

*How Is Your  
School District  
Performing?*



*A look at*  
**Gloucester**  
Public Schools

2004–2006



EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL  
*Office of Educational Quality and Accountability*

## **EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL**

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Ethan d'Ablemont Burnes

Joseph Esposito

Alison Fraser

Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

## **VISITING EXAMINATION TEAM**

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David Lockwood, Coordinating Examiner

Stephen Theall, Senior Examiner

Helen Apostolides, Examiner

Eamon Fennessey, Examiner

George Gearhart, Examiner

Katherine Lopez Natale, Examiner

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

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

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	2
HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?	
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results .....	3
WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?	
Overall District Management .....	7
Leadership, Governance, and Communication .....	8
Curriculum and Instruction .....	10
Assessment and Program Evaluation .....	12
Human Resource Management and Professional Development .....	14
Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support .....	16
Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency .....	18
CONCLUSION .....	20
APPENDIX A:	
EQA's District Examination Process .....	22
APPENDIX B:	
Glossary of Terms Used in EQA Technical Reports .....	23
APPENDIX C:	
State and Local Funding, 1998–2006 .....	24

## INTRODUCTION

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

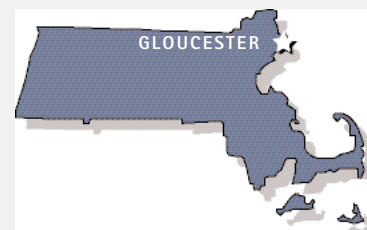
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools,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

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

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

## Putting the Data in Perspective

Gloucester, MA



### DISTRICT

*Population:* 30,273

*Median family income:* \$58,459

*Largest sources of employment:*  
Educational, health, and social services;  
and manufacturing

*Local government:* Mayor-Council

### SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

*School committee:* 7 members

*Number of schools:* 8

*Student-teacher ratio:* 13.3 to 1

*Per Pupil Expenditures:* \$10,351

*Student enrollment:*

Total: 3,803

White: 94.4 percent

Hispanic: 3.0 percent

African-American: 1.2 percent

Asian: 1.0 percent

Native American: 0.1 percent

Limited English proficient:

1.7 percent

Low income: 24.6 percent

Special education: 18.7 percent

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

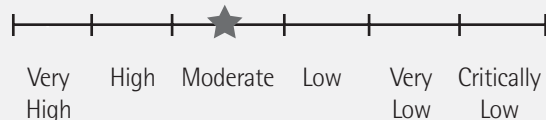
## EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

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

## MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	76	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	85	84
Math Proficiency Index	67	72

## Performance Rating



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

## HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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

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

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

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

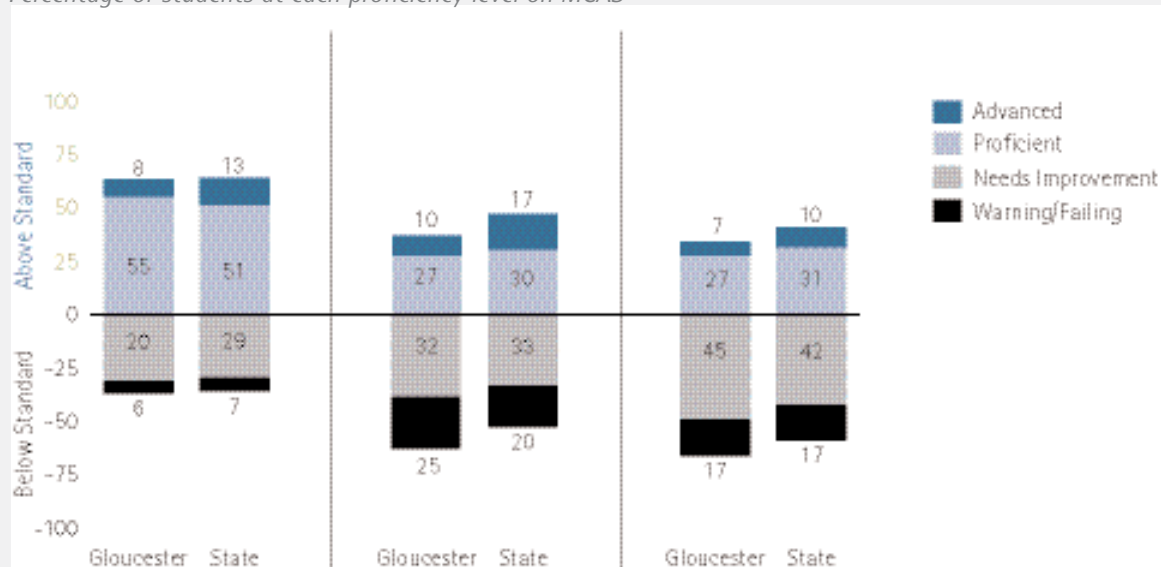
### 2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, half of all students in Gloucester attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, less than that statewide. Nearly two-thirds of Gloucester students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and roughly one-third of Gloucester students attained proficiency in math and in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-eight percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Gloucester's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 76 proficiency index (PI) points, two PI points less than that statewide. Gloucester's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 24 PI points.
- In 2006, Gloucester's proficiency gap in ELA was 15 PI points, one PI point narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of roughly two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly

## GLOUCESTER SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



progress (AYP).

- Gloucester's proficiency gap in math was 33 PI points in 2006, five PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of roughly four PI points per year to achieve AYP. Gloucester's proficiency gap in STE was 31 PI points, two PI points wider than that statewide.

