

District Review Report

Gardner Public Schools



Review conducted January 11–14, 2016

Center for District and School Accountability

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

Strengths

The school committee selected a new superintendent for the 2014-2015 school year to replace a superintendent who retired after leading the district since 2005. The superintendent has brought a sense of urgency to improving student achievement in the district. In the last 18 months, she has laid a foundation for supporting educators and improving student achievement by reorganizing school grades so all students in the same grade are in the same school, by collaborating with central office administrators and school principals in the development of new district and school planning documents with aligned goals and focus areas, by increasing collaboration time for teachers, and by requiring consistent administration of assessments across grade levels. Teachers and administrators at all levels have dedicated time during the school day or before or after school to engage in professional discourse about instructional best practices.

Also, principals and coaches are sharing information about instructional tools and resources used across the district such as Readers/Writers Workshop, and the Understanding by Design (UBD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) models. The district has a well-developed ELA and mathematics curriculum in grades 1-4 that can serve as an exemplar for curriculum development in other grades. And several steps have been taken that could lead to an organized assessment system that will focus on using assessment data to improve student achievement.

In addition, multiple venues for professional development (PD) are in place. Opportunities to enhance teacher competency and improve student achievement are available through district and school-based PD days, job-embedded coaching, common planning time, summer PD, train-the-trainer offerings, and staff and department meetings. The district recognizes that the social-emotional well-being of students is important to learning. As a result, the district is allocating resources for social-emotional programming and has established child and student support teams in schools across the district. To leverage limited resources, the district has developed partnerships and received support from a number of local organizations.

Challenges and Areas of Growth

Although planning documents reflect aligned goals and focus areas, the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) do not clearly identify key activities, person(s) responsible for implementing and completing activities, timelines, and benchmarks. In addition, improvement plans do not identify specific resources to achieve district goals and educator evaluation and professional development goals are not aligned with goals in these plans.

The district does not have an organized curriculum review process with timelines that clearly identify who is responsible at the district level and in schools for periodically reviewing and updating curricula. As a result, alignment of curricula to the frameworks is in various stages of completion and---with the exception of ELA and mathematics curricula in grades 1-4---essential components of a comprehensive

curriculum are not consistently reflected in most of the curriculum review work completed to date. The district does not have a common instructional model. In observed classes, the implementation of instructional best practices was inconsistent across grade levels (see the Instructional Inventory in Appendix C). Also, the district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system; many evaluations reviewed by the team did not include feedback that would enhance the professional growth of educators. The district is developing a multi-tiered system of support but staff is struggling to implement the co-teaching and full-inclusion instructional models. In observed classrooms, the review team found limited evidence of instruction that meets the individual needs of students.

In 8 of the last 10 years, district funding has been below required net school spending, but within the 5 percent allowance. This funding at required levels and increases in nondiscretionary expenses have challenged the district to meet the educational needs of all students. Concomitantly, most schools need repair or renovation and no plan is in place to correct these conditions.

The district participates in the school choice program and has experienced a substantial shift in recent years---with more students choosing to leave the district and fewer students choosing to enroll in the district. This trend is of substantial concern to district administrators and city officials.

Recommendations

- The district should develop actionable improvement plans that include strategic and measureable goals, key activities, person(s) responsible, resources, timelines, benchmarks, and measurable outcomes. The DIP and SIPs should be strategically aligned and the professional development plan and the educator evaluation process should reflect district goals.
- The district should continue the development of the ELA, mathematics, science, and ELL curricula using the work completed at the elementary level as an exemplar. At the same time, the district should develop a process for regular curriculum review and revisions to ensure consistent use and delivery of the curricula.
- Using the district's current tools as sources of best practices, a representative group of leaders and teachers should define the characteristics of high-quality instruction, create an instructional model, and develop a plan to share instructional expectations with staff. The district should ensure that educators have the information and support necessary to meet the district's expectations for instruction.
- The district should develop the ability of educators to use assessment data to inform instruction, ongoing curriculum revision, program evaluation, and the educator evaluation system. The district should provide ongoing PD for evaluators to improve the quality of evaluative feedback provided to educators and to calibrate expectations among evaluators.
- District leaders should continue efforts to develop and implement a multi-tiered system of support.

- The district should look at what reallocations might be necessary to fund initiatives included in the DIP and SIPs. District administrators and school committee members should undertake a formal study to determine why an increasing number of students are choosing to attend school in neighboring districts, analyze results, and formulate recommendations for change. District leaders should work with the city to develop a funded plan to repair, renovate, or replace school buildings to make them more conducive to teaching and learning.

Gardner Public Schools District Review Overview

Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws, district reviews support local school districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness of system wide functions, with reference to the six district standards used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE): leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources and professional development, student support, and financial and asset management. Reviews identify systems and practices that may be impeding improvement as well as those most likely to be contributing to positive results.

Districts reviewed in the 2015-2016 school year include districts classified into Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4 of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance. Review reports may be used by ESE and the district to establish priority for assistance and make resource allocation decisions.

Methodology

Reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards above. A district review team consisting of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards reviews documentation, data, and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to individual schools. The team conducts interviews and focus group sessions with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' association representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classroom instructional practice. Subsequent to the onsite review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE.

Site Visit

The site visit to the Gardner school district was conducted from January 11-14, 2016. The site visit included approximately 57 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 50 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, high school students, and teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted two focus groups with four elementary-school teachers, and one middle-school teacher. No high-school teachers attended the scheduled focus group for high-school teachers.

A list of review team members, information about review activities, and the site visit schedule are in Appendix A, and Appendix B provides information about enrollment, student performance, and expenditures. The team observed classroom instructional practice in 63 classrooms in 5 schools. The team collected data using an instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is contained in Appendix C.

District Profile

Gardner has a mayor-council form of government and the chair of the school committee is the mayor. The seven members of the school committee meet monthly September through June. Two new members took office in January 2016 replacing members who declined to run for re-election. A third new member will be selected at a joint meeting of the school committee and city council to replace a member of the committee who has been elected to the city council. One of the new members is a former long-time member returning to the committee.

The current superintendent has been in the position since July 1, 2014. The district leadership team includes the superintendent, the chief academic officer, the director of pupil personnel services, the business manager, and the ELL director/literacy coordinator/grants coordinator. Central office positions have been mostly stable in number over the past three years. The district has five principals leading five schools. There are seven other school administrators, including assistant and vice principals. In 2014-2015, there were 178 teachers in the district.

In the 2015–2016 school year, 2,419 students were enrolled in the district’s 5 schools¹:

**Table 1: Gardner Public Schools
Schools, Type, Grades Served, and Enrollment*, 2015–2016**

School Name	School Type	Grades Served	Enrollment
Waterford Street School	ES	Pre-K-1	440
Elm Street School	ES	2-4	607
Gardner Middle School	MS	5-7	536
Gardner High School	HS	8-12	759
Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology	HS	9-12	77
Totals	5 schools	Pre-K-12	2,419
*As of October 1, 2015			

Between 2011 and 2016 overall student enrollment decreased by 5.6 percent. Enrollment figures by race/ethnicity and high needs populations (i.e., students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged)

¹ Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, the district began limiting the use of the Helen Mae Sauter Elementary School to special purposes such as some after-school programs. The students in grades 1-4 of the Sauter school were assigned to the district’s Elm Street and Waterford Street elementary schools. Also, the district reconfigured the elementary schools so that all students in the same grade level attend the same school.

students, and English language learners (ELLs) and former ELLs) as compared with the state are provided in Tables B1a and B1b in Appendix B.

Total in-district per-pupil expenditures were lower than the median in-district per pupil expenditures for 46 K-12 districts of similar size (2,000-2,999 students) in fiscal year 2014: \$11,991 as compared with \$12,747. Actual net school spending has been equal to what is required by the Chapter 70 state education aid program, as shown in Table B6 in Appendix B.

Student Performance

District and Subgroup Results

Gardner is a Level 3 district because the Elm Street School, Gardner Middle, and Gardner High are in Level 3 for being among the lowest performing 20 percent of schools in their grade span statewide.

- Elm Street School is a focus school because its students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, and high needs students are among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups.
- Gardner Middle is a focus school because its students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, and high needs students are among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups.

**Table 2: Gardner Public Schools
District and School PPI, Percentile, and Level 2012–2015**

School	Group	Annual PPI				Cumulative PPI	School Percentile	Accountability Level
		2012	2013	2014	2015			
ES: Waterford Street	All	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	High Needs	--	--	--	--	--		
HS: Gardner Academy	All	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	High Needs	--	--	--	--	--		
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	All	75	38	38	25	36	--	2
	High Needs	75	38	50	50	50		
ES: Elm Street School	All	25	65	55	30	44	6	3
	High Needs	20	70	40	40	44		
MS: Gardner Middle	All	15	25	30	35	30	6	3
	High Needs	20	35	30	30	30		
HS: Gardner High	All	89	79	21	86	65	16	3
	High Needs	96	89	29	82	69		
District	All	25	50	25	21	29	--	3
	High Needs	21	43	18	21	25		

Gardner's ELA CPI in 2015 was lower than the state's CPI for all students by 10.9 CPI points and was lower by 3.7 to 15.5 points for high needs students and for each subgroup that makes up the high needs population.

**Table 3: Gardner Public Schools
ELA CPI by Subgroup 2012–2015**

Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2015
All students	District	81.5	81.3	78.6	75.9	-5.6	-10.9
	State	86.7	86.8	86.7	86.8	0.1	
High Needs	District	74.5	74.2	71.2	67.4	-7.1	-8.9
	State	76.5	76.8	77.1	76.3	-0.2	
Economically Disadvantaged	District	--	--	--	69.2	--	-8.4
	State	--	--	--	77.6	--	
ELL and former ELL students	District	65.7	62.9	62.1	65.2	-0.5	-3.7
	State	66.2	67.4	67.8	68.9	2.7	
Students with disabilities	District	57.5	57.8	51.4	51.9	-5.6	-15.5

Gardner’s math CPI in 2015 was lower than the state’s CPI for all students by 13.0 CPI points and was lower by 7.1 to 16.1 points for high needs students and for each subgroup that makes up the high needs population.

**Table 4: Gardner Public Schools
Math CPI by Subgroup 2012–2015**

Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2015
All students	District	70.1	70.9	68.1	67.7	-2.4	-13.0
	State	79.9	80.8	80.3	80.7	0.8	
High Needs	District	61.6	63.2	60.1	57.6	-4.0	-10.3
	State	67.0	68.6	68.4	67.9	0.9	
Economically Disadvantaged	District	--	--	--	59.3	--	-9.9
	State	--	--	--	69.2	--	
ELL and former ELL students	District	56.9	52.6	55.1	57.4	0.5	-7.1
	State	61.6	63.9	63.8	64.5	2.9	
Students with disabilities	District	44.9	45.5	42.0	41.2	-3.7	-16.1
	State	56.9	57.4	57.1	57.3	0.4	

Gardner’s science CPI in 2015 was lower than the state’s CPI for all students by 13.5 points and was lower by 7.8 to 12.1 points for high needs students and for each subgroup that makes up the high needs population with reportable data.

**Table 5: Gardner Public Schools
Science CPI by Subgroup 2012–2015**

Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2015
All students	District	70.4	70.9	72.7	65.9	-4.5	-13.5
	State	78.6	79.0	79.6	79.4	0.8	
High Needs	District	61.1	63.1	65.3	58.2	-2.9	-8.1
	State	65.0	66.4	67.3	66.3	1.3	
Economically Disadvantaged	District	--	--	--	59.3	--	-7.8
	State	--	--	--	67.1	--	
ELL and former ELL students	District	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	51.4	54.0	54.0	53.9	2.5	
Students with disabilities	District	45.8	50.0	48.3	48.1	2.3	-12.1
	State	58.7	59.8	60.1	60.2	1.5	

The district did not reach its 2015 Composite Performance Index (CPI) targets in ELA, math, and science for all students, high needs students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

**Table 6: Gardner Public Schools
2015 CPI and Targets by Subgroup**

Group	ELA			Math			Science		
	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating
All students	75.9	89.5	Declined	67.7	82.3	No Change	65.9	83.1	Declined
High Needs	67.4	84.4	Declined	57.6	76.4	No Change	58.2	76.0	Declined
Economically Disadvantaged ²	69.2	--	--	59.3	--	--	59.3	--	--
ELLs	65.2	78.5	Improved Below Target	57.4	73.8	Improved Below Target	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	51.9	73.6	Improved Below Target	41.2	66.1	No Change	48.1	66.7	No Change

Students' growth in ELA was low compared to their academic peers state wide for all students, high needs students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Students' growth in math was moderate to high for all students and English language learners and low for high needs students and students with disabilities.

**Table 7: Gardner Public Schools
2015 Median ELA and Math SGP by Subgroup**

Group	Median ELA SGP			Median Math SGP		
	District	State	Growth Level	District	State	Growth Level
All students	32.0	50.0	Low	42.0	50.0	Moderate
High Needs	30.0	47.0	Low	38.0	46.0	Low
Econ. Disadv.	--	--	--	--	--	--
ELLs	29.0	53.0	Low	40.5	51.0	High
SWD	26.5	43.0	Low	30.5	43.0	Low

Gardner's out of school suspension rate in 2015 was higher than the state rates for all students, high needs students, and economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

² The economically disadvantaged subgroup does not have a CPI target and rating because 2015 is the first year that a CPI was calculated for the economically disadvantaged group and will serve as a baseline for future years CPI targets.

**Table 8: Gardner Public Schools
Out of School and In School Suspensions by Subgroup 2013–2015**

Group	Type of Suspension	2013	2014	2015	State 2015
High Needs	OSS	9.0%	7.5%	6.2%	4.8%
	ISS	5.8%	4.0%	2.0%	2.7%
Economically disadvantaged*	OSS	9.6%	7.7%	6.7%	5.4%
	ISS	5.9%	4.3%	2.2%	2.9%
Students with disabilities	OSS	12.4%	8.5%	6.4%	6.1%
	ISS	4.7%	3.7%	2.5%	3.4%
ELLs	OSS	8.3%	7.6%	5.6%	3.8%
	ISS	5.3%	3.0%	2.4%	1.8%
All Students	OSS	7.2%	5.9%	5.1%	2.9%
	ISS	5.6%	3.2%	1.8%	1.8%

*Low income students' suspensions used for 2013 and 2014

Between 2012 and 2015, Gardner's four-year cohort graduation rate improved by 7.7 percentage points for all students, by 17.8 and 17.4 percentage point for high needs students and low income students, respectively, and by 41.3 percentage points for students with disabilities.

**Table 9: Gardner Public Schools
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates 2012-2015**

Group	Number Included (2015)	Cohort Year Ending				Change 2012-2015		Change 2014-2015		State (2015)
		2012	2013	2014	2015	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
High needs	109	60.2%	56.2%	62.7%	78.0%	17.8	29.6%	15.3	24.4%	78.5%
Low income	99	60.4%	57.4%	66.7%	77.8%	17.4	28.8%	11.1	16.6%	78.2%
SWD	32	40.0%	35.5%	41.0%	81.3%	41.3	103.3%	40.3	98.3%	69.9%
ELLs	--	45.5%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	64.0%
All students	175	74.6%	71.6%	75.1%	82.3%	7.7	10.3%	7.2	9.6%	87.3%

Gardner's five-year cohort graduation rate in 2014 was 12.2 percentage points lower than the state rate for all students and between 10.7 and 29.9 percentage points lower than the state rate for high needs students, low income students, and students with disabilities.

**Table 10: Gardner Public Schools
Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates 2011-2014**

Group	Number Included (2014)	Cohort Year Ending				Change 2011-2014		Change 2013-2014		State (2014)
		2011	2012	2013	2014	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
High needs	102	63.6%	69.5%	62.9%	64.7%	1.1	1.7%	1.8	2.9%	80.3%
Low income	90	64.6%	68.9%	62.8%	68.9%	4.3	6.7%	6.1	9.7%	79.6%
SWD	39	45.0%	51.1%	45.2%	43.6%	-1.4	-3.1%	-1.6	-3.5%	73.5%
ELLs	--	71.4%	54.5%	--	--	--	--	--	--	69.8%
All students	173	78.8%	79.9%	76.4%	76.3%	-2.5	-3.2%	-0.1	-0.1%	88.5%

Gardner's dropout rates for all students, high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners were higher than the state rates.

