number of suspensions. A credit recovery program, offered through PLATO (online learning) is scheduled to begin at the high school at the start of the second semester. Students will have the opportunity to make-up credits lost because of excessive absences.

Fitchburg Alternative High School

The district has established an alternative high school program where at-risk and struggling students are able to complete their high school education in a nontraditional school setting. There is no cost for full time students. Interviews with parents, review team visits to the alternative school and a review of district documents confirm that the Alternative High School offers students who are potential dropouts an appropriate and supportive setting to complete their education. The mission of the school as stated in its School Improvement Plan is "to have every student graduate and be capable of post-secondary training and college without remediation" while placing a strong emphasis on building positive relationships between students and teachers. As a participant in school choice, Fitchburg Alternative High School accepts students from outside the district and graduated 130 students in June 2011 from Fitchburg and 23 from sending school districts.

In summary, the district's policies and practices promoting student attendance have not yielded results. The district, particularly its high school, has had a high rate of absenteeism and chronic absenteeism, contributing to a four-year graduation rate significantly below the state rate and a four-year dropout rate for all students higher than the state's, with four-year graduation and dropout rates for some subgroups that until 2011 were frequently (graduation rates) or consistently (dropout rates) below those of their state counterparts. The district and its school leaders recognize the urgency of dealing with these problems and, with new leadership, have begun to take appropriate steps to address them at the high school. By not maintaining strong attendance in school, students have fewer opportunities to learn and succeed.

The district is addressing the social, emotional and health needs of its students by providing a comprehensive range of supports that address a variety of student needs.

With 68 percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, the district recognizes the need to provide for the social, emotional and health needs of its students. In interviews, school committee members characterized the supports offered students in the district as "wrap around services" tailored to reach all students. Interviewees stated that there are "large issues of poverty in the district with all of its hidden parts" and that the health and success of students is

“foremost” in their minds. To that end, the district has responded by creating coordinated support services to insure that student needs are met in a comprehensive way.

In interviews district and school leaders reported that students throughout the district participate in a universal breakfast program. In one estimate by an interviewee, over 400 students (of nearly 1150) at the high school arrive at 6:45 each morning to participate in the breakfast program. District leaders, school leaders and teachers reported the Responsive Classroom approach is used in all elementary schools while Developmental Design is used at the middle school level. Both programs are designed to set a positive, respectful classroom climate and to minimize problems in behavior. In fact, review team members noted positive classroom behaviors during classroom observations. A violence prevention program called Second Step is also in place in the district. Interviewees and district documents outlined the numerous services and supports promoting good mental health support services that are available to students at all levels. Examples of the many services that support the physical and emotional well being for students include, but are not limited to, the following: Clinical interventionists provide counseling support at all levels while a bi-lingual psychiatrist is available for monthly consultations. The Let Us Know program (LUK) offers school-based therapy to students while onsite counseling services are also available at all school levels. Trauma counseling offered through Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is available for students age ten to 15 in the district. On-site health services are available to high school students at the School-Based Health Center which is staffed by a physician assistant and nursing staff.

Interviewees noted that the district addresses the needs of its “almost 300 transient and homeless students” and ensures that they have timely and equitable access to quality programs and supports. In interviews, teachers and school leaders stated that there is a McKinney Vento liaison in each of the schools. The liaison tracks students to ensure they receive all support needed including, but not limited to Title I/SES services, the Gear-UP program, the 21st Century After School Program, the Student Success Centers and the Fitchburg High School Health Center. A Marketplace (food and jacket pantry) located at both the high school and Longsjo Middle School serves the needs of McKinney Vento students and their families.

Interviews with school leaders, with parents in a focus group and a review of district documents showed a variety of ways the district and its schools reach out to parents. The Title I parent liaison newsletter advertises elementary and middle school sponsored events in both English and Spanish. Among the activities interviewees cited were a back-to-school barbecue held annually at Memorial Middle School. McKay Elementary School is working on an outreach initiative by offering parenting classes to parents. The district communicates directly with homes through *ConnectED*, both in Spanish and English. Beginning in September 2011, the district introduced the EdLine website which enables parents to communicate with teachers and monitor their student’s progress online.

The district has developed partnerships with agencies, organizations and area colleges to support students’ academic progress and their social and emotional well being. In addition to the 21st Century After School Program and the Gear-UP Program mentioned earlier, other additional

supports were cited in interviews such as mentoring opportunities for middle school students on IEP's and for adolescent girls focused on good decision making. Other groups that focus on decision making are facilitated by community social service agencies. The Police Athletic League has an after school sports program for students in grades K through 8 while the district also offers a free after school sports program for middle school students.

By addressing the social, emotional and health needs of its students in a comprehensive manner, the district is working to remove the barriers that impede student achievement. Through enlisting community partnerships and providing comprehensive services to its students, the district is effectively responding to the needs of its students.

Financial and Asset Management

The city funds the district at just about the level of required net school spending. Decreasing enrollments, increasing out-of-district tuitions, and increasing expenses put great pressure on the district to allocate its funds, people, and time with a clear focus on improving instruction.

It was reported to review team members, by principals and other district personnel that the district begins its initial budget deliberations once the city provides the district with an idea of the amount of funds it will receive from the city. Recently, this number has annually been slightly above or slightly below the required Net School Spending (NSS) level required of the city. Interviewees reported that the superintendent tried to maintain as comprehensive a program as possible within the limited resources available to the district.

