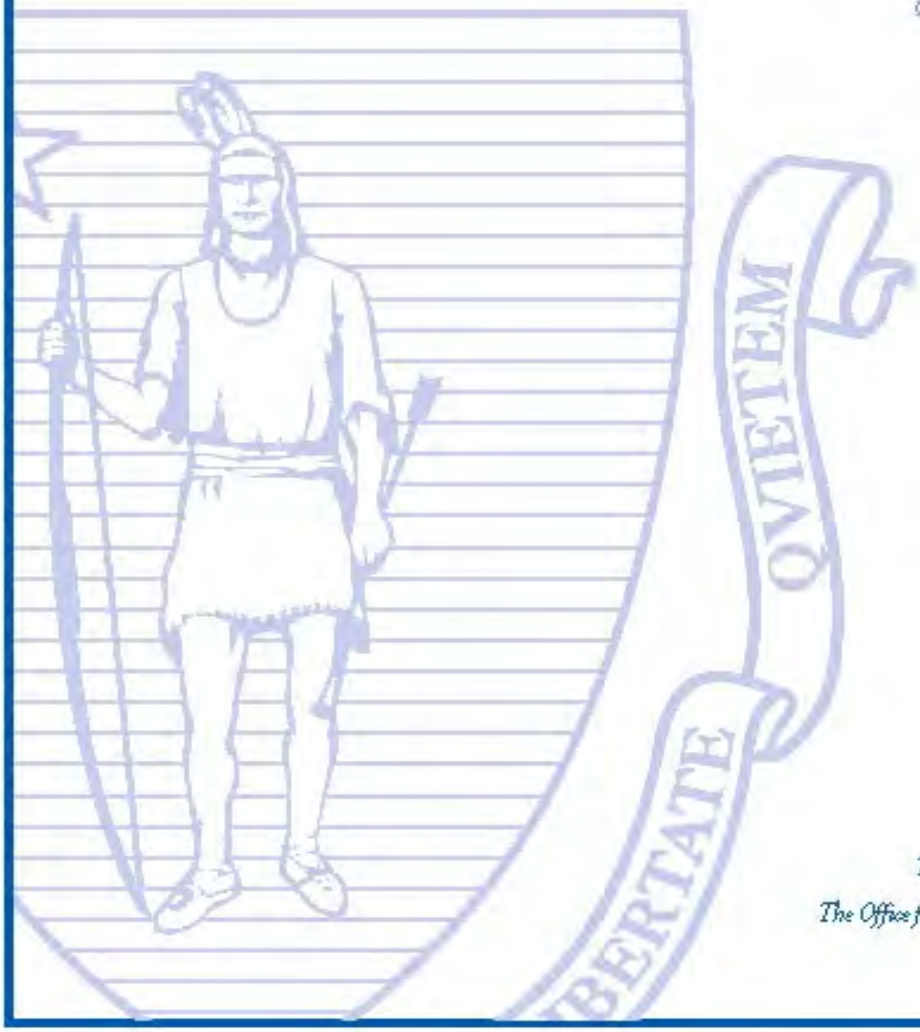
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

School District Examination Report:

Grafton
Public Schools
Technical Report

data driven
standards based
learner centered



The Education Management Audit Council
The Office for Educational Quality and Accountability

2004 - 2006

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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The Educational Management Audit Council accepted this report and its findings at its meeting of August 21, 2007. EMAC issued a management letter to the district commending strong practices. *Chairwoman Donahue and Dr. Blumer abstained from the vote.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Department of Education; the Superintendent of the Grafton Public Schools, Joseph Connors; the school department staff of the Grafton Public Schools; and the town officials in Grafton.

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Executive Summary

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Grafton Public Schools in February 2007. With an average proficiency index of 87 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006 (92 PI points in English language arts and 81 PI points in math), the district is considered a 'High' performing school system based on the Department of Education's rating system (found in Appendix A of this report), with achievement substantially above the state average. More than two-thirds of Grafton's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests.

District Overview

The town of Grafton is located in Worcester County in east central Massachusetts. Early manufacturing there included the production of textiles, and the six villages of the town grew around the industrial mills. Today Grafton is a residential community with light industrial, commercial, and technology oriented businesses. The largest sources of employment are manufacturing, retail trade, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and professional scientific and technical services. The town has a Board of Selectmen/Town Administrator/Open Town Meeting form of municipal government.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), the town had a median family income of $66,396 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 149 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 14,894 with a population of 2,957 school-age children, or 20 percent of the total. Of the total households in Grafton, 36 percent were households with children under 18 years of age, and 21 percent were households with individuals age 65 years or older. Thirty-five percent of the population age 25 years or older held a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) data, in 2005-2006 the Grafton Public Schools had a total enrollment of 2,675. The demographic composition in the district was: 91.9 percent White, 4.0 percent Asian, 2.2 percent Hispanic, 0.7 percent African-American, 0.1 percent Native American, 1.1 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 0.6 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 8.0 percent low income, and 15.7 percent special education. Ninety-one

percent of school-age children in Grafton attended public schools. The district does not offer school choice, but two students from other communities attended the Grafton schools in 2005-2006. A total of 101 Grafton students attended public schools outside the district, including 82 students who attended Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School and four students who attended charter schools.

The district has five schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 12, including three elementary schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 5, one middle school serving grades 6 through 8, and one high school serving grades 9 through 12. The administrative team at the time of the review consisted of a superintendent, a director of curriculum and staff development, a director of finance, a director of athletics, health, and physical education, and a director of special education. Each school had a principal, and the high school and middle school and one elementary school each had an assistant principal. The middle school had a dean of students. The district has a five-member school committee.

In FY 2005, Grafton's per pupil expenditure, based on appropriations from all funds, was $8,236, compared to $10,626 statewide, ranking it 301 out of the 328 school districts reporting data (charter schools not included). 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 $17,356,397 to $20,133,416; Chapter 70 aid increased from $5,599,191 to $5,916,246; the required local contribution increased from $9,676,932 to $11,239,997; and the foundation enrollment increased from 2,308 to 2,426. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 32 percent to 29 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total Schedule 1 net school spending reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report remained at 70 percent.

Context

Grafton is one of the fastest growing school districts in the state, and compared to other communities in the state it is not experiencing a declining or level-funded budget. In fact, Grafton was one of three communities that received $257,000 foundation reserve money (commonly referred to as "pothole money") in FY 2006 for unexpected enrollment. The Massachusetts Department of Education Foundation Enrollment Report indicates that the

Grafton schools experienced the highest percentage increase in student enrollment in the 2006-2007 school year of all kindergarten through grade 12 school districts in the state. Enrollment projections estimated by the New England School Development Council anticipate that Grafton's school enrollment will continue to grow significantly through 2015. From 1995 to 2005, Grafton's student population grew by 729 students and in the next 10 years is projected to increase by 802 students. Therefore, Grafton faces a continuing space issue in its public schools, which are overcrowded at all levels.

Based on these data, the town moderator established a secondary school building committee. The committee is meeting regularly and reviewing the work of the facilities needs committee. The *Facilities Needs Study* had recommended building a 1000-seat high school on town-owned land in south Grafton. The secondary school building committee has yet to endorse a remedy of the space problem. The town submitted a "statement of interest" to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the first step in applying for school building assistance. The MSBA will notify the district regarding its status sometime after July 31, 2007.

Grafton has had stable leadership in the district's central office during the period under review. The district has developed many participatory roles for teachers, which increased involvement in change efforts and provided useful feedback to central office through collaboration on leadership committees. All the committees and participants helped to keep individual and group efforts focused on goals in the District Improvement Plan. Through their ongoing training to develop elementary benchmark assessments, teachers and administrators learned to collect and analyze student achievement data, write curriculum benchmarks, create common benchmark tests, align the curriculum, and use differentiated instruction using groups, tasks, or materials. In the process, the district has developed improved systems for communication, analysis of data, collaboration, and implementation of new curriculum, instruction, and support initiatives that have proven to be successful in raising student achievement in mathematics at the middle school.

The EQA Examination Process

The Massachusetts Legislature created the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in July 2000 to provide independent and objective programmatic and financial audits of the 350-plus school districts that serve the cities and towns of the commonwealth. The agency is the

accountability component of the Education Reform Act of 1993, and was envisioned in that legislation. The EQA works under the direction of a five-person citizen council, appointed by the governor, known as the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC).

From February 26 through March 1, 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Grafton Public Schools for the period 2004-2006, with a primary focus on 2006. This examination was based on the EQA's six major standards of inquiry that address the quality of educational management, which are: 1) Leadership, Governance, and Communication; 2) Curriculum and Instruction; 3) Assessment and Program Evaluation; 4) Human Resource Management and Professional Development; 5) Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support; and 6) Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency. The report is based on the source documents, correspondence sent prior to the on-site visit, interviews with the representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers, and additional documents submitted while in the district. The report does not consider documents, revised data, or comments that may have surfaced after the onsite visit.

For the period under examination, 2004-2006, this report finds Grafton to be a 'High' performing school district with an average proficiency index of 87 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'High' in math on the 2004-2006 MCAS tests. Over this period, student performance declined by one and one-half PI points in ELA and improved by two and one-half PI points in math, which closed the district's average proficiency gap by six percent.

The following provides a summary of the district's performance on the 2006 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and the findings of the EQA examination.

Summary of Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

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

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

On average, more than two-thirds of all students in Grafton attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much more than that statewide. Nearly four-fifths of Grafton students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), three-fifths of Grafton students attained proficiency in math, and more than half of Grafton students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Grafton's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 87 proficiency index (PI) points, nine PI points greater than that statewide. Grafton's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 13 PI points.
- In 2006, Grafton's proficiency gap in ELA was eight PI points, eight PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Grafton's proficiency gap in math was 19 PI points in 2006, nine PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two PI points per year to achieve AYP. Grafton's proficiency gap in STE was 16 PI points, 13 PI points narrower than that statewide.

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

Between 2003 and 2006, Grafton's MCAS performance showed improvement overall, in ELA, and in math, and was relatively flat in STE. However, the gains in achievement overall and in ELA were made between 2003 and 2004, and overall achievement has been relatively flat and ELA achievement has declined since then.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by nine percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by five percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Grafton narrowed from 18 PI points in 2003 to 13 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 30 percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Grafton showed improvement, at an average of approximately two-thirds of a PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 19 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

- Math performance in Grafton also showed improvement, at an average of approximately two and one-half PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 33 percent, a rate higher than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Grafton had relatively flat STE performance, increasing by less than one PI point annually over the two-year period; this resulted in an improvement rate of 10 percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE declined by one percentage point during this period.

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Grafton students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Grafton in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA and 38 PI points in math (Asian students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Grafton 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). For these subgroups, less than half the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, Asian students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, approximately three-quarters or more of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gaps for White students and female students were wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. For these subgroups, more than two-thirds of the students attained proficiency.

Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2003 to 27 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 41 to 34 PI points over this period.

- In Grafton, all student subgroups except Asian students and students with disabilities had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the gains were made between 2003 and 2004. The performance of Asian students declined and the performance of students with disabilities was relatively flat. The most improved subgroups in ELA were regular education students and low-income students.
- In math, all subgroups in Grafton showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.

Standard Summaries

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Excellent' on one, 'Satisfactory' on eleven, and 'Needs Improvement' on one of the thirteen performance indicators in this standard.

Despite many changes in school committee membership, principals, union leadership, town officials, and the makeup of town committees, the superintendent continued to build a collaborative culture focused on district improvement. The town elected three new members to the school committee during the period under review. While the committee did not have a formal mentoring program in place, veteran members offered their support via telephone, face-to-face meetings, and e-mail. Newly elected members met with the superintendent as soon as possible following their election to the committee, and reviewed the duties associated with the position. The superintendent provided each member with a policy manual, the list of issues currently being addressed by administration, pertinent district information, copies of the past year's superintendent weekly updates, and answered any questions the new member had.

The school committee had subcommittees in the areas of negotiations and policy that met on a regular basis and shared information with the entire committee. A school committee member also served on each of the district strategic planning action committees that reported to the full committee on an annual basis regarding the attainment of goals in the strategic plan. The school committee also established defined timelines for the ongoing review/revision of the policy manual. The superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned

administrator, and the district practiced site-based management. The full administrative team met biweekly with agendas set by the superintendent with input from administration. In addition, the central office team also met as a separate entity on a weekly basis. The district website provided a great deal of information and included updated notices of importance issued by the office of the superintendent, as well as links to all five district schools. The school committee, the superintendent, and all the unions in the district worked collaboratively with the entire community in its quest to provide a challenging education to the entire student body.

The district developed systems for analyzing data, aligning curriculum and instruction, and providing professional development programs, and scheduled time to build capacity in its efforts to move the strategic plan forward. The district began strategic planning in 2002 and produced a three-year plan, which it updated in 2005 to serve the district through 2010. The strategic plan served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP). It contained both the mission and vision statements of the district. These statements were prominently posted in the school buildings and published in many documents such as student handbooks. The school committee formally reviewed the plan two times per year and discussed its components on approximately six other occasions during the year. With the exception of one school, each School Improvement Plan (SIP) mirrored the strategic plan (DIP), and administrators reviewed and addressed the information within each document during budget preparation. The district posted the strategic plan on its website and made it available in a brochure format.

The district analyzed MCAS data on a regular basis, as well as the results of elementary quarterly exams and middle and senior high school midyear and final exams. The superintendent provided the school committee and the community at large with an annual district report outlining the MCAS results and describing the achievements of the district and its schools. While the district regularly reviewed aggregate assessment data, the only use of disaggregated data addressed the middle school special education population. Members of the teaching staff had five full days and four half days for professional development activities in areas such as curriculum, assessment, review of data, and differentiated instruction. Faculty meetings focused on school programming and afforded staff members the opportunity to meet by grade level and in small groups. In addition to faculty meetings teachers also had regularly scheduled meetings to discuss curriculum and other items.

Curriculum and Instruction

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Excellent' on one, 'Satisfactory' on six, and 'Needs Improvement' on three of the ten performance indicators in this standard.

Guided by the strategic plan (DIP) and three School Improvement Plans, the district made significant progress in reviewing, revising, documenting, and communicating its curriculum, during the period under review. An exemplary curriculum planning council, established in 2002, oversaw curriculum development, documentation, adoption, and choice of instructional materials. In addition, the district focused on curriculum coherence through horizontal and vertical alignment and alignment with the state frameworks of curricula in all tested content areas and at all grade levels. By the end of the review period, the district had collaboratively documented curricula that contained all key components: objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, measurable outcomes, and sometimes assessments.

Through a distributed leadership model, principals, assistant principals, teachers, and teacher-leaders at each school collaborated to introduce differentiated instruction and heightened accountability as two strategies to ensure effective instruction. A third strategy, to integrate technology more fully into classroom instruction, was more difficult to achieve with the inequitable availability of computers and up-to-date educational technology at all schools.

The director of curriculum and staff development and the elementary school principals worked with consultants, teachers, and grade-level leaders to incorporate differentiated instruction into elementary teachers' practice, early in the review period. Through an ongoing process, the district more recently introduced differentiated instruction at the middle school and at the high school. Classroom observations indicated that the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies was not yet widespread at any school but was more consistent at the elementary level.

During the period under review, the district emphasized accountability by instituting teacher-designed quarterly exams and benchmarks at the elementary level and common midyear and final exams at the middle school that echoed the high school's summative testing format. These assessments focused teachers and the school community on students' progress in meeting measurable goals and objectives. They also helped teachers better understand and act upon

achievement trends and strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. District and school-based leaders worked with teachers to use data analysis as a tool to improve both curriculum and instruction. Although teachers improved their data analysis skills, teachers from each school stated that they did not all have sufficient training to analyze and use data well, and relied on school leaders for data analysis.

The director of curriculum development, principals, assistant principals and many teacher-leaders exhibited fluency in their knowledge and use of assessment data, including MCAS results, to improve student achievement. The district largely focused its data analysis on item analysis, grade-level, or subject-level achievement data and did not regularly examine subgroup achievement data such as for special education and low-income students. These were the district's lowest achieving subgroups. When the middle school failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets, it analyzed achievement data for its low-achieving subgroup, made changes, and met its target in 2006. Although MCAS results were stronger in Grafton than in the state overall, Grafton's MCAS proficiency index, in general, remained relatively flat during the period under review. According to data from the Merrimack Education Collaborative (MEC), the percentage of Grafton students who attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests was 60 percent in 2003, 69 percent in 2004, 66 percent in 2005, and 69 percent in 2006.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on all eight performance indicators in this standard.

Grafton had a solid assessment program during the period under review. The district conducted continuous data collection and analysis using various student assessments. The MCAS data analysis committee analyzed the MCAS data and noted general strengths and weaknesses to help improve instruction. While the district made aggregate adequate yearly progress (AYP), only the middle school disaggregated subgroup data and took targeted steps to close the achievement gaps of subgroups in the district. All administrators were trained in using TestWiz. The district's director of curriculum, the curriculum planning council (CPC), department chairs at the high

school, team leaders at the middle school, and grade-level leaders at the elementary schools all analyzed data and planned ways to improve teaching and learning.

Interviews and documents revealed that district personnel analyzed results from common midyear and final exams at the secondary levels for strengths and weaknesses. The elementary schools had offered professional development training in order to create their own benchmark quarterly exams that they analyzed to inform instruction. They were in the process of creating benchmark report cards to go along with these. The secondary levels had not yet created benchmark assessments.

Ninety-eight to 100 percent of students took the MCAS tests, exceeding the state's required 95 percent participation rate. The high school encouraged but did not mandate that students take PSATs, SATs, and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Students took English language learner (ELL) and special education tests as appropriate. The elementary schools used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at grade 2, the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). They had used Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for the period under review but replaced it with the DRA.

The elementary levels used well documented quarterly benchmark exams tied to a reporting system. The secondary schools used common midyear and final exams and analyzed the data but did not yet tie them to specific benchmarks. The district used information attained from the elementary quarterly exams and the secondary midyear and final exams to plan future instruction. Interviewees at the elementary level said that they changed instruction midyear according to analysis of the exam results. Teachers, committees, and curriculum leaders in the district used data also to prepare reports for the central office, school committee, parents, and community members. The staff at the various levels used the data generated by the tests to inform the purchase of materials, such as manipulatives at the elementary level.

The district analyzed MCAS data at all levels and looked for strengths and weaknesses to improve instruction. The entire faculty used information generated by TestWiz to analyze the types of questions that required more instruction. The middle school was the only level to disaggregate data thoroughly to evaluate subgroup needs. As a result, the middle school offered

extra math classes, math tutoring during and after school, and half-year math and ELA remediation. For two of the years during the period under review, the middle school made AYP in the aggregate but failed to make it for the low-income and special education subgroups. After the school put intense focus on analysis of aggregated and disaggregated data and altered targeted services, the middle school closed the achievement gap between the subgroups and made AYP.

Based on documents and interviews, the secondary schools used common midyear and final exams. Teachers and administrators analyzed results to adjust for weaknesses in the curriculum. They looked at patterns of scores from different teachers to determine if some teachers had better strategies that they could share with respective departments or teams. They had not yet developed benchmark exams and were scheduled to participate in professional development with the same consultant who had provided training at the elementary level. Documentation from the elementary schools demonstrated well developed quarterly benchmark exams. The elementary staff told the EQA examiners that they were looking to offer the benchmark exams three times per year to go along with the report cards. The district used appropriate special education and ELL testing.

The district kept all stakeholders informed of progress by providing data to staff to analyze, by informing parents serving on school councils, by making report cards more informative at the elementary level, and by using Power School at the secondary levels. Parents could log into Power School to learn of their child's progress, or be contacted by the web-based phone calling system.

The district was learning to use an automated grading and analysis system (Scantron) to correct, report on, and correlate data from several locally made benchmark assessments, especially at the elementary level. This will help highlight patterns of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning as well as in curriculum.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on nine and 'Needs Improvement' on four of the thirteen performance indicators in this standard.

In 2005-2006, Grafton had 76 non-professional status teachers. Many teachers who applied for employment had a few years of experience, and Grafton was able to hire them with respect to experience at the appropriate step. Principals went through resumes and chose candidates for interviewing. They formed an interview team with teachers, who then interviewed the candidates and made a recommendation to the superintendent. The superintendent then interviewed the recommended candidate and made the offer of a contract.

Grafton had a strong mentor program for any teacher who was new to the community, as well as a two-day induction program in the summer. Likewise, the superintendent mentored new administrators. All principals were fairly new in their positions and were promoted from within the school district.

The director of curriculum and staff development was a permanent member of the curriculum planning council and was responsible for closely connecting the strategic plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) to curriculum revision and the ongoing training that staff needed in the district's professional development plan, in order to build capacity for staff to participate in district efforts. The district goals focused on continuous training in data analysis to align the curricula, to develop quarterly assessments for use as a formative assessment, and to develop exit criteria in each grade and subject area. Teachers had eight days available for ongoing in-service, which was a mix of district, site, and programmatic activities. They also had a pool of $25,000 per year available to take university or college courses. The district also makes funds available for teachers to attend various trainings and workshops during the year, and for teachers to develop professional development projects, write curriculum, and form study groups. Alignment of all professional development with the district's strategic plan was expected and was monitored by the director of curriculum and staff development.

The district's evaluation procedure for non-professional status teachers aligned with Department of Education (DOE) requirements, since it was an annual summative evaluation based on classroom observations which used the Principals of Effective Teaching as indicators. In contrast, the district's evaluation procedure for professional status teachers did not align with the DOE requirements, since it called for a summative evaluation once in four years. According to the DOE, principals need to complete summative evaluations based on classroom performance at

a minimum in alternating years. The superintendent annually evaluated administrators based on mutually agreed upon goals, using criteria in the written evaluations that aligned with the Principles of Effective Leadership. The superintendent wrote evaluations that were informative, instructive, and promoted professional growth, and could serve as a model for the principals that he mentored. Neither the administrative contracts nor the teacher contracts directly linked performance to increased student achievement.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on five 'Needs Improvement' on five of the ten performance indicators in this standard.

The district provided a wide variety of educational services and supplementary programs at all grade levels designed to meet learning needs and improve academic achievement, and implemented or expanded a range of special education supports, including early intervention, programs before and after school, and summer remedial programs. The districtwide use of summative assessments helped to identify students performing below grade level. Although the district's proportions of limited English proficient (LEP), transient, and homeless students remained very low, it endeavored to provide these populations with a full range of appropriate programs and services.

The district's two primary subgroups, special education and low-income pupils, were substantially underrepresented in all advanced and accelerated academic programs in grades 8-12. Although the district permitted students who did not meet qualifying criteria and prerequisites to elect honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, very few chose to do so. The district presented little evidence that school leadership had initiated formal policies or practices to increase subgroup representation in these rigorous courses in order to close the achievement gap.

Student attendance rates in the district steadily declined throughout the review period. The rate fell from 95.8 percent in 2004 to 95.1 percent in 2005 and reached 94.8 percent in 2006. The high school attendance rate was 94.0 percent in 2006. A similar pattern was seen in the data regarding the percentage of students chronically absent from school across all grade levels.

Disaggregated analysis of attendance data revealed considerably higher absenteeism rates among special education and low-income students.

Suspension rates in the district remained substantially below state averages during the period under review. Between 2004 and 2006, Grafton's out-of-school suspension rate averaged 2.6 percent, compared to the state average of 5.9 percent. During that same period, the in-school suspension rate averaged 3.1 percent, compared to a state average of almost four percent. In addition, retention rates at all grade levels, as well as the high school dropout rate, remained well below state averages. The administration presented little evidence to examiners that it analyzed disciplinary and/or dropout data in any regular or systematic manner.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The EQA examiners gave the Grafton Public Schools an overall rating of 'Satisfactory' on this standard. They rated the district as 'Satisfactory' on ten and 'Needs Improvement' on three of the thirteen performance indicators in this standard.

The school committee policy on the budget process designated the superintendent to prepare the district's budget in consultation with the administration, town administrator, and the finance committee. The superintendent used a "bottom up" budget development process that included all relevant stakeholders. The development of the budget started in August with the distribution of the budget booklet that outlined the parameters for recommended increases in the discretionary accounts for each school and administrative function. In order to provide equity, he based each budget line item on a per pupil cost allocation. The superintendent stated that the budget was "connected" to the goals contained in the strategic plan (DIP) and the SIPs. The budget took into consideration increasing student enrollment. Each of the principals and administration presented their budgets to the superintendent followed by presentations to the school committee. The school committee voted the preliminary budget followed by a public hearing in January. The superintendent recommended a final budget to the school committee for their approval. Meetings with town officials followed school committee approval prior to the town meeting held in May. The budget included a five-year capital plan that was part of the town's capital plan submitted to the town administrator. The budget did not include funding from state and federal grants or from

other fund sources. The superintendent stated that starting with the FY 2007 budget, information on state and federal grants would be included along with other fund sources.

The town of Grafton annually provided the necessary financial resources to ensure that the students received quality education that focused on the improvement of student achievement. The voters at the annual town meetings supported the superintendent's recommended budget. The principals/administrators, teachers, committee members, and town officials confirmed the adequacy of the budget. The budget increased by 21.5 percent over the past three years. The per pupil cost in FY 2005 for regular students was $5,838, compared to the state average of $7,421. In addition to the budget, the school system received $257,000 in foundation reserve (pothole) money and $638,806 in circuit breaker funds. During the period under review, the district received substantial increases in Chapter 70 funds.

The town allocated 60 percent of the town budget to the school system and 40 percent to the town. The school system exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirements for the period under review. The town had a balance of $2,882,657 in the stabilization account (6.8 percent of the general fund) and $2,384,172 in free cash for FY 2005. The town had used part of these funds to support the annual town budget.

All five schools were in good condition. The Grafton Elementary School was constructed in 2002, the South Grafton School in 1975, and the North Elementary School had been renovated in 1975. The high school was renovated in 1993. At the high school it was necessary to improvise the available space to accommodate the increasing student enrollment. The suggested timeline for a new high school will necessitate using portable classrooms for an extended period. The superintendent and the director of building and grounds met periodically to develop yearly maintenance projects. The town annually approved the district's capital maintenance projects. Each of the facilities had adequate custodial staff and districtwide maintenance personnel who kept the facilities well maintained. All of the schools had adequate security systems that included a buzzer system and camera monitoring system at the middle and high schools. A walk-through of the schools by the EQA examiners revealed the schools to be clean, well lit, well maintained, and conducive to promoting student achievement.

Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The EQA's analysis of student achievement data focuses on the MCAS test results for 2003-2006, with primary attention paid to the 2006 MCAS tests. This analysis is framed by the following five essential questions:

1. **Achievement: Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?**
2. **Equity of Achievement: Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?**
3. **Improvement: Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?**
4. **Equity of Improvement: Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?**
5. **Participation: Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?**

In order to respond accurately to these questions, the EQA subjected the most current state and district MCAS test results to a series of analyses to determine whether there were differences between the mean results of district students and those of students statewide or among student subgroups within the district. Descriptive analyses of the 2006 MCAS test results revealed differences between the achievement of students in Grafton and the average scores of students in Massachusetts.

To highlight those differences, the data were then summarized in several ways: a performance-level based summary of student achievement in Grafton; and comparative analyses of districtwide, subject-area, grade, school, and subgroup achievement in relation to that of students statewide, in relation to the district averages, and in relation to other subject areas, grades, and subgroups.

The EQA then subjected the data to gap analysis, a statistical method that describes the relationship between student aggregate and subgroup performance and the state standard or target of 100 percent proficiency on the MCAS tests. Gap analysis also describes the relative achievement of different entities at a specific point in time, as well as how those relationships change over time. Gap analysis consists of several separate indicators, each of which builds on the others, and can be applied to a district, school, or subgroup of students.

The basis for gap analysis is the *proficiency index*, which is a measure of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, or meeting the state standard. The unit of measure is proficiency index (PI) points, and a score of 100

indicates that all students in the aggregate or in a subgroup are proficient. It can be calculated for overall achievement as well as achievement in an individual subject. Please see Appendix A for more detailed information about the proficiency index.

The *proficiency gap* is a measure of the number of proficiency index points by which student achievement must improve to meet the goal of proficiency for all students. It is the gap or difference between the current level of proficiency as measured by the proficiency index and the target of 100. A gap of zero indicates that all students in the aggregate or in a subgroup are proficient.

The *performance gap* is a measure of the range of, or variance in, achievement among different student subgroups within a district or school at a specific point in time. It measures the differences between the proficiency index of the highest-performing subgroup and those of the other subgroups. It also measures the difference in performance between any two entities. When the performance gap narrows over time, equity increases; when it widens over time, equity decreases.

Achievement

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

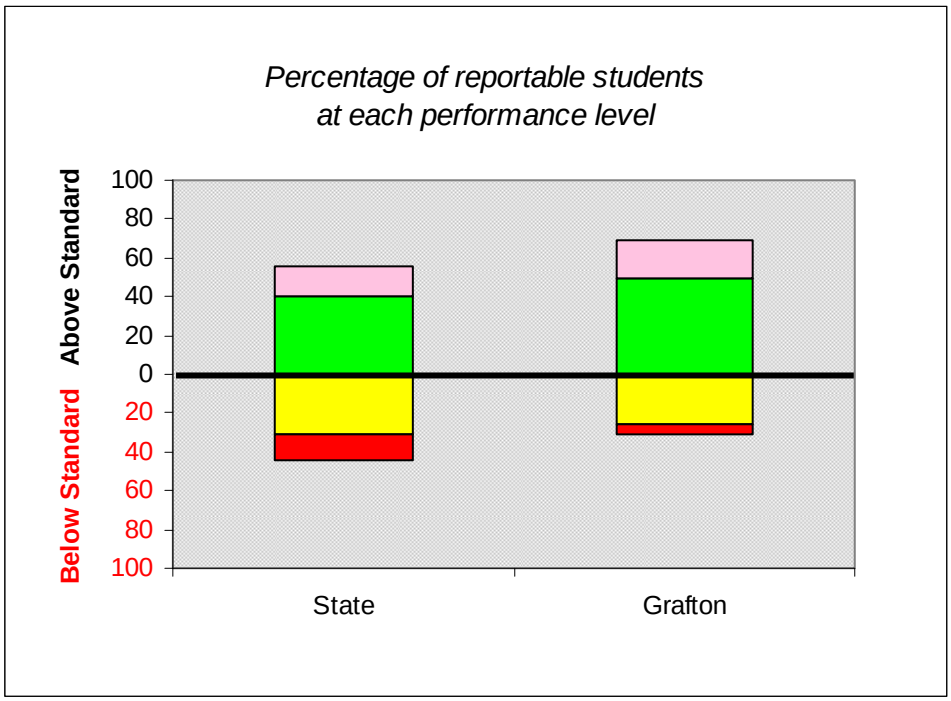
Findings:

- On average, more than two-thirds of all students in Grafton attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much more than that statewide. Nearly four-fifths of Grafton students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), three-fifths of Grafton students attained proficiency in math, and more than half of Grafton students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Grafton's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 87 proficiency index (PI) points, nine PI points greater than that statewide. Grafton's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 13 PI points.

- In 2006, Grafton's proficiency gap in ELA was eight PI points, eight PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Grafton's proficiency gap in math was 19 PI points in 2006, nine PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two PI points per year to achieve AYP. Grafton's proficiency gap in STE was 16 PI points, 13 PI points narrower than that statewide.

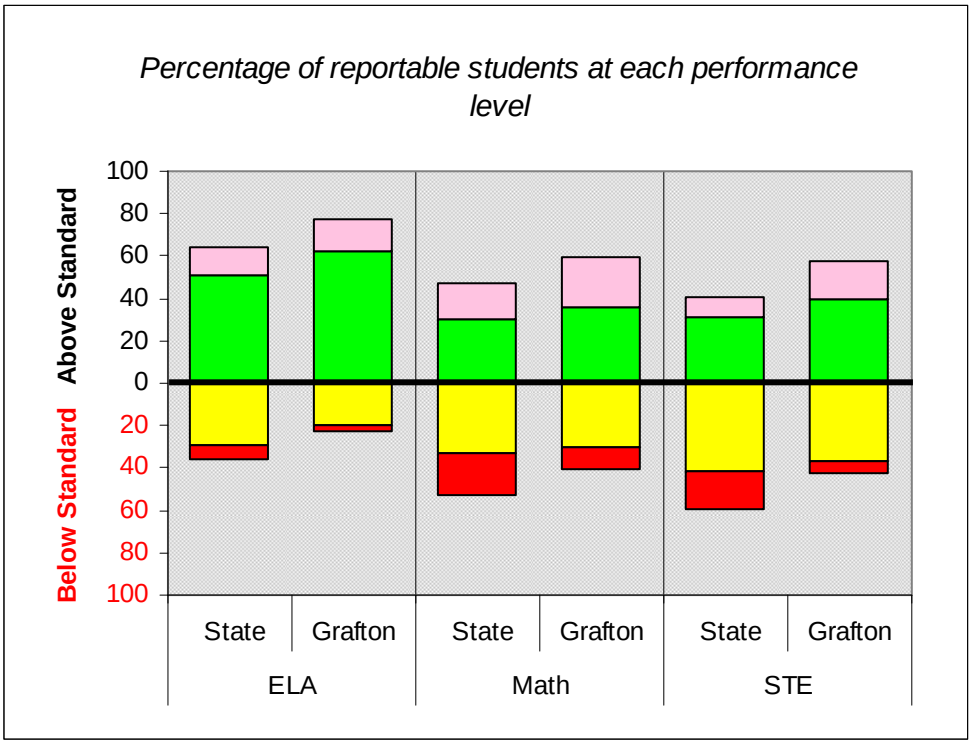
Figure/Table 1: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2006



	State	Grafton
Advanced	15	20
Proficient	41	49
Needs Improvement	31	25
Warning/Failing	14	6
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	69
Average Proficiency Index (API)	78.3	86.6

In 2006, 69 percent of Grafton students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests overall, 13 percentage points more than that statewide. Six percent of Grafton students scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category, eight percentage points less than that statewide. Grafton's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 87 proficiency index (PI) points, nine PI points greater than that statewide. Grafton's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 13 PI points.