**Table 11: Gardner Public Schools
Dropout Rates by Subgroup 2012–2015³**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	State 2015
High Needs	6.5%	7.6%	7.6%	3.9%	3.4%
Econ. Disad.	6.7%	7.7%	6.5%	3.5%	3.3%
SWD	11.9%	11.7%	9.9%	7.3%	3.5%
ELLs	7.1%	8.3%	8.3%	6.7%	5.7%
All students	5.0%	4.7%	5.4%	3.2%	1.9%

Grade and School Results

Gardner's ELA CPI in 2015 was below the state CPI in the district as a whole and in each tested grade and between 2012 and 2015 declined in the district as a whole and in each test grade except for the 10th grade.

- ELA CPI was below than the state CPI in 2015 by 14.7 and 14.3 points in the 5th and 7th grades, respectively, by 12.6 points in the 3rd grade, by 8.9 to 9.6 points in the 4th, 6th and 8th grades, and by 1.1 point in the 10th grade.
 - Between 2012 and 2015 math CPI decreased by 12.5 points in the 3rd grade, by 6.9 and 9.5 points in the 5th and 7th grade, respectively, by 3.0 and 4.2 points in the 4th and 8th grades, respectively, and by 1.2 point in the 6th grade.
- ELA CPI in the 10th grade improved from 93.1 in 2012 to 95.6 in 2015, but remained 1.1 CPI points below the state's 10th grade CPI of 96.7.

³ Low income students' dropout rate used for economically disadvantaged students' 2012, 2013, and 2014 dropout rates.

**Table 12: Gardner Public Schools
ELA CPI by Grade 2012–2015**

Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	209	82.4	75.9	78.7	69.9	82.5	-12.5	-8.8
4	170	71.8	72.0	65.7	68.8	77.8	-3.0	3.1
5	196	79.2	80.5	79.0	72.3	87.0	-6.9	-6.7
6	176	78.2	79.3	75.1	77.0	86.6	-1.2	1.9
7	212	81.6	86.0	79.5	72.1	86.4	-9.5	-7.4
8	173	87.3	81.6	81.5	83.1	92.0	-4.2	1.6
10	147	93.1	96.3	93.2	95.6	96.7	2.5	2.4
All	1,290	81.5	81.3	78.6	75.9	86.8	-5.6	-2.7

The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in ELA was below the state rate in each tested grade at the Sauter, Elm Street, Gardner Middle, Gardner Academy, and Gardner High.

**Table 13: Gardner Public Schools
ELA Meeting or Exceeding Expectation by School and Grade 2014-2015⁴**

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	28%	--	--	--	--	--	--	28%
ES: Elm Street School	34%	43%	38%	--	--	--	--	38%
MS: Gardner Middle	--	--	--	41%	32%	49%	--	40%
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	--	--	--	--	71%	71%
HS: Gardner High	--	--	--	--	--	--	89%	89%
District Total	30%	41%	38%	40%	32%	49%	87%	--
State	54%	57%	63%	60%	61%	64%	91%	--

Between 2012 and 2015, ELA CPI declined by 20.7 points at Sauter and by 5.0 and 5.4 points at Elm Street and Gardner Middle, respectively.

- ELA CPI for high needs students declined by 21.0 points at Sauter, by 6.5 points at Elm Street, and by 8.6 points Gardner Middle.
- ELA CPI for students with disabilities declined by 3.6 points at Elm Street and 6.3 points at Gardner Middle.

⁴ 10th grade results are MCAS and refer to the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced.

**Table 14: Gardner Public Schools
ELA CPI by School and Subgroup 2012-2015**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend
ESS: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	85.2	76.8	78.4	64.5	-20.7
High Needs	80.0	70.4	73.4	59.0	-21.0
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	61.8	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Elm Street School	76.7	76.2	74.2	71.7	-5.0
High Needs	70.9	68.9	67.1	64.4	-6.5
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	66.2	--
ELL and former ELL	--	60.8	--	59.0	-1.8
Students with disabilities	53.4	53.6	48.9	49.8	-3.6
MS: Gardner Middle	82.8	82.5	78.6	77.4	-5.4
High Needs	75.0	75.1	70.2	66.4	-8.6
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	67.8	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	66.7	68.3	--
Students with disabilities	55.1	55.2	47.8	48.8	-6.3
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	91.2	91.1	--
High Needs	--	--	88.5	90.9	--
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	90.0	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
HS: Gardner High	95.7	97.3	94.1	95.9	0.2
High Needs	90.0	94.4	90.2	92.9	2.9
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	94.8	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	75.0	85.9	73.1	79.2	4.2

Gardner's math CPI was below than the state CPI for the district as a whole by 13.0 points and was below the state CPI for each tested grade by 7.5 to 17.3 points.

- Math CPI was below than the state CPI in 2015 by 16.2 to 17.3 points in the 5th, 7th, and 8th grades, and by 9.4 to 11.0 points in the 3rd, 4th, and 10th grades.
 - Between 2012 and 2015, math CPI decreased by 9.1 points in the 7th grade, by 4.0 and 3.3 points in the 8th and 4th grades, respectively, and 2.1 and 0.8 points in the 10th and 5th grades, respectively.
- Between 2012 and 2015, math CPI improved by 2.6 points in the 3rd grade and by 2.1 points in the 6th grade.

**Table 15: Gardner Public Schools
Math CPI by Grade 2012-2015**

Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	209	71.7	73.5	72.8	74.3	85.3	2.6	1.5
4	169	70.3	74.5	67.2	67.0	77.1	-3.3	-0.2
5	195	66.7	71.3	72.6	65.9	83.2	-0.8	-6.7
6	175	71.6	70.1	69.5	73.7	81.2	2.1	4.2
7	210	64.8	65.2	57.2	55.7	72.5	-9.1	-1.5
8	172	65.9	56.8	58.8	61.9	78.1	-4.0	3.1
10	146	82.6	87.4	80.5	80.5	89.9	-2.1	0.0
All	1,283	70.1	70.9	68.1	67.7	80.7	-2.4	-0.4

The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in math was below the state rate in each tested grade at Sauter, Elm Street, Gardner Middle, Gardner Academy, and Gardner High.

**Table 16: Gardner Public Schools
Math Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by School and Grade 2014-2015⁵**

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	30%	--	--	--	--	--	--	30%
ES: Elm Street School	37%	33%	25%	--	--	--	--	31%
MS: Gardner Middle	--	--	--	36%	21%	28%	--	28%
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	--	--	--	--	29%	29%
HS: Gardner High	--	--	--	--	--	--	66%	66%
District Total	34%	32%	25%	36%	20%	28%	59%	--
State	55%	48%	55%	53%	45%	53%	79%	--

Between 2012 and 2015, math CPI declined for the school as a whole by 4.0 to 5.7 points at Sauter, Gardner Middle, and Gardner High, and by 0.2 at Elm Street.

- Math CPI for high needs students declined by 5.4 to 7.5 points at Sauter, Gardner Middle, and Gardner High, and by 1.8 points at Elm Street.
- Math CPI for students with disabilities declined by 18.8 points at Gardner high and by 4.4 and 3.7 points at Elm Street and Gardner Middle, respectively.

⁵ 10th grade results are MCAS and refer to the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced.

**Table 17: Gardner Public Schools
Math CPI by School and Subgroup 2012-2015**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend
ESS: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	73.9	76.1	69.3	69.5	-4.4
High Needs	70.0	71.4	62.2	63.3	-6.7
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	67.1	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Elm Street School	69.6	72.9	71.7	69.4	-0.2
High Needs	62.4	65.9	64.2	60.6	-1.8
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	62.9	--
ELL and former ELL	--	56.7	--	60.3	3.6
Students with disabilities	49.3	49.0	43.6	44.9	-4.4
MS: Gardner Middle	67.5	64.9	62.4	63.5	-4.0
High Needs	58.4	56.0	53.9	50.9	-7.5
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	51.6	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	50.8	49.2	--
Students with disabilities	39.6	36.7	38.1	35.9	-3.7
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	73.4	60.7	--
High Needs	--	--	69.2	56.8	--
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	52.5	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
HS: Gardner High	90.4	90.4	83.7	84.7	-5.7
High Needs	79.0	81.7	75.8	73.6	-5.4
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	77.1	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	64.6	70.6	41.7	45.8	-18.8

Gardner's science CPI was below the state CPI for the district as a whole by 13.5 points and was below the state CPI for each tested grade by 6.6 to 16.5 points. Between 2012 and 2015 science CPI declined throughout the district.

- 5th grade science CPI declined 3.9 points from 69.2 in 2012 to 65.3 in 2015, 12.9 points below the state CPI of 78.2.
- 8th grade science CPI declined 6.8 points from 62.7 points in 2012 to 55.9 points in 2015, 16.5 points below the state CPI of 72.4.
- 10th grade science CPI declined 2.0 points from 83.6 in 2012 to 81.6 in 2015, 6.6 points below the state CPI of 88.2.

**Table 18: Gardner Public Schools
Science CPI by Grade 2012-2015**

Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
5	198	69.2	69.5	74.3	65.3	78.2	-3.9	-9
8	177	62.7	60.4	65.7	55.9	72.4	-6.8	-9.8
10	122	83.6	86.3	79.8	81.6	88.2	-2.0	1.8
All	497	70.4	70.9	72.7	65.9	79.4	-4.5	-6.8

Science proficiency rates were below the state rate in each tested grade at Elm Street, Gardner Middle, and Gardner High.

**Table 19: Gardner Public Schools
Science Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade 2014-2015**

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Elm Street School	--	--	26%	--	--	--	--	26%
MS: Gardner Middle	--	--	--	--	--	15%	--	15%
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
HS: Gardner High	--	--	--	--	--	--	60%	60%
District Total	--	--	26%	--	--	15%	56%	29%
State	--	--	51%	--	--	42%	72%	54%

Between 2012 and 2015, science CPI declined for the school as a whole by 4.9 points at Elm Street, by 6.2 points at Gardner Middle, and by 3.9 points at Gardner High.

- Science CPI for high needs students declined by 3.4 to 4.2 points at Elm Street, Gardner Middle, and Gardner High.
- Science CPI for students with disabilities declined by 5.1 points at Gardner High.

**Table 20: Gardner Public Schools
Science CPI by School and Subgroup 2012-2015**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend
ESS: Waterford Street	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Helen Mae Sauter	--	--	--	--	--
High Needs	--	--	--	--	--
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	--	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
ES: Elm Street School	70.3	69.2	74.6	65.4	-4.9
High Needs	63.2	62.8	70.2	59.1	-4.1
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	59.9	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	50.7	53.0	52.0	50.0	-0.7

MS: Gardner Middle	62.8	61.2	66.3	56.6	-6.2
High Needs	53.4	54.5	55.6	49.2	-4.2
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	50.0	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	35.9	35.8	39.7	38.5	2.6
HS: Gardner Academy	--	--	72.7	--	--
High Needs	--	--	--	--	--
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	--	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	--	--	--	--	--
HS: Gardner High	87.8	88.4	81.3	83.9	-3.9
High Needs	76.9	80.2	73.1	73.5	-3.4
Economically disadvantaged	--	--	--	78.0	--
ELL and former ELL	--	--	--	--	--
Students with disabilities	62.5	69.1	50.0	57.4	-5.1

Leadership and Governance

Contextual Background

Since starting in the position on July 1, 2014, the current superintendent, a participant in the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents New Superintendent Induction Program, has developed an entry plan, has reported her findings to the school committee and stakeholders, and has developed a District Improvement Plan (DIP) based on the findings of the entry plan. Principals are now developing School Improvement Plans (SIPs) aligned to the DIP and use student performance data to develop and measure the success of SIP goals.

In 2014-2015, the school committee accepted the superintendent's recommendation to stop regular use of the Helen Mae Sauter School, built in 1898, and to limit its use to special purposes, including housing some after-school programs. Students in grades 1-4 of the Sauter school were assigned to the district's two remaining elementary schools. The superintendent's goal was a new grade configuration for the district as of September 2015 that places all students of the same grade level in the same school.

Of the 10 central office administrators and principals, 7 have been in their current positions for fewer than 3 years, and only 1, the grants/literacy coordinator/director of ELL, for more than 9 years. Notably, the chief academic officer (CAO) and the middle-school and high-school principals are in year three in their positions. The current high-school principal is in his third year as the high school principal; he was the principal of the Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology (grades 9-12) before becoming the high school principal. The high-school principal is the fifth principal in seven years. The middle-school principal is the third in five years. The CAO is responsible for curriculum, assessment, professional development, and educator evaluation.

The Gardner Education Association (GEA) is led by two co-presidents, both new to their positions in 2015-2016. The GEA and school committee are negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement to replace the one that expired June 30, 2015. The school committee and superintendent are supported in their negotiations with the GEA and other district unions by a new labor attorney under contract to the school committee; the new labor attorney replaced the role of the city's attorney who held the role for the negotiations before the current superintendent's arrival.

Strength Finding

1. Over the past 18 months the superintendent, in collaboration with central office administrators and principals, has begun to put in place systems and structures that are foundational to the urgent work of improving student achievement.

- A.** The superintendent undertook a systematic analysis of district strengths and challenges and communicated findings and their implications widely to stakeholders, including the school committee, in January 2015.
 - 1. The superintendent conducted what was described as a “forensic audit” during her first months in the district to determine strengths and challenges.
 - a. The superintendent concluded that Gardner was a “district of schools, not a school system.”
 - b. With the help of a district data team to monitor performance data, the superintendent identified programs “that were working and those not [working].”
 - c. The superintendent determined that there were gaps in the data because there was inconsistent use of data.
- B.** The superintendent has established three goals subsequently adopted by the school committee; these are now beginning to be reflected in critical district planning documents and the educator evaluation system.
 - 1. The school committee adopted the recommendation of the superintendent that the district and schools over the next three years focus on the following three broad strategies, described across the district as “goals”:
 - a. Address students’ social-emotional and behavioral growth through monitoring attendance, parent involvement, and proactive intervention;
 - b. Implement targeted standards-based instruction based on common assessments that measure student academic growth; and
 - c. Provide all stakeholders with transparent communication that is respectful, timely, consistent, and inclusive.
 - 2. The 2015-2017 District Improvement Plan (DIP) reflects the three strategies or “goals.”
 - a. The DIP uses data to identify three “focus areas” for district and school-level effort: literacy and mathematics at the elementary- and middle-school levels and “academics” at the high school; parent/community involvement; and “other student learning issues”

at each level (K-4, 5-7, 8-12). The DIP includes this year's schedule for all common assessments and the results to date.

- b. For the literacy and mathematics and "academics" focus area, the DIP identifies for each grade span (K-4, 5-7, 8-12) more specific "content and performance standards" as well as "indicators of success" that district leaders can measure over time.
 - c. For each content and performance standard, the DIP identifies "student performance objectives" as well as the specific strategies that district administrators will use to support staff at the school level to make the changes needed to achieve the "indicators of success."
 - i. Many of the "indicators of success" in the DIP are implementation benchmarks or measurable outcomes.
 - d. The DIP identifies the following key strategies: to support the effective use of department- and grade-level planning time to review results of common formative assessment data to drive instructional decisions; to provide instructional coaches; to conduct learning walks; to provide district-designed professional development (PD) complemented by school-level follow up; and to provide time, training, and resources for tiered instruction.
- 3. For the "other student learning issues" focus area, the DIP identifies three goals accompanied by student performance objectives, specific strategies to be used by administrators, and indicators of success.
- 4. The DIP identifies topics for the PD that the district will provide in the first year of the DIP (2015-2016).
- 5. The DIP is less specific about the third focus area parent/community involvement, only describing five events and activities that the district will sponsor.
- 6. The last section of the DIP requires an analysis of progress in achieving objectives and an identification of next steps.
- C.** In 2015-2016 both the DIP and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) include an analysis of common formative and summative data related to student performance.
 - 1. For each level (K-4, 5-7, 8-12), the DIP includes the 2015-2016 school year schedule for all common assessments and the results to date.
 - 2. Most of the SIPs include analysis of additional data beyond what is identified for their level in the DIP.