Initial budgetary meetings begin with attempts to establish the districts' priorities in a collaborative manner, all while working within the predetermined funding level determined by the city. The superintendent indicates that it is the strategy of the Administrative Council (ADCO) to begin setting budget priorities by coming to consensus over what is perceived as working in the district and what is not. He further indicated that the budget is built based upon areas of priority, tied to the goals of the DIP and SIPs and not by individual schools. Once the budget proposal within the NSS level is established by the superintendent, it is forwarded to the finance sub-committee of the school committee. In interviews with school committee members, it was indicated that there is not enough money to fund all needs and that many personnel cuts have had to be made. As a consequence, they acknowledged that programs often disappear when funding disappears. In FY2011 and to date in FY2012, the district received federal, state, and private grants totaling \$9,770,579 in FY2011 and \$9,135,685 in FY2012. For example, grant and choice funds largely support positions that were key to the district's improvement strategy such as the ELA and mathematics coaches.

The districts' actual Net School Spending level has been slightly above or slightly below the level of its foundation budget for the past few years. Since the 2010 school year, the school committee's budgets have shown limited increases: from \$43,300,000 in FY2010 to \$43,531,547 in FY2011 to \$43,800,000 in FY2012. Interviewees reported that this has resulted in reductions

valued at from \$1 million to \$2 million each year, largely by eliminating positions and laying off staff, to offset increases such as salary steps and benefits that increase the cost of present-level services. The district's transportation costs have increased annually to reflect increasing fuel costs. In addition, much needed replacement of classroom furniture has been deferred due to limited resources. This school year, the district is engaged in collective bargaining with the teachers association following an agreement that stipulated three years of a zero increase in the teachers' salary scale. The final negotiated salary rate will affect the cost of personnel next year, possibly requiring position reductions to offset salary increases.

Administrators reported an attempt to economize in the 2011 school year by closing the Longsjo Middle School that failed because of a reported lack of support from some municipal leaders. The plan would have relocated Longsjo students to an expanded Crocker School facility while reassigning Crocker Elementary students to other district elementary schools. At the time of the review, this matter was still being pursued through the district's capital plan. The new version will outline a short-term goal for a municipal share of \$400,000 for the Crocker School MSBA design phase (prior to an 80 percent Massachusetts School Building Authority [MSBA] reimbursement) and a long-term goal of \$6 million for the Crocker School MSBA expansion/construction phase.

Although the closing of a building was rejected, the school committee approved the elimination of administrative positions, requiring the responsibilities attached to those positions to be reassigned to the remaining cadre of administrators, especially for positions at the central office level. As mentioned in the first Leadership and Governance finding earlier in this report, the elimination of positions at the middle-management level and subsequent reassignment and addition of those responsibilities to remaining administrators resulted in more fragmented leadership capacity. A particular concern was insufficient oversight over the development of curriculum, instruction and assessment such as department heads with released time or subject-level curriculum leaders for ELA, mathematics, science and social studies. Oversight of the horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum, in lesson plan design, in the evaluation of curriculum and instructional programs and support services, and basically, in the promotion of the educational mission of the district has been dispersed across multiple positions at the central office and individual school levels. Without close management of curriculum the district has an incomplete curriculum in some areas, no documented curriculum for other subjects, and there are widely varying instructional approaches in use across the district. Whether by reorganizing leadership responsibilities or adding key leadership positions, the administration and school committee need to articulate a strategy for strengthening instructional leadership.

Administrators reported that the elimination of the Human Resources Director (now reinstated and in place this year) led to inconsistent oversight of personnel evaluations, which were not completed effectively and in a timely manner. A district administrator opined in an interview that, if the likelihood of improvement in student success is to be enhanced, it will be necessary to have in place a scaffold of staffing supports coupled with higher expectations for principals.

Other financial tensions surface from what one administrator described as “a school full of Fitchburg children attending school out of the district.” School choice costs of approximately \$2 million in FY2012 for children choosing to attend school in other communities exceeded school choice revenues of approximately \$900,000 for other children coming into the district from outside the district.

In interviews, several school committee members expressed interest in having a better understanding of leaders’ views of the true programmatic and budgetary needs for the district rather than simply acting on a proposed budget that addresses programmatic spending at the Net School Spending level. The district’s annual budget-building practice is based upon the assumption of municipal financial support at the required Net School Spending level. In the face of anticipated cost increases, this will make it especially necessary that the administration present clear priorities focused on key strategic objectives. Without the superintendent and school committee engaging in earnest discussions to clearly identify the allocation of financial and human resources needed to move the district forward, and collaborating with the city to maximize the resources available, the district will continue to experience dislocations and fragmentary improvement efforts. During these insecure economic times, a comprehensive strategy and carefully aligned budgeting are needed to provide the opportunities to learn as students and as future citizens that the young people of Fitchburg deserve.

The district has a sound set of financial processes and operating procedures in place and sustains a good working relationship with the city’s financial officials.

In interviews and from district documents, the review team learned that the district has a sound set of financial processes and operating procedures in place. These are consistently followed throughout the district. During the course of the site visit, reviews were conducted on the district’s payroll warrants, accounts payable warrants, expenditure reports by vendors, budget reports to the school committee and trial balance sheets. They were all found to reflect sound business practices. There are no checking accounts in the district, rather revolving accounts are created and audited by the City on a regular basis. The payroll and billing warrant processes and purchase order system procedures were described to review team members during the interview process.

The district’s financial affairs are tracked using the MUNIS Software System in place in the city. District warrants are processed by the purchasing agent, signed by the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance and sent to the school committee for signature by at least three committee members and the mayor. The warrants then are forwarded to the full committee for approval and transmission to city officials for processing. Responsibilities for the district’s payroll and purchasing department were reported in interviews as including payment of personnel, monitoring of account expenditures-to-date, substitute lines, out-of-district tuitions, and decisions regarding whether funds were to be taken from circuit breaker funds or not.

