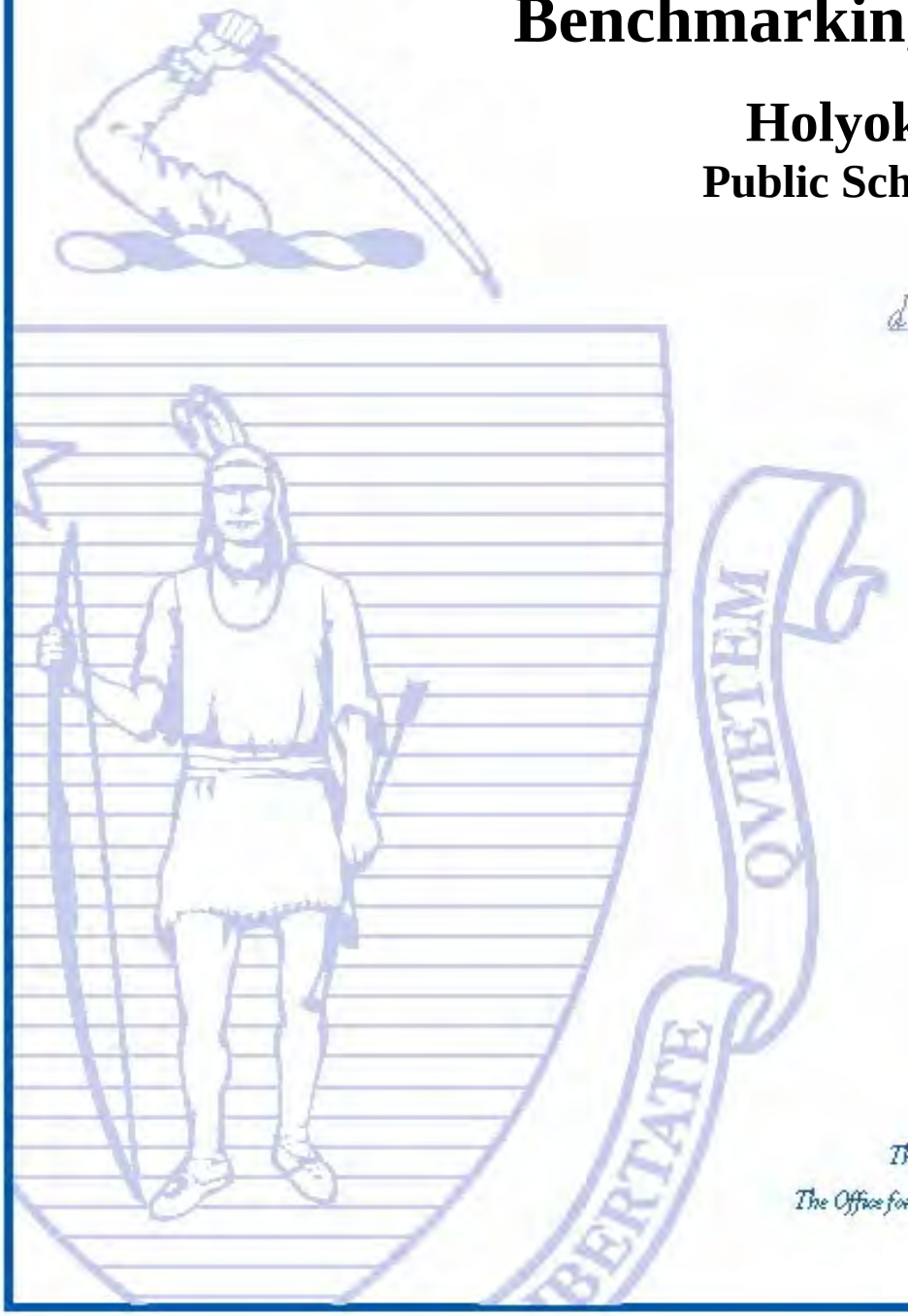
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

# Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report:

## Holyoke
### Public Schools

*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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# Executive Summary

The *Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report* describes the progress of the Holyoke Public Schools from the time of a fact-finding review in January 2004 to a follow-up review in May 2007, both conducted by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA). The focus of the May 2007 examination was the district's implementation of its District Turnaround Plan (DTAP) to improve the Holyoke Public Schools.

The EQA conducted its first review of the operations of Holyoke Public Schools in January 2003, which led the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) in May 2003 to recommend the district to the Board of Education (BOE) for a 'declaration of underperformance.' Following the BOE's declaration of underperformance in November 2003, the EQA conducted a fact-finding review in January 2004 to serve as a benchmark for the district's improvement and to inform improvement planning. Holyoke Public Schools used the findings from this review to inform the work of the district's Performance Improvement Mapping Team, assisted by the Department of Education (DOE), in creating its turnaround plan. The Board of Education approved Holyoke's DTAP in September 2004, and later provided the district with America's Choice as a turnaround partner for the 2005-2006 and the 2006-2007 school years. In May 2007, approximately two years after the implementation of the turnaround plan, an eight-member EQA team conducted a four-day site visit and a review of student achievement data and documents provided by the district to examine Holyoke's work since the benchmark visit. Two team members also conducted a two-day follow-up visit.

Overall the team found that the district made some necessary improvements since the January 2004 benchmarking visit. Holyoke improved its capacity and instructional program, with greater alignment of district activities and with central office staff and principals better organized and resourced to promote consistent curriculum delivery, coaching and professional development for teachers, and greater and more equitable resources across its schools. At the same time, the district was in the early stages of the implementation of its turnaround plan, and many improvements are not yet deeply embedded. Student achievement in Holyoke remained consistently low with insufficient improvement. In 2006, Holyoke's performance on the MCAS tests was 'low' in English language arts (ELA) and 'very low' in math. The district's cycle IV

adequate yearly progress (AYP) accountability status in both ELA and math was 'corrective action–subgroups.' Of the nine elementary/middle schools, four were in restructuring status, and two were in corrective action status. Holyoke High School's performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was 'moderate' in both subjects and its AYP accountability status was 'no status,' but the other district high school, Dean Technical High School, performed 'very low' in both subjects and had the AYP status 'corrective action–subgroups.' Between 2004 and 2006, the performance gap widened between regular education and special education students, between regular education and limited English proficient (LEP) students, and between low-income and non low-income students. Also, LEP students had substantial declines in both ELA and math performance. Furthermore, the district's dropout rate for the Class of 2006 was 35 percent. The district continued to struggle in improving the quality of instruction and providing ample and adequate instructional services for a high volume of students identified as transient, mobile, and whose first language is not English. The district is still in the process of assessing its programs and services and instilling changes that will improve student achievement.

## The District Turnaround Plan

Holyoke's turnaround plan contains six initiatives designed to address the district's key areas in need of improvement. Each initiative is described below.

**Initiative 1 is that the district will utilize a regionally developed student data management system.** The initiative also stated that the DOE has taken on the responsibility of creating this management system which will house all (general, special education, LEP) student assessment and demographic data so that progress in meeting state and local learning standards will be monitored. The district's responsibility was to prepare for the DOE's creation of its COGNOS data management system in a way that would allow the district to best utilize the system to improve student achievement. The district had no standard student profile or template to organize student assessment data, although some schools had developed their own, nor did it have an integrated database for analysis of student performance data from multiple sources. However, Holyoke was a pilot participant in the DOE data warehouse project, and through this project Holyoke would ultimately be able to analyze data from multiple sources and monitor changes longitudinally. Initiative 1 is not complete, as the district has not developed and put into

operation a student data management system because the COGNOS system is not yet operational.

Initiative 1 has three strategies. The first strategy is that the district will conduct data assessment and analysis using data banks and assessment tools currently available to the district. This activity was in progress and ongoing at the time of the EQA review. The second strategy is that the district will utilize all available data to drive instruction for student progress. This activity was in progress, but not yet completed. The third strategy is to form a data analysis team at the district level with representation from the curriculum, English language learner (ELL), and special education programs to evaluate student performance data. The team was formed, but the team has not completed its action steps.

The district has made much progress in preparing for a districtwide student data management system, as Holyoke has implemented a set of common assessments throughout the schools. However, the district still lacked a districtwide approach to use assessments throughout the school system. For example, this initiative did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice to inform all district initiatives in the DTAP, all district programs, or other district plans such as the District Improvement Plan (DIP), School Improvement Plans (SIPs), or school-based Implementation/Action Plans. Holyoke has not yet developed a districtwide student data management system to assess needed improvements to its programs, services, and initiatives. The district had no formal program evaluation cycle. Until recently, programs had not been stable and in effect long enough to be fairly evaluated, and solidifying programs had taken priority over program evaluation.

**Initiative 2 is that the district will have aligned curricula PreK-12 in ELA and mathematics.** Initiative 2 has one strategy with four action items at different stages of implementation. The strategy is that the district will develop a districtwide curriculum alignment for grades K-12 that aligns with the state curriculum frameworks in ELA and math. Overall, the district has made substantial progress in this area, but lacks complete vertical alignment through grade 12 and clear alignment with the frameworks.

The team found that Holyoke made substantial progress in delivering aligned curricula in grades K-8, but not for grades 9-12. The district made substantial progress in producing and

implementing a horizontally and vertically aligned curriculum, particularly in math for grades K-8 and in ELA for grades 4-8. Curriculum revision was constant as coaches developed the curriculum maps in ELA and math for elementary and middle schools. Dissemination of the curriculum by the coaches brought horizontal alignment at those levels. Authority for monitoring effective implementation of the developing curriculum rested with principals and central office administrators, but their monitoring activities were confined to walk-throughs and did not sufficiently address the quality of the curriculum delivery. Also still in need of development was explicit alignment with state standards and a system for assessment of student achievement of the stated objectives.

Grades 9-12 made insufficient improvements to curriculum. Central office curriculum administrators assumed little active responsibility for curriculum oversight at the high schools, the high school curriculum developed in 2004 was subject to little revision, and high school principals reported little involvement with or responsibility for the new grade 9 support programs. Classroom observations by EQA examiners found the instructional quality in grade 9 classrooms markedly lower than that in grade 10-12 classrooms.

**Initiative 3 is that the district will hold educators accountable for delivery of instruction.** Initiative 3 has one strategy with six action items at different stages of implementation. In progress at the time of the site visit, the strategy is to establish clear and specific linkage between teacher instructional delivery, the performance evaluation process, and students' performance. The district has completed negotiations for its renewed collective bargaining contract with its teachers. Administrators have been trained in generic competencies of observation and evaluation of teaching performance by an outside contractor, but have not yet been trained in the new evaluation tools and process. The new evaluation system has little apparent alignment with walk-through data, with many elements considered as district instructional priorities related to America's Choice protocols or teaching expectations indicated in district improvement plans, or with student outcomes. Past teacher evaluations completed by previous administrators that were reviewed by the EQA team had few recommendations for improvement. However, many school-based administrators were new to their respective roles and have completed external training on assessing teacher performance.

**Initiative 4 is that the district will consistently assess, analyze, and monitor student performance.** Initiative 4 has one strategy, to establish districtwide procedures to assess student performance and program effectiveness. This strategy has nine action items. Overall, the strategy is in progress, but not yet completed. The data team formed in 2005-2006 developed a portfolio of district assessments together with information on the utility and function of each. Data team members instructed staff on use of assessment results to measure student progress, form classroom groups, and plan instruction.

With the assistance of a consultant, Holyoke staff members developed district writing prompts and scoring rubrics for grades 2-12. The prompts and rubrics were completed by January 2005, and were embedded in the curriculum maps at most grade levels, K-8, by 2005-2006. At a minimum, fall and winter assessments were conducted at each school. Middle school students were assessed four times each year. While the results demonstrated overall gains in written language proficiency, the district was just beginning to make use of them to improve instruction. Holyoke administered common literacy assessments in grades K-9 according to an established assessment calendar.

Holyoke teachers and coaches developed curriculum-based assessments in mathematics through an informal process involving collegial discussion and consensus. There were no procedures to ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments, nor the inter-rater reliability in scoring them. Beginning in 2005-2006, the district administered the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in the fall, winter, and spring at grades 3-10 to assess students' progress and needs in mathematics. The data were used to measure incremental gains, form instructional groups, establish eligibility for support programs and services, and inform district and school improvement plans. The district intended to make greater use of these data in combination with other information once it had established an integrated database. The central data team had begun to correlate student performance on formative assessments with MCAS test results to establish the predictive validity of these measures, increasing their value for intermediate goal setting and instructional planning.

Teachers were trained to use student assessment data to track student progress and identify instructional needs. Some training needs were unmet. In certain schools, the majority of students

were functioning well below grade level standards and expectations, and teachers needed strategies and materials to reach these learners, especially when the district curriculum maps were not applicable or useful.

**Initiative 5 is that the district will develop and sustain a comprehensive professional development program.** Initiative 5 has one strategy: teachers will identify critical student learning objectives to address differentiated methods for teaching objectives. For the most part, the district has addressed the five action items under the strategy, although the effectiveness in meeting the goal has not been determined. The view of differentiated instruction in Holyoke was narrow, consisting primarily of mandated provisions for its identified high incident populations of ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. There was little training on individualizing instruction to accommodate a range of learner differences in readiness, talent, interest, learning style, and background.

The district developed a professional development plan to describe its professional development efforts in the DTAP and America's Choice initiatives. The district planned the professional development offerings and produced a monthly calendar. Principals matched the offerings to the staff. Holyoke's professional development program provided ample offerings, but the program was fragmented. Professional development for teachers was augmented by a job-embedded model of coaching, monitoring using a walk-through tool, and reviews of student work using rubrics to measure student understanding.

Although the district has not assessed the effectiveness of its professional development program in accomplishing its objectives, the total spent on professional development in fiscal year 2006 was $3,117,086, of which 95 percent was from grants. In a 184-day school year for teachers, this amounted to $16,941 per day of professional development expenditures.

**Initiative 6 is that the district will provide a program to stabilize highly mobile students so that they will have access to high quality instruction that meets their individual needs.** The first strategy is to design a pilot program to address the needs of highly mobile students and their families. The district has designed the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP), but it did not yet adequately meet the needs of highly mobile students and their families. The second strategy is to stabilize the middle school and grades K-5 (Kelly, Lawrence, and Morgan) population by

eliminating disruption caused by transience. This is in progress, but was not yet completed. The district did not provide TOP services for mobile elementary students at four of the elementary schools nor for any high school students. The third strategy is to gather specific data on students in the TOP pilot program regarding math and ELA achievement and students' related progress. The district started to gather the data, but had not gathered sufficient data to reach conclusions about student progress. The district conducted an initial evaluation in 2004-2005, but no further comparative evaluations during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years.

Holyoke evaluated and improved the program after the first year of implementation in 2004-2005. The district redesigned the TOP program in 2005-2006 by coordinating with the Student Assignment Center, assessing students placed in the program more quickly, implementing systematic procedures, adding teaching staff to meet special needs, amending entrance and exit criteria to allow for flexibility in TOP placement and/or earlier exit, and establishing systematic communication with receiving schools. A Brown University report questioned the district's decision to form TOP as a separate program, rather than a program integrated within each of the schools districtwide as recommended by best practices for mobile students. While the district was successful in reducing disruption to the schools caused by transient students, the superintendent cited inadequate social services as a hindrance for the district to adequately meet the needs of highly mobile students and their families.

## Findings

In developing general findings for the *Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report*, the EQA team considered the overall context of Holyoke Public Schools, the district's development and oversight (governance) of its turnaround plan, the district's progress in implementing its plan, and the district's provisioning (use of resources) to implement the plan. The team developed four general findings and 28 corresponding sub-findings. For a complete list of the general findings and sub-findings, see Appendix F: Organization of Findings and Appendix G: Order of Findings.

The first two general findings describe shortcomings in the way in which the district is currently implementing its turnaround plan, and the second two are areas in which the district has shown progress or promise for future improvement if Holyoke Public Schools addresses current shortcomings.

**The first general finding is that the current implementation of Holyoke Public Schools' turnaround plan prioritizes thoughtful process over analysis.** The development and planning process was largely successful. The turnaround plan development process supported successful collaboration among the district leadership and between the district leadership and the DOE. Although the process for developing and revising the plan did not fully consider Holyoke's readiness or all the district's needs to be addressed by a selected turnaround partner, the impact of the implementation was mostly considered a step in the right direction. The role of the turnaround partner has helped the district's planning process. In addition, the superintendent was effective in communicating district needs through a process which galvanized support for Holyoke Public Schools. However, the effectiveness of the plan was restricted by limited analysis of the district's implementation efforts. With the 2005-2006 school year considered as the start of implementation, the district has collected more data than it has evaluated, and was largely unable to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of new programs and initiatives.

The lack of careful analysis of the effectiveness of district initiatives did not ensure the best use of resources, even in a district with a large state investment supporting its turnaround plan. The DTAP did not have a financial plan associated with it, and the DTAP itself did not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies. In fiscal year 2006, spending on professional development was approximately $3 million, or $16,000 per day, but the district did not have measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs. The district did not have a clear accounting mechanism to assess all of its unexpended encumbrances. Further, Holyoke Public Schools' lack of budget forecasting hindered the implementation of the DTAP, caused hiring and purchasing delays, and resulted in budget freezes. The need for budget forecasting in the district was especially important because of Holyoke's reliance on Chapter 70 aid and grants, student mobility in the district, and the district's loss of students to charter schools.

**The second general finding is that Holyoke Public Schools lacks a systems approach in implementing its plan.** While implementing the plan, the leadership communicated district priorities but had multiple improvement plans not explicitly aligned, which did not create clarity for the focus of the district and its schools. Interdependent priorities in key district plans and

documents were not systemically interwoven and translated into sustainable, focused practices in all needed areas. The turnaround plan did not address some necessary components of key pieces of district work necessary for a whole-district turnaround. The district improved development of its professional development program and provided ample offerings; however, the program still fell short of a cohesive approach in a district experiencing substantial shifts with subsequent changes in district strategies and classrooms approaches. Administrators were sufficiently prepared to be held accountable for carrying out responsibilities directly related to district or school goals, but teachers were not. The district did improve its services and programs for ELL and special education students, although it continued some program-based approaches to address the needs of student subgroups rather than a district-based approach to addressing student subgroup needs in the regular education classroom or in programs designed for all students.

District resources were not consistently deployed to maximize the district's ability to improve its capacity, to maximize cost-effectiveness, and to institutionalize a long-term strategy in a sustainable way. However, the EQA team noted some exceptions, and the district did make improvements to its internal capacity and long-term approach compared to previous years. The team found that areas in need of improved provisioning included increased staff to support improved instruction and diverse student needs, and teacher access to technology, software, and support for the purposes of instruction, planning, and communication. Further, the district did not have a plan to improve aging building systems or classroom spaces that were ill-equipped or not conducive to learning.

**The third general finding is that the implementation of the plan has moved the district toward greater alignment of activities in Holyoke, especially in K-8 leadership, assessment, curriculum, and instruction, but the high schools have minimal connection with the DTAP.** The district aligned responsibility areas and evaluation for administrators. Accountability for implementing the DTAP was embedded in the superintendent's assignment of responsibility areas to administrators, and in the evaluations of the superintendent and principals. The DTAP has started to gain traction in the district to promote changes that the district expects will improve student achievement in grades K-8. However, the same is not true for grades 9-12. The implementation of the plan brought more consistency and uniformity through common curricula with common learning expectations in grades K-8, although the curriculum development process

was still being formed. Also, the district's use of student assessments improved, in spite of stagnation in implementing Initiative 1. The district also has plans to align its budgeting with district needs. Beginning with the fiscal year 2007 budget process, the district changed its method of developing the budget from a percentage increase of the current budget as determined by the central administration to a process in which budget proposals are initially developed at the school sites based on student needs and other data. However, results are speculative because the district had not produced its budget for the upcoming year by the time of the EQA review.

**As a fourth general finding, the team learned the plan was in its early implementation stage and has not been related to improved student achievement on the MCAS tests at this point. Implementation of the plan was slowed by both anticipated and unanticipated factors. The district has addressed some obstacles hindering the implementation, while other challenges remain.** From the beginning of the process, internal district capacity was a limiting factor in the speed of the plan's implementation, partially as a result of decisions to use external resources rather than develop internal resources. With the 2005-2006 school year considered as the start of implementation, administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had not gathered adequate data by the time of the review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges. Being in the early implementation stage, the turnaround plan has launched some changes that have promise, but are not necessarily deeply embedded. The district has improved its provision of materials and supplies so that the resources are equitable among the K-8 schools, and most staff members expressed that they have the resources they need to implement the core program. The superintendent cited that major challenges in implementing the DTAP were budget constraints, recruitment of qualified staff, limits in the teachers' contract, inadequate availability of social services, and reactions to the district's underperforming label.

# District Overview

The city of Holyoke in western Massachusetts was developed as a planned industrial city by Boston financiers who built a dam at the 57-foot drop in the Connecticut River at South Hadley Falls to generate power for their paper and textile mills. For several decades the economy of the region has suffered as manufacturing in New England has declined. The largest sources of employment in the city are educational, health, and social services, manufacturing, and retail trade. The city has a Mayor-Council form of municipal government.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Holyoke had a median family income of $36,130 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 346 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 39,838 with a population of 9,160 school-age children, or 23 percent of the total. Of the total households in Holyoke, 37 percent were households with children under 18 years of age, 15 percent were households with children headed by females with no husband present, and 27 percent were households with individuals age 65 years or older. Fifty-nine percent of the housing stock was renter occupied. Seventeen percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2005-2006 the Holyoke Public Schools had a total enrollment of 6,485. The demographic composition in the district was: 73.9 percent Hispanic, 21.6 percent White, 3.5 percent African-American, 0.8 percent Asian, 0.1 percent Native American, 0.1 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 53.6 percent first language not English, 23.6 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 80.0 percent low income, and 22.2 percent special education. Ninety-nine percent of school-age children in Holyoke attended public schools. The district offers school choice, and 25 students from other school districts attended the Holyoke schools in 2005-2006. A total of 795 Holyoke students attended public schools outside the district, including 567 students who attended charter schools and one student who attended the Massachusetts Academy for Math and Science.

The district has 13 schools serving pre-kindergarten through grade 12, including one preschool; seven elementary schools serving kindergarten through grade 5, 6, or 8; two middle schools

serving grades 6 through 8; two high schools, one of which is a technical school, serving grades 9 through 12; and one alternative school serving kindergarten through grade 9. Holyoke's administrative team includes a superintendent, a student services and special education director, a director of curriculum and testing, a human resources director, and a director of operations and finance. The district has an 11-member school committee.

In FY 2006, Holyoke's per pupil expenditure, based on appropriations from all funds, was $14,646, compared to $11,196 statewide, ranking it 46 out of the 328 school districts reporting data. 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 $73,298,100 to $74,187,880; Chapter 70 aid increased from $56,447,493 to $61,015,564; the required local contribution increased from $6,433,459 to $6,811,798; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 7,356 to 7,289. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending increased from 77 to 82 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending increased from 61 to 64 percent.

# The Review Process and History

In accordance with regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Education and Chapter 69 of the Massachusetts General Laws, an eight-member team from the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) visited the Holyoke Public Schools during the week of May 7, 2007. The objective of the visit was to collect information and analyze the depth and scope of the district's progress in implementing its District Turnaround Plan (DTAP).

The EQA conducted the first examination of the operations of the Holyoke Public Schools in January 2003, with a primary focus on management practices. This district-level audit led to the decision of the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) in May 2003 to recommend that the Massachusetts Board of Education assign the district the status of 'underperforming.' In November 2003, the Board of Education declared the district underperforming due to "serious deficiencies in the management and delivery of educational programs and services." The Board of Education further directed the EMAC to conduct a fact-finding visit to "to help guide the district's improvement planning."

The EQA conducted this fact-finding visit in January 2004. In its May 2004 report of that examination, the EQA noted that "in general, the team found the pervasive issue in the district was one of building and sustaining educational capacity." The report further identified five key hindrances contributing to Holyoke's inability to improve student performance. Two of the hindrances were related to challenging demographic factors requiring a strategic response: a high percentage of first language not English students and high levels of transience and mobility. The other three hindrances were Holyoke's curricular inconsistency, limited staff capacity to address diverse student needs, and inequities in the provision of adequate educational resources for all students.

Due to the underperforming status, the Board of Education required the Holyoke Public Schools to create a District Turnaround Plan. The Department of Education helped the district create its DTAP through the DOE's Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process. The Board of Education approved Holyoke's DTAP in September 2004.

To assist the district in implementing its turnaround plan, the DOE worked with Holyoke Public Schools to select a turnaround partner. DOE contracted with America's Choice to work with the Holyoke superintendent and his leadership team in the 2005-2006 school year. The contract was extended in the 2006-2007 school year.

The DOE monitored implementation through monthly meetings with the district leadership team and the turnaround partner. Holyoke Public Schools also submitted annual reports and maintained binders documenting its implementation of the plan.

The district leadership met regularly to discuss the progress of the plan's implementation and the next steps to be taken at weekly central office cabinet meetings; monthly district leadership team meetings; and monthly meetings involving a DOE representative, the superintendent, and the turnaround partner, and, periodically, with a monitor assigned to the district. The superintendent assigned a primary oversight role for each initiative in the DTAP to an administrator or a team. Central office administrators, principals, and staff members took responsibility for action steps in the plan appropriate to their roles. District leadership submitted periodic reports on the DTAP implementation to the school committee and an annual written report on the DTAP to the school committee and the DOE. In addition to the DTAP, Holyoke had a District Improvement Plan (DIP) and each school had a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Improvement/Action Plans, although explicit connections did not exist among the four types of plans.

In May 2007, the EQA again visited the Holyoke Public Schools to review the district's implementation of its DTAP. The EQA review team was comprised of members with expertise in the domains of leadership and governance, curriculum, instruction, student assessment, program evaluation, professional development, human resource management, student academic support, and financial management. The team completed a two-day document review prior to its four-day site visit. On site, the district made available to the EQA team members four binders that included supporting documentation for each of the DTAP initiatives, strategies, and activities for 2004-2005. Also, the superintendent made available to two EQA team members two binders that contained DTAP supporting documentation for 2005-2006.

During the site visit, the team conducted 38 interviews (approximately 45 hours) with the superintendent, six district administrators, 13 principals, 37 teachers in focus groups, three

school committee members, three town officials, six teachers' association representatives, and 10 parents serving on School Improvement Councils. The team also reviewed district documents on site, including Holyoke's DTAP binders, policies, handbooks, curriculum documents, seven principal personnel files, and 61 teacher personnel files. The team also observed 87 randomly selected classrooms among all K-12 schools: seven elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and the district's alternative school for grades K-9. Classroom observations focused on English language arts (ELA) and mathematics instruction in grades 2-12.

# Summary of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The following is a summary of EQA's analysis of the student achievement data of Holyoke Public Schools as measured by the district's performance on the MCAS tests from 2004 to 2006. For the complete analysis, see Appendix A: Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data.

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

On average, less than one-fourth of all students in Holyoke attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, considerably less than that statewide. Less than one-third of Holyoke students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), less than one-fifth of Holyoke students attained proficiency in math, and approximately one-tenth of Holyoke students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Eighty-two percent of the Class of 2006 earned a Competency Determination.

- Holyoke's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 53 proficiency index (PI) points, 25 PI points less than that statewide. Holyoke's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 47 PI points.
- In 2006, Holyoke's proficiency gap in ELA was 39 PI points, 23 PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of nearly five PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Holyoke's proficiency gap in math was 54 PI points in 2006, 26 PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of nearly seven PI points per year to achieve AYP. Holyoke's proficiency gap in STE was 54 PI points, 25 PI points wider than that statewide.

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

Between 2004 and 2006, Holyoke's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall, in math, and in STE, and little change in ELA.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by four percentage points between 2004 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by two percentage points. The average proficiency

gap in Holyoke narrowed from 49 PI points in 2004 to 46 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of five percent.

- Over the two-year period 2004-2006, ELA performance in Holyoke was relatively flat.
- Math performance in Holyoke showed improvement, at an average of more than two PI points annually, during this period. This resulted in an improvement rate of eight percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Holyoke had improved STE performance, increasing by more than one PI point annually, an improvement rate of five percent.

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

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Holyoke students. Of the nine measurable subgroups in Holyoke in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 42 PI points in ELA and 39 PI points in math (non low-income students, limited English proficient students, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Holyoke in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, limited English proficient (LEP) students, Hispanic students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than one-fifth of the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. Roughly one-third of regular education students and one-half of White and non low-income students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA but wider in math. Less than one-fourth of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

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

In Holyoke, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 43 PI points in 2004 to 45 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 36 to 43 PI points during this period.

- Regular education students, Hispanic students, and non low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students; the improvement of regular education and Hispanic students was very slight.
- In math, all student subgroups in Holyoke with the exception of limited English proficient (LEP) students showed improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was also non low-income students; the improvement of students with disabilities was slight.
- LEP students had substantial declines in both ELA and math performance between 2004 and 2006, by more than seven PI points in ELA and five PI points in math.
- Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by nearly four PI points, and between regular education and LEP students it widened by nine PI points. The average performance gap between low-income students and non low-income students widened by five PI points during this period.

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

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

# Examination of the Implementation of the Turnaround Plan of the Holyoke Public Schools

## *Development and Oversight of the Turnaround Plan*

As Holyoke Public Schools developed and began to launch its turnaround plan, internal capacity and district challenges impeded implementation. As a result, turnaround steps were launched more slowly than planned, and the effectiveness of the steps has not been determined to date. Regarding the development and oversight of the turnaround plan, the EQA team arrived at eight findings (1-8). The related general finding (I-IV) cited in the executive summary is indicated in parentheses at the end of each finding.

**Finding 1. The turnaround plan development process supported successful collaboration among the district leadership and between district leadership and the DOE. Although the process for developing and revising the plan did not fully consider Holyoke's readiness or all the district's needs be to addressed by a selected turnaround partner, the impact of the implementation was mostly considered a step in the right direction. (I)**

According to the superintendent, the process for developing the turnaround plan began when he received a letter from the DOE informing the district that it needed to develop a plan. The superintendent mentioned that the district's central office administrators "were not sure what the plan needed to look like concerning parameters." Also, the superintendent remarked that "the DOE came to us and said that we are the first district to go through the process of developing a District Turnaround Plan." In addition, the superintendent indicated that since both the Holyoke Public Schools and the DOE were unsure about the DTAP, the two organizations worked together. Furthermore, the superintendent commented that the notion of incorporating a third-party turnaround partner was undecided.

According to the superintendent, the development of the DTAP involved a DOE associate commissioner and staff working with the executive directors of the Holyoke Public Schools. Also, with joint approval of the DOE and the superintendent, the district hired a school support specialist who assisted the parties in shaping and developing the DTAP. The superintendent mentioned that the six initiatives in the DTAP grew out of the findings of the EQA's fact finding

review. The superintendent stated, “It was the EQA [EMAC] recommendations that informed the six initiatives.”

The superintendent indicated that he has met monthly with a representative from the DOE to discuss the status of the DTAP and the need, if any, for changes to it. Also, the superintendent reported that he has met weekly with his cabinet, comprised of the four executive directors and the special assistant to the superintendent (the turnaround partner), and monthly with the district leadership team (the cabinet plus all the principals) to discuss the status of the DTAP. In addition, the district prepared yearly written progress reports on each of the six initiatives in the DTAP in 2005 and 2006 for the school committee and the DOE.

The timing of the plan, the format of the plan, and the transition process did not fully take into account the district’s readiness to adopt the plan and how the district could address needs outside of the resources of the turnaround partner. Central office administrators cited several explanations. One reason was an initial implementation delay due to the newness of the process to all parties, with Holyoke being the first district declared underperforming. Another was the newness of the turnaround partner in creating a whole-district approach to reform rather than a school-based approach to reform. Another was the speed with which the district was expected to implement the plan. This impacted the extent of teacher understanding and buy in. Although many teachers were convinced that the plan was worthwhile and supported the work of the turnaround partner, focus group interviews revealed a large gap in understanding the reasons for the instructional changes they were to implement in the classroom. Another impact was greater urgency to improve communication, delegation, and organizational systems within the district.

Overall, the impact of the turnaround plan implementation was positive for stakeholders. The school committee, the superintendent, the central office administrators, the principals, and most of the teachers interviewed spoke favorably about the DTAP and the support it continues to receive in order to successfully accomplish the six initiatives. Some leadership personnel commented that the DTAP changed the culture in the district from a top down approach to a participatory approach involving all the stakeholders. However, some teachers in focus groups expressed that the plan was imposed on the district, and the superintendent stated that one of the

factors hindering the implementation of the DTAP involved some teachers who felt that the DOE imposed it on Holyoke Public Schools.