3. Principals reported that assessments are being refined to drive instruction. As one principal said, “Wherever you go in the district, there is a focus on trying to use data to drive instruction.”
- D.** The SIP template requires an analysis of data specific to the school, identification of strategies to be used to achieve the district targets, a description of district PD to be accessed and school-based PD to be provided, and steps to be taken to increase parent involvement.
1. Each month schools send data related to student performance, parent engagement, and social-emotional health to central office and one school presents to colleagues about what they are seeing and learning.
- E.** Educators’ professional practice and student learning goals are now being built from the DIP and SIPs and progress is documented in summative evaluations.
1. District administrators’ and principals’ evaluation goals are tied directly to one or more of the district’s priorities.
 2. Principals referred to goals related to increasing the number of classroom visits and “getting better at looking at data so I can do a better job supporting teachers to accomplish the team goal related to looking at student work.”
 3. Elementary principals developed shared student growth and professional practice goals tied to district and school priorities related to curriculum alignment; teacher monitoring of student attendance, behavior, and instructional issues; and monitoring instructional practice related to identified “power standards” and other district priorities, including implementation of PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports).
 4. For 2015-2016, principals helped teachers choose professional practice goals directly related to the priorities in the DIP and the SIPs.
- F.** The superintendent has begun to reorganize resources of time, people, and money to align with the three priorities for action.
1. District leaders, principals, and assistant principals are now meeting regularly outside of the regular school day to learn together and develop shared understanding of the district’s performance and strategies for improvement.
 - a. The superintendent changed administrator meetings from once a month during the school day to after school twice a month so that principals would not have to leave their schools.
 - b. The superintendent has made sure that administrative meeting time is focused on PD, including “book studies.”

- c. Administrators are doing “learning walks” to begin the process of developing a shared vision of effective teaching practice.
 - d. The superintendent assigned each central office administrator to one school as a “school buddy” to support the work of the principal.
 - 2. Starting in fall 2015, all elementary school students and teachers at each grade level are now assigned for the first time to the same school---a change that administrators and principals said will help them ensure more effective grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and more consistent and more rigorous practice across classes at the same grade level.
 - 3. Elementary school schedules, new for 2015-2016, build in substantial grade-level common planning time designed to support teachers to improve their practice and student learning.
 - 4. District and school leaders reported that they have begun to align budget priorities with the district’s three goals.
 - 5. Plans are in place for principals to identify increases they need in the fiscal year 2017 budget to more effectively address one or more of the three district goals.
- G.** District leaders and the city officials have begun to lay the groundwork to secure new resources to address the most critical deferred maintenance and capital needs of its schools.

Impact: With some basic foundational structures and processes being put in place, district leaders and principals are supporting high-quality teaching and learning in the district.

Challenge and Areas for Growth

2. The District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans are not sufficiently developed to provide the clarity of focus and actions needed to address the district’s urgent challenges.

- A.** District leaders recognize that district and school improvement planning is not well developed; they rated themselves as meeting this standard only “somewhat well” in the district self-assessment.
- B.** While the District Improvement Plan (DIP) has many elements of an effective plan, it is missing sufficient clarity and specificity about the actions people will take to improve teaching and learning.
 - 1. Some of the specific strategies identified for district administrators to use are ones that only school-level staff can put into practice, e.g., “utilize grade level meetings for...” or “utilize common planning time to....”

2. The DIP does not identify district level personnel responsible for ensuring that the specific strategies are implemented and progress and impact is assessed.
3. The DIP has no timeline for action beyond the dates on which common formative assessments will be administered.

C. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) vary in their specificity and comprehensiveness.

1. The SIP template does not require school leaders to develop SMART goals (specific and strategic; measureable; action-oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results-focused; and timed and tracked), identify key activities and the person(s) responsible for them, or establish timelines.
2. Most SIPs include analyses of data beyond that provided for their grade levels in the DIP.
3. Only one SIP identifies specific resources available to support implementation.
4. Only one SIP identifies a sequence for professional development activities.
5. No SIP has a detailed sequence and timeline for activities.
6. Principals told the team that they welcome the fact that the new SIP template is more data-driven. Some principals found some aspects of the new SIP format helpful and other features not helpful; one principal reported using the new format “externally” and the older format “internally” because it is “better for drafting a plan and next steps.”

Impact: Without comprehensive, actionable improvement plans that use SMART goals that identify key activities, person(s) responsible, timelines, and benchmarks, the district does not have an action plan to guide continuous improvement and so cannot systematically implement, monitor, or refine efforts to attain strategic goals and cannot ensure accountability for meeting improvement priorities.

Recommendation

1. The district should develop and implement actionable and comprehensive multi-year improvement plans for the district and the schools and regularly monitor progress toward plan goals.

- A.** In collaboration with school-level staff, district leaders should transform the “indicators of success” in the District Improvement Plan (DIP) into SMART goals (specific and strategic; measureable; action-oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results-focused; and timed and tracked). These should reflect the intentions of the “performance standards,” “student performance objectives,” and “specific strategies” in the plans.

1. Each SMART goal should include key activities, person(s) responsible, resources required (time, money and people), timelines, implementation benchmarks, and measurable outcomes.
- B. The DIP's goals should drive the development, implementation, and modification of the district's educational program.
 1. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) should be created in alignment with the DIP and based on an analysis of student performance data.
 - a. Principals should provide the superintendent, school committee, and staff with regular updates on progress toward SIP goals.
 - b. The principal should continue to use the SIP to inform his/her self-assessment and goal setting process when creating the Educator Plan, and progress toward Educator Plan goals should be used as evidence during implementation.
 2. Professional development should be designed to support DIP goals.
- C. The DIP should be used as a tool for continuous improvement.
 1. The superintendent should periodically report to the school committee, staff, families, and community on progress toward achieving DIP goals.
 2. The district should establish procedures to review the DIP annually. Strategic activities and benchmarks should be adjusted when necessary to meet current conditions.
 3. The superintendent and school committee should continue to consider some goals in the superintendent's Educator Plan (as part of the district's educator evaluation system) with DIP goals.

Benefits: By implementing this recommendation district and school leaders will be better able to identify, prioritize, and sequence those district actions that are most critical to supporting schools in the achievement of their goals. District and school leaders will have a way to assess progress and make mid-course corrections, as needed. All staff will have a sounder basis for prioritizing and sequencing district, school-based, and individual professional development. The DIP and the SIPs will provide guidance and ensure that the work at each level is intentionally designed to accomplish the district's short- and long-term goals.

Recommended resources:

- *What Makes a Goal Smarter?*
(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/presentations/SMARTGoals/Handout5.pdf>) is a description of SMART goals with accompanying examples. The handout was designed to support educators in developing goals as part of the educator evaluation system, but could also be a useful reference for the district as it develops or refines its DIP and SIPs.

- ESE's *Planning for Success* tools (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>) support the improvement planning process by spotlighting practices, characteristics, and behaviors that support effective planning and implementation and meet existing state requirements for improvement planning.
- *Focused Planning for Accelerating Student Learning* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dsac/focused-planning.pdf>) provides guidance for Level 3 districts to accelerate achievement for all students through the development of a focused, actionable and sustainable Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).
- *District Accelerated Improvement Planning - Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/level-4-guiding-principles-effective-benchmarks.pdf>) provides information about different types of benchmarks to guide and measure district improvement efforts.
- *Turnaround Practices in Action* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/practices-report-2014.pdf>) is a practice guide that highlights practices and strategies observed in turnaround schools that have shown significant and rapid gains in student achievement. It presents key practices for consideration as avenues to improve and sustain ongoing and future turnaround efforts.

Curriculum and Instruction

Contextual Background

In the 2014-2015 school year, the district initiated the development of ELA and mathematics curriculum documents across all grades. The district offered summer professional development so that teams of teachers could align standards to grades and begin the development of curriculum documents.

Common planning time and department and grade-level meetings are currently used to continue the curriculum development work. The district has five instructional coaches to support the development and implementation of curricula. At the elementary level (grades 1-4), two literacy coaches support the two schools. These same schools share one mathematics coach. At the secondary level (grades 5-12), a humanities (ELA and social studies) coach and a mathematics coach provide support. The district does not have elementary or secondary science coaches.

The elementary level has completed ELA and mathematics curricula and curricula documents are comprehensive. While templates for curriculum development in ELA and mathematics used at the middle school and high school levels are also comprehensive, curriculum development is incomplete. There has been no formal work done to align the district science curricula with the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Standards. While no documents were available for review, interviewees said that the ESL curriculum is approximately 50 percent completed.

In 2010, the district introduced the Readers and Writers Workshop model to elementary teachers. Initially, workshop lab-site teachers were identified to support the initial implementation efforts by modeling the Readers/Writers Workshop structure, strategies, and units for teachers. The district also purchased classroom libraries and anchor texts to support implementation. However, lab-site teacher positions no longer exist in the district. Two former lab teachers are now the district's K-4 literacy coaches and support the workshop model. The workshop model is the expected lesson structure for K-4 and includes a focus lesson, guided and independent practice, and a group share out. The middle school has also adopted this structure to organize instruction.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the district reviewed mathematics programs aligned with the 2011 mathematics frameworks. A group of teachers piloted mathematics curriculum modules from EngageNY and recommended a full adoption of the program. The district is in its first year of implementing EngageNY in grades 1-8.

Although the district has developed several instructional tools to measure best practice and inform professional development and district goals, the district has not developed, articulated, and shared a common model of instruction for K-12 educators. Each tool includes elements of best practice, but none is a comprehensive model that includes all elements of effective instruction. While the district has adopted and implemented an educator evaluation system consistent with current educator evaluation regulations, it has not achieved consistency in implementation and in the quality of feedback provided to educators.

Strength Finding

1. The ELA and mathematics and ELA curricula for grades 1-4 are comprehensive and provide teachers with the tools, supports, and information needed to implement the ELA and mathematics Massachusetts learning standards.

A. A review of the mathematics curriculum documents for grades 1-4 indicated alignment to the 2011 Massachusetts frameworks. The documents included the components essential for a cohesive and usable curriculum that exceed state guidelines.

1. The mathematics curriculum documents for grades 1-4 include: a cover sheet; a curriculum and instruction users' guide that emphasizes backward planning; unit summaries; an overview of grade-level standards, including mathematical practice; grade-level power standards; unit modules and lesson objectives; instructional strategies and suggestions; and assessments. The documents also provide links to lesson resources and locally developed lessons to bridge gaps between EngageNY Common Core resources and the Massachusetts 2011 mathematics frameworks.

B. The ELA curriculum documents for grades 1-4 are comprehensive and reflect extensive efforts to implement a Readers/Writers Workshop model of instruction.

1. A review of sample documents showed evidence of a Readers/Writers Workshop structure (focus/model, guided & independent practice, share out), units of study aligned with the state ELA learning standards, topic overviews, grade-level power standards, pacing suggestions and grade level unit/skills trajectories, common writing assessments and rubrics, and a schedule for administering literacy assessments.
2. Literacy coaches support teachers in the implementation of curriculum by assisting in unit development, the implementation of literacy assessments and Lucy Calkins/Writers workshop units, the analysis and sharing of data to inform instruction, and professional development.

Impact: The process of developing comprehensive ELA and mathematics curricula at the elementary level serves as exemplar for future curriculum development work. These documents ensure that teachers have clarity of instructional focus and the necessary tools to implement a rigorous curriculum. Additionally, students at this level have equitable access to aligned, consistent, and high-quality content.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

2. The district has not established a documented and clearly articulated process or plan for the timely review and revision of curriculum.

- A.** Central office staff, principals, and instructional coaches share leadership for the development of curriculum in the district. However, it was not clear to the review team who oversees this process or identifies districtwide expectations for the process and product.
 - 1. School and district administrators reported that they meet monthly to discuss curriculum and that the work is collaborative in nature. Instructional coaches meet bi-weekly with the chief academic officer (CAO) and ELL/literacy/grants coordinator to discuss curriculum development.
 - 2. Principals and coaches stated that curriculum work is conducted at the school level but depending upon grades and content areas, the responsibility for leading curriculum work varies.
 - a. At the high school and middle school levels, the principals facilitate curriculum development. The mathematics and humanities coaches reported that their role is to support school principals in this work.
 - b. At the elementary level, the principals, district literacy coordinator, and coaches share the leadership role for ELA. Principals rely on the shared coach to facilitate mathematics curriculum development.
- B.** A review of district curricula indicated that alignment to current frameworks is in various stages of completion and most work does not include essential components of a comprehensive curriculum.
 - 1. Elementary ELA and mathematics curriculum documents are complete and comprehensive.
 - 2. Middle-school ELA documents are in development and include grade-level standards, pacing guidelines, essential questions, short- and long-term learning objectives, and assessments. Documents do not include instructional strategies or resources. Middle-school mathematics binders are missing the following elements of a comprehensive curriculum: EngageNY curriculum and instruction users' guide, scope and sequence/pacing guide, grade-level power standards, and assessment rubrics.
 - 3. High-school ELA and mathematics curricula are also in varying stages of development and do not consistently contain unit overviews, learning objectives, essential questions, content topics, unit standards alignment, or assessments. However, the unit templates for this level include the elements of a comprehensive curriculum.

4. The district is in the early stages of aligning science curriculum to the recently adopted 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering Standards. Administrators and coaches reported that the district has begun to unpack standards and assign grade-level topics. This work is informal, however, and is addressed as staff time permits. The mathematics coaches have been helpful in this work in the absence of a K-8 science support position.
 5. ELL curriculum was not available online. The district has purchased a National Geographic (NGSS) ELL series and is using the WIDA ELD standards and the NGSS ELL series to build a K-12 ELL curriculum. Administrators stated that the work was approximately 50 percent complete.
- C. The district's efforts to prioritize and align curricula are resource dependent and are based upon decisions at the school level rather than guided by school committee policy and a comprehensive plan that systematically identifies the steps of a multi-year process, roles, and responsibilities and a timeline for completion that is communicated to the educational community.
1. Administrators stated that there had been little urgency before 2014 to update curriculum documents aligned with the 2011 ELA and mathematics curriculum frameworks. With recent changes in district leadership positions, efforts have been initiated in earnest to initiate this work.
 2. While curriculum review and revision is ongoing, administrators and coaches stated that they are not on a timeline and sequence to complete the alignment of ELA, mathematics, and science curriculum. Schools are working at their own pace and use common planning time, professional development days, and department and/or grade level meetings and reliance on instructional coaches to support this work.

Impact: The district's ELA, mathematics, science, and ELL curricula are in various stages of development and the district has not defined the roles of personnel for curriculum development and renewal. Only with clarity of process and product, can a district ensure that all Gardner students are receiving standards-based instruction at all grade levels in all subject areas.

3. The district has not developed, articulated, and shared a common model of instruction for K-12 educators.

- A. Through a collaborative effort, the district has established three goals, including one which sets the expectation at all levels for the implementation of targeted standards-based instruction based on common assessments that measure student academic growth. These goals drive the DIP and SIPs.
1. Educators at all levels can articulate the three district goals from the district and school improvement plans; however, interpretation of these goals and school practices to meet the goals vary.

- B.** The district has established an infrastructure for discussions of curriculum and instructional expectations and several resources are available in the district to support professional growth and evaluate practice. However, the tools vary among schools and do not reflect a comprehensive or common list of instructional expectations for all educators in the district.
1. Administrators across the district employ a variety of tools to support discussions of instructional expectations and areas for improvement.
 - a. Several documents have been developed at the central office to define, inform, and evaluate instruction, and to collect data on implementation progress.
 - i. An internal document, called *What Do I See?*, is a potential instructional model; it has not been linked with the educator evaluation model rubric or shared with all educators.
 - ii. The GPS Learning Walk Observation Notes, which are derived from the educator evaluation model rubric, was developed for principals to use during informal walkthroughs and is not used to evaluate teachers.
 - iii. The Observation Data Collection checklist was created to complement the GPS Learning Walk Observation Notes and is used by coaches to collect data on instructional strategy implementation to inform their support work.
 - b. Principals and coaches mentioned additional tools and resources that they use regularly as models of effective instruction. Examples included the workshop model shared by the Teaching and Learning Alliance (focus lesson, guided practice, independent practice, and group share), the education evaluation model rubric, the UDL and UbD instructional design models, The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching, DSAC training and the Learning Walkthrough model, the Total Participation Handbook, Leverage Leadership strategies, and the DCAP.
- C.** Administrators told the team that the educator evaluation model rubric is not viewed by all educators as a useful tool for professional discourse and instructional improvement.