The district operates exclusively on a purchase order system for both budgetary and grants expenditures. Purchase orders were reported in interviews as originating at the school site level. They are signed by the principal, forwarded to the Assistant Superintendent for Business and

Finance, who signs off and forwards them to the district's purchasing agent who ensures that all required information is contained, expenditures are charged to appropriate accounts, and that funding is available. Invoices are created once the order is sent out and matched to the original order. Throughout the process, school site secretaries are required to check to ensure that funds are available for the intended purchase. Once the purchase order leaves the district, it is forwarded to the City Treasurer who does a second check to ensure that all items have been appropriately charged to accounts. The processing of grant expenditures follows the same purchase order procedure, but flows through the office of the Grants Bookkeeper, a clerical role, prior to being forwarded to the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance for signature. It was indicated to review team members that on December 16, 2011 that electronic production of purchase orders would go on-line districtwide. Interviewees indicated that this new process intended to make the system more efficient. Each month the school committee receives a copy of the up-to-date district budget and each school receives a copy of their individual budget lines as well.

Grants are reviewed by the school committee three times for: intent to submit the grant; approval of accepting an award; and approval to disburse funds. Cash receipts from the athletic and food services departments are processed through direct deposit with the City Treasurer and do not pass through the district's business office. Reconciliation of those accounts is completed by the City Auditor's Office.

Payroll practices are similarly consistent with sound business practices. School personnel attendance is entered into the district's X 2 Software System by clerical personnel in the schools. The regular staff payroll is generated at the school site, signed by the principal, and forwarded to the business office to ensure a match with substitute payroll information. All substitutes have individual paper time sheets that are signed by the principal and forwarded to the payroll office for payment.

All bidding is conducted by the City Purchasing Agent who holds MCPPO certification. The Purchasing Agent is appointed by the Mayor and not the school committee. The process includes securing of quotes and forwarding same to the City Purchasing Agent for all purchases under \$10,000. Purchases above \$10,000 are initiated in the Office of the City Purchasing Agent. Outside audits are conducted regularly by the firm of Melanson and Heath, who, at the point of the review was in process of completing the current audit.

In interviews with both district and city financial personnel, it was reported to review team members that a good working relationship exists between the parties, characterized by collaboration and mutual trust. City officials indicated that communications between the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance and members of his support staff were often conducted via email and/or through phone calls. City officials also indicated similar good relationships with members of the district's maintenance and food service departments.

A review of district documents indicates that the district has in place a Capital Improvement Needs Plan which the school committee maintains. The committee meets regularly with a Building Needs Sub-Committee. Administrators annually update the school building needs plan,

an annual inventory of capital improvements and repairs, a re-assessment of handicapped accessibility, and a determination of a priority list of projects to be completed is also produced. Furthermore, the district has and maintains a formal preventative maintenance program and a long-term capital plan. The Capital Plan FY11 and Beyond contains both short and long term projects. In the short-term plan, there is a proposed \$400,000 (City share prior to 80 percent MSBA reimbursement) for the MSBA design phase to upgrade the Crocker School, a plan for boiler replacements in five schools and masonry repairs to the Crocker School at a cost of \$320,000 to the City and use of the \$164,500 balance in a \$700,000 bond for a total of \$484,500. The long-term plan calls for \$6 million for the Crocker School MSBA construction phase. City financial officials also note that with all financial actions being integrated in the MUNIS System, it is easy to view up-to-date balances in all accounts. Further, status reports are generated on the last Friday of each month by city officials and shared with the superintendent and assistant superintendent for business. City officials also report that a school-related city expenses (Schedule 19) written agreement dated June 7, 2006 is in place and is being followed. This was corroborated by the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance as being a fair process and one in which the city auditor compiles a packet detailing what the charges are for the city. The 2006 agreement modifies previous agreements in that it removes previous city reimbursements for the library, city trucks and other items from inappropriately being charged as indirect costs to the district. In process, the city auditor, city treasurer, and assistant superintendent for business meet and review the Schedule 19 packet for the purposes of clarification and mutual agreement.

By virtue of the good relationships that exist between district and City financial officials, communication, operations, and the district's financial matters generally are perceived by both parties as being appropriate and transparent. The district can build on this foundation by making its improvement planning equally focused and transparent and soliciting appropriate support from the city.

Recommendations

The school committee and the superintendent should strongly advocate for a middle-management level of curriculum, instruction, and assessment leaders to address the deficiencies in this area brought about by the reduction of administrator positions and the reassignment of responsibilities.

Over the last seven years the district has eliminated twelve central office administrator positions; this has made an impact on the delivery and monitoring of programs and services to students in the school system. The administrator who has the primary responsibility for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the district is the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. However, because of the elimination of several districtwide positions, including the positions of the Title I director and the director of grants, the responsibilities for multiple educational roles were reassigned to the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. These include oversight of Title I, grants, and professional development and the responsibility to supervise and evaluate all sixteen instructional coaches. As a result, these added responsibilities diminished the focused time to provide for the development, supervision, and evaluation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the district.