**Finding 2. The role of the turnaround partner has helped the district create more consistency and uniformity across K-8 classrooms. (I)**

Administrators remarked that the turnaround partner's resources helped deliver professional development opportunities to the faculty, provided modeling in the classrooms, and "humanized the process" as a result of the partner's presence in and availability to the school system. Administrators indicated that the turnaround partner attended various curriculum committee sessions and school leadership meetings to assist with the planning and implementation of curriculum initiatives and action plans.

The special assistant to the superintendent has also participated in the superintendent's weekly cabinet meetings, the monthly district leadership team meetings, and the monthly meetings with the representative from the DOE to discuss the status of the DTAP.

**Finding 3. The superintendent was effective in communicating district needs through a process which galvanized district and community support for Holyoke Public Schools. (I)**

District leaders indicated that they had begun to communicate with stakeholders about the district's progress with the DTAP and to gain support for it. Leadership personnel mentioned that they discussed matters related to the DTAP periodically at the bimonthly school committee meetings. The school committee meetings received coverage via cable television on Channel 12 and by the local newspapers, Springfield's *The Republican* and the *Holyoke Sun*. Also, leadership personnel stated that discussions about the DTAP and progress on initiatives, strategies, and activities occurred at the superintendent's weekly cabinet meetings and at the monthly district leadership team meetings.

Principals at the elementary and middle schools commented that during the school year discussions about matters involving the DTAP, the SIPs, and the Action/Implementation Plans took place at school leadership team meetings, school council meetings, and parent-teacher organization meetings. Leadership personnel indicated that at the two high schools, due to the

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation process, essentially only the ELA and math teachers in grade 9 had involvement with the DTAP.

Throughout the year, administrators and teachers reported that the school system produced and showed special cable television programs to the community. Some examples of these special programs included Summer Kindergarten Program, Attendance Zones, Reading First, Early Childhood Education, America's Choice, Read 180, and Title I Math.

Furthermore, administrators stated that the superintendent wrote a quarterly newsletter, *Connections,* in English and Spanish to share with the public information about the district's programs, services, accomplishments, and notices. The district made copies of *Connections* available to the EQA team. Also, the superintendent mentioned that every Tuesday afternoon he held a half-hour open session with the press. Other central office administrators confirmed the weekly press meeting that the superintendent held. In addition, the superintendent commented on meetings that he held with local organizations and representatives of Holyoke Community College to discuss initiatives in the district and to gain support for them.

However, within the district some confusion existed about which of the four plans drove improvement efforts in Holyoke Public Schools, and no documents explained the connections among these plans.

**Finding 4. While implementing the DTAP, the leadership communicated district priorities, but the multiple plans did not create clarity for the focus of the district and its schools. (II)**

The district had multiple plans with overlapping areas for improvement, but they lacked clear connections at the district level and at the school level. According to the superintendent, the district communicated its priorities for and the focus of the school system through four plans. Besides the six initiatives in the DTAP, the district leadership team developed a Holyoke Public Schools District Improvement Plan, 2006-2010. Each of the schools had a School Improvement Plan for 2006-2007, and the elementary and middle schools had Action/Implementation Plans.

While the plans did not necessarily contradict, they were not deliberately linked with each other. The DTAP was created to address priority areas of management identified in the external district review process, while the District Improvement Plan (DIP) was created to specifically address

instructional programming and use of resources for instruction. The SIPs were created through the PIM process, while the Action/Implementation Plans were created by the school leadership teams to implement the America's Choice model in their schools. An example of how the plans lacked explicit connections concerned the management of challenges of student transience and mobility. Cited by interviewees as a "huge issue" for the district, the issue of transient students only appeared in the DTAP.

Without clear connection to the DTAP, the DIP included a vision, mission, and two goals, all focusing on the educational purpose of the district. The vision statement was, "The vision of the Holyoke Public Schools is that every student will graduate from high school ready for college success without remediation and for success as a worker and citizen in a global society." The mission statement was, "The mission of the Holyoke Public Schools is to provide educational opportunities in a safe, secure, healthy learning environment while valuing diversity and promoting responsible citizenship." The two strategic goals were: 1) "Provide quality instructional programming to ensure all students are Proficient or Advanced by 2013-2014"; and 2) "Effectively use resources to improve all instructional goals." Strategic goal 1 had eight accompanying objectives and goal 2 had nine objectives. The instructional components of the DIP were not explicitly connected to the DTAP initiatives or strategies relating to instruction.

School Improvement Plans used roughly the same template: a) SIP committee; b) School Improvement Council; c) school demographics; d) student achievement data; e) AYP mid-cycle results; f) executive summary; g) outline-ELA; h) outline-math; i) action plan-ELA; j) action plan-math; and k) appendix. The format of the outline plan to improve general performance in ELA and math included: 1) goals; 2) student learning objectives; 3) causes and improvement objectives; 4) strategies and improvement benchmarks; and 5) outcome benchmarks. The Action/Implementation Plans of the elementary and middle schools focused on ELA and math and consisted of: a) student learning objectives; b) improvement objectives; c) strategies; d) activities; e) person(s) responsible; f) resources needed; and g) timelines. Objectives and strategies in the two plans for each school were not related to each other.

Opinions differed among the interviewees as to which plan or plans defined the priorities of the district and the schools, and explicit connections did not exist among the four plans. Many staff

members indicated that the DTAP served as the driving force for the district. Some other interviewees mentioned various combinations of the four plans as the driving force. Other staff members indicated that they saw the DIP, SIPs, and Action/Implementation Plans as being just as important if not more important than the DTAP. Most principals remarked that the Action/Implementation Plans provided the focus and direction for the schools.

**Finding 5. Accountability for implementing the DTAP was embedded in the superintendent's assignment of responsibility areas to administrators, and in the evaluations of the superintendent and principals. (III)**

Administrators indicated the steps within each initiative were embedded in their roles, and that the superintendent designated the person(s) responsible for each of the six initiatives. Primary responsible staff members for Initiative 1 were the interim data coordinator and the director of curriculum and testing; for Initiative 2, the director of curriculum and testing; for Initiative 3, the district leadership team; for Initiative 4, the district leadership team; for Initiative 5, the director of curriculum and testing and the curriculum team (the coordinators of ELA, math, science, and ELL, the director of health, and the director of federal and state grants); and for Initiative 6, the assistant principal of the Peck Middle School.

Both the school committee and the superintendent mentioned that a significant portion of the superintendent's evaluation had to do with progress made on the DTAP. A review of the superintendent's evaluation confirmed this. Also, the superintendent stated that he held the members of his leadership team accountable for overseeing the implementation of the DTAP. Furthermore, the superintendent stated that he made use of administrative portfolios as a means of evidence for accountability. Leadership personnel concurred with the statement of the superintendent pertaining to accountability as it related to the implementation of the DTAP.

**Finding 6. Internal district capacity was a limiting factor in the speed of implementation of the plan. The leadership frequently used consultants to address issues in the school system rather than build internal capacity. (IV)**

The district has responded to needs by enabling newly created roles, but the needs are vast. The special assistant to the superintendent has supported the work of the district, but greater internal

capacity building is a need recognized by the special assistant as well as the superintendent. The district's balance of outsourcing responsibility and hiring and developing administrators for key roles has not ensured the internal capacity to carry out plans efficiently as a coherent, embedded part of the district's overall strategy. Delegated responsibility and the new role of director of curriculum and testing were key enabling elements in the plan's implementation. However, the director of curriculum and testing was assigned to five of six initiatives, thereby giving one key administrator the broadest amount of responsibility and limiting the amount of time that could be dedicated to each task. The new role of data administrator enables the implementation of the plan, but this role has been filled by an interim administrator since the onset of the plan because the district has not found a person to meet the qualifications for the position.

Central office administrators indicated that the district initially lacked adequate data collection and analysis. Administrators stated that the district over the last two years had attempted, unsuccessfully, to recruit and hire two individuals to oversee district-level assessment, data analysis, research, and evaluation. In their place, the superintendent indicated that the district contracted with consultants (from Ideal) to analyze the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test results. In addition, the district hired an interim data coordinator and a management information supervisor. According to the superintendent, the DOE funded one of the positions and the district paid for the other. Furthermore, the district established an 11-member data team, consisting of individuals such as directors, supervisors, and coordinators and headed by the school support specialist.

During the period under review, administrators reported that they participated in a yearlong National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) training program. Leadership personnel indicated that this "was just a small portion" of the professional development offerings made available to the faculty in the last two years to address the initiatives in the DTAP and to develop and implement programs, services, and teaching strategies to improve the performance of students.

**Finding 7. The district perceived that major challenges in implementing the DTAP included budget constraints, recruitment of qualified staff, limits in the teachers' contract, inadequate availability of social services, and reactions to the district's underperforming label. (IV)**

The superintendent mentioned four things that he perceived as hindering the district's implementation of the DTAP. The first hindrance he stated concerned the budget. The superintendent commented that in his initial year as superintendent in the district he had his proposed needs budget reduced. He estimated that since then, the cost of those budget reductions amounted to approximately $18 million.

The second hindrance concerned the need for recruiting and hiring certified staff. The superintendent stated that the district was unsuccessful in the last two years in hiring two qualified individuals to develop and implement a comprehensive data and assessment system. Also, he commented about the difficulty in recruiting and hiring certified and qualified administrators (for example, the district received no applications in two years for the position of principal of the Dean Technical High School) and teachers of math, science, foreign languages, and special education. The superintendent did indicate that "approximately 240 teachers in the district are bilingual."

The superintendent mentioned the teachers' association as the third hindrance to the implementation of the DTAP. The superintendent expressed concern about issues associated with professional development days, the new teacher evaluation instrument and procedure, and the attitude of some teachers that the DTAP "was imposed top down by DOE." Other interviewees mentioned these same three concerns about the teachers' association.

The fourth hindrance stated by the superintendent dealt with the inadequate social service agency support. The superintendent commented that due to the "large number of mobile students and families living in shelters," the amount of social service agency support "to stabilize them was not sufficient." Although he referenced the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP), the Even Start program, and the Adult Basic Education program, the superintendent remarked that "more help was needed."

Interviewees also commented that stabilizing mobile students and families presented "huge issues" for the district. They cited, among other things, "the disruption in the classroom with students coming and going" and "fragmented versus continuity of instruction." The superintendent and some of the other administrators mentioned that in 2004-2005, the district initiated the TOP at the middle school level to meet the needs of mobile students. After some

problems in the initial year of the program, the district selected special teachers and provided them with professional development training, materials, and support services to implement the TOP. Also, administrators reported that the district used Title I funds to provide after-school programs for families living in shelters. In addition, the district used grant funds to implement the Even Start program, an evening program that worked with the whole family. Furthermore, using Drug Free grant funds, the district hired two social workers to assist approximately 30 families with high-risk youngsters to stabilize them by getting them the help they needed.

Some interviewees reported that being labeled as an underperforming district "was a demoralizing factor." They also indicated that the labeling impacted the recruitment and hiring process of professional staff. In addition, these interviewees felt that the labeling caused some parents to withdraw their youngsters from the school system and to enroll them in the local charter and parochial schools.

**Finding 8. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had not gathered adequate data by the time of the 2006-2007 review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges. (IV)**

The superintendent stated that the district "really" started to implement the DTAP during 2005-2006. He commented that the first year "was a year of frustration" in getting the DTAP underway. District administrators indicated that they did not have much evaluative data at the time of the review because the DTAP was still in an early stage of implementation.

The superintendent cited several factors within the district that impeded the accomplishment of the initial phases of some of the initiatives in 2005-2006, including student and family mobility and difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified and certified administrators and teachers.

Even so, district documentation and interviews with leadership personnel and teachers revealed that the district had begun to take steps to address each of the six DTAP initiatives, although implementation was still a work in progress. For the most part, administrators and teachers were positive about the changes in the district since the implementation of the DTAP. Many staff indicated that Holyoke Public Schools has begun to align more effectively efforts in the district

to ensure fidelity of implementation in grades K-8. Administrators mentioned that the DTAP, among other things, has resulted in a greater use and analysis of data, a better flow of information, a unified curriculum in ELA and math at the elementary and middle schools, a standard walk-through process, and a new teacher evaluation instrument and procedure.

Administrators and teachers commented favorably on the unified curriculum and the curriculum maps completed at the elementary and middle levels since the development and implementation of the DTAP. Other examples of the DTAP gaining traction in the district to improve student achievement, as cited by interviewees, included the hiring of grade 1-12 coordinators for ELA, math, and science and a kindergarten coordinator; adequate textbooks, supplies, and materials to deliver the academic programs; implementation of the new teacher evaluation instrument and procedure; and the institution of the walk-through process. Also, both the administrators and teachers made positive statements about the professional development offerings made available to them since the implementation of the DTAP, especially the NISL training for principals. Administrators and teachers also remarked about the value of having the DTAP partner on site as a resource and as a person who provided model lessons.

Administrators and teachers in focus groups also spoke favorably about the coaches hired in the district at the elementary and middle schools. According to the administrators and teachers, the ELA and math coaches have assisted with the continuity of the ELA and math curricula in grades K-8 and have provided support to classroom teachers in these two subject areas. Administrators and teachers voiced the opinion that coaches should be assigned to only one school, as opposed to some of them being shared between two schools. The superintendent indicated his awareness of this matter and said that he “was giving it consideration.” Curriculum initiatives in ELA and math began at the middle schools, then moved to the elementary schools, and so far only included Ramp-Up ELA and math at grade 9 in the high schools.

Leadership personnel stated that the district hired two individuals to oversee testing, assessment, data analysis, research, and evaluation for the school system. These administrators commented positively on the establishment of the district data team. Also, the superintendent reported that teachers and administrators have begun, at a rudimentary level, to analyze and use assessment

results in order to modify existing and/or implement new programs and services to address the needs of students in grades K-9.

Interviewees remarked about improved services to meet the needs of special education and limited English proficient (LEP) students. Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that the district had broadened its diversification of programs and services to meet the needs of all students. Leadership personnel mentioned programs such as the MCAS after-school program (at the elementary and middle schools), the Summer School (at all levels), the Saturday School (for students with poor attendance), and the Kinder Camp (for students preparing for kindergarten). Administrators also mentioned the establishment of the Transitional Academy and the implementation of the Transient Opportunity Program as examples of the DTAP's traction in the district.

According to the superintendent, in 2004, with the assistance of the America's Choice partner, the district developed a program after "we discussed data about repeats with grade 9 students." The issues examined and the profile developed included: a) absences of more than 35 days in the middle school; b) 'Warning/Failure' results on the MCAS tests; and c) disciplinary records. As a result, the superintendent stated that a year later the district launched the Transitional Academy for students who fit that profile. The superintendent referred to the Transitional Academy as a "fifth year of high school." The program included Read 180, small group instruction, language rich environments, and extensive language/leveled libraries. Designed for 100 students, the superintendent reported that it had approximately 35 students enrolled in it. Also, the superintendent indicated that "one of the unintentional side effects of the program was that it became labeled as the eight and a half academy."

Although most of the interviewees expressed optimism about the initiatives in the DTAP, only a few pockets of improvement in student achievement were evident in the district. The superintendent indicated that the impact of the DTAP was beginning to show in the small improvements made in the MCAS test results in some schools. However, the superintendent expressed the overall need to improve student performance throughout the district, especially in the three downtown schools (Peck, Lawrence, Lynch).

## *Progress in the Turnaround Plan Implementation*

The EQA review team learned that the Holyoke turnaround plan was in the early implementation stage, with various degrees of completion of the strategies and action steps embedded in the initiatives and with various degrees of full and effective implementation across all the schools in the district. Initiative 1 was largely incomplete, while Initiative 6 was largely complete. Initiatives 2 through 5 were underway. In general, the progress on the initiatives represented improvements in the district since the EQA baseline visit in 2004. Yet, the impacts on classroom instruction were mostly evident in the adoption of the America's Choice model rather than the adoption of the DTAP initiatives at the classroom level. The district has not assessed the impact of the initiatives on student performance. However, the team saw examples of improved district practices with the potential to improve instruction and student achievement if sustained, effectively staffed and provisioned for, and regularly and effectively evaluated and modified.

The review of the implementation of the entire plan yielded 10 findings (9-19) related to Holyoke's progress on the six initiatives. (As in the previous section of this report, the related general finding (I, II, II, or V) is indicated in parentheses at the end of each finding.) To clarify the link between the findings and the evidence documenting progress in implementing the initiatives, the summary below presents the evidence for each of these 10 findings. The evidence is listed as key observations associated with each of the six initiatives, e.g., 1f, with the related finding(s) indicated in parentheses at the end of each key observation. In many cases, a key observation is associated with more than one finding. More evidence is included in the detailed descriptions of the progress on each initiative that follow, where the key observations are organized by the turnaround plan initiative rather than by finding. For reference, Appendix F: Organization of Findings provides a list of the findings with their relationship to the general findings, and Appendix G: Order of Findings provides a list of the findings in order of their appearance in this document (i.e., numerical order).

**Finding 9. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, the district has collected more data than it has evaluated, and is largely unable to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of new programs and initiatives to date. (I)**

1f. Initiative 1 did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice throughout the school system to inform the DTAP, DIP, SIPs, or school-based Implementation/Action Plans or district programs. (9, 10, 15)

1g. Administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had not gathered adequate data by the time of the 2006-2007 review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges to date. (9)

2f. The various curricula did not all include assessments to measure attainment of the objectives. (9, 13)

2h. Pre- and post-assessments did not yet provide much diagnostic information concerning students' learning strengths and needs, and teachers did not have the data they needed to plan instruction. (9, 13)

2i. Teachers regularly had difficulties accessing the student achievement data they did have. Without a database, teachers collected data on their students from several sources, resulting in teachers devoting a great deal of energy to arrive at a clear picture of their students' achievement levels and needs. (9, 15, 19)

3h. The EQA team learned that individual professional development plans (IPDPs) were more in line with SIP requirements than with district professional offerings. In interviews, the team learned that at least one new principal renegotiated the substance of that school's IPDPs to reflect the new directions of the SIP and the DTAP. (9)

3m. No evaluation document reviewed by the EQA team reflected walk-through data. (9)

3n. No central office official conducted an annual qualitative or DTAP compliance review of completed evaluation materials. (9)

3s. The "exemplars" did not clearly align with state teacher evaluation standards (e.g. CMR 35:00), nor did they clearly align with America's Choice teaching protocols or with the district turnaround plan. (9)

3t. No determination has been made whether the new performance evaluation exemplars will blend into the new protocols of America's Choice. (9)

4e. Student assessment results resided on several databases. The district's goal was to integrate these databases for ease of access and to facilitate data comparison and analysis. (9)

4f. The district's writing prompts were scored holistically rather than analytically and were more useful for detecting aggregate trends, patterns, and curricular strengths and weaknesses than for diagnosing individual students' instructional needs in written language. (9)

4g. The reliability and validity of the district mathematics open-response questions were undetermined, and the procedures for scoring student responses did not ensure inter-rater reliability. (9)

4h. Holyoke teachers and coaches developed curriculum-based assessments in mathematics through an informal process involving collegial discussion and consensus. However, no procedural safeguards existed to ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments as measures of what students know and are able to do. (9)

4i. Holyoke lacked a procedure and a cycle for evaluating its curricula, programs, and services, except for grant funded initiatives. (9)

4j. Holyoke had a limited basis for monitoring the implementation of its literacy programs. There was no formal program evaluation cycle, programs had not been stable and in effect long enough to be fairly evaluated, and the solidification of programs had taken priority over program evaluation. (9)

4k. The district provided no standard student profile or template to organize student assessment data, although some schools had developed their own. (9)

5k. Neither teacher evaluations, walk-throughs, nor focus walks connected professional development to performance records or provided an assessment of the results of the professional development program. Informal conversations occurred, but an analysis of the professional development program was not a practice in the district. (9, 12)

5l. Training costs were very high in the aggregate with little supporting data about the return on investment expected or received as a result of the training. (9)

6d. District staff did not conduct a longitudinal study to discern the potential benefits of the Transient Opportunity Program for mobile students. (9)

6e. The Transient Opportunity Program was not evaluated using social-emotional data, attendance data (other than withdrawal/move data), or a comparison of TOP student performance versus non-TOP student performance for any of the data sets. (9)

**Finding 10. Interdependent priorities in key district plans and documents were not systemically interwoven and translated into sustainable, focused practices in all needed areas. (II)**

1e. The data/MIS coordinator position and Ideal consultants performed duties related to the "creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system," yet neither had the role, responsibility, or authority to do so. (10, 11, 18)

1f. Initiative 1 did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice throughout the school system to inform the DTAP, DIP, SIPs, or school-based Implementation/Action Plans or district programs. (9, 10, 15)

1l. The district did not have defined expectations for teacher use of standardized test data to inform instruction, so use of them varied among schools. Some evidence of data use was observed at the elementary and middle schools, but not at the high school. (10, 13, 16)

1m. Practices such as the use of observation and non-diagnostic, classroom-based assessments did not help teachers to perform stated instructional goals such as re-teaching and flexible grouping, which require diagnostic assessments. Some principals, teams, and teachers used formal assessment data to provide a deeper diagnosis of student weaknesses in content and skills. (10, 17)

2d. Alignment of the ELA curriculum maps with the state frameworks was not explicit. (10, 17)

2g. Curriculum assessments did not always reflect a clear connection with the objectives addressed. (10, 17)

3g. Summary data, which were tied to SIPs and the DTAP, gathered from walk-throughs and focus walks were displayed in schools. (10, 13)

3p. The Initiative 3 language outlines three (but is not limited to these) areas of focus as teachers become more responsible for delivery of instruction, but there was no obvious connection to which of the newly negotiated contract "exemplars" must be practiced to successfully meet

these areas of focus, nor any guidance regarding the frequency or intensity with which they must be practiced in order for these areas of focus to be mastered. (10, 13)

3r. The new teacher contract evaluation language did not line up with the areas of focus emphasized in Initiative 3. (10, 13)

5a. A comprehensive professional development plan was developed by the district. (10)

5h. The district shifted from centralized to decentralized decision-making in professional development access, accompanying a shift in instructional focus, routines, and rituals provided by an external vendor, America's Choice. (10, 12)

6f. The district did not align the initiative supporting mobile students with the remaining five initiatives of the DTAP and did not embed the mobile student initiative within the goals of the DIP, SIPs, or America's Choice Implementation/Action Plans. (10)

**Finding 11. The turnaround plan does not address some components for key pieces of district work necessary for a whole-district turnaround. (II)**

1e. The data/MIS coordinator position and Ideal consultants performed duties related to the "creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system," yet neither had the role, responsibility, or authority to do so. (10, 11, 18)

1i. The district lacked coaches to address English language learner (ELL) and special education student needs. This was despite a widening of the achievement gap from 2004 to 2006 between regular education and both ELL and special education students. (11, 14)

1h. Literacy and math coaches were key in assisting teachers to use data to inform instruction. However, the district did not have a sufficient number of coaches in these areas to provide adequate support. (11)

1j. ELL inclusion and special education coordinators were not assigned responsibility for or given adequate time to use data to support their students. (11, 14)

2e. Vertical alignment between the grade 8 and 9 curricula was problematic. (11, 16)

2l. Principals did not play a key role in the dissemination of the curriculum. (11, 16)

2m. Central office responsibility for curriculum oversight at the high school was unclear. (11, 16)

2n. Teacher content knowledge was an issue, especially in certain areas; 25 percent of the math and 19 percent of the special education teachers were not certified at the time of the EQA site visit. (11, 12)

3a. The district was in the planning stage of tying performance evaluations of teachers to formal documentation in teacher evaluations. (11)

3o. The district has not yet field tested its new teacher performance evaluation process. (11)

3q. The district's written records of performance evaluations for teachers, which the EQA team reviewed, were unclear as to how the evaluation process should be used to improve instruction. (11, 13)

6k. No program existed for transient high school students. (11, 16)

**Finding 12. The professional development program provided ample offerings and has become more developed. While improved, it still falls short of a cohesive approach in a district experiencing substantial shifts with subsequent changes in district strategies and classroom approaches. (II)**

1a. Holyoke was in the early stages of building staff capacity to analyze data by providing training and assistance to classroom teachers in the use of data starting at the middle and elementary levels. (12, 18, 19)

2n. Teacher content knowledge was an issue, especially in certain areas; 25 percent of the math and 19 percent of the special education teachers were not certified at the time of the EQA site visit. (11, 12)

3j. Several principals indicated that few if any teachers have had similar or parallel training in evaluation techniques by either Ribas Associates or Research for Better Teaching consultants as school-based administrators have received. (12, 13)

5b. The district organized a comprehensive approach to professional development which was layered in its offerings, but centrally administered, funded, and tracked. (12, 19)

5c. The district maintained a centralized planning and logistical function for professional development while distributing decision-making about access to schools. (12, 19)

5d. The district has initiated walk-throughs to assess the effects of professional development and a focus on student work with accompanying rubrics. These tandem efforts were done at the school level. (12, 19)

5e. Ample evidence indicated that professional development offerings were available and school-based monitoring protocols were in place to promote achievement of district goals. (12)

5f. The district was augmenting its professional development efforts to balance centralized, mandated training with school- and classroom-based job-embedded training. (12, 19)

5h. The district shifted from centralized to decentralized decision-making in professional development access, accompanying a shift in instructional focus, routines, and rituals provided by an external vendor, America's Choice. (10, 12)

5i. Schools participating in the America's Choice model of school reform received training in the required protocols. (12, 19)

5j. All teachers have not received required training in new protocols and practices. (12)

5k. Neither teacher evaluations, walk-throughs, nor focus walks connected professional development to performance records or provided an assessment of the results of the professional development program. Informal conversations occurred, but an analysis of the professional development program was not a practice in the district. (9, 12)

**Finding 13. Unlike administrators, teachers were not sufficiently prepared to be held accountable for carrying out responsibilities directly related to district or school goals. (II)**

1k. Not all staff were equally involved in the PIM process, and teachers in interviews indicated there was a limited shared understanding of data and how to use results for instruction across schools and grade levels. (13)

1l. The district did not have defined expectations for teacher use of standardized test data to inform instruction, so use of them varied among schools. Some evidence of data use was observed at the elementary and middle schools, but not at the high school. (10, 13, 16)

2f. The various curricula did not all include assessments to measure attainment of the objectives. (9, 13)

2h. Pre- and post-assessments did not yet provide much diagnostic information concerning students' learning strengths and needs, and teachers did not have the data they needed to plan instruction. (9, 13)

2j. Staff responsible for overseeing the K-8 curriculum did not evaluate teachers. (13)

3j. Several principals indicated that few if any teachers have had similar or parallel training in evaluation techniques by either Ribas Associates or Research for Better Teaching consultants as school-based administrators have received. (12, 13)

3p. The Initiative 3 language outlines three (but is not limited to these) areas of focus as teachers become more responsible for delivery of instruction, but there was no obvious connection to which of the newly negotiated contract "exemplars" must be practiced to successfully meet these areas of focus, nor any guidance regarding the frequency or intensity with which they must be practiced in order for these areas of focus to be mastered. (10, 13)

3q. The district's written records of performance evaluations for teachers, which the EQA team reviewed, were unclear as to how the evaluation process should be used to improve instruction. (11, 13)

3r. The new teacher contract evaluation language did not line up with the areas of focus emphasized in Initiative 3. (10, 13)

3u. A review of the evaluation training outline for administrators and a review of information gained in interviews with administrators provided no guidance as to how to affirm competence in one criterion using only one exemplar (of 127) per criterion. (13)

**Finding 14. The district improved its services and programs for ELL and special education students, although it continued some program-based approaches rather than a district-based approach to address student needs in programs designed for all students. (II)**

1i. The district lacked coaches to address English language learner (ELL) and special education student needs. This was despite a widening of the achievement gap from 2004 to 2006 between regular education and both ELL and special education students. (11, 14)

1j. ELL inclusion and special education coordinators were not assigned responsibility for or given adequate time to use data to support their students. (11, 14)

3d. In interviews, the EQA team learned that the principals in conjunction with the ELL curriculum director monitored ELL strategies using walk-throughs. The professional development record showed that over 190 teachers had received training in integrating ELL strategies into classroom practice and in the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O). (14)

3e. Records reflecting the district's professional development efforts provided ample evidence of teacher training in ELL instruction. (14)

3f. The district had well documented records showing the type, frequency, and populations of teachers participating in ELL training. (14)

4l. The district's professional development offerings on differentiated instruction focused on mandated modifications for ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. Few offerings were intended to help teachers accommodate students functioning well below grade-level expectations and to address a range of differences in readiness, interests, talents, and learning styles. (14)

4m. The view of differentiated instruction in Holyoke was narrow, consisting primarily of mandated provisions for its identified high-incident populations of ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. (14)

5g. The district's professional development plan showed a clear outline with ideas and suggestions for how staff at all levels should meet the challenges of ELA, math, ELL, and special education. (14)

6b. Despite the isolation of the TOP and/or the separation of students from their neighborhood schools, teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed generally supported the program as a good intervention for mobile students and the district's schools. (14)

6g. The design of the TOP separated transient students from their peers and made a small number of district staff responsible for meeting their needs. (14)

6i. The Holyoke Public Schools' plan for Initiative 6 did not use a systematic approach to coordinate services for all mobile students and their families. (14)

6j. The Brown University report questioned Holyoke's decision to form the TOP as a separate program, rather than as a districtwide program integrated within each of the schools, as recommended by best practices for mobile students. (14)

**Finding 15. With some exceptions, and to a lesser extent than in previous years, district resources were not deployed to maximize the district's ability to improve its capacity, to maximize cost-effectiveness, and to institutionalize a long-term strategy in a sustainable way. (II)**

1d. Holyoke still lacked a central database or system that could support and simplify the central collection of data for their efficient and effective use to improve the school district. (15)

1f. Initiative 1 did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice throughout the school system to inform the DTAP, DIP, SIPs, or school-based Implementation/Action Plans or district programs. (9, 10, 15)

2i. Teachers regularly had difficulties accessing the student achievement data they did have. Without a database, teachers collected data on their students from several sources, resulting in teachers devoting a great deal of energy to arrive at a clear picture of their students' achievement levels and needs. (9, 15, 19)

3k. The pattern of the district administration in hiring outside consultants to offer solutions for district problems did not build internal problem-solving supervisory capacity in the district over the long run. (15)

3l. Spending on professional development averaged approximately $3 million, or roughly $17,000 per day, but the district lacked measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs. (15)

5m. The district's professional development effort was almost exclusively paid for by grants. (15)

**Finding 16. The DTAP has started to gain traction in the district to promote changes that the district expects to improve student achievement in grades K-8, but not in grades 9-12. (III)**

1l. The district did not have defined expectations for teacher use of standardized test data to inform instruction, so use of them varied among schools. Some evidence of data use was observed at the elementary and middle schools, but not at the high school. (10, 13, 16)

2e. Vertical alignment between the grade 8 and 9 curricula was problematic. (11, 16)

2m. Central office responsibility for curriculum oversight at the high school was unclear. (11, 16)

2q. In classroom observations, grade 9 had remarkably lower scores than grades 10-12 on indicators of effective practice in every category. Grade 9 was the only high school level to incorporate the America's Choice model. However, the America's Choice model was not associated with lower scores in areas of classroom practice at the other grade levels. (16)

2r. The team found that the America's Choice practices did provide some structure for effective classroom management that set the stage for learning. (16)

2s. Students were engaged in good learning routines in only 27 percent of the observed high school math classes, compared to the average of 73 percent for grade 9-12 math classes in districts reviewed by the EQA in 2006-2007. (16)

2t. In grades 2-5 in ELA, the instructional practice score was 85 percent, higher than the EQA-reviewed district average of 78 percent for the same subject and grades. (16)

2u. In math, the instructional practice score for grades 2-5 was 69 percent, lower than the EQA-reviewed district average of 78 percent for the same subject and grades. (16)

2v. The high school's instructional practices compared negatively to those districtwide in ELA (57 compared to 63 percent) and in math (41 compared to 65 percent). (16)

6k. No program existed for transient high school students. (11, 16)

**Finding 17. The implementation of the plan has brought more consistency and uniformity through common curricula with common learning expectations in grades K-8, although the curriculum development process was still being formed. (III)**