Impact: Without a consistently documented and articulated message of instructional expectations for teachers, the district cannot ensure equitable and high-quality instruction for all students. A common understanding of instructional expectations across all school levels provides the foundation for professional discourse, targeted professional development, strategic coaching and support, and the basis of an evaluation system that focuses on professional growth and improvement.

4. In observed classrooms, implementation of instructional best practices was inconsistent across grade levels.

The team observed 63 classes throughout the district: 22 at the 2 high schools, 16 at the middle school, and 25 at the 2 elementary schools. The team observed 25 ELA classes, 19 mathematics

classes, and 19 classes in other subject areas. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members collected data using ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is presented in Appendix C.

A. Focus Area #1-Learning Objectives and Instruction The team found inconsistent implementation of the practices in this focus area across grade levels.

1. The team saw moderate or strong evidence of teachers providing and referring to clear learning objective(s) in 75 percent of observed middle-school classrooms (25 percent moderate; 50 percent strong), in 72 percent of elementary classrooms (36 percent moderate; 36 percent strong), and in 63 percent of observed high-school classrooms (36 percent moderate; 27 percent strong).
 - a. While in some classrooms an agenda of activities was posted, in 70 percent of observed classrooms districtwide teachers posted or shared with students specific lesson/learning objectives.
 - i. Examples of this practice included classrooms with objectives posted on a wall, pocket chart, projected, and/or verbally shared and reinforced during the lesson. Teachers who shared their lesson objectives with students set the stage for an optimal learning environment.
2. The team found strong or moderate evidence of teachers implementing lessons reflecting high expectations aligned to learning objectives in 69 percent of middle-school lessons (50 percent moderate; 19 percent strong), in 48 percent of elementary lessons observed (36 percent moderate; 12 percent strong), and in 45 percent of high-school classes (27 percent moderate; 18 percent strong).
 - a. In 53 percent of observed classrooms lessons reflected high expectations aligned to learning objectives. In these settings, expectations for quality work was defined for students and exemplars, rubrics and/or guided practice were provided to ensure that students knew what was expected.
 - b. Many observed lessons were teacher centered and did not reflect rigorous and high expectations for students. Students completed desk activities and then waited for the next activity or directive; they listened to lectures, reviewed homework or practiced problems; and they watched demonstrations or listened to the teacher read text with little opportunity for engaging in higher-order thinking.
 - c. In contrast, some lessons engaged all students in rigorous activities with high expectations and were appropriately student centered. For example, in one classroom students wrote book reviews in pairs and peer edited. Students in another classroom used manipulatives to solve problems with three addends. The teacher modeled

expectations and required students to work in pairs to solve additional problems. In yet another class, students predicted the probability of traits using a Punnet Square after a mini lesson using cartoon character “parents.”

3. The team saw moderate or strong evidence of teachers using a range of instructional strategies that allowed all students to access and engage with the lesson content in 82 percent of middle-school classrooms (38 percent moderate; 44 percent strong), in 60 percent of elementary-school classes (44 percent moderate; 16 percent strong), and in 46 percent of high-school classrooms (32 percent moderate; 14 percent strong).
 - a. Across the district, in 50 percent of classrooms teachers used appropriate instructional strategies well matched to the learning objective(s).
 - i. Examples included chunking lessons into smaller segments, wait time and buddy systems for help in responding to questions, turn and talk, small group work with accountability systems in place, pre-teaching vocabulary when using complex text, use of visuals and graphic organizers, and gradual release of learning (mini lesson, guided practice, independent practice, and group share out).

B. Focus Area #2-Student Engagement and Critical Thinking In observed classes students at each level were not consistently motivated or engaged with the content or lesson objectives or in tasks that encouraged them to use critical thinking. In a high proportion of classrooms, the instruction was teacher directed and students were not primarily responsible for their own learning.

1. The team found students motivated and engaged in lessons in 62 percent of middle-school classrooms (31 percent moderate; 31 percent strong), in 60 percent of elementary-school classes (48 percent moderate; 12 percent strong), and in 55 percent of high school classrooms (32 percent moderate; 23 percent strong).
 - a. In 59 percent of observed classrooms (38 percent moderate; 21 percent strong), students actively engaged in activities and volunteered responses and questions throughout the lesson.
2. Teachers consistently provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in tasks that require the use of higher-order thinking such as the use of inquiry, exploration, application of skills or new knowledge, and analysis in 81 percent of observed lessons at the middle school (50 percent moderate; 31 percent strong); in 45 percent of observed classrooms at the high school (36 percent moderate; 9 percent strong), and in 44 percent of visited elementary lessons (28 percent moderate; 16 percent strong).
 - a. Across the district, in 54 percent of observed classrooms (37 percent moderate; 17 percent strong) teachers consistently provided multiple opportunities for students to

engage in tasks that require the use of higher-order thinking such as the use of inquiry, exploration, application of skills or new knowledge, and analysis.

- b. In some classes, teachers asked students to explore and analyze content, topics, and graphs, share or explain their thinking using background and newly acquired knowledge, and apply knowledge and skills to solve problems and connect events. However, many lessons observed reflected teacher-directed activities with limited student engagement including paper/pencil activities, use of the Smart Board as a projector, lecture, and teacher-directed instruction.
3. The team saw moderate or strong evidence of students assuming responsibility for their own learning whether individually, in pairs, or in groups in 63 percent of middle-school classrooms (44 percent moderate; 19 percent strong), in 56 percent of elementary-school classrooms (48 percent moderate; 8 percent strong), and in 41 percent of high school classrooms (36 percent moderate; 5 percent strong).
 - a. In 53 percent of classrooms across the district (43 percent moderate; 10 percent strong), students were primarily responsible for their own learning through teacher-facilitated student-led explorations and learning of content throughout the lesson.
 - i. Examples of teacher-facilitated student-led explorations include explorations of mass and volume in a lab setting, an analysis of genetic traits, and a math/science exploration of weight using manipulatives that involved prediction and justification of findings.

C. Focus Area #3-Differentiated Instruction and Classroom Culture In observed classes the review team noted limited evidence of instruction that meets the needs of all students.

1. Lessons were structured with multiple entry points to allow access to all learners and accounted for differences in learning needs, interest, and level of readiness in only 16 percent of elementary lessons (8 percent moderate; 8 percent strong), in only 28 percent of high-school lessons (23 percent moderate; 5 percent strong), and in 62 percent of middle-school classrooms (31 percent moderate; 31 percent strong).
 - a. Lessons that reflected the differentiation of content, process or product was observed in only 32 percent of observed classrooms (19 percent moderate; 13 percent strong).
2. Teachers provided appropriate and available resources to meet the needs of most students in only 40 percent of elementary classrooms (28 percent moderate; 12 percent strong), in 50 percent of middle-school classrooms (19 percent moderate; 30 percent strong), and in only 32 percent of high-school classrooms (23 percent moderate; 9 percent strong).
 - a. The use of appropriate resources (e.g., technology, manipulatives, support personnel, multiple/available instructional resources, etc.) to support differentiated instruction was observed in only 40 percent of classrooms (24 percent moderate; 16 percent strong).

3. Teachers demonstrated the frequent use of formative assessments to check for understanding, provide feedback to students, and to adjust and inform instruction in 64 percent of elementary classes (48 percent moderate; 16 percent strong), in 69 percent of middle-school classrooms (50 percent moderate; 19 percent strong), and in only 45 percent (27 percent moderate; 18 percent strong) of high-school classrooms.
 - a. The frequent use of formative assessments to check for understanding, provide feedback to students, and to adjust and inform instruction was noted in 58 percent of observed classrooms (41 percent moderate; 17 percent strong).
 - i. Observers saw techniques such as thumbs up, asking clarifying questions, check-ins with individual or groups of students, exit tickets, and other lesson summary activities.

Impact: The use of effective instructional strategies is critical to the teaching process; their consistent implementation makes content/learning standards accessible and meaningful for students. Without clearly defined and articulated instructional expectations that reflect best practices, districts cannot ensure that teachers will consistently deliver high-quality and rigorous instruction that meets students' diverse learning needs or optimizes their college and career readiness. Districts that define, articulate, and implement a common model of instruction recognize the critical link between high-quality instructional practice and improved student performance.

Recommendations

Curriculum

1. **The district should complete as soon as possible the ELA, mathematics, science, and ELL curricula for grades 5-12.**
 - A. The district should complete the ELA and mathematics curricula for grades 5-7 using the ELA and mathematics documents in grades 1-4 to guide its efforts.
 - B. Teachers in grades 8-12 should continue to use the UbD unit/lesson template to complete curricula for ELA and mathematics courses. This template serves as a model for a comprehensively developed curriculum and is usable in all content areas.
 - C. District and school leaders are urged to provide time and resources, including teacher leadership, to complete the alignment of the K-12 science curricula with the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Standards.
 - D. The district should complete the K-12 ELL curriculum.

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation will mean updated and clearly articulated alignment of K-12 curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Completion of this work will ensure that current and comprehensive curricula are implemented in all classrooms. As a result, all students will have equal access to a high-quality education that gives them a strong foundation for college and career.

Recommended resources:

- ESE's *Common Core State Standards Initiative* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/standards/>) includes links to several resources designed to support the transition to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, which incorporate the Common Core.
- *Science and Technology/Engineering Concept and Skill Progressions* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/ste/default.html>) articulate possible ways for students to progress through levels of understanding of concepts.
- ESE's Science, Technology Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) home page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/>) provides the *Massachusetts 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Standards* in addition to other STE alignment resources.
- *Creating Curriculum Units at the Local Level* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/mcu_guide.pdf) is a guidance document that can serve as a resource for professional study groups, as a reference for anyone wanting to engage in curriculum development, or simply as a way to gain a better understanding of the process used to develop Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units.
- *Creating Model Curriculum Units* (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTuqmiQ9ssquWrLjKc9h5h2cSpDVZqe6t>) is a series of videos that captures the *collaboration and deep thinking by curriculum design teams over the course of a year as they worked to develop Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units. It includes videos about developing essential questions, establishing goals, creating embedded performance assessments, designing lesson plans, selecting high-quality materials, and evaluating the curriculum unit.*
- *Model Curriculum Units* (http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTuqmiQ9ssqvX_Yjra4nBfqQPwc4auUBu) is a video series that shows examples of the implementation of Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units.
- *The Model Curriculum Unit and Lesson Plan Template* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/MCUtemplate.pdf>) includes Understanding by Design elements. It could be useful for districts' and schools' curriculum development and revision.
- ESE's *Quality Review Rubrics* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/rubrics/>) can support the analysis and improvement of curriculum units.

- The *World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Download Library* (<http://www.wida.us/downloadLibrary.aspx>) provides resources and materials for ELL educators, including standards, guiding principles, sample items, and CAN DO descriptors.
 - *Useful WIDA ELD Standards Resources from the Download Library* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/wida/DownloadLibrary.html>) can be used as a type of recommended reading list for educators new to the WIDA ELD standards who are interested in developing a deeper understanding of the framework's components and how to apply them into classroom instruction and assessment.
 - The *World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development Standards Implementation Guide (Part I)* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/wida/Guidance-p1.pdf>) provides general information about the WIDA ELD standards framework, expectations for district implementation, and available support.
- 2. The district should develop and communicate a multi-year plan for the regular and timely review and revision of K-12 curricula. This process should be collaborative and include the necessary resources to support this work, including dedicated time and updated instructional resources.**
- A.** This system should be based on valid research and analysis of state and district common assessments including District-Determined Measures (DDMs), and should involve professional staff including teachers and special educators.
 - 1. The district's plan should provide a timeline for when K-12 curricula in each discipline will be regularly reviewed and updated, identify participants, and dedicate time (within and among schools) for this ongoing work.
 - a. The plan should include regular meetings to align the curriculum horizontally (across schools) and vertically (between grade levels).
 - 2. It is recommended that subject areas be prioritized in the review cycle to ensure responsive and timely review and adjustments based on data analysis and state revisions.
 - 3. This multi-year plan should be shared with faculty.
 - B.** The curriculum review plan should identify the leadership positions (administrators and/or teacher leaders) responsible for monitoring and facilitating the process for each content area.
 - C.** The district should identify resources, including time during and/or after school, summer work, professional development, compensation if appropriate, etc., that would be routinely needed to support this work at all levels.
 - D.** Practices should be established in this plan to ensure that curriculum materials are regularly reviewed and monitored for effectiveness and currency.

1. Practices might include conducting systematic review of lesson plans and regular collaborative discussions by level and discipline of what materials work well and which materials need revision or replacement, including textbooks.

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation will provide a clearly articulated and comprehensive curriculum review process to guarantee currency of curriculum, dedicated time to complete curriculum work in a timely manner, and a system for reviewing and updating instructional materials. A workable cycle of curriculum improvement and renewal ensures that curricula are dynamic, will continuously evolve as frameworks are revised at the state level, and that all students have access to a robust curriculum that meets their diverse learning needs.

Instruction

3. The district should build on its current tools and identify and articulate a comprehensive instructional model, communicate the model to the full educational community, and support teachers in its implementation.

- A. The district should convene a representative group of teachers and administrators to define the characteristics of effective instruction possibly using its current tools as sources of best practices.
 1. Key instructional practices should be prioritized as the district's non-negotiables.
- B. Once the practices associated with high-quality instruction have been identified and defined, district administrators should develop a plan for sharing instructional expectations with staff.
 1. Using grade level, department meetings, faculty meetings, common planning time, and/or professional development days, the district is encouraged to discuss ideas and strategies from the instructional model.
 - a. Teachers and administrators might consider watching videos of effective teaching and discussing instructional strategies as a way to calibrate expectations.
 - b. Administrators are encouraged to continue conducting non-evaluative walkthroughs in pairs/small groups, to generalize and share feedback about trends observed, and to discuss improvement strategies regularly with teachers.
 - c. K-12 administrators should consider a peer observation process so teachers may observe effective practice in the district.
- C. Teachers should be provided with appropriate guidance and feedback as they implement the model.
 1. Professional development should focus on elements of the instructional model.

2. Principals, as instructional leaders, should ensure that teachers have the information and support necessary to meet the district's expectations for instruction.
3. Teachers should receive frequent, helpful feedback that helps them to continually improve their instruction (see the Human Resources and Professional Development recommendation below).

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation will mean clear and articulated expectations for administrators and teachers of what constitutes effective teaching. A district that provides high-quality instruction for all students creates and sustains a culture of continuous improvement, resulting in professional growth and increased student achievement.

Recommended resources:

- *Characteristics of an Effective Standards-Based K-12 Science and Technology/Engineering Classroom* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/Standards-BasedClassroom.pdf>) and *Characteristics of a Standards-Based Mathematics Classroom* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/news07/mathclass_char.pdf) are references for instructional planning and observation, intended to support activities that advance standards-based educational practice, including formal study, dialogue and discussion, classroom observations, and other professional development activities.
- ESE's *Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ease/programs/accountability/tools-and-resources/district-analysis-review-and-assistance/learning-walkthrough-implementation-guide.html>) is a useful resource to support administrators in establishing a walkthrough process and culture of collaboration.
- *Appendix 4, Characteristics of Standards-Based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ease/accountability/dart/walkthrough/continuum-practice.pdf>) may offer a useful framework in developing a common language or reference point for looking at teaching and learning.

Assessment

Contextual Background

The new superintendent's audit of district systems determined that some assessments were not being consistently administered and that assessment data was not consistently being used by principals, teachers, and coaches to modify instruction and curriculum and create appropriate interventions. The district has taken steps to consistently use assessment data to inform instruction and develop interventions for struggling students.

First, the district's reorganization of school grades gives teachers more common planning time to collaborate and use data to inform instruction. Second, a district data team has been created and teams of teachers and coaches at the schools are now organized in groups called instructional leadership teams (or PODs) to collect, analyze, and use assessment data to inform instruction and curriculum. Thirdly, the superintendent has initiated the use of new district and school planning documents that include goals developed using assessment data. The expectation is that as these changes take hold, teachers will improve their ability to use assessment data to improve not only the achievement of students, but also their own professional growth.