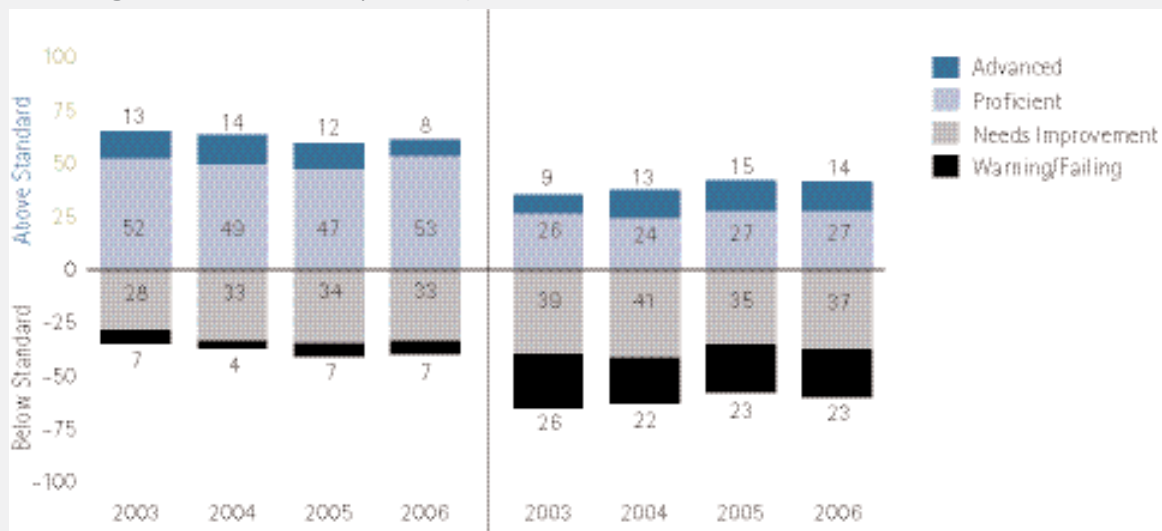
### 3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Gloucester's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall and in math, a slight decline in ELA, and a larger decline in STE. Most of the overall gain occurred between 2003 and 2004, with relatively flat performance since then.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by one percentage point between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by two percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Gloucester narrowed from 27 PI points in 2003 to 25 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of seven percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Gloucester declined slightly, by less than one PI point.
- Math performance in Gloucester showed improvement over this period, at an average of one PI point annu-

## GLOUCESTER ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



ally. This resulted in an improvement rate of nine percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

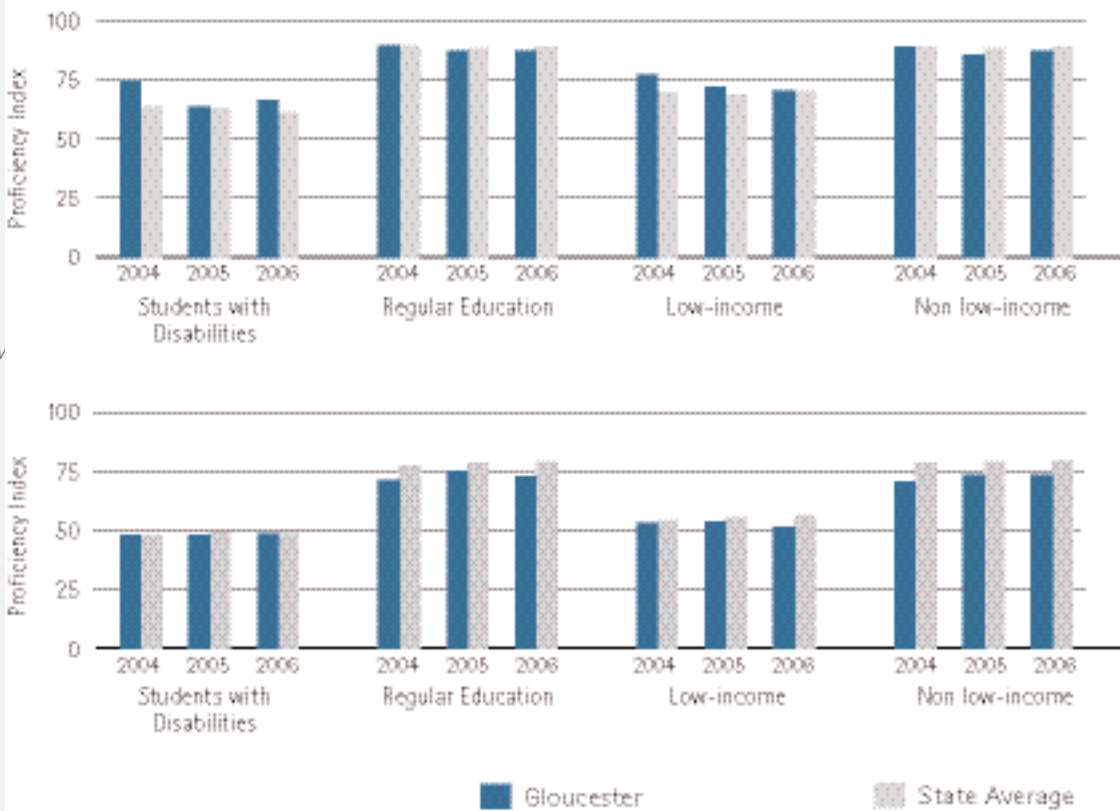
- Between 2004 and 2006, Gloucester had a decline in STE performance, decreasing by approximately three PI points over the two-year period.

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

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Gloucester students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Gloucester in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 22 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 24 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Gloucester in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than one-third of the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students. More than half the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.

## GLOUCESTER STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES

*English Language Arts*

- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. Roughly half the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

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

In Gloucester, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 16 PI points in 2003 to 21 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 23 to 25 PI points over this period.

- All student subgroups in Gloucester with the exception of non low-income students had a decline in performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The subgroup with the greatest decline in ELA performance was students with disabilities.
- In math, all subgroups in Gloucester showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were non low-income students and regular education students.