During interviews with review team members, leadership personnel mentioned that a middle-management level of leaders is one of the greatest needs in the district. Examples of items missing in the area of curriculum and instruction in the district that could be provided by middle-management leaders are the development and refinement of curriculum documents, the horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum, a collaborative districtwide effort to define the qualities of excellence in teaching, monitoring with coaches the implementation of excellence in teaching, a lesson design model, evaluation of curriculum and instructional services, and promoting and supporting all the educational objectives of the district. Furthermore, the establishment of middle-level curriculum, instruction, and assessment positions could also benefit the district by supporting administrators and teachers with information about up-to-date developments in the various subject areas, communication and coordination of curriculum and assessments, additional facilitation of the use and understanding of test results to improve student achievement, and additional sharing of research-based techniques and strategies to enhance teaching and learning.

Therefore, it is essential for the school committee and the superintendent to become strong advocates for the creation of appropriate middle-level manager positions for curriculum, instruction, and assessment to oversee and coordinate the duties, responsibilities and activities in this area with the ultimate goal of helping improve student achievement throughout the district.

The superintendent and school committee are urged to present a clear case for funding that is sufficient to meet the diverse identified needs of the student population and ample enough to provide and sustain the appropriate leadership, coordination, and oversight of its curricular and instructional programs and services to enhance the likelihood of improved student success.

Recent budgets had limited increases, from \$43,300,000 in fiscal year 2010, to \$43,531,547 in fiscal year 2011, to \$43,800,000 in fiscal year 2012. These small increases would not support the continuation of present level services, and necessitated position eliminations at the middle-management level. These eliminations resulted in a absence of appropriate curriculum oversight and instructional supervision and management districtwide. Furthermore, the subsequent reassignment of the vast majority of responsibilities formerly attached to the eliminated positions to the remaining cadre of administrators created an untenable set of performance responsibilities and expectations and diminished administrative capacity to maintain an adequate and coordinated supervisory approach to ensure the linking of knowledge and practice across the district. This elimination of middle-management positions has negatively impacted the district in the development of curriculum documents, horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum, lesson plan design, evaluation of curriculum and instruction, and the promotion of the educational objectives of the district. A further example of this diminished capacity can be found in the Human Resource and Professional Development findings. In a review of 47 randomly selected teacher folders, fewer than half were found to be timely.

To prevent the potential for even further reductions and continued erosion of district programs and services, it will be necessary to implement an appropriate and coordinated supervisory and management approach districtwide for curriculum and instruction, the primary functions of the school system. To support those efforts, it is urged that the superintendent and school committee initially engage in discussions to clearly identify the districts' true financial and human resources necessary to move the district forward. Particular attention should be paid to the restoration or re-creation of middle-management positions related to providing appropriate oversight and management of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the district beyond the district level. Based upon those identified needs, the superintendent and school committee should develop a plan as to how to obtain the necessary financial support to meet those needs. The acquisition of sufficient annual municipal funding to meet clearly identified needs will better enable the district to meet students' diverse needs and enhance the likelihood of improved student performance for all.

The superintendent should establish an appropriate balance between autonomy and consistency as it relates to expectations, decision-making, and the implementation of district systems to ensure effective leadership throughout the district.

In an interview with review team members, the superintendent indicated that he believed in autonomy and gave each of his administrators the authority to handle all the duties and responsibilities assigned to them. As a result, in some areas/systems there is consistency; yet, in other areas, there is inconsistency. For example, consistency occurs among the principals in the

recruitment, screening, and hiring of personnel, the preparation of the school improvement plans using the same template as the district improvement plan, their involvement in the development of the annual school and district budgets, the expectation for principals to monitor classroom instruction and to write staff evaluations, and the management of school facilities.

However, inconsistencies that were evident to review team members during the onsite visit include the definition of what constitutes excellence in curriculum and instruction, expectations for students in the classroom and in each school, the review of teacher lesson plans, the design and implementation of high-quality instruction, the variances in curriculum documents and fidelity of its implementation, the absence of clarity on the part of leaders about their role in the use of data to improve student achievement, the involvement of instructional coaches in each school and how they interact with principals, the design and implementation of the walkthrough protocol, and the evaluation of staff as required by Massachusetts General Law.

Although the superintendent supports site-based management and autonomy, there are certain aspects of the school system, such as those cited in the previous paragraph that do not lend themselves to individual interpretation and implementation, especially in a school system such as Fitchburg's where so many students are struggling. These aspects require consistency in the district with leadership emanating from the superintendent. The superintendent should clearly define expectations, narrow the range of decision making without hindering innovation, and expect to and hold all his administrators accountable for certain designated "non-negotiable" aspects of the educational institution.

Principals should be led to develop School Improvement Plans that are focused, written with SMART goals, and user-friendly for teachers. They should also provide periodic updates to stakeholders on progress made toward attainment of SIP goals.

Although principals developed 2011–2012 School Improvement Plans for their schools, interviewees commented that the documents are lengthy, neither totally focused nor user friendly. The average number of pages in the 2011–2012 SIPs is forty-six, with one SIP containing twenty-five goals. Also, a review of the SIPs showed that some goals had several sections or statements, each having a different focus. Principals should write SMART (specific, m measurable, attainable, relevant/results oriented, and timely) goals for inclusion in their SIPs. In addition, consideration should be given to removing section(s) of the template such as the student learning objectives and including them in appropriate curriculum documents.

Some principals said that they reported progress to their staffs about SIP goal attainment while others said that they did not. Similarly, teachers in some schools mentioned receiving periodic updates from their principals on progress toward achieving the SIP goals while teachers in other schools said that no status reports were given by their principals. It is incumbent upon the principals to periodically share with stakeholder groups such as teachers, parents, and residents of the community, progress they have made toward attaining each of the SIP goals.