Figure/Table 2: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Subject, 2006



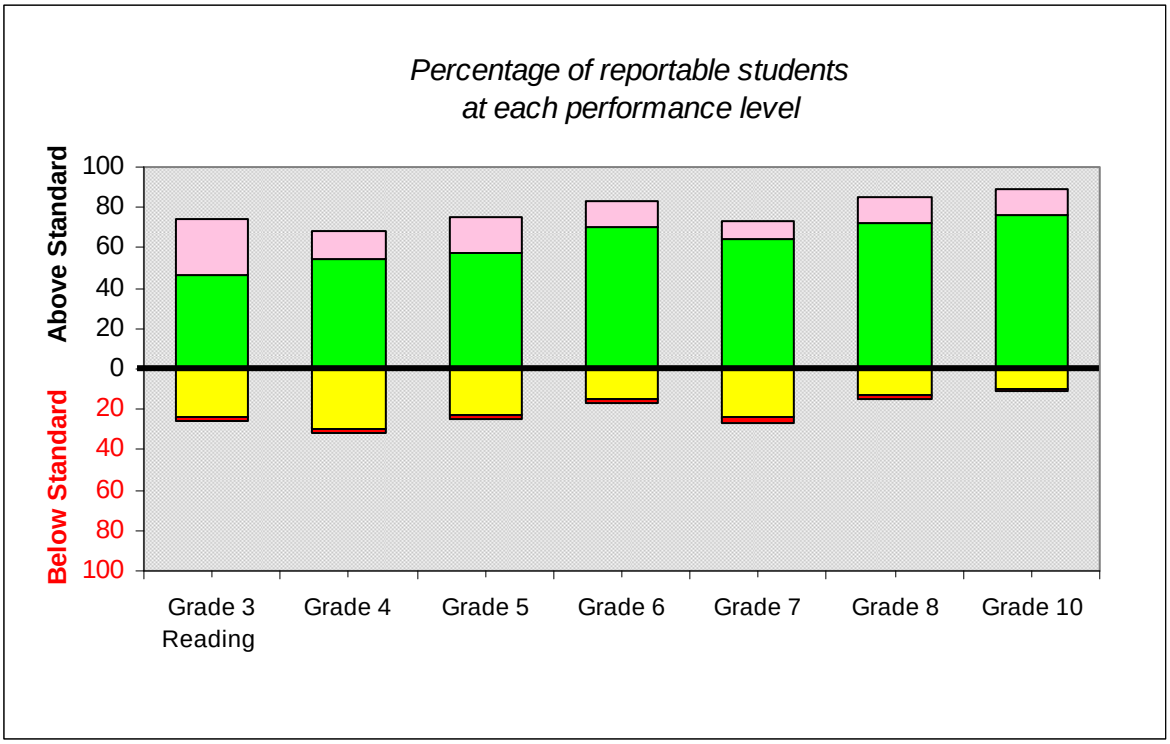
	ELA		Math		STE	
	State	Grafton	State	Grafton	State	Grafton
Advanced	13	16	17	24	10	18
Proficient	51	62	30	36	31	40
Needs Improvement	29	20	33	30	42	37
Warning/Failing	7	2	20	10	17	5
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	78	47	60	41	58
Proficiency Index (PI)	84.3	91.7	72.3	81.4	71.4	83.6

In 2006, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was higher in Grafton than statewide. In Grafton, 78 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 64 percent statewide; 60 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 47 percent statewide; and 58 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 41 percent statewide.

Grafton students had stronger performance on the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA than in math and STE. The proficiency index for Grafton students in ELA was 92 PI points; in math, it was 81 PI points; and in STE, it was 84 PI points. These compare to the statewide figures of 84, 72, and 71 PI points, respectively.

The proficiency gap for Grafton students was eight PI points in ELA, 19 PI points in math, and 16 PI points in STE. These compare to the statewide figures of 16, 28, and 29 PI points, respectively. Grafton's proficiency gaps would require an average annual improvement of one PI point in ELA and more than two PI points in math to meet AYP.

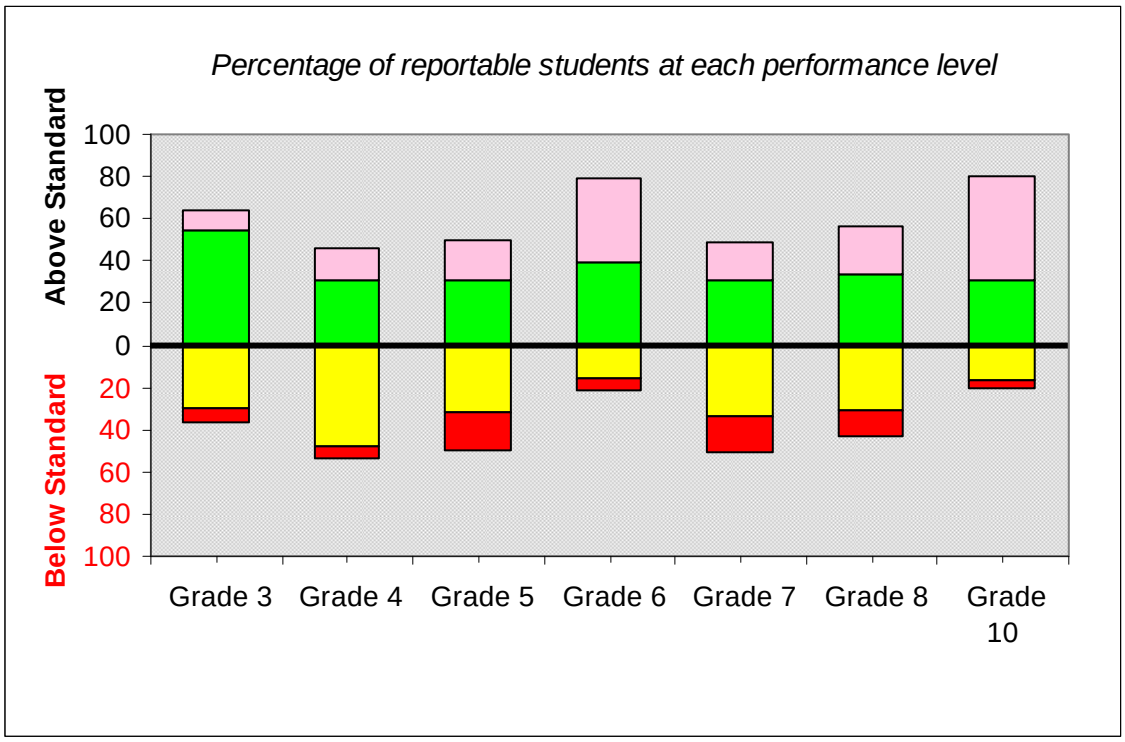
Figure/Table 3: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	29	14	17	13	10	13	13
Proficient	46	54	57	70	64	72	76
Needs Improvement	24	29	23	15	24	12	10
Warning/Failing	2	3	2	2	3	3	1
Percent Attaining Proficiency	75	68	74	83	74	85	89

The percentage of Grafton students attaining proficiency in 2006 in ELA varied slightly by grade level, ranging from a low of 68 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 89 percent of grade 10 students.

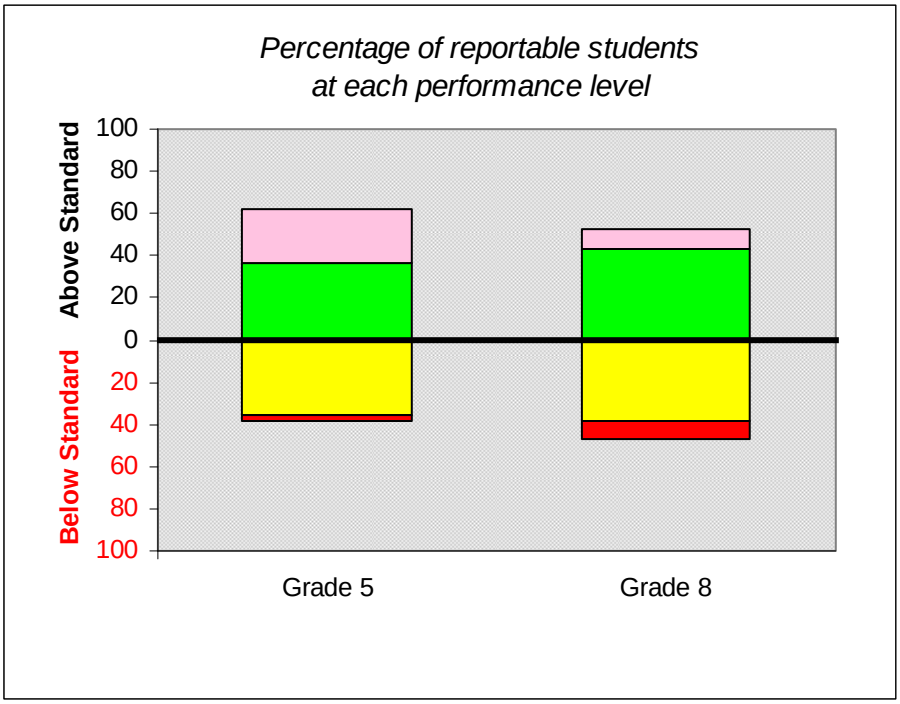
Figure/Table 4: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	10	15	19	39	18	23	49
Proficient	54	31	31	39	30	34	30
Needs Improvement	30	48	32	16	34	31	17
Warning/Failing	6	6	18	5	18	12	3
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	46	50	78	48	57	79

The percentage of Grafton students attaining proficiency in 2006 in math also varied somewhat by grade level, ranging from a low of 46 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 79 percent of grade 10 students.

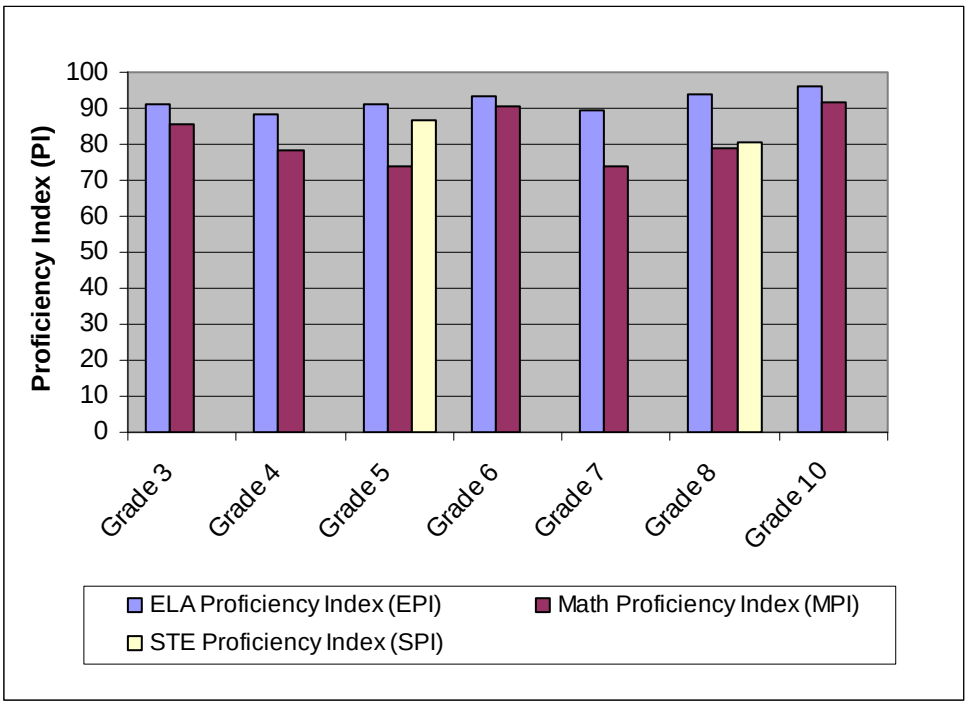
Figure/Table 5: Student MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 5	Grade 8
Advanced	25	10
Proficient	36	43
Needs Improvement	35	39
Warning/Failing	3	8
Percent Attaining Proficiency	61	53

In Grafton in 2006, 61 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 53 percent of grade 8 students did so.

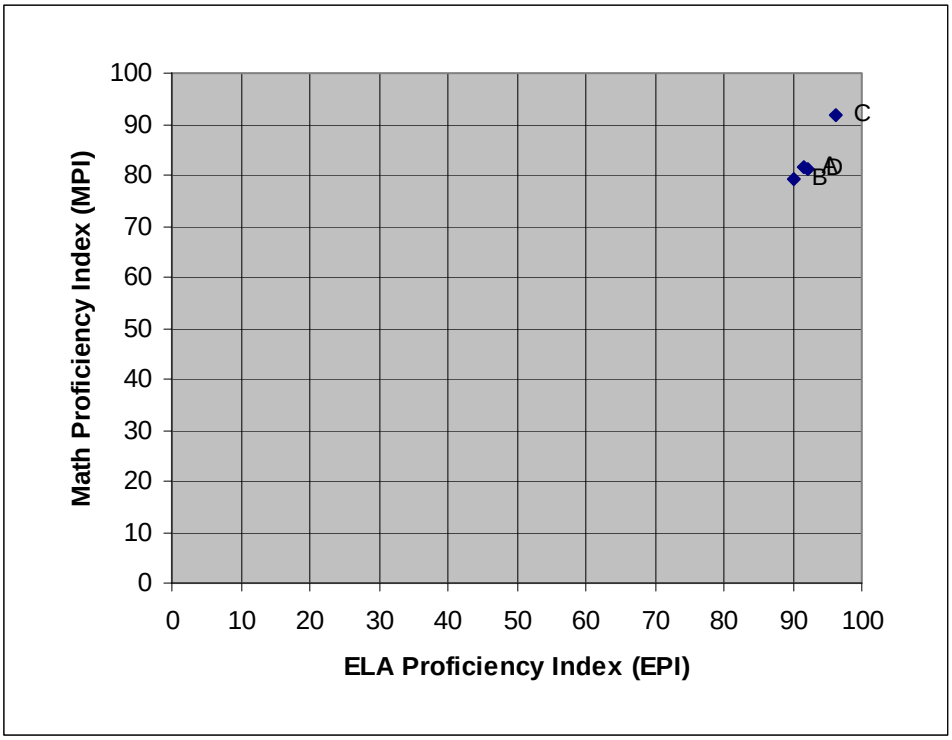
Figure/Table 6: Student MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Grade and Subject, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	91.3	88.4	91.0	93.2	89.6	93.9	96.3
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	85.4	78.6	73.9	90.4	73.7	79.0	91.6
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			86.5			80.3	

By grade, Grafton's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of four PI points at grade 10 to a high of 12 PI points at grade 4. Grafton's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of eight PI points at grade 10 to a high of 26 PI points at grades 5 and 7. Grafton's STE proficiency gap was 13 PI points at grade 5 and 20 PI points at grade 8.

Figure/Table 7: Student MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index, by School, 2006



		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Grafton	91.7	81.4	2,825
B	Grafton Elementary	90.2	79.4	1,308
C	Grafton Memorial Sr. High	96.3	91.6	298
D	Grafton Middle	92.1	81.0	1,219

Grafton's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of four PI points at Grafton Memorial Senior High School to a high of 10 PI points at Grafton Elementary School. Grafton's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of eight PI points at Grafton Memorial Senior High School to a high of 21 PI points at Grafton Elementary School.

Equity of Achievement

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Grafton students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Grafton in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA and 38 PI points in math (Asian students, students with disabilities, respectively).

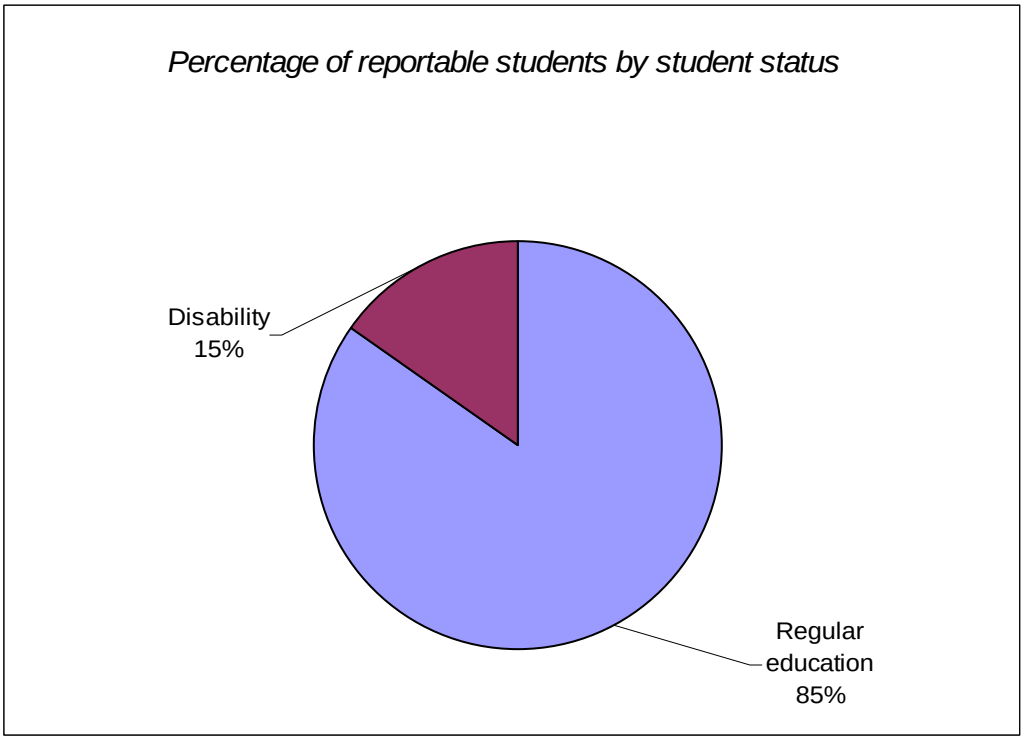
- The proficiency gaps in Grafton in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). For these subgroups, less than half the students attained proficiency.

- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, Asian students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, approximately three-quarters or more of the students attained proficiency.

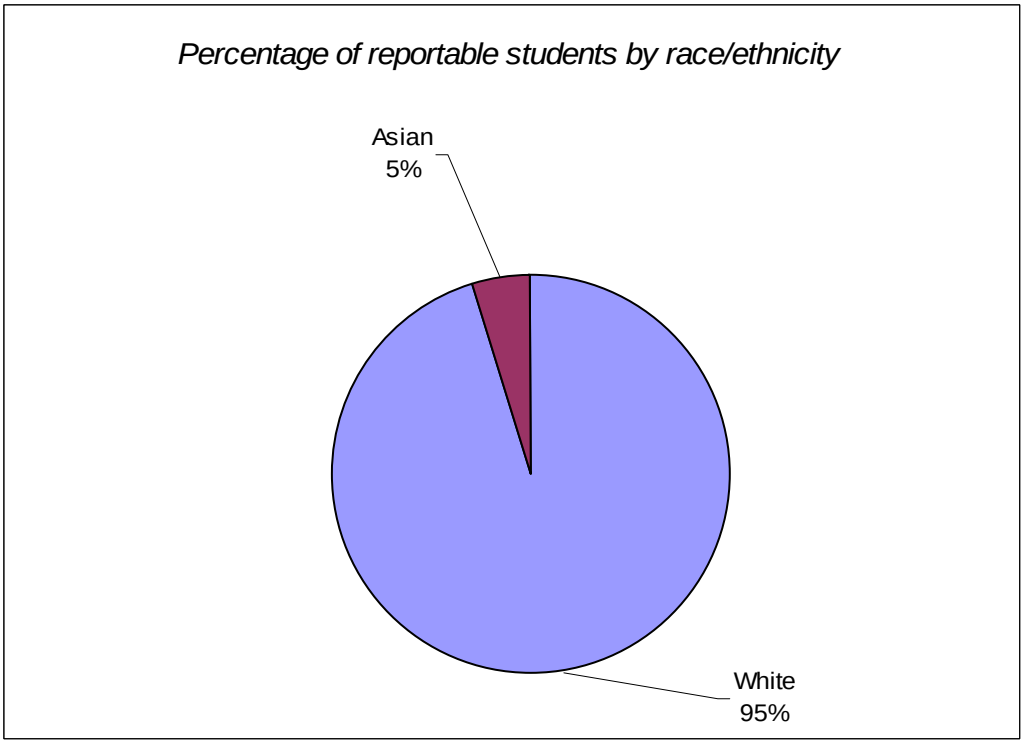
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gaps for White students and female students were wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. For these subgroups, more than two-thirds of the students attained proficiency.

Figures 8 A-C/Table 8: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2006

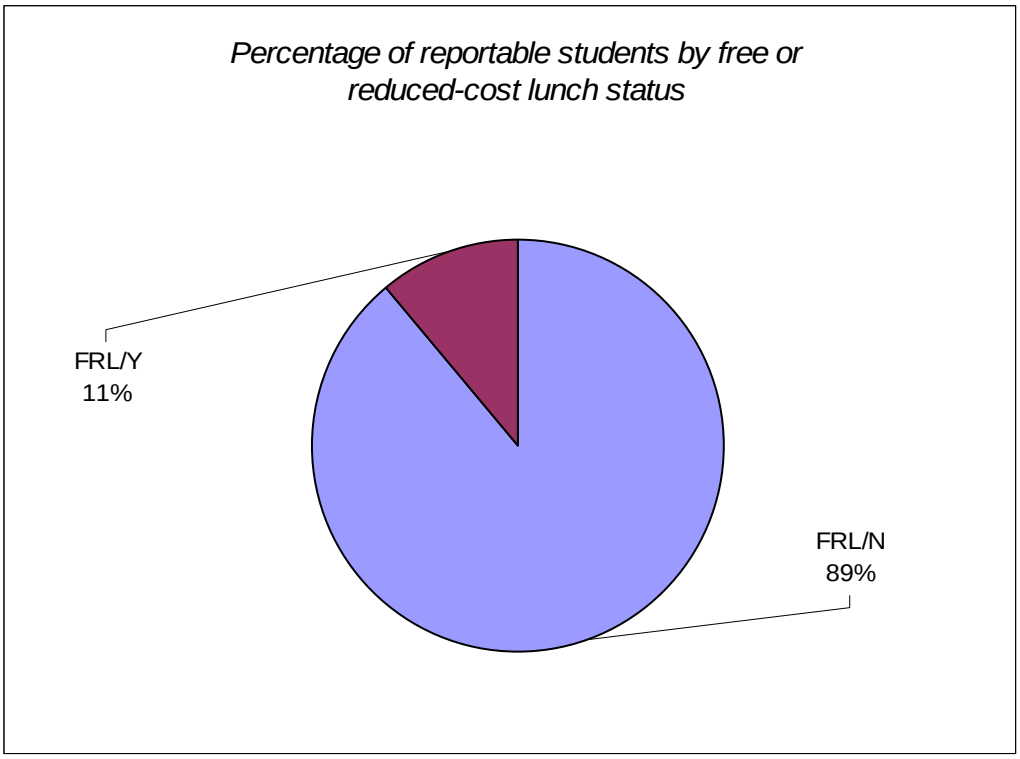
A.



B.



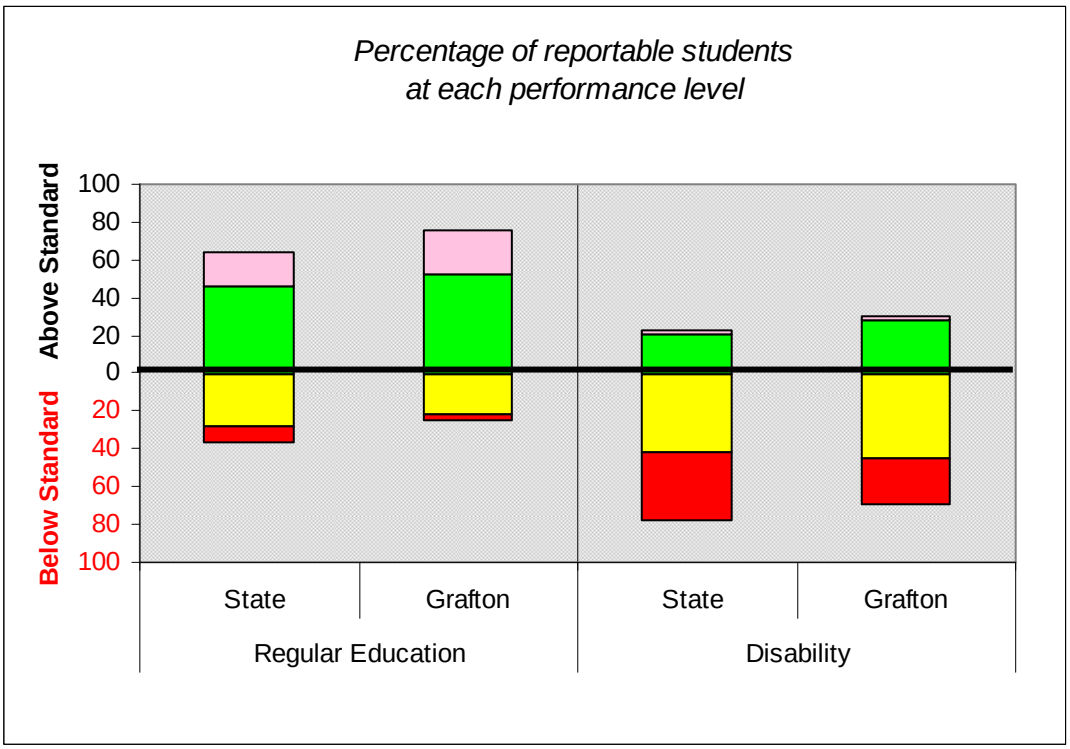
C.



	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	1,197
	Disability	215
Race/ethnicity	White	1,305
	Asian	64
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	1,266
	FRL/Y	160

In 2006 in Grafton, 15 percent of the students were students with disabilities, five percent were Asian, and 11 percent were low-income (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).

Figure/Table 9: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Student Status Subgroup, 2006

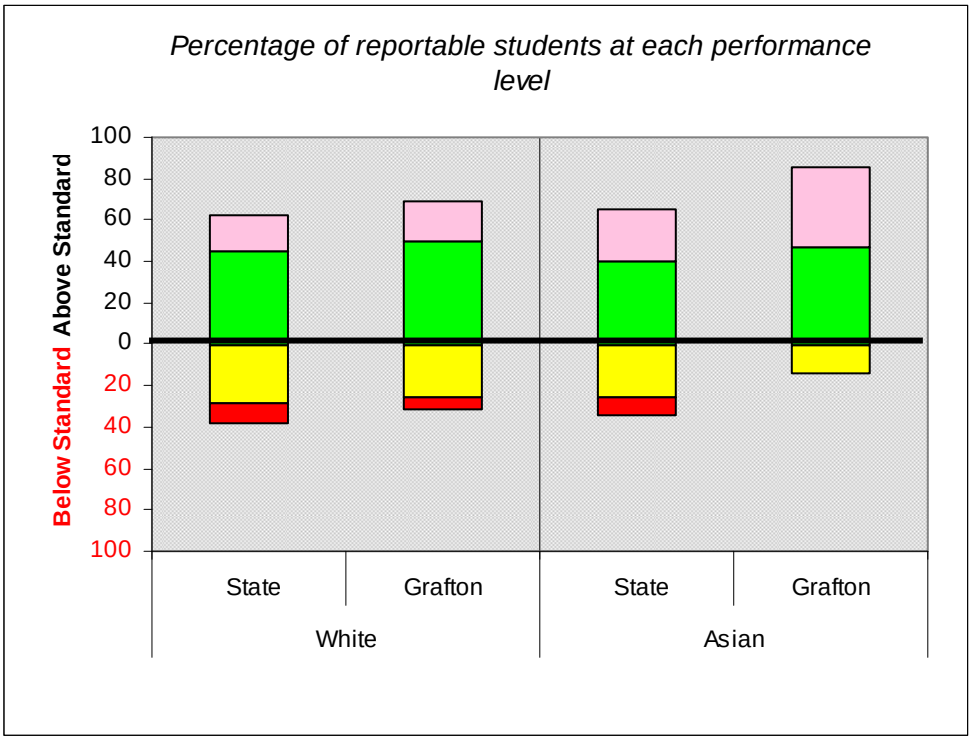


	Regular Education		Disability	
	State	Grafton	State	Grafton
Advanced	18	23	2	2
Proficient	46	53	20	29
Needs Improvement	28	22	41	45
Warning/Failing	8	3	36	24
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	76	22	31
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.0	90.5	55.9	64.3

In Grafton in 2006, the proficiency rate of regular education students was more than two times greater than that of students with disabilities. Seventy-six percent of regular education students and 31 percent of students with disabilities attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Grafton's average proficiency gap in 2006 was nine PI points for regular education students and 36 PI points for students with disabilities. The average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was 27 PI points.

Figure/Table 10: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2006

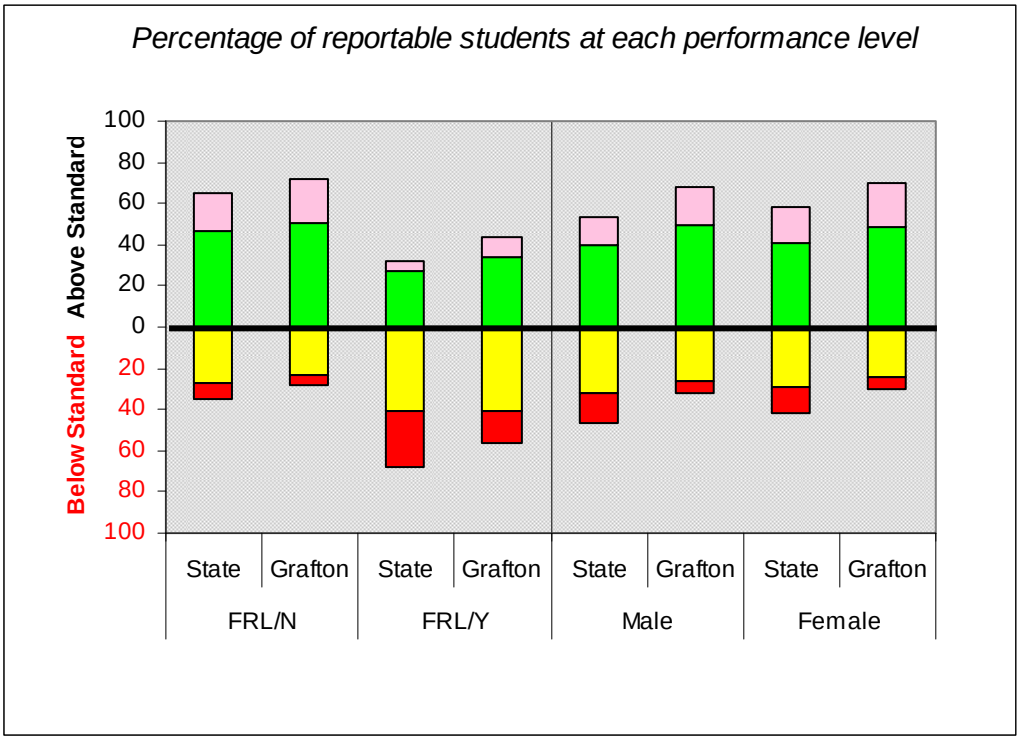


	White		Asian	
	State	Grafton	State	Grafton
Advanced	17	19	25	39
Proficient	45	49	40	47
Needs Improvement	29	25	25	14
Warning/Failing	9	6	9	0
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	68	65	86
Average Proficiency Index (API)	82.9	86.6	84.0	95.5

In Grafton in 2006, performance on the MCAS tests varied by race/ethnicity, as 86 percent of Asian students and 68 percent of White students attained overall proficiency.

Grafton's average proficiency gap in 2006 was four PI points for Asian students and 13 PI points for White students. The average performance gap between Asian and White students was nine PI points.

Figure/Table 11: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Socioeconomic Status and Gender Subgroups, 2006

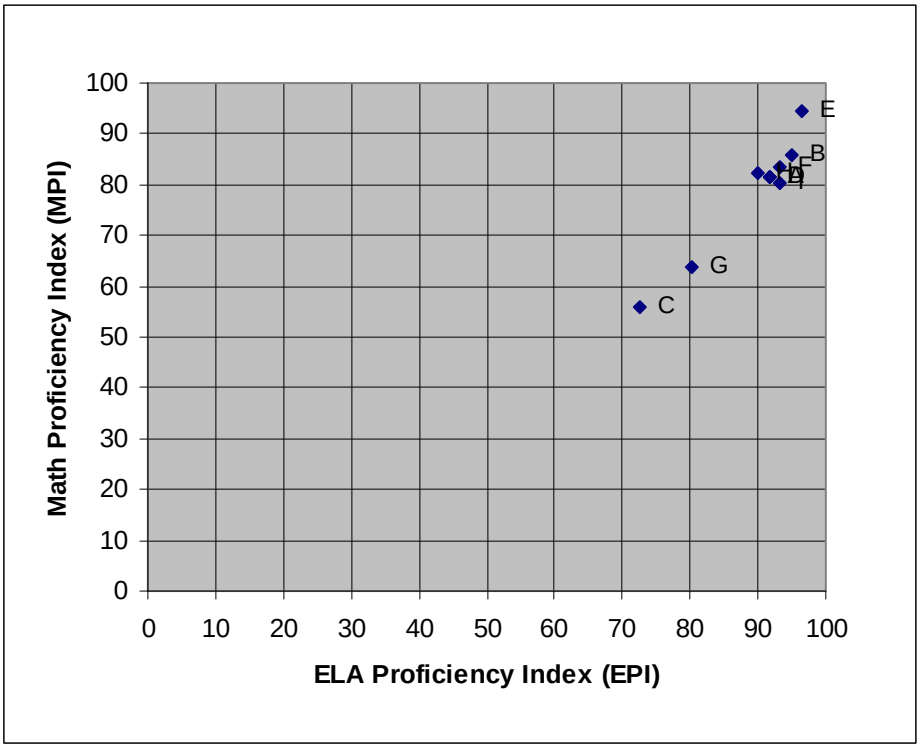


	FRL/N		FRL/Y		Male		Female	
	State	Grafton	State	Grafton	State	Grafton	State	Grafton
Advanced	19	21	5	10	13	18	17	21
Proficient	46	51	27	34	40	50	41	48
Needs Improvement	27	23	40	41	32	26	29	25
Warning/Failing	8	5	27	16	15	6	13	6
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	72	32	44	53	68	58	69
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.5	88.3	63.5	72.1	77.1	86.2	79.6	86.9

In Grafton in 2006, 44 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests, compared to 72 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The average proficiency gap was 28 PI points for low-income students and 12 PI points for non low-income students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was 16 PI points.

Performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was comparable for male and female students in Grafton, with 69 percent of female students and 68 percent of male students attaining overall proficiency. The average proficiency gap was 13 PI points for female students and 14 PI points for male students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was one PI point.