## Performance at a Glance

### Management Quality Index

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

#### Performance Rating:



## WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

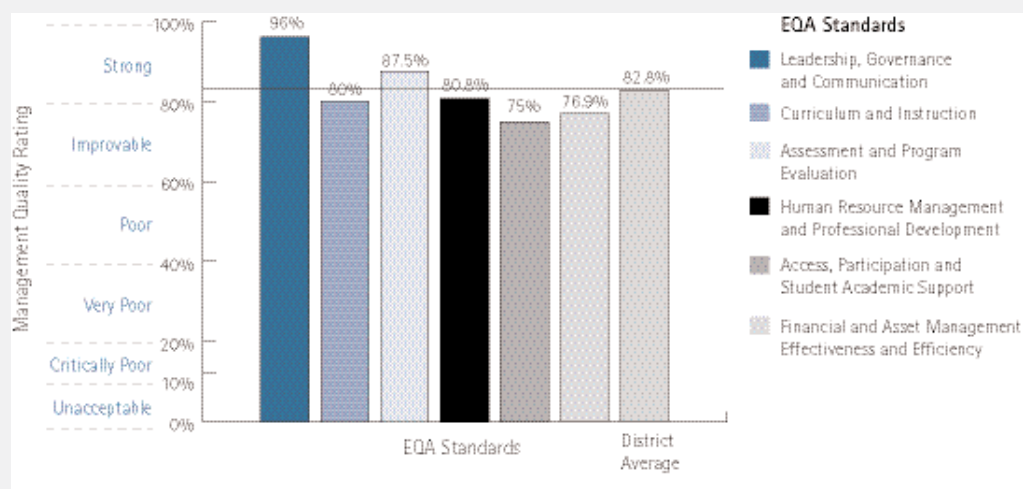
### Overall District Management

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

In 2006, Gloucester received an overall MQI score of 'Strong' (82.8 percent). The district performed best on the Leadership, Governance, and Communication and the Assessment and Program Evaluation standards, scoring 'Strong.' It was rated 'Improvable' on the Access Participation and Student Academic Support standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance improved slightly in ELA but declined slightly in math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

*Gloucester, 2004–2006*



## Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

### Leadership and Governance

The leadership of the Gloucester Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the seven-member school committee. The superintendent, in large measure, provided effective administration for the Gloucester Public Schools during the period under review. The school committee understood its role as a policymaking body, received training in the requirements of education reform, and worked effectively as a group with school and city officials. However, the district leadership team comprised of central administrators and principals lacked the resources necessary to provide adequate educational programs due to budgetary restrictions. In FY 2004, the district's Chapter 70 aid was reduced by 20 percent, followed by no increase in FY 2005, and the district's Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of net school spending (NSS) declined from 19.9 percent in FY 2003 to 15.2 percent in FY 2006.

The superintendent assigned the director of information technology and the assistant superintendent for operations and central services to serve as interim principals for certain time periods from 2005 through 2007 to alleviate staffing needs and funding shortfalls. These decisions, while fiscally understandable, compromised the district's ability to respond efficiently and effectively in these two critical areas. In addition, the district did not have a facilities director in place two of the last four years.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The district effectively gathered and analyzed student achievement data to understand student strengths and weaknesses, inform instruction, and promote higher levels of achievement.
- The strategic plan guided the development of standards-based School Improvement Plans that aligned with district goals, and were uniformly presented because of the adoption of a comprehensive plan development protocol/checklist.
- The district developed and promulgated a comprehensive emergency operations plan and a school safety handbook.
- The superintendent effectively delegated leadership within the school system.
- The district created several organizational structures, such as a district coordinating council, that enabled the school system to monitor the academic progress of its students.

### Areas for Improvement

- Evidence was lacking that school and district leaders met statutory requirements for teacher and administrator performance evaluations, although they did actively supervise staff and provide feedback to teachers and administrators.

## Planning and Communication

The district adopted a strategic plan in 2004 that guided the direction of the school system. The plan, yet to take root uniformly across the system, lacked sufficient resources to attain its intended vision for the system. The district effectively gathered, analyzed, and utilized data at both the district and school levels in an effort to understand the challenges and barriers students faced in gaining greater academic proficiency. The district did not comply with statutory requirements concerning the frequency of and criteria for teacher and administrator evaluation, and it lacked a uniform and consistently applied instrument for administrator evaluation.

The district leaders created a set of management structures that facilitated district communication and promoted collegial working relationships among staff. The superintendent afforded leadership autonomy to the principals and held them accountable for efficient and effective school operations. The superintendent effectively promoted collegial relations with city officials and school committee members. Annual budget requests supported by data analysis, presented by the superintendent and school staff, articulated district challenges that provided a context for financial resource prioritization and allocation. The district implemented criteria to guide school councils in the development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The plans presented during the budget deliberations provided uniformity, consistency, context, and rationale to budget decision-makers. The district developed an excellent student/staff safety plan. The plan enabled the system to effectively plan for and respond to potential safety incidents. The district prepared and disseminated an emergency operations plan and emergency response handbook that guided school staff in the event of situations that threatened school safety.

## Curriculum and Instruction

The Gloucester Public Schools performed effectively in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

### Aligned Curricula

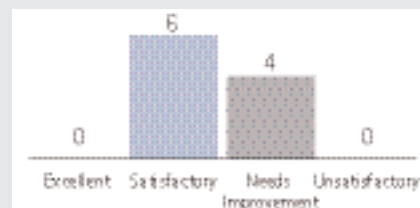
The district had curricula at all grade levels in tested core content areas that aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. The format and components of the curricula differed in scope and detail. In contrast to the detailed K-5 ELA curriculum, the middle school ELA curriculum guide did not have resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes. The middle school math curriculum components included pacing charts, math standards mapped to the curriculum, units to cover, math lab requirements, and types of assessments. The high school ELA and math curricula included benchmarks, rubrics, timelines, articulation maps, and assessments.

The district ensured consistent articulation of the curriculum in a variety of ways. It purchased common materials, provided common professional development, and monitored implementation through its principals, program leaders, and coordinators. The district did not have a comprehensive curriculum revision plan. The district did have a draft of a curriculum development grid in place to guide some of its curricular priorities, and it had a district teaching and learning leadership team that met every six weeks. The district also had a leadership team that consisted of principals and district office administrators.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The Gloucester Public Schools implemented curricula at all grade levels in tested core content areas that addressed the components of the state curriculum frameworks.
- All schools had principals and curriculum leaders who actively monitored what occurred in classrooms by meeting regularly with teachers at grade-level and departmental meetings and by visiting classrooms.
- The district ensured consistent articulation of curriculum through the purchase of common materials, professional development, and implementation monitoring.