1m. Practices such as the use of observation and non-diagnostic, classroom-based assessments did not help teachers to perform stated instructional goals such as re-teaching and flexible grouping, which require diagnostic assessments. Some principals, teams, and teachers used

formal assessment data to provide a deeper diagnosis of student weaknesses in content and skills. (10, 17)

2a. The district succeeded in providing curriculum maps for math in grades K-8 and for ELA in grades 4-8. (17)

2b. Horizontal alignment of curriculum at grades K-8 was in place as the 2006-2007 school year progressed. (17, 19)

2c. Some gaps in the aligned curriculum continued to exist. (17, 19)

2d. Alignment of the ELA curriculum maps with the state frameworks was not explicit. (10, 17)

2g. Curriculum assessments did not always reflect a clear connection with the objectives addressed. (10, 17)

2k. Coaches assumed responsibility for the dissemination of the recently developed curriculum and for oversight of its implementation. (17, 19)

2o. Overall, for each classroom observation category the team found that classroom practices were stronger in ELA than in math. (17)

2p. Overall, for each classroom observation category the team found that classroom practices were strongest at the elementary school level, followed by the middle school level, then the high school level. (17)

2w. A strength of the district was the amount of student work displayed, as classrooms at all levels scored higher on this indicator in classroom observations than did those of other districts reviewed by the EQA. (17)

**Finding 18. The district's use of student assessments has improved, although work on Initiative 1 has experienced the greatest stagnation. (III)**

1a. Holyoke was in the early stages of building staff capacity to analyze data by providing training and assistance to classroom teachers in the use of data starting at the middle and elementary levels. (12, 18, 19)

1c. Holyoke clarified and aligned its assessments since the first review, and established assessments for students in grades K-10 for formative, summative, and intervention purposes. (18)

1e. The data/MIS coordinator position and Ideal consultants performed duties related to the "creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system," yet neither had the role, responsibility, or authority to do so. (10, 11, 18)

4b. The district central data team was participating in the DOE data warehouse project with the goal of establishing an integrated database for longitudinal comparison of multiple sources of information about student characteristics and performance. (18)

4c. A district data team was formed in 2005-2006 to develop a common vision of assessment. This team created a portfolio of commonly administered assessments together with information for teachers on the utility and function of each. A calendar was also administered. (18)

**Finding 19. Being in the early implementation stage, the turnaround plan has launched some changes that have promise, but were not necessarily deeply embedded. (IV)**

1a. Holyoke was in the early stages of building staff capacity to analyze data by providing training and assistance to classroom teachers in the use of data starting at the middle and elementary levels. (12, 18, 19)

1b. The district built the capacity to analyze data by assigning responsibility areas to its data team, the director of curriculum and testing, the data/MIS coordinator, the district leadership team, principals, building-based teams, curriculum teams, and instructional coaches. (19)

2b. Horizontal alignment of curriculum at grades K-8 was in place as the 2006-2007 school year progressed. (17, 19)

2c. Some gaps in the aligned curriculum continued to exist. (17, 19)

2i. Teachers regularly had difficulties accessing the student achievement data they did have. Without a database, teachers collected data on their students from several sources, resulting in teachers devoting a great deal of energy to arrive at a clear picture of their students' achievement levels and needs. (9, 15, 19)

2k. Coaches assumed responsibility for the dissemination of the recently developed curriculum and for oversight of its implementation. (17, 19)

2x. The high schools' expectations in math classes were notably low, with a 35 percent score in classroom observations, compared to 58 percent in high school math classes across EQA-reviewed districts. (19)

2y. Student engagement in the learning process was low at the high school; at the middle and elementary levels, it varied by subject. (19)

2z. In ELA but not in math, classrooms were generally characterized by active listening, courtesy, fairness, and respect at levels similar in other EQA-reviewed districts. (19)

3b. The district non-renewed and terminated teachers in recent years. (19)

3c. The district initiated walk-throughs in its America's Choice schools as a monitoring process in classrooms. (19)

3i. An outside consultant trained administrators in teacher observation and evaluation writing techniques. (19)

4a. Holyoke made substantial progress in the use of assessment, especially formative measures, against the baseline of the 2004 EQA report. (19)

4d. Holyoke had a battery of common assessments with defined purposes administered according to a centrally coordinated calendar, and the central data team developed pathways to make the results immediately accessible to the schools. (19)

4n. While the results of student responses to district-developed writing prompts demonstrated gains in written language proficiency, according to a review by the EQA team, the district was just beginning to make use of them to improve instruction. (19)

4o. The presence of multiple tasks for different levels was a strength of the district's K-8 classrooms, but there was little evidence that the tasks were targeted to students at the appropriate skill level or were capable of bringing students from one skill level to the next higher level. (19)

5b. The district organized a comprehensive approach to professional development which was layered in its offerings, but centrally administered, funded, and tracked. (12, 19)

5c. The district maintained a centralized planning and logistical function for professional development while distributing decision-making about access to schools. (12, 19)

5d. The district has initiated walk-throughs to assess the effects of professional development and a focus on student work with accompanying rubrics. These tandem efforts were done at the school level. (12, 19)

5f. The district was augmenting its professional development efforts to balance centralized, mandated training with school- and classroom-based job-embedded training. (12, 19)

5i. Schools participating in the America's Choice model of school reform received training in the required protocols. (12, 19)

6a. During interviews, parents, teachers, and administrators reported that they were pleased with the TOP for reducing the disruption caused when transient students arrived in the schools and for preparing mobile students to be more familiar with school routines. (19)

6c. According to TOP staff, starting in 2005-2006, the district made several TOP improvements based on the Brown University recommendations and TOP staff input. (19)

6h. The district piloted the TOP for all mobile students at the middle school level and for some students at the elementary level during the period reviewed. (19)

The following presents each initiative of the Holyoke District Turnaround Plan and its status. The section begins with a summary of the initiative's implementation and the key observations related to the initiative made by the EQA team, followed by supporting evidence regarding each strategy and action item associated with the initiative. As above, the finding(s) related to each key observation is indicated in parentheses.

## Initiative 1: The district will utilize a regionally developed student data management system.

The State Department of Education has taken on the responsibility of creating this management system which will house all (general, special education, LEP) student assessment and demographic data so that progress in meeting state and local learning standards will be monitored.

**Status**: Initiative 1 is not complete; the district has not developed and put into operation a student data management system.

**Summary**

The original intent of Initiative 1 was for the district to prepare for the DOE's creation of its COGNOS data management system in a way that would allow the district to best utilize the system to improve student achievement.

To that end, district leadership planned to first identify, assess, and align the student assessments used in the district. The district's next steps were to develop a plan for using data while also beginning to prepare staff members at the school building level to use data to inform their work. As a strategy, the district decided to conduct data assessment and analysis using data banks and assessment tools currently available to it. This was the district's strategy to prepare the district for effective use of the COGNOS system in the service of creating a data-driven environment within Holyoke Public Schools. Also as a strategy, Holyoke Public Schools worked to build capacity and systems in order for the district to use selected data to drive instruction. Holyoke had a contract with Ideal consulting to provide an analysis of the DIBELS data. Internally, Holyoke has built staff capacity to analyze data for instructional use by providing new staff positions with data analysis responsibilities and training to classroom teachers in the use of data. Additionally, the district contracted much of its aggregate data analysis work to outside vendors.

The district also worked on a strategy to create a team at the district level with representation from the curriculum, ELL, and special education programs to evaluate student performance data in ways that would result in the modification of the instructional program for students with different needs.

This initiative did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice to inform all district initiatives in the DTAP, all district programs, and other district plans such as the DIP, SIPs, or school-based Implementation/Action Plans. Lacking a districtwide approach to use assessments throughout the school system, Initiative 1 did not include all the components of a plan for fully utilizing student data to improve achievement.

**Key Observations:**

1a. Holyoke was in the early stages of building staff capacity to analyze data by providing training and assistance to classroom teachers in the use of data starting at the middle and elementary levels. (12, 18, 19)

1b. The district built the capacity to analyze data by assigning responsibility areas to its data team, the director of curriculum and testing, the data/MIS coordinator, the district leadership team, principals, building-based teams, curriculum teams, and instructional coaches. (19)

1c. Holyoke clarified and aligned its assessments since the first review, and established assessments for students in grades K-10 for formative, summative, and intervention purposes. (18)

1d. Holyoke still lacked a central database or a system that could support and simplify the central collection of data for their efficient and effective use to improve the school district. (15)

1e. The data/MIS coordinator position and Ideal consultants performed duties related to the "creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system," yet neither had the role, responsibility, or authority to do so. (10, 11, 18)

1f. Initiative 1 did not include a strategy to incorporate the use of assessments as an embedded practice throughout the school system to inform the DTAP, DIP, SIPs, or school-based Implementation/Action Plans or district programs. (9, 10, 15)

1g. Administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had not gathered adequate data by the time of the 2006-2007 review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges to date. (9)

1h. Literacy and math coaches were key in assisting teachers to use data to inform instruction. However, the district did not have a sufficient number of coaches in these areas to provide adequate support. (11)

1i. The district lacked coaches to address English language learner (ELL) and special education student needs. This was despite a widening of the achievement gap from 2004 to 2006 between regular education and both ELL and special education students. (11, 14)

1j. ELL inclusion and special education coordinators were not assigned responsibility for or given adequate time to use data to support their students. (11, 14)

1k. Not all staff were equally involved in the PIM process, and teachers in interviews indicated there was a limited shared understanding of data and how to use results for instruction across schools and grade levels. (13)

1l. The district did not have defined expectations for teacher use of standardized test data to inform instruction, so use of them varied among schools. Some evidence of data use was observed at the elementary and middle schools, but not at the high school. (10, 13, 16)

1m. Practices such as the use of observation and non-diagnostic, classroom-based assessments did not help teachers to perform stated instructional goals such as re-teaching and flexible grouping, which require diagnostic assessments. Some principals, teams, and teachers used formal assessment data to provide a deeper diagnosis of student weaknesses in content and skills. (10, 17)

**Evidence**

To accomplish Initiative 1, the district identified three strategies. Strategy 1A has two action steps, Strategy 1B has four action steps, and Strategy 1C has seven action steps. The last strategy (to form a data team) was fully addressed, but the district has not completed all the action steps under any of the strategies.

***Strategy 1A: The district will conduct data assessment and analysis using data banks and assessment tools currently available to the district.***

*Status: In progress and ongoing.*

District administrators and the action steps of this strategy indicated that the operational definition of Strategy 1A was to "conduct data assessment and analysis using data banks and assessment tools currently available to the district" *in order to inform the district of the requirements to prepare the district for effective use of the COGNOS system in the service of creating a data-driven environment within Holyoke Public Schools.*

Internally, Holyoke Public Schools has partially improved its management of student data, although the current use of data falls short of a completed comprehensive data management

system capable of ensuring that the district's programs, instruction, professional development, and management of human and financial resources best serve to meet the educational needs of its students.

At the time of the review, data were organized in several different systems, and different staff members were responsible for the collection and dissemination of data that were not all centrally located or analyzed in comparable formats to simplify, align, and organize assessment data for practical uses. The data team created a Current Data Management Environment Draft that describes each data source in the district, along with the application, the implementation status, and the vendor supporting the data platform. According to the draft, Rediker contained MCAS, student demographic, attendance, Student Information Management System (SIMS) interface, and entry and withdrawal data. Holyoke was still developing, revising, or fully implementing across schools other Rediker functions such as student grades, scheduling, school choice, photos, medical records, lunch data, income status, student portfolios, the Pocket PC student management system, and student standards. The district has implemented custom Microsoft Access software for school choice, entry and withdrawal data, and special education and LEP student data.

Holyoke also centrally used TestWiz to analyze the MCAS data, and the data coordinator produced and disseminated an analysis of Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data to schools. The district contracted out much of its aggregate data analysis to consultants. For example, although grade-level teams and literacy coaches were responsible for classroom and grade-level use of data, Ideal consultants analyzed the DIBELS data in the aggregate for the district. The district used a Brown University study to analyze its Transient Opportunity Program. Vendor reports were not organized in the same way to serve as tools in the evaluation and modification of programs and services. While the data could potentially be used for that purpose, the lack of alignment of responsibility areas for data analysis, the lack of alignment in the format of data collection and reporting, the lack of a formal program evaluation procedure, and the lack of a central database made practical data collection and use complex in a district with many student subgroups, many programs, and transience issues.

This strategy has two action items that serve as preliminary steps to the district's strategy to conduct data assessment and analysis using the district's available data banks and assessment tools.

*Action Item 1 is to identify the types of trainings that have already occurred in the district regarding the use of data and data analysis, and determine which staff have participated.*

*Action Item 2 is to identify the types of data that school principals, curriculum leaders, and teachers will find most useful for guiding instruction and student learning.*

Central office administrators stated in interviews that the district's leadership team assessed the level of teacher training in data analysis prior to implementing the new professional development plan, and learned that the understanding of student achievement data and of how to apply the results to instruction was uneven among teachers throughout the district. The leadership team stated that initially there were great variances among the schools for many reasons. Schools that had been through the PIM process, as required by the DOE for underperforming schools, and schools with Reading First and BayState Readers grants had more teacher training than other schools. The leadership team decided that training in data analysis and use needed to be part of a larger district plan tied to the turnaround plan and to district improvement goals. The district committed to supporting the schools in different ways to promote improved data analysis.

According to building-based staff, principals at all schools explained their respective school's MCAS test data to the school staff, provided centrally produced TestWiz analyses and MAP data to teams, and made data analysis central to school-based planning efforts, including the creation of Implementation/Action Plans and School Improvement Plans. Principals also were responsible for identifying professional development needs for the staff in their buildings, professional learning community priorities, and the work of the grade-level teams. The elementary and middle schools received training from America's Choice that incorporated the turnaround partner's student assessment practices. They also received support from the math and reading coaches who had additional training and responsibilities regarding the analysis and dissemination of student achievement data. The high schools were separate entities, lacking additional support in data analysis training and professional development from the turnaround partner, as the

district's approach to the high school level was to support preparation for the NEASC accreditation process.

According to the Professional Development Plan 2006-2007, one of the eight priorities for professional development is "data informed decision making" (page 5). The plan states that "professional development is ongoing as The Curriculum Teams, District Data Coordinator, Management Information Supervisor, and the Data Team analyze and disseminate the following data: Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), GRADE, DIBELS, MEPA, MCAS, QRI4, SRI, and district writing prompts" (page 12). The same staff members responsible for data analysis and dissemination, including the director of curriculum and testing, principals, and the turnaround partner, were involved in the identification of "the types of data that school principals, curriculum leaders and teachers will find most useful for guiding instruction and student learning" as the object of Action Item 2.

The section "Priority 5: Data Informed Decision Making" on page 12 of the professional development plan describes the role of the three types of assessments administered in the district: classroom assessments, continuous district assessments, and MCAS state assessments. According to the plan, "all of the schools in the district analyze assessment results in order to evaluate curriculum, improve instruction, and enhance student achievement. Principals, along with their building based leadership teams, use the results of assessments to establish annual goals for improvement by their students." According to the plan, the purpose of the district assessments, such as MAP, is to "make decisions about resource allocations, professional development planning, [and] program analysis, and to gain a better understanding of the probability of students passing the state's high stakes exam." Another purpose stated in the plan is to measure student growth to help the district learn "which programs are making a difference for students and can focus efforts on those programs which are working." However, interviewees stated that this has not happened for the TOP, the America's Choice programs, and some others. The superintendent stated that the district has not had the time to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives after only a year of full implementation of the DTAP.

Further, the plan states that "classroom teachers utilize assessments results, not only to evaluate their instruction, but to determine what concepts need to be reinforced and to utilize flexible

grouping practices in order to more effectively address and target identified student academic needs. This kind of professional development is ongoing and supported by the district." The plan indicates that "the largest amount of information about a student is gathered from classroom observation and assessment. Student work and performance expectations have been built into the curriculum maps and aligned with state standards." Holyoke's Grade Level Benchmarks K-8 2006-2007 provides "benchmarks [which] are defined in this document as specific statements that help clarify what students should know and be able to do at a particular level in a specific subject area with explicit level of work that demonstrate achievement and mastery." These expectations were linked with the state frameworks and incorporated into the district's curriculum maps and the math and literacy workshop models. To make student assessment more consistent, schools and school-based teams conducted meetings and professional learning community sessions around the expectations. The district developed rubrics and has begun to identify exemplars of student work. Principals and teachers indicated to the EQA team that this work has been valuable in aligning practices, but that teachers and principals need more time to discuss standards with their peers across the district.

Central office administrators, principals, and teachers verified that the district's approach to using data to inform decision-making was aligned in practice with the professional development plan, curriculum maps, and grade-level benchmarks document. In other words, the "types of data that school principals, curriculum leaders and teachers will find most useful for guiding instruction and student learning" were mostly considered to be observations and assessments built into the curriculum maps, as the district acknowledged in interviews. According to the professional development plan, these data are "difficult to aggregate."

Given that the instructional goals include specific practices such as re-teaching, targeted instruction, and flexible grouping, some principals and teachers acknowledged that the use of observation and non-diagnostic, classroom-based assessments such as the writing prompt did not lend themselves to these instructional goals. Some principals, teams, and teachers used formal assessment data, primarily from the MAP, Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and DIBELS, as well as other supplementary data to provide a deeper diagnosis of student weaknesses in content and skills, and to respond with specific strategies to strengthen students' learning gaps.

The district did not have formal practices and protocols defining the way that teachers were expected to use standardized test data to inform instruction. Therefore, while all teachers had access to data, the use of them varied among schools and depended on the principal or grant requirements. For example, one school decided to use flexible grouping within a whole grade level to ensure that students were being taught at the appropriate instructional level based on MAP data three times a year. The schools with Reading First grants had to follow very specific guidelines for assigning students to tiers with differentiated layers of support based on the DIBELS and progress monitoring data. Some schools relied more heavily on assessment data not frequently used in other schools because of teacher training and comfort level in interpreting and applying the results of the assessments.

In support of the use of data for instructional use, Holyoke was in the early stages of building staff capacity to analyze data by providing training and assistance to classroom teachers in the use of data starting at the middle and elementary levels. Elementary teachers administered the DIBELS and applied the data to instruction in different ways, depending on their school's staffing resources, which were partly determined by whether the school received a reading grant that provided additional reading support. The district administered the DIBELS at least three times a year to all K-3 students and also to grades 4 and 5, through the MAZE assessment, for schools with the Reading First or the BayState Readers grant funded programs. Teachers used the DIBELS data to inform instructional groupings and lesson planning, although schools without Reading First or BayState Readers grant funded programs had less prescribed methods and fewer staff to create flexible groups for differentiation.

The district also administered the MAP to all students in grades 3-10 three times a year. MAP data were centrally analyzed and disseminated by the data coordinator, who ensured that the data were provided immediately after the assessments were administered for instructional use. The district used MAP and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data to identify students in need of interventions. The district also ensured that priority assessments were administered to all students at the prescribed grade levels. Holyoke Public Schools continued the use of the pre-existing assessments and added other assessments—or clarified the use of the assessments—for diagnostic, screening, and intervention purposes, and to cover areas not previously assessed. The district instituted writing prompts and embedded the administration of the prompts in the

curriculum maps. Some schools administered additional assessments because of grant requirements and building-based decisions.

Holyoke's new programs and instructional models brought by America's Choice allowed greater use of assessment data to target instruction to individual student needs. The turnaround partner provided the training and technical assistance to support the incorporation of the models and programs. The writing and math workshop model and long instructional blocks provided the time and structure to allow for flexible groupings and targeted instruction based on data. Classroom observations indicated, however, that the use of these blocks for this purpose varied by school and by teacher.

The new safety net programs in the district were targeted to students with low performance on standardized tests, provided students with additional instructional time, and used ongoing assessment data to determine students' instructional needs and growth. Ramp-Up literacy and Ramp-Up math provided grade 6 and grade 9 students who were two years below grade level in these subjects with additional differentiated support. Read 180 is a reading intervention program for struggling readers that was used in four elementary and middle schools and in the high schools. Navigator is a math intervention program using pre- and post-tests and checkpoint data to monitor learning. Larson math is a software tutorial program that continuously assesses and provides practice problems and open-ended questions based on student skill levels.

While the action steps within this strategy did not specifically describe the ways in which the district would conduct data assessment and analysis using the district data banks and tools, Holyoke leadership made specific plans that addressed this strategy. Since the benchmarking visit in 2004, the district has been engaged in leadership team conversations concerning how to manage and analyze student assessment data within the district. Initially, according to the superintendent, district leadership anticipated that the school system would be able to rely on the full development of the Department of Education's COGNOS database, which was planned to ultimately house all student assessment and demographic data so that selected districts such as Holyoke would have improved tools for monitoring student progress in meeting state and local learning standards.

***Strategy 1B: The district will utilize all available data to drive instruction for student progress.***

*Status: In progress, not yet completed.*

The operational definition of Strategy 1B as indicated by the action steps and district leadership responsible for the implementation of the plan was for the Holyoke Public Schools to *build capacity and systems in order for the district to* "utilize all available data to drive instruction for student progress."

Although Holyoke leadership originally anticipated the development of DOE's COGNOS system to fully implement Strategy 1B, the district began to implement a plan to utilize data for instructional purposes. The preliminary steps to utilizing the data to drive instruction were contained in four action items.

*Action Item 1 is to identify all assessment data used in the district, which the district has completed.*

Through interviews and documents, the EQA team learned that the district centrally identified the assessments and created a districtwide assessment calendar. The assessment calendar identified the dates for the administration of all state mandated, grant related, and centrally analyzed assessments in the district. Thus, the calendar included the DIBELS, MAP, GRADE, MAZE, MCAS, MELA-O, and Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). It also included high school midterms and the Ramp-Up pre- and post-tests. The calendar addressed the expectations for the administration of the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM), Read 180, and writing prompts.

*Action Item 2 is to hire two new positions directly related to the creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system, and establish goals and evaluation instrument for the new positions*.

The district has addressed, but not completed, this action item. According to the superintendent and the Turnaround Plan Progress to Date End of the Academic Year 2005, the DOE initially agreed to fund two positions to create and implement the data system. One of these positions was the data coordinator, but the district was unable to fill this role between its initial posting in

February 2005 and the time of the EQA review with a person meeting the stated qualifications and agreeing to the work schedule.

The team learned that the district's data management function lacked coordination, as the responsibilities were splintered between positions and consultants. The district appointed a former principal as the interim data/MIS coordinator in 2005-2006 to analyze MAP data and to perform other functions as a central office administrator. During the review, central office administrators stated that the interim position was made permanent while the team was on site. As the data coordinator's qualifications and role did not match the original posting, this position was funded by the district. The other position planned was that of an assessment, data analysis, research, and evaluation specialist. The district was unable to fill this position, but the DOE agreed to use the promised funds to pay for Holyoke's contract with Ideal consultants. Ideal provided an analysis of the DIBELS data and training in the use of the assessment. While the data/MIS coordinator position and Ideal consultants performed duties related to the "creation and implementation of a comprehensive data system," neither had the role, responsibility, or authority to do so.

The administrator with the closest responsibility for this area and who has dedicated much effort to the overall management of the use of data was the director of curriculum and testing, but she had extensive oversight responsibilities in the district besides assessment, with limited time to manage the additional task. She worked as a member of the data team, but there was no one on the data team with the specific responsibility and time to devote to the completion and implementation of a comprehensive data system. The special assistant to the superintendent provided by the turnaround partner has also assisted in the district's efforts, but her role, as well, was too inclusive and broad to focus specifically on this data system task. The superintendent stated that he identified a company that could create an effective data management system that could allow the district to manage its massive amounts of student data for optimal use, but the contract was too expensive for DOE to agree to fund. Rather, the superintendent stated that as the district lacked the resources to further or more expediently develop a data management system, his leadership team was using available resources to use data for decision-making. An example provided by the superintendent and his special assistant was that principals were expected to

form their building-based budgets around the profile of student needs as determined by descriptive and assessment data.

*Action Item 3 is to create a data management plan that is articulated throughout the district.*

The district did not complete this action item but has made progress in this area. Holyoke formed a data analysis team, and the team created the Holyoke's Current Data Management Environment Draft describing the district's data collection platforms. Much of the data that the interviewees indicated were central to supporting instruction and school-based decision-making was absent in this draft, including the MAP, DIBELS, GRADE, SRI, and Ramp-Up math and literacy data. The district initially created a flow chart that attempted to illustrate how student achievement data collected centrally were disseminated throughout the district. However, the chart was outdated and incomplete by the time of the review.

Much of the district's approach to managing data was defined and in practice at the time of the review, but not clearly articulated in a document that would easily describe and track how all data were aligned and how the district worked to support all students. Because the data were collected, organized, and disseminated in different platforms and formats, the district data management plan was still evolving with stronger practices in some schools than in others, and the district had no central database, the EQA team determined that the lack of an articulated districtwide data management plan slowed Holyoke's progress. This was in spite of many examples of effective practices using pieces of data, rather than the whole collection, to inform decisions throughout the district. Current practices were time consuming, required much conversation and creativity to apply the results to instruction, were largely school and classroom based rather than an embedded district practice, did not lend themselves to the analyses of program effectiveness or cost-effectiveness, and did not facilitate the cross-pollination of different data points to compare student performance on assessments with different information.

Overall, Holyoke's accomplishment of parts of its action plan contained in this strategy has resulted in a greater capacity in the district to use "data to drive instruction for student progress," while the district was still lacking a central database or a system that can support and simplify the central collection of data for their efficient and effective use to improve the school district. Thus, while the district has *built greater capacity and improved systems in order for the district*

*to* "utilize all available data to drive instruction for student progress," the district has not yet created a sustainable way for classroom instruction to be driven by the use of data throughout the system.

There was no action item to use data to drive instruction, as implied by the initiative, but Strategy 1C has an action item to this effect.

***Strategy 1C: The district will form a data analysis team at the district level with representation from the curriculum, ELL, and special education programs to evaluate student performance data.***

*Status: The team was formed, but action steps not completed.*

The operational definition for Strategy 1C, as indicated by the action steps and district interviewees, was for the district to "form a data analysis team at the district level with representation from the curriculum, ELL and special education programs to evaluate student performance data" *and use the results to modify the instructional program*.

The district formed a data analysis team at the district level with the responsibility of evaluating student performance data and creating a district data management plan. Originally, the plan was to utilize the COGNOS database, which has not been made operational by the DOE. Holyoke nevertheless partially completed some of the action steps contained in this strategy.

*Action Item 1 is to form an evaluation and action team to review data.*

The data team served this purpose, along with building-based data teams and grade-level teams supported by math and literacy coaches and special education coordinators. No evaluation of the DTAP initiatives was built into the plan.

*Action Item 2 is to train the team to use the database (data warehouse).*

This action step has not been completed, because the referenced database has not been developed.

*Action Item 3 is to provide professional development (PD) to teaching staff on how to use data to inform instruction.*

This action step is ongoing. Training in TestWiz, MCAS data analysis, the MAP assessment, and the administration of the DIBELS for grades K-3 has been provided formally to districtwide staff and formally and informally through professional learning communities and school- and grade-level meetings, supported by coaches.

*Action Item 4 is to have building-level teams analyze assessment data and present analysis to peers.*

According to principals, teachers, and central office administrators, the Turnaround Plan Progress to Date End of the Academic Year 2006 is correct in stating that "all schools have completed Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) training" and that the "PIM team has shared their data analysis and causal analysis with staff," which were used for school improvement planning purposes (page 6). Not all staff members were equally involved in the process, and teachers in interviews indicated there was a limited shared understanding of data and how to use results for instruction across schools and grade levels.

*Action Item 5 is for the appropriate parties to review data analysis results and plan for instruction.*

*Action Item 6 is to apply results to instruction.*

The team saw evidence that the district made progress in applying assessment to instruction only at the elementary and middle levels. Coaches in literacy and math supported teachers in using assessment data for instructional purposes, and some principals and teams made building-based or grade-level decisions to use assessment data in prescribed ways to ensure that instruction considered data through flexible grouping, re-teaching, targeted instruction, and small groups. The team did not observe evidence of data-informed instruction at the high school level.

*Action Item 7 is to report results of data review, suggest curriculum adjustments, and identify challenges.*

Grade-level meeting notes, leadership team agendas, the 2006 turnaround plan report, and interviewees indicated that elementary and middle schools regularly reviewed data and were supported by district curriculum coordinators and coaches. The team found some evidence of the review of data at the high school level, but the evidence did not indicate that data were reviewed

as systematically at this level as at the elementary and middle levels. The team did not find evidence that the practices at the high schools supported regular modifications to the curriculum informed by data analysis. Holyoke High School focused on curriculum development to prepare for the upcoming NEASC review. Dean Technical High School did not present a clear strategy to use data or revise the curriculum at all.

If the results of Strategy 1C must be evident in instruction, as indicated in Action Item 6, the district has made definite progress but has more work to do in this area to fully engage all classrooms at all levels in using data to inform instruction in meaningful ways that will maximize student learning. The team learned through interviews and also determined through a review of responsibility areas that coaches in literacy and math were fundamental in supporting teachers to use assessment results to modify instruction. Teachers, principals, and central office administrators agreed that the district needed to provide more coaches in order to give teacher teams adequate support. At the time of the visit, some of these coaches were shared between buildings. The superintendent stated that he was considering adding more coaches.

Additionally, in spite of the district's efforts to include ELL and special education representation in curriculum revision and data assessment, the team determined that the district lacked coaching support in these areas to support the unique needs of these subgroups. This was despite a widening of the achievement gap from 2004 to 2006 between regular education and both ELL and special education students. Further, achievement of LEP students declined in both ELA and math between 2004 and 2006, by more than seven PI points in ELA and five PI points in math.

Further, the district was hindered in fully accomplishing the purposes, strategies, and action steps in Initiative 1 by remaining system-wide gaps: the lack of a central database, lack of a central office position responsible for all the data in the district, lack of a system-wide data management plan to ensure that all staff members were using data in the most effective ways to improve instruction at all grade levels, and lack of unification of all support program analysis data.

With some progress in the areas of assessment but without systemic implementation and completion, the district did not have the intended student data system in use that defines Initiative 1.

## Initiative 2: The district will have aligned curricula PreK-12 in ELA and mathematics.

**Status**: The district has made substantial progress in delivering aligned curricula in grades K-8, but not in grades 9-12.

**Summary**

At the time of the site visit by EQA examiners, the district had made progress in producing and implementing a horizontally and vertically aligned curriculum, particularly in math at grades K-8 and in ELA at grades 4-8. However, the alignment of the ELA curriculum to the state learning standards was not explicit, and the math curriculum was aligned to a combination of the state frameworks and the standards adopted by the National Conference on Education and the Economy. In addition, an element of the curriculum still in need of development was a system for assessment of student achievement of the stated objectives. At the point of the EQA visit, the assessment in the curriculum was generally a writing assessment, the results of which offered teachers little diagnostic information.

District curriculum work after adoption of the DTAP was focused for the most part on grades K-8. In fact, central office curriculum administrators assumed little active responsibility for curriculum oversight at the high school. In 2006-2007, to address perceived needs at the high school, America's Choice introduced Ramp-Up English and Ramp-Up math for at-risk students in grade 9. These were programs which America's Choice had developed and implemented in other districts. Teachers were trained in the routines necessary for successful implementation, but high school principals reported little involvement or responsibility for the programs. At the same time, classroom observations by the EQA examiners found the instructional quality in grade 9 classrooms markedly lower than that in grade 10-12 classrooms.

Curriculum revision was constant as coaches developed the curriculum maps in ELA and math for elementary and middle schools. Also, the dissemination of the curriculum by the coaches brought horizontal alignment at those levels. Authority for monitoring effective implementation of the developing curriculum rested with principals and central office administrators. However, their monitoring activities were confined to walk-throughs, and they had little useful information regarding the quality of the curriculum delivery. At the high school, the curriculum developed in 2004 was subject to little revision.