While the district administers numerous assessments at the elementary-, middle-, and high-school levels and actions are being taken to ensure consistent administration of assessments and use of assessment results across the district, the district does not have a centralized warehouse for the storage of all student data. Also, only limited student data is displayed on the parent and student portal.

Strength Finding

- 1. The district is taking steps to consistently use assessment data to inform curriculum and develop interventions for struggling students.**
 - A.** In 2014, the new superintendent conducted an audit of district systems and found that assessments were not being consistently administered and assessment data was not used in an organized way to monitor educational progress. For example, elementary schools were using DRA and Lexia results inconsistently or not at all. As a result, many teachers did not know how well students were mastering material.
 1. The superintendent said that at that time schools were using data differently and some intervention programs were not working effectively.
 2. Interviewees told the team that assessments were used inconsistently and data was not always leveraged to inform instruction.

- B.** The superintendent, central office administrators, and principals have begun to implement structures and systems to be used consistently to assess students and have begun to use the data to modify instruction and create interventions for students.
1. The superintendent reorganized school grades so that all students in the same grade are in the same school, allowing more time for teachers to collaborate and review data.
 - a. At the elementary level (grades 1-4), teachers meet in grade-level meetings three times weekly to review data and discuss student progress; each team is a POD of three teachers. Interviewees told the team that an intervention called “swarming” was a product of these meetings.
 - b. At the middle-school level (grades 5-7), an ILT meets by grade level twice weekly to review data; interviewees stated that the middle school is behind the elementary schools in this work because it has less data to review at this time.
 - c. At the high-school level (grades 8-12), interviewees told the team that teachers meet multiple times weekly to review data.
 - d. At the district level, a district data team of central office administrators meets with coaches bi-monthly to review data, to modify instruction, and to plan interventions. The team calibrates observation data from learning walks at this meeting to make sure all schools and teachers are consistently assessing students and implementing instructional changes.
 2. The superintendent said that a district data team was created and schools now have to present their data results to the data team monthly. The data team reviews academic data, parent surveys, and social-emotional data to calibrate data and to ensure that all schools are moving in the same direction.
 3. The superintendent, central office administrators, and principals stated that a DIP and new SIPs have been created that include focus areas and goals developed using student assessment data.
 - a. Central office administrators said that principals wrote the SIPs using “any data they had” as a starting point. The superintendent and chief academic officer (CAO) reviewed the SIPs to ensure the inclusion of data that would help the school reach the three DIP goals.
 - b. The superintendent stated that the district created the DIP first and put it on the shared drive so that principals could use it as a model for the SIP. Each SIP includes a list of assessments at the school.

- c. Principals said that they like the common format of the SIPs, that SIPs are data inclusive, and that the schools now feel connected. They also told the team that educators' professional practice goals are now aligned with the goals in the SIPs.
4. Principals told the team that assessments are being refined to drive instruction and that until recently the MCAS assessment was the principal assessment in the district. Common interim, mid-term, and final examinations were implemented in 2015-2016.

Impact: The reorganization of school grades has created more time for teachers to learn how to use assessment data strategically. With the creation of a district data team, the refinement of assessments, and the development of strategic goals using assessment data, the district is on its way to developing an organized assessment system that will focus on using assessment data to improve student achievement.

Challenge and Area for Growth

2. The district does not have a centralized warehouse to store all student data.

- A. Interviewees told the team that some data is stored on Google docs.
- B. Some limited student data is displayed on Rediker, the parent and student portal.

Impact: Challenges in the storage of student data prevent parents from being fully informed about students' progress and constrain instructional leaders and teachers from using aggregated and disaggregated data in a timely way to monitor student progress, create meaningful interventions, and improve instruction.

Recommendation

1. The district should ensure that professional staff and parents have convenient, real-time access to student data as well as to other relevant academic and demographic data, as appropriate.

- A. The district should consider allocating resources for a data and assessment specialist to manage all student data, conduct statistical analysis, train staff in the administration and use of data, and make recommendations for appropriate warehousing of student data.
- B. To ensure that student data is readily accessible (as appropriate) in a centralized location, the district should consider allocating resources to purchase data warehouse software. As an alternative the district might consider contracting with an organization to store student assessment results.

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation will improve educators' ability to continuously monitor students' academic progress and to accurately measure achievement, which can lead to improved

classroom instruction and student support services, enhanced curriculum, and better informed educational policy and decision making.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Contextual Background

Multiple professional development (PD) opportunities are available for teachers, but the effectiveness of PD is not measured. The district schedules district and school-based PD and teachers receive job-embedded PD from coaches.

A review of teachers' and administrators' formative and summative evaluations indicated that evaluators do not consistently provide teachers with high-quality feedback that would enhance professional growth. Conversely, most administrators are provided feedback to enhance professional growth.

The district has a policy book and a series of personnel policies (G series) that it updates periodically. District practices for recruiting and selecting staff include internal postings and reliance on School Spring as the district's major recruitment vendor. About one-third of the teaching staff does not have professional status.

At the time of the onsite, the collective bargaining agreement with the Gardner Education Association (GEA) had expired, teachers were "Working to Rule" on Fridays, and the collective bargaining agreement was being mediated.

Strength Finding

1. The district provides teachers with multiple venues for professional development.

- A.** The district has a comprehensive approach to PD that includes districtwide PD days, school-based PD days, job-embedded PD from coaches, structured common planning time, summer PD, train-the-trainer sessions, and faculty and staff meetings.
 - 1. The chief academic officer (CAO) told the review team that she was part of a stakeholder group that developed ESE's "high-quality" PD standards, is responsible for developing districtwide PD, and receives input from the district's PD committee, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and tutors. The CAO considers the development of PD programs a districtwide effort.
 - a. The PD committee includes teachers from each school, administrators, and a representative from the GEA.
 - b. The PD committee uses surveys and feedback from participants about PD events in its districtwide decision-making. The feedback helps the district's administrative council make decisions about the quality of the offerings during the school year, and about teachers' needs the next year.

2. Each PD day is scheduled as a districtwide event, and each event includes time for school-based PD aligned with school goals.
 - a. A review of the 2015-2016 PD calendar indicated that the district scheduled four full days and two half days for district or school-based PD. Two full days of PD took place in August before school started. Periodically the district participates in regional PD held by a consortium of local districts called NAWWG (Narragansett, Ashburnham-Westminster, Winchendon, and Gardner).
3. Districtwide PD is partially planned around three priority goals included in the superintendent's entry plan and are reflected in the District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans. For example, the district PD calendar indicated an emphasis on improving tiered systems of support and strategies for improving students' social/emotional/behavioral health. District PD also emphasized improving inclusion and co-teaching instructional strategies.
 - a. Interviews and a review of the district's summer 2015 PD schedule indicated that the district offered train-the-trainer PD in Universal Design for Learning and Tier 1 and Tier 2 behavior strategies, as well as in using the WIDA standards and curriculum assessment mapping.
4. The district's five instructional coaches provide job-embedded support to teachers.

Impact: Having numerous differentiated PD opportunities that are aligned to district, school, and teachers' goals shows a commitment by the district to enhancing educator growth, which will likely improve student achievement.

Challenge and Area for Growth

2. **The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system and in the quality of feedback provided to educators.**
 - A. The team reviewed the personnel folders of 11 administrators and 30 teachers, including those of 12 teachers without professional status in their first 3 years of teaching in the district.
 1. Reviewed documents included summative and formative evaluations as well as self-assessments and goal setting documents.
 2. All self-assessment forms reviewed were complete, but the educators' goals were not consistently SMART (specific and strategic; measureable; action oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results focused; and timed and tracked). Interviewees said that professional development offerings are tied to team educator evaluation goals.

- a. Most teachers' evaluations were informative⁶ and included observations about goals or an account of educator abilities. However, none of the teachers' summative evaluations included specific recommendations that could contribute to professional growth.
- b. Most of the administrators' summative evaluations were informative and instructive.
- B.** Representatives from the Gardner Education Association (GEA) said that teachers and administrators received educator evaluation training through the Massachusetts Teachers' Association, noting the GEA is talking with the superintendent about the need to have districtwide training on calibrating expectations.
- C.** Interviewees said that the educator evaluation system is a "work in progress" and evaluators are getting better at reviewing "wheelbarrows" of evidence.
 - 1. Some evaluators told the review team that they have begun to watch evaluation videos to calibrate instructional expectations.
- D.** Administrators said that the district submitted in June 2014 to ESE's Center for Educator Effectiveness a DDM Implementation Plan for the 2014-2015 school year; however, interviewees said the district had received "a grace year" from using DDM data in rating teachers. Interviewees said DDM data was used to build teachers' student learning goals.
 - 1. Gardner received additional time and was notified by ESE's Center for Educator Effectiveness that it is expected to report Student Impact Ratings for all educators after the 2016-2017 school year.

Impact: Without consistency in the implementation and in the quality of feedback to educators, the desired goal of creating a culture of growth-oriented supervision and evaluation will be difficult to achieve.

⁶ An informative evaluation is factual and cites instructional details such as methodology, pedagogy, Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice or instruction of subject-based knowledge that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. It does not commit to improvement strategies. An instructive evaluation includes comments intended to improve instruction.

Recommendation

1. **To improve the implementation of its educator evaluation system and enhance its overall effectiveness, the district should address inconsistencies in policies, practices, and procedures that continue to exist and provide ongoing training for evaluators to improve the quality of observations and evaluations.**
 - A. The district should consider the formation of a joint committee, composed equally of administrators and teacher representatives, which would meet regularly and serve as a formal mechanism to monitor the overall implementation of the educator evaluation system, to identify problems proactively, and to collaboratively develop appropriate and timely solutions. In particular, the joint committee should focus on opportunities to maximize the efficiency of the system by scrutinizing the amount of documentation the district is requiring of educators and evaluators.
 - B. The district should provide additional and ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators to further support and promote the educator evaluation system. All administrators should receive targeted training in contemporary supervisory and evaluative practices in order to improve their professional judgment. This includes enhancing their abilities to observe and to analyze classroom instruction, and to provide specific, evidence-based feedback to staff that can significantly improve teaching and expand professional competencies. Educators should receive training and guidance on collecting meaningful evidence of their practice to contribute to a professional dialogue between evaluators and educators and to avoid the creation of “wheelbarrows” of evidence.
 - C. The district, in collaboration with the GEA, should identify opportunities for evaluators to calibrate expectations, grounded in the Standards of Effective Teaching and Administrative Leadership Practice.

Benefit: Improved district monitoring and communication systems will enable the superintendent, her administrative team, and all key stakeholders to more effectively oversee and ensure the full and consistent implementation of the educator evaluation system. Additional time and ongoing targeted training will likely improve professional skills and judgment and the overall effectiveness of teachers and administrators and result in an authentic and collaborative culture of growth-oriented supervision and evaluation.

Recommended resources:

- *The Evidence Collection Toolkit* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/implementation/CollectionToolkit.pdf>) supports districts in setting expectations for meaningful evidence collection with an emphasis on quality over quantity.

- *The Transforming Educator Evaluation in Massachusetts (TEEM) Video Series* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/teem/>) features educators from four districts discussing how to design and implement a meaningful evaluation system aligned to the state framework.
- *The Calibration Video Library* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/calibration/>) includes videos of classroom instruction and several calibration training protocols for groups of educators to practice conducting observations and giving feedback.

Student Support

Contextual Background

The student population in Gardner has changed over the last decade, reflecting changes in the town. Students from low-income families made up 25.6 percent of enrollment in 2004, compared with 59 percent in 2014. (In 2015, ESE introduced a different variable called “economically disadvantaged,” which typically is a lower percentage. Gardner’s economically disadvantaged students were 43.1 percent of enrollment in 2015, compared with 26.3 percent in the state.) Students with disabilities were 20.9 percent of enrollment in 2015, compared with 17.1 percent for the state. Educators in the district reported that many families are moving out of the district and/or sending their children to other districts; the overall number of students in the district is decreasing but the proportion of students needing supports is increasing.

The new superintendent last year laid out three goals to focus change in the schools; one is related to the social-emotional and behavior growth of students. Much of the work and many of the resources of student support have focused on that goal. Behavior management at the high school has been particularly difficult this year. The new superintendent’s re-organization of schools resulted in 8th and 9th graders transitioning to the high school in 2015-2016, effectively doubling the high school’s enrollment. Administrators said that they had not adequately planned for the impact of such a move on school culture and climate. At the same time, efforts to support behavioral growth through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices have not taken hold. Some high-school students expressed the view that the quality of their education is being compromised by disruptions by a few students. The district recently adopted an inclusion model; at the elementary level there is still more partial inclusion than full inclusion. The model entails instructional delivery via co-teaching (general education teacher and special education teacher or para-professionals). Some teachers have not fully embraced the full-inclusion teaching model.

Although the administrative team is working to communicate and implement a multi-tiered system of support for students’ academic and non-academic needs, the system is not gaining traction in the district. Key support components, such as differentiating instruction at each tier and inclusion, have not been effectively implemented districtwide.

Strength Finding

- 1. The district is allocating resources and implementing programs to support the social-emotional and behavioral well-being of students across the district.**
 - A.** One of the district’s three goals is to address students’ social-emotional and behavioral growth, as the district serves many high-needs students. The district is aligning professional

development (PD) with this goal and establishing practices and programs to support students' social-emotional and behavioral learning.

1. Instructional leaders reported that some PD addresses specific, intensive and/or specialized needs related to the social-emotional and behavioral growth of students.
 - a. Some interviewees said that they received Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS training) through the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC). A consultant provided PD on social-emotional learning related to PBIS to some staff, following a train-the-trainer model.
 - b. Others described district-based PD about children who have experienced trauma; they said that they received this PD, which included book study and discussions, in a professional learning community at the Elm Street School.
2. Interviewees reported that at the Elm Street School, when data show a student is struggling academically, teachers use a Child Study Team (CST) as a first step before engaging in a Student Support Team (SST) review. One interviewer described the CST as having a "social-emotional drive." Attention to social-emotional issues comes from teachers, adjustment counselors and the school nurse, in consultation with parents and social services agencies.
3. Interviewees said that the SST process that has been established in all schools this 2015-2016 school year to help struggling students get back on track.
 - a. SST team members help teachers of struggling students consider social-emotional and academic strategies to implement in their classrooms. If data show that a student continues to struggle, the SST identifies specialized social-emotional interventions.
 - b. In addition to the SST coordinator, attendees of the SST meetings can include the teacher of the struggling student, a school administrator, special education personnel, guidance personnel, and the school nurse. At the elementary level, another teacher at the student's grade-level attends and parents are invited into the second SST meeting.
4. The superintendent reported that staff at the Gardner Academy of Learning and Technology (GALT) provides personalized, responsive, social-emotional, and special education services for students who do not thrive in a traditional full-day school environment. Responsibility for each student's attendance is assigned to a specific person on staff.
 - a. The GALT is not a typical alternative high school. Students in the district self-select to apply for admission; they must attend the school for a two-week trial period before they can be accepted. GALT offers a shorter school day, more one-to-one instruction, and educational planning for students who are not achieving at grade level.
5. Interviewees credited guidance counselors at the high school as offering extensive social-emotional support for students. For example, counselors have created an in-house social-

emotional curriculum; this is implemented during a long advisory block each week, to address key concepts (e.g., “respect”) that promote a respectful climate in the high school.

6. At the high school, several peer-to-peer initiatives provide social-emotional support to students, including: the LINKS Crew (students in grades 10-11 who create orientation activities for new students); a mentoring program pairing upper class students with younger students for everyday discussions of academics and the social aspects of navigating the high school; and the annual student success assembly, where struggling students talk with older students who overcame their struggles and are succeeding at the high school.
7. Implementation of the PBIS approach has begun in earnest at the middle school and is evident in the public spaces such as the lunchroom and in many classrooms. Review team members noted moderate or strong evidence of a respectful classroom climate in 87 percent of middle-school classes observed.
 - a. The middle school has implemented a reward card system. When students demonstrate positive behaviors, they receive “PRIDE” cards (Positive, Respectful, shows Integrity, Determined, strives for Excellence).
 - b. A student support center has been established at the middle school. Teachers who identify a behavior problem can call the center and report the incident. A school administrator then discusses the incident with the student. If needed, a positive behavior plan is created for students and parents have to sign it.
7. Each school reports data related to social-emotional learning (SEL) (including attendance data) and one gives a presentation about its SEL and academic data) each month to peers across the district.
8. At the time of the onsite an administrator stated that a SEL Task Force composed of administrators and some special education staff had just been formed.