Figure/Table 12: Student MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index, by Subgroup, 2006

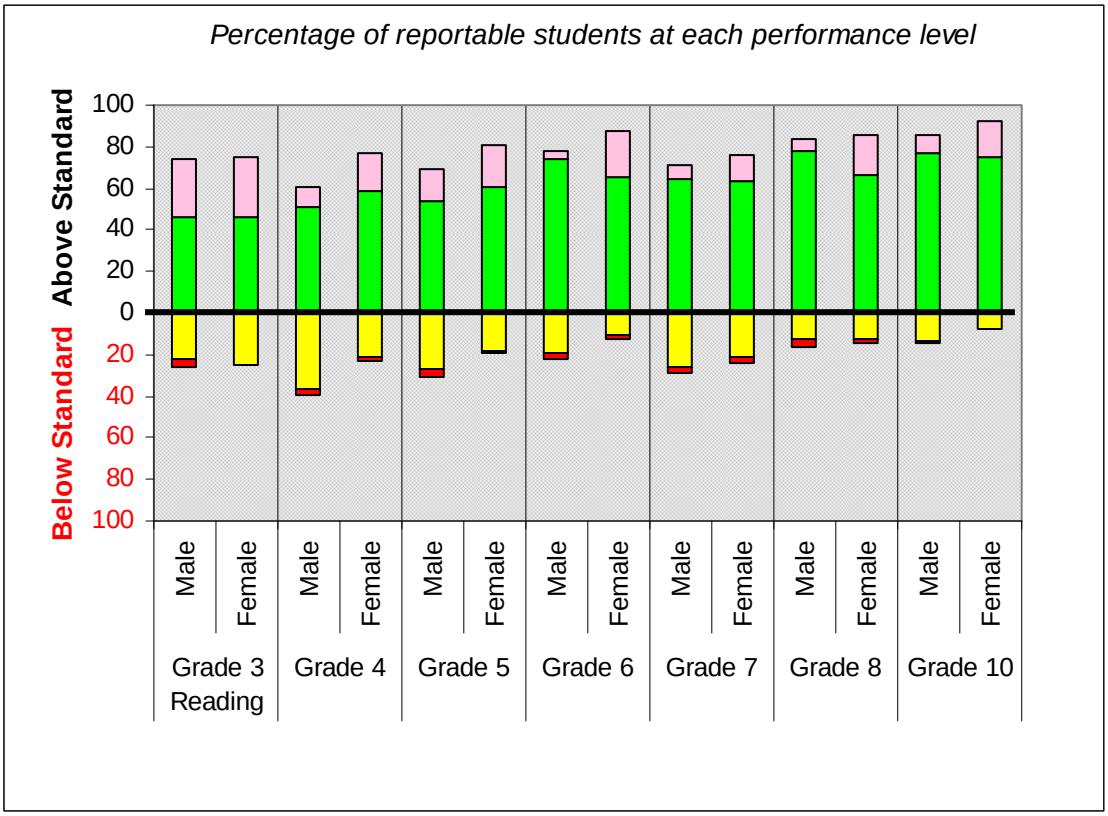


		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Grafton	91.7	81.4	2,825
B	Regular Education	95.1	85.9	2,394
C	Disability	72.5	56.1	403
D	White	91.8	81.3	2,583
E	Asian	96.5	94.5	128
F	FRL/N	93.1	83.5	2,514
G	FRL/Y	80.3	63.9	311
H	Male	90.1	82.2	1,431
I	Female	93.3	80.5	1,394

Of the eight measurable subgroups in Grafton in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA (Asian students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 38 PI points in math (Asian students, students with disabilities, respectively).

The proficiency gaps in Grafton in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income (FRL/Y) students. The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, Asian students, and non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gaps for White students and female students were wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA.

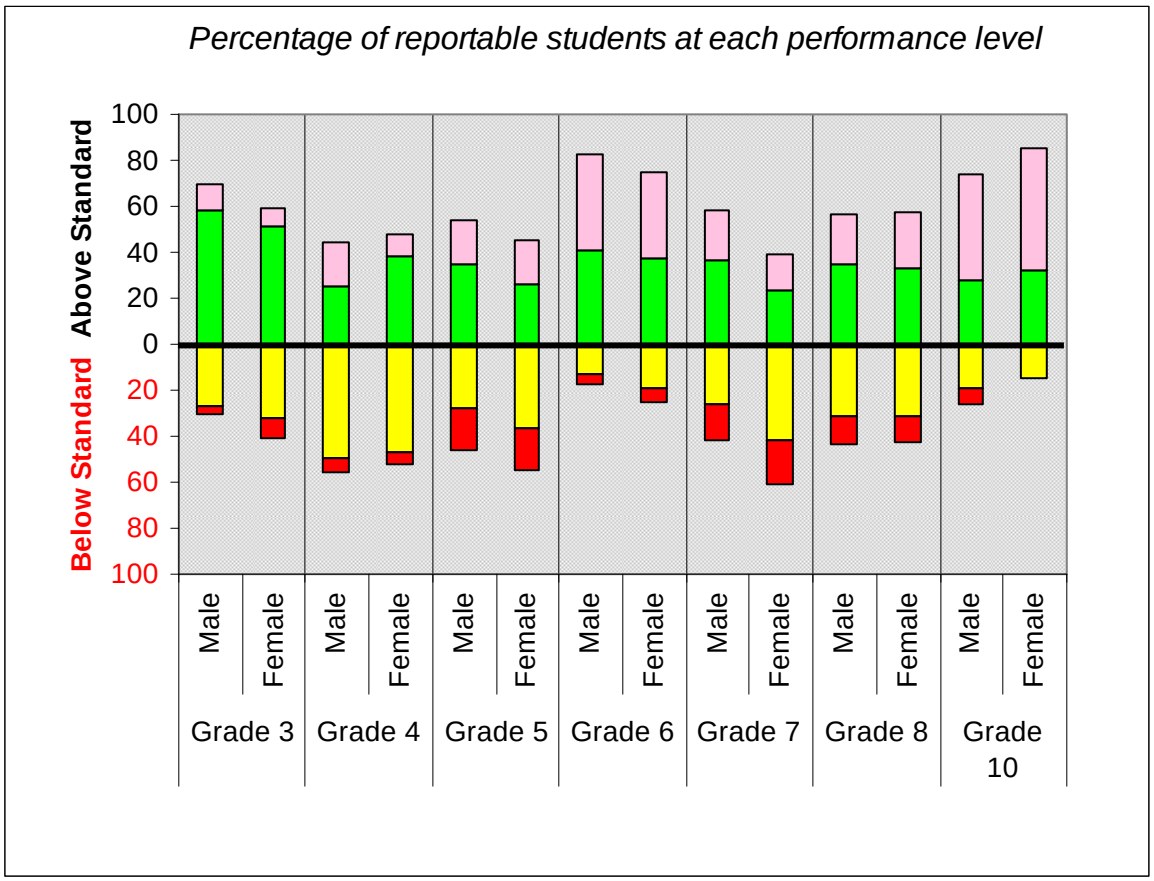
Figure/Table 13: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	28	29	10	18	15	20	5	22	7	12	6	19	9	17
Proficient	46	46	51	59	54	61	74	66	64	64	78	66	77	75
Needs Improvement	22	25	36	21	27	18	19	10	26	21	13	12	13	7
Warning/ Failing	4	0	3	2	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	1	0
Percent Attaining Proficiency	74	75	61	77	69	81	79	88	71	76	84	85	86	92

In Grafton in 2006, female students outperformed male students on all grade-level ELA tests.

Figure/Table 14: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	11	8	19	10	20	19	42	37	21	15	22	24	46	53
Proficient	58	51	25	38	35	26	41	38	37	24	34	33	28	33
Needs Improvement	27	32	49	47	28	36	13	19	26	42	31	31	19	15
Warning/ Failing	4	9	6	5	18	18	5	6	16	19	13	11	7	0
Percent Attaining Proficiency	69	59	44	48	55	45	83	75	58	39	56	57	74	86

On the 2006 MCAS tests in math, male students outperformed female students at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7. Female students outperformed male students at grades 4, 8, and 10.

Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2003 and 2006, Grafton's MCAS performance showed improvement overall, in ELA, and in math, and was relatively flat in STE. However, the gains in achievement overall and in ELA were made between 2003 and 2004, and overall achievement has been relatively flat and ELA achievement has declined since then.

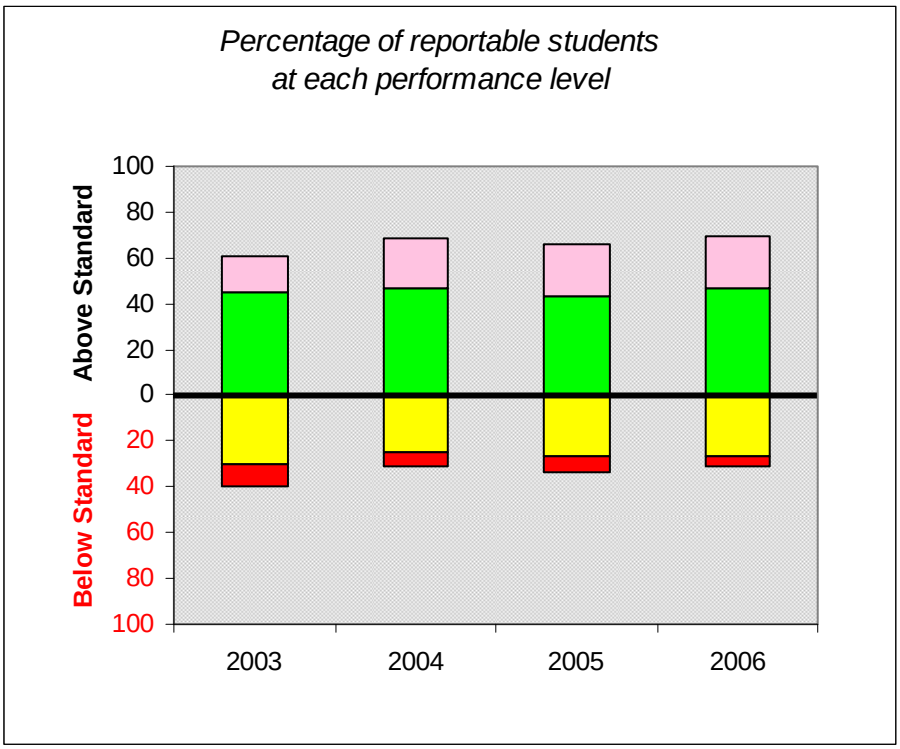
- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by nine percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by five percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Grafton narrowed from 18 PI points in 2003 to 13 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 30 percent.

- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Grafton showed improvement, at an average of approximately two-thirds of a PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 19 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

- Math performance in Grafton also showed improvement, at an average of approximately two and one-half PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 33 percent, a rate higher than that required to meet AYP.

- Between 2004 and 2006, Grafton had relatively flat STE performance, increasing by less than one PI point annually over the two-year period; this resulted in an improvement rate of 10 percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE declined by one percentage point during this period.

Figure 15/Tables 15 A-B: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2003-2006



A.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	15	22	23	22
Proficient	45	47	43	47
Needs Improvement	30	25	27	26
Warning/Failing	10	6	7	5
Percent Attaining Proficiency	60	69	66	69
Average Proficiency Index (API)	81.6	86.4	85.0	87.2

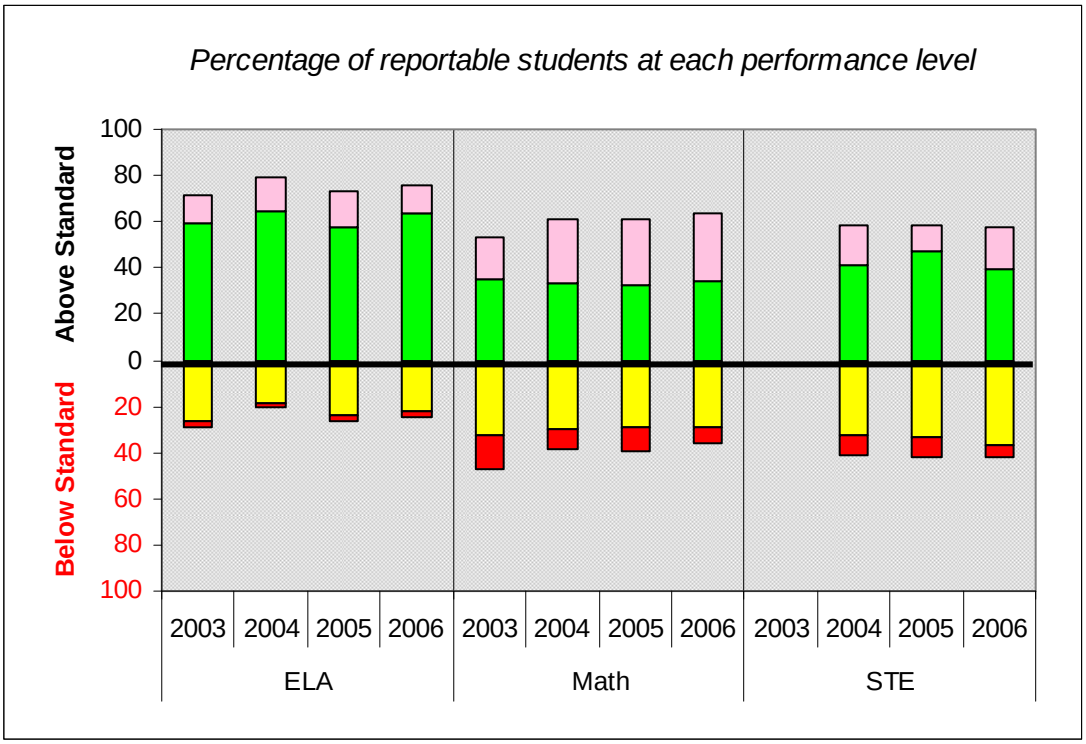
B. n-values

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	192	260	304	303
Proficient	558	556	567	637
Needs Improvement	372	293	355	358
Warning/Failing	122	74	94	64
Total	1,244	1,183	1,320	1,362

Note: Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2006 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 1.

The percentage of Grafton students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests increased from 60 percent in 2003 to 69 percent in 2006. The percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased from 10 percent in 2003 to five percent in 2006. The average proficiency gap in Grafton narrowed from 18 PI points in 2003 to 13 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 30 percent. However, the gains were made primarily between 2003 and 2004.

Figure/Table 16: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Subject, 2003-2006



	ELA				Math				STE			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	12	15	16	12	18	28	28	30		18	12	18
Proficient	59	65	58	63	35	33	33	34		41	47	40
Needs Improvement	27	19	24	22	32	29	29	29		32	33	37
Warning/ Failing	2	2	3	2	15	9	10	7		9	8	5
Percent Attaining Proficiency	71	80	74	75	53	61	61	64		59	59	58
Proficiency Index (PI)	88.7	92.3	90.3	90.8	76.8	81.9	81.2	84.4		81.7	82.4	83.6

Note: Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2006 data for ELA and math may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 2. STE data for 2003 are not available.

The percentage of Grafton students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 71 percent in 2003 to 75 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in ELA narrowed from 11 PI points in 2003 to nine PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 19 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP. However, the gains were made between 2003 and 2004 and ELA achievement has declined since then.

The percentage of Grafton students attaining proficiency in math increased from 53 percent in 2003 to 64 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 23 PI points in 2003 to 16 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 33 percent, a rate higher than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Grafton students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 59 percent in 2004 to 58 percent in 2006. However, the proficiency gap in STE narrowed from 18 PI points in 2004 to 16 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 10 percent.

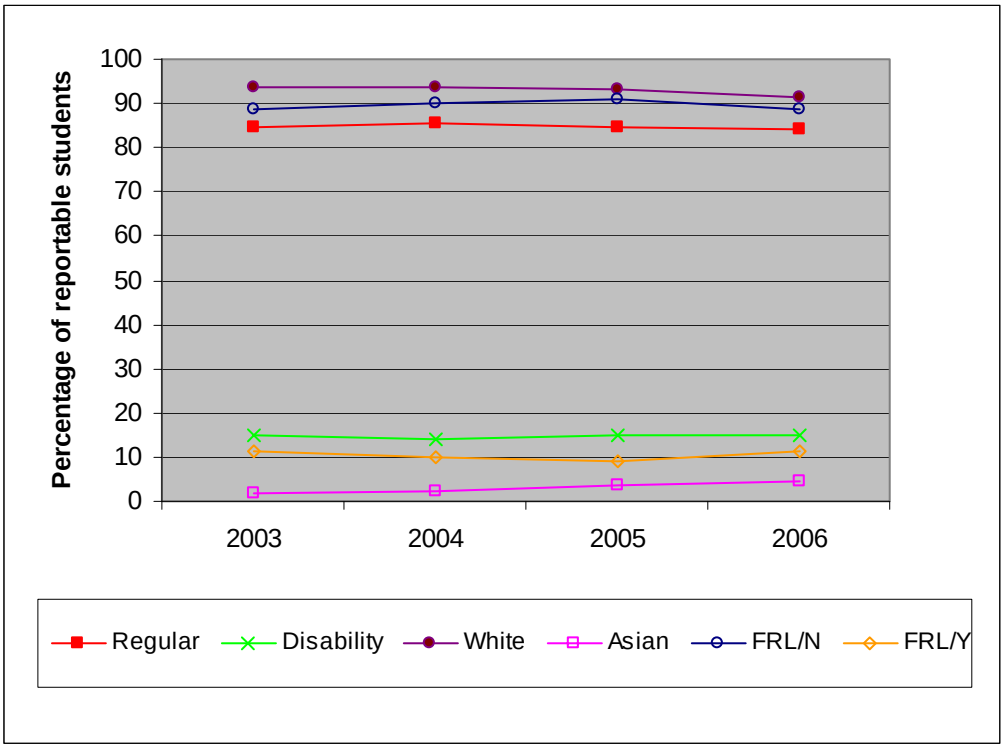
Equity of Improvement

Has the equity of MCAS test performance among the district's student subgroups improved over time?

Findings:

- In Grafton, all student subgroups except Asian students and students with disabilities had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the gains were made between 2003 and 2004. The performance of Asian students declined and the performance of students with disabilities was relatively flat. The most improved subgroups in ELA were regular education students and low-income students.
- In math, all subgroups in Grafton showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.
- The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2003 to 27 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 41 to 34 PI points over this period.

Figure/Table 17: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2003-2006



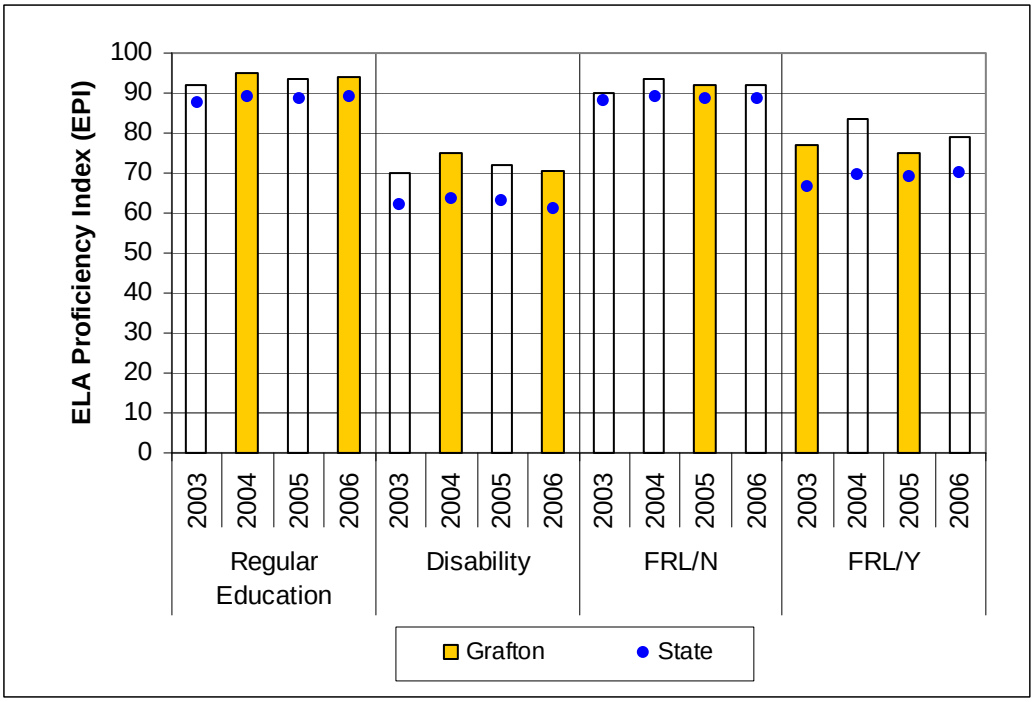
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2003	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**
Grafton	915	1,111	1,182	1,426	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	775	951	999	1,197	84.7	85.6	84.5	83.9
Disability	135	157	179	215	14.8	14.1	15.1	15.1
White	859	1,043	1,101	1,305	93.9	93.9	93.1	91.5
Asian	18	25	41	64	2.0	2.3	3.5	4.5
FRL/N	810	1,000	1,073	1,266	88.5	90.0	90.8	88.8
FRL/Y	105	111	109	160	11.5	10.0	9.2	11.2

Note: The 2006 percentages of students reported here may differ from those reported in Figure 8; the percentages shown here are based on the total number of students in the district, whereas the percentages shown in Figure 8 are based on the number of students in reportable subgroups.

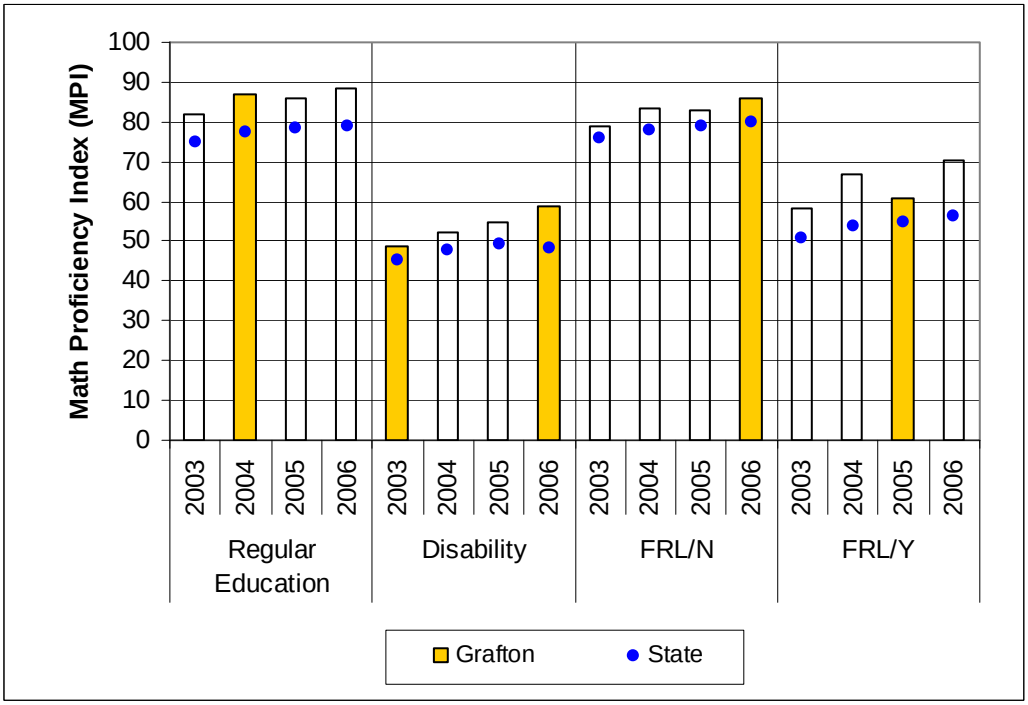
The makeup of the Grafton student population did not change much between 2003 and 2006. The proportion of Asian students increased by two and one-half percentage points, while the proportions of the other subgroups changed only slightly.

Figures 18 A-D/Table 18: MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Subgroup, 2003-2006

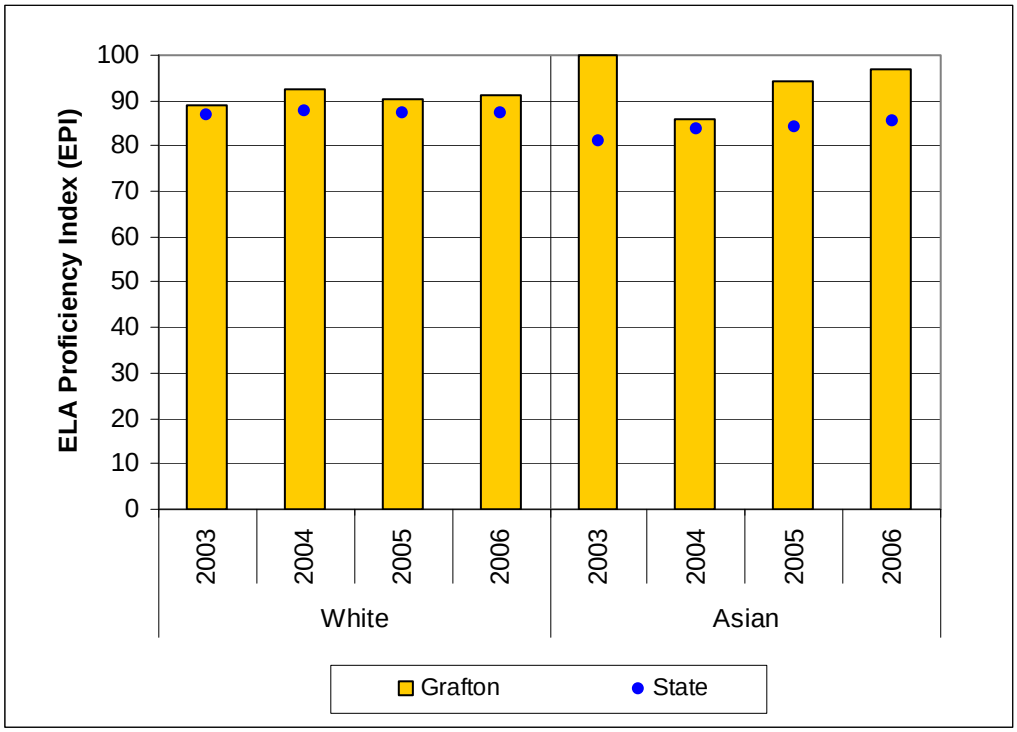
A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



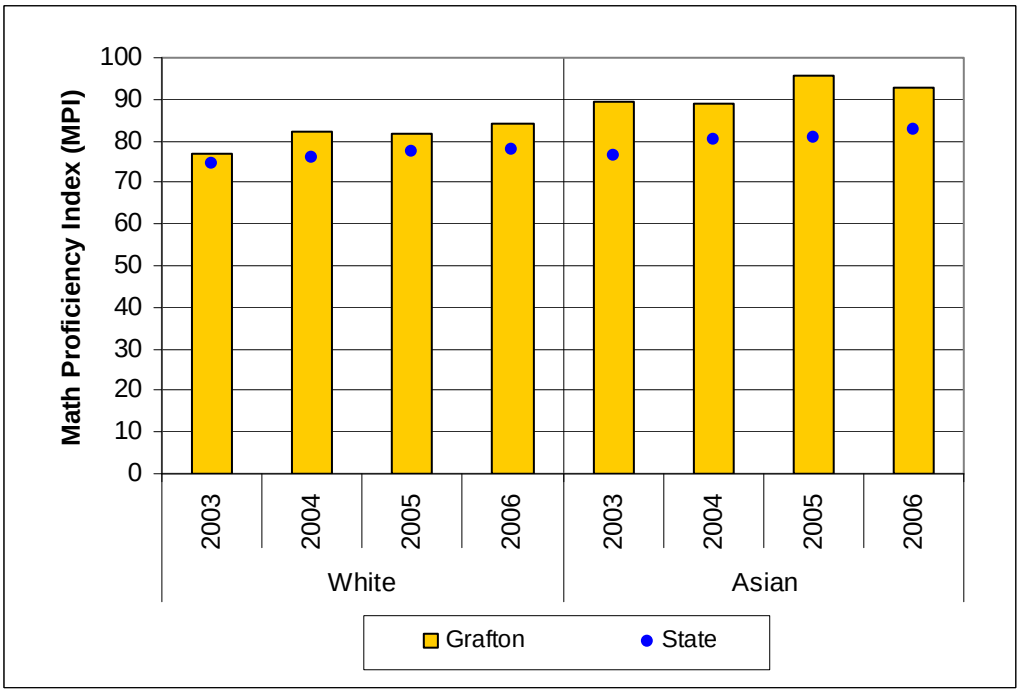
B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



C. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup



D. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup

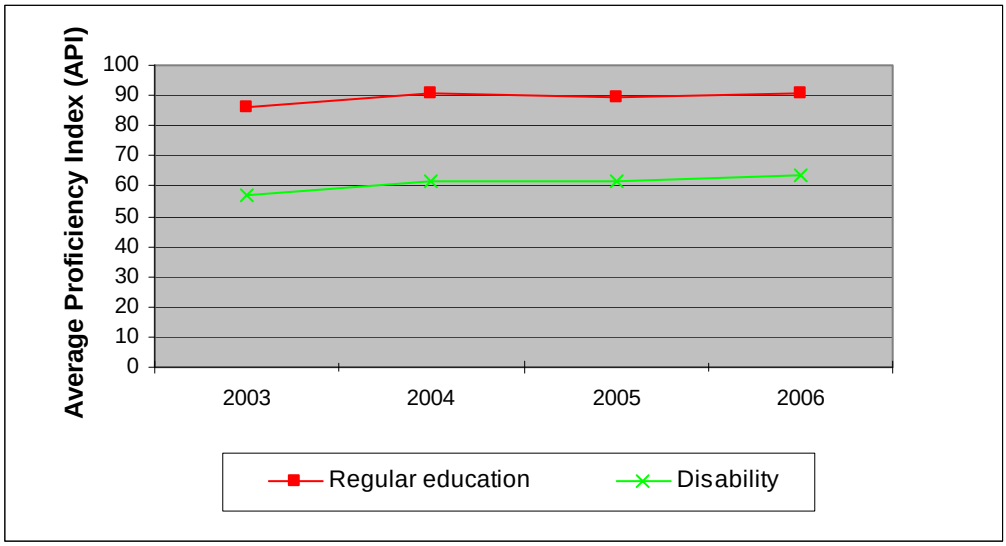


State				Grafton			
Subgroup	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**	**Subgroup**	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**
Regular Education	2003	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2003	92.0	81.7
	2004	89.2	77.4		2004	95.1	86.8
	2005	88.3	78.2		2005	93.6	85.9
	2006	89.0	78.9		2006	94.1	88.4
Disability	2003	62.1	45.3	Disability	2003	70.1	48.8
	2004	63.3	47.9		2004	75.0	52.1
	2005	62.9	49.0		2005	72.0	54.6
	2006	61.2	48.4		2006	70.3	58.6
FRL/N	2003	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2003	90.2	78.9
	2004	88.9	78.1		2004	93.3	83.6
	2005	88.3	79.0		2005	91.9	83.0
	2006	88.6	79.7		2006	92.1	86.1
FRL/Y	2003	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2003	76.8	58.3
	2004	69.7	53.9		2004	83.3	67.0
	2005	68.8	55.0		2005	75.0	60.8
	2006	70.0	56.3		2006	78.9	70.4
White	2003	86.9	74.4	White	2003	89.1	77.1
	2004	87.7	76.2		2004	92.6	82.1
	2005	87.1	77.2		2005	90.5	81.7
	2006	87.4	77.8		2006	91.1	84.3
Asian	2003	81.2	76.6	Asian	2003	100.0	89.3
	2004	83.7	80.2		2004	86.1	88.9
	2005	84.3	81.0		2005	94.1	95.8
	2006	85.5	82.5		2006	96.9	92.6

In Grafton, all student subgroups except Asian students and students with disabilities had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the gains were made between 2003 and 2004. The performance of Asian students declined and the performance of students with disabilities was relatively flat. The most improved subgroups in ELA were regular education students and low-income (FRL/Y) students. In math, all subgroups in Grafton showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2003 to 27 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 41 to 34 PI points over this period.

Figure/Table 19: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Student Status Subgroup, 2003-2006

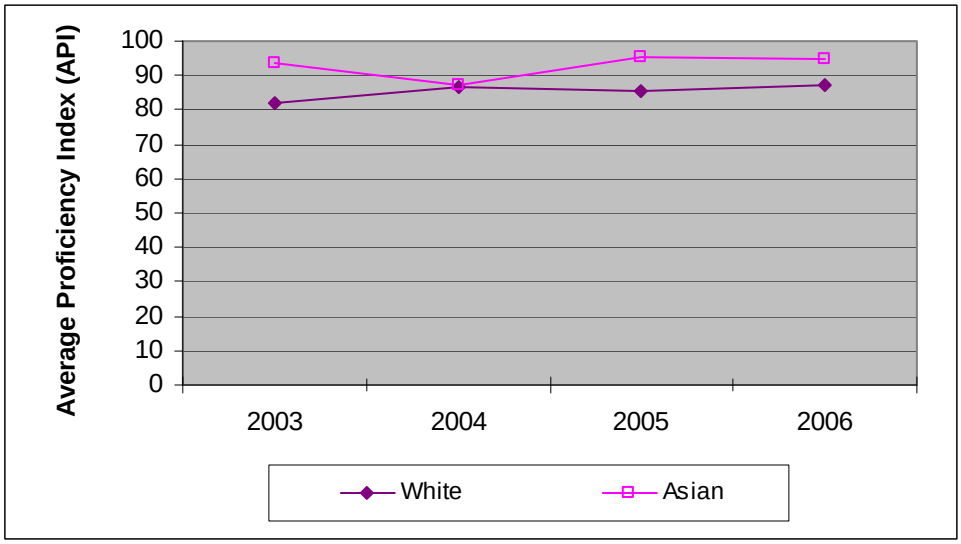


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Regular education	2003	85.9	92.0	81.7	77	59
	2004	90.4	95.1	86.8	85	68
	2005	89.1	93.6	85.9	80	68
	2006	90.9	94.1	88.4	83	70
Disability	2003	57.2	70.1	48.8	36	18
	2004	61.8	75.0	52.1	40	18
	2005	61.9	72.0	54.6	39	21
	2006	63.6	70.3	58.6	29	26

Both students with disabilities and regular education students in Grafton had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for Grafton's regular education students narrowed from 14 to nine PI points; for students with disabilities, it narrowed from 43 to 36 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 35 percent for regular education students and 15 percent for students with disabilities.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities narrowed by two PI points.

Figure/Table 20: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2003-2006

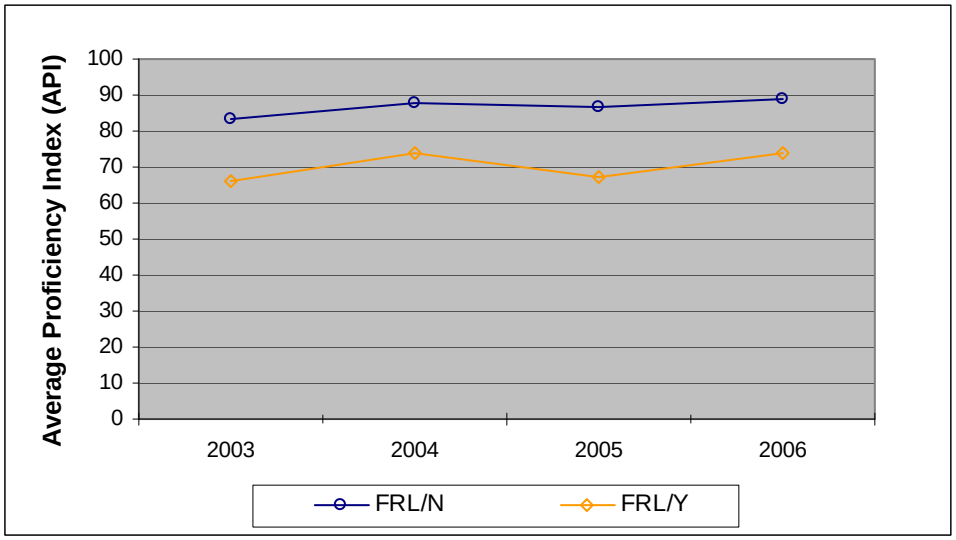


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
White	2003	82.0	89.1	77.1	72	53
	2004	86.6	92.6	82.1	80	61
	2005	85.4	90.5	81.7	74	62
	2006	87.3	91.1	84.3	76	64
Asian	2003	93.5	100.0	89.3	100	79
	2004	87.5	86.1	88.9	67	67
	2005	95.1	94.1	95.8	88	88
	2006	94.6	96.9	92.6	88	78

Both Asian and White students had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for White students narrowed from 18 to 13 PI points, and for Asian students, it narrowed from six to five PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 29 percent for White students and 17 percent for Asian students.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between Asian students and White students narrowed by four PI points.