During an interview, the superintendent stated that he did not specifically write about progress made toward attainment of SIP goals in his evaluation of the principals. This was confirmed by principals' comments and from a review of principals' evaluations prepared by the

superintendent and made available to the review team. Since the SIP is typically an influential, yearly, guiding document for a school, it is essential for the superintendent to hold principals accountable for attaining the goals in the SIP as part of their evaluations. Furthermore, the superintendent should expect that since the SIP goals are aligned with the DIP goals, they have an impact on whether or not the DIP goals are achieved.

The district should establish a procedure and a cycle for curriculum development, completion, and renewal with timelines for completion of each aspect of the work to ensure that the curriculum is aligned to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and updated as needed.

The documentation of the district's curriculum is incomplete in all core subject areas and some core subject areas are undocumented at certain grade spans. The district's curriculum is most fully documented in mathematics and least fully documented in science and social studies. The kindergarten through grade 8 mathematics curriculum consists of the district's benchmark planners. The taught English language arts (ELA) curriculum in kindergarten through grade 4 is undocumented. The grades 5 through 8 ELA curriculum consists of benchmark planners with the same components as the mathematics benchmark planners. The science and social studies curricula for kindergarten through grade 8 are largely undocumented. High school mathematics, English, science, and social studies course syllabi vary considerably in format and comprehensiveness. The district does not have assigned personnel and a process for curriculum development and renewal.

The review team encourages the district to develop a procedure for structuring and phasing curriculum development and renewal, beginning with formation of a district curriculum steering committee. This committee might be composed of the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, a principal from each level, two elementary and two middle school teacher representatives, and four grades 9 through 12 department facilitators.

The steering committee could establish a continuous, multiyear cycle for curriculum development and renewal with timelines for completion. For example, it might decide to implement a four-year repeating cycle consisting of an analysis year, followed by two design and development years and an implementation year.

There are many curriculum development models. In most, the steering committee appoints a subcommittee for each discipline consisting of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers. In the analysis year, the subcommittee reviews student performance data and other data to determine curricular strengths and weaknesses, and reports its findings to the steering committee. In the first design year, the subcommittee revises the curriculum to correct deficiencies, circulating preliminary drafts to the steering committee and faculty for comment.

In the second design year, the subcommittee finalizes the revisions for the approval of the steering committee. In the implementation year, teachers are introduced to the approved curriculum, and receive professional development on the new instructional and assessment practices as the steering committee begins to assess the effectiveness of the curricular changes. The district might adopt this or a similar model for curriculum development and renewal. The

process would be enhanced by the addition of elementary, middle, and high school level curriculum coordinators.

No matter what model the district chooses for curriculum development and renewal, the professional development committee should be linked to the curriculum steering committee to ensure that the district's curricular and instructional needs are given highest priority in its mandatory professional development program.

Under current conditions, the district's curriculum and data analysis functions are not formally linked. Fitchburg might consider forming a district data team composed of three principals and three instructional coaches, one from each level, and a data proficient teacher representative from each school. This committee could analyze relevant data for the curriculum steering committee to inform curriculum renewal.

With an established and continuous process for curriculum development and renewal, the district can ensure that curricular content is current, research based, and aligned with national and state standards. Closer integration of the district's curricular, assessment, and professional development functions will result in more systematic identification of student, curricular, and instructional strengths and needs as well as relevant topics for professional development. Integration will also help to increase the effectiveness of the district's limited resources for improving educational results.

The district should establish common lesson plan components and a systematic process for lesson plan review.

Lesson design varies widely in the district, consistent with the belief that decisions should be school based. In interviews with the review team, principals described different models of lesson design and the review team found little consistency in the quality of instruction in observed classrooms throughout the district. Most principals told the review team that they did not review teachers' lesson plans regularly.

The district should establish common lesson plan components. These components might include an objective, key vocabulary, an activator, a sequence of whole-class instruction followed by guided practice, small group and independent work, a summarizer, and an assessment. Teachers would select the components most appropriate to the lesson objective. Principals should make reviewing and commenting on teachers' lesson plans a high priority to improve the quality and consistency of instruction. Lesson plans are essential for continuity of instruction, given the rate of teacher absenteeism in the district.

The establishment of common, research-based components will ensure that teachers design lessons with high expectations for student learning that consist of clear learning goals closely aligned with the standards and unit outcomes, provisions for diverse learning needs, and measurement by a variety of on-the-spot and summative assessments. A consistent format will ensure educational equity for all students and provide a basis for determining students' strengths and needs and the effectiveness of instruction.

To ensure a higher level of success for the coaching model, the district should strengthen key components of the learning environment upon which coaching depends and ensure that these components are consistently implemented across schools.

District leaders have designed a thoughtful coaching model that has heightened awareness of the importance of collecting, analyzing, and using data to make decisions. Where coaches are in place and collaborate closely with principals, there has been some success in monitoring student progress and defining students' needs for support and intervention. However, there are several important but missing elements related to coaching and the coaches' primary role of improving teaching and learning. One example is the absence of a documented and interrelated system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Currently, teachers rely on state and some common core standards as expressed by benchmark planners and syllabi, when they exist, as well as on textbooks or other materials. The assessment system is also largely commercially based. No districtwide documents align and link the key elements of the learning and teaching system.

In addition, there is an absence of clarity about the role of coaches and how principals and coaches can collaborate and interact to benefit students. Also, teachers' capacity to analyze and use data and student work to improve student achievement and instructional practice is uneven across schools. Furthermore, the benefits of the coaching model are not uniformly experienced across the district because not all schools have coaches in literacy, mathematics, and to support the work of talented students.

Also, the coaches cannot take the place of districtwide leaders for curriculum and instruction. Their work is inherently focused at the school and classroom level.