**Key Observations:**

2a. The district succeeded in providing curriculum maps for math in grades K-8 and for ELA in grades 4-8. (17)

2b. Horizontal alignment of curriculum at grades K-8 was in place as the 2006-2007 school year progressed. (17, 19)

2c. Some gaps in the aligned curriculum continued to exist. (17, 19)

2d. Alignment of the ELA curriculum maps with the state frameworks was not explicit. (10, 17)

2e. Vertical alignment between the grade 8 and 9 curricula was problematic. (11, 16)

2f. The various curricula did not all include assessments to measure attainment of the objectives. (9, 13)

2g. Curriculum assessments did not always reflect a clear connection with the objectives addressed. (10, 17)

2h. Pre- and post-assessments did not yet provide much diagnostic information concerning students' learning strengths and needs, and teachers did not have the data they needed to plan instruction. (9, 13)

2i. Teachers regularly had difficulties accessing the student achievement data they did have. Without a database, teachers collected data on their students from several sources, resulting in teachers devoting a great deal of energy to arrive at a clear picture of their students' achievement levels and needs. (9, 15, 19)

2j. Staff responsible for overseeing the K-8 curriculum did not evaluate teachers. (13)

2k. Coaches assumed responsibility for the dissemination of the recently developed curriculum and for oversight of its implementation. (17, 19)

2l. Principals did not play a key role in the dissemination of the curriculum. (11, 16)

2m. Central office responsibility for curriculum oversight at the high school was unclear. (11, 16)

2n. Teacher content knowledge was an issue especially in certain areas; 25 percent of the math and 19 percent of the special education teachers were not certified at the time of the EQA site visit. (11, 12)

2o. Overall, for each classroom observation category the team found that classroom practices were stronger in ELA than in math. (17)

2p. Overall, for each classroom observation category the team found that classroom practices were strongest at the elementary school level, followed by the middle school level, then the high school level. (17)

2q. In classroom observations, grade 9 had remarkably lower scores than grades 10-12 on indicators of effective practice in every category. Grade 9 was the only high school level to incorporate the America's Choice model. However, the America's Choice model was not associated with lower scores in areas of classroom practice at the other grade levels. (16)

2r. The team found that the America's Choice practices did provide some structure for effective classroom management that set the stage for learning. (16)

2s. Students were engaged in good learning routines in only 27 percent of the observed high school math classes, compared to the average of 73 percent for 9-12 math classes in the districts reviewed by the EQA in 2006-2007. (16)

2t. In grades 2-5 in ELA, the instructional practice score was 85 percent, higher than the EQA-reviewed district average of 78 percent for the same subject and grades. (16)

2u. In math, the instructional practice score for grades 2-5 was 69 percent, lower than the EQA-reviewed district average of 78 percent for the same subject and grades. (16)

2v. The high school's instructional practices compared negatively to those districtwide in ELA (57 compared to 63 percent) and in math (41 compared to 65 percent). (16)

2w. A strength of the district was the amount of student work displayed, as classrooms at all levels scored higher on this indicator in classroom observations than did those of other districts reviewed by the EQA. (17)

2x. The high schools' expectations in math classes were notably low, with a 35 percent score in classroom observations, compared to 58 percent in high school math classes across EQA-reviewed districts. (19)

2y. Student engagement in the learning process was low at the high school; at the middle and elementary levels, it varied by subject. (19)

2z. In ELA but not in math, classrooms were generally characterized by active listening, courtesy, fairness, and respect at levels similar in other EQA-reviewed districts. (19)

**Evidence**

Initiative 2 has one strategy. That strategy, 2A, has four action items at different stages of implementation. The last action item is concerned with effective delivery of the curriculum. Classroom observation data from the EQA site visit are included in the last part of the discussion of this initiative.

***Strategy 2A: The district will develop a districtwide curriculum alignment for grades K-12 that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks for ELA and math.***

*Status: The district has made substantial progress in this area, but lacks complete vertical alignment through grade 12 and clear alignment with the frameworks.*

*Action Item 1. Complete the draft form of ELA and mathematics alignment preK-12.*

The district has engaged in a great deal of curriculum development since the adoption of the DTAP, with the result that districtwide curriculum alignment in ELA and math was partially completed. Already in place in elementary schools in the district at the time of the implementation of the DTAP were a balanced literacy and guided reading program in ELA and the Investigations program in math. Under the direction of America's Choice, the district created the positions of central office director, coordinators, and coaches with responsibility for curriculum oversight in ELA and math. The director and coordinators reported that their curriculum responsibility extended from kindergarten through grade 12. However, in interviews, they agreed that their backgrounds and work were focused mainly on grades K-8. The team did not find it possible to identify the central office positions actively involved with curriculum oversight at the high schools.

In 2005-2006, the district completed three curriculum map units at grades 6-8. Then in the summer of 2006, and as the 2006-2007 school year unfolded, coaches wrote and presented to teachers unit by unit curriculum maps in ELA at grades 4-8 and in math at grades K-8. In addition, a large number of leveled readers were purchased for the 2006-2007 school year. However, interviewees reported that these resources arrived late in some locations, specifically at the alternative program. In ELA at grades K-3, schools were continuing to implement the Reading First model; some had Reading First and John Silber grants, and others followed the model developed in the grant schools. In addition, both high schools worked together in 2004 to develop common aligned curricula complete with unit plans.

The components of the curricula in place at the time of the EQA site visit had some variation. Each of the math curriculum map documents at grades K-8, developed as the 2006-2007 year progressed, referenced at the beginning what the district called the content standards and the performance standards. Content standards were from the state curriculum frameworks and performance standards were those adopted by the National Conference on Education and the Economy and brought forward by America's Choice in its role as facilitator of implementation of the DTAP. As explained by the America's Choice assistant to the superintendent, content standards were *what* the students were to learn and performance standards were *how* students were to learn them. However, an examination of the content and performance standards listed for each math curriculum map did not demonstrate such a clear distinction. The state frameworks' learning standards (referred to by America's Choice as content standards) were stated both in terms of what students needed to know and in terms of what students needed to be able to do.

The ELA curriculum maps at grades 4-8 did not reference the state frameworks' learning standards at all. As a result, alignment with the state curriculum frameworks was not clear. Regarding the alignment of the K-3 ELA curriculum, the assumption was made that because Reading First was promoted by the state, its elements aligned with the state frameworks. Finally, the high school documents produced in 2004 did reference the state learning standards.

The math curriculum maps at grades K-8 both under development and being implemented in 2006-2007 included stated objectives as well as resources and instructional strategies. The same was true of the ELA curriculum maps at grades 4-8. The Reading First model was also

prescriptive as to resources and instructional strategies. Curricula for the high school were frequently specific as to the resources to be used, but offered generic lists of instructional strategies, such as "[l]ecture, discussion, group work and independent work." In addition, one of the positive features of the curriculum maps developed under America's Choice for grades K-8 was the specificity of the articulation maps. But articulation of the high school curricula was limited to the syllabi listing the content to be covered.

The various curricula did not all include assessments to measure attainment of the objectives. In ELA at grades K-3, the Reading First initiative required a number of assessments, such as the DIBELS and GRADE. With regard to assessments for the curriculum maps developed in math at grades K-8 and in ELA at grades 4-8, teachers were to refer to journal entries and classroom work. However, the primary means of assessment for each map unit was through a written response either to an Investigations or Connected Math Program (CMP) word problem or to an ELA prompt drawn from previously published MCAS tests. These written products were to be scored with the rubrics used on the MCAS tests. For both the pre- and post-ELA assessments, teachers were to determine with a 'Yes' or 'No' answer whether each piece had organizational structure, relevant and specific details, and clear and accurate descriptions. However, results such as these did not yield much information concerning students' needs or achievement of unit objectives, particularly since the results were derived from an individual teacher's application of the rubric. For the high school curricula, the assessments in English, for example, were repeatedly listed as the long composition and the twice-yearly administration of the district writing prompts. These bore no necessary connection to the objectives of the daily classroom instruction. Also, interviewees pointed out that midterm and final exams at the high school were 75 percent common. However, the extent to which these exams were analyzed as measures of student achievement of curriculum objectives was not clear.

Interviews and classroom observations confirmed that the development of curriculum maps in ELA and math at grades K-8 had brought horizontal alignment of the curriculum. Interviewees frequently referred to this alignment as the most important result of the curriculum work underway. They reported that such alignment had not been in place previously.

Vertical alignment of the curriculum was a separate challenge. In math, vertical alignment of the curriculum had been ensured to a certain extent by implementation of the closely connected Investigations program in grades K-5 and CMP in grades 6-8. The development of the curriculum maps enhanced this alignment. In ELA at grades 3-8, the collaborative development of the curriculum by teachers across grade levels brought vertical alignment. In addition, the district developed curriculum maps for ELL students.

At the time of the site visit, a gap in vertical alignment existed between grade 8 and the high schools. An underlying reason for this gap was that the central office staff and the organizational chart reflected little expertise or responsibility for high school curriculum.

According to interviewees, those students who grade 8 teachers determined were not academically prepared for high school were assigned for a year to an academy where skill deficits were addressed. Only then did they enter grade 9. Interviewees reported that middle school and high school teachers had met during the 2006-2007 school year to address improving connections between the middle school and high school curricula. However, interviewees indicated that those talks did not seem to have progressed. Also, administrators were clear in stating they believed high school curriculum work could only be addressed after that of the middle and elementary schools.

As a stop-gap measure, Ramp-Up English and Ramp-Up math were introduced at the high school for at-risk grade 9 students. However, classroom observations by the EQA examiners indicated a contrast between scores for grade 9 classrooms and grade 10-12 classrooms. Total scores represented the percentage of classrooms in which positive indicators of behaviors and conditions were observed. For *classroom management*, the total score at grade 9 was 57 percent, while the total score at grades 10-12 was 83 percent. For *instructional practice*, the total score at grade 9 was 43 percent, and at grades 10-12 it was 58 percent. For *expectations*, the grade 9 total score was 37 percent, while at grades 10-12 it was 57 percent. For *student activity and behavior*, the total score at grade 9 was 33 percent, and at grades 10-12 it was 54 percent. Finally, for *climate*, the total score at grade 9 was 42 percent, and in grades 10-12 it was 60 percent.

*Action Item 2. Disseminate the aligned ELA and math documents to teachers and principals; training in teachers' responsibilities regarding alignment.*

Principals of grades K-8 reported that they received copies of the first set of curriculum maps during the summer of 2006. At the same time, they were provided with an overview of how the new curriculum worked. Those principals subsequently attended coaches' training sessions for a more detailed understanding of the curriculum maps. They agreed in interviews that the most detailed training had been for the coaches.

Teachers received training on the first units of the curriculum maps at workshops before school opened in September 2006. Then, as additional maps were developed, ELA and math coaches trained teachers at grade-level team meetings regarding their implementation. Coaches then monitored the implementation by visiting classrooms and modeling lessons to the extent that was possible. Principals and central office personnel reported they assisted with the monitoring during classroom walk-throughs.

At the high schools, teachers involved with the Ramp-Up English and math programs received regular training during the school day in the implementation of those programs. Coaches were not available at the high schools to oversee the implementation, and high school principals in interviews did not express responsibility for monitoring the programs.

*Action Item 3. Revise and update curriculum alignments as related to gaps, standards, materials, instructional pacing, assessments, programs, etc.*

Teachers and coaches drafted three curriculum map units during 2005-2006. Coaches reported in interviews that curriculum map development began in earnest during the summer of 2006 and continued throughout the 2006-2007 school year. Coaches solicited feedback from teachers concerning the format of the curriculum maps. Then, as later units were developed, the format was revised based on teacher feedback and the coaches' experiences in classrooms. At the high schools, teachers and administrators reported extensive curriculum work in 2004, but little revision of curriculum since then.

Several aspects of the total program were still at the beginning stages. For example, coaches and principals reported an emphasis on student work, and the EQA examiners found during their observations that work was prominently displayed in classrooms at all levels. In addition, teachers reported they had begun looking at student work (LASW) during team meetings. However, the full impact and purpose of LASW have not yet been made clear to teachers.

In addition, when it became clear late in 2005-2006 that teachers did not have the leveled readers they needed for a successful balanced literacy program, the district ordered the resources needed and provided them to teachers. At the same time, however, in part because of the urgency of issues at grades 6-8, the district had been able to do little to address vertical alignment between those grades and the high school.

*Action Item 4. Full, consistent, and uniform implementation of the aligned curriculum for all students.*

Given the limited time available for the development and implementation of the curriculum maps, there was a remarkable degree of horizontal alignment in math at grades K-8 and in ELA at grades 4-8. Curriculum maps were being developed just slightly before teachers needed them in classrooms. At the time of the site visit, pre- and post-assessments developed under America's Choice did not yet provide much diagnostic information concerning students' learning needs, and did not necessarily represent an accurate reflection of students' achievement. As a result, teachers did not have the data they needed to plan instruction.

In addition, teachers regularly had difficulties accessing the data they did have. The district had plans for the establishment of a districtwide database, but this had not yet become a reality. In the meantime, teachers collected data on their students from several sources, with the result that teachers devoted a great deal of energy to arrive at a clear picture of their students' achievement levels and needs. Also, the district had not yet addressed the gap between the grade 8 and high school curricula. Finally, teachers delivering the curriculum did not always have the requisite content knowledge to do so. Twenty-five percent of the math and 19 percent of the special education teachers were not certified at the time of the EQA site visit.

***Classroom Observation Data***

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 87 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 12 of the district's schools (all but the preschool) as

follows: 34 at the elementary school level, 33 at the middle school level, and 20 at the high school level. In total, the EQA examiners observed 34 ELA classrooms, 40 math classrooms, nine science classrooms, and four classrooms of other subjects.

Overall, for each classroom observation category, the team found that practices were stronger in ELA than in math. The team also found that for each category, practices were strongest at the elementary school level, followed by the middle school level, then the high school level. While this is a common observation in many districts, the team found one unusual pattern. Grade 9 had remarkably lower scores in every category than did grades 10-12. The evidence pointed to a lower quality of classroom management practice, instructional practice, expectations for students, student activity and behavior, and climate. These data stood out because grade 9 was the only high school grade to incorporate the America's Choice model. However, the America's Choice model was not associated with lower scores in areas of classroom practice at the other grade levels.

*Classroom management* refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 84 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 93 percent at the elementary level, 85 percent at the middle school level, and 69 percent at the high school level. Within the high school, the classroom management score was 57 percent for grade 9 classrooms and 83 percent for grade 10-12 classrooms. Across all grades, the classroom management score was 89 percent in ELA observations and 77 percent in math observations.

The team found that the America's Choice practices did provide some structure for effective classroom management that set the stage for learning. Classroom management scores at the elementary and middle school levels in Holyoke were comparable to classroom observation data at the same grade levels across districts reviewed by the EQA in 2006-2007. In fact, the team observed that "interactions between teacher and students are positive and respectful" in 100 percent of grade 6-8 ELA classrooms and 94 percent of grade 6-8 math classrooms, compared to 88 and 92 percent, respectively, of grade 6-8 classrooms in districts reviewed by the EQA in 2006-2007.

On the other hand, the scores of the Holyoke high schools were well below those of the high schools in districts reviewed by the EQA in 2006-2007. The overall classroom management score in Holyoke was 79 percent in ELA classrooms and 59 percent in math classrooms, compared to the EQA inter-district comparison of 85 percent in both subjects at the high school level. Students were engaged in good learning routines in only 27 percent of the observed Holyoke high school math classrooms, compared to the EQA inter-district average of 73 percent for grade 9-12 math classrooms. Interactions between teacher and students were "positive and respectful" in 71 percent of ELA and 73 percent of Holyoke math classrooms, compared to the EQA inter-district averages of 92 and 94 percent, respectively.

*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 70 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 78 percent at the elementary school level, 74 percent at the middle school level, and 50 percent at the high school level. Within the high school, the instructional practice score was 43 percent for grade 9 classrooms and 58 percent for grade 10-12 classrooms. Across all grades, the instructional practice score was 76 percent in ELA observations and 62 percent in math observations.

In grades 2-5, the team observed stronger instructional practices in ELA than in math. In ELA, the instructional practice score was 85 percent, higher than the EQA inter-district average of 78 percent for these grades. One particular strength was "questioning techniques that encourage[d] elaboration, thought, and broad involvement," which were observed in 28 percent of grade 2-5 ELA classrooms in Holyoke, compared to 69 percent of grade 2-5 ELA classrooms in the EQA-reviewed districts. Other strengths included "multiple tasks that engage all levels of learners" (56 compared to 45 percent), clear objectives (94 compared to 89 percent), and "a variety of instructional techniques" (61 compared to 40 percent). In math, the score for instructional practices for grades 2-5 in Holyoke was 69 percent, lower than the EQA inter-district average of 78 percent for the same subject and grades. Weaknesses included incorporating multiple tasks (23 compared to 38 percent) and a variety of instructional techniques (23 compared to 37 percent).

In grades 6-8, instructional practices in math and ELA in Holyoke were comparable, with scores of 73 and 71 percent, respectively, compared to the EQA inter-district averages of 68 and 70 percent, respectively. Strengths included incorporating multiple tasks (in 33 percent of ELA and 56 percent of math classrooms, compared to 29 and 32 percent, respectively, across EQA-reviewed districts) and a variety of instructional techniques (in 56 percent of ELA and 44 percent of math classrooms, compared to 27 and 28 percent, respectively, across EQA-reviewed districts). Weaknesses included "directions to students were clear and explicit" in math (81 compared to 90 percent) and clear objectives in ELA (78 compared to 84 percent) and in math (75 compared to 85 percent).

The high school's instructional practices compared negatively to those in high schools across EQA-reviewed districts in both ELA (57 compared to 63 percent) and in math (41 compared to 65 percent). A particular weakness was teacher questioning techniques "that encourage elaboration, thought and broad involvement." This attribute was observed in only 29 percent of ELA classrooms and 50 percent of math classrooms in Holyoke, compared to the EQA inter-district high school averages of 56 and 57 percent, respectively. The pace of instruction helped students stay engaged in only 57 percent (compared to 72 percent) of the ELA classrooms, and in only 18 percent (compared to 71 percent) of the math classrooms. In math, several other indicators fell far below the EQA inter-district average for grade 9-12 math classrooms. The

teacher used time effectively in 27 percent of observed classrooms (compared to 77 percent); directions were clear to students in 73 percent of classrooms (compared to 92 percent); and objectives were clear in 64 percent of classrooms (compared to 82 percent). Multiple tasks were observed in no math classrooms in Holyoke (compared to 18 percent across EQA-reviewed districts). A variety of instructional techniques were observed in none of the ELA and only nine percent of the math classrooms (compared to 13 and 16 percent, respectively, in the EQA-reviewed districts).

*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 69 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 84 percent at the elementary school level, 66 percent at the middle school level, and 46 percent at the high school level. Within the high school, the high expectations score was 37 percent for grade 9 classrooms and 57 percent for grade 10-12 classrooms. Across all grades, the score for high expectations was 79 percent in ELA observations and 58 percent in math observations.

A strength of the district was the amount of student work displayed, as classrooms at all levels scored higher on this classroom observation indicator than did those of the EQA-reviewed districts. The comparison between Holyoke Public Schools and the EQA-reviewed districts at the elementary school level was 94 versus 54 percent in ELA and 85 versus 59 percent in math; at the middle school level it was 50 versus 39 percent in ELA and 50 versus 41 percent in math; and at the high school level it was 67 versus 28 percent in ELA and 50 versus 22 percent in math. No significant differences were found between grade 9 and grades 10-12 on this indicator.

At the elementary level, strengths also included teacher modeling and expecting good routines and work habits from students in ELA classrooms (94 percent in Holyoke versus 85 percent across districts) and communicating expectations of high quality of work to students in ELA classrooms (83 versus 68 percent). These two indicators were not strengths in elementary math classrooms, with respective scores of 77 (versus 87) percent and 77 (versus 78) percent. The same pattern was observed at the middle school level. All ELA classrooms at this level in Holyoke showed evidence of teacher modeling and expecting good routines and work habits from students (compared to 80 percent across districts), and teachers in 67 percent of middle school ELA classrooms communicated expectations of high quality of work to students (compared to 62 percent across districts). In math, the respective scores on the same indicators were 75 (compared to 83) percent and 50 (compared to 66) percent. The high schools' expectations in math classes were notably low, with a 35 percent score compared to 58 percent across EQA-reviewed districts. Most significantly, 27 percent of the classrooms spent time "focused on challenging academic tasks" (compared to 70 percent across districts), and instructors in nine percent of classrooms communicated expectations of high quality work (compared to 64 percent across districts). In only nine percent of all grade 9 classrooms (all subjects included) did the team observe communication of expectations of high quality work, compared to 56 percent of Holyoke's grade 10-12 classrooms.

*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 60 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 69 percent at the elementary school level, 60 percent at the middle school level, and 42 percent at the high school level. Within the high school, the score for positive student activity and behavior was 33 percent for grade 9 classrooms and 54 percent for grade 10-12 classrooms. Across all grades, the score for student activity and behavior was 62 percent in ELA observations and 55 percent in math observations.

Student engagement in the learning process was low at the high schools; at the elementary and middle levels it varied by subject. At the elementary level, students were "actively engaged in the learning process" in 94 percent of the ELA classrooms (compared to 90 percent across districts), but in only 46 percent of the math classrooms (compared to 91 percent across districts). Contributions of students were valued and followed up in 89 percent of the ELA observations (compared to 80 percent across districts) and in only 62 percent of the math observations (compared to 83 percent across districts). At the middle school level, on the other hand, more student engagement was observed in math classrooms than in ELA classrooms. For example, the interaction among students was constructive and productive in 71 percent of the math classrooms, but in only 44 percent of the ELA classrooms. Students recalled prior learning in 56 percent of math but in only 25 percent of ELA classrooms. On each indicator and for both subjects, Holyoke performed below the EQA-reviewed districts in engaging middle school students. Indicators of full student engagement were generally weak at the high school level as well. Particularly low was productive interaction among students (14 percent in ELA and 45 percent in math, compared to 54 percent in ELA and 62 percent in math across districts). Also low was "student engagement in the learning process" (57 percent in ELA and 27 percent in math, compared to 72 percent in ELA and 74 percent in math across districts) and follow up to student contributions (50 percent in ELA and 20 percent in math, compared to 68 percent in ELA and 69 percent in math across districts).

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 75 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 89 percent at the elementary school level, 79 percent at the middle school level, and 45 percent at the high school level. Within the high school, the climate score was 42 percent for grade 9 classrooms and 48 percent for grade 10-12 classrooms. Across all grades, the score for classroom climate was 81 percent in ELA observations and 68 percent in math observations.

Classrooms were generally characterized by active listening, courtesy, fairness, and respect at levels similar to other EQA-reviewed districts in ELA, but not in math. In ELA, this indicator was observable in 94 percent of elementary classrooms (compared to 95 percent across districts), 89 percent at grades 6-8 (compared to 85 percent across districts), and 86 percent at the high school level (compared to 85 percent across districts). In math, however, the percentage dwindled from 85 percent at the elementary school level (compared to 96 percent), to 75 percent at the middle school level (compared to 88 percent), to 64 percent at the high school level (compared to 86 percent). Elementary classrooms were "filled with multiple resources for different learning styles" at rates higher than the EQA-reviewed districts in ELA (89 compared to 74 percent), but not in math (69 compared to 76 percent). The middle schools were resourced for different learning styles at greater rates than in the EQA-reviewed districts in both ELA (78 compared to 47 percent) and in math (69 compared to 50 percent). High schools were poorly resourced for diverse learning styles in both ELA (29 compared to 34 percent) and in math (zero compared to 18 percent).

## Initiative 3: The district will hold educators accountable for delivery of instruction.

**Status**: In progress but not yet complete.

**Summary**

The district has completed negotiations for its renewed collective bargaining contract with its teachers. The EQA team received a draft of the new contract with accompanying rewritten evaluation documents. Administrators have been trained in generic competencies of observation and evaluation of teaching performance by an outside contractor, but have not yet been trained in the new evaluation tools and process.

An analysis of the newly negotiated language indicated that the 80 "indicators" in the previous contract's evaluation process have been increased by an additional 47, and all have been re-titled as "exemplars," under the seven competency categories of CMR 35:00. The evaluation tool did not demonstrate clear means for administrators to hold teachers accountable to district expectations, particularly because of its use of "exemplars" to describe *examples* of practice rather than *standards* for practice. The exemplars did not clearly align with state teacher evaluation standards (i.e., CMR 35:00), nor did they clearly align with America's Choice

teaching protocols or with the district turnaround plan. The draft contract contained no accompanying standards to differentiate levels of competency in each exemplar.

The EQA team could not audit whether the new performance evaluation system will "hold teachers accountable for delivery of instruction," the goal of Initiative 3, because the district has not initiated the process yet. The new evaluation process did not include a provision for inclusion of walk-through data. There was no discernable crosswalk between the new system and the America's Choice protocols or the traditional instruction observed in the non-America's Choice schools in Holyoke.

A review of evaluations in 54 teacher personnel files indicated few connections between past performance evaluations and instructional comments by supervisors related to improved growth and teaching effectiveness. Few had comments about improved performance. None contained professional development recommendations.

The new "exemplars" were heavily connected to teaching "inputs" and had no official connection to student outcomes in the newly created performance appraisal process. The DTAP is focused on improving efforts to increase student achievement, but the results of the EQA review of Initiative 3 have yielded mixed findings. The new teacher evaluation language has yet to be field tested and contains uncertain connections between the various "exemplars" and student outcomes. In addition, because the language of the process allows an entire CMR 35:00 criterion to be cleared by meeting only one exemplar, with neither standards of performance nor decision rules available in the contract's ratings, the impact of the new language weakens the intent of Initiative 3. Three ratings, 'Satisfactory,' 'Satisfactory with Concern,' and 'Unsatisfactory,' are available for each of the seven major CMR 35:00 criteria, but there is no written guidance related to what constitutes sufficient evidence for each rating.

Walk-throughs and increased professional development opportunities were well documented in district records, but a review of formal evaluation documents did not reflect their use or impact in classroom instruction. Many school-based administrators were new to their respective roles. The superintendent, in his performance evaluation process with administrators, included specific portfolio documentation before assigning merit raises or an evaluation rating for the previous

year. No such reflection of standards and results was present in the language of the new teachers' contract.

**Key Observations:**

3a. The district was in the planning stage of tying performance evaluations of teachers to formal documentation in teacher evaluations. (11)

3b. The district non-renewed and terminated teachers in recent years. (19)

3c. The district has initiated walk-throughs in its America's Choice schools as a monitoring process in classrooms. (19)

3d. In interviews, the EQA team learned that the principals in conjunction with the ELL curriculum director monitored ELL strategies using walk-throughs. The professional development record showed that over 190 teachers had received training in integrating ELL strategies into classroom practice and in the MELA-O. (14)

3e. Records reflecting the district's professional development efforts provided ample evidence of teacher training in ELL instruction. (14)

3f. The district had well documented records showing the type, frequency, and populations of teachers participating in ELL training. (14)

3g. Summary data, which were tied to SIPs and the DTAP, gathered from walk-throughs and focus walks were displayed in schools. (10, 13)

3h. The EQA team learned that IPDPs were more in line with SIP requirements than with district professional offerings. In interviews, the team learned that at least one new principal renegotiated the substance of that school's IPDPs to reflect the new directions of the SIP and the DTAP. (9)

3i. An outside consultant trained administrators in teacher observation and evaluation writing techniques. (19)

3j. Several principals indicated that few if any teachers have had similar or parallel training in evaluation techniques by either Ribas Associates or Research for Better Teaching consultants as school-based administrators have received. (12, 13)

3k. The pattern of the district administration in hiring outside consultants to offer solutions for district problems did not build internal problem-solving supervisory capacity in the district over the long run. (15)

3l. Spending on professional development averaged approximately $3 million, or roughly $17,000 per day, but the district lacked measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs. (15)

3m. No evaluation document reviewed by the EQA team reflected walk-through data. (9)

3n. No central office official conducted an annual qualitative or DTAP compliance review of completed evaluation materials. (9)

3o. The district has not yet field tested its new teacher performance evaluation process. (11)

3p. The Initiative 3 language outlines three (but is not limited to these) areas of focus as teachers become more responsible for delivery of instruction, but there was no obvious connection to which of the newly negotiated contract "exemplars" must be practiced to successfully meet these areas of focus, nor any guidance regarding the frequency or intensity with which they must be practiced in order for these areas of focus to be mastered. (10, 13)

3q. The district's written records of performance evaluations for teachers, which the EQA team reviewed, were unclear as to how the evaluation process should be used to improve instruction. (11, 13)

3r. The new teacher contract evaluation language did not line up with the areas of focus emphasized in Initiative 3. (10, 13)

3s. The "exemplars" did not clearly align with state teacher evaluation standards (e.g. CMR 35:00), nor did they clearly align with America's Choice teaching protocols or with the district turnaround plan. (9)

3t. No determination has been made whether the new performance evaluation exemplars will blend into the new protocols of America's Choice. (9)

3u. A review of the evaluation training outlines for administrators and a review of information gained in interviews with administrators provided no guidance as to how to affirm competence in one criterion using only one exemplar (of 127) per criterion. (13)

**Evidence**

Initiative 3 has one strategy. That strategy, 3A, has six action items at different stages of implementation. As the initiative addresses accountability for educators in the delivery of instruction, but the district had no action item to use evaluation for accountability, the last part of the discussion of Initiative 3 describes evidence from the team's review of evaluations in the personnel files.

***Strategy 3A. Establish clear and specific linkage between teacher instructional delivery, performance evaluation process, and students' performance.***

*Status: In progress.*

*Action Item 1. Performance Evaluation: A task force will be created to evaluate and make modifications as needed to the present teachers' evaluation form, which includes, among other things, teachers' preparation for instruction, teachers' expectation for student learning and performance, and level and quality of instructional practices.* (Subject to outcome of teachers' contract negotiations; recent contract ended June 2005.)

Negotiations for the teachers' collective bargaining contract were concluded in December 2006. The EQA team received a draft copy of the new contract during the site visit. In interviews with the teachers' union leadership, the EQA team learned that the final draft contract had not yet been reviewed by the current union leadership and that the district plans to launch the new teacher evaluation process in September 2007, so interviewed representatives could not comment on the contract's new teacher evaluation requirements.

In an analysis of the new teachers' contract's performance evaluation process, the EQA team found several key changes. The seven major categories of performance in the new language were in perfect alignment with the seven major categories of the Principles of Effective Teaching in CMR 35:00. These categories include the major criteria stated in Initiative 3, Action Item 1. The 80 indicators of effective teaching in CMR 35:00 have been replaced by 127 "exemplars" of effective teaching in Holyoke. The term "exemplar" is used to describe all 127 subtexts, but some of them are the original "indicators" and have simply been renamed "exemplars." Some of the original 80 indicators were retained, but many have been augmented by more descriptive language as "exemplars." For example, in Category II in the Principles of Effective Teaching,

Effective Planning and Assessment of Curriculum and Instruction, "A. The Teacher plans instruction effectively," the CMR 35:00 language states: "1. [The teacher h]as a personal vision of committed confident learners and uses that vision to guide learning goals, expectations, and standards for student work." The replacement exemplar states: "1. [The teacher u]ses data gathered from assessment to plan classroom instruction." Additionally, the original language of (1) has also been included in the 14 exemplars for this criterion now as the eighth item.

The example above indicates the district's effort to align performance assessment language with new instructional protocols. The CMR 35:00 categories and subcategories have stayed the same, but the details on what is important for an observer to look for have been made more explicit. The 80 indicators appearing in the original CMR 35:00 protocol have been rewritten and expanded as the new exemplars. No determination has been made whether the new exemplars will blend into the new protocols of America's Choice as they spread through the district. All schools have not adopted the America's Choice model yet; those that have were in different phases of the program.

In interviews, the EQA team learned that all school-based administrators have been trained in evaluation techniques by Ribas Associates. Some were also trained by Research for Better Teaching consultants. Several principals indicated that few if any teachers have had similar or parallel training by either group.

A review of the evaluation training outlines for administrators and a review of information gained in interviews with administrators provided no guidance as to how to affirm competence in one criterion using only one exemplar per criterion. The new language in the draft document allows an evaluator to affirm competence in any of the seven CMR 35:00 major criteria of effective teaching by observing only seven of the 127 exemplars that underpin the criteria (one per criterion). For example, Criterion II (Effective Planning and Assessment of Curriculum and Instruction) has 14 exemplars. Each exemplar is discreet and observable or measurable. Under the new language, an evaluator may declare only one as meeting district standards, and suggest that all 14 exemplars also meet district standards. This practice could lead to confusion, uneven treatment of like employees, and labor disputes. This practice could also impede district efforts to fully align the new evaluation tool with district expectations for instructional practice, since

combinations of practices described by the exemplars may be expected, rather than just one exemplar. Focusing on one exemplar per criterion has the potential to weaken the district's effort to improve student achievement. The new contract language has been slated to begin in the fall of 2007.