Impact: When the district prioritizes supporting the social-emotional and behavioral growth of all students and takes steps toward achieving this goal, the district creates an environment that supports students’ academic progress and emotional well-being and where all students feel understood and can thrive.

Challenge and Area for Growth

2. The district has not established an effective multi-tiered system of support for all students.

- A. In observed classrooms, the team saw limited differentiation of instruction so that lesson content was accessible to all learners.

1. Observers saw moderate or strong evidence of teachers appropriately differentiating instruction in only 32 percent of district classrooms (16 percent at the elementary level, 62 percent at the middle school, and 28 percent at the high-school level).
 2. Observers saw moderate or strong evidence of teachers using appropriate resources aligned to students' diverse learning needs in only 40 percent of district classrooms (40 percent at the elementary level, 50 percent at the middle school, and 32 percent at the high-school level).
 3. Interviewees stated that differentiated instruction is done well "in pockets" of the district and some teachers "do not know what it is" or are "not open to using it."
 - a. A district administrator said: "A lot of our teachers don't know how to teach kids who don't 'fit in the box'."
- B.** Through Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) train-the-trainer professional development, staff are learning to use assessment data to develop tiered instruction.
1. An interviewee said that many in the district do not understand how special education fits into MTSS, and confuse special education with either Tier 3 or a tier "beyond Tier 3."
- C.** Although instructional coaches and principals have recently developed Tier 2 and 3 interventions called "swarming," only Title I tutors in some schools are using them.
- D.** The district has adopted an inclusion model through which accommodations for students with disabilities are used in general education classrooms through co-teaching and the use of paraprofessionals, but some teachers have not fully implemented or embraced the model.
1. An interviewee said that partial inclusion is still the most common model used at the elementary level, although the number of sub-separate classrooms has been reduced. Partial inclusion is used the least at the high-school level.
 2. An interviewee reported that the district has not created schedules that enable general education teachers and special education co-teachers to collaborate.
 3. Some district leaders said that some teachers struggle with changing their practices. One interviewee described the district's adoption of an inclusion model for special education through co-teaching as a "philosophical shift" that created stress among teachers. Several interviewees, including the superintendent, mentioned that some teachers were not comfortable adopting inclusion.
- E.** Although the district has taken steps recently to implement PBIS districtwide, effective management of classroom behaviors by all teachers has not taken hold.

- F.** Behavior management has been particularly challenging this year with the district reorganization, in which eighth graders entered high school with the incoming ninth graders. Administrators said that they were not adequately prepared to provide supports to new students as they transitioned to the high school or to set expectations about behavior and help new students adjust to the culture and climate at the high school level.

- 1. A district administrator reported that in the first two months of school this year, approximately a dozen fights took place and 69 suspensions were given.

Impact: When a comprehensive system of tiered support is not effectively implemented to ensure that students' diverse learning needs are identified and met, student achievement may suffer, particularly among struggling students. Without setting high expectations and providing appropriate support to students as they enter high school, it will be challenging for rising ninth graders to adjust to the culture and climate in their new school. Without a multi-tiered support system for all students, some students may struggle to stay engaged in school, greatly reducing their chances for being well prepared for success after high school.

Recommendation

1. The district should continue its efforts to develop a well-defined multi-tiered system of support K-12.

- A.** The district should put practices in place to ensure that all learners are provided with instruction and supports that meet their needs. The district should review and extend its approach to providing additional supports to students with the goal of establishing a coordinated, districtwide system of tiered interventions.
 - 1. The district should identify Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions and if needed clarify the difference between the two tiers. Once Tier 1 is clearly defined and understood, then Tiers 2 and 3 can be defined.
 - a. District leaders might identify examples (including descriptions and/or video clips) that illustrate best practices.
 - 2. The district should use student performance data to determine additional necessary interventions in order to more directly address students' needs.
 - 3. The district should identify the staff and resources available to deliver additional Tier 2 interventions. In cases where insufficient resources exist, the district should consider reallocating resources in budget planning to fill these gaps.
 - 4. District leaders should set appropriately high expectations for behavior and provide adequate support to students entering high school.

5. All interventions provided in the district should be documented and communicated districtwide to ensure coordination and consistency.

- B. As part of its coordinated approach to professional development, the district should provide ongoing, high-quality training to teachers focused on instructional strategies that are desirable for high-needs students, including students with disabilities. These strategies should include techniques to differentiate instruction while providing an appropriate level of challenge for all students; differentiated instruction should be more frequently implemented throughout the district.

Benefits: By implementing this recommendation the district will establish a tiered system designed for all students based on a common understanding of ways in which students learn differently, of supports that help all children learn, and of strategies that create a positive climate for learning across the district. The establishment of a tiered system of support and setting of high expectations for classroom climate signal to teachers, staff, students and families that the district's priorities for educational improvement include all students.

Recommended resources:

- The *Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS)* (www.mass.gov/ese/mtss) is a blueprint for school improvement that focuses on systems, structures and supports across the district, school, and classroom to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students. The MTSS website includes links to a self-assessment and a variety of helpful resources.
- ESE's *Early Warning Indicator System* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/ewis.html>) is a tool to provide information to districts about the likelihood that their students will reach key academic goals. Districts can use the tool in conjunction with other data and sources of information to better target student supports and interventions and to examine school-level patterns over time in order to address systemic issues that may impede students' ability to meet academic goals.
- The *Early Warning Implementation Guide* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/2014ImplementationGuide.pdf>) provides information on how to use early warning data, including the Massachusetts Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS), to identify, diagnose, support and monitor students in grades 1-12. It offers educators an overview of EWIS and how to effectively use these data in conjunction with local data by following a six-step implementation cycle.
- *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>) highlights ways in which states and school districts can promote academic excellence by creating safe and productive learning environments for all students.
- The *Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/>) includes tools for districts, schools, and educators

that are aligned to the MA Educator Evaluation Framework and promote evidence-based best practices for inclusion following the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and Social and Emotional Learning.

- The *Inclusive Practice Tool* (www.doe.mass.edu/eval/guidebook/2a-rubric.pdf) is a guide for districts as administrators visit classrooms. It suggests what teaching practices to look for during observations.
- *Ninth Grade Counts* (<http://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/resources/ninth-grade-counts/>) is a resource to help high schools identify weaknesses in their ninth-grade programs, and then develop a purposeful, proactive plan to strengthen this critical educational transition. The guide is divided into three areas of focus:
 - Strengthening the Transition into High School
 - Strengthening the High School Transition for English Language Learners
 - Using Summer Bridge Programs to Strengthen the High School Transition

Financial and Asset Management

Contextual Background

The district's student foundation enrollment over the last 10 years has decreased from 2,981 in 2007 to 2,419 in 2016, a decrease of 562 students or 19 percent. During the same period, student enrollment in the state decreased only 1.7 percent. The proportion of students from low-income families has increased steadily, from 45.5 percent in 2010 to 49.2 percent in 2011 to 51.3 percent in 2012 to 55.9 percent in 2013 to 59.0 percent in 2014. (In 2015, ESE introduced a different variable called "economically disadvantaged," which typically is a lower percentage. Gardner's economically disadvantaged students were 43.1 percent of enrollment in 2015, compared with 26.3 percent for the state.)

The district participates in the school choice program and has experienced a substantial shift in recent years---with more students choosing to leave the district and fewer students choosing to enroll in the district. This trend is of concern to district administrators and city officials. Historically, there has been an understanding between city officials and district administrators that the district will receive no more than the required net school spending amount for its annual budget. As a result, the district has budgeted to that amount. Actual net school spending has been below the required amount for 8 of the last 10 years but within the allowed 5 percent variance. The agreement between the city and the school district on the allocation of indirect costs was last reviewed and signed in 2005. The superintendent plans on submitting a needs-based budget for fiscal year 2017.

Many of the six school buildings in the district are old and need repairs. MSBA has encouraged the submission of a Statement of Interest for a new building to replace the Waterford Street School though at the time of the onsite it was not apparent that any action had been taken. New growth revenues for fiscal year 2016 are \$350,826 and excess capacity is \$212,681. The average tax bill in Gardner is 55 percent lower than the state average.

Strength Finding

- 1. District administrators have developed relationships with local businesses, colleges, and community agencies to provide programs and support to help the district meet the needs of students, parents, and staff.**
 - A.** Student teachers from Fitchburg State University, Franklin Pierce University, and UMass Lowell work with teachers in Gardner.
 - B.** The Montachusett Opportunity Council has provided translators at evening meetings and other translation services when needed at no cost to the district.
 - C.** Simplex Grinnell donated 8-10 truckloads of computers and other industrial equipment to the high school this year when it closed its Westminister, MA, plant.

- D. The YMCA in Leominster operates the district's after-school program at the Sauter school.
- E. A district administrator enlisted the assistance of community members, other government departments, and area companies in the district's school move in the summer 2015.
 - 1. ROTC members from Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School volunteered to help move supplies, furnishings, etc., when the district reorganized.
 - 2. Employees of city departments accepted reduced wages to help move furniture, equipment, and boxes from one school to another. Local moving companies donated boxes for the move.

Impact: Collaborations with area colleges, local businesses, and community agencies have enabled the district to provide needed services and equipment as well as important role models to students to help the district leverage limited financial resources and further its goals.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

- 2. **Years of appropriations at the required net school spending level and increases in nondiscretionary expenses have challenged district administrators to adequately provide resources for academic initiatives.**
 - A. For many years, city officials and district administrators have had a shared understanding that the school district will have a budget amount that is no more or less than the amount required by the state to be appropriated for public education.
 - 1. A city official stated that the school district has historically been funded at the required net school spending (NSS) level.
 - 2. A district administrator stated that because there has been an expectation that school budgets will never exceed required NSS, for many years a city official has told administrators the required NSS number and then administrators have adjusted the proposed budget to meet that number.
 - 3. Administrators acknowledged that the budget allocation process is a "zero sum game" where increases in one area of the budget must be offset by decreases in another area of the budget to ensure that the total budget does not exceed the required NSS amount set by the city.
 - a. For example, a school administrator stated that they had to "swap out" a librarian to get an arts teacher.
 - B. In 8 out of the last 10 years, actual net school spending has been below the required amount but within the allowed 5 percent variance.

1. Actual net school spending has ranged from \$694,236 below NSS (-2.7 percent) in fiscal year 2008 to \$660,124 over NSS (2.5 percent) in fiscal year 2014 (see Table B6).
- C. City officials and district administrators have instituted cost saving measures that have resulted in operating savings.
1. The city was one of the first in the state to implement Plan Design Authority for the city's health insurance plan in 2010-2011. The district is self-insured and the plan is administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield. Initial savings were an estimated \$800,000. A city official attributed much of the savings to the fact that many health care services are provided by Heywood Hospital, which is located in Gardner and less expensive than Boston hospitals.
 2. The district has made a concerted effort to provide special needs services within the district to save money on out-of-district transportation.
 3. Because of savings in fiscal year 2015 utility costs, the district was able to reallocate over \$200,000 toward the purchase of curriculum materials and supplies.
- D. Notable increases have been seen in school choice-out tuition and health insurance premiums.
1. Tuition for out-of-district school choice has increased from \$648,914 in fiscal year 2012 to \$1,007,541 in fiscal year 2015, an increase of \$358,627 (see the finding below).
 2. Recent increases in annual health insurance premiums have been in the range of 12 percent.
- E. Administrators and staff members offered examples of various instructional challenges facing the district, including the following:
1. A school administrator stated that the district is not attracting the best applicants for positions because the district's salary scale is not competitive.
 2. Teachers' association representatives stated that the district is having a problem keeping new teachers because they leave for higher-paying positions in other communities.
 3. A school administrator said that the district wanted to add a special education teacher but the money appropriated in the fiscal year 2016 school budget was not enough for a new staff position.
 4. A school administrator stated: "I would like to have SmartBoards in every classroom."
 5. District administrators stated that the district does not have a centralized data warehouse.
 6. When asked which district priorities were not addressed in fiscal year 2016, a district administrator said that there was not enough money for more data teams in the schools.

Impact: Although the district has attempted to save money and control expenses while operating under the city's funding appropriation at required net school spending levels, increases in nondiscretionary

expenses are limiting the amount of funds that can be allocated to help the district improve student achievement.

3. The district has had financial challenges for several years in part because the number of students who leave the district through school choice has increased steadily.

A. According to ESE data, in fiscal year 2015, 183 Gardner-resident students enrolled in neighboring school districts.

1. In fiscal year 2015, Gardner lost tuition fees of \$1,007,541 to other districts.
2. The table below represents the losses of students and tuition for out-of-district school choice for fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2015.

Table 21
Gardner Public Schools
Choice-In and Choice Out Enrollment, Revenue, and Expense
Fiscal Years 2012-2015

	Fiscal Year 2012	Fiscal Year 2013	Fiscal Year 2014	Fiscal Year 2015
Number of Choice-In Students	177	156	151	140
Number of Choice-Out Students	122	143	158	183
Choice-In Revenue	\$965,448	\$821,803	\$776,929	\$773,133
Choice-Out Expense	\$648,914	\$775,280	\$880,990	\$1,007,541

Source: [MA ESE School Choice Trends in Enrollment and Tuition](#)

- B.** A district administrator expressed concern that fiscal year 2016 school choice-out tuition already exceeded the budget projection of \$1,002,576 by \$160,000.
- C.** When asked why increasing numbers of students were “choicing out,” administrators, city officials, and staff members offered several reasons:
1. A district administrator said there were three issues: the quality of sports, facilities, and education.
 2. A city official said that some students leave the district for districts with more competitive sports teams.

3. A school administrator expressed the view that parents and students are trying to “skip” the middle school.
 4. Teachers’ association representatives said that the city of Gardner is viewed as struggling and having a high number of children in foster care. It is also the location of a state correctional facility. They added that families might be leaving the district because of the condition of school buildings.
- 4. Most of the district’s schools are old and need repair and the district does not have an approved and funded plan for repairing, renovating, or replacing school buildings.**
- A.** Of the 6 school buildings in use by the district, 3 are over 90 years old, 2 are over 40 years old, and 1 is 19 years old.

Table 22
Gardner Public Schools: Year Built, Renovations, and Present Use

School	Year Built	Renovations	Present Use
Waterford Street	1957	1997	Pre-K , kindergarten, grade 1
Elm Street	1926	1998	Grades 2-4
Middle School	1997	--	Grades 5-7
High School	1976	2000	Grades 8-12
Helen Mae Sauter	1898	1988	Special education administration, before and after-school programs
Prospect	1922	--	Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology, grades 9-12

Source: [Massachusetts School Building Authority](#)

- B.** A wide variety of stakeholders said that many school buildings need repair.
1. A city official described the condition of the school buildings as “awful.”
 2. The superintendent and other administrators stated on multiple occasions that the condition of the district’s facilities is a major issue. Leaky roofs, a bad boiler, and a heater that fell off a restroom wall were cited by administrators as examples of facility conditions.
 3. Parents stated that many district facilities are in “rough shape.”
 4. In 2015 an architectural firm completed a facilities assessment of the district’s school buildings.

- a. The report stated that all Gardner’s school buildings needed renovations ranging from systems replacement to accommodations for handicapped access.
 - b. Other needs cited included:
 - i. Toilets and sinks not at the proper height for elementary students;
 - ii. Outdated fire alarm system at an elementary school;
 - iii. An inoperable Air exchange system in elementary; and
 - iv. Middle-school roof needs to be repaired.
 - c. A report on school facilities was presented to the finance subcommittee of the school committee on October 6, 2015, and discussed at their meeting on November 3, 2015. The report contained the district’s priority list of repairs and lists of repairs by school building.
- C.** Although the district has participated in several repair programs through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), at the time of the onsite there did not appear to be an actionable and financed plan in place at the district or city level to address the many building issues.