Figure/Table 21: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2003-2006

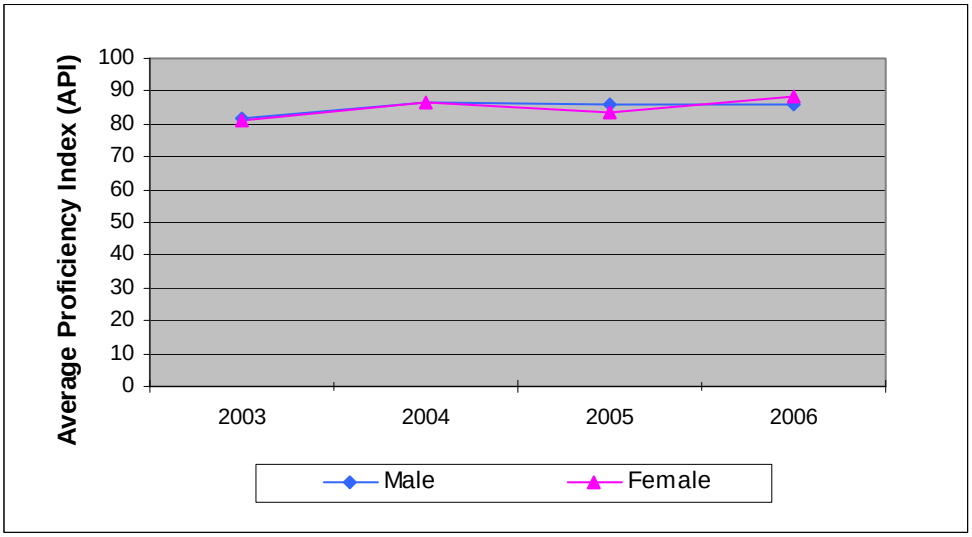


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
FRL/N	2003	83.5	90.2	78.9	74	56
	2004	87.8	93.3	83.6	81	63
	2005	86.7	91.9	83.0	77	63
	2006	88.7	92.1	86.1	78	67
FRL/Y	2003	66.3	76.8	58.3	47	29
	2004	74.1	83.3	67.0	63	41
	2005	67.1	75.0	60.8	37	32
	2006	73.9	78.9	70.4	53	41

Both the low-income (FRL/Y) and non low-income (FRL/N) subgroups in Grafton had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for low-income students narrowed from 34 to 26 PI points, and for non low-income students it narrowed from 16 to 11 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 32 percent for non low-income students and 23 percent for low-income students.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between low-income students and non low-income students narrowed by three PI points.

Figure/Table 22: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Gender Subgroup, 2003- 2006



		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Male	2003	81.9	87.6	78.1	69	56
	2004	86.4	91.3	82.3	76	60
	2005	86.1	89.9	83.6	72	65
	2006	86.1	88.9	83.9	70	63
Female	2003	81.4	90.0	75.4	74	50
	2004	86.5	93.6	81.5	84	62
	2005	83.7	90.7	78.5	75	56
	2006	88.4	92.9	84.9	81	65

Both female and male students in Grafton had improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for male students narrowed from 18 to 14 PI points, and for female students it narrowed from 19 to 12 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 23 percent for male students and 38 percent for female students.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between male and female students widened by one PI point.

Participation

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Finding:

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

n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2006

Subgroup	Performance Level	ELA	Math	STE
Grafton	ALL LEVELS	**1,416**	**1,409**	**389**
	Advanced	222	332	70
	Proficient	876	508	154
	Needs Improvement	286	429	144
	Warning/Failing	32	140	21
Regular Education	Advanced	219	327	68
	Proficient	802	460	142
	Needs Improvement	171	345	109
	Warning/Failing	8	62	6
Disability	Advanced	3	5	2
	Proficient	71	44	11
	Needs Improvement	104	78	33
	Warning/Failing	24	74	15
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	0	0	0
	Proficient	3	4	1
	Needs Improvement	11	6	2
	Warning/Failing	0	4	0
White	Advanced	195	301	58
	Proficient	813	464	144
	Needs Improvement	258	396	132
	Warning/Failing	29	127	21
Hispanic	Advanced	2	1	2
	Proficient	11	7	1
	Needs Improvement	8	8	2
	Warning/Failing	3	8	0
African-American	Advanced	1	3	1
	Proficient	12	6	1
	Needs Improvement	7	8	4
	Warning/Failing	0	3	0
Asian	Advanced	24	26	9
	Proficient	32	28	6
	Needs Improvement	8	10	3
	Warning/Failing	0	0	0
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	211	312	64
	Proficient	802	477	144
	Needs Improvement	227	362	117
	Warning/Failing	20	103	12
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	11	20	6
	Proficient	74	31	10
	Needs Improvement	59	67	27
	Warning/Failing	12	37	9
Male	Advanced	82	177	39
	Proficient	444	265	76
	Needs Improvement	168	203	74
	Warning/Failing	22	70	5
Female	Advanced	140	155	31
	Proficient	432	243	78
	Needs Improvement	118	226	70
	Warning/Failing	10	70	16

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2003-2006

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2003	195	0	0
	2004	197	0	0
	2005	213	0	0
	2006	221	219	0
Grade 4	2003	209	208	0
	2004	205	205	0
	2005	189	189	0
	2006	228	228	0
Grade 5	2003	0	0	0
	2004	0	0	215
	2005	0	0	209
	2006	206	206	206
Grade 6	2003	0	210	0
	2004	0	184	0
	2005	0	214	0
	2006	209	208	0
Grade 7	2003	176	0	0
	2004	202	0	0
	2005	182	0	0
	2006	217	217	0
Grade 8	2003	0	202	0
	2004	0	171	171
	2005	0	196	195
	2006	185	183	183
Grade 10	2003	120	119	0
	2004	108	108	0
	2005	175	175	0
	2006	150	148	0
All Grades	2003	700	739	0
	2004	712	668	386
	2005	759	774	404
	2006	1,416	1,409	389

Notes

Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years. The following grades are included in the trend data for 2003-2006 reported in Figures/Tables 15-22 and in the table of n-values by year:
English language arts (ELA): 3, 4, 7, 10
Math: 4, 6, 8, 10
Science and technology/engineering (STE): 5, 8

Data for science and technology/engineering (STE) are not included in computing overall proficiency and the average proficiency index (API); they will be included beginning in 2007 when STE becomes a graduation requirement.

The highest performance level for grade 3 reading in 2006 is Advanced/Above Proficient; this level did not exist in prior years, when the highest level was Proficient.

Subgroup inclusion is based on the number of students and the number of schools in the district. To be included as reportable, a subgroup must have at least 10 times the number of schools in the district. Subgroup inclusion for all years of the trend data is based on the 2006 data.

N-values represent the number of tests taken unless otherwise specified.

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

Standard Findings and Summaries

Standard I: Leadership, Governance, and Communication														
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**Total**
Excellent												✓		**1**
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	**11**
Needs Improvement								✓						**1**
Unsatisfactory														

I. Leadership, Governance, and Communication

School committee, district leadership, and school leadership established, implemented, and continuously evaluated the cost effectiveness and efficiency of policies and procedures that were standards-based, focused on student achievement data and designed to promote continuous improvement of instructional practice and high achievement for all students. Leadership actions and decisions related to the attainment of district and school goals were routinely communicated to the community and promoted public confidence, financial commitment and community support needed to achieve high student and staff performance.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The district had a strategic plan that served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP) for the entire period under review, as well as a School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each building. Four of the five SIPs were aligned with the strategic plan.
- The membership of the five-member school committee changed during the review period, and members participated in the Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) training program and were active in local and state meetings. The superintendent met with all newly elected members of the committee to review their roles and responsibilities and to share pertinent information.
- The district used a variety of data to aid in the development of programs.
- All administrators and staff members met on a regular basis at both the administrative level and building levels to review available data and made decisions to address areas of strength and weakness.

- Members of the staff were actively involved in the ongoing review of aggregated assessment data (item analysis, trends and patterns, grade-level analysis), and reviewed assessment data disaggregated by subgroup in a limited manner.
- The superintendent worked very closely with the school committee, town officials, and administration during the development of the budget, addressing the goals in the strategic plan and SIPs pertaining to the financial needs of each building and the district in general.
- The school committee evaluated the superintendent on an annual basis for the entire period under review.
- A review of all administrative files showed superintendent-authored summative evaluations for all 11 administrators employed by the district at the time of the review.
- The district had a crisis/safety plan in place that the superintendent of schools, the administrative team, and the police and fire chiefs reviewed on an annual basis. Regular drills occurred annually, and all new staff members received appropriate training and information.
- The district website contained a great deal of information, which the district technology coordinator updated on a regular basis.

Summary

Despite many changes in school committee membership, principals, union leadership, town officials, and the makeup of town committees, the superintendent continued to build a collaborative culture focused on district improvement. The town elected three new members to the school committee during the period under review. While the committee did not have a formal mentoring program in place, veteran members offered their support via telephone, face-to-face meetings, and e-mail. Newly elected members met with the superintendent as soon as possible following their election to the committee, and reviewed the duties associated with the position. The superintendent provided each member with a policy manual, the list of issues currently being addressed by administration, pertinent district information, copies of the past year's superintendent weekly updates, and answered any questions the new member had.

The school committee had subcommittees in the areas of negotiations and policy that met on a regular basis and shared information with the entire committee. A school committee member

also served on each of the district strategic planning action committees that reported to the full committee on an annual basis regarding the attainment of goals in the strategic plan. The school committee also established defined timelines for the ongoing review/revision of the policy manual. The superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator, and the district practiced site-based management. The full administrative team met biweekly with agendas set by the superintendent with input from administration. In addition, the central office team also met as a separate entity on a weekly basis. The district website provided a great deal of information and included updated notices of importance issued by the office of the superintendent, as well as links to all five district schools. The school committee, the superintendent, and all the unions in the district worked collaboratively with the entire community in its quest to provide a challenging education to the entire student body.

The district developed systems for analyzing data, aligning curriculum and instruction, and providing professional development programs, and scheduled time to build capacity in its efforts to move the strategic plan forward. The district began strategic planning in 2002 and produced a three-year plan, which it updated in 2005 to serve the district through 2010. The strategic plan served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP). It contained both the mission and vision statements of the district. These statements were prominently posted in the school buildings and published in many documents such as student handbooks. The school committee formally reviewed the plan two times per year and discussed its components on approximately six other occasions during the year. With the exception of one school, each School Improvement Plan (SIP) mirrored the strategic plan (DIP), and administrators reviewed and addressed the information within each document during budget preparation. The district posted the strategic plan on its website and made it available in a brochure format.

The district analyzed MCAS data on a regular basis, as well as the results of elementary quarterly exams and middle and senior high school midyear and final exams. The superintendent provided the school committee and the community at large with an annual district report outlining the MCAS results and describing the achievements of the district and its schools. While the district regularly reviewed aggregate assessment data, the only use of disaggregated data addressed the middle school special education population. Members of the teaching staff had five full days and four half days for professional development activities in areas such as

curriculum, assessment, review of data, and differentiated instruction. Faculty meetings focused on school programming and afforded staff members the opportunity to meet by grade level and in small groups. In addition to faculty meetings teachers also had regularly scheduled meetings to discuss curriculum and other items.

Indicators

1. The district and school leaders had a clearly understood vision and/or mission, goals, and priorities included in the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The standards-based plan and the analysis of student achievement data drove the development, implementation, and modification of educational programs.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Grafton had a strategic plan that included both mission and vision statements, and served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP) for all of the years under review. The EQA team noted that the district prominently displayed both of these statements in the school buildings, posted them on the website, and published them in many documents. The first strategic plan (DIP) was developed in 2002, eight months after the school committee hired the present superintendent. The strategic plan covering the years 2005-2010 evolved from the original strategic plan covering the years 2002-2005. Stakeholders from all areas of the educational community collaborated on both the first strategic plan and the newly revised plan. With the help of a consultant, they crafted both plans to best meet the needs of the school district. Members of the school committee actively participated, and they adopted the final documents during open school committee meetings. The present plan contained four goals: implementation and communication of a consistent curriculum PK-12; improvement of student performance; analysis and use of data; and meeting space and technology needs.

The previous plan had included goals about technology, improvement of curriculum, recruitment and retention of staff, and maintenance of facilities and grounds. Each goal contained an action plan, timelines, person responsible, financial impact, and indicators of accomplishment. School committee members and all members of the administrative staff stated that the plan had been and continued to be the driving force of the district, and they spent a great deal of time reviewing the

objectives and accomplishments outlined in the document. The school committee formally reviewed the strategic plan (DIP) in January and again in the summer, and interviewees stated that information contained within the DIP was a regular part of many school committee meeting discussions. The school committee minutes reflected regular discussions concerning the contents of the strategic plan. Administrative council members (principals, assistant principals, and all central office administrators) also stated that they regularly reviewed the strategic plan at council meetings. The district posted the strategic plan on its website, and upon approval of the new plan sent brochures to all members of the community.

The EQA team reviewed annual progress reports of the action plan that were prepared and presented to the school committee by the action plan team leader. Each of the reports described accomplishments to date, remaining tasks, major problems or issues to be addressed, recommendations for future actions, and overall assessment of performance.

2. School committee members were informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act, and relied on student achievement data and other educationally relevant data as the foundation of their policy-making and decision-making.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The five-member school committee changed membership during the period under review. The recent chairperson had served for a total of seven years, the secretary had served for two years, and other members of the committee had served for three years or less. All children of school committee members attend the Grafton public schools.

The superintendent and school committee interviewees stated that all members of the committee have been involved in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) training, and they received a refresher course in the fall of 2006 from an MASC consultant to review the duties associated with the position, including information on the issue of micromanagement and members' role as student advocates. The committee also met with the school attorney regarding the position in order to review changes in laws and mandates from the Department of Education (DOE). Representatives from the committee also attended a variety of sponsored workshops on an annual basis.

The district did not have a formal mentoring program for the school committee but the superintendent counseled new members, and on occasion they received information from other board members. The superintendent met with each new member and shared current, pertinent information and a copy of the policy manual, as well as copies of the weekly superintendent update from the past year.

The policy manual of the school committee provided to the EQA team showed that the school committee had totally revised the manual in 2002, establishing specific times for regular and continuous updates and revisions. The manual showed that the school committee had adhered to regular revision dates and that it had revised the sections of the manual earmarked for revision. The committee did have a subcommittee to work on many revisions, but it discontinued the use of subcommittees in the past year and the full committee now reviews and revises the manual. A member of the committee indicated that the committee was once again in the process of reviewing its policies and was looking at different models to employ during 2007-2008. Interviewees stated that they solicited input from teachers, parents, and the community at large when deemed necessary. The committee interviewee stated that the strategic plan (DIP) was of utmost importance to the committee and directed it's decision-making. A member of the committee was an active participant on each of the districtwide committees charged with monitoring the attainment of goals within the strategic plan (DIP).

3. <u>The district was highly effective at data selection, data generation, data gathering and interpretation, data use, and data-driven decision-making.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had procedures and practices in place directly associated with gathering, selection, and use of data, as stated in interviews and confirmed in the review of documents. During the period under review, the district leadership regularly analyzed a great deal of MCAS data and shared the results of these analyses with the school committee and the community. The superintendent and the director of curriculum reviewed the MCAS results upon arrival and promptly sent all pertinent documents to each building principal. Once teachers, department heads, and teacher leaders received the information, they analyzed the results as soon as possible

by grade level and department. Teachers stated that their ability to review the data as soon as they arrived in the district made it possible to adjust teaching strategies and make curriculum adjustments in those areas of noted weakness or strength. Mathematics was of particular concern to the district, and analysis of data led the district to increase the amount of time students spent in mathematics classes. The district increased mathematics instructional time from 45 to 75 minutes per day at the elementary level and added an additional half class for students at each grade level in the middle school.

Interviewees also attested to the fact that the district had created common tests at all levels and had analyzed the results of these tests on a regular basis. The district allocated professional development time to ensure that all members of the teaching staff were involved in the process of creating the assessments, which aligned with the curriculum.

All administrators had some training in the use of TestWiz and some staff members stated they used some of the components of the system. In addition to TestWiz, the district had recently purchased a bubble-card scanning program that enabled teachers to receive immediate results from any in-house testing, such as teacher-made quarterly, midyear, and final tests. The district staff indicated that in the future it was their intent to compare the results of MCAS tests with those of the within-district testing program.

The district provided the EQA team with a copy of the annual summary of district performance packet that it shared with the school committee at the November meeting of each school year. The report gave an in-depth analysis of performance level results from the most recent MCAS tests and included year-to-year comparisons , cohort data for selected student groups, item analysis trends, and adequate yearly progress (AYP) data. In an interview, a school committee member stated that the school committee spent a great deal of time discussing the data and how it could provide help during budget planning to improve student scores. The report was given during the time when the annual budget was being established, thus affording the district the opportunity to make adjustments deemed necessary. There was less evidence that the district reviewed other types of data related to student performance, such as student attendance, teacher attendance, correlation of Advanced Placement (AP) scores and report card grades, and trends in enrollment in middle and high school courses by subgroup and gender.

4. Each school used an approved School Improvement Plan (SIP) that was aligned with the DIP and was based on the analysis of student achievement data. (Only for multi-school districts)

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The EQA team reviewed School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of all five schools covering the entire period under review . The most recent plans included the school years 2005 through 2008. With the exception of the high school, each SIP aligned with the strategic plan (DIP). The year-end School Improvement Plan submitted by the high school contained information related to school conditions such as cafeteria conditions, hallway crowding, directed study format, and class size, none of which were included in the strategic plan. All other plans included reference to the use of data and the enhancement of student achievement. The SIPs submitted by the three elementary schools and the middle school were similarly formatted and followed the prescribed form established by the district, which included the goal, the need for the goal, the objective, an action plan, expected outcomes, evaluation methodology, and budget needs for professional development.

Interviewees stated that all school improvement councils (SICs) met on a regular basis with set agendas and posted the meetings as required by law. Stakeholders were encouraged to attend SIC meetings, which has occurred, with input sought throughout the school year. In focus group sessions, interviewees stated that they discussed the contents of the SIPs on a regular basis at faculty meetings, and each member of the staff adhered to the goals in both the SIPs and the strategic plan (DIP) when creating individual professional development plans (IPDPs). The IPDPs of the administrative staff aligned with the strategic plan, and these documents were kept in the office of the superintendent.

5. The district leadership promoted equity by treating schools' populations and allocations differently and allocating more and better resources to their students and schools with greater needs.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees in administrative and budget sessions stated that the superintendent sought much information from principals and teachers as he developed the budget, during the period under review. The district used a per pupil allocation for those line items under the purview of the building principal, basing the allocation on the projected amount of money coming from the town. The per pupil allocation increased from the elementary level to the senior high level. Interviewees stated that central office addressed budget items related to personnel, special education, textbooks, utilities and maintenance. According to interviewees, budget allocations did take into account the differing needs of each school, and administrators indicated they knew how much money they would have to run their individual buildings. Principals had to justify the need for additional personnel and/or any other particular needs of their buildings. Teachers in focus groups stated that they had sufficient supplies and materials, and the administration rarely denied special requests, even as the end of the school year approached. In addition, parent-teacher organizations in each school raised money to address the needs of both the building and the classroom teachers.

The review of the professional development program showed that teachers were afforded a total of seven days per year of in-service time to work on identified areas of need, and the district retained the services of a consultant to address these areas. Members of the staff also were able to engage in course work at the college/university level, and funding was available to offset the cost of this work as part of the negotiated contract.

6. <u>The superintendent annually recommended and the school committee annually approved educationally sound budgets based primarily on the analysis of student achievement data and advocated for these budgets with the appropriating authority and community.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated that during the period under review, the establishment of the budget was a team effort starting at the classroom level. At the beginning of the school year, central office distributed information packets to building principals and directors to begin the process of soliciting information on staff needs. In October, each principal/director presented a budget representing the needs of the building/program to the superintendent at individual meetings.

Interviewees stated that participants needed to supply supporting student achievement data to show the importance of each request. If the superintendent deemed that the total request would not be acceptable, he would suggest reductions during administrative council meetings. During regularly scheduled meetings in the month of November, the principals/directors presented each budget to the school committee, and during the month of December the superintendent presented his final budget to the school committee.

During the period under review, the district asked for a budget increase in the range of nine to 10 percent. After discussion, the school committee adopted the preliminary budget and presented the document to the town administrator, a selectman, and a member of the finance committee during the following week. At this time, copies would be available to the public, as dictated by school committee policy.

During the month of January, the school committee held a public hearing and adopted the final budget for submission to the finance committee and eventually to the town meeting. The school committee was involved in the budget process in its entirety and advocated for the students in meetings with town officials and with the parent group at each school. Interviewees consistently stated that the town supported education, and the district usually received 60 percent of the town budget. During the period under review, no major cuts were necessary, as sufficient funding was available.

7. <u>The leadership periodically reported to the school committee, staff, and community on the extent of its attainment of the goals in the DIP and the SIPs, particularly regarding student achievement.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The strategic plan (DIP) and each SIP had defined dates when administrators would meet with the school committee, as listed in the policy manual. All principals presented their respective SIPs for the upcoming year in the spring of each year. The interviewed school committee member stated that the committee did not formally vote on each plan as it had in previous years, but it did review each plan in depth and made recommendations for any needed changes that the members perceived to be important. Interviewees stated that during the period under review,

some principals were asked to have their school improvement councils revisit the plans and include defined timelines and measurable outcomes. The posture of the school committee was that each SIP must be in accordance with the strategic plan (DIP) and that individual school needs must be included. The school committee representative stated that the strategic plan was the primary influence on policy, and the goals in the strategic plan were also in the SIPs. It dictated the direction toward which the community wanted to move, especially regarding student achievement and increased MCAS scores across the system. The local access cable television station taped and broadcast all school committee meetings, and approximately six times during the school year the discussion concerned the attainment of goals in the strategic plan and SIPs.

8. District and school leadership used and effectively implemented practices that required all staff to regularly use aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data to improve instructional programs and services for all student populations.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviewees stated that the district analyzed MCAS data on a regular basis for the entire period under review, and the process was under the purview of the superintendent, curriculum directors, the director of special education, and the principals. Staff members made use of aggregate data but did not assess the needs of subpopulations, with the exception of the special education subgroup at the middle school. They cited the limited size of subpopulations within the district as the reason deeper analysis did not occur. Administrators indicated that it was their intention to disaggregate the data of more subgroups in the future, using both MCAS results and the results generated by the newly implemented local testing system. According to interviewees, during 2007-2008 the district will begin the process of comparing the results of these two testing systems.

Interviewees stated that principals met with staff members on a regular basis and developed strategies to improve instruction in each building and at each grade level. Staff members told the EQA examiners that they met regularly at grade-level meetings to share information and strategies that could lead to improved student achievement, and they also met by mixed grade level to review curriculum offerings. The review of results of quarterly exams at the elementary

level has led the district to make adjustments on an as-needed basis. In addition to the professional development time allocated, the EQA team found evidence of analysis of MCAS data and the review of other testing programs on the agendas of faculty meetings throughout the entire year.

As the result of MCAS data analysis, the district reported that it made adjustments in the time spent on mathematics, increasing the time to 75 minutes per day at the elementary level, increasing the number of periods at the middle school from one to one and a half at grade 6, from one to two in grades 7 and 8 for students in the 'Needs Improvement' or 'Warning/Failing' categories, and adding a second block for freshmen/sophomores at the high school level. The proposed budget for FY 2008 includes the addition of three reading specialists to address the noted lack of improvement in grade 3 reading scores.

9. District and school leaders monitored student achievement data throughout the year, considered the goals identified in the DIP and the SIPs, and implemented or modified programs, policies, and services as required.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated the importance of the goals included in both the strategic plan (DIP) and the SIPs continually drove personnel to search out better methods of assessing student achievement, as reflected in the agendas of administrative and faculty meetings. The administrative team consistently monitored student achievement and reviewed classroom data from the district testing program on a regular basis. The EQA team reviewed the copies of MCAS test results for all of the years under review that the administrative team had shared with the school committee and the community at large. The reports elicited much discussion at school committee meetings, and the interviewed member stated that the school committee considered the recommendations of administrators regarding needed changes in curriculum and, if needed, additional resources. In addition, the district had strategic planning action committees to address each of the four goals in the DIP, and they reported annually to the school committee.

The ongoing monitoring of student achievement allowed the district the opportunity to modify and/or implement programs and services that the administrative team deemed necessary. During

the period under review, the district introduced the practice of classroom review of released MCAS test questions, continued to emphasize writing across the curriculum, increased the amount of time spent on mathematics, invested in a new math series that aligned with the district curriculum, and focused on the assessment of all students and programs. The district offered professional development programs to all staff with respect to assessment, open-response questioning techniques, and differentiated instruction. In addition to district initiatives, the district provided each building the time and resources for professional development to address its needs.

10. The performance of the superintendent, administrators, and principals was annually evaluated based on MCAS results, other student achievement data, and the attainment of the goals in the DIP and the SIPs.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

In reviewing the administrative file of the superintendent in office for all the years under review, the EQA team found evaluations for each year. All school committee members participated in the evaluation of the superintendent, and the chairperson of the committee gave the superintendent a composite evaluation during a regularly scheduled meeting. The policy manual of the school committee dictated the timing of such evaluations and the committee adhered to it. The mutually agreed upon evaluation tool included the following areas: relationship with the board, fiscal management, community/public relations, effective leadership of staff, and management of central office/professional skills and abilities.

The final evaluation showed the composite score for each of these areas and included all statements made by individual committee members. The accompanying narrative included committee statements regarding questions such as: "What has the superintendent done well?"; "What could the superintendent do better?"; "What could the board do to help the superintendent?"; and other suggestions for future educational goals. The school committee issued a five-year contract to the superintendent in 2005-2006, and the committee member interviewed stated that the school committee was extremely satisfied with the superintendent. Financial commitments for the first three years were evident in the contract, but interviewees

stated there was no direct correlation between salary adjustments and improved student achievement. The school committee interviewee also stated that the committee looked at the salaries afforded superintendents of surrounding communities and used this information when the salary was determined.

The EQA team found timely and signed evaluations for all of the years under review in its review of 14 administrative files. All of the reviewed evaluations of central office personnel and the principals contained statements that were informative, descriptive, promoted growth, and were timely. All members of the administrative team held certification in their assigned areas and all certifications were up to date. Interviewees all stated that they established agreed upon goals directly related to the strategic plan (DIP) and SIPs on an annual basis and the attainment of said goals determined compensation. The school committee gave the superintendent a set amount of money to grant raises, and he made the sole determination of how to distribute the total sum of money to the members of the administrative team.

11. The superintendent effectively delegated the educational and operational leadership of the schools to the principals and program directors and used student achievement data to assess the success of their leadership.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The administrative council, comprised of principals, assistant principals, and all central office administrators, met biweekly, except in the summer months when they met monthly. The central office administrative team met an additional two times per month. Interviewees stated that all members had the opportunity to discuss district, building, and program needs, and agendas existed for all meetings. Sample agenda items included the strategic plan (DIP), budget, student data, and other administrative issues. Interview sessions provided evidence that close communications existed among all members of the administrative team.

Administrative interviewees stated that the superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator and the district practiced site-based management. Principals and staff members worked cooperatively in the hiring of new staff. Committees made up of staff members and sometimes parents reviewed the credentials of all

applicants, and submitted their recommendations to the principal for final review and consideration. All final candidates met with the superintendent prior to the issuance of a contract. The office of the superintendent received all applications and shared the applications with the principal/administrator when a vacancy occurred.

The three-year contracts issued to principals and other administrators did not have specific language related to student achievement. As part of the hiring or re-hiring process, the attainment of the mutually agreed upon goals were connected to the strategic plan (DIP) and SIPs, and each of these documents made reference to student achievement, but in unspecified terms, with respect to improvement.

12. The school committee and superintendent created a culture of collaboration and developed contracts and agreements that encouraged all stakeholders to work together to support and sustain improved student achievement.

Rating: Excellent

Evidence

The school district had a teachers' union, a custodial union, a nurses' union, and a union made up of secretaries, instructional aides, and cafeteria workers. Secretaries in the office of the superintendent were not part of this latter union, and each individual received a separate contract. The raises afforded to the school unions did not tie in to any raises afforded to town departments.

The materials the district provided to EQA examiners included signed teacher contracts for all years from 2002 to 2008. In separate interviews, the superintendent, the school committee representative, and union leadership all stated that they needed only three bargaining sessions to sign the aforementioned contracts, and this was a major change from bargaining for contracts in years past. Legal counsel from both sides of the table reviewed the contracts prior to the final signing, and while they addressed some of the language, they negotiated the issue of compensation. Interviewees all stated that the issue of student achievement did not appear as a bargaining issue, nor did the issue of merit pay.

Members of the union and the superintendent stated that they had a regular schedule of meetings in place for the first part of the period under review, but they had replaced the schedule with a

system of establishing meetings on a "need to have" basis. Communication was ongoing via telephone calls and face-to-face meetings, and both parties welcomed the current procedures. Members of the union stated that grievances were minimal, and for the period under review could not recall a grievance that the superintendent needed to address. All interviewees stated that they handled problematic issues immediately and attained solutions cooperatively.

School and town officials stated in interviews that the ability of all parties to work together was most positive and the lines of communication were always open. The superintendent and the town administrator worked together to develop the annual budget, and members of the school committee were involved throughout the entire process. The school department released a detailed monthly report for the school committee and town officials, which they shared with all building principals and other administrators. The school committee discussed the contents of the monthly report during its regularly scheduled meetings, thus affording the community knowledge of school expenditures. The school department business officer and the town treasurer also worked together to ensure the proper tracking of finances and adherence to the bottom line.

All interviewees consistently stated that the town was invested in the educational system, as evidenced by the fact that the town continually exceeded minimum net school spending requirements and that it spent 60 percent of town resources on education. School and town officials all stated that student achievement has always been and continues to be very important to the members of the community.

13. <u>The superintendent created and disseminated a comprehensive safety plan in collaboration with the community and plans were reviewed annually with the police and fire departments prior to each school year. School and district safety plans were aligned.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the entire period under review, the district had a comprehensive safety plan in place for all schools and the central administration office, which also housed the head start program. The administrative council established the plan in 2002. The police and fire departments reviewed the plan and the school committee adopted it. The general manual contained pertinent

information regarding lockdown and evacuation training, floor plans, and various dangerous scenarios with precise procedures the district expected school personnel to follow. Principals placed crisis management flip charts in each classroom and office within the district. Members of the EQA team noted the presence of the flip charts during classroom visits. The flip charts provided a synthesized form of the overall crisis response manual to aid a needed response by a member of the staff. New staff, substitute teachers, and student teachers received training and classroom knowledge about where needed information and materials were contained and how to use the flip charts.

The superintendent, the fire chief, the police chief, and the principals of each school reviewed, revised, and/or updated all plans on an annual basis prior to the opening of school. In addition to the general manual and the flip charts, each building had its own safety/crisis plan that contained specific procedures to follow in the case of an emergency, including phone numbers and emergency exit routes.

Annual fire drills, bus evacuation drills, and lockdown drills were conducted, as noted in memos sent to the office of the superintendent. Each school had security plans regarding the locking of doors and some made use of cameras and sign-in sheets for all visitors. Among the potential incidents included in the crisis/emergency plan were medical emergencies, fire/explosion, bomb threats, suspicion of drugs/alcohol, out of control student behavior, school bus accidents, hazardous materials problems, violence/weapons/hostage situations, field trip incidents, and universal precautions for school settings.

Standard II: Curriculum and Instruction											
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**Total**
Excellent					✓						**1**
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		**6**
Needs Improvement							✓	✓		✓	**3**
Unsatisfactory											

II. Curriculum and Instruction

The curricula and instructional practices in the district were developed and implemented to attain high levels of achievement for all students. They were aligned with components of the state curriculum frameworks and revised to promote higher levels of student achievement.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- During the period under review, the district documented its curricula in all tested content areas and at all grade levels and aligned them with the state frameworks.
- By the end of the review period, the district had aligned its curricula horizontally and vertically, and curriculum documents included objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, measurable outcomes, and sometimes assessments.
- The district established and defined the roles and responsibilities of the district curriculum planning council (CPC) to monitor and oversee curriculum development, curriculum documentation, and the selection of instructional materials for all grade levels. The structure and functioning of this council worked well to keep efforts focused on the goals in the DIP and SIPs.
- The district encouraged a collaborative culture and distributed leadership. This led to increased capacity at each school for leaders and teachers to develop, implement, and evaluate curriculum and to assess student achievement and analyze achievement data.
- The district used multiple tools and strategies to improve instruction during the period under review, including principal walk-throughs, curriculum meetings for grades, teams, and departments, professional development, summer workshops, and early release time for in-

service. The district attained stronger results at the elementary level than at the secondary level.

- The district created multiple feedback loops for analysis of student achievement data to improve curricula and instructional practice.
- The district worked to incorporate differentiated instruction during the review period. Although teachers could describe how to differentiate instruction, random classroom observations revealed little differentiation in use and evidenced more teacher-centered, rather than student-centered, instruction.
- The district used formative and summative assessment data from multiple assessments to improve instruction and to allocate instructional time in the tested core content areas. Leaders informally used assessment data to monitor teachers' instruction.
- Instructional practice that reflected highly skilled delivery, frequent student engagement, multiple learning styles, and consistently high expectations varied across the district's five schools.
- Availability of educational technology and computers was inequitable for both teachers and students throughout the district. Although a district priority, the district had not consistently integrated technology use into instructional practice, according to classroom observations.

Summary

Guided by the strategic plan (DIP) and three School Improvement Plans, the district made significant progress in reviewing, revising, documenting, and communicating its curriculum, during the period under review. An exemplary curriculum planning council, established in 2002, oversaw curriculum development, documentation, adoption, and choice of instructional materials. In addition, the district focused on curriculum coherence through horizontal and vertical alignment and alignment with the state frameworks of curricula in all tested content areas and at all grade levels. By the end of the review period, the district had collaboratively documented curricula that contained all key components: objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, measurable outcomes, and sometimes assessments.