The team did not learn of any district plans to monitor the effects of the evaluation tool in promoting district instructional goals or measuring teacher effectiveness. The new language citing 127 exemplars of effective teaching did not assign each a relative weight. The exemplars were weighted equally regardless of their potential impact on improved student performance. They were not prioritized with respect to the other criteria, with respect to their alignment with the routines of America's Choice, or with respect to district initiatives. Without weighting or prioritizing the exemplars, the new system may not have the capacity to measure teacher effectiveness.

The EQA team learned that the human resources office had nine collective bargaining contracts to negotiate, implement, and monitor. This involved continual contact with supervisors at all levels, including principals. The human resources director worked with principals to ensure contract compliance with prescription plans, but did not monitor all evaluations for quality. He randomly selected teacher evaluations for review as they were sent to the office at the end of the year. He also developed an annual calendar, sorted by teacher and by social security number, to notify administrators of teachers' evaluation years. When asked who was responsible for ensuring that Initiative 3 was carried out, he indicated that the curriculum and instruction leaders were responsible. In interviews with curriculum and instruction administrators, the EQA team learned that the extent of their involvement with teacher evaluations was limited to coaching/observing when asked by the principal, monitoring the results of professional development in classrooms as a follow-up to training, and interviewing teaching candidates as part of an interview team. The EQA team did not find any evidence of centralized monitoring of completed teacher evaluations with the exception of random spot-checks by the human resources director. A review of a number of teacher personnel files yielded no evidence that student achievement results made their way into formal written evaluations.

*Action Item 2. Administrators will be trained in new evaluation and walk-through tools as well as the monitoring box.*

Through a review of records and in interviews, the EQA team learned that Ribas Associates had been hired to provide training for administrators in ways of observing and writing up observations as part of the teacher performance evaluation. In addition, records showed that a Ribas Associates representative worked with principals in an in-service program that provided administrative support for principals. In interviews, principals affirmed the value of these in-service offerings to them in their practice, and in particular in writing up clear teacher observations.

EQA visits to elementary and middle schools yielded evidence that monitoring boxes and walk-throughs were being used. The team also saw summary data, which were tied to SIPs and the DTAP, gathered from walk-throughs and focus walks displayed in schools. Principals referred to the walk-through process and how it led to conversations with teachers about improving practice. ELA and math coaches were frequent users of the walk-through model. ELL curriculum staff also cited examples, confirmed by principal interviews, that walk-throughs were common in practice. District and curriculum leaders used the "focus" walk also to gain information about classroom application of training and professional development. These protocols were introduced through the America's Choice collaboration.

*Action Item 3. Dissemination of new teachers' evaluation and walk-through forms.*

The teachers' contract was still in draft form and was not disseminated. Walk-throughs were in use in schools and completed summaries were available for review. In interviews, the EQA team learned that walk-throughs were being used by principals, central office teams, curriculum leaders, and school-based coaches in ELL, ELA, and math. Principals cited instances when they gained information by viewing student work in classrooms and followed up in conversations with teachers. In interviews with teachers at the middle school level, the EQA team confirmed that walk-throughs were a permanent and practiced ritual in schools which used America's Choice protocols. Not all schools were involved with their rituals and protocols.

*Action Item 4. The district will initiate the process of implementing walk-through tools for math, literacy, and the Sheltered English Immersion Program.*

In interviews, the EQA team learned that the principals in conjunction with the ELL curriculum director monitored ELL strategies using walk-throughs. The professional development record showed that over 190 teachers had received training in integrating ELL strategies into classroom practice and in the MELA-O.

In interviews and through a review of district monthly professional development offerings, the EQA learned that math and ELA professional development was conducted throughout the year. Principals cited their confident reliance on the monthly professional development calendar which they used as a guide to ELA and math training. Records reviewed, including IPDPs of teachers, showed evidence of classroom teachers' frequent use of training events. However, few teacher evaluations reviewed by the EQA team contained references to or recommendations for professional development. IPDPs did contain references to professional development that were in line with recertification requirements and approved by the appropriate principal. However, with a massive shift in principals, few reviews yielded evidence of new principals changing IPDPs. In interviews, the EQA team learned that IPDPs were more in line with SIP requirements than with district professional development offerings. The team also learned that at least one new principal renegotiated the substance of that school's IPDPs to reflect the new directions of the SIP and the DTAP.

No evaluation read by the EQA team made reference to walk-through data. According to administrators, walk-through data were shared quickly with teachers and did not make their way into official evaluations, unless they were connected to a CMR 35.00 criterion which was continually observed to be below standard. Administrators indicated that "prescription" plans were used in the district with professional status teachers. Non-professional status teachers who did not meet the standard were non-renewed. The district non-renewed four teachers during the period under review and persuaded several professional status teachers to resign.

*Action Item 5. Continue to train teachers in ELL strategies, differentiated instruction, and the use of formative assessments to improve instruction.*

The EQA team did not see an overlap of the district's differentiated instruction efforts with the "workshop" model of instruction currently being spread through the district. Differentiated instruction was included in daylong professional development in-service days, which amounted

to three days per year at a cost of 1.63 percent of the total teacher salary budget. The training in America's Choice protocols, rituals, and routines was not fully integrated with the district's other efforts in professional development to ensure alignment of efforts.

Records reflecting the district's professional development initiatives provided ample evidence of teacher training in ELL instruction. District records indicated that 20 teachers and paraprofessionals received ACCELA training over the two-year period 2003-2005. Participants gained ELL licensure and advanced degrees as a result of participating in the program. Ten secondary teachers received 37.5 hours of ACCESS training to fulfill ELL requirements in 2005. Thirty teachers participated in a TeachFirst experience, which led to the development of a learning community model that reviews assessments of ELL students to improve services. In 2004-2005, 295 teachers completed Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) courses offered by the district. Each participant received 12 hours of training. Twenty-two teachers received 25 hours of SEI Train the Trainer professional development to aid the district in its efforts to build a job-embedded model of ELL support. In 2004-2005, 295 teachers received 10 hours of MELA-O training. More than 100 other teachers received specialized training in ELL areas during the period under review.

*Action Item 6. Monitor classroom implementation of training regarding differentiation of instruction, ELL strategies, and formative assessments.*

Through a review of documents provided by the district, the EQA team found evidence that verified the district's efforts to monitor classroom implementation of training. District walk-through data contained examples of ELL strategies being practiced in classrooms. In classroom observations, the EQA team did not witness the substantial implementation of differentiated instruction as suggested by district data.

Holyoke Public Schools has initiated a districtwide emphasis on the systematic analysis of student work with accompanying rubrics to provide formative assessment data to teachers and administrators about student progress in the approved curriculum. The workshop model allowed large amounts of class time for students to read, write, and compute. When students were busy with assigned tasks, teachers, coaches, and aides provided both coaching and support. Some of

the district efforts to promote coaching and student learning support may include the effects of ELL, differentiated instruction, and analyzing student work.

Although the district had extensive documents reflecting its professional development efforts, a review of performance evaluations revealed few recommendations for participation in professional development activities to improve performance.

***Personnel File Review Results***

The EQA team reviewed 61 randomly selected personnel files to view historical records of performance evaluations. Of the 61 files, seven were files of new employees, which had no historical data. Of the remaining 54 files, 61 percent were timely, in that they were completed every two years, and 39 percent were not timely. All were signed, and five percent were compliant with CMR requirements as to their form. Ninety-five percent were informative, reflecting the testimony of administrators that the Ribas Associates training helped with observation and evaluation writing. However, 60 percent of the documents were not instructive, and the EQA team judged 95 percent of them to not promote growth and overall teaching improvement. In two cases, the supervisor had a "boiler plate" list of 10 identical recommendations.

The EQA team reviewed administrator personnel files and examined the performance evaluation files contained therein. The superintendent evaluated central office administrators and principals. Records showed that principals were required to provide specific data about their performance and that of their schools which related to the DTAP and action plans. Principals had to assemble portfolios of data to bring to the final evaluation conferences with the superintendent. Compensation for the ensuing year was in part based on the superintendent's evaluation. Seven randomly selected principals' evaluations were reviewed. All the principals' evaluations reviewed were signed, timely, informative, and instructive. Each had four rating possibilities: 'Excellent,' 'Good,' 'Poor,' and 'Needs Improvement.' Principals were rated on five areas of performance: implementation of districtwide programs and initiatives; parental involvement; school improvement and academic achievement; professional development; and operations, facility, and budget. Most ratings were 'Good' or 'Excellent' for these principals. A review of 24 files of other administrators yielded mixed information. Of these files, 25 percent had

evaluations which were untimely, with some dating back eight years for the most recent evaluation; 50 percent contained no administrative evaluation because the administrators held new roles or were recent appointments to their roles; and the final 25 percent were timely. Of those which were timely, four were informative and two were instructive. All of these administrators were licensed.

## Initiative 4: The district will consistently assess, analyze, and monitor student performance.

**Status**: In progress, but not yet complete.

**Summary**

With the assistance of a consultant, Holyoke staff developed district writing prompts and scoring rubrics at grades 2-12. The prompts and rubrics were completed by January 2005 and embedded in the curriculum maps at most grade levels, K-8, by 2005-2006. At a minimum, fall and winter assessments were conducted at each school. Middle school students were assessed four times each year. While the results demonstrated overall gains in written language proficiency, the district was just beginning to make use of the results to improve instruction.

Holyoke had a limited basis for monitoring the implementation of literacy programs. The district monitored its specialized and grant funded literacy programs, but lacked a fully developed K-12 ELA curriculum to enable more encompassing programmatic monitoring. Specialized and grant funded literacy programs were actively monitored to ensure fidelity of implementation, but had no formal program evaluation cycle. Until recently, programs had not been stable and in effect long enough to be fairly evaluated, and solidifying programs had taken priority over program evaluation.

Holyoke administered common literacy assessments at grades K-9 according to an established assessment calendar. Teachers were trained to use student assessment data to track student progress and identify instructional needs. The district had no standard student profile or template to organize student assessment data, although some schools had developed their own. Although the district did not yet have an integrated database for analysis of student performance data from multiple sources, Holyoke was a pilot participant in the DOE data warehouse project. Through

this project, Holyoke would ultimately be able to analyze data from multiple sources and track changes longitudinally.

The data team formed in 2005-2006 developed a portfolio of district assessments together with information on the utility and function of each. Data team members instructed staff on the use of assessment results to measure student progress, form classroom groups, and plan instruction.

The view of differentiated instruction in Holyoke was narrow, consisting primarily of mandated provisions for its identified high-incident populations of ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. Little training was provided on individualizing instruction to accommodate a range of learner differences in readiness, talent, interest, learning style, and background. While the workshop model was employed in most classrooms, the EQA team found little evidence of tiered assignments and projects, graduated rubrics with upper-level expectations, and curriculum compacting. In observations of 87 district classrooms, various instructional techniques, including differentiated instruction, were seen in 38 percent of the observed classrooms and planning of multiple tasks in 36 percent.

Some training needs were unmet. In certain schools, the majority of students were functioning well below grade-level standards and expectations, and teachers needed strategies and materials to reach these learners, especially when the district curriculum maps were not applicable or useful.

Holyoke teachers and coaches developed curriculum-based assessments in mathematics through an informal process involving collegial discussion and consensus. No procedures existed to ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments or inter-rater reliability in scoring them.

Beginning in 2005-2006, the district administered the MAP in the fall, winter, and spring at grades 3-10 to assess students' progress and needs in mathematics. The data were used to measure incremental gains, form instructional groups, establish eligibility for support programs and services, and inform district and school improvement plans. The district intended to make greater use of these data in combination with other information once it established an integrated database. The central data team began to correlate student performance on formative assessments

with the MCAS test results to establish the predictive validity of these measures, increasing their value for intermediate goal setting and instructional planning.

**Key Observations:**

4a. Holyoke made substantial progress in the use of assessment, especially formative measures, against the baseline of the 2004 EQA report. (19)

4b. The district central data team was participating in the DOE data warehouse project with the goal of establishing an integrated database for longitudinal comparison of multiple sources of information about student characteristics and performance. (18)

4c. A district data team was formed in 2005-2006 to develop a common vision of assessment. This team created a portfolio of commonly administered assessments together with information for teachers on the utility and function of each. A calendar was also administered. (18)

4d. Holyoke had a battery of common assessments with defined purposes administered according to a centrally coordinated calendar, and the central data team developed pathways to make the results immediately accessible to the schools. (19)

4e. Student assessment results resided on several databases. The district's goal was to integrate these databases for ease of access and to facilitate data comparison and analysis. (9)

4f. The district's writing prompts were scored holistically rather than analytically and were more useful for detecting aggregate trends, patterns, and curricular strengths and weaknesses than for diagnosing individual students' instructional needs in written language. (9)

4g. The reliability and validity of the district mathematics open-response questions were undetermined, and the procedures for scoring student responses did not ensure inter-rater reliability. (9)

4h. Holyoke teachers and coaches developed curriculum-based assessments in mathematics through an informal process involving collegial discussion and consensus. However, no procedural safeguards existed to ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments as measures of what students know and are able to do. (9)

4i. Holyoke lacked a procedure and a cycle for evaluating its curricula, programs, and services, except for grant funded initiatives. (9)

4j. Holyoke had a limited basis for monitoring the implementation of its literacy programs. There was no formal program evaluation cycle, programs had not been stable and in effect long enough to be fairly evaluated, and the solidification of programs had taken priority over program evaluation. (9)

4k. The district provided no standard student profile or template to organize student assessment data, although some schools had developed their own. (9)

4l. The district's professional development offerings on differentiated instruction focused on mandated modifications for ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. Few offerings were intended to help teachers accommodate students functioning well below grade-level expectations and to address a range of differences in readiness, interests, talents, and learning styles. (14)

4m. The view of differentiated instruction in Holyoke was narrow, consisting primarily of mandated provisions for its identified high-incident populations of ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model. (14)

4n. While the results of student responses to district-developed writing prompts demonstrated gains in written language proficiency, according to a review by the EQA team, the district was just beginning to make use of them to improve instruction. (19)

4o. The presence of multiple tasks for different levels was a strength of the district's K-8 classrooms, but there was little evidence that the tasks were targeted to students at the appropriate skill level or were capable of bringing students from one skill level to the next higher level. (19)

**Evidence**

Initiative 4 has one strategy and nine action items. Action Items 1-4 have been completed, with ongoing improvement work. The district has made progress implementing Action Items 5-9, but they have not been completed.

***Strategy 4A: Establish districtwide procedures to assess student performance and program effectiveness.***

*Status: In progress, but not yet complete.*

The first four action items were completed as a set.

*Action Item 1. The district, in collaboration with Education Performance Systems, Inc. (EPSI), will develop districtwide writing prompts and rubrics for grades 3-10.*

*Action Item 2. Teachers will receive professional development through EPSI in grading districtwide writing prompt with district rubric.*

*Action Item 3. Implement districtwide writing prompt assessment.*

*Action Item 4. Monitor writing instruction based on writing assessment feedback.*

Administrators and teachers told the EQA team that according to MCAS trend data analysis, Holyoke students had significant difficulty with written language at all grade levels subject to assessment with the long composition. Many student responses were either unable to be scored or were assigned the lowest ratings in both topic development and conventions. Holyoke intended to improve student performance systematically by identifying students' strengths and needs in written language, providing targeted instruction, and regularly monitoring the effectiveness of instruction through pre- and post-testing of students.

In 2003-2004, Holyoke engaged EPSI to help develop district writing prompts and scoring rubrics for grades 2-12. The work began at the secondary level because both the Peck and Lynch middle schools had been declared underperforming by the DOE and improvement was urgent. Interviewees told the EQA examiners that under the guidance of the EPSI consultants, teacher representatives and administrators developed writing prompts and rubrics for grades 3-12 by the summer of 2004. Grade 2 prompts and rubrics were completed by January 2005.

The EQA examiners determined that the prompts and rubrics were closely based on the state curriculum frameworks. Administrators stated that the district writing assessments were embedded in the curriculum maps at most grade levels, K-8, by 2005-2006. They further stated that the initial work with EPSI focused on personal writing. Narrative writing and response to

literature were added to the ELA curriculum in 2005-2006 through the district's partnership with America's Choice, and this emphasis was reflected in the newer prompts.

In interviews, central office administrators and principals stated that the prompts were first administered at the secondary level in 2004-2005 and at grades 2-12 in 2005-2006. The EQA team reviewed district records of the results. The frequency of assessment varied by grade level, and sometimes from school to school at the same grade. At a minimum, fall and winter assessments were conducted in each school at every grade. Middle school students were assessed four times each year. Administrators stated that these students required more frequent practice given prevailing assessment results.

Central office administrators and principals told the EQA team that the district trained teachers to score the writing prompts with the rubrics. The high school ELA department head and the middle school ELA coordinator trained secondary teachers in 2003-2004, and Holyoke central office administrators trained teacher representatives from each elementary school in 2004-2005. In 2005-2006, the training was broadened to include all district teachers in grades 2-12. The EQA examiners reviewed the agendas and attendance logs for these trainings. The sessions were conducted during two full consecutive days. The goals were to introduce teachers to the characteristics of writing as defined by the rubrics, and to develop inter-rater reliability among the teachers in scoring student responses.

Central office administrators and principals told the EQA team that the prompts were initially scored centrally by trained teacher representatives and the results were distributed to the individual schools. Beginning in 2006-2007, after more inclusive training, teachers in each school scored the assessments of their students and recorded the results on a grid. School results were sent to the district office for aggregate analysis.

While the results demonstrated gains in written language proficiency, according to a review by the EQA team, the district was just beginning to make use of the results to improve instruction. In interviews, central office administrators and principals stated that grade-level and departmental teams in each school reviewed the data to determine student progress. ELA coaches, department heads, and coordinators helped teachers make interpretations and determine both common and individual student needs. Principals further stated that students were taught to

understand the scoring rubrics, and many could state what they needed to work on in order to progress to a higher level.

Administrators also stated that the district was progressing toward the goal of using the results to improve written language instruction. One said, “We are very new at doing this, and it isn’t easy to translate a score into an instructional prescription.” Another noted that the responses were scored holistically to determine overall effectiveness, and required a second analytic scoring to determine the specific implications for instruction for each student. One central office administrator stated that developing and implementing the prompts and rubrics was stage one, and making full meaning and use of them for teaching and learning was stage two, “a work in progress.”

*Action Item 5. The district will monitor the implementation of the literacy programs at all school levels.*

Holyoke had a limited basis for monitoring the implementation of its literacy programs. The district carefully monitored its specialized and grant funded literacy programs in the grades and schools where these programs were located, but lacked a fully developed K-12 ELA curriculum to enable more encompassing programmatic monitoring. ELA curriculum maps for grades 6-8 were developed in 2004-2006, while maps for the elementary grades were being issued in monthly installments during most of 2006-2007. The ELA curriculum at the high schools was largely undocumented, and articulation of the ELA curriculum from the middle school level to the high school level was problematic.

Central office administrators and principals told the EQA team that specialized and grant funded literacy programs in grades K-9 were actively monitored to ensure fidelity of implementation. This monitoring was accomplished primarily through walk-throughs by administrators and coaches, meetings between literacy specialists and teachers, accountability reports to the DOE, and analysis of student performance on required literacy assessments, such as the DIBELS and the SRI. In interviews, teachers reported that they received formal and informal feedback on grouping, instructional strategies, and other aspects of program implementation following most classroom visits by coaches, specialists, and administrators.

Administrators told the EQA team that the district literacy coordinator and building principals worked with the K-3 reading coordinators and the Reading First specialists to monitor beginning reading programs in the elementary schools. They also stated that principals and the coordinators monitored the Read 180 programs at the middle and high schools and the Ramp-Up English programs at grades 6 and 9 for students performing two or more years below grade level. They further stated that the DOE provided an external evaluation of the adequacy of grant funded reading programs to supplement local monitoring.

Administrators stated that although student performance and teacher compliance were monitored, no formal program evaluation cycle existed. Central office administrators stated that until recently programs had not been stable and in effect long enough to be fairly evaluated. Solidifying programs took priority over program evaluation. Administrators told the EQA team that they would rely on the 2007 MCAS test results to measure the effectiveness of the Reading First program for students who had been enrolled for three years.

*Action Item 6. The district will develop a management system for keeping track of students' reading data.*

Holyoke administered many common literacy assessments at grades K-9 according to an established district assessment calendar. District leaders provided teachers with embedded professional development on the use of student assessment data to track student progress and identify instructional needs. The district provided no standard student profile or template to organize student assessment data, although some schools had developed their own. Holyoke did not have an integrated database for comparison and analysis of student performance data from multiple sources, but it was a pilot participant in the DOE data warehouse project. This project allows districts to analyze data from multiple sources, including SIMS and TestWiz, and to track changes longitudinally. As part of the project, the central data leadership team was selecting the most useful data fields and sources to inform decisions about teaching and learning.

Central office administrators and principals told the EQA team that prior to 2005, the district office of program accountability collected, compiled, and issued MCAS and other data to the schools. They also stated that teachers were "drowning in the data, and didn't know how to use

it." As further complications, assessments were not always common from school to school, and the district had lacked a coordinated administration calendar.

A district data team was formed in 2005-2006 to develop a common vision of assessment. This team created a portfolio of commonly administered assessments together with information for teachers on the utility and function of each assessment. Following the development of this portfolio, district data team members instructed school-based leaders and teachers on how to use each assessment to measure student progress, form classroom groups, and plan instruction.

Members of the district data team told the EQA examiners that the district administered a number of common literacy assessments including the MCAS tests, DIBELS, GRADE, and SRI. The results resided on several databases, including TestWiz and Rediker. Data team members further stated that their ultimate goal was to integrate these databases for ease of access and to facilitate data analysis. One administrator stated that the first priority was "knowing what to do with data." The second was "gathering data together," and this was in process.

*Action Item 7. The district will provide professional development and classroom support to teachers so that they will differentiate instruction, and provide targeted instruction as a result of analysis of formal and informal assessments.*

The view of differentiated instruction in Holyoke was narrow, consisting primarily of provisions for identified high-incident populations of ELL and special education students, and implementation of the workshop model with flexible grouping in reading and mathematics. In a review of courses and workshops offered by the district over the past three years, the EQA team found few trainings focused on individualizing instruction to accommodate a range of learner differences in readiness, talent, interests, learning style, and background.

In observations of 87 district classrooms, various instructional techniques were seen in 38 percent of the observed classrooms, and planning of multiple tasks in 36 percent. EQA observers found "multiple tasks that engage all levels of learners" in 41 percent of elementary school classrooms, in 47 percent of middle school classrooms, and in 10 percent of high school classrooms. "A variety of instructional techniques" was observed in 44 percent of elementary school classrooms, 48 percent of middle school classrooms, and 10 percent of high school classrooms. While the workshop model was employed in most classrooms, the examiners found

little evidence of tiered assignments and projects, graduated rubrics with upper-level expectations, and curriculum compacting. Administrators told the EQA team that they looked at student work for evidence of differentiated instruction, but were not able to state precisely what they were looking for or whether teachers understood what constituted evidence of providing for individual differences.

The district's professional development program contained relevant offerings. Holyoke offered a series on determining content and language objectives for ELL students using a backwards design, SEI training for classroom teachers, and proficiency training in Lindamood-Bell, an intensive intervention program for students with diagnosed language-related learning disabilities. Holyoke trained teachers to use the DIBELS and SRI results to plan instruction, and sponsored a series on the five essential elements of reading with an emphasis on strategies for ELL and special learners.

In informal sessions, district coaches and specialists helped teachers analyze student assessment results and work to form instructional groups in K-8 ELA and mathematics. A flexible grouping model based on skills and needs was a component of both the workshop model brought to the district through its partnership with America's Choice and the Reading First initiative, but in classroom observations the EQA team found little evidence of individualization within the groups. For the most part, the learning experiences and expectations were differentiated for each group, but uniform and undifferentiated within the groups.

Principals told the EQA team that accommodating students with significant background weaknesses was the greatest challenge for teachers. In some schools, the majority of students were functioning well below grade-level standards and expectations. The principals further stated that teachers needed strategies and materials to reach these learners, especially when the district curriculum maps were not applicable or useful.

Action Items 8 and 9 were addressed in tandem.

*Action Item 8. Formalize specific district math assessments and related rubrics for the current curriculum in preK-8.*

*Action Item 9. Use Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to assess math knowledge and skill sets in grades 4-10.*

Holyoke teachers and coaches developed curriculum-based assessments in mathematics through an informal process involving collegial discussion and consensus. However, no procedural safeguards existed to ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments as measures of what students know and are able to do. During the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, teams of Holyoke teachers developed end-of-unit open-response questions and scoring rubrics at grades K-8 in mathematics. The prompts were word problems derived from the two district mathematics programs, Investigations in Number, Data and Space at grades K-5 and the CMP at grades 6-8.

In informal meetings with coaches, teachers were trained to score the open-response questions, but there were no safeguards to ensure inter-rater reliability. Administrators told the EQA team that teachers in one school might rate the same response differently than the teachers in another. They went on to say that although more calibration was needed to increase the value of these open-response measures, the focus on student work was highly appropriate and a change from past practice.

Beginning in 2005-2006, the district administered the MAP in the fall, winter, and spring at grades 3-10 to assess students' progress and needs in mathematics. Administrators and teachers stated that the data from the MAP were used to measure incremental gains, form instructional groups, establish eligibility for support programs and services, and inform district and school improvement plans.

Central office administrators told the EQA examiners that the results in grades 3, 6, 8, and 10 were being used as a baseline for setting improvement goals. They added that the central data team had begun to correlate student performance on the DIBELS, GRADE, SRI, and MAP with the MCAS test results to establish the predictive validity of these formative instruments, increasing their value for intermediate goal setting and instructional planning.

## Initiative 5: The district will develop and sustain a comprehensive professional development program.

**Status**: In progress**.**

**Summary**

The district was shifting its professional development strategy for teachers of ELA, math, and ELL. The traditional model of cataloging attendance at district mandated training was being augmented by a more job-embedded model of concurrent training delivered by on-site coaches, monitoring using a walk-through tool, and review of student work using rubrics to measure student understanding.

The district planned and executed a professional development calendar each month listing backup professional development for teachers and others. This training occurred after school hours. The major emphasis of professional development influencing student achievement in elementary and middle schools was supervised at the building level by coaches.

IPDPs were formerly more aligned with the DIP and teachers' certification needs. At the time of the review, they were more connected to SIPs and to building-level needs, while meeting the content needs of re-licensing.

The district developed a comprehensive professional development plan to describe its professional development efforts through the DTAP and America's Choice initiatives to improve student achievement. The plan was a road map for professional development in the district. The district's monthly professional development calendar, DIP, SIPs, IPDPs, walk-throughs, and coaching were the vehicles.

The district remained the hub of training to maintain economies of scale in the logistics of professional development, but the decisions about who accesses the various vehicles were made in schools. Funding for professional development came from grants and the general fund. The total spent on professional development for FY 2006 was $3,117,086, of which 95 percent was from grants. In a 184-day school year for teachers, this amounted to $16,941 per day for professional development expenditures. No cost breakdowns of these aggregate figures were available to the audit team. Training costs were very high in the aggregate with little supporting data about the return on investment expected or received as a result of the training.

Holyoke's professional development program provided ample offerings, but the program was fragmented. Professional development was planned and executed in classrooms, in schools, in

training sessions off site in the district, and off campus. These opportunities were offered before and after duty hours, in the evenings, on weekends, and during the summer. Both inside and outside the district consultants planned and conducted training.

Meanwhile, the district was undergoing a number of shifts: cultural shifts in student populations; programmatic shifts brought on by America's Choice protocols and rituals; economic shifts regarding tax and fiscal issues in the region; family shifts, with new homeless and low-income students needing increased support services; leadership shifts in schools with the role of coaches becoming more closely connected to teaching practice; and a contract shift with the new evaluation system going into effect through 2009.

At the time of the review, the district's approach to professional development was still evolving and expanding as the district more thoroughly incorporated America's Choice and new strategies. The professional development program provided many opportunities for teacher growth and flexibility for principals working to improve teacher instructional skills and content knowledge. With all of the options and ongoing changes to the district's offerings and approach, the professional development program was a set of evolving tools for principals to use that could be described as a mosaic of offerings shaped by district shifts. At the time of the review, Holyoke was still working to identify better methods to improve teacher quality, and many staff expressed that they learned that literacy and math coaching was highly effective and should be increased, for example. Still in flux, the professional development program fell short of a comprehensive system focused on clear student learning outcomes. The strategies and action steps prioritized teacher access to priority professional development offerings, but did not address the program in its entirety. The district does not yet have a plan to align the professional development program focused on ensuring that all teachers implement an approach that can improve student achievement, rather than be simply overwhelmed and lacking clear direction. However, the district has the tools to create a comprehensive professional development program and has some momentum in that direction.

**Key Observations:**

5a. A comprehensive professional development plan was developed by the district. (10)

5b. The district organized a comprehensive approach to professional development which was layered in its offerings, but centrally administered, funded, and tracked. (12, 19)

5c. The district maintained a centralized planning and logistical function for professional development while distributing decision-making about access to schools. (12, 19)

5d. The district has initiated walk-throughs to assess the effects of professional development and a focus on student work with accompanying rubrics. These tandem efforts were done at the school level. (12, 19)

5e. Ample evidence indicated that professional development offerings were available and school-based monitoring protocols were in place to promote achievement of district goals. (12)

5f. The district was augmenting its professional development efforts to balance centralized, mandated training with school- and classroom-based job-embedded training. (12, 19)

5g. The district's professional development plan showed a clear outline with ideas and suggestions for how staff at all levels should meet the challenges of ELA, math, ELL, and special education. (14)

5h. The district shifted from centralized to decentralized decision-making in professional development access, accompanying a shift in instructional focus, routines, and rituals provided by an external vendor, America's Choice. (10, 12)

5i. Schools participating in the America's Choice model of school reform received training in the required protocols. (12, 19)

5j. All teachers have not received required training in new protocols and practices. (12)

5k. Neither teacher evaluations, walk-throughs, nor focus walks connected professional development to performance records or provided an assessment of the results of the professional development program. Informal conversations occurred, but an analysis of the professional development program was not a practice in the district. (9, 12)

5l. Training costs were very high in the aggregate with little supporting data about the return on investment expected or received as a result of the training. (9)

5m. The district's professional development effort was almost exclusively paid for by grants. (15)

**Evidence**

Initiative 5 has one strategy and five action items. For the most part, the district has addressed the action items. The effectiveness has not been determined, and the team did not see evidence that the district has effectively supported teachers to identify critical student learning objectives or to deliver differentiated methods of instruction.

***Strategy 5A. Teachers have identified critical student learning objectives to address differentiated methods for teaching objectives.***

**Status:** Incomplete. While the action items are all in progress, the action items all involve teacher training, not teacher implementation.

None of the action items require that "teachers have identified critical student learning objectives to address differentiated methods for teaching objectives." Further, the team did not find ample evidence of teacher knowledge or teacher implementation of differentiated learning objectives or of instruction differentiated for students at their assessed level of performance. This was especially true in elementary math, and at the high school.

*Action Item 1. Review and revise professional development needs based on individual school improvement plans and the District Improvement Plan with a clear focus on the principles of reading and mathematical knowledge, ELL strategies, and differentiated instruction.*

In interviews and through a review of documents, the EQA team learned that the traditional model of top down decision-making for choosing important training topics for teachers was changed to accommodate a model in which decision-making was done closer to where the instructional issues existed. A model with the same professional development for all teachers was being replaced by a school-based model using ELA and math coaches to influence the delivery of instructional content in those disciplines. In addition, the ELL department has developed a train the trainer model to embed ELL expertise in differentiated instruction into each school.

In interviews, the EQA team learned that schools have adopted a "learning community" model of instructional leadership. Each school had a leadership team which in turn fostered a professional "learning community." The leadership team provided direction and made decisions related to resources and training emphasis. The "learning community" perpetuated professional conversations about instruction, formative assessment of student progress, and related areas in the three realms of academic focus: reading and mathematical knowledge, ELL strategies, and differentiated instruction. Articulated professional development needs were an outcome of these discussions. Documents reviewed by the EQA team supported the district's efforts to create professional learning communities in participating schools.