To strengthen the coaching model, the district should:

1. Ensure that coaches are deployed in all schools or ensure that schools without coaches have an alternative format to provide for the analysis and discussion of teaching and learning that coaching provides. Given the district's relatively flat and declining achievement on MCAS tests, its low median SGPs, and the uneven quality of instruction observed in classrooms, all schools can benefit from the opportunities that the district's coaching model promises. This will require important decisions about allocating both fiscal and human resources.
2. Define and communicate more clearly the expectations about how principals and coaches will collaborate and share a productive partnership for improvement at their schools.
3. Collaboratively develop and communicate shared qualities and expectations for excellence in teaching and ensure that coaches and principals reinforce and integrate these qualities in their work with teachers to improve instruction.
4. Involve principals in the process of the hiring or assignment of coaches for their schools.
5. Ensure additional, ongoing professional development for teachers to improve their skill in analyzing and using assessment data.

6. Include more detail about assessment and assessment strategies in more completely developed and documented benchmark planners or other curriculum documents for core academic subjects.

The district should develop a supervision model that all principals and supervisors can more effectively use to inform and improve instruction. The district should also fully commit to implementing the new evaluation system in ways that support educator development. All administrators should be trained to implement the new supervision and evaluation system in an aligned and effective manner.

Because there are no districtwide supervision models, each school principal implements a process that he/she believes is best for his/her school. As a result, many different systems of supervising teachers are in use and in some cases, because of an absence of time or personnel to adequately do the job, very little supervision of teachers is done in this important area of administrative responsibility.

Central office and school leaders should collaborate to create and implement a supervision model that can be used effectively by all appropriate administrators. If needed, adjustments to the duties and schedules of supervising administrators should be made so that they will have adequate time to effectively administer the new supervisory process. The impact of such a model would inform and improve instruction at all grade levels and help to improve student achievement.

In addition, the district should commit to fully implementing the new ESE evaluation system in the fall of 2012. Training the administrators who will be using the new system is vital to the success and effective use of the new instrument. The adoption of this new system has the potential to greatly improve the timeliness and effectiveness of the evaluation process throughout the district and also to help improve instruction at all levels.

Collaborative efforts should be made by all relevant stakeholders to increase teacher attendance.

Behavior and attitudes that concern teacher absenteeism have had a negative impact on teacher attendance and on the continuity of instruction at all grade levels in the district. As is enumerated in the second Human Resources and Professional Development finding in this report, teacher absenteeism throughout the district is too high. Having teachers absent or out-of-classrooms an average of 16.5 days a year, as was the case during the 2011 school year, should be unacceptable and all parties should want to solve this problem.

Throughout the interview process, it was clear that many stakeholders were aware of the severity of the situation and everyone, including many from the teacher ranks, realized that something should be done to change the behavior and culture that exists concerning taking days off. Efforts should start as soon as possible to bring teacher leaders and association representatives together with administrators to address this important topic. Continuity of instruction is critically important to the well-being of all students in the district and cannot be ensured unless teachers are present in classrooms.

The district, particularly at the high school level, needs to address the high rate of student absenteeism in part by involving parents in the development of consistent practices and programs that support improved attendance.

The district, school leaders, and teachers interviewed recognized the urgency of addressing student attendance and other practices related to educational continuity and student participation in the district. Interviewees reported that attendance at the high school was a particularly serious problem. The district's attendance rate is 92.4 percent while the high school's rate of attendance is 88.8 percent. Both are lower than the state attendance rate of 94.6 percent. Interviewees stated that the biggest cohort of absentees is retained students in grades 9 and 10. In 2011 the retention rate for grade 9 at Fitchburg High School was 19.2 percent with 66 students retained and with 22.1 days being the average number of days absent for grade 9 students.

Interviews with school leaders and a review of district documents indicated that the district and the high school have begun to address the high rate of absenteeism. Listed as a goal in the 2012 District's Improvement Plan is the creation of a grade 8 and 9 transition program to focus on high-risk students using a variety of indicators such as attendance, grades, MCAS tests results, and record of disciplinary issues. In addition, new strategies were developed this year to address attendance issues at the high school. A new schoolwide advisory program matching students and teachers includes a special focus on chronically absent students. The high school has applied for a MassGrad Implementation Grant for the coming school year to establish a freshman academy targeting at-risk students. A credit recovery program, offered through PLATO (online learning), is scheduled to begin at the high school at the start of the second semester.

With these factors being considered, the review team strongly recommends that the district continue to develop and fully implement its goal in the current District Improvement Plan of addressing the high rate of absenteeism at the high school. Further, the review team recommends that parents be involved in the development of practices and programs targeted to improve attendance for its high-risk students at the high school and throughout the district. It is hoped that the MassGrad Implementation Grant will be awarded. However, with or without the grant, the district must use its own resources to dramatically improve the rate of student attendance, thus ensuring that the district's students have an opportunity to learn and achieve at higher levels.

Professional development in the district should be more centralized and more focused on improving teachers' instructional skills.

As is noted in the finding above professional development in the district does not have district leadership even though responsibility is partially vested in that level. Much of what happens in professional development in the district, outside of that targeted to meeting compliance issues, is generated at the school level. There are many good examples of school-based professional development opportunities; however, without district oversight and input into the discussion and planning process, there is an unevenness that exists that seemed to frustrate a number of teachers in the district.

A new mechanism to lead and oversee professional development in the district, however, does not have to be created. The district already has a comprehensive Professional Development Plan that includes both a vision and mission statement and the means, through a professional development steering committee, to create a sequence of professional development opportunities and to monitor and evaluate them. To be more effective in planning and implementing a strong professional development program, the district only needs to implement its current plan more effectively and consistently combine central office leadership and school-level leadership.