Through a distributed leadership model, principals, assistant principals, teachers, and teacher-leaders at each school collaborated to introduce differentiated instruction and heightened

accountability as two strategies to ensure effective instruction. A third strategy, to integrate technology more fully into classroom instruction, was more difficult to achieve with the inequitable availability of computers and up-to-date educational technology at all schools.

The director of curriculum and staff development and the elementary school principals worked with consultants, teachers, and grade-level leaders to incorporate differentiated instruction into elementary teachers' practice, early in the review period. Through an ongoing process, the district more recently introduced differentiated instruction at the middle school and at the high school. Classroom observations indicated that the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies was not yet widespread at any school but was more consistent at the elementary level.

During the period under review, the district emphasized accountability by instituting teacher-designed quarterly exams and benchmarks at the elementary level and common midyear and final exams at the middle school that echoed the high school's summative testing format. These assessments focused teachers and the school community on students' progress in meeting measurable goals and objectives. They also helped teachers better understand and act upon achievement trends and strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. District and school-based leaders worked with teachers to use data analysis as a tool to improve both curriculum and instruction. Although teachers improved their data analysis skills, teachers from each school stated that they did not all have sufficient training to analyze and use data well, and relied on school leaders for data analysis.

The director of curriculum development, principals, assistant principals and many teacher-leaders exhibited fluency in their knowledge and use of assessment data, including MCAS results, to improve student achievement. The district largely focused its data analysis on item analysis, grade-level, or subject-level achievement data and did not regularly examine subgroup achievement data such as for special education and low-income students. These were the district's lowest achieving subgroups. When the middle school failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets, it analyzed achievement data for its low-achieving subgroup, made changes, and met its target in 2006. Although MCAS results were stronger in Grafton than in the state overall, Grafton's MCAS proficiency index, in general, remained relatively flat during the period under review. According to data from the Merrimack Education Collaborative (MEC),

the percentage of Grafton students who attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests was 60 percent in 2003, 69 percent in 2004, 66 percent in 2005, and 69 percent in 2006.

Indicators

1. The district implemented curricula for all grade levels in tested core content areas that clearly addressed all the components of the state curriculum frameworks. The curricula document contained, at a minimum, components that addressed: objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Evidence from both a review of curricula and interviews with administrators and teachers indicated that throughout the period under review, the district engaged in ongoing work to document and monitor its curricula in all tested content areas for grades preK-12. Prior to the arrival of the current superintendent in 2001, the curricula lacked documentation and consistency in both format and implementation across grade levels, schools, and even within specific courses. Some curricula did not exist in writing. To address this, in its strategic plan for 2002-2005 (the DIP), the district prioritized writing the curriculum and aligning it with the state curriculum frameworks. The 2005-2010 strategic plan highlighted consistency in implementation and communication of curricula throughout the district. Three of five School Improvement Plans (SIPs) articulated curricular goals and objectives aligned with the district's curricular goals and objectives.

Interviewees from all schools and from the central office cited numerous examples of work to revise and update curricula during the period under review. Although elementary schools shared the same ELA program (McGraw Hill) and math program (Addison Wesley), teachers were quick to state that the texts did not comprise the full curriculum. Rather, the curriculum consisted of the written curriculum documents that included proficiencies, texts, instructional materials, frameworks, and other elements. Most new curriculum documents were aligned with the state frameworks and often included framework strands. A district administrator from central office noted that the district considered the state frameworks to be the minimum standard, and the challenge was to define what Grafton students should know and be able to do, above and

beyond what the state mandated. Newly written documents largely included minimum components such as objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, measurable outcomes, and sometimes assessments. All elementary level curricula delineated what students should know or be able to do in the form of measurable skills, proficiencies, and often benchmarks.

An examination of curricula revealed some inconsistencies in the form and substance, and breadth and depth, of several curricular components. However, these inconsistencies did not affect the overall goal of guiding instruction. Some cited specific resources and materials for teachers to use while others simply noted "text," "teacher-made materials," or "internet." Some included particular instructional strategies; others cited strategies such as "lab" and "guided practice," while others made no instructional recommendations at all, e.g., elementary science, grades 8 and 9 ELA. Timelines varied and, although often broad, for the most part they were appropriate to the topic covered. For example, some recommended teaching a topic within a specific number of weeks, e.g., "Unit 1 and Unit 2 during week 1, 2, 3." Others recommended a month or two for coverage, e.g., "Number Sense and Operations in Honors Algebra I in May, June." Still others, such as in ELA, displayed the curriculum for a full academic term with no time delineated to teach individual topics or skill sets. Some curricula incorporated assessments into the document, recommending the use of an "objective test," "objective test with open response," "notebooks," or "math journal," then repeated these same math assessment formats for every topic taught with perhaps one change, while other curricula did not include assessment recommendations at all, e.g., preK-12 ELA, elementary science.

Although the district transformed the Grafton curriculum during the review years, district leaders and teachers acknowledged there was still more to accomplish in order to create a consistent, systematic, and comprehensive set of curriculum documents. Currently, the district's curriculum planning council is writing guidelines to standardize curriculum templates and is refining the process for curriculum review. The district intended to finalize those guidelines by summer 2007.

2. <u>The district's curricula in all tested areas were aligned horizontally and vertically.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district prioritized horizontal and vertical curricular alignment at all levels and in all tested content areas during the period under review. The first goal in the 2005-2010 strategic plan (DIP), was "to implement and communicate a consistent curriculum throughout the district, Pre-K-12." Two objectives in the strategic plan targeted "focused curriculum discussions across the district" and "to monitor the continued development, alignment, and implementation of curriculum." To accomplish these objectives, the district scheduled meetings for professional staff at all schools to examine curricular alignment and expectations guided by an agenda developed by principals and the director of curriculum and staff development. At a minimum, professional staff focused on curricular issues at one summer workshop, one half-day in-service session at midyear, meetings scheduled to discuss transitions from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, grade 2 to grade 3, and grade 5 to grade 6, and grade-level meetings. In addition, the district required staff from the middle school and high school to focus on curricular issues at no less than two additional staff meetings during the year.

Evidence from documents and interviews indicated that professional staff met these expectations during the period under review. The 2005-2006 SIPs at both K-2 elementary schools cited "continuity in the curriculum for ELA and math" as key goals. To ensure alignment at all three elementary schools, grade-level teachers met monthly after school to discuss horizontal and vertical alignment under the leadership of grade-level leaders. Interviewees estimated that they discussed curriculum 85 percent of the time and spent 15 percent of the time on other grade-level concerns. School principals participated in alignment conversations at grade-level meetings and stated that they included alignment topics at school faculty meetings and summer workshops, often grouping teachers in cross-grade-level groups as well as grade-level groups. Since 2005, principals also monitored consistency and alignment via classroom observations, walk-throughs, review of weekly newsletters each teacher wrote and sent home, and by charting, examining, and writing reports on quarterly assessment results.

Although elementary school teachers did not have common planning time during the school day, they admitted that alignment was so important to them that they often met with colleagues before school or during lunchtime to discuss pacing, alignment, assessments, and instructional strategies. Elementary teachers interviewed stated they worked on vertical alignment at

transition meetings, during summer work, and during professional development sessions focused on curriculum mapping during the last three years. Based on observations of elementary school classrooms, tight alignment was visible. On the day the EQA examiners visited classes in both K-2 schools, examiners noted similar grade 2 reading strategies, books, topics, and guided discussions (about snakes at one school and bats at the other). Similar Responsive Classroom discussions framed the new month of March as "in like a lion and out like a lamb." At the Grafton Elementary School, students in several grade 3 math classes worked with and discussed square numbers, square roots, and squares on the same day, yet teachers were able to use different instructional strategies to teach those lessons.

At the middle school, not only did subject area teachers have common planning periods during the school day, but some also shared the same students due to the team structure. During common planning time, curriculum leaders for each subject regularly discussed pacing and horizontal and vertical alignment with teachers. During formal team meetings, held every three days, teachers from multiple disciplines had additional opportunities to discuss curriculum as well as instructional strategies, assessment, data analysis, and student achievement. Curriculum leaders, however, had no supervisory role or responsibilities and were members of the teachers' bargaining unit.

Middle school curriculum leaders shared updates and issues related to curriculum alignment with each other and with the building leadership at monthly meetings with the principal. Building administrators cited meetings with curriculum leaders and classroom walk-throughs as informal methods to check curriculum alignment and classroom observations as a formal method to monitor content delivery, instructional methods, and assessments. When reporting on progress for its 2005-2006 SIP, the middle school included curriculum in goal #5, "All curriculum guides were finished, and approved by CPC."

Although the assistant principal at the high school closely monitored curriculum development and curriculum reviews, department heads and classroom teachers took main responsibility for horizontal alignment for multi-section courses and for vertical alignment at monthly department meetings. Until recently, horizontal alignment was not an issue since many high school courses

were single sections. As enrollment increased during the past few years and the school created new sections to accommodate more students, alignment surfaced as a concern.

Several examples of high school alignment emerged during interviews with teachers and administrators. For example, biology teachers shared a common prep period and all science teachers shared the same lunch period. This facilitated both vertical and horizontal alignment conversations for courses with multiple sections and levels. One interviewee stated that on a given day, the high school biology classes and the child study class covered genetics concurrently. Teachers had purposefully aligned their courses this way. High school math teachers who taught the same course collaborated on pacing, assessments, and instruction both formally and informally.

3. Each school in the district had a curriculum leader who oversaw the use, alignment, consistency, and effectiveness of delivery of the district's curricula that focused on improvement for all of its students.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

EQA examiners found evidence, based on interviews and document review, of distributed curriculum leadership across the district, with district leaders, school leaders, teacher-leaders, and teachers sharing responsibilities. While the director of curriculum and staff development held overall responsibility for curriculum oversight, she simultaneously delegated considerable authority and responsibility to the school levels and to the curriculum planning council (CPC). Each school managed curriculum leadership differently, and the district leadership held each school accountable for alignment, consistency, and delivery, which was accomplished through multiple feedback loops. Overall, the elementary levels demonstrated tight curricular leadership through the accountability and monitoring roles held by principals, grade-level leaders, and teachers. The middle and high schools operated under a looser model led by middle school curriculum leaders and high school department heads, respectively, with some participation and oversight by building administrators.

At all levels, student achievement was the key decision-making component for curriculum alignment, consistency, and delivery. Quarterly assessments at the elementary schools since

2005, MCAS results, and the increasing use of midterms and finals at the secondary schools supplied primary sources of achievement data that influenced curricular activity and decisions. However, professional staff mainly used aggregate achievement data when analyzing quarterly assessments and MCAS results, focusing on scores of a class or a grade-level. While the district disaggregated achievement data for item analysis and for subgroups (e.g., special education, low income, minority populations), the district's educators predominantly communicated and discussed grade-level achievement data with each other and with the school committee.

It is important to note that achievement of special education and low-income students was significantly lower than that of regular education students. According to interviewees, recent analyses of results of midterms and final exams at the secondary levels focused on specific test items and course-specific issues, when done at all, and not on achievement of specific subgroups. Mainly, the special educators and behaviorists analyzed achievement data for special education students and used that information in their work. However, the middle school did disaggregate achievement data for special education students when it failed to meet its AYP targets early in the review period. Using those data, middle school educators made meaningful adjustments to programs and staffing, with the result of meeting its targets in 2006. However, even given this principal focus on aggregate student achievement, curriculum leadership was strong and vigilant during the review years.

In interviews and focus groups at the elementary schools, teachers and administrators stated that both principals and teachers provided curriculum leadership in a collaborative process. Teachers interviewed stated that they participated in curriculum planning and development and participated in teams in curriculum mapping and writing. Elementary principals managed curriculum by entrusting meaningful responsibility to grade-level teams led by grade-level leaders. Principals attended and participated in monthly grade-level meetings at which curriculum regularly informed the conversation. Grade-level leaders were members of the teachers' bargaining unit and had no supervisory or evaluative role. In addition, principals monitored the curriculum review process, participated in curriculum decision-making, and examined key curriculum documents emanating from their schools. Principals reported in writing to the district leadership and the school committee on progress in meeting curricular goals and objectives embedded in School Improvement Plans. They wrote and shared analyses

of quarterly assessments grounded in curriculum implementation – where they found strengths and where it lacked effectiveness. Principals also monitored and supported teachers' delivery of the curriculum formally and informally through supervision, evaluation, and professional development. They crafted agendas and activities such as curriculum mapping for faculty meetings, in-service time, and summer workshops.

When asked about instructional leadership at the middle school, the principal responded that curriculum leaders in each of the six departments were responsible for curriculum monitoring and implementation. Each of the curriculum leaders met regularly with teachers to monitor and manage curriculum either at monthly departmental meetings or during common planning time. Curriculum leaders were members of the teachers' bargaining unit and had no supervisory or evaluative role. At a dozen meetings a year, the principal and curriculum leaders discussed issues related to curriculum development, MCAS, assessment, and budget. The principal stated his role was to provide instructional leadership by listening to staff and advocating for their day-to-day needs, believing that teachers "know what is best for kids." Middle school administrators tried to attend departmental meetings and "support the departments to help them move forward."

At Grafton High School, the principal and assistant principal shared instructional leadership responsibilities to monitor curriculum, with the principal focused on grades 11 and 12 and the assistant principal focused on grades 9 and 10. Interviewees noted that the assistant principal, who was in her second year of service, had demonstrated a keen interest in curricular issues. She was proactive in monitoring and supporting new curricular development and implementation. She sought clearly stated expectations and shared standardized templates for rewriting curricula that were more complete and complex than those used in the past. However, department heads, for the most part, convened the monthly departmental meetings at which direct discussions of curriculum took place. Interviewees indicated that these conversations occurred teacher-to-teacher more often than with a full department, and building administrators rarely attended them. According to interviewees, in a department such as science in which faculty held specialized knowledge, the department head chose not to intervene over curricular decisions and management outside his area of expertise. In such cases, department heads delegated leadership responsibilities to the faculty teaching the courses.

4. Each school provided active leadership and support for effective instructional strategies, techniques, and methods grounded in research and focused on improved achievement for all students.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district increasingly prioritized support for effective instructional strategies and techniques, grounded in research, to improve teaching and learning. When asked about leadership and support for more effective instruction, interviewees from across the district pointed first to differentiated instruction as a district priority. Interest in implementing differentiated instruction began four years ago at the elementary schools, and district leaders worked to extend its use throughout the system since then. Next, interviewees cited the district's emphasis on accountability demonstrated by the analysis and use of results from elementary school quarterly assessments, MCAS tests, and common midterm and final exams at the secondary level. Two years ago, the district began quarterly assessments at the K-2 level and more recently at grades 3-5. Midterm and final exams always existed at the high school, and the middle school introduced them during the last two years.

The EQA examiners found that teachers' use of differentiated instruction and achievement data had developed better at the elementary schools, supported by ongoing professional development with consultants, study groups, focused in-service time, and summer workshops. Evidence from meeting agendas, professional development plans, instructional materials, and interviews confirmed this. Implementing differentiated instruction and the methodical use of assessment data had not developed as well at the middle and high schools during the period under review, although the district offered additional support in 2006-2007. This was an ongoing process. Even with significant professional development in differentiated instruction for elementary teachers, random observations of 53 classrooms throughout the district indicated that differentiated instruction was evident in 26 percent of observed elementary classrooms. Furthermore, elementary teachers planned multiple tasks that engaged all levels of learners in 30 percent of observed classrooms. EQA examiners observed differentiated instruction in eight percent of middle school classrooms visited and in 10 percent of high school classrooms visited. In addition, classroom observations revealed that teachers planned multiple tasks that engaged all

levels of learners in 23 percent of middle school classrooms visited and in no high school classrooms visited.

Interviewees stated that learning styles informed teachers' choices for differentiation of instruction. They did not mention using achievement results as data points that could inform the selection of differentiated strategies. Without analyzing subgroup achievement data from key assessments, educators across the district lacked a valuable source of information to improve student learning for the district's lowest achieving students. For example, as noted above, analysis of quarterly assessment data explicitly focused on results of a class or a grade level. District leaders mainly communicated MCAS results by grade level to the school committee. Although the data analysis committee's document *Summary of District Performance – MCAS 2006* tracked cohort performance (e.g., class of 2008, class of 2010, etc.) and included item analyses of "standards/learning strands/skills," it cited subgroups such as special education, limited English proficient, and low income only in the form of state reports that indicated how well the district met AYP targets. While MCAS results for most subgroups improved during the period under review, they lagged behind the achievement of regular education students.

The middle and high schools offered common midterm and final exams, and although interviewees stated that analysis and discussions took place, there was little documented evidence of analysis of results from these exams to inform changes in either instructional practice or curriculum during the period under review. It is important to note, however, that during 2006-2007, the middle school faculty has expanded its analysis and use of achievement data and has experimented with the use of a Scantron scanner to disaggregate test item results from common midterms and final exams to analyze students' and curricula's strengths and weaknesses.

5. <u>The district had an established, documented process for the regular and timely review and revision of curricula that was based on valid research, the analysis of the MCAS test results, and other assessments, and focused on improved achievement for all subgroups.</u>

Rating: Excellent

Evidence

In January 2003, just prior to the review period, the superintendent established a 14-member curriculum planning council (CPC) to guide and oversee all significant curriculum work in the district through an ongoing five-year cycle of curriculum planning, design, implementation, and evaluation. The school committee structured the CPC to include permanent membership for the director of curriculum and staff development, two school committee members, and one elementary and one secondary administrator. The committee also included staggered two-year terms on the CPC for a teacher representative from each school building, a high school student, and a maximum of three parents/community members.

The school committee charged the CPC with significant oversight and decision-making for curriculum development and approval of new courses, course revisions, curriculum documents, textbook adoptions, and the adoption of instructional materials. During the period under review, the CPC held 22 meetings and conducted much curriculum activity. Teachers, sometimes with support from consultants, wrote curricula at all levels to fill in gaps, which, by necessity, delayed large-scale program reviews and revisions in several content areas until late in the review period.

A review of CPC agendas from 2003 through 2006 revealed that the CPC met to approve new or revised courses in video production, government, business math, entrepreneurship, careers, Microsoft Office, high school math, and high school special education. They also met to approve a new format to write and document middle school curricula, to develop plans for curriculum alignment for the district's strategic plan (DIP), to realign high school social studies courses to conform to state framework changes, to change AP U.S. History to a two-year sequence, and to realign high school science courses. The council met to approve newly written curricula for courses in music history, quilting, entrepreneurship, careers, Microsoft Office, AP Calculus, high school U.S. history and social studies, K-2 math scope/sequence/benchmarks, grades 3-5 math scope/sequence/benchmarks, and middle school curricula for art, music, family consumer science, health, guidance, and physical education. The council met to adopt new textbooks for college math, high school social studies, grade 3 social studies, Spanish, middle school science, AP Physics, AP Chemistry, Chemistry level II, and Algebra I and II. In addition, the council developed a process to approve curriculum materials other than textbooks and reviewed summer reading programs and lists.

Interviews with teachers and administrators confirmed that the curriculum review process had proved to be a powerful tool for capacity building. Teachers and leaders collaborated and used their knowledge of curriculum to improve the academic program under the guidance and support of a representative group of educators and community members. In addition, although teachers admitted they were still learning to use data to address curriculum design issues, they did employ the results from MCAS tests, quarterly assessments, midterm and final exams, and classroom assessments to inform decisions. For example, interviewees stated that the elementary schools adopted a new math program by Addison Wesley because they believed it addressed particular math achievement issues and also aligned better with state frameworks. They developed benchmarks for K-5 math that addressed strengths and weaknesses drawn from an analysis of MCAS data, e.g., using more writing across the curriculum, standardizing math vocabulary, and teaching students how to respond better to open-response questions. Even though teachers' data analysis skills and use of disaggregated data could have been stronger, the five-year cycle of review, revise, train, implement, and evaluate had gained traction.

6. <u>The district analyzed student achievement data and allocated instructional time in the tested core content areas that focused on improved rates of proficiency for all students.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district analyzed student achievement data and shared data analysis in an orderly way from the district level to principals and teachers. An MCAS data analysis committee comprised of representatives from across the district was responsible for reporting achievement data to the school committee and posted its report on the district's website each year. Its report, *Summary of District Performance – MCAS 2006*, compared district and state performance by grade levels for the MCAS results from 1999 to 2006. It showed progress in achievement on the MCAS tests by grade level/subject (e.g., grade 4 ELA) from 2001 to 2006; compared achievement of each cohort (e.g., class of 2008) from 2002 to 2006; and displayed adequate yearly progress (AYP) and composite proficiency indices (CPI) data from 2003 to 2006. Other sections of the report displayed item analyses for the 2006 MCAS results in ELA and math, and described district initiatives planned for 2006-2007 to use MCAS data to examine curriculum, instructional strategies, and student performance.

The MCAS report, however, did not include subgroup analysis other than the federal AYP report. The EQA examiners observed in an analysis of Grafton's MCAS data by the Merrimack Education Collaborative (MEC) that the proficiency rate of students in regular education was more than two times greater than that of students with disabilities; 76 percent of regular education students attained overall proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests compared to 31 percent of students with disabilities. Furthermore, 72 percent of non-low-income students attained overall proficiency compared to 44 percent of low-income students. In addition, MEC's analysis of MCAS results by subject indicated a flat trend in all tested subject areas during the period under review. After a strong gain of nine percentage points from 2003 to 2004, the percentage of students attaining ELA proficiency went from 80 percent in 2004, to 74 percent in 2005, to 75 percent in 2006. Math proficiency increased by eight percentage points from 2003 to 2004, remained at 61 percent in both 2004 and 2005, and then increased to 64 percent in 2006. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in science and technology/engineering was 59 percent in both 2004 and 2005 and then dropped slightly to 58 percent in 2006. A subgroup analysis indicated that overall proficiency for students with disabilities increased from 49 percent in 2003 to 59 percent in 2006, and overall proficiency for low-income students increased from 58 percent in 2003 to 70 percent in 2006. Overall proficiency for Asian students declined from 2003 to 2006 in ELA (from 100 to 97 percent) and increased in math (from 89 to 93 percent).

Evidence from interviews and a review of documents revealed that during the period under review, district leaders and principals systematically analyzed and used student achievement data from the MCAS tests, quarterly assessments, and midyear and final exams at grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, curriculum meetings, and team meetings. In interviews, teachers from the elementary level sounded more fluent and adept at understanding and using achievement data to improve instructional practice and to modify curriculum during the entire period under review, although some stated there was still more to learn. Secondary teachers were improving their skills in data analysis during the review years. It is important to note, however, that during 2006-2007 the middle school faculty expanded its analysis and use of achievement data and experimented with using a Scantron to disaggregate test item results to analyze students' strengths and weaknesses on common midterms and final exams. This was also piloted in grades K-5.

Based on the district's analysis of achievement data, each school instituted a number of changes in the allocation of instructional time in tested core content areas to focus on improved rates of proficiency. Interviewees stated that elementary math teachers shifted coverage of probability and estimation to earlier in the school year and increased math instruction from 45 to 75 minutes per day. Math teachers also included more open-response questions and more math writing. According to interviewees, in addition to flexible reading groups, elementary teachers created flexible groups for help in spelling. An after-school voluntary enrichment program at the elementary level also offered an hour of additional reading activities several times a week.

At the middle school, interviewees stated that teachers restructured the grade 6 program by lengthening regular math and ELA instruction for half the year each during one instructional block and instituted co-taught math special education classes. ACES, an after-school program for low-performing students in grades 4 through 8, strengthened basic skills. Given extra help, performance on the MCAS tests of middle school special education students improved during the period under review, and the middle school was able to meet its AYP target. At the high school, teachers reviewed grade 8 MCAS results and in 2005-2006 instituted an MCAS prep class for at-risk students in grades 9 and 10. In addition, students in these grades could choose a double math period for half the year, and high school students could also receive extra help in math for 30 minutes each day. Using state Academic Support grant funds the district also provided MCAS tutoring after school for students who had failed the MCAS tests. The tutoring is done in small groups or one-on-one.

7. Appropriate educational technology was available and used as an integral part of the instructional process.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district prioritized the integration of technology into the instructional process; yet, educational technology was inequitably available and inconsistently used across all schools in the district during the review period. The district's strategic plan and three of five SIPs for 2005-2006 (South Grafton Elementary School, Grafton Elementary School, and Grafton Middle School) included goals and objectives to update and integrate the use of technology as a tool to

improve student achievement. Technology specialists were available in each building to assist teachers in the use of technology, and the district's Technology Training Plan for 2004-2005 offered a dozen staff professional development opportunities in technology at beginner and intermediate levels. The district also encouraged teachers to seek mini-grants to explore and share new technology integration ideas during 2005-2006. However, the availability of computers and technology in general varied from school to school. In 53 randomly observed classrooms, EQA examiners found the overall student-to-computer ratio to be 12.9 students per computer. However, when broken down by level, at the K-2 school the ratio was 23 students per computer; at grades 3-5, four students per computer; at the middle school, 8.6 students per computer; and at the high school, 23.9 students per computer (excluding access to computer labs.) Assistive technology was available for disabled students.

In randomly observed classrooms, EQA examiners noted the use of technology embedded in teaching strategies less than 10 percent of the time in the two K-2 elementary schools, less than a third of the time at the grade 3-5 elementary school and at the high school, and less than 40 percent of the time at the middle school.

At the two K-2 schools, computers were scarce, usually one or two per room, and, according to interviewees, there was only one ActivBoard for the whole school. Interviewees stated that many computers were outdated. Teachers had Internet access and used technology for administrative duties such as attendance and generating report cards and the school newsletter that appeared on the school website. Each school had a computer lab and students participated in 40 minutes of computer instruction per week, guided by a sequential and full curriculum. Although most teachers had training in using technology, the EQA examiners noted that technology was in use in only eight percent of observed classrooms. Interviews with teachers and administrators confirmed that integrating and using technology needed more attention and more support. The district had plans to develop technology at this level further.

The Grafton Elementary School, grades 3-5, demonstrated the most frequent use of SmartBoards and computers as tools for teaching and learning. Built five years ago, the school was equipped with one teacher computer and five student computers, ActivBoards, SmartBoards, and/or LCD projectors in each classroom, as well as a well-equipped computer lab. The staff participated in

professional development to learn to better use technology. Although an interviewee stated that the expectation was that "you could not do a lesson without integrating technology," the EQA examiners noted technology in use in 29 percent of observed classrooms. Teachers interviewed also spoke fluently and easily about use of software such as Co-writer, Lexia, and Write-Out-Loud, which they used to support classroom instruction. Students could also use Study Island to work on concepts and skills that needed strengthening or acceleration.

The middle school prioritized the acquisition of new equipment and increased its expectations for the use of technology to support instruction in its School Improvement Plan. The school had been purchasing two ActivBoards with web access per year and had almost completed acquiring enough for each classroom to have one at the time of the review. The middle school also aimed to replace older computers used by teachers with 10 new ones per year and transfer the older computers to student use. The school had a computer lab and students could follow a sequence of specific computer courses during all three years. Teachers had received one half day of professional development on the use of the ActivBoard and groups of teachers had been trained to be trainers. Teachers had the use of LCD projectors in some classrooms. Interviewees stated that the district fulfilled requests for software if principals could justify how it would help students learn. Also, middle school special education students had more technology and more computers integrated into their academic programs. Administrators and teachers interviewed admitted that the school lagged behind in terms of technology use and availability, but was working toward meeting its goals. When the EQA examiners observed a random sample of middle school classrooms, they noted technology in use in 38 percent of classrooms.

According to interviewees, compared to the other schools the high school "had been underprovided with technology." There was a computer lab, and although the school had increased the number of ActivBoards during the period under review, there were still not enough for every room to have one. Each department had one and social studies had two. According to interviewees, most classrooms had one teacher computer, but because teachers shared rooms it was not uncommon for one teacher to remain in the classroom during a prep period. Other options for teachers included using computers in the library, the media center, the teachers' workroom, or the computer lab if no class was in session. The EQA examiners did not observe LCD projectors or ActivBoards in use in high school classrooms. Students used graphing

calculators in advanced math class. There were three department sets and many students had their own. According to interviewees, AP Physics classes had computers, probes hooked up to computers, and some modern lab equipment. Interviewees admitted that technology was not highly embedded into high school teaching and learning but "it was up and coming." When the EQA examiners observed high school classrooms, technology was used 30 percent of the time.

Technological capacity increased at the end of the period under review, based on information from interviewees. For students in grades 6-12, the district implemented Power School software to record student grades, attendance, and homework. With Power School, students, teachers, and parents had access to student data on a website accessed with a password. Also, the district implemented Global Connect, an automated telephone system that enabled district leaders or principals to automatically send voicemail messages to students' homes, with an option to choose to communicate with either all or selected segments of the student population to receive the message. During the 2006-2007 school year, each principal created parent e-mail groups, which are used to send weekly information to parents about school issues.

8. District and school leaders actively monitored teachers' instruction for evidence of practices that reflected high expectations for students' work and mastery.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Based on interviews and a review of documents, the EQA examiners found that district and school leaders set a tone for high expectations for both teachers' instruction and student achievement throughout the period under review. However, expectations did not always match practice at the school and classroom levels. For example, the district focused a small number of strategic goals on improving student achievement and endorsed school improvement goals that aligned with district goals, particularly at the elementary and middle schools. The district established a curriculum review and renewal procedure that was thoughtful and thorough. Planning and support for professional development and in-service programs were collaborative, aligned with district and school goals, and resourced with time, money, and expertise. The district required teachers to align individual professional development plans with school and/or district goals and held teachers accountable for meeting them. The district supported teachers'

and school leaders' designing, administering, and analyzing formative and summative assessments. The district designed procedures for supervision and evaluation to monitor instruction for high expectations.

Evidence from documents, interviews, classroom observations, and achievement results indicated differences among schools in meeting the district's expectations for achievement. School Improvement Plans at the elementary schools cited expectations such as "improve and strengthen our students' writing abilities," "implement differentiated instruction," "improve continuity of curriculum and use of assessment data," "develop and implement 'extension of learning' opportunities for students," "optimize the collection and analysis of data to improve instruction and student performance," and "continue to integrate technology into the curriculum." At the middle school, one broad goal directed attention to student achievement – "develop programs that will ensure every student has what he/she needs to reach their maximum potential on the MCAS." At the high school, the first of two goals for 2005-2006 addressed support for the school's mission and expectations for learning. A report on what the school did to meet that goal explained improved cafeteria conditions, lessened hallway crowding, an examination of directed study halls, decreased incidences of theft, and awareness of security. The second goal centered on a faculty study to develop guidelines for student/teacher ratios and class size.

At each school, principals used a number of supervision and evaluation tools to monitor teachers' instruction for evidence of high expectations for students' work and mastery. When asked about supervision, principals cited walk-throughs as an informal practice to check both instruction and curriculum. Although principals had professional development to improve the effectiveness of their walk-throughs, they used no formal protocols when practicing walk-throughs. Interviewees stated that they looked for examples of good practice, e.g., "use of standardized math vocabulary" and "good questioning techniques," but not systematically. Principals noted that they would give informal feedback to teachers orally, in an email, or in a note. Elementary and middle school principals and assistant principals aimed to spend part of each day in classrooms, either conducting walk-throughs or formal observations. The high school principal noted that visibility was important to him and he conducted walk-throughs at least 10 times a year

When observing a random sample of 53 classrooms, the EQA examiners noted high expectations in 88 percent of classrooms at the elementary schools, 54 percent at the middle school, and 83 percent at the high school. EQA examiners noted effective instructional practice in 78 percent of observed elementary classrooms, 70 percent at the middle school, and 73 percent at the high school.

When interviewed about expectations, elementary teachers spoke about improving curriculum, learning to use differentiated instruction, integrating technology into instruction, and using benchmarks, quarterly assessments, and assessment data to drive decisions about pedagogy, materials, and pacing. Interviewees from the high school cited expectations such as turning in work on time, expecting rigor in curriculum, daily posting of agendas and learning objectives, and working from bell-to-bell in each class. The EQA reviewers noted a four-level stratification of courses in Grafton's small high school of approximately 702 students – AP, Honors, Level 1, and Level 2. Teachers interviewed stated that they taught the same basic curriculum at each level, but used different strategies, different depths of coverage, and had different expectations for student work.

When EQA reviewers asked high school interviewees about expectations, they stated that the school's leaders gave teachers their grade distributions for each course, and if teachers gave all high grades, an administrator engaged them in a discussion about high expectations. Although high school teachers met by departments to discuss rigor and course prerequisites, according to interviewees, the high school did not make a concerted effort to raise students' expectations and encourage them to take one or more higher-level courses. Interviewees stated that guidance counselors did not seek out underrepresented populations to take higher-level math or science courses. The district did not require AP students to take AP exams but still gave them weighted credit on report cards. Of the 60 AP exams taken in six courses in 2006, 10 students scored a 5 (seven were in AP biology), 12 students scored a 4, 23 students scored a 3, and the remaining 15 students scored a 2 or 3. In other words, a third of AP students performed with some distinction. Males took 20 AP tests and females took 40. Seven of 10 students in AP Calculus were girls, as were nine of 10 students in AP Biology. Although students could begin the study of a foreign language in grade 7, the district did not offer AP language courses.

9. Through the ongoing use of formative and summative student assessment data, the district monitored the effectiveness of teachers' instruction and provided resources, professional development, and support to improve and maintain high levels of instructional quality and delivery.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district used multiple formative and summative assessments to monitor student achievement, but did not use assessment data to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' instructional practice. Most principals indicated that they knew where instructional strengths and weaknesses existed in their buildings, and provided resources and planned professional development and support to improve instructional quality and delivery.

According to interviewees, a major shift in the district's approach to accountability took place during the period under review. The district engaged consultants to improve leaders' and teachers' use of assessment data and ability to better understand student achievement through designing and analyzing common quarterly assessments at the elementary schools. Interviewees commented that this represented work still in process. In addition to quarterly assessments, district leaders and principals analyzed elementary MCAS results and used them to inform instruction, professional development, materials development and acquisition, and curriculum revisions.

At the secondary level, school leaders and teachers also experienced some professional development and support in data analysis and used that information to make changes in curriculum, pacing, and instructional strategies in order to improve student achievement. However, much of this work was in an earlier stage of development during the review period. Since 2005, middle school teachers have worked to develop and analyze results from common midterms and final exams as well as MCAS results. The high school had always administered midterms and finals. Teachers used MCAS analyses to target students who were at risk of failing MCAS in grade 10. MCAS results also indicated which students needed support in math and framed instructional topics and strands that needed additional emphasis. Interviewees from the middle and high schools indicated that during 2006-2007 the district had targeted additional

resources and professional development to their levels to support the use of data analysis and more effective instructional strategies.

10. Random observations of classrooms revealed that teachers used a variety of effective techniques and strategies to address differences in learning style, and that instruction was student-focused, reflected high expectations, and called for engaged learning and participation on the part of students.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 50 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 26 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching. The attributes were grouped into five categories: classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student activity and behavior, and climate. The EQA examiners checked the attributes that they observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. Observations were conducted at the district's five schools as follows: 13 at the K-2 elementary schools, 14 at the grades 3-5 elementary school, 13 at the middle school, and 10 at the high school. In total, the EQA examiners observed 24 ELA classrooms, 18 math classrooms, and eight science classrooms.