The district continued to offer a wide range of enrichment professional development programs as a support system to the emerging school-based model of job-embedded training. Principals, teachers, and coaches relied on a monthly calendar to determine what kind of training would be offered and when it would be offered. The calendar was detailed and rich with offerings. Its content derived from layered discussions from classrooms to schools to curriculum leaders.

*Action Item 2: Continue to train teachers in district literacy and math initiatives.*

The district's professional development plan had as a priority to "focus staff development efforts on expanding educators' knowledge of subject matter, increasing teachers' knowledge of standards based curriculum, instruction and assessment," among other goals. In documents reviewed, the EQA team found ample evidence that professional development offerings were available and school-based monitoring protocols were in place to promote achievement of these goals. A review of the district professional development plan showed a clear outline with ideas and suggestions for how staff at all levels should meet the challenges of ELA, math, ELL, and special education.

Literacy programs included Literacy for K-8, Reading First for grades K-3, Readers and Writers Workshop for grades 4-8, Ramp-Up literacy for middle and high school students, and English Language Development (ELD) for ELL students in grades 4-8. Other offerings included Reading First, a K-3 phonics-based model, which first focuses on the use of assessment data, interventions, brain research language, and comprehension issues; and Read 180, a systematic

remedial program for older students, which uses software to diagnose student needs and allow for one-to-one adjustment of instructional materials and attention.

Principals confirmed that teachers implemented the literacy programs and used the program materials in classroom instruction. Principals relayed stories of training interventions, of viewing student work with teachers, and of assigning coaches to model lessons. The spirit and text of the district professional development effort in literacy were in alignment in participating schools.

A number of professional development opportunities were available in math instruction. The workshop model was a three-phase instructional program for grades K-8. The EQA team observed numerous math classes at grades K-8 using this model. A centerpiece of math instruction in the district, this effort provided a unification of numeracy throughout the elementary and middle school period. This effort also connected math coaches and teachers around content and analyses of student work. The impact of this program was not contained in documents reviewed.

The district provided an array of programs to improve instruction and aid student comprehension in math. Math Investigations in Number, Data and Space is an inquiry-based program directed at integrating mathematical thinking and language with various iterations of increasingly complex math challenges. The Connected Math Program was directed at middle school students and focused on reasoning and communicating in “accountable” talk. Ramp-Up math and algebra for grades 6-9 were designed to provide a “catch-up” dimension to the comprehensive numeracy program in the district. Navigator was an America’s Choice program delivered by coaches to accelerate math understanding in students who were catching up on their math skills. Larson Math is a technology-based program. The EQA team saw few computers available for student use in observed classrooms.

In addition to the above, the district had a math and science partnership program with the UMASS Boston, Lesley University, Mass Insight Education, and the DOE. This was an academic program in mathematics leading to an advanced degree or certificate. There were 30 teachers currently enrolled in the program.

*Action Item 3. Continue to train teachers in ELL strategies and differentiated instruction.*

Holyoke offered a series on determining content and language objectives for ELL students using a backwards design, Sheltered English Immersion training for classroom teachers, and proficiency training in Lindamood-Bell, an intensive intervention program for students with diagnosed language-related learning disabilities. Holyoke trained teachers to use the DIBELS and SRI results to plan instruction, and sponsored a series on the five essential elements of reading with an emphasis on strategies for ELL and special education students. Over 200 teachers received classroom instruction on integrating ELL strategies into classroom practice and on the MELA-O. Principals in conjunction with the ELL curriculum director monitored ELL strategies using walk-throughs.

From 2003 to 2005, ELL teacher training was ongoing. District records indicated that 20 teachers and paraprofessionals received ACCELA training over the two-year period 2003-2005. Participants gained ELL licensure and advanced degrees as a result of participating in the program. Ten secondary teachers received 37.5 hours of ACCESS training to fulfill ELL requirements in 2005. Thirty teachers participated in a TeachFirst experience which led to the development of a learning community model that reviewed assessments of ELL students to improve services. In 2004-2005, 295 teachers completed SEI consultant courses offered by the district. Each participant received 12 hours of training. Twenty-two teachers received 25 hours of SEI train the trainer professional development to aid the district in its efforts to build a job-embedded model of ELL support. In 2004-2006, 295 teachers also received 10 hours of MELA-O training.

However, interviewees indicated that since the district partnered with America's Choice, the priority has been adopting the turnaround partner's rituals and routines. These have not been incorporated into a strategy for the ELL learner.

Differentiated instruction was included in daylong professional development in-service days, which amounted to three days per year at a cost of 1.63 percent of the total teacher salary budget. In informal sessions, district coaches and specialists helped teachers analyze student assessment results and work to form instructional groups in K-8 ELA and mathematics. A flexible grouping model based on skills and needs was a component of both the workshop model brought to the district through its partnership with America's Choice and the Reading First initiative, but in

classroom observations the EQA team found little evidence of individualization within the groups. For the most part, the learning experiences and expectations were differentiated for each group, but uniform and undifferentiated within the groups.

The EQA team did not observe instruction differentiated within the workshops. Although teachers were explicitly expected to implement the workshop model, and the workshop model provided opportunities for teachers to use the structure to provide tasks for students appropriate to their assessed level, EQA observers did not see evidence of widespread instructional practices of using tiered assignments. America's Choice protocols, rituals, and routines were not fully integrated with the district's other efforts in professional development to ensure alignment of efforts. The workshop model was employed in most classrooms, contributing to a variety of instructional techniques. In observations of 87 district classrooms, various instructional techniques were seen in 38 percent of the observed classrooms. "A variety of instructional techniques" were observed in 44 percent of elementary school classrooms, 48 percent of middle school classrooms, and 10 percent of high school classrooms. The workshop model was not used at the high schools.

Planning of multiple tasks were seen in 36 percent of observed classrooms, and EQA observers found "multiple tasks that engage all levels of learners" in 41 percent of elementary school classrooms, 47 percent of middle school classrooms, and 10 percent of high school classrooms. The presence of multiple tasks for different levels was a strength of the district's K-8 classrooms, but the examiners found little evidence that the tasks were targeted to students at the appropriate skill level or were capable of bringing students from one skill level to the next higher level. Rather, depending on teacher judgment, students could spend a great deal of their time on tasks below their level of proficiency, and fewer tasks at their level or at the next highest level to challenge them. Little evidence was found of tiered assignments and projects, graduated rubrics with upper-level expectations, and curriculum compacting. Administrators told the EQA examiners that they looked at student work for evidence of differentiated instruction, but were not able to state precisely what they were looking for or whether teachers understood what constituted evidence of providing for individual differences.

*Action Item 4. Train teacher and administrator teams in each building to gather, disaggregate, and analyze data by student subgroup, classroom, and school.*

In interviews, the EQA team learned that the district collected aggregate MCAS data and distributed them to schools. In training sessions, principals reviewed these data with teachers; however, by the time they were presented, the tested cohort had moved to a higher grade. Coaches shared as much data as could be disaggregated from standardized tests with individual teachers. The district had a number of formative assessments in use, the results of which influenced conversations among principals, coaches, and classroom teachers. Test data analysis originated at the leadership team level and was passed on to schools and classrooms.

*Action Item 5. Continue to train teachers to use assessment data to improve instruction.*

Much classroom data analysis took place in informal conversations at schools between principals and teachers or between coaches and teachers. An analysis of the several hundred workshops offered during the district's three full days of professional development in August and during each month of the school year provided evidence that the district offered repeated opportunities for teachers to learn how to use data through reviews of formative assessments, such as the DIBELS, through analysis of student work, and through consistent discussions about new programs in the district. However, a review of teacher evaluations and topographical summaries of walk-throughs and focus walks indicated no connection between these various activities, workshops, and other professional development offerings to official performance records. Much of the substance of conversations about linking student achievement data was done in informal meetings or in workshops at schools or in district offices. Few formal results were made part of official records, with the summary documentation required by the superintendent at the end of year evaluation conferences with principals.

## Initiative 6: The district will provide a program to stabilize highly mobile students so that they will have access to high quality instruction that meets their individual needs.

**Status**: In progress but not yet complete.

**Summary**

Initiative 6 of the DTAP committed the district to provide a program to meet the needs of highly mobile students including the provision of high quality instruction. The district carried out this

initiative through the implementation of three strategies. In the first strategy, the district designed a pilot program, the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP), to meet the needs of transient students and their families. With the next strategy, the district established pilot programs first for the middle school population and then for a portion of the elementary school population. Using the last strategy, the district would gather data on the social progress and academic performance in ELA and math for students involved in the pilot programs. The district accomplished the first two strategies. The third strategy remained partially complete.

After addressing initial design challenges, the district used evaluative data, including a Final Evaluation Report on TOP from Brown University, to improve the design of the mobile student program. Some of the problems that existed in the first-year design of the TOP in 2004-2005 included failure to assess all students within the first week after arrival, unclear/inflexible entrance and exit criteria, inadequate staffing and other staffing issues, keeping students in the TOP too long, and inadequate communication with receiving schools about exiting TOP students. The district redesigned the TOP in 2005-2006 by coordinating with the Student Assignment Center (SAC) to place substantially separate special education students directly into the appropriate district program without TOP placement. This freed up the TOP staff to assess all remaining new students within the first week of arrival. The district also added TOP secretarial staff to implement systematic procedures and added teaching staff to meet special needs. Other changes made included amending entrance and exit criteria to allow for flexibility in TOP placement and/or earlier exit, and establishing systematic communication about exiting TOP students through transition meetings with receiving schools. The Brown University report questioned Holyoke's decision to form TOP as a separate program rather than a program integrated within each of the schools districtwide, as recommended by best practices for mobile students.

The pilot TOP for mobile middle school students operated at Peck Middle School for all three years of the period reviewed. The TOP for mobile elementary school students in three elementary schools operated at Kelly Elementary School during 2006-2007. The district did not provide TOP services for mobile elementary students in four of the elementary schools nor for any high school students.

The district did not list Initiative 6 in the DIP, SIPs, or America's Choice Implementation/Action plans, indicating that the district did not embed or align Initiative 6 with the district's goals. Initiative 6 also did not align with the other five initiatives of the DTAP.

Using the Brown University report, the district conducted an initial evaluation of the first year of the TOP. Brown University staff stated that, when studied together, final student grades and the MCAS test results suggested that the TOP did not significantly impact student achievement in the Holyoke schools during 2004-2005. Evaluators had difficulty in acquiring information on the social progress of TOP students; however, they concluded it was possible that, based on their academic progress, TOP students' social issues may not have significantly affected their grades.

Brown University's Education Alliance staff concluded that the "biggest impact of TOP on mainstream classrooms during 2004-05 appeared to be operational; teachers reported a sense of relief at not having many students entering their classroom throughout the term." They further stated, "…this finding did not translate into reports of improvement in the teaching and learning climate in the mainstream classrooms." Brown University staff recommended that the district conduct further evaluations at the end of each year of the program to determine whether the TOP was successful or not. During interviews with the EQA team, teachers, administrators, and parents shared that the TOP reduced the disruption formerly caused by the constant arrival of new students in classroom, and that TOP students transitioned more smoothly into classrooms at their receiving schools. District and TOP staff reported that they completed no further comparative evaluations during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years. They also reported that the district conducted no longitudinal studies of the possible benefits of the TOP program for former TOP students.

**Key Observations:**

6a. During interviews, parents, teachers, and administrators reported that they were pleased with the TOP for reducing the disruption caused when transient students arrived in the schools and for preparing mobile students to be more familiar with school routines. (19)

6b. Despite the isolation of the TOP and/or separation of students from their neighborhood schools, teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed generally supported the program as a good intervention for mobile students and the district's schools. (14)

6c. According to TOP staff, starting in 2005-2006, the district made several TOP improvements based on the Brown University recommendations and TOP staff input. (19)

6d. District staff did not conduct a longitudinal study to discern the potential benefits of the Transient Opportunity Program for mobile students. (9)

6e. The TOP was not evaluated using social-emotional data, attendance data (other than withdrawal/move data), or a comparison of TOP student performance versus non-TOP student performance for any of the data sets. (9)

6f. The district did not align the initiative supporting mobile students with the remaining five initiatives of the DTAP and did not embed the mobile student initiative within the goals of the DIP, SIPs, or America's Choice Implementation/Action plans. (10)

6g. The design of the TOP separated transient students from their peers and made a small number of district staff responsible for meeting their needs. (14)

6h. The district piloted the TOP for all mobile students at the middle school level and for some students at the elementary level during the period reviewed. (19)

6i. The Holyoke Public Schools' plan for Initiative 6 did not use a systematic approach to coordinate services for all mobile students and their families. (14)

6j. The Brown University report questioned Holyoke's decision to form the TOP as a separate program, rather than as a districtwide program integrated within each of the schools, as recommended by best practices for mobile students. (14)

6k. No program existed for transient high school students. (11, 16)

**Evidence**

Initiative 6 has three strategies. Strategy 6A has four action items, Strategy 6B has four action items, and Strategy 6C has eight action items. The first two strategies were mostly completed, but not necessarily effectively implemented or adequate. Strategy C was started, but not completed.

***Strategy 6A: Design and implement a pilot program to address the needs of highly mobile students and their families.***

*Status: Complete but not yet adequate.*

*Action Item 1. Determine criteria that would be used to define a highly mobile student.* (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered.)

According to district documentation, the 2004 EQA fact-finding review, and interviews, mobility was one of the factors affecting the achievement of students in Holyoke, and this was the major reason for placing Initiative 6 in the DTAP. For the purposes of the pilot program, Holyoke Public Schools defined a mobile student as any new student arriving after October 1 during a school year. The district computed mobility rates to determine the schools affected most by mobility. District staff used a formula that took into account the new entries and withdrawals of students taking place after October 1 and compared those data to the October 1 total student enrollment to arrive at a percentage called the mobility index. During the last four years, the mobility indices or rates for Holyoke were 21.6 percent in 2002-2003, 21.6 percent in 2003-2004, 17.3 percent in 2004-2005, and 23.5 percent in 2005-2006, as reported in the District Mobility Report SY2005-2006. Mobility rates for individual schools over the last four years ranged from a low of 7.5 percent to a high of 36.5 percent, indicating that mobility was a greater concern in some schools than in others.

In interviews with district and school administrators and teachers, staff reported that mobility or transience negatively affected student social adjustment, emotional adjustment, and academic achievement. Mobile students missed opportunities to form relationships with students and teachers, which often affected their ability to socialize and to develop emotional attachments. Mobile students also lost much of the continuity of their instruction, which affected their academic performance. These student issues affected the schools with large numbers of transient students through increased emotional, behavioral, and academic problems. Although the district mentioned the issue of mobility in the DTAP, the DIP, SIPs, and America's Choice Implementation/Action plans did not mention mobility. In addition, Initiative 6 did not align with the other five initiatives in the DTAP.

*Action Item 2. Identify the types of data (demographic, academic) needed to assist in making an appropriate program and school placement for the students.* (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered.)

*Action Item 3. Establish process, procedures, and protocol of the program*. (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered. Language in the most recent plan combines Action Items 3 and 4 to be, "Establish process, procedures, and protocol of the program and the needs of both its children and families." In alignment with the previous turnaround plan in which 6A action items were numbered, the two actions were kept separate for reporting purposes.)

Prior to the start of the pilot program to help mobile students, SAC staff obtained registration information from parents and worked with school staff to assign new students to a school. SAC staff gathered the following information: student entry form, records release, emergency contact form, medical and mental health records, Home Language Survey (HLS), proof of residency, proof of legal custody, academic records, lunch form, technology sign-off, and special bus. SAC staff forwarded this information to the student's assigned school.

Starting in 2004-2005, this procedure changed at grades 6-8 when the district piloted the TOP for all mobile middle school students. When new middle school students arrived after October 1, SAC staff asked parents to complete registration information as before, but asked parents to contact the TOP office at Peck Middle School to finish the registration process. TOP staff received the registration materials from SAC and conducted a full assessment of each student. Student assessments conducted by TOP staff included the MAP for math and reading, Woodcock-Johnson reading comprehension-fluency, the district writing prompt, and the Woodcock-Johnson math fluency-calculation tests. If the Home Language Survey indicated that a language other than English was an issue, then TOP staff administered the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) and obtained MELA-O scores, if available.

TOP staff also interviewed the parent to complete the home assessment form; discussed school policies/rules, after-school connections, the Community Education Project (Family), teen recourse guide, Holyoke Adult Learning Opportunities (HALO), and Holyoke Public Library;

and gathered the handbook receipt, information release form, and teen clinic application and release. TOP staff assigned the student to TOP classes at Peck.

According to district administrators and the Final Evaluation Report on the TOP done by the Education Alliance at Brown University, problems existed with the appropriate placement and the entrance/exit criteria of TOP students during the first year of implementation. TOP staff often did not assess new students within the first week of their arrival. TOP teachers experienced many challenges in teaching some of the new students assigned to their classrooms. Some of these new students required ELL support, and there were no ELL-trained TOP staff. Other new students came from substantially separate special education programs, and district staff assigned them to the inclusion setting of TOP.

According to TOP teachers, they lacked training on how to work with these student issues. Some TOP students remained in the program for longer than one grading period, and staff did not exit them to their home schools as soon as they should. When TOP students did exit, communication with receiving classroom teachers and staff was lacking as students transitioned to their home schools. A last concern was that TOP staff placed some students with no academic, emotional, or social issues in the TOP rather than sending them directly to their neighborhood schools.

According to TOP staff, starting in 2005-2006 the district made several TOP improvements based on the Brown University recommendations and TOP staff input. The district added staff to increase efficiency and enable the testing of all students within the first week of entry. The district also added an English Language Development teacher to the TOP for ELL support, and SAC staff assigned new substantially separate special education students directly to the appropriate special education program in Holyoke rather than sending them to the TOP. TOP staff followed entrance criteria that allowed for more flexibility in assigning students to the TOP, with new students who were at grade level or above being able to obtain an “Approved Exception” to go directly to their home school. TOP staff established revised exit criteria to support clarity, flexibility, and faster transition to the student’s home school at the earliest possible grading period. TOP staff developed a systematic process including the “Student at a Glance” form and scheduled meetings with counselors and teachers to improve communication and coordination with receiving schools when students transitioned.

In 2006-2007, the district initiated a pilot elementary TOP for three elementary schools which was housed at Kelly Elementary School. Elementary TOP staff followed these revised procedures developed for appropriate placement and exit of students.

*Action Item 4. Establish a process for addressing the needs of families of the transient population.* (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered. Language in the most recent plan combines Action Items 3 and 4 to be, "Establish process, procedures, and protocol of the program and the needs of both its children and families." In alignment with the previous turnaround plan in which 6A action items were numbered, the two actions were kept separate for reporting purposes.)

Holyoke Public Schools began the process of addressing the needs of mobile students and their families by initiating pilot programs for all middle school and some elementary school students. Holyoke staff gave varied and, in some cases, contradictory reasons for starting at the middle school level for the pilot program. Some staff reported that the district selected the middle school level because historically that was where the highest mobility existed. The District Mobility Report provided by the district to the EQA did not show mobility to be any higher historically at the middle school level compared to the elementary or high school levels. In fact, in some years the elementary or high school levels had higher mobility. Other staff reported that the district chose the middle school level for the pilot because district administrators thought this would be the best place to start a pilot. Staff made no mention of any research-based reasons for selecting the middle school level to start the pilot program.

The rationale often given in interviews with teachers and administrators for the establishment of the TOP program was to prevent the disruption caused by the arrival of transient students in the general education classrooms. These responses were similar to the responses given in interviews conducted for the Brown University Final Evaluation Report on TOP. Based on these responses, eliminating school disruptions took precedence over meeting the needs of the transient students and their families. In contrast to the districtwide view of the reasons for the program, the TOP staff expressed a clear emphasis on meeting the needs of the mobile students in the program and the goal of providing a smooth transition to the students' home schools in keeping with the TOP's mission.

The Brown University study commissioned by Holyoke Public Schools made several recommendations supported by research on promising practices for mobile students and their families. Some of these recommendations included "providing immediate assessment and assistance, educating parents about the negative effects of transience, and establishing programs that make families want to stay at the school." The study stated, "Successful programs that combat student mobility are characterized by schools that take a holistic approach to the problem. All staff are committed and knowledgeable…all teachers and staff share the responsibility and work together to meet the special needs of these students." Thus, the study indicated that schoolwide approaches were most successful and district policies that spread the load throughout the district were most effective (p.18-20).

The original design of the TOP as a program that separated transient students from the mainstream classrooms of their peers was a design contrary to the above recommendations supported by research in the Brown University study. For the last three years, the district housed the middle school TOP at Peck Middle School with students coming from up to six different school attendance areas. The program used four classrooms and office space in the basement of the school, next to the cafeteria. During 2006-2007, the district housed the elementary school TOP in the grade 1-5 wing at Kelly Elementary School with students coming from three different school attendance areas. Despite the isolation of the TOP and/or the separation of students from their neighborhood schools, teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed generally supported the program as a good intervention for mobile students and the district's schools. The Final Evaluation Report from Brown University also indicated that most parents, teachers, and students spoke favorably about the TOP's implementation, support of mobile students, and reduction of concerns at schools. TOP staff members noted that they worked very hard to support families in stabilizing their home situation.

The district's initial design of and revisions to the pilot program did not address some of the needs of mobile students and their families. The district did not have a program to meet the needs of the transient elementary students at four schools: Donahue, McMahon, Sullivan, and White. Furthermore, no program existed for transient high school students. According to interviewees, although office staff at all schools had training in welcoming all new students, and counselors worked with transient families at each of the schools, the district provided no training for all

mainstream teachers and paraprofessionals in how to work with transient students and families after the student exited the TOP to arrive at his/her home school. In some instances, TOP staff provided a briefing for teachers receiving a student exiting from the TOP, but this was not always the case. In all situations, TOP staff briefed the receiving school's counselor concerning any TOP student coming to his/her school. Up to the time of the EQA review, the district provided no schoolwide training or a list of recommended procedures for mainstream staff to use when working with mobile students and for enabling smooth transitions into the new school. No systematic, districtwide coordination or integration of services existed for the programs intended to help mobile families want to stay at their schools. These programs included adult basic education, Even Start, adult literacy, and after-school and weekend programs.

*Action Item 5. Identify, post, and hire for the appropriate positions needed in the program.* (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered.)

Holyoke provided the TOP with the appropriate positions to provide instruction in the program at the middle and elementary levels by the time of the 2006-2007 review, although staffing issues impeded instructional service delivery at the beginning of the program. The program was not staffed to connect sufficient families with the appropriate city services in order to stabilize family situations for its students.

In 2004-2005, the first year of the TOP when the program operated only at the middle school level, staffing was inadequate. The district did not provide the middle school TOP with the appropriate staff to provided needed special education services, English language learner services, and sufficient support for the administration of the program. The district redesigned the TOP in 2005-2006 by adding TOP secretarial staff to implement systematic procedures, increasing the number of staff to provide timely assessment of new students, adding an English Language Development teacher, adding teaching staff to meet special needs, and placing substantially separate special education students directly into the appropriate district program instead of in the TOP. In the 2005-2006 and the 2006-2007 school years, the middle school TOP was staffed by six teachers including a special education teacher, an ELD teacher, an ELA teacher, a math teacher, a science teacher, and a social studies teacher. The middle school TOP

enrolled 127 students in 2005-2006 and 137 students at the time of the EQA review in 2006-2007.

The district hired the appropriate instructional staff to open the elementary TOP prior to the start of the school year in 2006-2007. The district staffed the elementary TOP with three teachers and three paraprofessionals organized into a grade K-1 class, a grade 2-3 class, and a grade 4-5 class. Special education teaching staff at the Kelly Elementary School provided special education support for TOP students as specified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). TOP teachers and/or paraprofessionals provided ELL support as needed for ELL students in the TOP. At the time of the 2006-2007 review, 159 elementary school students were enrolled in the TOP.

TOP and school staff have worked to reduce the number of disruptions to the education of their students by working with state and local social service agencies to support families with housing, health, employment, safety, emotional, and other issues. However, the staff is inadequate to provide support to the number of families with needs and to coordinate services that are not sufficiently coordinated on a state or local level, according to administrators.

*Action Item 6. Prepare the space and materials/supplies needed for the program.* (Note: In the 2006-2007 turnaround plan document, action steps for Strategy 6A were not numbered.)

The TOP middle school program operated at Peck Middle School for all three years of the period reviewed. The program used four classrooms and office space in the basement of the school, next to the cafeteria.

The TOP for mobile elementary school students in three elementary schools operated at Kelly Elementary School during 2006-2007 in three classrooms on the first floor of the grade 1-5 building wing.

The TOP design did not require the district to provide space or a program to serve all mobile students in all schools. The middle school TOP served transient students in grades 6-8 from Lynch and Peck middle schools, as well as grade 6-8 transient students from the K-8 elementary schools in the district. The elementary TOP was in the pilot stage at the time of the review, and served three of the seven elementary schools with the highest mobility rates: Kelly, Lawrence, and Morgan. The district did not provide TOP for mobile elementary students in four of the

elementary schools (Donahue, McMahon, Sullivan, and White) or for the two high schools (Holyoke High School and Dean Technical High School).

TOP staff indicated that the district provided adequate materials and supplies for the program, including the appropriate assessments for all students.

***Strategy 6B: Stabilize the middle school and grades K-5 (Kelly, Lawrence, and Morgan) population by eliminating disruption caused by transience.***

*Status: In progress but not yet complete.*

*Action Item 1. Place new students entering the district after October 1 in the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP).*

*Action Item 2. Evaluate entering TOP students for academic and support services placement.*

According to administrators, teachers, and parents, placement in the TOP benefited both the transient student and the students and teachers in classrooms. Mobile students had the opportunity to learn the rituals and routines of the classroom in the less stressful setting of the TOP. TOP classes usually were smaller, everyone in the class was a new student, and teachers spent extra time teaching school procedures. Meanwhile, TOP staff members gathered data on each student's needs to prepare a plan that they shared with the receiving school at the time of transition. Staff hoped the mobile student's parent(s) continued their efforts to stabilize the new home situation with help available from TOP staff.

The expectation was that all these preparations would reduce the disruption for new students, instill confidence, and make for a smoother transition to their new schools. Placement of new students in the TOP allowed teachers and students in classrooms to avoid the disruption caused when a new student arrives. In the past, the arrival of a new student caused the teacher to stop the instruction in the classroom to orient and assess the new student. The teacher lost much valuable academic learning time helping new students, and this increased when more transient students arrived in a classroom. The establishment of the TOP reduced the amount of time lost to assist new students and made for a more stable transition for each new student. It reduced the possibility of inappropriate behaviors due to the frustration of the new and existing students.

TOPs were in operation for the placement of new elementary and middle school students at the time of the EQA visit. The middle school TOP operated at Peck Middle School during the last three years. TOP staff received transient students in grades 6-8 from Lynch and Peck middle schools, as well as grade 6-8 transient students from the K-8 elementary schools in the district. The TOP enrolled 122 students during its first year. District administrators staffed the middle school TOP with five teachers including a special education teacher, an ELA teacher, a math teacher, a science teacher, and a social studies teacher. The TOP enrolled 127 middle school students during 2005-2006 with the district adding an ELD teacher to support ELL student needs. The middle school TOP had 137 students enrolled at the time of the EQA review in 2006-2007.

During the third year of the TOP in 2006-2007, the district piloted an elementary version of the program for the three elementary schools with the highest mobility rates. The schools involved were Kelly, Lawrence, and Morgan elementary schools. As of the time of the review, 159 elementary school students were enrolled in TOP. The district housed the elementary TOP at Kelly Elementary School in three classrooms on the first floor of the grade 1-5 building wing. The district staffed the elementary TOP with three teachers and three paraprofessionals organized into a grade K-1 class, a grade 2-3 class, and a grade 4-5 class. Special education teaching staff at the Kelly Elementary School provided special education support for TOP students as specified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). TOP teachers and/or paraprofessionals provided ELL support as needed for ELL students in the TOP.

According to district administrators, TOP staff evaluated every new student eligible for the program and arriving after October 1. In addition to administering the educational assessments mentioned above to each student, TOP staff conducted an interview with the parent(s) to complete the home assessment form. District staff reported that the issues occurring most often and causing disruption for the families were housing, emotional, and social problems for the student and/or parent(s), family instability, and medical and job-related concerns. Specific circumstances causing a change of residence for families included loss of job, eviction from rental property, family problems, flight from an unsafe situation, and relocation by a state agency. TOP and district staff members reported that state and local social services agencies exacerbate many of the challenges of mobility that families face through lack of coordination of

services and resources. An example of this was the number of families coming from the eastern part of the state because not enough housing was available. These families came to Holyoke but tried to return to their former neighborhoods as soon as possible. The sheer number of families needing services was overwhelming for Holyoke staff and made it difficult for staff to gather all the evaluation data needed.

Despite these challenges, TOP and school staffs reported some successes in helping to stabilize the family situations for many students. Some examples included connecting a deaf mother with community services so she could obtain hearing implants and her son would no longer be the caretaker for his mother. Another success was assisting a family in getting an apartment in 2005-2006 and the student still attending school at Peck Middle School in 2006-2007. A last example cited by TOP staff involved a former student who ran away from a shelter in the eastern part of the state several times. TOP staff helped the mother find an apartment in Holyoke so the student would return home. That student was still in school at the time of the review and was doing well.

*Action Item 3. Establish a collection of data regarding student history of academic performance, social-emotional background, and pattern of school attendance.*

Each year of the program, TOP staff assessed all new students arriving after October 1 and the assessments included baseline testing in MAP. Staff also gathered all available MCAS test data on these new students. According to TOP staff members, a review of MAP baseline assessment data informed them that the majority of new students entering Holyoke had ELA and math scores below those of their mainstream peers. MAP data indicated that these new students were generally several grade levels below their peers. TOP and district staff reported no additional baseline data.

TOP staff provided the EQA team with charts and graphs showing 2005-2006 former TOP student status for promotion/retention/moved; TOP Program Final Statistics 2005-2006 showing number enrolled, transitioned, early exited, promoted/retained; TOP K-5 Kelly and TOP 6-8 Peck Student Complete Lists for 2006-2007 showing entry/exit dates; and TOP Test Results for Peck 2006-2007 including MAP math/reading, Woodcock-Johnson comprehension/fluency-writing, Woodcock-Johnson fluency-calculation, and MELA-O scores. District staff also provided descriptive information and charts showing the composition of the TOP population

including TOP enrollment; student services, such as mainstream, special education, 504, ELL; ethnicity; number of schools/moves; custody/guardianship; type of residence; and other significant issues. District staff provided no social-emotional data and no attendance data, other than withdrawal/move data. Staff provided no evaluative analysis of these data or comparison of TOP student performance versus non-TOP student performance for any of the data sets.

The question remained as to what was happening for transient students who received little or no services because they attended the high school or one of the elementary schools that did not offer the TOP. Other than training office staff and available counseling support at these schools, district staff members said they did not offer any services for students at non-TOP participating schools at the time of the review. They reported that the White School was under consideration for inclusion among elementary schools offering the TOP for 2007-2008. District and TOP staff said no plans were in place to train or to share best practices from the TOP with all classroom teachers or paraprofessionals in the schools.

***Strategy 6C: Gather specific data on students in pilot program regarding math and ELA achievement and students' related progress.***

*Status: Started but not in progress.*

*Action Item 1. Reassess TOP students for academic progress and needs using MAP.*

*Action Item 2. Reassess student placement from data results and adjust program placement and support systems as needed.*

TOP staff administered a full battery of MAP assessments to all students enrolled in the TOP. Holyoke Public Schools' staff conducted three MAP assessments each year; therefore, TOP staff members tested any students remaining in the TOP at the time of the next MAP testing. District administrators reported that TOP teachers and staff routinely reassessed TOP students and used the results of these assessments to adjust a student's placement and/or support.

*Action Item 3. Define and create an evaluation tool to determine pilot program's effectiveness.*

*Action Item 4. Complete a data comparison between student progress in the regular middle school classroom to the TOP based on district assessments.*

As part of Action Item 3, the district decided to identify an evaluation facilitator who will meet with central office and program leaders to evaluate program effectiveness, issues, and problems.