### Areas for Improvement

- Not all curricula contained the minimum components of objectives, resources, strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and assessments.
- The district did not have a comprehensive plan to review and revise its curricula, though it did have a curriculum grid that outlined its priorities.

## Effective Instruction

With the support of the district literacy specialist and math program leader, the principals were the curriculum and instructional leaders in the elementary schools. They oversaw the use, alignment, and consistency of the district's curricula and focused on improvement for all students. At the middle and high schools, the principals, assistant principals, and program leaders provided active leadership and support for the professional development and training in effective instructional strategies. The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning met with district leaders and analyzed assessment data, discussed curriculum and instructional practices, and led curriculum revision efforts.

The district had a technology plan, and administrators and teachers used technology to enhance instruction. For example, at the middle school level the district supplied electronic boards and professional development to its math teachers. District leaders indicated that they purchased web-based software to compensate for aged computers.

The EQA examiners conducted observations in 41 randomly selected classrooms during their site visit. Examiners rated the district's teachers high on classroom management skills and the creation of a positive classroom learning environment. High expectations, classroom rigor, and strong instructional practices scored lower. Furthermore, upon inspection of teacher evaluations, the EQA team found that evaluations of teachers were limited and were not performed in compliance with statute. However, principals and other supervisors did utilize active supervision methodologies such as contractually allowed classroom observations to monitor instruction. In addition, the district analyzed student assessment data to monitor the effectiveness of teacher instruction.

## Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

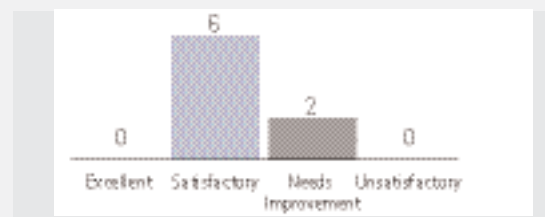
### Student Assessment

For a number of years prior to the period under examination, the Gloucester Public Schools utilized a number of assessments to monitor the progress of its students. In the past three to four years, the district has made a concerted effort to streamline the monitoring process and develop a more unified assessment program. Although the district did not mandate the program or describe it in policy documents, it was well understood by all parties within the district. In the elementary grades, the students were assessed using standardized tests such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and Group Mathematics Assessment Diagnosis Evaluation (GMADE). Some, namely the DIBELS and the DRA, were used several times during the year in a formative way, thereby giving the teachers a moving picture of each student's progress in ELA. The district used the GRADE and GMADE tests as summative assessments to document the overall progress of students. At the high school, each department developed common assessments. A review of the district's data showed that it had very high rates of participation on the various assessments, including the MCAS tests, for which participation rates were consistently at 99 to 100 percent for the aggregate population.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The district had a coordinated assessment program for grades K-12 that all parties understood well.
- Gloucester students participated in assessments at very high rates. In 2006, the participation rates on the MCAS tests in ELA and math were 99 and 100 percent, respectively.
- The district efficiently gathered assessment data at grades K-8 and analyzed them using various software and database systems, permitting a broad perspective of how the students were doing individually, by class, by school, or in the district as a whole.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district did not formally evaluate its programs on a regular basis, though it did use assessment data on an ongoing basis to examine the effectiveness of its math and ELA curricula and instruction in general terms.

During the period under review, the district focused on improving literacy, resulting in changes to the ELA curriculum and its instructional delivery system. Also, the district had paid close attention to the results of the various assessments (particularly at grades K-8), reviewing these data on a student-by-student, class-by-class, and districtwide basis. District coordinators in math and literacy facilitated the effort using database software to analyze the assessment data the district had collected.

### **Program Evaluation**

The district did not engage in a formal process of evaluating its programs for effectiveness. It did, however, use assessment data frequently as part of its decision-making process. Administrators, principals, school committee members, and teachers all explained that a great deal of time was spent discussing assessment data and trends. A review of the redesigned 2006-2007 School Improvement Plans showed that the district has moved to more formal data-driven practices. These plans reflected goals and measurement of accomplishment from previous years, particularly in ELA and mathematics, and they also contained measurable goals with timelines and metrics for measuring success.

## Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

### Hiring Practices and Certification

The Gloucester Public Schools had hiring procedures in place for the hiring of teachers and administrators and advertised vacancies in Essex County newspapers, *The Boston Globe*, and on the district and Boston Works websites. Central office provided all applications to principals who created school screening committees. Principals made hiring recommendations to the superintendent. The district formed committees when hiring administrators. Interviewees indicated that the district did not have any financial barriers to hiring teachers or administrators. The district provided licensure data to the EQA examiners that showed many administrators and Gloucester Teachers Association (GTA) members did hold the appropriate licensure. Interviewees mentioned that possible factors creating difficulty in attracting licensed personnel included budget approval timing, geographic location, housing costs, and lack of available teacher specialists. The district posted rental housing opportunities on the district website.