The district should give particular attention to the delivery of support to its students receiving special education services and its English language learners as it continues to refine its academic supports and supplemental programs for all students to ensure that these programs are consistently and rigorously delivered throughout all the schools in the district.

The district is developing support procedures and practices to improve student learning for a diverse student population. In addition the district is providing students with a range of supplemental supports that address their learning needs. However, not all the practices are solidly in place at every level and in every school in the district. This is of particular concern in the areas of special education and in the delivery of support to English language learners.

The goal in the district is to arrive at a full-inclusion model of special education. While examples of full inclusion exist in the district, full implementation is not present in all schools. In interviews it was reported that the district's special education model varies from school to school with the goal that all schools are "progressing" toward a full-inclusion model. Some schools in the district are still using the more traditional pull-out model. The district should ensure that this goal of full inclusion is met effectively and in a timely way.

There is a need to determine the effectiveness of support for English language learners (ELLs) in the district where a significant percentage of students are classified as ELLs and an even higher number come from homes where English is not the first language. Although the district has had a significant number of teachers participate in category training, the review team did not discern solid sheltered English instruction in most of the 87 classrooms observed during the site visit. More pervasive and effective supervisory practices are needed to ensure that instructional practices promoting successful English language acquisition are fully in place in all district schools.

With these factors being considered, the review team recommends that the district continue to further develop and refine its academic supports and supplemental programs while giving particular attention to the delivery of its academic supports for students receiving special education services and for ELLs, ensuring that they are consistently and rigorously delivered throughout all schools in the district. With rigorous and high-quality academic supports, the district will promote high student achievement.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Fitchburg Public Schools was conducted from November 28 – December 1, 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

James McAuliffe, Ed. D., Curriculum and Instruction

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

William Wassel, Human Resources and Professional Development

Suzanne Kelly, Student Support

William Contreras, Ed. D., Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Fitchburg financial personnel: Assistant Superintendent for Business, Grants Bookkeeper, Business Officer Manager/Payroll, Purchasing and SPED Grants, City Auditor, City Treasurer
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Fitchburg School Committee: mayor/chairman and five of six committee members
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Fitchburg Education Association: President, two vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer, chair and co-chair of paraprofessionals and ten association members
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Fitchburg Public Schools central office administration: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Grants, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Human Resources Director, Technology, Assessment/STEM Director, Administrator of Pupil and Special Education Services
- The review team visited the following schools in the Fitchburg Public Schools: Crocker Elementary School (PK-4), McKay Campus School (PK-4), Reingold Elementary School (K-4), South Street Elementary School (PK-4), Fitchburg Arts Academy (5-8), Longsjø Middle School (5-8), Memorial Middle School (5-8), Fitchburg Alternative Education Program (9-12), and Fitchburg High School (9-12).
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, assistant principals, teachers, coaches, directors, social worker/interventionist, nurse leader, parent outreach liaison. The team interviewed 23 elementary teachers, 8 middle school teachers, and 25 high school teachers.
 - The review team conducted 87 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the nine schools visited.
- 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

- 2005 District Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA)
- Collective bargaining agreement with teachers, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010 and 2011
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - Organization Chart
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School Improvement Plans
 - FHS SIP Highlights and Accomplishments, 2010-2011
 - FHS Professional Learning Circles document
 - FHS Transition Activities
 - Samples of School Self-Evaluations
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative and power point presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - School Committee Budget Updates/Power Point Presentations, 2010, 2009
 - Selected Power Point Presentations to School Committee and Staff, e.g., Growth Models, AYP, enrollment Analysis
 - Strategic Planning Advisory Committee Power Point Presentation
 - K-12 ELA, mathematics benchmark planners
 - Elementary Schools Literacy Model
 - Examples of faculty meeting agendas, school newsletters, school meeting notes
 - NEASC Two-Year Progress Report, June 2011 and Update 12/1/11
 - FHS and FAHS programs of studies
 - Examples of High School syllabi

- Examples of High School rubrics
- 2011 List of Colleges accepting members of FHS class of 2011
- Various attendance and enrollment data/comparisons
- Attendance Mentor Protocol
- Matrix of assessments administered in the district
- Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
- Copies of Principals' MCAS presentations to school committee, 2011
- MCAS Reports to school committee by central office, 2010
- Data reports used by coaches and teachers (Galileo, ALEKS, AIMSweb, MCAS, Progress Monitoring, etc.)
- Coaches' Focus Group Agenda Packets
- Benchmark Assessment Packets
- Performance Task Packet
- Sample Student Improvement Plans
- Grant Application for 21st Century Grant
- Mass Graduation Implementation Grant
- Summer Program Evaluation
- Title I Reports
- Evaluation of corrective Action Plan
- Collaborative Evaluation Checklist
- Descriptions of student support programs
- Student and Family Handbooks
- Faculty Handbook
- McKay School Innovation School Prospectus
- Entry Plan 2011-2012 for McKay School's new principal
- McKay School Progress Report 2010-2011
- Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
- Bay State Reading Initiative Summer Professional Development
- Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs October 2011 (IDEA, University of Oregon)
- Teacher certification and qualification information

- Teacher planning time schedules
- Coaches Reports
- Reference materials/charts used by coaches and teachers
- Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators, coaches and instructional staff
- Emails with Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Human Resources Director regarding coaching positions/job descriptions
- Records for SEI Category Training for Teachers, 2007-2010
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Tables of Staff Reductions since 2005
- Fifty-one randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Payroll warrant
- Accounts payable warrant
- Expenditure report by vendor
- Trial balance sheet
- School Budgets, FY09, FY10, FY11, FY12