Classroom management refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 97 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 100 percent at the K-2 elementary school level, 96 percent at the grades 3-5 elementary school level, 90 percent at the middle school level, and 100 percent at the high school level.

Instructional practice was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher's questions transcend direct recall and include open-ended questions that require the use of higher order thinking skills. Students should be encouraged to go beyond their initial responses, to analyze, to synthesize, to compare and contrast, and to explain their own thinking. Class time should be focused on student learning. Students who have finished their work should be provided with other appropriate tasks; students who are off-task should be redirected to their task. The work should engage all students; it

should be age-appropriate, and attuned to many learning modalities, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The pace of the class should be appropriate, challenging, and engaging for all students. Instruction should be differentiated so that all learners are challenged. The lesson should be clearly aligned with the state curriculum frameworks and either posted on the board or cited in the teacher's planner. The lesson's objectives should be clear and explicitly articulated. The teacher should use standards-based instruction to set objectives, to plan activities, to assess the effect of the lesson and to measure progress for all learners. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 75 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 86 percent at the K-2 elementary level, 70 percent at the grades 3-5 elementary level, 70 percent at the middle school level, and 73 percent at the high school level.

Expectations refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. Evidence of high expectations could include recent examples of high quality student work posted in the classroom. In addition, high quality work should be evident through rubrics that may sometimes be generated by students. Tasks should be challenging for all students, and all students should have access to the same curriculum, although the instruction and strategies may be adapted to the needs of students. The teacher should clearly maintain and communicate high expectations for student work during class time. All students should be expected to be on task and engaged in the lesson. High expectations for students were evident in 78 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 96 percent at the K-2 elementary level, 80 percent at the grades 3-5 elementary level, 54 percent at the middle school level, and 83 percent at the high school level.

Positive student activity and behavior are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They must show a clear understanding of the objective of the lesson and interact with the teacher and each other in accomplishing the tasks at hand. They should be attentive and responsive. While the environment may be busy and constructive, it must also be controlled and orderly. There should be few distractions, and the learning process must be clearly evident. Indicators of positive student activity and behavior were evident in 72 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 73 percent at the K-2 elementary level, 71 percent at the grades 3-5 elementary level, 73 percent at the middle school level, and 72 percent at the high school level.

Finally, the concept of climate is considered evident when the classroom is welcoming, and the teacher is an active listener and treats all students with respect. Students should listen attentively to and be respectful of all other students. Many resources and means beyond the textbook should be available for learning; these may include technology, manipulatives, cassettes, visuals, overhead projectors, and a classroom library. Positive indicators of climate were evident in 85 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 97 percent at the K-2 elementary school level, 100 percent at the grades 3-5 elementary school level, 69 percent at the middle school level, and 70 percent at the high school level.

Summary of Classroom Observations

	Number of Classrooms						Computers		
	ELA	Math	Science	Total	Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Elementary	16	7	4	27	18.8	0.4	104	80	6.4
Middle	4	5	4	13	21.2	0.3	45	32	8.6
High	4	6	0	10	19.1	0.2	18	8	23.9
Total	24	18	8	50	19.5	0.3	167	120	8.1

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity & Behavior	Climate
Elementary					
Total checks	106	187	94	116	80
Maximum possible	108	240	107	161	81
Avg. percent of checks	98	78	88	72	99
Middle					
Total checks	47	82	27	57	27
Maximum possible	52	117	50	78	39
Avg. percent of checks	90	70	54	73	69
High					
Total checks	40	66	33	43	21
Maximum possible	40	90	40	60	30
Avg. percent of checks	100	73	83	72	70
Total					
Total checks	193	335	154	216	128
Maximum possible	200	447	197	299	150
Avg. percent of checks	97	75	78	72	85

Standard III: Assessment and Program Evaluation									
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**Total**
Excellent									
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**8**
Needs Improvement									
Unsatisfactory									

III. Assessment and Program Evaluation

The district and school leadership used student assessment results, local benchmarks, and other pertinent data to improve student achievement and inform all aspects of its decision-making including: policy development and implementation, instructional programs, assessment practices, procedures, and supervision.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The district and school leadership had a formal system for using assessments and local benchmarks, including a curriculum planning council to approve curriculum and assessment instruments on a rotating five-year cycle.
- The district had an MCAS data analysis committee that included the director of curriculum, administrators, and representatives from each school that was actively involved in curriculum and assessment and reported results to the school committee and central office.
- The district continuously collected and analyzed data from local assessments and the MCAS tests to improve curriculum and instruction and to make the best use of staff and resources. It used multiple methods for disseminating results to parents.
- The elementary schools had developed their own quarterly benchmark exams to measure teaching and learning and were developing standards-based report cards.
- The middle school and high school had developed common midyear and final exams, but they needed more professional development on creating benchmarks to use as formative assessments.

- The district had analyzed disaggregated MCAS math scores of special education students only at the middle school, and had successfully developed and implemented a plan to raise student achievement.
- The district participated in both internal and external audits. These included the New England Association of Secondary Schools (NEASC) accreditation of the high school and the New England League of Middle Schools audit of the middle school. The curriculum planning council began to conduct internal audits, but it needed to refine the process.
- Ninety-eight to 100 percent of Grafton students participated in the ELA, math, and science and technology MCAS tests, exceeding the state's 95 percent requirement.
- During the years under review, the achievement gaps of the low-income and students with disabilities subgroups narrowed, particularly at the middle school.
- In the aggregate, all schools were making adequate yearly progress (AYP), but the district had not disaggregated test scores or used benchmarks throughout the entire district to improve practice.

Summary

Grafton had a solid assessment program during the period under review. The district conducted continuous data collection and analysis using various student assessments. The MCAS data analysis committee analyzed the MCAS data and noted general strengths and weaknesses to help improve instruction. While the district made aggregate adequate yearly progress (AYP), only the middle school disaggregated subgroup data and took targeted steps to close the achievement gaps of subgroups in the district. All administrators were trained in using TestWiz. The district's director of curriculum, the curriculum planning council (CPC), department chairs at the high school, team leaders at the middle school, and grade-level leaders at the elementary schools all analyzed data and planned ways to improve teaching and learning.

Interviews and documents revealed that district personnel analyzed results from common midyear and final exams at the secondary levels for strengths and weaknesses. The elementary schools had offered professional development training in order to create their own benchmark quarterly exams that they analyzed to inform instruction. They were in the process of creating

benchmark report cards to go along with these. The secondary levels had not yet created benchmark assessments.

Ninety-eight to 100 percent of students took the MCAS tests, exceeding the state's required 95 percent participation rate. The high school encouraged but did not mandate that students take PSATs, SATs, and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Students took English language learner (ELL) and special education tests as appropriate. The elementary schools used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at grade 2, the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). They had used Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for the period under review but replaced it with the DRA.

The elementary levels used well documented quarterly benchmark exams tied to a reporting system. The secondary schools used common midyear and final exams and analyzed the data but did not yet tie them to specific benchmarks. The district used information attained from the elementary quarterly exams and the secondary midyear and final exams to plan future instruction. Interviewees at the elementary level said that they changed instruction midyear according to analysis of the exam results. Teachers, committees, and curriculum leaders in the district used data also to prepare reports for the central office, school committee, parents, and community members. The staff at the various levels used the data generated by the tests to inform the purchase of materials, such as manipulatives at the elementary level.

The district analyzed MCAS data at all levels and looked for strengths and weaknesses to improve instruction. The entire faculty used information generated by TestWiz to analyze the types of questions that required more instruction. The middle school was the only level to disaggregate data thoroughly to evaluate subgroup needs. As a result, the middle school offered extra math classes, math tutoring during and after school, and half-year math and ELA remediation. For two of the years during the period under review, the middle school made AYP in the aggregate but failed to make it for the low-income and special education subgroups. After the school put intense focus on analysis of aggregated and disaggregated data and altered targeted services, the middle school closed the achievement gap between the subgroups and made AYP.

Based on documents and interviews, the secondary schools used common midyear and final exams. Teachers and administrators analyzed results to adjust for weaknesses in the curriculum. They looked at patterns of scores from different teachers to determine if some teachers had better strategies that they could share with respective departments or teams. They had not yet developed benchmark exams and were scheduled to participate in professional development with the same consultant who had provided training at the elementary level. Documentation from the elementary schools demonstrated well developed quarterly benchmark exams. The elementary staff told the EQA examiners that they were looking to offer the benchmark exams three times per year to go along with the report cards. The district used appropriate special education and ELL testing.

The district kept all stakeholders informed of progress by providing data to staff to analyze, by informing parents serving on school councils, by making report cards more informative at the elementary level, and by using Power School at the secondary levels. Parents could log into Power School to learn of their child's progress, or be contacted by the web-based phone calling system.

The district was learning to use an automated grading and analysis system (Scantron) to correct, report on, and correlate data from several locally made benchmark assessments, especially at the elementary level. This will help highlight patterns of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning as well as in curriculum.

Indicators

1. District assessment policies and practices were characterized by the continuous collection, analysis, and use of student assessment results by district and school leadership.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, district and school leaders and teachers used summative assessment at all levels and formative assessment at most to gauge student progress. The district's director of curriculum and staff development oversaw the use of assessment and curriculum to support change. The high school assistant principal, department chairs at the high school, team leaders at the middle school, and grade-level leaders at the elementary schools

assisted the director. A curriculum planning council (CPC) and an MCAS data analysis committee also had responsibility for the oversight of curriculum and the analysis of student assessment data. The CPC consisted of 14 members including permanent membership by the director of curriculum and staff development, two school committee members, one elementary and one secondary administrator, as well as staggered two-year terms for a teacher representative from each building, a high school student, and a maximum of three parent/community representatives. The CPC guided and oversaw all curricula in the district on ongoing five-year cycles.

The data analysis committee, chaired by the middle school principal, consisted of staff members from all grade levels. This committee analyzed MCAS data looking for patterns of strength and weakness and noted where subgroups in the middle school failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in math. While the district had reviewing data for a long time, interviews and documentation revealed that the district was now doing so in a more formal way, particularly at the elementary level.

All staff at all levels of the district analyzed MCAS results for strengths and weaknesses. According to interviews, the staff analyzed results for the district as a whole and for each individual school. The superintendent and director of curriculum did this in a global manner. Subsequently, all administrators discussed the results at their meetings. The faculty of each school went over the data at monthly staff meetings. At the high school, each department with MCAS-tested content analyzed its data at departmental meetings led by its respective chair. At the middle school, team leaders conducted this type of analysis during common team planning time. At the elementary level, teachers analyzed data at grade-level meetings led by grade-level leaders.

Interviewees stated that teachers at the elementary and middle school levels had done a thorough and formalized analysis of the MCAS data. They had looked for patterns on questions on which students had scored higher than the state average and on which they scored lower. This informed their instruction, including pedagogy, and encouraged more exposure to old MCAS and MCAS-like questions, remediation, revision of curriculum, and professional development. The middle school had especially put great effort into this effort since its math scores failed to meet AYP for

the special education and low-income subgroups for two years. The high school interviewees claimed that they looked for patterns of MCAS strengths and weaknesses but gave little detail about how they used this.

The district had trained all administrators in using TestWiz and they disseminated information to teachers in order to aid in data analysis. Each school gave a yearly report to the superintendent, school committee, and staff after analyzing MCAS data by grade including sample questions that many students answered incorrect. Teachers used this information to create sample MCAS questions to be used throughout the year and particularly just prior to the MCAS testing.

The entire district had not yet disaggregated and analyzed student assessment data nor planned remediation for the special education subgroup. The middle school was the only school to have done this effectively as evidenced by improved MCAS scores for its special education subgroup. The CPI for this subgroup increased by 9.7 points and the group met its target due to intense remediation efforts. The district did not perform this type of MCAS data disaggregation and intense focus on remediation consistently across the grade levels. Interviews with staff revealed that this was an area in need of attention.

In addition to the MCAS tests, the district used other summative assessments to inform teaching and learning. At the high school level, common midyear and final exams were required to include open-ended questions. The staff analyzed these exams for strengths and weaknesses and noted if there was a pattern of inconsistent results among teachers. If staff noted a major difference, they compared methodologies. The high school encouraged students to take the PSAT and the SAT, but there was no requirement to do so. If a student did well on the PSAT, the guidance department would use the results to encourage the student to enroll in higher-level courses, according to interviewees. At this level, teachers had not developed various formative assessments to inform practice or to use as benchmarks.

Students at the middle school also took common midyear and final exams. The middle school had plans to use quarterly exams like those that the elementary schools had developed, after a consultant had fully trained them. The elementary schools had been through training and had created their own quarterly exams that served as benchmarks to inform instruction and to assess what students ought to know. Samples of the exams and interviews demonstrated that the

elementary schools were far along in creating these exams and analyzing the results from them for patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Other formative assessments given at the elementary level during the period under review included the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) for reading for grade 2 students, Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). The district piloted Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) during the period under review but staff at both K-3 elementary schools decided to use DRA in the future.

The district administered Student Support Team (SST) informal assessments, Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O), and Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). The latter two assessments tested whether the students receiving English language learner (ELL) services could be released from services and put on a monitor-only status. School psychologists also conducted other testing for special education students using a variety of instruments appropriate to their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The district had implemented the use of a Scantron machine, a resource that would allow teachers to grade formative assessments quickly. Teachers would use the Scantron to grade multiple-choice bubble sheets as well as long- and short-answer questions using a 1-4 point scale rubric. The program could generate reports to make comparisons between students, classes, teachers, and schools. It could also track subgroups and cohorts as they moved throughout the system. Staff would be able to look at data for strengths and weaknesses and to compare data from various assessments.

Grafton required each school to compile and submit to the central office assessment summaries for all of the various secondary school midyear and final exams, elementary quarterly exams, and MCAS tests. The district developed a common template for this purpose. The district required teachers to submit copies of the common exams to central office. According to interviewees, the quality of assessments across grade levels was inconsistent, and the high school was awaiting further training in this area.

2. <u>District and school leadership required all students to participate in all appropriate assessments.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had strong participation rates in all appropriate assessments for the period under review. Data from the Department of Education (DOE) showed that 99.2 percent of all Grafton regular and special education students participated in the 2006 MCAS ELA tests, 98.8 percent participated in the math tests, and 99.2 percent participated in the science/technology and engineering MCAS tests. These rates exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement. Furthermore, 99.3 percent of regular education students participated in the ELA tests, and 98.6 percent of the special education students did so. Regular education students had a 98.8 percent participation rate for the math tests, and 98.6 of the special education students participated in the same tests. In the science/technology and engineering tests, 99.1 percent of the regular education students participated, while 100 percent of the special education students participated. According to interviewees, students with severe disabilities were given alternative assessments.

According to interviewees and high school policy, students with at least "an A- average" had the option of taking the final exam, but all midyear exams were mandatory. All other students were required take midyear and final exams at the high school. These exams were approximately 60 minutes in length. At the middle school, all students had to take midyear and final exams lasting one period or approximately 45 minutes. All elementary students took the four quarterly exams.

Interviews with parents and teachers revealed that the district and its students put a high premium on test participation whether it was local assessments, the MCAS tests, SATs, or PSATs. They stated that when the National Report Card Project randomly chose Grafton Middle School grade 8 for testing, the students took the exam seriously, even though it did not count toward their grades. Students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes were encouraged but not required to take the corresponding exams, according to the interviewees. However, AP students would still receive extra credit toward their grade point averages (GPAs) whether they participated in the exams or not.

3. Through the use of district-generated reporting instruments and report cards, district and school leaders implemented assessment systems to measure the attainment of goals, progress, and effectiveness. These assessment reports were focused on student achievement and were communicated to all appropriate staff and community members.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Handbooks for each school described all grading and reporting procedures. Teachers used an array of appropriate formative and summative assessments as well as other indicators to formulate grades. Teachers and administrators indicated that they used midyear and final exams at the middle and high schools and quarterly exams at the elementary level for both the grades K-2 and grades 3-5 elementary schools, and also exams and quizzes provided by the textbook series and/or created by teachers, homework, participation, collaborative group work, oral discussions, projects, laboratory projects, and portfolios. At the K-2 level, portfolios of writing samples followed the students throughout the grades and were passed up to the grades 3-5 elementary school. From documents and interviews, the EQA team learned that students received interim progress reports and quarterly report cards. The district also held several parent conferences per year.

The district planned to initiate a standards-based report card in the elementary grades issued only three times per year. Educators interviewed felt that while the reporting would be less frequent, information on student learning would be greater and would better inform them about teaching practices. It would require a change from quarterly exams to exams given three times per year for better correspondence with the new reporting paradigm.

At the secondary level, teachers evaluated students four times per year and issued progress reports in between. Quarterly report cards evaluated students using traditional letter grades. High school students had their grade point average (GPA) tied to course levels, such as AP, Honors, Level I, and Level II, according to the handbook and program of studies. In addition, according to interviewees, the district sent appropriate progress reports home for all special education and Title I students. Student Support Teams (SSTs) at each building monitored students experiencing academic difficulty and frequently updated parents.

Documents and discussions provided evidence that the district reported to the school committee regarding data analysis. The district used a common template to report both MCAS results and results of quarterly exams. Principals and the director of curriculum received these reports, as well as analysis of results of middle school and high school midyear and final exams, and copies of all the exams. Administrators trained in using TestWiz disseminated information on MCAS achievement to their teachers.

The district strategic plan (DIP) and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) aligned but did not contain measurable academic improvement goals across the board. The three-year plans could be modified annually. The middle school had aligned its plan primarily to recommendations in the New England Middle League of Middle Schools (NELMS) report, which did not focus on academic achievement. As well, the high school geared its SIP goals toward the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report for 2009, which focused on student achievement data.

Principals disseminated important information to parents by way of e-mail for those who registered and via an automatic phone system (Global Connect). They also mailed MCAS results home, and parents could join a parent teacher group (PTG) or school council to get information. The middle and high schools reached out to parents through a monthly coffee hour. The school committee taped its meetings for broadcast.

4. In addition to the MCAS test, the district and school leadership regularly used local benchmarks and other assessment tools to measure student progress and analyzed and disseminated the results in a timely manner to appropriate staff.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, district and school leaders used a variety of assessment tools, in addition to MCAS tests, to measure student progress, and disseminated the results in a timely manner to appropriate staff, according to interviews with the director of curriculum, building administrators, curriculum leaders, and teachers. At the secondary level, there had been a move toward creating common assessments for midyears and finals. Staff analyzed the results for strengths and weaknesses and for differences due to different teachers' pedagogy so that they

could make changes in curriculum and instructional methods. Training in developing benchmark tests had been provided only to teachers in grades K-5, but was soon scheduled to be done at the middle school level. The staff learned to analyze these newly created tests for weaknesses and strengths, performance on different types of questions, and performance of specific subgroups. The middle school had disaggregated and analyzed the MCAS test results only for its special education subgroup and then worked on intense remediation, according to interviewees.

According to interviews with the director of curriculum, high school assistant principal, high school department chairs, middle school team leaders, and elementary grade-level leaders, the district had used the TestWiz analysis of MCAS scores to inform staff of strengths and weaknesses. Based on this information, staff realigned and strengthened curricula in certain areas. Grade 9 students had to take Biology in order to take that MCAS test in that grade. The district scheduled extra courses in math for two double blocks, and gave extra help during Directed Learning Time (DLT) at the middle school to students scheduled for it and at the high school on a voluntary basis. The elementary school established voluntary Literacy Circles and extended day literacy programs, and added the ACES after-school program for grades 4-8.

Although the district could not produce a complete matrix of all exams it administered, interviewees told the EQA examiners that the district had begun to use the DRA for grade 2 students at both elementary schools, and the GRADE and QRI at other elementary grades. The interviews did not provide evidence that the staff had analyzed the results of these tests in any great detail. During the period under review, interviewees stated that they had used the DIBELS reading test, but while copies of this were still in the district, staff were using the DRA in place of it and had made plans to expand the use of the DRA to grade 1.

In 2005-2006, high school students took the AP tests in six subjects, according to documents examined and interviews with staff. Interviewees told the EQA that the teachers and assistant principal had completed an informal analysis of the scores. They had not done a formal comparison of test scores to grades attained in class. Across the district, the staff had conducted informal comparisons of results of standardized and local exams and grades attained. The district had not done a longitudinal study on the progress of specific students regarding MCAS results, report card grades, quarterly exams at elementary level, midyears and finals at the

secondary level, attendance rates, and dropout rates, although documents provided showed that there were longitudinal studies of the results of an entire cohort of students regarding its MCAS results. According to the high school assistant principal, the high school informally tracked students longitudinally who had overridden teacher recommendations and taken subjects that were more difficult.

The district held formal departmental meetings at the high school, team-level meetings at the middle school, and grade-level meetings at the elementary schools to discuss data and aligning curriculum and pedagogy to improve student scores. Only teachers at the middle school had common planning time during the day, but teachers at other levels got together during lunch and before and after school to discuss data and curriculum.

5. The district and school leadership used student assessment results and other pertinent data to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, district and school leadership used student assessment results and other assessment data to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs. According to interviewees, at the elementary level they used assessment data from the MCAS tests and quarterly exams to revise curriculum. The data results pointed to the need for better methods for strengthening the program when patterns of weaknesses showed up. The educators stated that they regularly looked at questions on the MCAS tests to see on which questions the students tended to score better than the state average and on which ones they scored more poorly. They used sample MCAS-style questions in their instructional programs. They had aligned the elementary quarterly benchmark exams to the state curriculum frameworks. .

One particular area of weakness seen was performance on MCAS open-response questions, so the district incorporated more of these into the curriculum. The district had started voluntary Literacy Circles, staffed by both staff members and trained parent volunteers, during recess and lunch, during programs before and after school for students in grades 1-3, and in an extended day program. In the latter, students could use Lexia software and engage in fluency and comprehension improvement activities. There was an increase in math instructional time from

45 to 75 minutes and this included more math writing and open-response journal prompts. Math and ELA curriculum professional development helped staff align standards-based elementary quarterly exams to standards-based report cards showing possible benchmarks under consideration. The district also purchased math manipulatives to assist all types of learners and offered a series of workshops in which teachers learned and produced lessons/assessments using differentiated instruction in math and ELA.

Based on an MCAS analysis revealing poor scores in math for some subgroups, the middle school incorporated some program changes. Students identified as having difficulties were scheduled into a math Directed Learning Time (DLT) with math teachers for extra help, according to interviews. Special education students and others who did poorly on the math test attended a second math class with a math teacher and two special education teachers. The teachers usually spent the first day on direct instruction of math concepts, then grouped approximately 18 students into three small groups for targeted instruction. On the final day of the week, they assessed the students for mastery. The middle school principal stated that the certified math teacher had dual certification in special education to serve the students better. The staff stated that they also looked at students' ELA scores, since this could also cause problems in math problem solving. The district offered much professional development in better math instruction for both teachers and paraprofessionals, placing special emphasis on using a common math vocabulary. The staff at the elementary and middle schools stated that they invited struggling students in grades 4-8 to an after-school program known as ACES, which was created using funds from the adult education program. Students with low MCAS scores and school grades worked on particular skills and received incentives for attendance, according to the director of the program.

At the high school, a few program changes were instituted because of MCAS scores. Staff examined strengths and weaknesses and, as a result, attempted to improve the curriculum alignment. There was more emphasis on open-ended questions and journal writing. At both the middle school and high school levels, students had daily practice on MCAS questions, which increased as the tests approached. They reported that there was also increased collaboration between the schools. The staff at both levels said that they looked at curriculum at grade 8 and grade 9 and closed gaps. The high school staff said that they looked at the grade 8 MCAS math

scores of students in grades 9 and 10 who had scored below a 230 and scheduled them into a half-year prep class. This class ran every other day for the double block in addition to students' regular math class. During the common Directed Learning Time (DLT), students could get extra help from their math teachers. Because high school students could get this extra help during the school day, they were not part of the ACES after-school program. Some students took two full-year math courses per year in grade 10 and as a result completed three math courses by the time that they took the MCAS test. There was also a mandatory half-year writing course for freshmen.

The interviewees told the EQA examiners that they also worked on improving the curriculum because of lackluster AP test scores and a lack of correlation to report card grades. Likewise, the high school was getting ready for the AP audit in which the College Board would make recommendations for improvement. The assistant principal at the high school encouraged staff to take the summer AP workshops the district offered.

6. The district and school leadership regularly engaged in internal and external audits or assessments to inform the effectiveness of its program implementation and service delivery systems. The data from these assessments were provided to all appropriate staff.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the Massachusetts Department of Education conducted a Coordinated Program Review (CPR) for special education and limited English proficient (LEP) students. By the end of the review period, the department required some documents highlighted as only partially completed. The New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) had conducted an external audit in May 2006. It looked at academic and non-academic goals. In the area of assessment, the visiting team wanted "continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures" that "provide evidence about every student's learning progress." In this way, the report stated, "students, teachers, and family members select immediate learning goals and plan further education." The visiting team found specific strengths in the areas of assessment discussions and use of midterms and finals; professional development on varied assessment strategies; authentic assessment in grade 7 science labs; and teachers recognizing the

difference between assessing for instruction and assessment of instruction. The NELMS team had offered the following recommendations: use rubrics rather than letter grades; use a standards-based reporting system; offer a different grading scale with fewer opportunities to fail; and begin discussions regarding the proper use of homework. The high school was preparing for a NEASC review, and staff from the Clark School for the Deaf visited to monitor the elementary children with cochlear implants. There were no outside audits of the early childhood education program, according to interviewees.

During the period under review, the district had established a curriculum planning council (CPC) which had formalized the process for curriculum review. Initially, it had approved all curricula and thereafter had rotated all curricula on a five-year cycle. The CPC helped to develop the curriculum of different grade levels and disciplines to spell out a blueprint of exactly what all teachers should be teaching. The council also approved any textbooks and additions/deletions to curricula, as in the case of a change the AP Physics teacher had proposed at the high school, according to an example the interviewees gave. The CPC had done all this by prior to any formal approval by the school committee.

An MCAS data analysis committee had also been established to prepare reports on MCAS scores for schools, the central office, and the school committee showing trends and patterns of strengths and weaknesses as compared to the state averages, item analyses, and results by teacher, specific subject area, and grade level. The EQA examiners saw a document in which the district had tracked the MCAS scores of three cohorts of students in a longitudinal study. The district had completed this for the classes of 2008, 2010, and 2011. However, teacher interviewees were unaware that this analysis existed.

The director of curriculum stated that she worked closely with principals, the assistant principal at the high school, high school department chairs, middle school team leaders, and elementary grade leaders to stay informed about the effectiveness of program implementation and service delivery effectiveness. Teachers and administrators stressed in interviews that they were always reviewing curriculum and pedagogy – both formally and informally. This occurred in faculty meetings, departmental meetings, team planning time, grade-level meetings, across-grade-level meetings, during lunch, and before and after school. The most developed standards-based

curriculum and accountability system was in evidence at the elementary level where the outside consultant had provided staff with ongoing professional development.

7. The district and school leadership annually reviewed student assessment results and other pertinent data to maximize effectiveness in assigning staff, prioritizing goals, and allocating time and resources.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district and school leadership regularly reviewed assessment results and other data both formally and informally to prioritize goals and to allocate time and resources. As a result of MCAS scores, elementary school administrators were able to offer more professional development to staff in areas of differentiated instruction, assessment, and the creation of elementary benchmark quarterly exams and standards-based report cards. Administrators interviewed felt that all staff could work with all types of students and so they did not differentiate when assigning staff. According to interviewees, the district was always willing to purchase new texts and manipulatives to help teach the curriculum, according to several interviewees. Administrators and grade-level leaders at the elementary level said that they had used the results of the quarterly exams to change curriculum and/or pedagogy for the next quarter.

At the middle school, the principal had requested funding for an extra math teacher to reduce class size and to offer struggling students an extra period of math with three teachers. The principal told the EQA that he had been able to hire a math teacher who had dual certification in special education. As cited, he had reallocated time for math. The district picked up the funding for the after-school ACES program when a DOE grant ended. Teachers and paraprofessionals participated in professional development with an emphasis on writing, reading, and vocabulary used by the successful math student.

At the high school, there were general plans to add more Advanced Placement courses and plans to better align theses courses with the tests to improve scores and to do well on the upcoming AP audit. The teachers requested to teach the AP courses, according to interviews with administrators and staff, and the district would pay for summer training for them. The high

school principal said that he handpicked teachers to teach freshmen who had done poorly on the grade 8 MCAS tests. These students attended half-year courses in ELA and/or math that met for a double block every other day. All freshmen had to take a half-year writing course that would incorporate both writing and public speaking skills, which the school intended to change to a communication course in 2007-2008. For a year, both freshmen and sophomores would take Biology so that the students would be better prepared to take the biology MCAS test.

The district had broad, if not specific and measurable, goals for raising MCAS scores. The same was true for the school improvement goals. They did not define specific, objective, measurable amounts by which students should improve.

8. District and school leadership routinely used program evaluation results to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services to continuously improve the delivery of instruction and student achievement.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, district and school leadership used program evaluation results and student assessment data to initiate, modify, and discontinue programs and services with the goal of improving delivery of instruction and student achievement. For example, when a new person took over the role of coordinator for the limited English proficient (LEP) students, she discovered that too many students were in the program since the district had used incorrect criteria for entry into the program. As a result, she moved some students out of the program and onto monitor status, according to the coordinator and documents revealing the number of LEP students.

According to interviewees, due to the work of the CPC and the MCAS data analysis committee, the curriculum had better alignment with the state curriculum frameworks, according to interviews. Schools added remedial classes and programs at different grade levels. For example, students took mandatory writing class in high school to address weaknesses seen on the MCAS tests. On a rotating basis, departments at the secondary level and grade levels at the elementary level presented their respective curricula to the CPC for revision and analysis. The district used a template that it had developed for this purpose. One example of a change was that teachers had

divided an Earth Science course at the high school into two half-year elective courses, according to interviews and the student course of studies guide. Another example the interviewees cited was that the Advanced Placement Physics teacher had come before the CPC to modify the course to improve the necessary content for students to pass the course and do well on the AP exam.

At the elementary level, teachers showed the EQA examiners examples of quarterly benchmark exams already in use and benchmark report cards that were in draft form. They also stated that they adjusted instruction when they noted a pattern of weakness on a prior exam. At the middle school, the staff targeted special education students and had provided three teachers – one certified in math and special education and two special education teachers – to target and remediate those students in mathematics. The middle school also eliminated foreign language for those requiring an extra math course.

Teachers of common courses at the high school and middle school composed, analyzed, and modified common exams. In interviews, teachers told the EQA that they shared methods and lesson plans during departmental and team meetings, especially when some students consistently did better on a common exam. The high school program of studies listed a new half-year remediation program for students scoring low in math and/or ELA on the grade 8 MCAS tests. When teachers at the elementary level noted that students had done poorly on some area of a quarterly exam, they changed their curriculum for the next quarter. District and school leaders were supportive with funds for supplies, texts, professional development, and class coverage to improve instruction.

School leaders realigned the curriculum vertically and horizontally in response to assessment results. The middle school special education students improved their math performance after getting extra math help with both special education teachers and a content specialist, according to MCAS results and interviews. At some grade levels, though, special education students received instruction in core areas from special education teachers in a substantially separate environment. Also, at the middle school students did not take foreign language if they required an extra math course, according to staff interviews. Teachers interviewed said that they analyzed and improved the math and science curricula and sequence in response to assessment data and goals. Based on state and accreditation audits, the district addressed recommendations and

implemented modifications at high school and middle school for special education and ELL programs.

Standard IV: Human Resource Management and Professional Development														
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**Total**
Excellent														
Satisfactory	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	**9**
Needs Improvement					✓		✓	✓		✓				**4**
Unsatisfactory														

IV. Human Resource Management and Professional Development

The district identified, attracted and recruited effective personnel, and structured its environment to support, develop, improve, promote and retain qualified and effective professional staff who were successful in advancing achievement for all students.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- Professional development in the district focused on data analysis, developing quarterly assessments, and implementing differentiated instruction, and these activities closely aligned with the strategic plan (DIP), the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), and individual professional development plans (IPDPs).
- Although the professional development program focused on data analysis, not all levels of the school district had the same access to in-depth or ongoing training.
- The district analyzed student achievement data for trends and patterns and item analysis, but did not disaggregate data to inform efforts to improve subgroup student achievement, with the exception of the middle school.
- The district had not yet addressed achievement and program analysis for special education students, its underperforming subgroup population, through either an outside consultant or internal program review.
- The district created leadership opportunities for teachers by creating numerous teacher-leader positions such as grade-level leaders, grade team leaders, mentors, committee leaders, and study group leaders.

- Although the superintendent modeled the writing of comprehensive and well-written summative evaluations of administrators, the range of abilities in writing summative teacher evaluations varied widely among principals.
- Administrators and mentors met frequently with and actively supported new teachers in Grafton.
- Mentors and mentees rated the ongoing mentor training they had received highly. The superintendent met frequently with new principals to mentor them, which received high ratings as well. Overall, teachers described the district as having developed a collaborative culture.
- Teacher certification was both up to date and well tracked. Despite the high number of teachers in the district who were new hires during the period under review, in 2006-2007 only nine teachers were working on waiver.
- The district monitored its changes in the expectations for programs and practice by submitting frequent analyses and reports from study groups, and supported them to a lesser degree by changing supervision practices.
- Practices in supervision were vague, lacked consistency from school to school, and did not necessarily focus on the fidelity of implementation in classrooms with respect to stated district goals.
- The district's evaluation procedure for teachers' performance was a four-year cycle and therefore did not align with all the requirements of the Education Reform Act.

Summary

In 2005-2006, Grafton had 76 non-professional status teachers. Many teachers who applied for employment had a few years of experience, and Grafton was able to hire them with respect to experience at the appropriate step. Principals went through resumes and chose candidates for interviewing. They formed an interview team with teachers, who then interviewed the candidates and made a recommendation to the superintendent. The superintendent then interviewed the recommended candidate and made the offer of a contract.

Grafton had a strong mentor program for any teacher who was new to the community, as well as a two-day induction program in the summer. Likewise, the superintendent mentored new administrators. All principals were fairly new in their positions and were promoted from within the school district.

The director of curriculum and staff development was a permanent member of the curriculum planning council and was responsible for closely connecting the strategic plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) to curriculum revision and the ongoing training that staff needed in the district's professional development plan, in order to build capacity for staff to participate in district efforts. The district goals focused on continuous training in data analysis to align the curricula, to develop quarterly assessments for use as a formative assessment, and to develop exit criteria in each grade and subject area. Teachers had eight days available for ongoing in-service, which was a mix of district, site, and programmatic activities. Alignment of all professional development with the district's strategic plan was expected and was monitored by the director of curriculum and staff development.