1. The district has participated in the MSBA repair programs detailed in the table below:

Table 23
Gardner Public Schools: MSBA Repair Programs and Costs

School Building	Project Type(Year)	Total Project Cost	Maximum Anticipated MSBA Payment	Anticipated City Payment
Elm Street	Green Repair (2011)	\$68,784.75	\$169,061	\$80,044
High School	Green Repair (2011)	\$272,377.91	\$1,152,296	\$1,037,102
High School	Science Lab (2013)	\$421,742.81	\$2,689,793	\$958,259
Middle School	Accelerated Repair (2013)	\$58,110	\$401,196	\$153,718
Waterford Street	Green Repair (2011)	\$40,334.53	\$198,570	\$76,363

Sources: [District document and the Massachusetts School Building Authority](#)

2. The current city 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan does not identify school building repairs as high priority.

- a. The priority ranking of the city's capital projects as listed on Attachment "A" of the Capital Improvement Plan has 13 other projects ranked higher than the first school project which calls for security cameras at the middle school.
 - i. A city official was surprised to learn that no school projects were rated in the top 10 priority projects by the Capital Improvement Committee.
3. A city official stated that he would like to spend \$250,000 on capital school repairs as soon as free cash is certified. However, this amount is only a fraction of the total \$2,421,000 estimated costs on the district's building repair list that was presented at the October, 2015, finance subcommittee meeting.
4. A district administrator stated that the MSBA told the district to submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) for replacing the Waterford Elementary School after the MSBA declined the city's April 6, 2015, SOI for replacing the Elm Street School. However, at the time of the onsite a review of school committee and city council minutes did not show any evidence that the SOI process for the Waterford School had been initiated by the school committee and/or approved by the city council.
5. A school administrator stated his school has many issues including a leaking roof and an improperly working heating system, noting that there is no long term maintenance plan in place to address these and other issues.
6. At a recent committee meeting a school committee member pointed out the need for a plan to address the many facilities issues in the district.

Impact: Without a comprehensive maintenance and repair plan in place, along with identified financial resources from the city and state to address the urgent needs, the district will not be able to provide safer and healthier learning environments for students and staff.

Recommendations

- 1. Aligned to the strengthened improvement planning process recommended under Leadership and Governance above, budget development should include a hard look at whether current resource allocation directly supports continuous improvement, and what reallocations may be needed to fully implement the District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans.**

- A.** Goals and activities contained in the DIP and SIPs should be included in the budget narrative, and specific statements about resources provided in the plan document for initiatives that have financial implications; e.g., staffing changes, technology, or new professional development.

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation will mean a better understanding by all district and community stakeholders of the resources needed in the schools and the associated costs. In addition,

examining present allocations and identifying areas of savings will allow for the reallocation of limited funds to those areas where student needs are greatest, moving the district toward its goal of improved student achievement .

Recommended resources:

- *Best Practices in School District Budgeting* (<http://www.gfoa.org/best-practices-school-district-budgeting>) outlines steps to developing a budget that best aligns resources with student achievement goals. Each step includes a link to a specific resource document with relevant principles and policies to consider.
- *Smarter School Spending for Student Success* (<http://smarterschoolspending.org/home>) provides free processes and tools to help districts use their resources to improve student achievement.
- MassEnergyInsight (<https://www.massenergyinsight.net/home>) is a free, web-based tool made available by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources as part of the Massachusetts Green Communities Program. The tool is designed to help communities learn about and monitor energy use and related costs, plan energy efficiency programs, and communicate this information.
- *Per-Pupil Expenditure Reports* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/ppx.html>) is a report series that provides summary and detail per-pupil spending data for each school district.
- ESE's *School Finance Statistical Comparisons* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/>) provides comparisons of per-pupil expenditure, long-term enrollment, teacher salaries, and special education expenditure trends.
- The Rennie Center's *Smart School Budgeting* (http://www.renniecenter.org/topics/smart_school_budgeting.html; direct link: <http://www.renniecenter.org/research/SmartSchoolBudgeting.pdf>) is a summary of existing resources on school finance, budgeting, and reallocation.
- *In Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets* (<http://dmccouncil.org/spending-money-wisely-ebook>), authors Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan of The District Management Council identify and discuss the top ten opportunities for districts to realign resources and free up funds to support strategic priorities. Drawing on the wisdom of leading thinkers, district leaders, and education researchers from across the country, the authors gathered a long list of opportunities for resource reallocation. To distill these down to the ten most high-impact opportunities, each opportunity was assessed based on its financial benefit, its impact on student achievement, its political feasibility, and its likelihood of success relative to the complexity of implementation.

2. District administrators and school committee members should undertake a formal study to determine why an increasing number of students are choosing to attend other public schools.

1. The district should collect school choice data and formally collect feedback (for example, through exit interviews) from stakeholders, including parents who have enrolled their children in other districts and parents who chose to keep their children in the district's schools.
 - a. The district should determine from which schools and grades students are choosing out.
 - b. The district should collect feedback from a large enough number of families to understand the range of reasons why families are leaving the district.
2. District leaders should analyze results and formulate recommendations for change.
 - a. The district should inform stakeholders of planned changes.

Benefit: Implementing this recommendation will help the district to build on the work it has completed by identifying areas for improvement and will likely increase the public's awareness of the district's priorities and the many instructional improvements in the district's schools.

Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Schedule, Site Visit

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from January 11-14, 2016, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. Dr. Karla Brooks Baehr, leadership and governance
2. Michelle Kingsland-Smith, curriculum and instruction
3. James L. Hearn, , assessment, *review team coordinator*
4. Dr. Thomas Johnson, human resources and professional development
5. Dr. Janet Smith, student support
6. Margaret Foster, financial and asset management

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted during the review:

The team conducted interviews with the following financial personnel: district business administrator, mayor, city treasurer, city auditor, city procurement officer, district payroll clerk, and district accounts payable clerk.

The team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: chairman and member.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers' association: two co-presidents.

The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: superintendent, chief academic officer, director of pupil personnel services, business administrator, and the ESL coordinator/literacy coordinator/grants administrator.

The team visited the following schools: Waterford Street School (Pre-K-1), Elm Street School (grades 2-4), Gardner Middle School (grades 5-7), Gardner High School (grades 8-12), and Gardner Academy of Learning and Technology (grades 9-12).

During school visits, the team conducted interviews with 5 principals and focus groups with 4 elementary school teachers, and 1 middle school teacher.

The team observed 63 classes in the district: 22 at the 2 high schools, 16 at the middle school, and 25 at the 2 elementary schools.

The review team analyzed multiple data sets and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:

- Student and school performance data, including achievement and growth, enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
- Data on the district's staffing and finances.
- Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).
- District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks, school schedules, and the district's end-of-year financial reports.
- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Monday 01/11/2016	Tuesday 01/12/2016	Wednesday 01/13/2016	Thursday 01/14/2016
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; document reviews; and visits to the Waterford Street Elementary School for classroom observations.	Interviews with town or city personnel; Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; interview with teachers' association; teacher focus groups; parent focus group; and visits to the Gardner High School, Gardner Middle School, and the Waterford Street Elementary School for classroom observations.	interviews with school leaders; interviews with school committee members; visits to the Elm Street Elementary School, the Gardner Middle School, the Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology, and the Gardner High School for classroom observations.	Interviews with school leaders; follow-up interviews; district review team meeting; visits to the Elm Street Elementary School, the Gardner Middle School, the Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology, and the Gardner High School for classroom observations; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix B: Enrollment, Performance, Expenditures

**Table B1a: Gardner Public Schools
2015–2016 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

Student Group	District	Percent of Total	State	Percent of Total
African-American	70	2.9%	83,481	8.8%
Asian	37	1.5%	61,584	6.5%
Hispanic	323	13.4%	176,873	18.6%
Native American	6	0.2%	2,179	0.2%
White	1,789	74.0%	597,502	62.7%
Native Hawaiian	3	0.1%	888	0.1%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	191	7.9%	30,922	3.2%
All Students	2,419	100.0%	953,429	100.0%

Note: As of October 1, 2015

**Table B1b: Gardner Public Schools
2015–2016 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

Student Groups	District			State		
	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of District	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of State
Students w/ disabilities	536	39.1%	21.9%	165,559	39.4%	17.2%
Econ. Disad.	1,072	78.2%	44.3%	260,998	62.2%	27.4%
ELLs and Former ELLs	112	8.2%	4.6%	85,763	20.4%	9.0%
All high needs students	1,371	100.0%	56.0%	419,764	100.0%	43.5%

Notes: As of October 1, 2015. District and state numbers and percentages for students with disabilities and high needs students are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Total district enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 2,958; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 964,026.

Table B2a: Gardner Public Schools
English Language Arts MCAS/PARCC Performance, 2012–2015

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS/PARCC Year					Gains and Declines	
			2012	2013	2014	2015*	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	CPI	209	82.4	75.9	78.7	69.9	82.5	-12.5	-8.8
4	CPI	170	71.8	72.0	65.7	68.8	77.8	-3.0	3.1
	SGP	159	34.0	34.0	32.5	32.0	50.0	-2.0	-0.5
5	CPI	196	79.2	80.5	79.0	72.3	87.0	-6.9	-6.7
	SGP	178	37.0	53.0	44.0	38.0	50.0	1.0	-6.0
6	CPI	176	78.2	79.3	75.1	77.0	86.6	-1.2	1.9
	SGP	158	30.0	38.5	32.5	30.0	50.0	0.0	-2.5
7	CPI	212	81.6	86.0	79.5	72.1	86.4	-9.5	-7.4
	SGP	190	38.5	49.0	34.0	28.0	50.0	-10.5	-6.0
8	CPI	173	87.3	81.6	81.5	83.1	92.0	-4.2	1.6
	SGP	164	44.0	33.0	26.0	40.0	50.0	-4.0	14.0
10	CPI	147	93.1	96.3	93.2	95.6	96.7	2.5	2.4
	SGP	114	39.0	42.5	30.0	35.0	51.0	-4.0	5.0
All	CPI	1,290	81.5	81.3	78.6	75.9	86.8	-5.6	-2.7
	SGP	966	37.0	42.0	32.0	32.0	50.0	-5.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in statewide assessments for the first time.

* The PARCC Assessment was given in 2015 for grades 3 through 8. The MCAS assessment was given in 2012-2014 and in grade 10 in 2015.

Table B2b: Gardner Public Schools
English Language Arts MCAS Performance, 2011-2014

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2014)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2011	2012	2013	2014	State 2014	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	P+	181	55%	54%	38%	49%	57%	-6	11
4	P+	193	42%	41%	41%	33%	54%	-9	-8
5	P+	175	61%	51%	54%	57%	64%	-4	3
6	P+	199	54%	54%	52%	49%	68%	-5	-3
7	P+	183	67%	55%	65%	52%	72%	-15	-13
8	P+	188	83%	73%	62%	62%	79%	-21	0
10	P+	159	80%	81%	91%	83%	90%	3	-8
All	P+	1,278	63%	58%	57%	54%	69%	-9	-3

**Table B2c: Gardner Public Schools
English Language Arts 2015 PARCC Performance Level**

Grade	N	Levels 4 & 5		Level 5		Level 4		Level 3		Level 2		Level 1	
		Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State
3	208	30%	54%	2%	7%	28%	47%	28%	22%	23%	14%	19%	10%
4	167	41%	57%	7%	15%	34%	42%	33%	25%	18%	12%	8%	5%
5	192	38%	63%	1%	8%	37%	55%	28%	23%	19%	10%	15%	4%
6	175	40%	60%	3%	12%	37%	48%	34%	25%	16%	11%	10%	4%
7	209	32%	61%	5%	21%	26%	40%	28%	22%	25%	11%	15%	6%
8	170	49%	64%	5%	16%	44%	48%	19%	20%	22%	10%	11%	5%

Levels 4 and 5: Met or Exceeded Expectations, Level 5: Exceeded Expectations, Level 4: Met Expectations; Level 3: Approached Expectations; Level 2: Partially Met Expectations; Level 1: Did Not Meet Expectations

**Table B2d: Gardner Public Schools
Mathematics MCAS/PARCC Performance, 2012–2015**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS/PARCC Year					Gains and Declines	
			2012	2013	2014	2015*	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	CPI	209	71.7	73.5	72.8	74.3	85.3	2.6	1.5
4	CPI	169	70.3	74.5	67.2	67.0	77.1	-3.3	-0.2
	SGP	158	35.5	54.0	50.0	47.0	50.0	11.5	-3.0
5	CPI	195	66.7	71.3	72.6	65.9	83.2	-0.8	-6.7
	SGP	179	28.0	42.0	40.5	42.0	50.0	14.0	1.5
6	CPI	175	71.6	70.1	69.5	73.7	81.2	2.1	4.2
	SGP	159	43.0	40.0	40.0	50.0	50.0	7.0	10.0
7	CPI	210	64.8	65.2	57.2	55.7	72.5	-9.1	-1.5
	SGP	190	51.0	40.5	43.0	36.0	50.0	-15.0	-7.0
8	CPI	172	65.9	56.8	58.8	61.9	78.1	-4.0	3.1
	SGP	163	37.0	20.0	26.0	29.0	50.0	-8.0	3.0
10	CPI	146	82.6	87.4	80.5	80.5	89.9	-2.1	0.0
	SGP	114	54.0	39.5	27.5	45.0	50.0	-9.0	17.5
All	CPI	1,283	70.1	70.9	68.1	67.7	80.7	-2.4	-0.4
	SGP	967	41.0	40.5	37.0	42.0	50.0	1.0	5.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in statewide assessments for the first time.

* The PARCC Assessment was given in 2015 for grades 3 through 8. The MCAS assessment was given in 2012-2014 and in grade 10 in 2015.

**Table B2e: Gardner Public Schools
Mathematics MCAS Performance, 2011-2014**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2014)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2011	2012	2013	2014	State 2014	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
3	P+	181	51%	40%	49%	47%	68%	-4	-2
4	P+	196	34%	39%	42%	32%	52%	-2	-10
5	P+	176	40%	33%	42%	47%	61%	7	5
6	P+	199	45%	43%	44%	42%	60%	-3	-2
7	P+	184	35%	28%	38%	30%	50%	-5	-8
8	P+	188	48%	35%	27%	28%	52%	-20	1
10	P+	163	68%	66%	74%	59%	79%	-9	-15
All	P+	1,287	46%	40%	44%	40%	60%	-6	-4

**Table B2f: Gardner Public Schools
Math 2015 PARCC Performance Level**

Grade	N	Levels 4 & 5		Level 5		Level 4		Level 3		Level 2		Level 1	
		Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State
3	208	34%	55%	3%	12%	30%	43%	30%	25%	25%	14%	11%	6%
4	165	32%	48%	1%	6%	30%	41%	32%	29%	23%	18%	14%	5%
5	191	25%	55%	2%	11%	23%	44%	33%	26%	32%	15%	10%	5%
6	174	36%	53%	2%	10%	34%	44%	36%	28%	20%	14%	8%	5%
7	207	20%	45%	0%	8%	20%	37%	39%	32%	29%	18%	11%	4%
8	169	28%	53%	1%	10%	27%	43%	25%	22%	25%	15%	22%	10%

Levels 4 and 5: Met or Exceeded Expectations; Level 5: Exceeded Expectations; Level 4: Met Expectations; Level 3: Approached Expectations; Level 2: Partially Met Expectations; Level 1: Did Not Meet Expectations

**Table B2g: Gardner Public Schools
Science and Technology/Engineering MCAS Performance, 2012–2015**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2012	2013	2014	2015	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
5	CPI	198	69.2	69.5	74.3	65.3	78.2	-3.9	-9.0
	P+	198	35%	33%	43%	26%	51%	-9%	-17%
8	CPI	177	62.7	60.4	65.7	55.9	72.4	-6.8	-9.8
	P+	177	29%	25%	31%	15%	42%	-14%	-16%
10	CPI	122	83.6	86.3	79.8	81.6	88.2	-2.0	1.8
	P+	122	63%	66%	52%	56%	72%	-7%	4%
All	CPI	497	70.4	70.9	72.7	65.9	79.4	-4.5	-6.8
	P+	497	40%	39%	41%	29%	54%	-11%	-12%

Notes: P+ = percent *Proficient* or *Advanced*. Students participate in Science and Technology/ Engineering (STE) MCAS tests in grades 5, 8, and 10 only. Median SGPs are not calculated for STE.