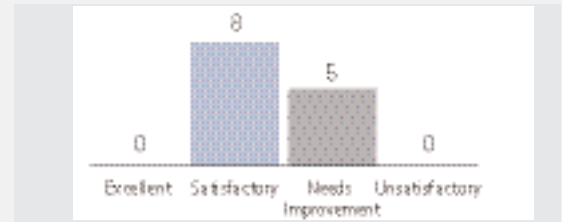
### Professional Development

The district had mentoring and professional development programs in place during the period under review and provided appropriate funding. The mentoring program was a two-year program, and the district had trained approximately 62

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The Gloucester Public Schools provided and funded substantial professional development programs for staff and a two-year mentoring program for new teachers.
- The district determined professional development needs based on the analysis of assessment data, teacher evaluation and program implementation, and research-based practices.
- The district provided multiple professional development sessions in data analysis skills.
- The district had crisis and emergency plans for the district and its schools, provided crisis and emergency training, and held periodic emergency drills.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district did not apply for DOE waivers for uncertified staff; four percent of the Gloucester Teachers Association members and 20 percent of the administrators did not hold the appropriate license, but had applied for licensure or enrolled in a licensure program.
- During the period under review, the professional growth cycle for non-professional status teachers did not comply with the requirements of education reform in that it included summative evaluation only every two years.



mentors and provided all new teachers in the district with mentors in compliance with statute. The district had two districtwide and four early release professional development days. In addition, schools conducted professional development sessions at faculty and departmental meetings, and the district had a math and literacy specialist who provided embedded professional development in all schools. The district also provided summer professional development opportunities as well as tuition reimbursement. A review of the professional development plans and information provided by interviewees showed that analysis of student achievement data, program evaluation and implementation, teacher evaluations, and research-based practices informed professional development. The district trained staff in TestWiz and in the use of data associated with the DIBELS, DRA, GMADE, and GRADE assessments.

## Evaluation

District administrators received training in Research for Better Teaching (RBT) evaluation methods and teachers received training in skillful teacher methods. The district did not hold administrators and teachers explicitly accountable for student achievement. While principals and other supervisors conducted formative classroom evaluations, the four-year professional development cycle in place during the period under review did not comply with the MGL 603 CMR 35 evaluation requirements under the Education Reform Act of 1993. The district recognized this and amended the cycle to include a mid-cycle evaluation; however, statute requires an annual evaluation for non-professional status teachers. The superintendent did not conduct annual evaluations for all administrators in accordance with Chapter 71, Section 38; however, administrators indicated they developed annual goals with the superintendent and met regularly with the superintendent to discuss progress. The administrator contract included a performance achievement clause related to additional goals negotiated with the superintendent. Although some administrators took advantage of this opportunity, some did not due to time constraints and the elimination of the bonus received by meeting this goal from base salary calculations.

## Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

### Services

The high school offered an extensive program of vocational and semi-vocational courses to appeal to students in the community. In addition to a summer school for credit recovery, students had access to the COMPASS program and the North Dakota Independent Study, programs providing alternative settings for completion of diploma requirements.

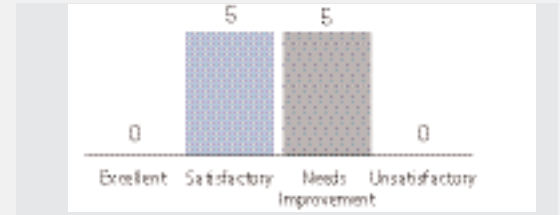
The district invested in staff and materials to develop a literacy program, which extended into the high school. Over several years, the district purchased phonics texts, Rigby readers, and a leveled library for student use. The district literacy specialist, supervised by the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, provided staff with professional development on instruction and assessment. The staff examined and reported assessment results, using formative tests to adjust instruction from kindergarten through middle school. The district also purchased texts and software for the math program. A math program leader provided coaching and supervised curriculum development through grade 8. The high school provided remediation through an MCAS test review for English and a variety of in-school and after-school opportunities to receive teacher help. The district provided opportunities for MCAS test remediation after school, in the evening, and through the summer school.

Special education students were taught in an inclusionary setting. In addition, the district maintained substantially separate resource rooms for special populations at the Fuller Elementary School, the middle school, and the high school. Some of these resource rooms also provided pullout

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



#### Areas of Strength

- Students who enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses were required to take the AP exams, and they earned creditable scores in sizeable numbers.
- The district mainstreamed special education students, providing some essentially separate services at each level for developmentally delayed, behaviorally challenged, or autistic students.
- The district provided professional development and leadership in literacy to identify at-risk students through assessments such as the DIBELS, DRA, and GRADE.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Average attendance at Gloucester High School was below 90 percent. Chronic absenteeism was high in grades 6-12. The high school did not penalize students with loss of credit for excessive absenteeism.
- The middle school did not retain students as a matter of policy. In 2006, 26 percent of high school freshmen were unable to attain sophomore status because they did not pass enough of their high school coursework.
- School handbooks contained few or no consequences for routine disciplinary infractions with the exception of the West Parish Elementary School, which listed a hierarchy of consequences.

support. Special education caseloads outside of the Fuller Elementary School varied greatly by school. The district had guidance counselors in grades 6-12 who also did individual counseling. Title I students received additional literacy services in one elementary building and both literacy and math support in the other. These students and teachers benefited from the extensive district efforts made on behalf of literacy. A licensed individual offered pullout and some in-class instruction to English language learners (ELLs) through grade 8. At the high school, one foreign language teacher, unlicensed in ELL, provided two periods of English as a second language (ESL).

### Attendance

Most Gloucester schools posted brief expectations for attendance in their respective handbooks. The high school had an attendance rate that was below 90 percent. Four unlicensed personnel, reporting to the assistant principal, handled initial attendance, tardiness, truancy, and the penalties. These personnel referred students with chronic attendance problems for further action. Chronic absenteeism ranged from 29 to 38 percent. The high school assigned no academic penalty for absenteeism, although social and out-of-school activity sanctions did exist. Interviewees attributed the high retention rate of freshmen to absenteeism and to the students' belief that there would be no consequences for poor performance.

While overall middle school attendance met state targets, chronic absenteeism was high in the middle school as well. The middle school responded to "excessive" absenteeism, meaning six or seven absences in one quarter. Poor attendance triggered family outreach and intervention, sometimes culminating in the filing of a child in need of services (CHINS) petition.