The district's evaluation procedure for non-professional status teachers aligned with Department of Education (DOE) requirements, since it was an annual summative evaluation based on classroom observations which used the Principals of Effective Teaching as indicators. In contrast, the district's evaluation procedure for professional status teachers did not align with the DOE requirements, since it called for a summative evaluation once in four years. According to the DOE, principals need to complete summative evaluations based on classroom performance at a minimum in alternating years. The superintendent annually evaluated administrators based on mutually agreed upon goals, using criteria in the written evaluations that aligned with the Principles of Effective Leadership. The superintendent wrote evaluations that were informative, instructive, and promoted professional growth, and could serve as a model for the principals that he mentored. Neither the administrative contracts nor the teacher contracts directly linked performance to increased student achievement.

Indicators

1. The district's policies and practices for the identification, recruitment, and selection of professional staff resulted in the employment of an effective teaching force that advanced student achievement.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

In Grafton, a large number of teachers were on non-professional status. This was primarily due to recent retirements and the increasing growth of the district's school population. The district also recently hired an ELL teacher to coordinate the testing of the ELL student population, which the Coordinated Program Review had cited as a need. Interviewees stated that those in teaching positions tended to stay employed in the school district for the long term, in contrast to administrative positions, for which turnover was higher. Four of the five principals, promoted from within the district, were new in their respective positions.

Teachers, department heads, and principals served on teacher interview teams. The district advertised open positions in regional newspapers. Applicants with teaching experience in other communities were chosen with fewer applicants who were first-year teachers. The district was able to offer and could afford to hire highly qualified teachers with a master's degree. It balanced new hires among those new to the profession with those who were most experienced in hard to fill positions.

Principals interviewed candidates with teams made up of teachers and recommended a candidate to the superintendent. The superintendent then interviewed the candidate, made the offer to hire, and placed the new hire on the salary scale. Principals stated that the superintendent almost always hired the recommended candidate.

2. All professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The EQA examiners reviewed a sample of personnel folders of 40 teachers and 15 administrators who were employed during the period under review. All certifications in the sample files were

up to date. They were well organized and divided into four sections, and certifications/waivers and evaluations were in two of the four sections.

3. In the event of unfilled positions, professional staff were hired on professional waivers and were provided mentoring and support to attain the standard of substantial annual progress toward appropriate licensure.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had nine teachers on waiver in 2006-2007. A clerk in the central office was formally designated the task of tracking those on waiver with the coordination of respective school principals. A formal mentoring program existed for all teachers new to Grafton, including veteran teachers new to the community. The program began in August and the district held monthly mentor meetings with specific agendas.

Principals solicited and approved mentors to the program. They made great effort to find a mentor with the same grade and school assignment. Mentors had common training planned by the director of curriculum and an experienced teacher who was in charge of the program. Mentors met throughout the school year to discuss common issues, to problem solve, and to address subsequent needs. The district allowed course reimbursement for two courses per year at the state college rate to help teachers attain professional status. The pool of funds used for this reimbursement had increased from $15,000 to $25,000 with the approval of the current teacher contract. Administrators stated that adequate funds were available and that many veteran teachers took advantage of this opportunity as well.

The EQA examiners spoke with both mentors and mentees in the program. Mentees highly rated the feedback and support from the formal mentoring program and stated that it continued on an informal basis in years two and three. Likewise, those trained as mentors described it as a growth oriented and learning opportunity for them as well. The assistant principal at the high school trained mentors and supervised the program.

4. The district provided teachers and administrators who were new to the district or their assignments with coaches or mentors in their respective roles and included an initial orientation that addressed the importance of the assessment and use of student data.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The superintendent was in charge of mentoring new principals and met with them monthly, sometimes individually and sometimes paired at a specific level.

New teachers were required to attend a two-day induction program in August, which the director of curriculum and staff development coordinated. As cited, all teachers new to the Grafton school district, whether new to the profession or veteran teachers, received a formal mentor for one year. Interviewees stated that despite the brief period of mentorship, many formed long-lasting collegial friendships. New teachers also told the EQA examiners that other more experienced teachers at their grade or team level offered them much help as well. New teachers, equally represented in interview sessions, spoke positively regarding the quality of help and support they were getting from their colleagues and principals.

Although specific training in the use of TestWiz had not been widely provided in the district, analyzing test scores, especially from quarterly benchmark testing at the elementary level and from the MCAS tests, was a predominant use of team, faculty, and in-service sessions for all teachers in the district. All teachers have had ongoing training with a consultant who has helped them develop benchmark assessments for their students. The elementary school had made the most progress in this effort, which was in the intermediate stages at the middle and secondary levels. The ongoing training in developing quarterly benchmark assessments based on the district's curriculum which adequately aligns with the state frameworks had developed a common understanding of the importance of using formative assessments to inform instruction. The district was in the process of developing and implementing a standards-based report card at the elementary level, which it hopes will better inform parents of the degree to which all students are meeting grade-level standards and expectations. What remains for further development is correlating more definitively other forms of student achievement data, such as those from DRA, PSAT, SAT and MCAS testing and grades given at the secondary level on report cards.

5. The district's professional development programs included development of data analysis skills and the use of item analysis and disaggregated data to address all students' achievement.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The districtwide professional development had focused on data analysis for two years at all levels. The district was developing grade-level benchmarks and quarterly assessments at the elementary and middle levels, and had just started this process at the high school.

The middle school principal chaired a data analysis team, which reviewed the MCAS scores when the superintendent received them. These were then distributed to principals at each building. The data analysis committee was responsible for developing a report for the superintendent and the school committee.

At all levels, teachers have been actively involved in analyzing MCAS scores and local assessment data for trends and patterns and item analyses. Principals tracked the analysis of data and sent the results to the superintendent. The district had recently invested in a Scantron system in order to correct quarterly assessments and develop a data collection system to make quarterlies easier to analyze and track. At the same time, teachers at grade 2 had been learning to use DRA testing to correlate with the data from the quarterly assessments. In 2006-2007, the district has expanded this training to grade 1 teachers.

At the same time, the district expanded development of quality assessments to the middle school where quarterly assessments were under development. They included short answer and open-response questions, which the teachers corrected and then bubbled in. These assessments traversed entire grades at the middle level for midterms and finals. The middle school successfully used this type of assessment and data analysis to raise its math scores to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). The district accomplished this by increasing instructional time in mathematics and changing the model of the delivery of instruction at the middle level. At the high school, teachers gave common midterms and finals, which have developed within departments, between teachers assigned to teach the same course. The same consultant who has

worked in other district schools will commence in-service training at the high school in 2006-2007.

Achievement and program analysis for the special education subgroup in the district had not yet been addressed, either by using an outside consultant or internal review. Students on IEPs comprised the district's largest underperforming subgroup population.

6. The district's human resources policies and practices encouraged professional growth and recognition and placed high priority on retaining effective professional staff and on creating promotional opportunities for effective teachers.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district encouraged professional growth for teachers and placed high priority on retaining effective professional staff. It also created promotional opportunities for teachers by creating grade team leaders, mentors, and focused committees and study group opportunities for a large number of teachers in the district. For example, there were 34 stipended positions at the middle school and 17 at the elementary level, exclusive of mentor and special education chairpersons. In addition, there were multiple opportunities for teachers to participate in professional growth projects (two-year duration) and to participate in focused study groups. The individual or paired study groups were encouraged to share their professional growth projects in areas of expertise with their colleagues. At the high school, the district had department heads in every content area and equal opportunity to participate in focused study group efforts.

With increasing professional development funds, the teachers could also earn PDP approved in-service credits, which they could use to gain steps on the salary scale. They could also request approval to take two college or university courses per year and receive reimbursement at the state college rate.

The district had a majority of new administrators promoted from within the district, which included principals, assistant principals, department heads, homeless facilitator, and director of curriculum and staff development.

7. The district's professional development program was informed by most or all of the following: the instructional program content; student, teacher, and administrator needs as indicated by program assessments; research-based practices; the staff evaluation process; and student achievement data.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district's professional development program was aligned with the strategic plan and the SIPs. The focus of the professional development plan was data analysis, developing benchmark assessments, and learning to use the research-based practice of differentiated instruction.

District personnel used the analyses of student data, needs in instructional program content, and both student and teacher needs to develop the district's professional development program. According to interviewees, professional development was divided into three areas: that which had been developed by the central office and connected to the strategic plan, that which had been developed by principal and school leadership teams and connected to each respective SIP, and that which had been chosen to meet individual needs and connected to IPDPs. These themes were reflective of research-based practices and student achievement data.

Principals also planned school-based in-service on two half-days per year and ongoing professional development at two faculty meetings per month in each building.

According to interviewees, representatives from the curriculum planning council (CPC) and administrators from each level of schooling informed the district's professional development program. The director of curriculum and staff development, as a permanent member of the CPC, oversaw the work of the committee. It was less evident that the staff evaluation process informed the professional development program. In the sample of evaluations that the EQA team reviewed, only a small number of evaluations contained recommendations for improvement or made suggestions for growth or improving overall effectiveness in improving student achievement.

With respect to professional development regarding administrative needs, it was clear from reading the teacher evaluations that there was a wide range of expertise among principals in the

ability to write evaluations that were informative, instructive, and contributed to professional growth and overall professional development. The superintendent modeled well-written evaluations for his principals in his writing of their evaluations.

Based on the random sample of teacher evaluations reviewed by the EQA, the district had not yet established common expectations with respect to the depth and comprehensiveness of either the written observations or the summative evaluations. The use of a common language in writing evaluations and a similar focus on research-based instructional practices to improve student achievement had not yet been established and was not consistent among principals in the district.

8. Changes in the expectations for programs and practice were monitored and supported by changed supervision and evaluation standards and in the professional development plans of professional staff.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Changes in the expectations for programs and practice were supported by the expectation that during time for teacher collaboration and in-service, teachers were to keep notes and submit them to the department head, principal, and/or the director of curriculum and staff development. Examples of written products from teacher meeting times were most numerous from the elementary and middle levels.

In addition, the elementary and middle school principals were required to write and submit to the superintendent executive summaries of quarterly assessments. Likewise, teacher teams and departments at the high school were required to complete written analyses of trends and patterns and item analyses of MCAS data for submittal to the superintendent. The results of common exams were analyzed at the department level or within a subject area.

Principals had copies of all updated individual professional development plans (IPDPs), consisting of a compilation of progress toward recertification and a log of PDP activities. Principals told the EQA examiners that they checked for alignment of individual goals with the strategic plan (DIP) and respective SIPs. The EQA examiners could not verify that activities

logged linked closely to individual needs and connected to specific individual summative evaluations.

When teachers at all levels were asked about expectations for changes in programs and practice, they expressed consensus that administrators expected a focus on analysis of data, the development of common assessments, and the use of differentiated instruction at all levels in the district. Teachers and administrators frequently cited in-service training and a focus on using differentiated instruction as the subject of ongoing professional development and expectations of all classrooms. Work on differentiated instruction had begun in 2003-2004 with workshops from Teachers 21. The district had purchased Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) videos, and study groups had formed to develop lessons using differentiated instruction by ability. Some teachers became trainers and led the development of lessons in 2005-2006. The district leadership wanted educator designed activities to ascertain that differentiated instruction went into practice.

According to interviewees, differentiated instruction at grades K-2 focused on ability, and faculty produced different materials and responses. At grades 3-5, differentiated instruction focused on using diverse strategies, and at the middle school it addressed learning styles. Elementary teachers had received the most training and could describe Tier 1, 2, and 3 examples as a way to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners. In EQA classroom observations, although the team gave high ratings to indicators of engagement, resources for differentiated instruction, and interaction of students, they rated much lower indicators that addressed planning multiple tasks for students and student-to-student interaction.

The middle school SIP included differentiated instruction and responsive classroom goals. According to interviewees, students could do different types of independent study projects and have come a long way at the middle level. According to the New England Middle League of Middle Schools (NELMS) accreditation report done in May 2006, evaluators did not often observe implementation of differentiated instruction strategies in classroom observations. Likewise, in the EQA classroom visits, indicators of the fidelity of implementation of differentiated instruction received the lowest ratings in the protocol. Examiners saw evidence of multiple tasks that engaged all learners in 23 percent of classes observed. Only eight percent of

classes observed engaged in a variety of instructional techniques such as differentiated instruction. In 80 percent of classrooms observed, the classroom focused on challenging academic tasks. In 58 percent of classes observed, the interaction between students was constructive and productive. Finally, in 64 percent of classes observed the classroom was filled with multiple resources for student learning which addressed diverse learning styles.

According to interviewees at the high school, they were in the beginning stages of differentiated instruction training. Students could "contract up" in classes, but they did not know how widely this was used. According to the classroom observations by the EQA examiners, the ratings of indicators that directly measured the implementation of differentiated instruction strategies were lower at the high school than at the middle school. At the high school, due to the degree of stratification (four levels was the norm in most departments), there was less of a focus on, and interviewees expressed less of an urgency for, using differentiated instruction as a way to engage more learners in order to promote higher levels of achievement.

According to interviewees, administrators had a chart to keep track of what they were looking for. Yet it was not evident that they monitored classrooms to assess whether changes in the expectations for implementing the practice of differentiated instruction resulted in improvement, or that they supported these expectations by changed supervision.. Classroom observations showed that across the district a prevalence of whole class instruction continued to exist, especially at the high school and to a lesser extent at the middle school. Although the EQA team observed cooperative learning activities such as paired learning, taking on different roles, and small group learning, and they observed increased student engagement at the elementary level, tiered classroom instruction was not prevalent, since in most observations all students were engaged in one learning activity. In most classrooms, the team observed teacher talk with good quality questioning to be the norm, while student-to-student interaction was far less prevalent.

9. The district's evaluation procedure for administrators' performance was aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act and was informative and instructive, and used to promote individual growth and overall effectiveness. Compensation and continued employment were linked to evidence of effectiveness, as measured by improvement in student performance and other relevant school data.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to school committee policy, approved on October 28, 2002 and revised on September 26, 2005, the school committee believed that quality teaching is of critical importance to a sound educational program and that thorough and regular appraisal of teaching, supervisory, and administrative performance is crucial to improving the total educational process. A continuous program of performance appraisal of all professional personnel was to be established and maintained. The purpose of performance appraisal was to ensure a high quality of teaching, supervisory, and administrative performance, primarily to advance the instructional program for students. Another purpose of the evaluation system was to provide information to management and leadership personnel to assist them in making personnel decisions.

The district's procedure for evaluation of administrators' performance aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act and was informative and instructive and promoted individual growth and overall effectiveness. The superintendent completed informative and instructive evaluations of principals annually. The EQA examiners reviewed the evaluations of 15 administrators who worked in Grafton during the period under review. With the exception of those administrators about to retire or those in their first year, the superintendent had completed informative, instructive, and growth oriented evaluations annually.

Compensation and continued employment were linked to evidence of effectiveness, as measured by accomplishment of mutually agreed upon goals that had been outlined in each respective SIP and/or aligned with the strategic plan. Therefore, improvement in student performance and other relevant school data only loosely supported increased employment compensation and duration of contract. Although the improvement of student achievement was the overarching goal of each

contract, concrete measurable goals that focused on increasing student achievement were not evident in each SIP.

Similarly, the raises afforded the superintendent had less to do with overall student achievement data and more to do with ensuring that his salary was commensurate with that of other superintendents in surrounding towns, which were somewhat higher. The contracts of the district's administrators and that of the superintendent did not have automatic rollovers; the superintendent needed to extend them for district administrators, while the school committee had to extend the contract of the superintendent.

10. The district's evaluation procedure for teachers' performance was aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act and was informative and instructive and used to promote individual growth and overall effectiveness. The district provided opportunities for additional professional development and support to struggling teachers. After following due process, the district took action against persistently low-performing teachers.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district's evaluation procedure for professional status teachers' performance did not align with all of the requirements of the Education Reform Act. For example, summative evaluations were not done in alternating years for professional status teachers. Instead, the performance evaluation in the current contract consisted of a four-year evaluation cycle consisting of two phases. One phase, called the comprehensive phase, consisted of "observations, personal self-reflective activity, parent/student feedback survey activity, and a summary evaluation conducted by the administrator." The next phase, called the professional growth phase, consisted of "a selection from three options – individual PD plan, collegial partnership, district partnership – from which a plan must be developed, submitted for approval and implemented during the two years." In this event, a tangible work product was required, but the district had done no classroom observations to verify implementation of the plan developed from the selected option.

The EQA examiners reviewed a random sample of 40 evaluation folders of a mix of non-professional status and professional status teachers. Seventeen evaluations in the sample were for non-professional status teachers and 23 were for professional status teachers. The examiners

looked for evidence that evaluations considered qualities of effective teaching and were timely, informative, instructive, and used to promote individual growth and overall effectiveness, which are the requirements set by the Department of Education. Evaluators had evaluated all of the non-professional status teachers annually, and so the EQA team considered them timely. The team considered nine of the remaining 23 evaluations of professional status teachers to be timely and summative, since principals completed them at least in alternating years and based them on observations of actual classroom practice.

All evaluations of teachers in the sample selected stated that all of the teachers were meeting or exceeding district standards. When the EQA examiners asked teachers in interview sessions about this, they said that perhaps the face-to-face post conferences with principals elicited expectations or substantive comments that were more specific than those they put into writing. The EQA examiners found that 38 of the evaluations were informative, in that they described and commented on the quality of the instruction . In contrast, in only 16 of the 40 evaluations did the principals or assistant principals suggest ways for enriching the instruction or lessons observed or extending and improving upon the learning, based on what the team observed in the classroom. Finally, in only seven of 40 evaluations did principals or assistant principals make suggestions to the teacher that the team considered could promote growth and overall effectiveness. Most of the quality feedback went to teachers on non-professional status, and very little critical feedback went to teachers who had four or more years in the school district.

When asked whether the district provided opportunities for additional professional development and support to struggling teachers, teacher interviewees cited a number of examples. Principals interviewed stated that if a non-professional status teacher was still struggling at the end of three years, the district did not granted professional status. At least one principal confirmed that the district had not rehired a non-professional status teacher for a subsequent year based on performance. The teacher contract provided a remediation plan for a professional status teacher who had received an unsatisfactory performance review. None of the principals interviewed could confirm that the district had ever used this in dismissal situations.

11. Administrators in the district used effective systems of supervision to implement district/school programs and goals for improving student achievement in their respective assignments, and used these systems to address the strengths and needs of assigned staff.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

In individual interviews, the team asked principals about active supervision, in other words, how they knew that teachers were implementing the curriculum. Principals stated that they tried to be in classrooms frequently. Teachers, when interviewed, told the EQA that expectations were clear, especially regarding the use of data analysis and the use of differentiated instruction, which were district goals. They also stated that they worked in teams to discuss lessons in implementing the curriculum and that it would be obvious if some classes were doing something else. Classroom observations by EQA examiners, especially those at the elementary level, confirmed that there was consistency of curriculum delivery across teachers at the same grade level.

None of the principals used a written or formal walk-through protocol that focused on district or school expectations. However, teachers stated that they sometimes received a note in their mailbox commending them for something that the principal had observed in a walk-through.

The district used the curriculum planning council (CPC), on which administrators, principals, and teachers served, as a forum to discuss the future professional development needs of teachers. Principals told the EQA that they had reassigned teachers, especially at the secondary level, to teach where they would be most effective . They cited examples at the middle school where higher math achievement had been targeted, and at the high school where the needs of students entering grade 8 and the achievement of students in honors and AP classes had been targeted.

12. The district's employment (human resources), supervision, and professional development processes were linked and supported by appropriate levels of funding.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school year for students was 183 days. Teachers in Grafton worked 188 days, which included five full in-service days and four half-days for professional development. According to the superintendent, teachers had the equivalent of eight days of in-service time throughout the school year to focus on district and school goals.

The district linked its employment, supervision, and professional development processes. The director of curriculum and staff development worked to tie change in curriculum, assessment, and data analysis to the districtwide programs for professional development. In addition, school-based plans aligned with the district's strategic plan (DIP) and, according to principals and teachers, were supported by appropriate levels of funding. The director of curriculum and staff development stated that the district made a concerted effort to eliminate one-day workshops unless they were essential to one's position or part of an ongoing effort that was in the strategic plan.

As cited, the new teacher contract increased the option for individuals to take up to two courses per year with partial reimbursement, which supported recertification and ongoing professional developments needs. According to the director of curriculum and staff development, principals checked on alignment with the SIP and strategic plan (DIP) to approve all individual requests and then submitted the requests for her approval.

13. <u>The district provided ongoing and regular training in dealing with crises and emergencies to all staff, provided procedures for substitutes, student-teachers, and volunteers responsible for students, and provided opportunities to practice emergency procedures with all students.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

In 2002, the police and fire departments were involved in creating the district's first comprehensive safety plan. The superintendent provided ongoing and regular training in dealing with crises and emergencies to principals at administrative meetings.

Each principal had an updated safety plan on hand and teachers had evacuation routes and plans in classrooms. The schools provided bus evacuation drills twice a year for students who

regularly rode the school buses. Provisioning for students who generally walked to school but may have the opportunity to be bussed on a field trip was not yet provided.

Principals were expected to provide ongoing training for teachers in dealing with crises and emergencies and each school had a designated crisis team. Principals were responsible for informing substitutes about emergency procedures. Students had regular opportunities to practice fire drills and other emergency procedures. According to principals, each school periodically did a simulation practice regarding a school lockdown. The crisis team in each school met periodically to update information and coordinate activities. Principals also had access to Global Connect, which enabled them to notify parents of school-based emergencies.

Standard V: Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support											
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**Total**
Excellent											
Satisfactory		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		**5**
Needs Improvement	✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	**5**
Unsatisfactory											

V. Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

The district provided quality programs for all students that were comprehensive, accessible and rigorous. Student academic support services and district discipline and behavior practices addressed the needs of all students. The district was effective in maintaining high rates of attendance for students and staff and retained the participation of students through graduation.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- District schools increasingly used formative and summative assessments to identify students not meeting academic expectations. A similar process at the secondary level (grades 6-12) resulted in the implementation of criterion-referenced midterm and final common assessments in all subject areas.
- The collection and analysis of student achievement data was a major goal of the district. Consultant training and in-service professional development time were provided to enable faculty to make better use of data collection and analysis techniques to support instruction.
- Analysis of local benchmarked assessment data had become a common practice, although much of the analysis of disaggregated data focused on grade level and departmental results rather than student subgroup performance.
- During the review period, the district's aggregate student attendance rate steadily declined. A similar pattern was apparent in the increased number of students chronically absent at both the elementary and secondary levels.
- The district has done much to facilitate student transitions between schools, grade levels, and programs.

- Grafton's carefully articulated, vertically and horizontally aligned K-12 curriculum greatly enhanced academic transitions.
- Administrators and staff were very pleased that their student suspension, retention, and dropout rates were historically very low, and that they remained substantially below state averages throughout the period under review.

Summary

The district provided a wide variety of educational services and supplementary programs at all grade levels designed to meet learning needs and improve academic achievement, and implemented or expanded a range of special education supports, including early intervention, programs before and after school, and summer remedial programs. The districtwide use of summative assessments helped to identify students performing below grade level. Although the district's proportions of limited English proficient (LEP), transient, and homeless students remained very low, it endeavored to provide these populations with a full range of appropriate programs and services.

The district's two primary subgroups, special education and low-income pupils, were substantially underrepresented in all advanced and accelerated academic programs in grades 8-12. Although the district permitted students who did not meet qualifying criteria and prerequisites to elect honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, very few chose to do so. The district presented little evidence that school leadership had initiated formal policies or practices to increase subgroup representation in these rigorous courses in order to close the achievement gap.

Student attendance rates in the district steadily declined throughout the review period. The rate fell from 95.8 percent in 2004 to 95.1 percent in 2005 and reached 94.8 percent in 2006. The high school attendance rate was 94.0 percent in 2006. A similar pattern was seen in the data regarding the percentage of students chronically absent from school across all grade levels. Disaggregated analysis of attendance data revealed considerably higher absenteeism rates among special education and low-income students.

Suspension rates in the district remained substantially below state averages during the period under review. Between 2004 and 2006, Grafton's out-of-school suspension rate averaged 2.6

percent, compared to the state average of 5.9 percent. During that same period, the in-school suspension rate averaged 3.1 percent, compared to a state average of almost four percent. In addition, retention rates at all grade levels, as well as the high school dropout rate, remained well below state averages. The administration presented little evidence to examiners that it analyzed disciplinary and/or dropout data in any regular or systematic manner.

Indicators

1. The district administration and staff used aggregated and disaggregated student achievement data on student participation and achievement to adjust instruction and policies for at-risk populations and provided additional programs and supports to assist their progress and academic achievement.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the period under review, the district made improved and expanded use of student achievement data. The district strategic plan, published in June 2005, identified the "development of a systems approach to analyzing and using data" as a major goal of the school system. Interviews with administrators and staff confirmed the increased attention given to the development, use, and analysis of criterion-referenced assessments and MCAS data to enhance instruction at all grade levels. The district created a districtwide data analysis committee to review and analyze MCAS data and report strengths, weaknesses, and other pertinent data to central office and building administrators. Furthermore, school-based data analysis committees were established to identify and examine each school's MCAS results and to develop corrective actions as appropriate. Although the district has subsequently disaggregated student achievement data, data analysis in the district has thus far focused primarily on categories such as teacher, subject area, and/or grade level(s), rather than the performance of specific student subgroups such as special education and low-income students.

At grades K-5, the district developed and implemented benchmarked quarterly assessments in both ELA and mathematics. Consulting support and in-service training enabled teachers to design these grade-level assessments and analyze their results . At grades 6-12, a similar process resulted in the implementation of criterion-referenced midterm and final common assessments in

all subject areas. Those interviewed indicated that using the district's Power School software for its student information system, the faculty had begun to collect, disaggregate, and analyze the results of these assessments. Administrators acknowledged that additional training, particularly at the secondary level, was needed and planned in order to make data analysis a more effective tool to support student progress and promote academic achievement.

Increased emphasis on collection and analysis of student achievement data led the district to implement numerous adjustments to programs, policies, and instruction. At the elementary level for example, interviewees explained that they had instituted major revisions to mathematics curriculum and instruction. Math instruction increased from 45 to 75 minutes each day and included considerably more writing, open-response questions, and use of manipulatives. Flexible groupings created in grades K-2 provided identified students with increased spelling, reading, comprehension, and literacy experiences. An emphasis on differentiated instruction and an increased variety of before, during, and after school academic supports, as well as summer programs, illustrated the district's commitment to address the educational needs of all students.

Administrators described a number of data-driven revisions to the middle school curriculum. Among these was a substantial increase in mathematics instructional time, including a double math block for half the year and increased professional development training for staff. The district provided students needing remediation with supplemental small group support in both content and study skills. In addition, ACES, an after school enrichment/remediation program, had become more data driven. The ACES director explained that the district now based student eligibility for the program on scores from the MCAS and other standardized tests, as well as teacher referrals, and that it was often included as a recommendation in IEPs. Interviewees further reported that student report card failure rates had declined noticeably at the middle school.

2. <u>At each grade level, the district used formative assessments and summative data to identify all students who did not meet expectations and provided these students with supplementary and/or remedial services that resulted in improved academic achievement and MCAS test proficiency.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district made increased use of both formative and summative assessments to identify underperforming students and provide them with appropriate remedial services. In addition to increased analysis of MCAS data, elementary staff, with the assistance of a consultant, developed benchmarked grade-level quarterly assessments at grades K-5 in ELA and mathematics. Further, those interviewed reported the use of a variety of other assessments, including the DRA, the QRI, the GRADE, and McGraw Hill anthology assessments, to be among the most valuable and widely used of their diagnostic tools. Teachers subsequently made referrals for Title I services, remedial reading assistance, and a wide range of other appropriate academic supports and accommodations. In addition, administrators indicated that a voluntary extended-day program had been established at the elementary level to provide one hour of after-school support to students whose scores on the grade 3 MCAS reading test warranted it. Further, the district also implemented low cost after-school programs offering reading support (Model T C.A.R.S) and enrichment (ACES) at the elementary level.

At the secondary level in grades 6-12, the district implemented common criterion-referenced midterms and final assessments in all subject areas and academic levels. Consulting services were provided and professional development time and resources devoted to assist faculty in the development and analysis of these student assessments. High school staff also reported that other sources of student achievement data (e.g., PSAT and SAT results) were receiving increased scrutiny. Further, students in grades 9-12 had access to a wide range of courses, academic levels, and supports designed to meet diverse learning needs. These included MCAS remediation and alternative classes in all core courses for special education students. These classes were smaller so that teachers, tutors, and aides could provide needed remediation and individualized attention. Promotion was based on students earning a predetermined number of credits each year in those core courses and elective areas that were specified for graduation. All of this was clearly explained in the high school's program of studies catalogue. As at the elementary and middle schools, the high school utilized a Student Support Team (SST) that responded proactively and constructively to student performance concerns. Interviewees explained that the SST proposed a wide variety of academic accommodations and modifications, as well as personal supports, to enable students to be successful. They indicated that there was a continuous flow of information between the SST and guidance counselors, special education staff, and classroom teachers. In

addition, Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) were developed to support underperforming students as they worked toward meeting their MCAS goals. According to interviewees, ISSPs were prescriptive, diagnostic, and included identification of the learning standard(s), deficiencies, and appropriate remedial strategies and materials.

A review of DOE Coordinated Program Review documents and NEASC progress reports confirmed that the district had responded appropriately to recommendations relative to supplementary programs, remedial services, academic accommodations, and curriculum revisions. Administrators collected and shared data more systematically with curriculum leaders and classroom teachers. Staff reported the increased use of data to inform decision-making, design or improve educational programs and services, develop/revise curriculum, and contribute to overall student MCAS proficiency.

During the period under review, all Grafton student subgroups, with the exception of Asian students and students with disabilities, had improved MCAS performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The performance of Asian students declined and the performance of students with disabilities was relatively flat. The most improved subgroups in ELA were regular education and low-income students. In mathematics, all subgroups in Grafton showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in mathematics were low-income students and those with disabilities. The performance gap between the highest and lowest performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 30 PI points in 2003 to 27 PI points in 2006. The performance gap between the highest and lowest performing subgroups in mathematics narrowed from 41to 34 PI points during this same period.

3. Early intervention programs in literacy were provided at the primary education level to ensure that all students were reading at the 'Proficient' level on the MCAS test by the end of grade 4.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Although the district's aggregate scores were above state averages, the grades 3-5 student subgroup failed to meet AYP in ELA in both 2005 and 2006. Those interviewed expressed awareness of the issue and described a number of efforts and initiatives undertaken in response

to the problem. The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of the elementary schools included improving student reading and writing skills as major academic goals. The district added remedial and developmental reading programs and increased the number of reading specialists in order to deliver needed programs and services. The district assigned Title I teachers and reading specialists to targeted populations, with grades 1 and 2 receiving particular focus. A variety of diagnostic assessments, including GRADE, DRA, and QRI, as well as local benchmarks, grade-level writing rubrics (McGraw Hill), and writing guidelines were implemented. Under the direction of a consultant, the elementary school teachers created and implemented carefully benchmarked grade-level quarterly assessments.

Interviewees identified an extensive array of instructional supports and curriculum enhancements implemented as part of the district initiative. Elementary teachers and administrators received training in NCS Mentor for writing MCAS prompts and devoted in-service release time to MCAS data analysis activities. SIPs called for an increased emphasis on collection and analysis of student achievement data, and administrators and building Student Support Teams made more and better use of a variety of disaggregated data. Among the literacy programs cited as most effective were: a) McGraw Hill writing prompts, reading comprehension, and dictation for quarterly assessments; b) LINKS templates and graphic organizers for paragraph development; c) writing process enhancements using weekly "quick write prompts"; d) Accelerated Reader technology integration; e) daily journal writing; f) differentiated instruction resources designed and used for writing prompts and skill readiness; g) creation of Literacy Circles that featured different genres of writing and were accessible during lunch and recess; h) before and after school and summer reading programs established or expanded. Finally, examiners learned that the elementary schools sponsored a number of parent programs and workshops that focused on literacy issues and related home-school collaborations.

4. <u>District administration and staff helped all students make effective transitions from one school, grade level, or program to another. This assistance was focused on maintaining or improving levels of student performance.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district devoted considerable attention and effort to improving school, grade-level, and program transition practices and procedures for all students. Interviewees reported the district had taken a number of specific actions during the period under review. The districtwide CPC, under the direction of the director of curriculum and staff development, created a vertically and horizontally integrated K-12 curriculum, carefully aligning it with the state curriculum frameworks and MCAS requirements. In interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents, they concurred that the curriculum work had resulted in a much more uniform, equitable, and high quality learning experience for students across the district. An important component of the district's curriculum improvement efforts was the creation of system-wide, benchmarked quarterly (K-5) and midterm and final (6-12) standardized assessments. These assessments also served to generate substantial student performance data that the district analyzed as a means of validating and/or improving curriculum, instruction, or the assessments.

Because of the district's school building and grade configurations, student transition points occurred at grades preK-K, 2-3, 5-6, and 8-9. Accordingly, those interviewed described a wide variety of orientation, school visitation, curriculum nights, and open house programs provided annually for students and their parents. Additionally, the school councils of the sending and receiving schools have begun to hold joint meetings to discuss transition issues and concerns and develop enhanced practices and procedures. They also cited improved communication between special education and guidance staffs, as well as academic department members and building administrators, as indicative of the systemic improvements developed.

In response to recommendations contained in the high school's NEASC accreditation report, the district had paid much attention to the development of more effective coordination and articulation policies, practices, and procedures between the middle and high schools. Interviewees reported that the schools had used professional development time and resources to allow for vertical meetings within academic departments. It was believed that this had done much to improve curriculum alignment and create a smoother academic transition for incoming grade 9 students. Additionally, they credited the increased collection and use of student performance data, along with the more systematic sharing and analysis of that data, by the

guidance and special education staffs at both buildings with making important contributions to more effective student transitions.

The number of limited English proficient (LEP) students in the district remained small throughout the review period. The DOE data for 2005-2006 reported the LEP population to be 1.0 percent, well below the 5.6 percent state average. Grafton's 2003 CPR report had cited a number of noncompliance issues, including eligibility determination, service initiation, IEP development/content, parental notification, provision of related services, and equitable facilities. Interviews with administrators and a review of the district's CPR report to the DOE confirmed that the district had corrected or was working to correct these noncompliance issues. In response to one of these recommendations, it placed the program under the direction of a single administrator. Under the leadership of the district's new LEP program director, improved procedures, practices, and protocols were established and consistently followed. A review of LEP student folders revealed that the district had met all legal and educational requirements for testing and related academic support services.

5. The district had fair and equitable policies, procedures, and practices to reduce discipline referrals, grade retention, suspension, and exclusion.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Although the district had not developed formal, system-wide written policies relative to discipline referrals, promotion, suspensions, and exclusions, a review of student handbooks revealed that relevant procedures and practices were established and communicated at the individual building levels. Student handbooks were clear and comprehensive. The school councils annually revised and distributed them to all families served. Interviewees explained that the three elementary principals coordinated many of their procedures. For example, the School Improvement Plans of the elementary schools reflected alignment on a number of components, including their joint implementation of Responsive Classroom principles and practices.