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Fitchburg Public Schools, conducted from November 28 – December 1, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
November 28 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents and personnel files; interview with teachers' association	November 29 Interviews with district staff and principals; interview with city personnel; interview with mayor/ chairman of school committee; review of documents and personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with members of parent councils	November 30 School visits (Fitchburg Arts Academy, Longsjo Middle School, Memorial Middle School, McKay Elementary School); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee members interviews	December 1 School visits (Fitchburg High School, South Street Elementary, Crocker Elementary, Reingold Elementary); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meeting at Crocker; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals

Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements

Leadership and Governance

1. Since 2005, the significant decrease in positions and reordering of responsibilities for district and middle level administrators and support staff combined with both the elimination and turnover in administrative positions at the school building level have led to a constantly shifting organizational structure and changes in administrative personnel in the district.
2. School Improvement Plans were not sufficiently user-friendly, used to inform staff about progress made towards attaining school goals, or used to hold principals accountable in the evaluation process.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Fitchburg's curriculum documents are incomplete in all core subject areas. Some core subject areas are undocumented at certain grade spans. The district does not have an established process for curriculum development and renewal.
4. Classroom observations demonstrated an overall positive climate conducive to teaching and learning at the elementary and middle schools. Instructional practices observed were not strong enough to support Fitchburg students in attaining high levels of proficiency. Instructional objectives were often unclear, expectations for student performance were not high, and a range of teaching techniques to support student proficiency was not widespread.
5. The instructional model varies from level to level and from school to school at the same level, creating inconsistencies in the quality of instruction. The district does not have a common format for lesson design and a systematic process for lesson plan review.
6. The instructional coaching model has promise as a key improvement strategy but the impact of coaches is hindered by an inadequate number of coaches and an inadequate foundation of district-wide expectations for practice that coaches could reinforce in their work.

Assessment

7. The district has improved its use of assessment data to use in teaching students what they need. Assessments and assessment data are used more comprehensively at the elementary and middle schools and less so at the high school.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. Teachers did not generally receive sufficient feedback through administrator supervision or evaluation to support their continued growth as education professionals. Less than half of professional teacher evaluations reviewed were completed within two years as required by law, and some evaluations were not completed even in the four years allowed under the district's collective bargaining agreement.
9. Teacher absenteeism throughout the district is very high and interrupts the continuity of classroom instruction for Fitchburg students.
10. School-level professional development programs, which constitute the majority of professional development in the district, are not coordinated by the district to ensure alignment to district priorities.
11. The district has made concerted districtwide effort to have professional development in the four categories of Sheltered English Immersion.

Student Support

12. The district recognizes the need to provide students with academic supports and supplemental instructional programs to improve achievement. Mainstream students in pre-kindergarten through grade 4 and in the high school have a range of supports.
13. Academic supports for middle school students, and for special education and English language learners at all levels, are not solidly in place in all of the district's schools during the school day.
14. The district recognizes the need to develop solid practices that will lead to increased student attendance and continue to improve graduation rates, especially for at-risk student populations.
15. The district is addressing the social, emotional and health needs of its students by providing a comprehensive range of supports that address a variety of student needs.

Finance

16. The city funds the district at just about the level of required net school spending. Decreasing enrollments, increasing out-of-district tuitions, and increasing expenses put great pressure on the district to allocate its funds, people, and time with a clear focus on improving instruction.
17. The district has a sound set of financial processes and operating procedures in place and sustains a good working relationship with the city's financial officials.

Recommendation Statements

1. The school committee and the superintendent should strongly advocate for a middle-management level of curriculum, instruction, and assessment leaders to address the deficiencies in this area brought about by the reduction of administrator positions and the reassignment of responsibilities.
2. The superintendent and school committee are urged to present a clear case for funding that is sufficient to meet the diverse identified needs of the student population and ample enough to provide and sustain the appropriate leadership, coordination, and oversight of its curricular and instructional programs and services to enhance the likelihood of improved student success.
3. The superintendent should establish an appropriate balance between autonomy and consistency as it relates to expectations, decision-making, and the implementation of district systems to ensure effective leadership throughout the district.
4. Principals should be led to develop School Improvement Plans that are focused, written with SMART goals, and user-friendly for teachers. They should also provide periodic updates to stakeholders on progress made toward attainment of SIP goals.
5. The district should establish a procedure and a cycle for curriculum development, completion, and renewal with timelines for completion of each aspect of the work to ensure that the curriculum is aligned to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and updated as needed.
6. The district should establish common lesson plan components and a systematic process for lesson plan review.
7. To ensure a higher level of success for the coaching model, the district should strengthen key components of the learning environment upon which coaching depends and ensure that these components are consistently implemented across schools.
8. The district should develop a supervision model that all principals and supervisors can more effectively use to inform and improve instruction. The district should also fully commit to implementing the new evaluation system in ways that support educator development. All administrators should be trained to implement the new supervision and evaluation system in an aligned and effective manner.
9. Collaborative efforts should be made by all relevant stakeholders to increase teacher attendance.
10. The district, particularly at the high school level, needs to address the high rate of student absenteeism in part by involving parents in the development of consistent practices and programs that support improved attendance.
11. Professional development in the district should be more centralized and more focused on improving teachers' instructional skills.

12. The district should give particular attention to the delivery of support to its students receiving special education services and its English language learners as it continues to refine its academic supports and supplemental programs for all students to ensure that these programs are consistently and rigorously delivered throughout all the schools in the district.