### Discipline and Dropout Prevention

School handbooks defined unacceptable behavior in general terms and contained mandated language for hazing, harassment, the treatment of special education students, and other such matters. The high school handbook provided additional language regarding discipline but did not clearly indicate penalties for routine infractions. Only the West Parish Elementary School spelled out a ladder of disciplinary consequences for unacceptable behavior. Four unlicensed staff members, reporting to the assistant principal, supervised discipline at the high school. The high school did not have an in-school suspension option, but did exercise out-of-school suspensions. In 2006, the high school retained approximately one-fourth of all freshmen and one-tenth of its sophomores. While the high school handbook did have a minimum credit requirement for advancing to the next grade, there were no listed academic penalties for absence and the retention rate was completely based on course failure. Three assistant principals supervised

discipline at the middle school.

## Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

### Budget Process

Administrators and school committee members described a budget process in which parents, school councils, administrators, school committee members, and the city council actively participated. The district's strategic plan and SIPs included goals to improve student achievement, especially in literacy. The principals presented budget and SIP proposals to the school committee, a practice school committee members reported made the needs of schools clear. The budget document provided details on changes in the proposed and approved budget as well as historical trends and relevant outside sources of revenue. School committee members and city officials noted that the process and the content of the school budget had become more transparent.

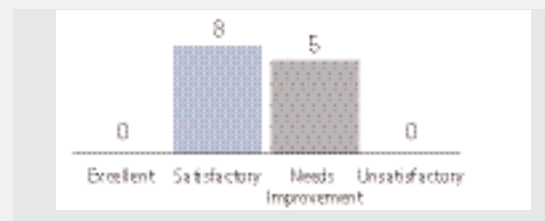
### Financial Support

The district sustained a 20 percent reduction in state Chapter 70 aid in FY 2004 followed by no increase in FY 2005, and as a percentage of net school spending Chapter 70 aid declined from 19.9 percent in FY 2003 to 15.2 percent in FY 2006. Approved budgets were not adequate to maintain educational programs, eliminating over 60 staff positions since October 2001 including K-8 librarians, high school physical education staff, middle school foreign language teachers, the facilities manager, a high school assistant principal, and career and technical education leadership. High school class size increased. The district had to rely on fees and contributions to fund athletic

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The district consulted parents, staff, and administrators in developing its budget, and held an open hearing and meetings with the city council to discuss it; school committee members and city officials described the process and the budget as much more transparent.
- The SIPs included goals based on student assessment data, and principals presented their SIPs to the school committee along with school budget proposals.
- The city exercised substantial control over district purchases and payroll, ensuring appropriate documentation and compliance with state regulations.

### Areas for Improvement

- While the city and the state provided revenue in accordance with their legal obligation, interviewees indicated that the Gloucester Public Schools budget was not adequate to maintain or improve school programs and facilities, and the district lost 60 positions since FY 2002.
- The city had a five-year capital plan that included school projects, but limited funding precluded the completion of most projects.

and transportation programs. Needed improvements in some district programs did not receive funding, including elementary reading specialists and adjustment counselors, special education teachers, and compliance with English language learner requirements. The district took steps to improve cost effectiveness by combining certain administrative positions, participating in an energy savings program, transferring some employee benefit charges to the lunch program, improving special education programs to avoid out-of-district costs, cooperative bidding, and other efficiencies.

The district had no written agreement with the city regarding its indirect charges for education until January 2007, and the agreement was vague concerning the methodology for calculating charges for certain items such as snow plowing and grounds maintenance.

The district provided monthly financial reports to a subcommittee of the school committee, with updates to the full committee as needed. The reports included forecasted surpluses and deficits and outside funds. School budgets, including grants and revolving funds, were available to administrators online. Administrators could create purchase orders online using the district's accounting technology, and the accounting system rejected purchase orders unless funds were available. Because the district shared the same accounting system with the city, necessary approvals and oversight were efficient and financial information was immediately available to the district and the city.

Appropriate administrators applied for and managed grants as well as revolving funds, and the assistant superintendent coordinated the grant process. City and district administrators worked together to ensure procurement laws were followed, with certified personnel in both offices. The district had audits of school programs conducted, with the exception of student activity accounts, and administrators took steps to follow their recommendations.

## Facilities and Safety

The strategic plan included a goal to prepare a formal preventative maintenance plan, but the district had not yet completed it. Contractors performed major maintenance tasks annually, and in-house maintenance personnel took care of day to day needs. Examiners found the buildings clean, safe, and well lit. The district submitted the capital needs of the schools to the city for inclusion on the city capital projects list. Limited funds, however, precluded the completion of most projects. Examiners found all but two buildings unlocked during the day, but visitors were required to sign in and wear badges. The district had plans to install surveillance cameras when funding was available. Its emergency procedures manual was extensive, updated, and improved

annually with the assistance of police and fire officials.

## CONCLUSION

The Gloucester Public Schools was considered to be a 'Moderate' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in ELA and 'Low' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. On average, half of all students in Gloucester attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Strong,' with the highest rating in Leadership, Governance, and Communication, and the lowest in Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support.

The Gloucester superintendent effectively promoted a good collaborative working relationship between the superintendent, the school committee, and the city. The strategic plan guided the development of standards-based School Improvement Plans that aligned with district goals, and were uniformly presented because of the adoption of a comprehensive plan development protocol/checklist. The SIPs included goals based on student assessment data, and principals presented their SIPs to the school committee along with school budget proposals.

The school budget became more transparent as parents and school councils, administrators, school committee members, and the city council actively participated in the budget process. Using student achievement data proactively in the budget process allowed the district to allocate resources based on school or student need. Sharing the city's accounting system enhanced efficiency and facilitated exchange of information between the district and the city.

Budget restrictions limited the ability of the district and the city to provide adequate resources for improving student achievement and providing adequate educational programs, as the district eliminated over 60 staff positions since October 2001. To improve cost effectiveness, the district combined certain administrative positions, participated in an energy savings program, transferred some employee benefit charges to the lunch program, and improved special education programs to avoid out-of-district costs and cooperative bidding.