The middle school had implemented several specialized programs, such as peer mediation, and student recognition activities to improve school climate and reinforce positive behaviors. Administrators indicated that they have considered the Responsive Classroom model for middle

school implementation as well. Interviewees expressed the belief that these kinds of programs had a beneficial impact within the school community, and parents, students, and staff tended to view them favorably. Both the middle and high school employed out-of-school suspension as a disciplinary tool. In-school suspension was utilized at the high school only. According to DOE statistics, during the period under review suspension rates remained below state averages. The district's out-of-school suspension rate between 2004 and 2006 averaged 2.6 percent compared to the state average of 5.9 percent. During that same period, the high school's in-school suspension rate averaged 3.1 percent compared to a state average of 3.7 percent. In addition, retention rates at all grade levels in the district remained substantially below state averages.

The district used the Power School student information system to manage student academic, attendance, and disciplinary data. Much of the data were thereby accessible electronically at grades 6-12 to teachers, parents, and students. The director of technology oversaw and supported the district's data collection and management system; he disaggregated the data by special education, grade level, low income, course, and teacher, and made them available to central office and building administrators. They then became their responsibility to disseminate them to staff.

6. <u>The district had policies, procedures, and practices to prevent or minimize dropping out, and to recover dropouts and return them to an educationally appropriate placement.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district's dropout rate had historically been low and it continued to be lower than the state average throughout the period under review. The district's dropout rate averaged 2.4 percent during the review period, a rate that was almost half the state's average dropout rate. An analysis of the class of 2006 data revealed that only eight students out a cohort of 113 students had actually withdrawn from school. According to interviewees, central office and high school administrators administered dropout programs and prevention services in a collaborative manner. Those interviewed asserted that they had done much to prevent, minimize, and recover dropouts and indicated that substantial time, attention, and staffing resources were devoted to the effort.

Staff cited the increase in the number of school psychologists/adjustment counselors to seven as evidence of the district's commitment to the social and emotional welfare of its students. Their role included membership on SSTs, which were composed of high school special educators, guidance staff, school resource officer, school nurse, administration, and classroom teacher(s). Interventions for at risk students were initiated on a case-by-case basis. These teams worked in an intensive manner with at risk students and their families and developed a wide range of school-based and collaborative support programs and therapeutic services for them. Among those interviewees cited as particularly effective were a variety of school initiated internships and work study programs, dual enrollment at Quinsigamond Community College, the federally funded Grafton Job Corps, and a regional career academy that provided both vocational and academic options for at-risk students. Additionally, in order to provide appropriate educational options for students who had been unable to gain admission to the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School, the high school had begun to introduce some vocational programs (e.g., the greenhouse program) on a limited basis. Further, administrators identified a number of alternative academic classes and counseling/support services that were available at Grafton High School. Administrators and staff felt that the high school responded proactively and appropriately to students with serious academic and/or disciplinary problems in order to prevent them from withdrawing from school. They also believed that the district had provided them with adequate resources to do so effectively.

7. <u>The district implemented policies and programs that addressed the needs of transient and homeless students and provided them with timely and equitable access to quality programs.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Although the number of transient and homeless students had historically been very low and averaged only one or two students during the review period, the district implemented a comprehensive set of policies and programs to meet their needs. Grafton's homelessness/out-of-district coordinator administered programs and services for these students. Interviewees reported that the district took its responsibilities seriously and that all of the services and supports required by state and federal statutes (e.g., McKinney Vento Assistance Act) were in place and provided to its homeless/transient population. These included Title I and special education

services, as well as extensive collaborations with parents, foster parents, and a variety of state and local agencies and organizations.

Policies and relevant information were included in the student handbooks of each of the district's schools, as well as in the policy manual of the school committee. In addition, appropriate notices were prominently posted in public buildings throughout the community. The homeless coordinator indicated that she regularly worked with a number of educational and social service agencies, such as the DOE, DYS, and DSS, to ensure provision of all necessary and appropriate academic and personal support services. Further, although very small, the district monitored its homeless and transient student population continually in order to maintain a high level of timely and individualized assistance.

8. <u>District and school policies and practices promoted the importance of student attendance, and attendance was continuously monitored, reported, and acted upon.</u>

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Although all those interviewed stated that student attendance was a district priority with the exception of at the high school, there were no formal attendance policies in place in the district's schools. According to the high school handbook, students could be denied academic credit if they exceeded 10 days of unexcused absence in a full-year course and five days in half-year courses. The middle school and high school used their school resource officer (SRO) to deal with absentee concerns. The SRO regularly attended SST meetings and was described as a valuable resource in supporting the schools' efforts. Administrators reported that they attempted to align attendance practices among the three elementary schools. Daily attendance was taken in all the buildings using the district's highly capable Power School computer software system. School administrators and guidance staff and routinely reviewed and distributed daily attendance to all classroom teachers. Attendance letters, phone calls to students' homes, and parent conferences were among the attendance strategies cited as employed in all the schools. The district enlisted the services of outside agencies such as DSS when necessary. Interviewees also reported that Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petitions had been filed in the most exigent cases.

A careful review of DOE data revealed that the district's aggregate student attendance rate had steadily dropped from 95.8 percent in 2004 to 94.8 percent in 2006, a rate only slightly above the state average. School attendance was, on average, increasing across the state while declining in Grafton. A similar pattern of decline was present in the district's data for the percentage of pupils chronically absent (i.e., absent more than 10 percent of the school year). Analysis of disaggregated data showed considerably higher absentee rates among special education and low income subgroups. Further analysis showed the high school's attendance rate had fallen to 94.0 percent and that chronic absenteeism had spiked in grades 3, 4, 5, and in grades 7-12. Central office and building administrators, in interviews, stated that they were unaware of these attendance statistics and patterns and acknowledged that the district had conducted little formal, systematic, or disaggregated analysis of student attendance and disciplinary data.

9. District and school policies and practices promoted and tracked the importance of staff attendance and participation, and appropriate provisions were made to ensure continuity of the instructional program.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Although Grafton did not have a formal districtwide staff attendance policy, principals indicated that staff attendance was carefully monitored at the building levels and that the central office regularly provided attendance data to assist them in doing so. They further explained that the issue of staff attendance was addressed at administrative council meetings, and that they were encouraged to speak with any faculty member(s) who presented an excessive absence pattern. Teacher focus groups confirmed this practice. Faculty handbooks described in detail the procedures to follow in the case of classroom teacher absence. Substitute hiring and coverage for teachers absent were arranged through the central office. Administrators at the elementary and middle levels and department heads at the high school worked closely with substitutes. They were responsible for facilitating the efforts of substitutes to ensure that they fully implemented the lesson plans provided by the classroom teacher and maintained instructional continuity.

When interviewed, both administrators and teachers asserted they did not consider staff absenteeism to be a concern in the schools. They believed that positive morale, administrator expectations, and a tradition of collegiality contributed to consistent levels of daily attendance

throughout the district. A review of DOE data confirmed that the average number of days absent annually, excluding professional development days, was 10 days per teacher, and that this rate was essentially the same in each of the district's schools.

10. District and school leadership implemented policies, procedures, and practices to increase proportionate subgroup representation in advanced and/or accelerated programs, in order to close the achievement gap.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviews and documentation established that there were practices in place within the district designed to increase subgroup access and participation in advanced and/or accelerated academic programs. At the elementary levels, the district identified its differentiated instruction initiative as a primary vehicle for effectively meeting the range of student educational needs, interests, and abilities. An increased use of data to inform instruction, technology as an instructional tool, and a wide range of individualized educational activities and assignments supported this. In addition, a variety of co-curricular remedial and enrichment programs were available to students throughout the school year, as well as during the summer.

Administrators explained that the district introduced leveled classes in grade 7 mathematics and added a third, honors level Algebra class at grade 8. The honors curriculum continued and expanded in grades 9-12 to include classes in all core areas. Advanced Placement (AP) courses were available to juniors and seniors. Student handbooks and the program of study described qualifying criteria for admission to higher level and AP courses. They included grades earned in previous classes, scores on standardized tests, teacher and counselor recommendations, and parent requests. Administrators at both middle and high schools indicated that students who failed to meet the academic prerequisites were nonetheless permitted to elect these classes. Guidance counselors reported encouraging students to select the most challenging courses possible and communicating these expectations to parents. High school students also had the opportunity to "contract up," an option that allowed them to take certain courses at a higher level than offered in the program of studies, by entering into an academic "contract" with the department head. Little evidence was presented to EQA examiners that school administrators

initiated formal policies or practices to increase subgroup representation in the more rigorous academic programs in order to close the achievement gap.

The total number of students enrolled in AP classes was relatively small, averaging approximately eight percent of the high school population during the period under review. Of the seven AP courses offered, three were in science (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics) and the others were English, United States History, Calculus, and Computer Science. The foreign language department had not yet introduced any AP course(s). Approximately 70 percent of the students who took the AP examinations between 2004 and 2006 earned a passing grade of three or better. Administrators acknowledged that data analysis of student subgroup participation in honors and AP classes was not a regular or systematic practice. Consequently, they could not accurately describe how closely subgroup enrollment paralleled population proportions, although they speculated that they most likely did not match them. A review of data provided by the College Board revealed that, with the exception of Asian students, very little subgroup representation existed in any of the AP courses offered in Grafton.

Standard VI: Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency														
Ratings▼ Indicators►	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**Total**
Excellent														
Satisfactory	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**10**
Needs Improvement		✓		✓				✓						**3**
Unsatisfactory														

VI. Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The district engaged in a participative, well-documented, and transparent budget process that used student achievement as a factor in the overall budget. The district acquired and used financial, physical, and competitive capital resources to provide for and sustain the advancement of achievement for all students enrolled in the district. The district regularly assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of its financial and capital assets and had the ability to meet reasonable changes and unanticipated events.

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The superintendent stated that the town provided adequate financial resources to meet the educational needs of Grafton students, although the district was concerned that enrollment had been increasing every year and was projected to continue to increase in the future.
- The secondary building committee of the town retained a firm that recommended a 1,000 student high school be built. A need existed for short- and long-term solutions to the annual increases in student enrollment.
- Additional financial resources were required to maintain the technology operating system and to integrate technology into the curriculum.
- The budget process was "bottom up" with all stakeholders involved in the development of the budget. The town voted the budget as presented by the superintendent for the past three years.
- The town and the school department had a formal written agreement regarding the indirect costs for the school system related to services provided by the town. The allocation had been

based on percentages in lieu of actual expenditures in some cases. The director of finance contemplated a review of the agreement.

- Visits by the EQA examiners noted that each school was well maintained and conducive to learning. The schools had adequate security systems.
- The school system had adequate procedures in place to ensure that staff followed the state procurement laws. The school system employed a staff member with MCPPO credentials and a certified school business official. The town had employed the current auditing firm for a "long time."
- The district accounting system used antiquated financial software that did not adequately meet the needs of the town or the school system. The school system used a separate accounting system for the general ledger and payroll. Purchase orders were hand written and entered manually into the accounting system in addition to the payroll.
- The budget process did not include a formal review of suggested costs, except for special education, in analyzing disaggregated student assessment data to assure that adequate financial resources had been budgeted to support improved achievement for all students.

Summary

The school committee policy on the budget process designated the superintendent to prepare the district's budget in consultation with the administration, town administrator, and the finance committee. The superintendent used a "bottom up" budget development process that included all relevant stakeholders. The development of the budget started in August with the distribution of the budget booklet that outlined the parameters for recommended increases in the discretionary accounts for each school and administrative function. In order to provide equity, he based each budget line item on a per pupil cost allocation. The superintendent stated that the budget was "connected" to the goals contained in the strategic plan (DIP) and the SIPs. The budget took into consideration increasing student enrollment. Each of the principals and administration presented their budgets to the superintendent followed by presentations to the school committee. The school committee voted the preliminary budget followed by a public hearing in January. The superintendent recommended a final budget to the school committee for their approval. Meetings with town officials followed school committee approval prior to the town meeting held in May. The budget included a five-year capital plan that was part of the town's capital plan submitted to

the town administrator. The budget did not include funding from state and federal grants or from other fund sources. The superintendent stated that starting with the FY 2007 budget, information on state and federal grants would be included along with other fund sources.

The town of Grafton annually provided the necessary financial resources to ensure that the students received quality education that focused on the improvement of student achievement. The voters at the annual town meetings supported the superintendent's recommended budget. The principals/administrators, teachers, committee members, and town officials confirmed the adequacy of the budget. The budget increased by 21.5 percent over the past three years. The per pupil cost in FY 2005 for regular students was $5,838, compared to the state average of $7,421. In addition to the budget, the school system received $257,000 in foundation reserve (pothole) money and $638,806 in circuit breaker funds. During the period under review, the district received substantial increases in Chapter 70 funds.

The town allocated 60 percent of the town budget to the school system and 40 percent to the town. The school system exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirements for the period under review. The town had a balance of $2,882,657 in the stabilization account (6.8 percent of the general fund) and $2,384,172 in free cash for FY 2005. The town had used part of these funds to support the annual town budget.

All five schools were in good condition. The Grafton Elementary School was constructed in 2002, the South Grafton School in 1975, and the North Elementary School had been renovated in 1975. The high school was renovated in 1993. At the high school it was necessary to improvise the available space to accommodate the increasing student enrollment. The suggested timeline for a new high school will necessitate using portable classrooms for an extended period. The superintendent and the director of building and grounds met periodically to develop yearly maintenance projects. The town annually approved the district's capital maintenance projects. Each of the facilities had adequate custodial staff and districtwide maintenance personnel who kept the facilities well maintained. All of the schools had adequate security systems that included a buzzer system and camera monitoring system at the middle and high schools. A walk-through of the schools by the EQA examiners revealed the schools to be clean, well lit, well maintained, and conducive to promoting student achievement.

Indicators

1. The district's budget was developed through an open, participatory process, and the resulting document was clear, comprehensive, complete, current, and understandable. The budget also provided accurate information on all fund sources, as well as budgetary history and trends.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school committee's policy on budget planning states that as part of the annual budget process the superintendent shall prepare a list of priorities in specific areas of need, as determined by the administrative team; the superintendent shall also consult with the town administrator and the finance committee in the development of the budget. The superintendent followed this process and began the budget process in August with the distribution of the budget booklet and guidelines to the principals/directors. Principals and administrators submitted budgets in October followed by presentations to the superintendent. Each of the principals/directors made budget presentations to the school committee in November. The school committee adopted a preliminary budget in December, and then distributed the budget to the town administrator, selectmen, and finance committee. In January, the town officers held a public hearing and the superintendent recommended the budget to the school committee. The school committee reviewed and adopted the final budget, then held meetings with town officials prior to town meeting. The superintendent and the school committee presented the budget at the May town meeting. According to interviewees, there have not been any issues in having the town meeting approve the superintendent's requested budget.

The superintendent stated that the faculty, school councils, and relevant stakeholders reviewed and were involved in the development of the budget, which reflected the changing pattern of student enrollment. The superintendent categorized the budget process as "bottom up" and connected to the strategic plan (DIP) and the SIPs.

The budget document consisted of a narrative budget overview, classes and staffing, budget analysis, budget overview, five-year capital plan, capital project requests, and detailed line item report. The superintendent assigned an allocation for the discretionary accounts to each school of the district. In order to provide equity, except for salaries and districtwide accounts, each line

item was based on a per student cost allocation. The detailed line item report consisted of proposed versus. actual and the difference in staffing on an FTE basis. The budget did not include funding from state and federal grants or from other fund sources. The superintendent stated that starting with the FY 2007 budget, information on state and federal grants would be included along with other fund sources. The school committee had broadcast its budget meetings on local access television.

2. The budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of aggregate and disaggregated student assessment data to assure the budget's effectiveness in supporting improved achievement for all student populations.

Rating: Need Improvement

Evidence

The district used the aggregate assessment data that focused on the whole student population when developing the budget. The disaggregated analysis of student achievement of subgroups did not occur with the exception of the middle school special education population. The superintendent had participated in the development of the strategic plan (DIP), and had embedded student achievement data in the budget process. Administrators and principals regularly used assessment data in the development of the budget. In the preparation of the budget, a goal included the analysis and use of criterion-referenced assessment data to enhance instruction and improve student achievement. One of the superintendent's goals in the development of the budget was the maintenance of small class sizes. The district had budgeted in a new math series that it used to improve student achievement. The district purchased a Scantron which could disaggregate results of local student assessments.

After reviewing the MCAS test data for special needs students at the middle school, the superintendent added a math position to the budget and the district instituted an after-school MCAS remediation program. Cherub's Haven contracted with the Grafton school system to provide after-school and summer programs. The district had budgeted $20,000 for an after-school enrichment program. At the Grafton elementary schools, the district implemented an optional First Step Math program in addition to regular professional development. In response to the analysis of the data, the district added two reading positions at the elementary schools and

one at the middle school to support improved student achievement. Several of the state and federal grants focused on improving student achievement.

3. The district's budget and supplemental funding were adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and to provide for adequate operational resources. The community annually provided sufficient financial resources to ensure educationally sound programs and facilities of quality, as evidenced by a sufficient district revenue levy and level of local spending for education.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The superintendent stated that the budgets for the period under review were adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and adequate operational resources. The town approved the superintendent's recommendation at each of the town meetings. Interviews with the principals, staff, a committee member, and town officials confirmed the adequacy of the budget. The district's enrollment had been increasing each year, resulting in a need to provide adequate funding to meet the increasing student demand. According to an October 2, 2006 DOE report, the North and South Elementary Schools increased by 64 students, including 89 preschoolers; the Grafton Elementary School increased by 24 students from the previous year; the Grafton Middle School increased by 20 students; and Grafton High School increased by 53 students.

Due to increasing enrollment, the budget increased 4.9 percent ($16,595,328) in FY 2004, 5.5 percent ($17,513,715) in FY 2005, and 5.6 percent ($18,490,939) in FY 2006. The school system received $600,000 in circuit breaker funds, $638,806 in state and federal grants, $257,000 in foundation reserve (pothole) funds, and $125,000 in Medicaid funds that supplemented the budget. In FY 2005, the per pupil cost for regular education students in Grafton was $5,838, compared to the state average of $7,421 (a difference of $1,583). The per pupil cost for special education students in Grafton was $15,843, compared to the state average of $14,643 (a difference of $1,200).

The district exceeded the NSS requirement for each of the years of the period under review. Chapter 70 funding increased by $520,869 in FY 2004 (10.3 percent), $92,527 in FY 2005 (1.7 percent), $224,528 in FY 2006 (3.9 percent), and $667,254 in FY 2007 (11.3 percent), which

approximated 33 percent of the budget in each of the years. The foundation enrollment increased from 2,203 in FY 2003 to 2,426 in FY 2006 for an additional 223 students.

The town administrator stated that the school system received 73 percent (after deducting fixed costs) of the additional funding available to the town. The town budget was divided, with the school allocated 60 percent and the town 40 percent of the town budget. According to the Department of Revenue, the town had a balance of $2,882,657 in the stabilization fund (6.8 percent of the general fund) and $2,384,172 in free cash at the end of FY 2005. The town had used some of these funds as revenue for funding the town budget. The town was at its maximum tax levy.

4. The district, as part of its budget development**,** implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of all of its programs, initiatives, and activities. This process was based, in part, on student performance data and needs.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not have a formal review process to determine cost effectiveness for all programs and initiatives based on student performance data. Although not part of the budget development process, the principals and administration used student performance data to make changes in curriculum and programs that resulted in a more efficient delivery system. For example, they noted a decline in student enrollment upon review of the French language program, while Spanish enrollment was increasing. This resulted in the reduction of one French teacher and the start of a Latin program with an existing certified teacher.

The Grafton schools have been successful in reducing the need to place special education students in private schools, thus reducing the special needs tuition costs. The cafeteria program showed a decline in sales of lunches at the high school. The school surveyed the students as to what they would like in the lunch program. The high school used the survey results and implemented the student suggestions that resulted in increased revenue, and the program became more cost effective.

5. The district and community had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district budget by the community.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a cost allocation agreement covering certain municipal expenses that the town board of selectmen and the school committee had voted and signed on December 12, 2006. The agreement complied with CMR 10.04 that outlines the methodology for conformity with DOE guidelines. Prior to the signed written agreement, the district had used same methodology for several years. The allocation of costs in the agreement used percentages instead of actual expenditures in several areas. The director of finance indicated that the town would conduct a review of the allocation method in the future.

6. The combination of Chapter 70 Aid and local revenues, considering justified indirect charges, met or exceeded the Net School Spending (NSS) requirements of the education reform formula for the period under examination.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school department budget exceeded the required local contribution for each of the years under review. Required local contribution increased by 23 percent ($9,088,391 to $11,239,997) from FY 2003 to FY 2006. The Grafton school system exceeded the required NSS for each of the years from FY 2003 to FY 2006 by 21 percent (from $14,166,713 to $17,156,243), while Chapter 70 aid increased by 16.5 percent (from $5,078,322 to $5,916,246). In FY 2004, Grafton exceeded the required NSS of $15,276,123 by $2,080,274, or 13.6 percent over the requirement ($17,356,397 actual NSS). In FY 2005, the school district exceeded the required NSS of $15,982,601 by $2,096,360, or 13 percent over the requirement ($18,078,961 actual NSS). In FY 2006, the school department exceeded the required NSS of $17,156,243 by $2,920,737, or 17 percent ($20,076,980 actual NSS). The school district received an increase of 10.3 percent (from $5,078,191 to $5,599,191) of Chapter 70 aid in FY 2004. In FY 2005, it received an increase of 1.7 percent (from $5,599,191 to $5,691,718), while in FY 2006 Chapter 70 aid increased by 3.9 percent (from $5,691,748 to $5,916,246). The foundation enrollment increased from 2,203 to

2,426, or 10.1 percent, from FY 2003 to FY 2006. Total instructional costs increased by 15.5 percent ($12,172,706 to $14,060,630) for the same period, while indirect expenditures increased significantly in the areas of health insurance, employer retirement contribution, and school choice during the period under review.

7. Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators and staff, and the public. In addition, required local, state, and federal financial reports, and statements were accurate and filed on time.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school committee received monthly financial reports from the superintendent. The financial reports reflected the Grafton school department operation. The report listed the operating budget by line item as approved by the school committee and had a "revised for transfer" column that listed the school committee's future transfers. A "current cash requirement" column listed the estimated cash payout for each line item as projected for the end of the school year. Another column listed the projected surplus or deficit for each of the line items. The next two columns listed year-to-date expended/encumbered funds and year-to-date available balance. The report also showed whether favorable balances exited in the appropriation, personnel account, special education service accounts, and the special education transportation account. The report also listed the utilities account, special education tuition, and the balance in the circuit breaker account. Attachments included a special education update and the food service program budget sheet. The report did not include the accounting of the federal and state grants and other fund sources. Telecasts of the school committee meetings informed the public of the financial condition of the school system.

Principals and administrators received monthly financial reports for their areas of responsibility. According to the director of finance, all required local, federal, and state financial reports and statements have been accurate and submitted on time. The End of Year Pupil and Financial Report was submitted on time.

8. The district used efficient accounting technology that integrated the district-level financial information of each school and program, and the district used forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure that spending was within fiscal budget limits. District administrators were able to regularly and accurately track spending and other financial transactions.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district uses the city's Data National accounting system and the Harper's payroll system, which integrated information from the school system level for each school and program. The business office was networked with the city for its accounting functions. The principals and other administrators did not have electronic access to the accounting system in order to monitor the expenditures in their areas of responsibility.

Purchase orders were hand written and approved by the principal or administrator and forwarded to the business office for entry into the accounting system and to encumber the appropriate account, provided sufficient funds were available. All purchased orders were approved by at least two administrators by school committee policy. The director of finance stated that only purchase orders encumbered accounts.

The town accountant's office entered the payroll to the general ledger from the payroll warrant developed by the school department. Transfers required the approval of the school committee. The business office maintained separate spreadsheets to monitor salary and other expenditures. A review of the payroll and purchasing system with business office personnel revealed that there were controls and procedures to assure that spending conformed with the approved school committee budget.

9. The district had a system in place to pursue, acquire, monitor, and coordinate all local, state, federal, and private competitive grants and monitored special revenue funds, revolving accounts, and the fees related to them to ensure that they were managed efficiently and used effectively for the purposes intended.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school system acquired entitlement grants but did not actively pursue competitive state and federal grants. The director of curriculum and staff development had the responsibility for grant development. Grant managers prepared the applications in conjunction with the director of curriculum and staff development. The district received $628,616 in state and federal grants. The district received $257,000 from the foundation reserve program (pothole money) in FY 2006. This resulted from an extraordinary increase in the total minimum required local contribution due to increased enrollment. A person in the business office monitored all state and federal grants and revolving accounts using the financial encumbrance system to ensure compliance with the requirements of the grants. The business office used the existing purchase order system for all expenditures for supplies and material. The district used internal accounting and procedures to monitor special revenue, revolving accounts, and school activity accounts to assure management efficiency and use of the funds for the purpose intended.

10. The district had a system in place to ensure that state procurement laws were followed, that appropriate staff had MCPPO credentials, and that all assets and expenditures were monitored and tracked to insure efficient and maximum effective utilization. The district also competitively procured independent financial auditing services at least every five years, shared the results of these audits, and consistently implemented their recommendations. All procurement, tracking, monitoring systems, and external audits were accurate, current and timely.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The school district employed a staff member credentialed through MCCPO and a certified school business official. School committee policy required bidding to conform to the state procurement laws. The town administrator of Grafton was designated the procurement agent for the town. The town administrator had delegated the district business official as the procurement officer for the school district. It excludes procurements greater than $25,000, which require bidding proposals. All contracts required the signature of the school committee per the town bylaws. All purchase orders and services between $5,000 and $24,999 required written quotes. The policy on purchase order procedures required two administrative signatures for approval.

The district complied with the requirements of GASB 34 for asset management. In interviews with the director of finance, he stated that there was an inventory of the technology equipment but the district lacked an organized districtwide inventory system. The district tracked purchasing via an encumbrance system built into the accounting system. The director of finance monitored salaries and other expenditures to ensure efficient and maximum effective utilization and within budget limits.

According to the director of finance, the town of Grafton had employed the current auditing firm "a long time." The district did not provide an FY 2006 audit report. The audit report was in process of being prepared at the time of the site visit. There were no significant exceptions in the FY 2005 audit report regarding the district's fiscal operation. The FY 2006 audit report for high school student activity funds noted improvements made since the prior audit in the accounting for student activity funds. The auditor's report recommended that the school department consider a stipend position to assist in the accounting and reconciliation of the student activity accounts.

11. The district had a formal preventative maintenance program to maximize and prolong the effective use of the district's capital and major facility assets, to ensure that educational and program facilities were clean, safe, well-lit, well-maintained, and conducive to promoting student learning and achievement.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a preventive maintenance program that was ongoing throughout the year. The facilities inventory report stated that all of the schools in the district were in good condition. The superintendent and the director of building and grounds met periodically to develop maintenance projects for the year and prepare a five-year capital maintenance plan, following a review of the needs of each school. The district employed four maintenance personnel (painter, experienced welder, experienced carpentry, and HVAC tradesmen) in addition to the working building and maintenance supervisor. Each of the primary elementary schools had two and one-half custodians, the intermediate elementary school had four custodians, and the middle and high school each had five. The superintendent and the director of building and grounds stated that the

schools had been adequately maintained to provide an environment that was conducive to student learning. In a walk-through, the EQA examiners observed that the schools were clean, well lit, well maintained, and conducive to promoting to student learning and achievement. Due to increased student enrollment at the high school, it was necessary to improvise with the available space in order to accommodate the increased enrollment.

12. The district had a long-term capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected the future capital development and improvement needs, including educational and program facilities of adequate size. The plan was reviewed and revised as needed with input from all appropriate stakeholders.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district prepared a five-year capital plan that relevant stakeholders annually reviewed and updated. Enrollment projections by the New England School Development Council (NESDC) estimated an increase of 802 in student enrollment in the next 10 years. One of the goals in the strategic plan (DIP) was to conduct a yearly short-term space needs assessment for each school building to accommodate increased enrollment. Portable classrooms may be required until the district can build a new high school. The Massachusetts School Building Authority prepared a needs assessment of the schools in Grafton and rated the high school in good condition, but it did not take into consideration expanding enrollment. The town moderator established a secondary school building committee. The Grafton school municipal facilities study committee retained the firm of Symnes, Maini, & McKee in 2005 to evaluate the educational needs, space requirements, code requirements, and condition of the school and municipal buildings. The committee voted to combine the reuse of all of the existing school facilities and reconfigure the grade structure of those buildings. With a new high school, the remaining buildings could provide the necessary space to accommodate nearly all the projected increases in student enrollment. The committee voted to set the design size for the new high school to accommodate 1,000 students on town owned land. According to the selectman, the new high school could cost an estimated $70 million. The town had submitted a Statement of Interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

The town does not have a capital planning committee, and all requested capital items go to the town administrator for review and approval. The district submitted to the town administrator a five-year capital plan as part of the town budget process.

13. The schools were secure and had systems to ensure student safety.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The mission of the Grafton Public Schools had as one of its goals that "all students learn best in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment." According to a survey done by NELMS in an assessment of the middle school, 87 percent of the students surveyed sometimes or always felt that there were plans in place to make them feel safe during school emergencies. The school system had adequate facilities security systems for each of the schools that ensured student safety. The elementary schools had buzzer systems for entering the schools. The middle and high schools had buzzer systems in addition to cameras throughout each of the schools. All schools had sign in and sign out procedures. All schools had an intrusion monitoring system when the schools were not in use. In the FY 2006 budget, the district requested additional security systems for the middle and high schools.

The district had a well documented school safety plan and emergency procedures. Each school had a crisis response team. Each classroom had a crisis management flip chart that was visible and accessible. The superintendent stated that there has been a close relationship among the school system, the fire department, and the police. The police department funded a resource officer for the school system. The district had conducted various drills during the year, including lockdowns.

Appendix A: Proficiency Index (PI)

The proficiency index is a metric used to measure and compare all schools and school districts regarding their performance on the MCAS tests. The proficiency index is a measure of the level of achievement a district, school, grade, or subgroup has made in relation to the 'Proficient' achievement level on the MCAS tests. There are four indices: the Average Proficiency Index (API), the English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI), the Math Proficiency Index (MPI), and the Science and Technology/Engineering Index (SPI). The API currently is a weighted average of the EPI and MPI; the SPI will be included beginning in 2007, when passing the STE test becomes a graduation requirement.

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

Percentage of students scoring 200-208 on test x 0 = A
Percentage of students scoring 210-218 on test x 25 = B
Percentage of students scoring 220-228 on test x 50 = C
Percentage of students scoring 230-238 on test x 75 = D
Percentage of students scoring 240 or more on test x 100 = E

The proficiency index equals the sum of A + B + C + D + E = PI

Example: The Anywhere High School had the following results on the 2006 MCAS tests:

12 percent of all students scored 200-208; therefore, 12 percent x 0 = 0
15 percent of all students scored 210-218; therefore, 15 percent x 25 = 3.75
21 percent of all students scored 220-228; therefore, 21 percent x 50 = 10.5
34 percent of all students scored 230-238; therefore, 34 percent x 75 = 25.5
18 percent of all students scored 240 or more; therefore, 18 percent x 100 = 18.0

The average proficiency index is calculated by adding: 0 + 3.75 + 10.5 + 25.5 + 18 = 57.75

The average proficiency index (API) for the Anywhere High School would be 57.75.

The EPI would use the same calculation using the ELA results for all students taking the ELA exam. The MPI would use the same calculation using the math results for all students taking the math exam. The SPI would use the same calculation using the STE results for all students taking the STE exam.

The 100 point proficiency index is divided into six proficiency categories as follows: 90-100 is 'Very High' (VH), 80-89.9 is 'High' (H), 70-79.9 is 'Moderate' (M), 60-69.9 is 'Low' (L), 40-59.9 is 'Very Low' (VL), and 0-39.9 is 'Critically Low' (CL).

Appendix B: Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1997 – FY2006

	Foundation Enrollment	Pct Chg	Foundation Budget	Pct Chg	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid	Pct Chg	Required Net School Spending (NSS)	Pct Chg	Actual Net School Spending	Pct Chg	Dollars Over/Under Requirement	Percent Over/ Under
FY97	1,860	0.2	10,051,313	3.0	6,719,096	3,001,429	6.4	9,720,525	6.0	9,729,863	1.3	9,338	0.1
FY98	1,946	4.6	10,767,248	7.1	7,054,056	3,392,645	13.0	10,446,701	7.5	11,020,062	13.3	573,361	5.5
FY99	2,008	3.2	11,482,892	6.6	7,368,989	3,979,546	17.3	11,348,535	8.6	11,842,043	7.5	493,508	4.3
FY00	2,109	5.0	12,223,739	6.5	7,816,131	4,573,742	14.9	12,389,873	9.2	13,115,607	10.8	725,734	5.9
FY01	2,143	1.6	12,791,709	4.6	8,201,170	4,948,767	8.2	13,149,937	6.1	13,875,734	5.8	725,797	5.5
FY02	2,143	0.0	13,450,365	5.1	8,595,077	5,078,322	2.6	13,673,399	4.0	15,266,156	10.0	1,592,757	11.6
FY03	2,203	2.8	14,166,713	5.3	9,088,391	5,078,322	0.0	14,166,713	3.6	16,576,084	8.6	2,409,371	17.0
FY04	2,308	4.8	15,276,123	7.8	9,676,932	5,599,191	10.3	15,276,123	7.8	17,356,397	4.7	2,080,274	13.6
FY05	2,359	2.2	15,982,601	4.6	10,290,883	5,691,718	1.7	15,982,601	4.6	18,078,961	4.2	2,096,360	13.1
FY06	2,426	2.8	17,156,243	7.3	11,239,997	5,916,246	3.9	17,156,243	7.3	20,133,416	11.4	2,977,173	17.4

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	
FY97	5,404	1,614	5,231	29.9	96.7	96.8	30.8
FY98	5,533	1,743	5,663	31.5	97.0	102.3	30.8
FY99	5,719	1,982	5,897	34.7	98.8	103.1	33.6
FY00	5,796	2,169	6,219	37.4	101.4	107.3	34.9
FY01	5,969	2,309	6,475	38.7	102.8	108.5	35.7
FY02	6,276	2,370	7,124	37.8	101.7	113.5	33.3
FY03	6,431	2,305	7,524	35.8	100.0	117.0	30.6
FY04	6,619	2,426	7,520	36.7	100.0	113.6	32.3
FY05	6,775	2,413	7,664	35.6	100.0	113.1	31.5
FY06	7,072	2,439	8,299	34.5	100.0	117.4	29.4

Foundation enrollment is reported in October of the prior fiscal year (e.g. FY06 enrollment = Oct 1, 2004 headcount).
Foundation budget is the state's estimate of the minimum amount needed in each district to provide an adequate educational program.
Required Net School Spending is the annual minimum that must be spent on schools, including carryovers from prior years.
Net School Spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures and transportation.