**Table B3a: Gardner Public Schools
English Language Arts (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS/PARCC Year				Gains and Declines	
				2012	2013	2014	2015*	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	District	CPI	760	74.5	74.2	71.2	67.4	-7.1	-3.8
		SGP	543	37.0	37.0	30.0	30.0	-7.0	0.0
	State	CPI	220,963	76.5	76.8	77.1	76.3	-0.2	-0.8
		SGP	164,300	46.0	47.0	47.0	47.0	1.0	0.0
Econ. Disad.	District	CPI	620	--	--	--	69.2	--	--
		SGP	446	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	CPI	151,741	--	--	--	77.6	--	--
		SGP	114,505	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	294	57.5	57.8	51.4	51.9	-5.6	0.5
		SGP	208	29.0	33.5	24.5	26.5	-2.5	2.0
	State	CPI	90,429	67.3	66.8	66.6	67.4	0.1	0.8
		SGP	65,886	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	0.0	0.0
English language learners or Former ELLs	District	CPI	84	65.7	62.9	62.1	65.2	-0.5	3.1
		SGP	56	36.0	41.0	46.0	29.0	-7.0	-17.0
	State	CPI	49,639	66.2	67.4	67.8	68.9	2.7	1.1
		SGP	32,850	51.0	53.0	54.0	53.0	2.0	-1.0
All students	District	CPI	1,290	81.5	81.3	78.6	75.9	-5.6	-2.7
		SGP	966	37.0	42.0	32.0	32.0	-5.0	0.0
	State	CPI	490,449	86.7	86.8	86.7	86.8	0.1	0.1
		SGP	386,631	50.0	51.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

* The PARCC Assessment was given in 2015 for grades 3 through 8. The MCAS assessment was given in 2012-2014 and in grade 10 in 2015.

**Table B3b: Gardner Public Schools
English Language Arts (All Grades)
Percentage of Selected Subgroups Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS, 2011-2014**

Group	Number Included (2014)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
		2011	2012	2013	2014	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	802	48%	44%	44%	41%	-7	-3
Low Income	707	52%	48%	45%	44%	-8	-1
Students w/ disabilities	286	20%	17%	17%	12%	-8	-5
ELL or Former ELLs	68	34%	33%	30%	29%	-5	-1
All Students	1,278	63%	58%	57%	54%	-9	-3

**Table B3c: Gardner Public Schools
ELA Grades 3 to 8 by Group 2015 PARCC Performance Level**

Grade	N	Levels 4 & 5		Level 5		Level 4		Level 3		Level 2		Level 1	
		Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State
High Needs	658	25%	38%	1%	4%	24%	34%	28%	30%	26%	20%	20%	11%
Econ. Disad.	538	27%	41%	1%	5%	25%	36%	29%	30%	25%	19%	19%	11%
Students with disabilities	241	8%	21%	0%	2%	8%	20%	18%	30%	34%	29%	40%	20%
ELL	79	27%	31%	3%	3%	24%	28%	27%	30%	20%	24%	27%	15%
All	1,121	38%	60%	4%	13%	34%	47%	28%	23%	21%	12%	13%	6%

Levels 4 and 5: Met or Exceeded Expectations, Level 5: Exceeded Expectations, Level 4: Met Expectations; Level 3: Approached Expectations; Level 2: Partially Met Expectations; Level 1: Did Not Meet Expectations

**Table B3d: Gardner Public Schools
Mathematics (All Grades)**

Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015

Group and Measure			Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS/PARCC Year				Gains and Declines	
				2012	2013	2014	2015*	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	District	CPI	754	61.6	63.2	60.1	57.6	-4.0	-2.5
		SGP	543	37.0	35.0	35.0	30.0	-7.0	-5.0
	State	CPI	221,202	67.0	68.6	68.4	67.9	0.9	-0.5
		SGP	165,003	46.0	46.0	47.0	46.0	0.0	-1.0
Economically Disadvantaged	District	CPI	614	--	--	--	59.3	--	--
		SGP	446	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	CPI	151,816	--	--	--	69.2	--	--
		SGP	115,029	--	--	--	--	--	--
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	293	44.9	45.5	42.0	41.2	-3.7	-0.8
		SGP	208	28.0	30.0	27.0	26.5	-1.5	-0.5
	State	CPI	90,520	56.9	57.4	57.1	57.3	0.4	0.2
		SGP	66,285	43.0	42.0	43.0	43.0	0.0	0.0
English language learners or Former ELLs	District	CPI	84	56.9	52.6	55.1	57.4	0.5	2.3
		SGP	56	31.0	43.0	50.0	29.0	-2.0	-21.0
	State	CPI	49,969	61.6	63.9	63.8	64.5	2.9	0.7
		SGP	33,076	52.0	53.0	52.0	51.0	-1.0	-1.0
All students	District	CPI	1,283	70.1	70.9	68.1	67.7	-2.4	-0.4
		SGP	966	41.0	40.5	37.0	32.0	-9.0	-5.0
	State	CPI	490,466	79.9	80.8	80.3	80.7	0.8	0.4
		SGP	387,674	50.0	51.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

* The PARCC Assessment was given in 2015 for grades 3 through 8. The MCAS assessment was given in 2012-2014 and in grade 10 in 2015.

**Table B3e: Gardner Public Schools
Mathematics (All Grades)**

Percentage of Selected Subgroups Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS, 2011-2014

Group	Number Included (2014)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
		2011	2012	2013	2014	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	813	31%	27%	33%	29%	-2	-4
Low Income	715	33%	29%	34%	31%	-2	-3
Students w/ disabilities	289	11%	8%	10%	9%	-2	-1
ELL or Former ELLs	68	25%	27%	24%	25%	0	1
All Students	1,287	46%	40%	44%	40%	-6	-4

**Table B3f: Gardner Public Schools
Math Grades 3 to 8 by Group 2015 PARCC Performance Level**

Grade	N	Levels 4 & 5		Level 5		Level 4		Level 3		Level 2		Level 1	
		Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State	Dist.	State
High Needs	652	17%	31%	0%	3%	17%	28%	30%	31%	35%	26%	18%	11%
Econ. Disad.	532	17%	33%	0%	3%	17%	30%	32%	31%	34%	25%	17%	11%
Students with disabilities	240	6%	17%	0%	2%	5%	16%	15%	28%	44%	35%	35%	20%
ELL	78	23%	30%	1%	4%	22%	26%	26%	30%	26%	27%	26%	13%
All	1,114	29%	52%	2%	10%	27%	43%	33%	27%	26%	16%	12%	6%

Levels 4 and 5: Met or Exceeded Expectations; Level 5: Exceeded Expectations; Level 4: Met Expectations; Level 3: Approached Expectations; Level 2: Partially Met Expectations; Level 1: Did Not Meet Expectations

**Table B3g: Gardner Public Schools
Science and Technology/Engineering (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2015)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2012	2013	2014	2015	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	District	CPI	282	61.1	63.1	65.3	58.2	-2.9	-7.1
		P+	282	24%	27%	31%	18%	-6	-13
	State	CPI	91,013	65	66.4	67.3	66.3	1.3	-1
		P+	91,013	31%	31%	33%	32%	1	-1
Econ. Disadv.	District	CPI	235	--	--	--	59.3	--	--
		P+	235	--	--	--	19%	--	--
	State	CPI	62,345	--	--	--	67.1	--	--
		P+	62,345	--	--	--	33%	--	--
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	104	45.8	50.0	48.3	48.1	2.3	-0.2
		P+	104	10%	12%	13%	13%	3	0
	State	CPI	38,520	58.7	59.8	60.1	60.2	1.5	0.1
		P+	38,520	20%	20%	22%	22%	2	0
English language learners or Former ELLs	District	CPI	27	61.4	40.2	50.0	45.4	-16.0	-4.6
		P+	27	9%	13%	19%	4%	-5	-15
	State	CPI	17,516	51.4	54.0	54.0	53.9	2.5	-0.1
		P+	17,516	17%	19%	18%	18%	1	0
All students	District	CPI	497	70.4	70.9	72.7	65.9	-4.5	-6.8
		P+	497	40%	39%	41%	29%	-11	-12
	State	CPI	210,454	78.6	79.0	79.6	79.4	0.8	-0.2
		P+	210,454	54%	53%	55%	54%	0	-1.0%

Notes: Median SGPs are not calculated for Science and Technology/ Engineering (STE). State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B4: Gardner Public Schools
Annual Grade 9-12 Drop-Out Rates, 2012–2015**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2012–2015		Change 2014–2015		State (2015)
	2012	2013	2014	2015	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
High Needs	6.5%	7.6%	7.6%	3.9%	-2.6	-40.0%	-3.7	-48.7%	3.4%
Econ. Disad.	--	--	--	3.5%	--	--	--	--	3.3%
Students w/ disabilities	11.9%	11.7%	9.9%	7.3%	-4.6	-38.7%	-2.6	-26.3%	3.5%
ELL	7.1%	8.3%	8.3%	6.7%	-0.4	-5.6%	-1.6	-19.3%	5.7%
All students	5.0%	4.7%	5.4%	3.2%	-1.8	-36.0%	-2.2	-40.7%	1.9%

Notes: The annual drop-out rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who drop out over a one-year period by the October 1 grade 9–12 enrollment, multiplied by 100. Drop outs are those students who dropped out of school between July 1 and June 30 of a given year and who did not return to school, graduate, or receive a high school equivalency by the following October 1. Drop-out rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B5: Gardner Public Schools
Attendance Rates, 2012–2015**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2012–2015		Change 2014–2015		State (2015)
	2012	2013	2014	2015	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
All students	93.5%	93.5%	93.7%	93.5%	0	0%	-0.2	-0.2%	94.7

Notes: The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of days students attended school by the total number of days students were enrolled in a particular school year. A student's attendance rate is counted toward any district the student attended. In addition, district attendance rates included students who were out placed in public collaborative or private alternative schools/programs at public expense. Attendance rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B6: Gardner Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending Fiscal Years 2012–2014**

	FY12		FY13		FY14	
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual
Expenditures						
From local appropriations for schools:						
By school committee	\$19,433,997	\$19,657,193	\$20,543,198	\$20,416,575	\$21,614,140	\$22,363,489
By municipality	\$8,590,597	\$8,726,150	\$8,149,974	\$8,062,244	\$7,941,641	\$7,982,994
Total from local appropriations	\$28,024,594	\$28,383,343	\$28,693,172	\$28,478,819	\$29,555,781	\$30,346,484
From revolving funds and grants	--	\$5,004,657	--	\$4,375,491	--	\$2,912,350
Total expenditures	--	\$33,388,000	--	\$32,854,310	--	\$33,258,833
Chapter 70 aid to education program						
Chapter 70 state aid*	--	\$18,037,844	--	\$18,422,676	--	\$18,961,405
Required local contribution	--	\$6,788,528	--	\$6,993,242	--	\$7,411,601
Required net school spending**	--	\$24,826,372	--	\$25,415,918	--	\$26,373,006
Actual net school spending	--	\$24,541,777	--	\$25,167,711	--	\$27,033,130
Over/under required (\$)	--	-\$284,595	--	-\$248,207	--	\$660,124
Over/under required (%)	--	-1.1%	--	-1.0%	--	2.5%

*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: FY12, FY13, and FY14 District End-of-Year Reports, Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website

Data retrieved 11/20/15

**Table B7: Gardner Public Schools
Expenditures Per In-District Pupil
Fiscal Years 2012–2014**

Expenditure Category	2012	2013	2014
Administration	\$408	\$424	\$477
Instructional leadership (district and school)	\$797	\$836	\$896
Teachers	\$4,571	\$4,573	\$4,485
Other teaching services	\$815	\$808	\$918
Professional development	\$429	\$362	\$315
Instructional materials, equipment and technology	\$174	\$106	\$254
Guidance, counseling and testing services	\$275	\$420	\$463
Pupil services	\$921	\$1,039	\$1,126
Operations and maintenance	\$923	\$892	\$1,058
Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs	\$2,021	\$1,961	\$1,998
Total expenditures per in-district pupil	\$11,335	\$11,421	\$11,991

Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](#)

Note: Any discrepancy between expenditures and total is because of rounding.

Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number of points
		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
Focus Area #1: Learning Objectives & Instruction						
1. The teacher demonstrates knowledge of subject matter and content.	ES	12%	12%	24%	52%	2.2
	MS	0%	13%	19%	69%	2.6
	HS	0%	9%	45%	45%	2.4
	Total #	3	7	19	34	2.3
	Total %	5%	11%	30%	54%	
2. The teacher provides and refers to clear learning objective(s) in the lesson.	ES	16%	12%	36%	36%	1.9
	MS	0%	25%	25%	50%	2.3
	HS	14%	23%	36%	27%	1.8
	Total #	7	12	21	23	2.0
	Total %	11%	19%	33%	37%	
3. The teacher implements a lesson that reflects high expectations aligned to the learning objective (s).	ES	12%	40%	36%	12%	1.5
	MS	0%	31%	50%	19%	1.9
	HS	14%	41%	27%	18%	1.5
	Total #	6	24	23	10	1.6
	Total %	10%	38%	37%	16%	
4. The teacher uses appropriate instructional strategies well matched to the learning objective(s).	ES	12%	28%	44%	16%	1.6
	MS	6%	13%	38%	44%	2.2
	HS	18%	36%	32%	14%	1.4
	Total #	8	17	24	14	1.7
	Total %	13%	27%	38%	22%	
Total Score For Focus Area #1	ES	0	23	70	87	7.2
	MS	0	13	42	87	8.9
	HS	0	2	20	30	7.0
	Total	0	38	132	204	7.6

Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Critical Thinking		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number of points
		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
5. Students are motivated and engaged in the lesson.	ES	0%	40%	48%	12%	1.7
	MS	0%	38%	31%	31%	1.9
	HS	5%	41%	32%	23%	1.7
	Total #	1	25	24	13	1.8
	Total %	2%	40%	38%	21%	
6. The teacher facilitates tasks that encourage students to develop and engage in critical thinking.	ES	16%	40%	28%	16%	1.4
	MS	6%	13%	50%	31%	2.1
	HS	14%	41%	36%	9%	1.4
	Total #	8	21	23	11	1.6
	Total %	13%	33%	37%	17%	
7. Students assume responsibility for their own learning whether individually, in pairs, or in groups.	ES	8%	36%	48%	8%	1.6
	MS	0%	38%	44%	19%	1.8
	HS	14%	45%	36%	5%	1.3
	Total #	5	25	27	6	1.5
	Total %	8%	40%	43%	10%	
Total Score For Focus Area #2	ES	0	29	62	27	4.7
	MS	0	14	40	39	5.8
	HS	0	28	46	24	4.5
	Total	0	71	148	90	4.9

Focus Area #3: Differentiated Instruction & Classroom Culture		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number of points
		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
8. The teacher appropriately differentiates instruction so the lesson content is accessible for all learners.	ES	60%	24%	8%	8%	0.6
	MS	6%	31%	31%	31%	1.9
	HS	23%	50%	23%	5%	1.1
	Total #	21	22	12	8	1.1
	Total %	33%	35%	19%	13%	
9. The teacher uses appropriate resources aligned to students' diverse learning needs. (e.g., technology, manipulatives, support personnel).	ES	8%	52%	28%	12%	1.4
	MS	19%	31%	19%	31%	1.6
	HS	23%	45%	23%	9%	1.2
	Total #	10	28	15	10	1.4
	Total %	16%	44%	24%	16%	
10. The classroom climate is characterized by respectful behavior, routines, tone, and discourse.	ES	8%	8%	48%	36%	2.1
	MS	6%	6%	31%	56%	2.4
	HS	9%	18%	27%	45%	2.1
	Total #	5	7	23	28	2.2
	Total %	8%	11%	37%	44%	
11. The teacher conducts appropriate formative assessments to check for understanding and provide feedback to students.	ES	8%	28%	48%	16%	1.7
	MS	13%	19%	50%	19%	1.8
	HS	9%	45%	27%	18%	1.5
	Total #	6	20	26	11	1.7
	Total %	10%	32%	41%	17%	
Total Score For Focus Area #3	ES	0	28	66	54	5.9
	MS	0	14	42	66	7.6
	HS	0	35	44	51	5.9
	Total	0	77	152	171	6.3