The district contracted with the Education Alliance at Brown University to design and conduct an evaluation of the TOP for the 2004-2005 school year. The school support specialist served as the evaluation facilitator. With regard to evaluating the academic and social progress of TOP students, the Brown University Final Evaluation Report of TOP stated, "For all analyses, the significantly lower student numbers in the TOP make it difficult to generalize results, and findings must be interpreted knowing that no causal interpretations may be made." Based on final grade results for 2004-2005, said the report stated that TOP program students "may have performed as well as their mainstream peers." It further stated, "However, these results should be explored further in case there were different grading criteria in the TOP relative to the other schools in the sample." The report also stated, "There appeared to be some positive increases in grade 6 MCAS scores between 2004 and 2005; however, there were no large differences observed between years for grades 7 or 8." It went on to say, "…however, the MCAS data for TOP students was available for only a small portion of TOP students; therefore, these findings may not be representative of the TOP population overall... Combined, the results suggest that the TOP did not significantly impact student achievement in the Holyoke schools during 2004-05."

Evaluators reported difficulty in obtaining information on the social progress of TOP students; however, based on their academic progress, evaluators concluded that it was "possible that for TOP students in 2004-05 their social issues may not have significantly impacted their grades." Education Alliance staff concluded that the "biggest impact of TOP on mainstream classrooms during 2004-05 appeared to be operational; teachers reported a sense of relief at not having many students entering their classroom throughout the term." The report went on to state, "…this finding did not translate into reports of improvement in the teaching and learning climate in the mainstream classrooms."

In Action Item 4, Holyoke Public Schools was to "complete a data comparison between student progress in the regular middle school classroom to the TOP program based on district assessments." As part of Action Item 4, the district decided to track TOP students' progress by conducting a longitudinal study of former TOP students who exited during the school year and transitioned into the regular classroom setting. In its Final Evaluation Report, the Education

Alliance recommended that Holyoke Public Schools continue to evaluate the TOP program at the end of each school year in a manner similar to the way it conducted its evaluation. As of the EQA team's review, Holyoke conducted no data comparison of TOP versus non-TOP student academic performance for the end of the 2005-2006 school year based on district assessments. TOP staff collected data on the promotion/retention status of former TOP students during the 2005-2006 school year, but the district did not track the progress of these students in the regular classroom. The district did not provide the EQA team with any other evaluations of the academic progress, attendance, or stability of the students.

Also as part of Action Item 4, the 2006-2007 turnaround plan indicated that the district decided to compile a final review of program findings for the superintendent and to share findings with the school committee and the Department of Education. According to the *Turnaround Plan Progress to Date End of the Academic Year 2005,* at the end of 2004-2005 the district used the Brown University evaluation as the basis for providing program findings to the superintendent, school committee, and the DOE. The *Turnaround Plan Progress to Date End of the Academic Year 2006* indicated that the TOP staff compiled student data for school year 2005-2006 into a chart, which it sent to the superintendent. *The Turnaround Plan Progress to Date End of the Academic Year* 2006 also showed and the TOP director confirmed that TOP staff shared a review of the program's progress with the superintendent and the school committee. The chart entitled *TOP Program Final Statistics 2005-2006* showed totals for the number of students enrolled in the TOP, the number of TOP students who transitioned to various schools, the number of students who remained in the TOP, and the number of students who moved out of district before transitioning from the TOP to their neighborhood schools. The chart also listed totals for the number of students exiting early from the TOP, the number of TOP students promoted and the number retained, and demographic data, such as special education, 504, and ELL information. TOP staff provided the EQA team with a chart for the TOP for school year 2006-2007 that contained columns for TOP (6-8), TOP (K-5), and Total TOP. Each column had residence categories and totals for enrollment, with special education, ELL, and mainstream enrollments also listed. TOP staff also provided charts of demographic data.

## *The Use of District Resources to Implement the Turnaround Plan*

Leadership personnel in the district stated they began to institute a needs-based budget as an effective manner to implement the DTAP. However, no financial plan was associated with the DTAP and the DTAP itself does not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies. The district had no systematic approach to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of its programs. The leadership personnel revised the budget process beginning in 2007 to have a more shared decision-making process and to address student achievement data by making budget decisions at the school level to target funding where it was most needed. However, the budget development, the final approval, and the spending commitment timeline did not always allow funds to be available in a timeframe which would permit hiring of new personnel and purchasing of materials and supplies to be in place at the start of the school year when they were needed. The district also did not have a procedure that would provide necessary materials in a timely manner to students who entered the system during the school year. In addition, interviewees reported that at some period during each year, the budget was frozen until a more firm knowledge of available funding was acquired.

**Finding 20. There was no financial plan associated with the DTAP and the DTAP itself does not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies. (I)**

Although the budget development process has improved, in 2006-2007 the district had not yet produced a budget through a process that supported effective implementation of the DTAP.

Although interviewees stated that DTAP initiatives were considered, the EQA team did not find documented evidence of budget development based on the DTAP. No financial plan was associated with the DTAP and the DTAP itself does not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies. Therefore, since this new process was not instituted until 2006-2007, the results of the new budget process were unclear at the time of the review, and not enough information was available to determine the level of improvement or whether the district has produced a sustainable and effective set of budget development procedures.

Administrators stated in interviews that the budget process for 2006-2007 had the principals look at the kinds of students in their buildings and then determine the teaching and special services that were needed. The budget process had each principal develop data on a student-by-student need basis. Principals, in interviews, confirmed that the guiding standard was to try to provide the neediest student with the most support and that was built into the budget process. Another principal stated that "we now have to make programmatic decisions and each school budget is based on the particular student needs of your building." Principals stated that this process also included the assessment of subgroup needs.

The new 2006-2007 budget development process began at the central administration level with an analysis of current staffing levels and an update of salaries and benefits for the upcoming budget year to arrive at a salary baseline. Other projected fixed costs, such as maintenance and utilities, were forecasted and updated. In January, the process continued at the individual school level when principals and other district supervisory personnel were furnished with preliminary budget preparation instructions. Principals and teachers were required to use the various assessment tools associated with the DTAP to evaluate the teaching and learning process within their own schools and were required to prepare a presentation of this information and its associated costs to district leadership in order to justify the funding they requested. Although the DTAP document does not make specific references to the budget document or the budget preparation process, Initiative 1 requires the development of a student data management system to guide instruction and student learning and to utilize data to drive instruction for student progress. These data, when developed, could be used as the basis for assigning budget funding.

Interviews with principals, teachers, and parent council representatives regarding the 2006-2007 budget preparation process provided a mixed response. Interviews with school improvement council representatives regarding their involvement in the budget preparation process also provided a mixed response. One parent stated that the principal asked for input, another stated that parents were just informed as to what had been requested, and a third parent stated that parents had been involved in the past but not currently.

In the new budget development process, after principals completed their budget discussions with the central administration and the superintendent compiled a preliminary budget, the budget

subcommittee of the school committee reviewed the programs the central administration requested. The budget subcommittee reported the administration's requests to the full school committee, and the superintendent's budget was completed and presented to the full school committee. In early May, the budget was discussed and approved by the full school committee. School committee members stated in interviews that "we give a lot of latitude to the administration in the budget preparation process but we do the best we can to go through the numbers." One member commented that the school committee pushed every year to get the preliminary receipt numbers as early as possible because the district is so heavily state funded. This member wanted to see the estimates in March, but in one recent year the committee did not receive the budget until June. The district then held its legally required public hearing on the budget and forwarded it to the city council and mayor for final approval.

Representatives from the municipal side were kept informed during the budget development process. Interviewees representing the municipal side of government stated to the examiners that the cooperation between the district and the municipality was high with a good working relationship, although at times "communication could be better." In a separate interview, an official stated that he did not believe a positive relationship existed.

In summary, while the new process used in 2006-2007 reflected an improvement from a budget percentage increase, the district had not yet produced a budget using this process, and the effectiveness of the process remained unclear.

**Finding 21. FY 2006 spending on professional development averaged approximately $3 million, or $17,000 per day, but the district lacked measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs. (I)**

A review of the district's End of Year Pupil and Financial Report for 2005-2006 indicated that the district spent a total of $3,117,086 from federal and state grants, school committee budget funds, and other receipts in the category of professional development. This expenditure, based on a 184-day school year, amounted to an average expenditure of $16,941 per day. Despite high expenditures for professional development, district administrators indicated that they did not have a system for evaluating the effectiveness of the programs, determining program outcomes, or comparing the cost-effectiveness of in-house versus external professional development.

Teachers in interviews indicated that coaches provided valuable professional development, but that the district needed more.

**Finding 22. The district did not have a clear accounting mechanism to assess all of its unexpended encumbrances. (I)**

Examiners, when reviewing the district's FY 2006 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report, observed that the district reported the sum of $9,599,766 in the line item "Previous Year Unexpended Encumbrances (Carry Forward)." District and municipal personnel were unable to explain the genesis of this entry.

Principals had difficulty obtaining the current budget status of their accounts, according to school-based administrators interviewed by the team.

**Finding 23. Holyoke Public Schools' lack of budget forecasting hindered the implementation of the DTAP, caused hiring and purchasing delays, and resulted in budget freezes. The need for budget forecasting in the district was especially important because of Holyoke's reliance on Chapter 70 aid and grants, student mobility in the district, and the district's loss of students to charter schools. (I)**

The timeliness of the budget preparation process impacted the successful implementation of the DTAP. The effective implementation of Initiative 3, "The district will hold educators accountable for delivery of instruction," and Initiative 6, "The district will provide a program to stabilize highly mobile students so that they will have access to high quality instruction that meets their individual needs," required the necessary personnel and supplies to be available when needed. Interviews with district administrators confirmed that because the district was so heavily dependent on Chapter 70 aid and federal and state grants, the budget process did not begin until January. Final budget decisions were not made, and the mayor and city council did not approve the budget, until June when receipts were firm. Confirmation of positions offered to new personnel and the purchase of materials and supplies were delayed. Interviewees in a teacher focus group at the high school stated, "the way the state interacts with our district affects our budget. We do not get state funding until July and it is hard to do long-term planning." Other

interviewees stated that supplies and materials did not arrive in time for the start of school, particularly materials that required bids.

The district's finances depended heavily on Chapter 70 aid. From FY 2002 to FY 2003, the district's Chapter 70 aid was level funded, and from FY 2003 to FY 2004 Chapter 70 aid dropped by 5.1 percent or $3,063,929. The district experienced a number of staff reductions as a result. From FY 2004 to FY 2007, Chapter 70 aid increased each year. In FY 2007 it was $8,651,734 higher than in FY 2004, and Chapter 70 aid was 87.8 percent of actual net school spending. In FY 2005, the district exceeded its net school spending requirement by $7,540,110; in FY 2006, it exceeded it by $6,360,518.

Federal and state grants awarded to the district totaled $14,725,652 in FY 2004, $14,884,540 in FY 2005, and $14,085,754 in FY 2006. Some grants were dependent on student enrollment, and the enrollment in the district was 7,245 in FY 2004, 7,056 in FY 2005, and 6,485 in FY 2006. The district has also experienced a number of its students leaving to attend charter schools.

The EQA team did not see evidence that administrators made financial commitments contingent on receipt of funding. This affected whether necessary supplies, materials, and textbooks were in the hands of students when programs were scheduled. Interviewees also stated that although approximately 6,500 students were in the system, a total of 9,000 students registered and spent some time in the system during the school year. The purchasing process could cause delays in getting materials in the hands of those pupils who enter during the year. A central office administrator also stated almost every year the budget was frozen at some point until the cost to complete the year was determined.

**Finding 24. Interviewees indicated that the district needed more staff in key positions to better support improved instruction and diverse student needs. (II)**

Interviewees indicated that two staff roles were key in improving instruction: the role of director of curriculum and testing and the role of the instructional coaches. These positions addressed instruction at grades K-8, but not at grades 9-12. Teachers and principals stated that the district needed more coaches so that each school would have at least one full-time ELA and one full-time math coach. At the time of the review, some schools shared coaches. The high schools did

not have instructional coaches or a similar position to fill the role. The superintendent stated that staff members have expressed to him the need for more instructional coaches, and he was considering how to fund them.

Central office administrators and principals expressed hiring difficulties in particular areas of need. Particular areas mentioned included middle school staff, certified ELL staff, and principals. One administrator acknowledged that in some situations, classroom support personnel should be replaced with a professional teacher.

The End of Year Pupil and Financial Report for FY 2006 stated that approximately 150 teachers, 100 paraprofessionals, 30 custodians, and 15 administrators had been proposed but not funded. Central office administrators emphasized in interviews that the district had cut a total of $18,984,875 from its operating budget in fiscal years 2003 through 2007. However, this total was derived by calculating the differences between the initial budget requests of the superintendent and the final approved budgets of the municipality for these years, rather than cuts from year to year. A summary document was presented, without backup support, to the examiners that listed the monetary reductions per year.

**Finding 25. Students had access to technology, but teachers did not have adequate access to effective technology, software, and support to improve instruction, planning, and communication. (II)**

Interviewees stated that computer labs were very good and the district spent a “ton” of money upgrading computers. A walk-through of all buildings by the EQA examiners indicated that schools had computer labs with up-to-date computers that were being used by students. Classrooms had drops for Internet access, but there were few computers being used within the classrooms. The buildings were wired for Internet access.

However, it was stated in a focus group interview that the e-mail system was “terrible” and the district needed a larger server. Elementary teacher focus group interviewees stated that the technology was great when the server was up. Also, interviewees stated that some non-computer equipment, such as televisions and VCRs, were obsolete. Some staff indicated a need for more professional development on using computers. Teacher focus group interviewees stated they

needed more support in instructional technology. The average number of computers in classrooms observed by EQA examiners was 3.4 at the high school level (3.1 for student use), 2.6 at the middle school level (2.1 for student use), and 1.3 at the elementary school level (1.2 for student use). The team observed students using technology appropriately in only nine percent of classrooms at the elementary level, but at the middle and high school levels the rates were 22 and 20 percent, respectively.

**Finding 26. The district did not have a plan to improve aging building systems or classroom spaces that were ill equipped or not conducive to learning. (II)**

With most buildings in need of some renovation, the district has not yet followed a recommendation made five years ago to develop a long-term capital renovation and construction plan. In 2002, the district had a long-range school facilities planning study completed by the New England School Development Council. This comprehensive plan recommended a number of alternatives for the district to address its needs, including consolidation of non-school buildings into schools.

The district listed 13 buildings in its facility inventory. It rated the general condition of seven buildings as "approaching poor condition" and five buildings as in "moderate condition." Examiners toured all school buildings in the district and observed that district buildings, in general, were well maintained and structurally sound, but building systems in some of the schools were reaching the end of their mechanical life. Some schools had only one boiler with no backup. The examiners did not determine whether the district had a reassignment plan should a boiler go down in cold weather. A number of upgrades were needed in HVAC, lighting, roof, doors, plumbing, and electric.

Classrooms were not all conducive to student learning. The district had a number of buildings constructed before World War II and some buildings constructed in the 1960s and 1970s with open classroom architecture. The schools constructed with open design had classrooms separated by former portable walls, which did not provide adequate sound barriers. In some cases, classes were observed being held in non-educational spaces, such as the rear of a stage. Examiners' observations of the high school science laboratory facilities indicated that they were substandard. In observations, the team found that 94 percent of the classrooms at the elementary level used

space “to create a positive learning environment,” compared to 85 percent of classrooms at the middle school level and 50 percent at the high school level.

**Finding 27. Beginning with the FY 2007 budget process, the district changed its method of developing the budget from a percentage increase of the current budget as determined by the central administration to a process based on student needs and other data initially developed at the school site. However, results were speculative by the end of the review because the district had not produced its budget for the upcoming year. (III)**

The budget development process used by the district before the FY 2007 budget cycle was a procedure in which the district would take the previous year’s budget and increase it by a certain percentage. According to central office administrators, the DTAP influenced the district to change this method of budgeting to developing a budget based on the analysis of student assessment data. Administrators stated that principals now reviewed the data and needed to understand them to be able to justify more funding for their schools. As a result, administrators felt that resources have become more targeted to where they are needed.

**Finding 28. The district improved in its provision of materials and supplies, so that the resources were equitable among the K-8 schools and most staff members felt they had the resources they needed for the core program. (IV)**

According to interviewees and the 2004 benchmarking report, allocations to the individual schools in the district were inequitable.

Interviews with school administrators and teachers indicated that the schools now had adequate textbooks, supplies, and materials, with a few exceptions. In interviews with principals regarding adequacy of resources, one stated that they were fortunate to have been given a “lot of resources” and have never had a problem with obtaining textbooks. Math and guidance have been “beefed up, but we always could use more.” Another principal stated that he felt the same way and had no issue with textbooks and consumables. In addition, he believed that the district had taken a step forward in technology. A third principal also stated that resources were not a problem although the school did experience a cut in Title I funding.

A central administration director acknowledged that enough resources existed for textbooks and materials. In focus group interviews, teachers stated that math and ELA had adequate supplies and the library had adequate books. An elementary teacher focus group interviewee acknowledged "plenty of books, more materials than I have ever seen."

When questioned about the adequacy of resources, a central office consultant stated that Holyoke was a "revolving door boutique district" because of the transience, homeless shelters, and short stays in rental housing. A central administration consultant stated that "because we are creating a model we do not know how much it will cost but we do have the resources to do the core program." In a high school focus group, interviewees stated that the alternative program did not have sufficient supplies and materials. However, most interviewees at the school level generally believed that the schools were adequately staffed and supplied through the school committee operating budget and federal and state grants. In classroom observations, the EQA team noted that 76 percent of the K-8 classrooms were "filled with multiple resources for student learning which address diverse learning styles," but only 10 percent of high school classrooms met that criterion.

The End of Year Pupil and Financial Report for the 2005-2006 school year indicated that in the category of textbooks and related media, the district spent from school committee funds the amount of $877,148 in FY 2004, $1,548,587 in FY 2005, and $2,492,843 in FY 2006.

# Conclusion

The implementation of Holyoke's District Turnaround Plan represents the work that the district has invested in using strategies to address its challenges so that "no child is left behind," in the spirit of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 that preceded the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Holyoke has demonstrated evidence of its efforts to improve its planning documents and implement a sustainable improvement plan since the initial EQA examination in 2003. However, movement has not met expectations set by adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets or by the accountability agencies considering the district's planning processes.

According to the fact-finding report following the 2004 EQA visit, the team found much of what was in discussion during the initial EQA examination in 2003 to be in the beginning stages of implementation during the EQA fact-finding visit in 2004. Changes include "the enhancement of the district and school improvement plans, the development of a district curriculum accommodation plan, and an improved districtwide professional development plan. However, in general, the team found the pervasive issue in the district was one of building and sustaining educational capacity" (page 7). The team noticed, for example, that many of the School Improvement Plans considered data but might lack "sufficient accountability measures to determine the progress and/or status of the implementation."

Even after the DTAP was later developed, the district has not shown evidence of moving beyond this institutional tendency. According to the minutes of the September 28, 2004 Board of Education (BOE) meeting, a board member stated "the outcomes set forth in the plan are in some cases focused more on process than on substance." The BOE agreed to have Department of Education officials "work on the plan to ensure that the benchmarks for measuring the district's progress are clear," but the DTAP and the district had no benchmarks for measuring effectiveness. The plan emphasized process outcomes, and Holyoke had no parallel program evaluation process or a process for analyzing cost-effectiveness. The district did not prioritize the utilization of assessment systems to determine general priorities, and the district did not assess its readiness to implement its plan prior to the start. In fact, the DTAP was created before the selection of the turnaround partner, and the district was still in the early stages of implementing the plan. As a result, Holyoke has not evaluated the impact of the plan on the school district.

While planning documents have improved, the tendency to take action without simultaneously measuring the effects of the actions—and reassessing priorities and next steps—still impedes the district's ability to implement a plan with optimal effectiveness.

As a result, the team identified **General Finding I: The current implementation of Holyoke Public Schools' turnaround plan prioritizes thoughtful process over analysis**.

The district's main goals as stated in the six initiatives are concrete. Initiative 1 is that the district will use an assessment system. Initiative 2 is that the district will have aligned curricula. Initiative 3 is that the district will hold educators accountable for instruction. Initiative 4 is that the district will constantly monitor student performance. Initiative 5 is that the district will sustain a comprehensive professional development program. Initiative 6 is that the district will stabilize its mobile students.

However, the initiatives were implemented in a way which emphasized process over analysis. One stated rationale for limited analysis of effectiveness was that the 2006-2007 school year was considered the first year of implementation for the district as a whole. However, parts of the plan were implemented prior to 2006-2007. This led to **General Finding II: Holyoke Public Schools lacks a systems approach in implementing its plan.**

The district had several documents identified as improvement plans: the DTAP, the DIP, SIPs, and school-based action plans. Leadership had yet to communicate with the stakeholders regarding which plan(s) drove the school system, and leadership had yet to communicate the connections among the plans.

The district had no financial plan associated with the DTAP. Specific written documentation accounting for key expenditures was not available. For example, documentation for more than $3 million in professional development funds and more than $9 million in unexpended encumbrances was not specifically identified.

Although the district expended a lot of resources to implement its plans, Holyoke did not have a systematic approach to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of its programs. Further, the district engaged in much contracting out to address issues rather than using internal ingenuity or increasing internal capacity.

Holyoke's plan for improving student achievement through improved curriculum and instruction did not have sufficient coherency. The district lacked a rationale for selecting the specific curriculum and instructional models, lacked clear and specific connections between curriculum and data-based assessments, and did not link curriculum delivery expectations and supervision. Holyoke did not have a clear preK-12 instructional program; rather, fragmentation existed between grades preK-8, the Transitional Academy (informally referred to as grade eight and a half), grade 9, and grades 10-12. In addition, the placement of students in programs sometimes created access issues and a warehousing effect.

However, it was evident that the district's elementary and middle school curricula had improved substantially since the DTAP implementation. The change was substantial enough to rise to the level of a **General Finding III: The implementation of the plan has moved the district toward greater alignment of activities in Holyoke, especially in K-8 leadership, assessment, curriculum, and instruction, but the high schools have minimal connection with the DTAP.**

Holyoke made improvement in curricular consistency through the use of math and ELA coaches, the America's Choice program, NISL-trained elementary principals, new curriculum coordinators, a newly created position of director of curriculum and testing, and newly developed curriculum maps. However, the high schools did not benefit from these resources and were not a significant part of the improvement plan. The two high schools were instead focused on preparations for an upcoming accreditation review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. No focus existed either on using the DTAP to improve the high school curriculum or instruction or to link the high school curriculum to the middle school curriculum.

Ironically, in spite of limited involvement with the DTAP, the high schools made adequate yearly progress. The caveat was that the impact of the district's dropout rate on the MCAS test scores had not been analyzed, and the district had no specific plans to do so. On the other hand, the district administered regular student assessments to students in grades K-8, and Holyoke staff members responsible for districtwide improvements to curriculum and testing were working to align the results of formative assessments with the MCAS tests. The district did not make AYP at the elementary and middle school levels, and only one of these schools made AYP in 2006.

Thus, the team developed **General Finding IV: The plan was in its early implementation stage and has not been related to improved student achievement on the MCAS tests at this point. Implementation of the plan was slowed by both anticipated and unanticipated factors. The district has addressed some obstacles hindering the implementation, while other challenges remain.**

# Appendix A: Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The EQA's analysis of student achievement data focuses on the MCAS test results for 2004-2006, 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 Holyoke 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 Holyoke; 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 B 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.

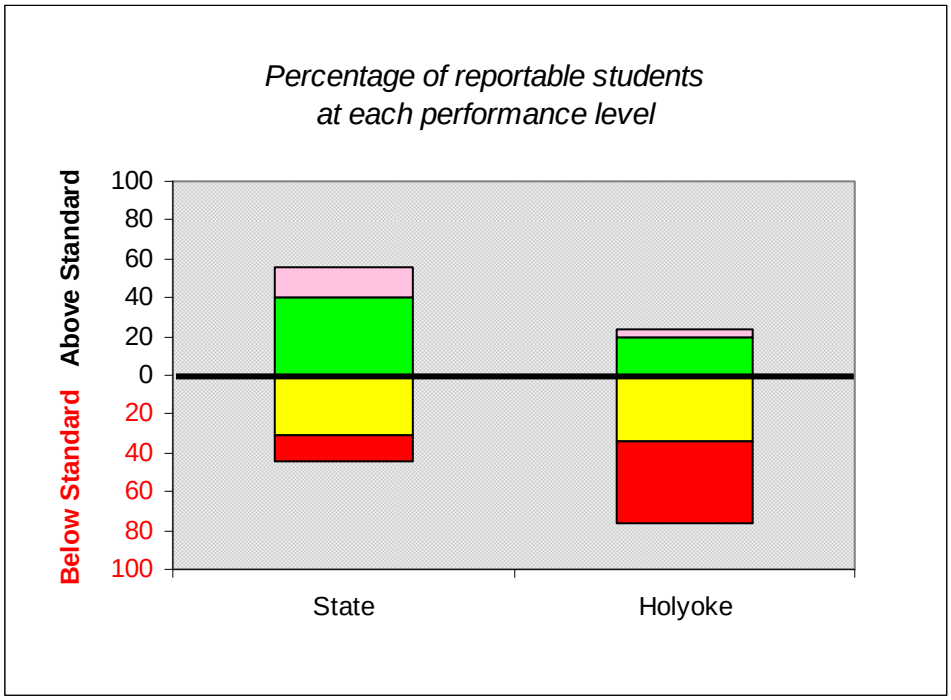
## Achievement

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

**Findings:**

- On average, less than one-fourth of all students in Holyoke attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, considerably less than that statewide. Less than one-third of Holyoke students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), less than one-fifth of Holyoke students attained proficiency in math, and approximately one-tenth of Holyoke students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Eighty-two percent of the Class of 2006 earned a Competency Determination.
- Holyoke's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 53 proficiency index (PI) points, 25 PI points less than that statewide. Holyoke's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 47 PI points.
- In 2006, Holyoke's proficiency gap in ELA was 39 PI points, 23 PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of nearly five PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Holyoke's proficiency gap in math was 54 PI points in 2006, 26 PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of nearly seven PI points per year to achieve AYP. Holyoke's proficiency gap in STE was 54 PI points, 25 PI points wider than that statewide.

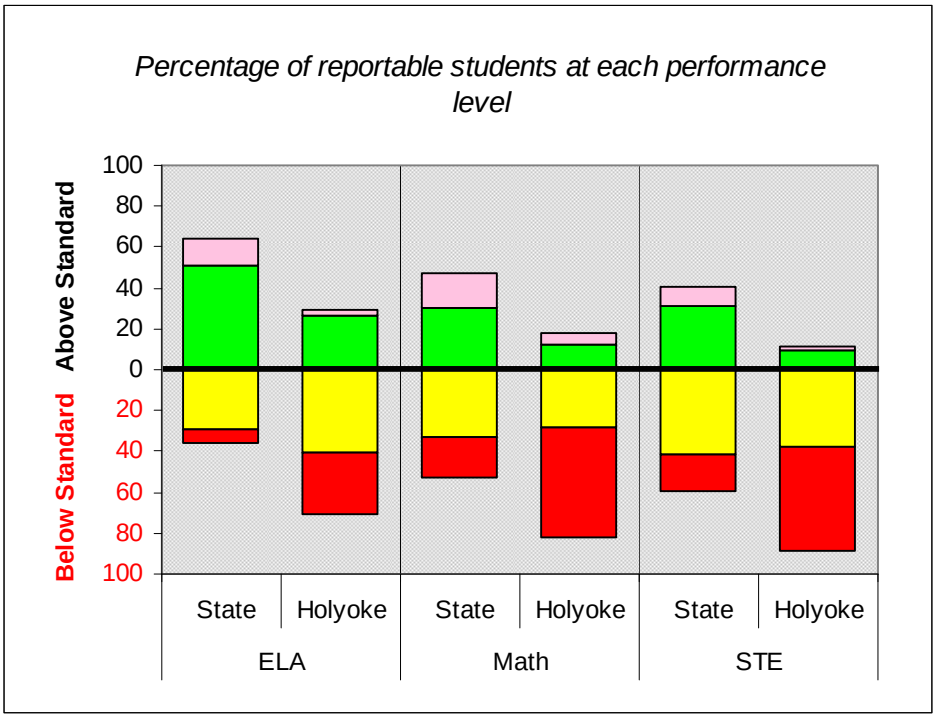
**Figure/Table 1: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2006**




| | State | Holyoke |
|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 15 | 4 |
| Proficient | 41 | 19 |
| Needs Improvement | 31 | 35 |
| Warning/Failing | 14 | 42 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 56 | 23 |
| Average Proficiency Index (API) | 78.3 | 53.2 |

In 2006, 23 percent of Holyoke students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests overall, 33 percentage points less than statewide. Forty-two percent of Holyoke students scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category, 28 percentage points more than statewide. Holyoke's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 53 proficiency index (PI) points, 25 PI points less than statewide. Holyoke's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 47 PI points.

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



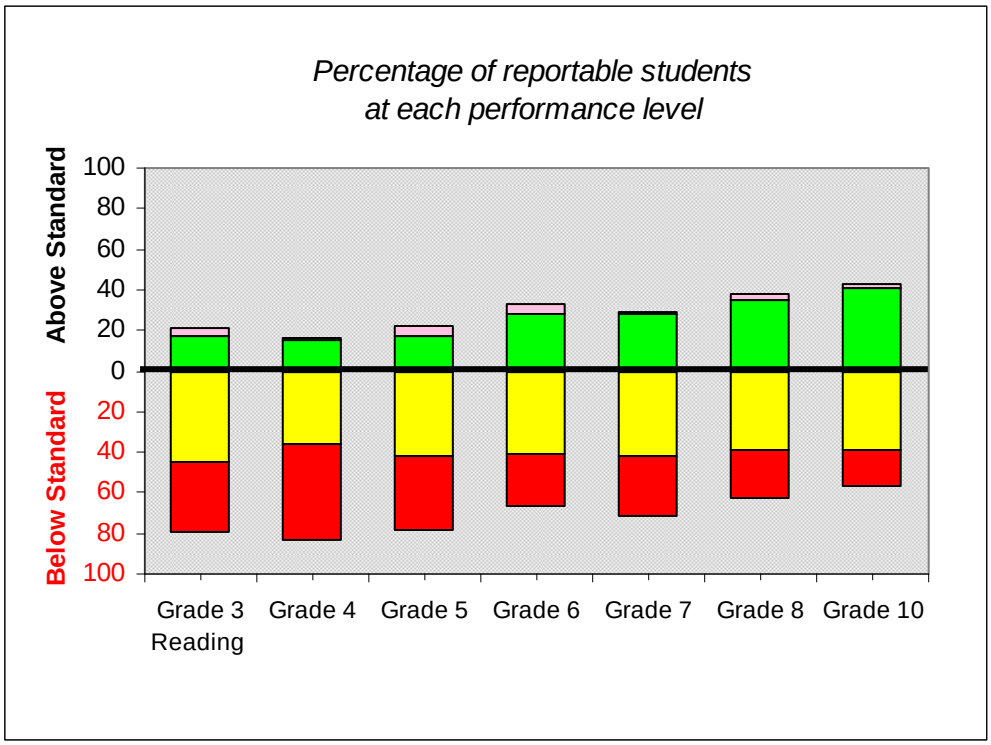

| | ELA | | Math | | STE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke |
| Advanced | 13 | 3 | 17 | 5 | 10 | 2 |
| Proficient | 51 | 26 | 30 | 13 | 31 | 9 |
| Needs Improvement | 29 | 40 | 33 | 29 | 42 | 38 |
| Warning/Failing | 7 | 31 | 20 | 54 | 17 | 50 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 64 | 29 | 47 | 18 | 41 | 11 |
| Proficiency Index (PI) | 84.3 | 60.6 | 72.3 | 45.9 | 71.4 | 45.9 |

In 2006, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was much lower in Holyoke than statewide. In Holyoke, 29 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 64 percent statewide; 18 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 47 percent statewide; and 11 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 41 percent statewide.

Holyoke students had stronger performance on the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA than in math and STE. The proficiency index for Holyoke students in ELA was 61 PI points; in math, it was 46 PI points; and in STE, it was 46 PI points. These compare to the statewide figures of 84, 72, and 71 PI points, respectively.

The proficiency gap for Holyoke students was 39 PI points in ELA, 54 PI points in math, and 54 PI points in STE. These compare to the statewide figures of 16, 28, and 29 PI points, respectively. Holyoke's proficiency gaps would require an average annual improvement of nearly five PI points in ELA and nearly seven PI points in math to meet AYP.