Though the district did not formally evaluate its programs, it effectively gathered and analyzed student achievement data, using various software and database systems, to understand student strengths and weaknesses. The school district recently streamlined a strong formative and summative data analysis system for grades K-12, allowing the district to improve student achievement with immediate changes to instruction and curriculum, particularly in math and ELA. Gloucester students participated in assessments at very high rates.

The district had implemented curricula at all grade levels in tested core content areas that addressed the components of the state curriculum frameworks. All schools had principals and curriculum leaders who actively monitored what occurred in classrooms by meeting regularly with teachers at grade-level and departmental meetings and by visiting classrooms. The middle school ELA curriculum guide lacked resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes. Despite its lack of a comprehensive curriculum revision plan, the district did draft a curriculum development grid, and a district teaching and learning leadership team met every six weeks. Although teachers had very good classroom management skills, and the classroom climates were conducive to learning, not all classroom instruction observed was rigorous.

The Gloucester Public Schools provided and funded substantial professional development programs for staff and a two-year mentoring program for new teachers. The district determined professional development needs based on the analysis of assessment data, teacher evaluation and program implementation, and research-based practices. The school-based administrators provided active leadership and support for training in effective instructional strategies. The district provided multiple professional development sessions in data analysis skills as well as summer professional development opportunities and tuition reimbursement.

School and district leaders actively supervised staff and provide feedback to teachers and administrators. The evaluation process did not comply with statutory requirements for the frequency of and criteria for teacher and administrator evaluation, and it lacked a uniform and consistently applied instrument for administrator evaluations. The district did not hold administrators and teachers explicitly accountable for student achievement, but the administrator contract included a performance achievement clause related to additional goals negotiated with the superintendent.

Average attendance at Gloucester High School was below 90 percent. Chronic absenteeism was high in grades 6–12. The high school did not penalize students with loss of credit for excessive absenteeism. The middle school did not retain students as a matter of policy. In 2006, 26 percent of high school freshmen were unable to attain sophomore status because they did not pass enough of their high school coursework. Most school handbooks contained few or no consequences for routine disciplinary infractions. Students who enrolled in Advanced Placement courses had to take the AP exams, and they earned creditable scores in sizeable numbers. The district mainstreamed special education students, providing some essentially separate services at each level for developmentally delayed, behaviorally challenged, or autistic students. The district provided professional development and leadership in

## APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

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

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

### *Data-Driven Assessment*

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

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

### *Standards-Based Examination*

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

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



## APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

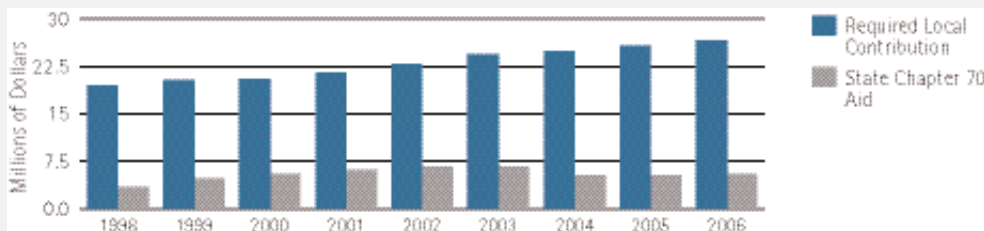
**ABA:** Applied Behavioral Analysis**ADA:** Average Daily Attendance**ALT:** MCAS Alternative Assessment**API:** Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)**ATA:** Accountability and Targeted Assistance**AYP:** Adequate Yearly Progress**CAP:** Corrective Action Plan**CBM:** Curriculum-Based Measures**CD:** Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates**CMP:** Connected Math Program**CORI:** Criminal Offender Record Information**CPI:** Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)**CPR:** Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE**CRT:** Criterion-Referenced Test**CSR:** Comprehensive School Reform**DCAP:** District Curriculum Accommodation Plan**DIBELS:** Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills**DIP:** District Improvement Plan**DOE:** Department of Education**DPDP:** District Professional Development Plan**DRA:** Developmental Reading Assessment**ELA:** English Language Arts**ELL:** English Language Learners**EPI:** English Language Arts Proficiency Index**ESL:** English as a Second Language**FLNE:** First Language Not English**FRL/N:** Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No**FRL/Y:** Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes**FTE:** Full-Time Equivalent**FY:** Fiscal Year**Gap Analysis:** A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency**GASB:** Government Accounting Standards Board**GMADE:** Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation**GRADE:** Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation**GRADU:** The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry**IEP:** Individualized Education Program**Improvement Gap:** A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time**IPDP:** Individual Professional Development Plan**IRIP:** Individual Reading Improvement Plan**ISSP:** Individual Student Success Plan**LASW:** Looking at Student Work**LEP:** Limited English Proficient**MASBO:** Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials**MASC:** Massachusetts Association of School Committees**MASS:** Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents**MAVA:** Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators**MCAS:** Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System**MCAS-Alt:** Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency**MCPPPO:** Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official**MELA-O:** Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral**MEPA:** Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment**MPI:** Math Proficiency Index**MQI:** Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system**MUNIS:** Municipal Information System**NAEYC:** National Association for the Education of Young Children**NCLB:** No Child Left Behind**NEASC:** New England Association of Schools and Colleges**NRT:** Norm-Referenced Test**NSBA:** National School Boards Association**NSS:** Net School Spending**Performance Gap:** A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district**PI:** Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency**PIM:** Performance Improvement Management**POA:** Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process**Proficiency Gap:** A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency**QRI:** Qualitative Reading Inventory**Rate of Improvement:** The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap**SAT:** A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders**SEI:** Sheltered English Immersion**SIMS:** Student Information Management System**SIOP:** Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol**SIP:** School Improvement Plan**SPED:** Special Education**STE:** Science and Technology/Engineering**TerraNova:** K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

## APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

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

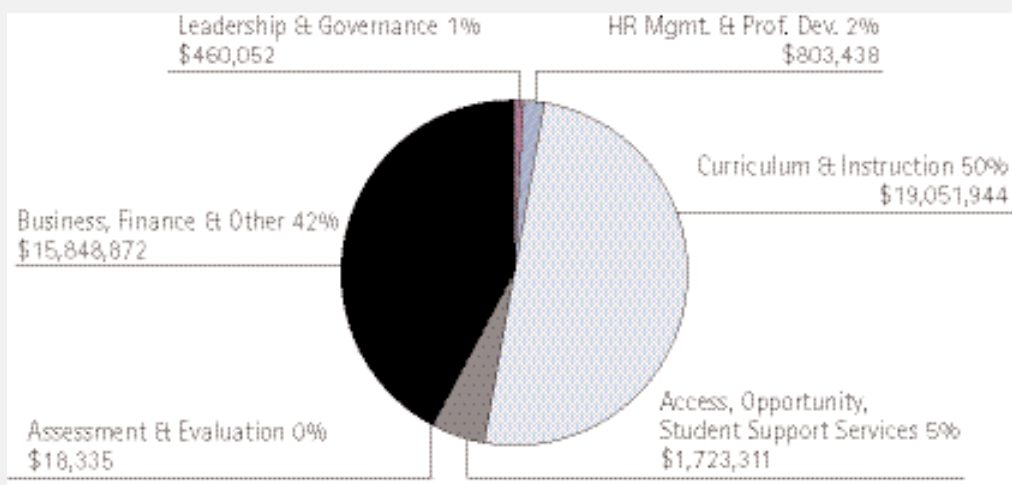
The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from \$33,711,105 to \$35,905,471; Chapter 70 aid increased from \$5,243,302 to \$5,446,302; the required local contribution increased from \$24,803,276 to \$26,625,347; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 4,152 to 4,060. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 15.6 to 15.2 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 62 to 60 percent.

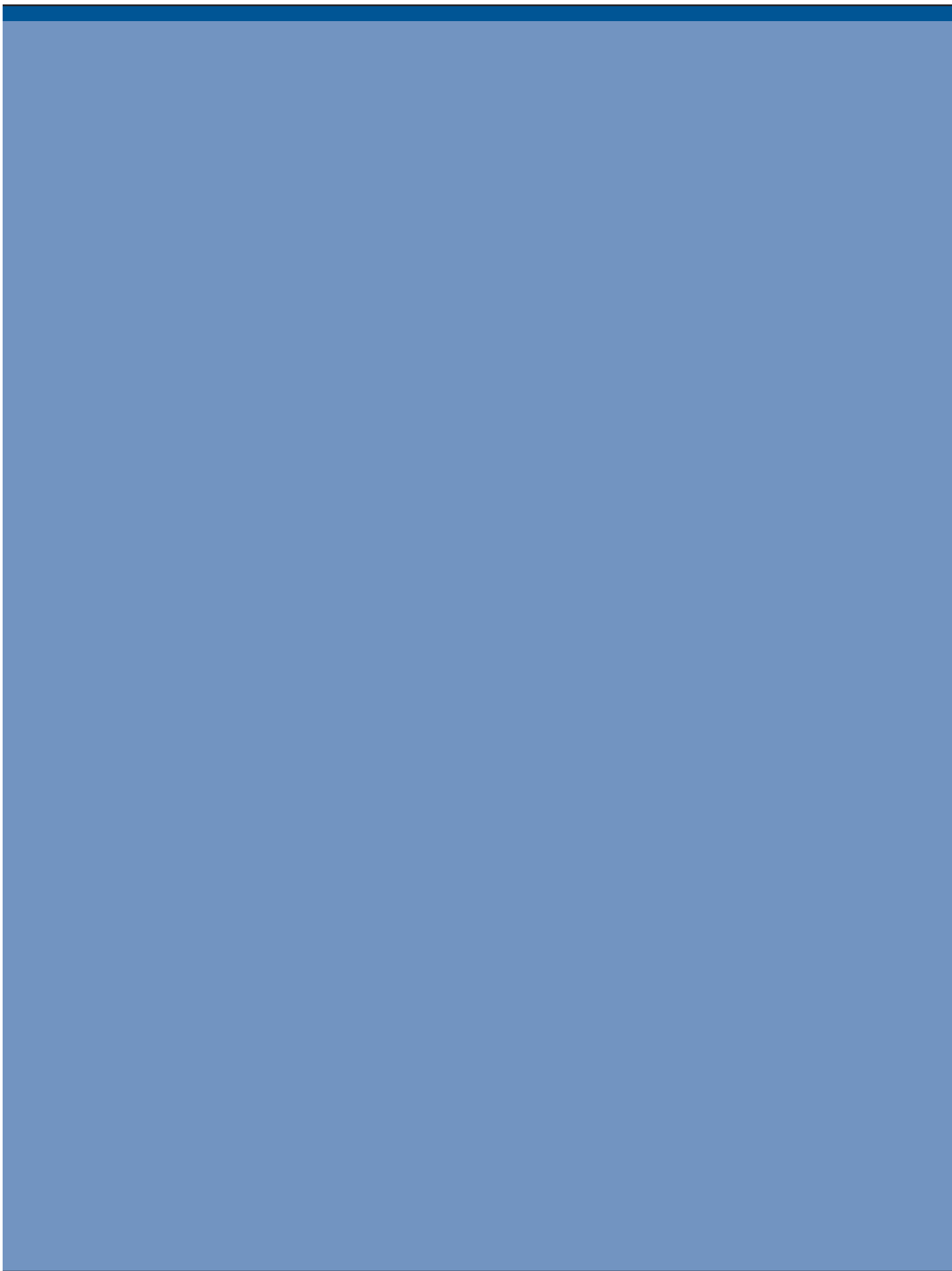
### WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



### HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

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





EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL  
*Office of Educational Quality and Accountability*

One Ashburton Place, Room 1403, Boston, MA 02108 ■ (617) 727-2398 ■ Fax: (617) 727-0049

65 South Street, Suite 104, Hopkinton, MA 01748 ■ (508) 435-5126 ■ Fax: (508) 435-5249