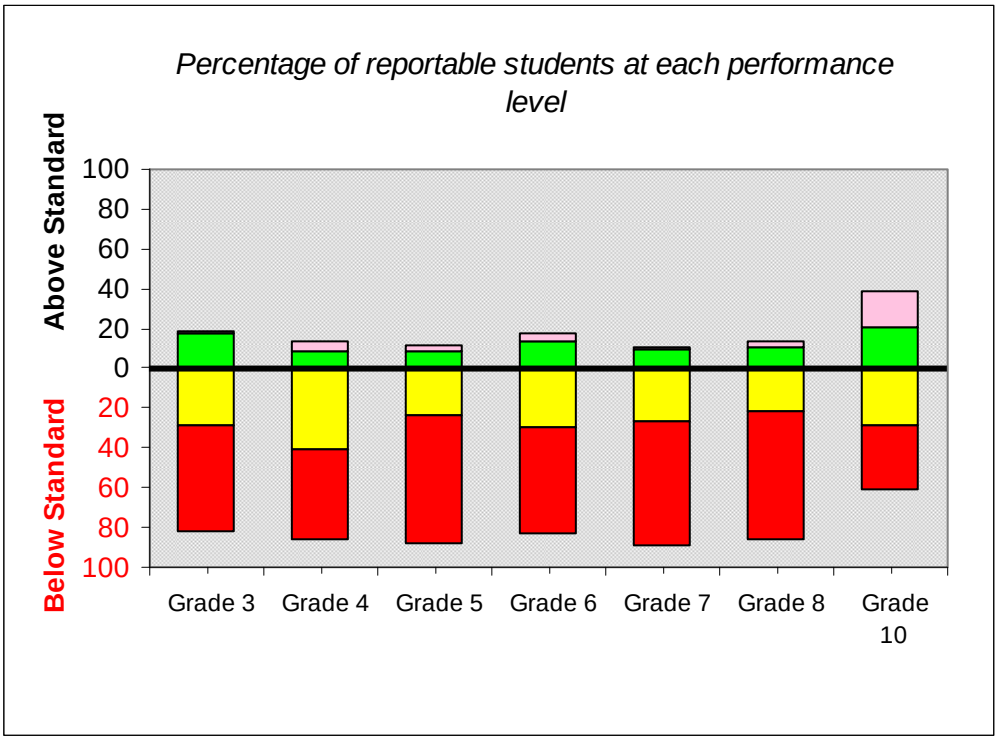
**Figure/Table 3: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006**




| | Grade 3 Reading | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 4 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Proficient | 17 | 15 | 18 | 28 | 28 | 35 | 41 |
| Needs Improvement | 45 | 36 | 42 | 41 | 42 | 39 | 39 |
| Warning/Failing | 34 | 48 | 36 | 26 | 30 | 23 | 17 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 21 | 16 | 22 | 33 | 29 | 38 | 44 |

The percentage of Holyoke students attaining proficiency in 2006 in ELA varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 16 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 44 percent of grade 10 students.

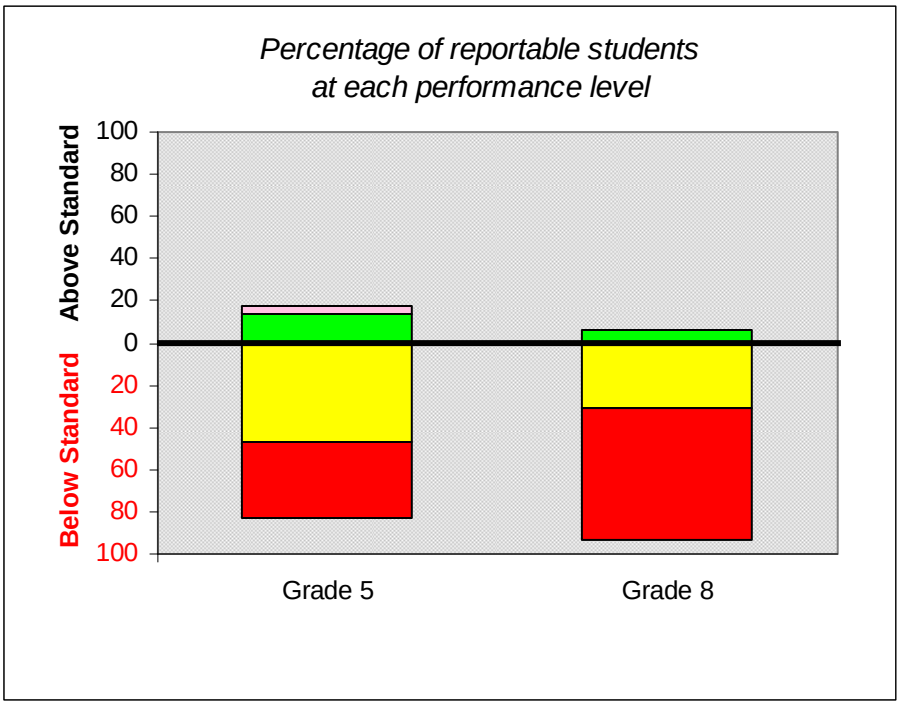
**Figure/Table 4: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade, 2006**




| | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 0 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 19 |
| Proficient | 18 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 10 | 11 | 20 |
| Needs Improvement | 29 | 41 | 24 | 29 | 27 | 22 | 29 |
| Warning/Failing | 53 | 45 | 64 | 53 | 62 | 64 | 32 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 18 | 14 | 12 | 17 | 11 | 14 | 39 |

The percentage of Holyoke students attaining proficiency in 2006 in math also varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 11 percent of grade 7 students to a high of 39 percent of grade 10 students.

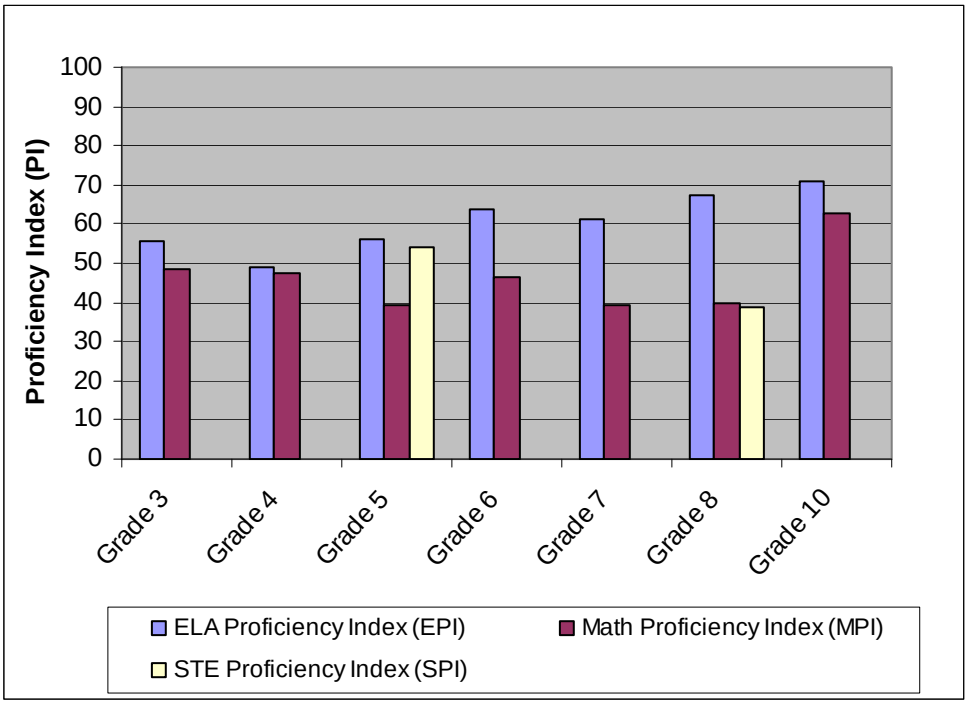
**Figure/Table 5: Student MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006**




| | Grade 5 | Grade 8 |
|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 4 | 0 |
| Proficient | 13 | 6 |
| Needs Improvement | 46 | 30 |
| Warning/Failing | 36 | 63 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 17 | 6 |

In Holyoke in 2006, 17 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and six percent of grade 8 students did so.

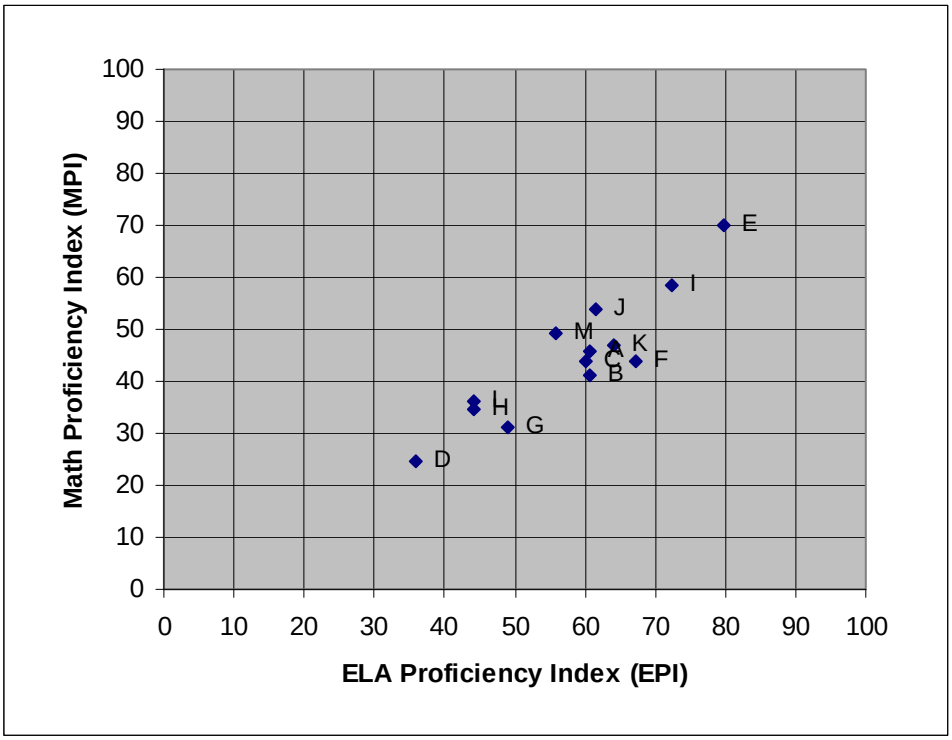
**Figure/Table 6: Student MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Grade and Subject, 2006**




| | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) | 55.5 | 49.1 | 56.3 | 63.8 | 61.2 | 67.1 | 71.1 |
| Math Proficiency Index (MPI) | 48.5 | 47.3 | 39.2 | 46.6 | 39.2 | 39.6 | 62.7 |
| STE Proficiency Index (SPI) | | | 54.1 | | | 38.6 | |

By grade, Holyoke's MCAS performance in 2006 in both ELA and math was strongest at grade 10. The ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of 29 PI points at grade 10 to a high of 51 PI points at grade 4. Holyoke's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 37 PI points at grade 10 to a high of 61 PI points at grades 5 and 7. Holyoke's STE proficiency gap was 46 PI points at grade 5 and 61 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 | Holyoke | 60.6 | 45.9 | 6,093 |
| B | Dr. Wm. R. Peck Middle School | 60.7 | 41.2 | 692 |
| C | Edward N. White Elementary | 60.0 | 43.9 | 609 |
| D | Holyoke Alternative | 36.0 | 24.5 | 176 |
| E | Holyoke High School | 79.8 | 70.0 | 531 |
| F | John J. Lynch Middle School | 67.2 | 43.7 | 593 |
| G | Kelly Elementary School | 49.1 | 31.3 | 540 |
| H | Lawrence Elementary School | 44.1 | 34.7 | 421 |
| I | Lt. Clayre Sullivan Elementary | 72.5 | 58.3 | 813 |
| J | Lt. Elmer J. McMahon Elem | 61.5 | 53.8 | 278 |
| K | Maurice A. Donahue Elem | 64.2 | 46.8 | 710 |
| L | Morgan Elementary School | 44.1 | 36.0 | 438 |
| M | Wm. J. Dean Technical High | 55.7 | 49.1 | 292 |

MCAS performance in Holyoke in 2006 in both ELA and math was strongest at the high school and weakest at the alternative school. The ELA proficiency gap ranged from a low of 20 PI points at Holyoke High School to a high of 64 PI points at Holyoke Alternative School. Holyoke's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 30 PI points at Holyoke High School to a high of 75 PI points at Holyoke Alternative School.

## Equity of Achievement

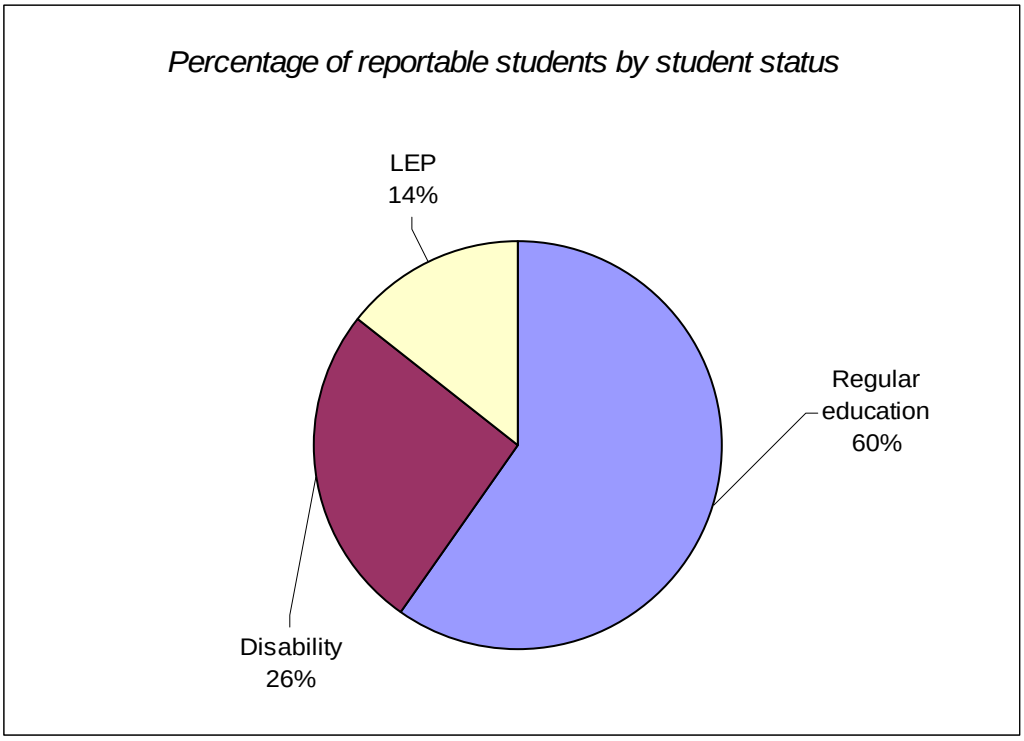
### Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

**Findings:**

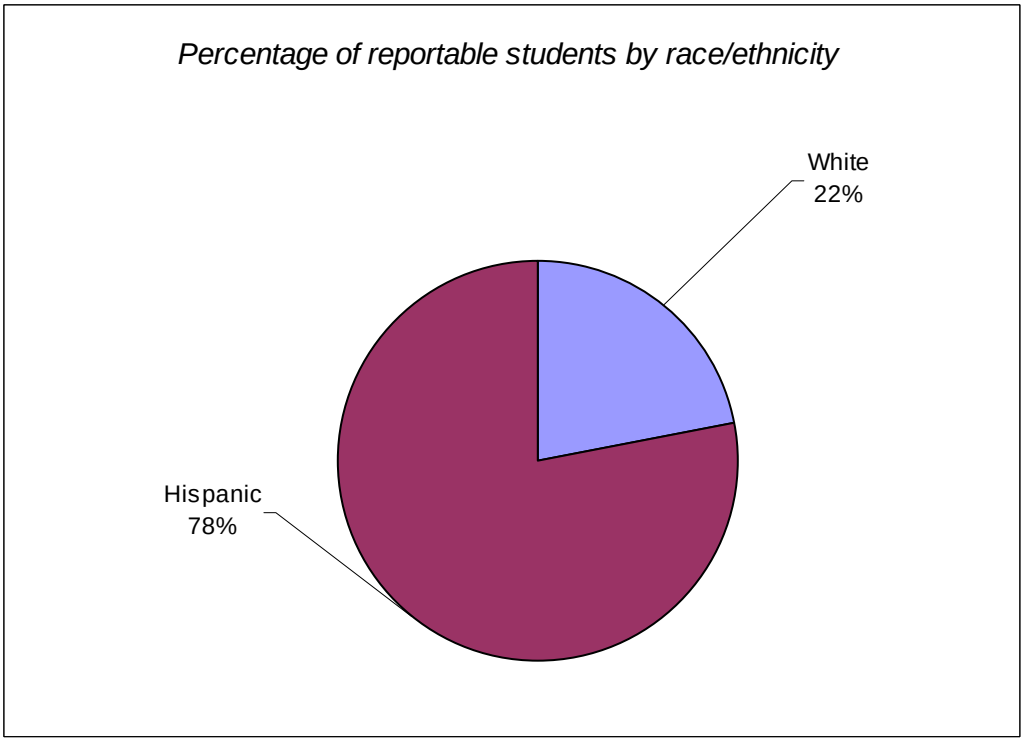
- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Holyoke students. Of the nine measurable subgroups in Holyoke in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 42 PI points in ELA and 39 PI points in math (non low-income students, limited English proficient students, respectively).
- The proficiency gaps in Holyoke in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, limited English proficient (LEP) students, Hispanic students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than one-fifth of the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. Roughly one-third of regular education students and one-half of White and non low-income students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA but wider in math. Less than one-fourth of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

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

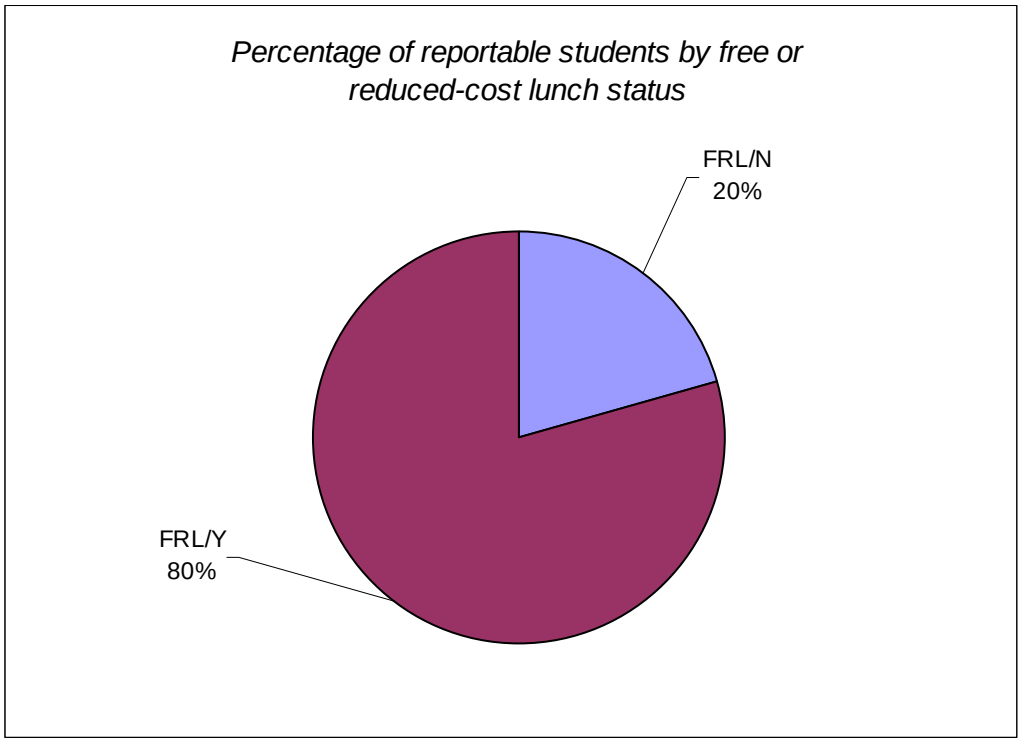
**A.**




**B.**



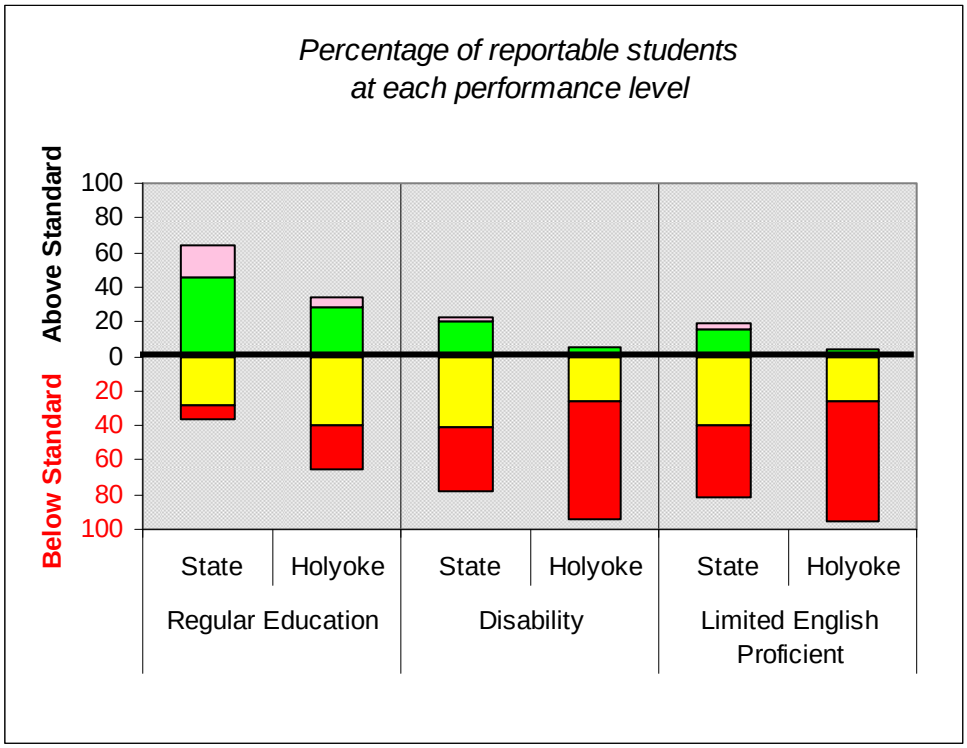
**C.**




| | Subgroup | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|
| Student status | Regular education | 1,907 |
| | Disability | 825 |
| | LEP | 462 |
| Race/ethnicity | White | 672 |
| | Hispanic | 2,378 |
| Free or reduced-cost lunch status | FRL/N | 654 |
| | FRL/Y | 2,540 |

In Holyoke in 2006, 26 percent of the students in the tested grades were students with disabilities, 14 percent were students with limited English proficiency, 78 percent were Hispanic students, and 80 percent were students participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program.

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

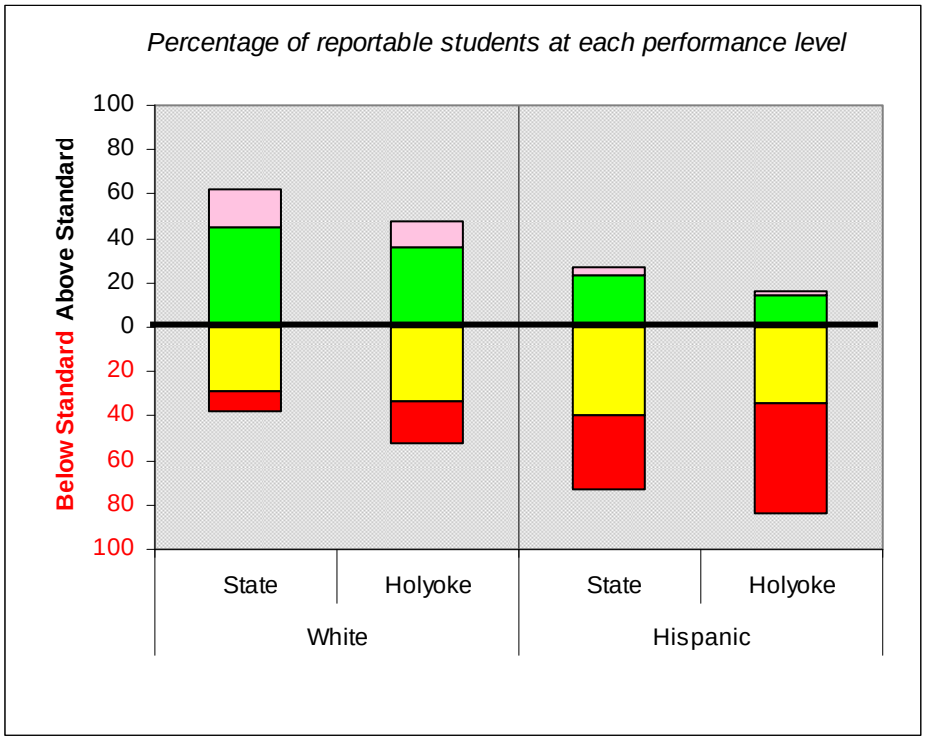



| | Regular Education | | Disability | | Limited English Proficient | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke |
| Advanced | 18 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Proficient | 46 | 28 | 20 | 5 | 16 | 4 |
| Needs Improvement | 28 | 39 | 41 | 27 | 40 | 26 |
| Warning/Failing | 8 | 26 | 36 | 68 | 42 | 69 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 64 | 34 | 22 | 5 | 19 | 4 |
| Average Proficiency Index (API) | 84.0 | 64.9 | 55.9 | 34.8 | 52.0 | 33.7 |

In Holyoke in 2006, the proficiency rate of regular education students was nearly seven times greater than that of students with disabilities and more than eight times greater than that of limited English proficient (LEP) students. Thirty-four percent of regular education students, five percent of students with disabilities, and four percent of LEP students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Holyoke's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 35 PI points for regular education students, 65 PI points for students with disabilities, and 66 PI points for LEP students. The average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was 30 PI points, and between regular education students and LEP students it was 31 PI points.

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

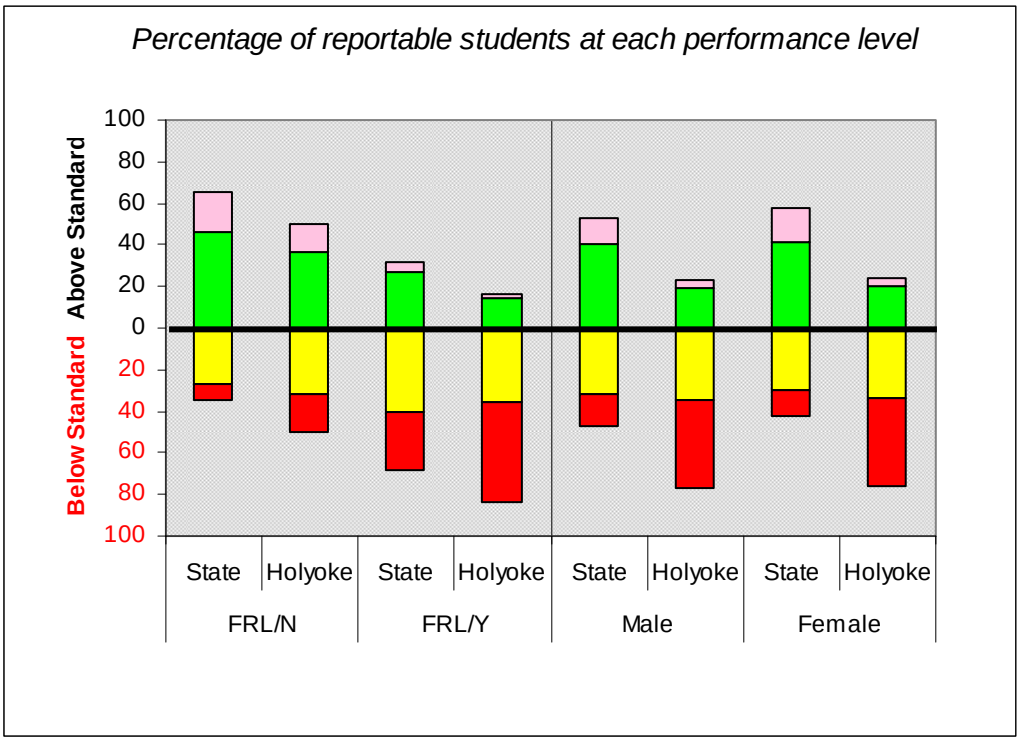



| | White | | Hispanic | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke |
| Advanced | 17 | 12 | 4 | 1 |
| Proficient | 45 | 36 | 23 | 14 |
| Needs Improvement | 29 | 34 | 40 | 34 |
| Warning/Failing | 9 | 18 | 33 | 50 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 62 | 48 | 27 | 15 |
| Average Proficiency Index (API) | 82.9 | 73.5 | 59.2 | 47.1 |

In Holyoke in 2006, the proficiency rate of White students was more than three times greater than that of Hispanic students, as 48 percent of White students and 15 percent of Hispanic students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Holyoke's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 26 PI points for White students and 53 PI points for Hispanic students. The average performance gap between White and Hispanic students was 27 PI points.

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

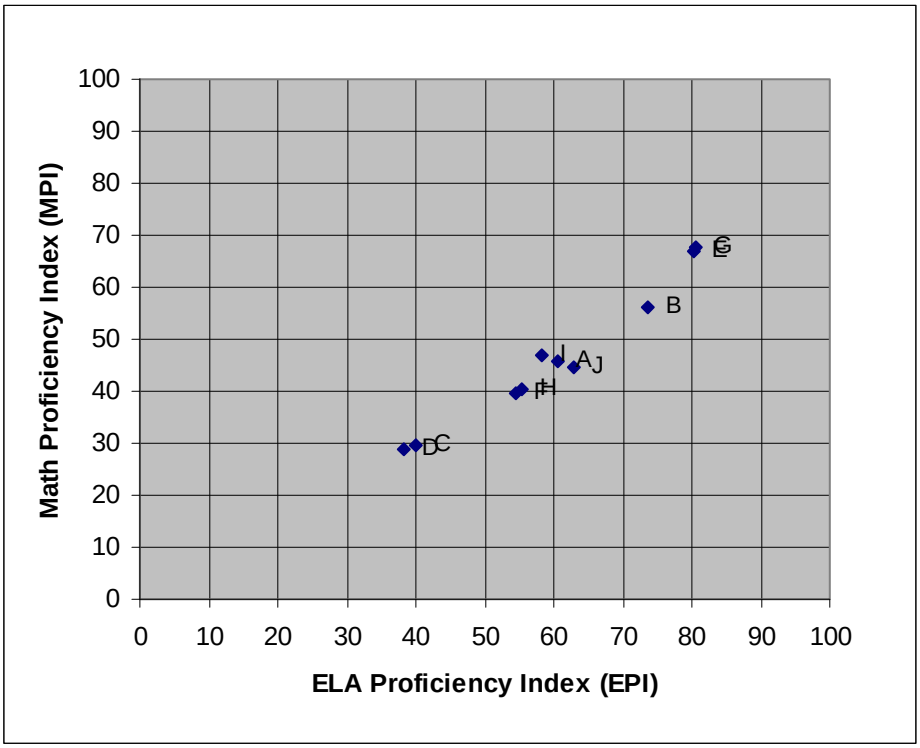



| | FRL/N | | FRL/Y | | Male | | Female | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke | State | Holyoke |
| Advanced | 19 | 13 | 5 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 17 | 4 |
| Proficient | 46 | 37 | 27 | 15 | 40 | 19 | 41 | 20 |
| Needs Improvement | 27 | 32 | 40 | 35 | 32 | 35 | 29 | 34 |
| Warning/Failing | 8 | 18 | 27 | 48 | 15 | 42 | 13 | 42 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 65 | 50 | 32 | 16 | 53 | 23 | 58 | 24 |
| Average Proficiency Index (API) | 84.5 | 74.1 | 63.5 | 47.8 | 77.1 | 52.7 | 79.6 | 53.9 |

In Holyoke in 2006, the proficiency rate of non low-income (FRL/N) students was more than three times greater than that of low-income (FRL/Y) students, as 50 percent of non low-income students and 16 percent of low-income students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests. The average proficiency gap was 52 PI points for low-income students and 26 PI points for non low-income students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was 26 PI points.

Performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was comparable for male and female students in Holyoke, with 24 percent of female students and 23 percent of male students attaining overall proficiency. The average proficiency gap was 47 PI points for male students and 46 PI points for female 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**

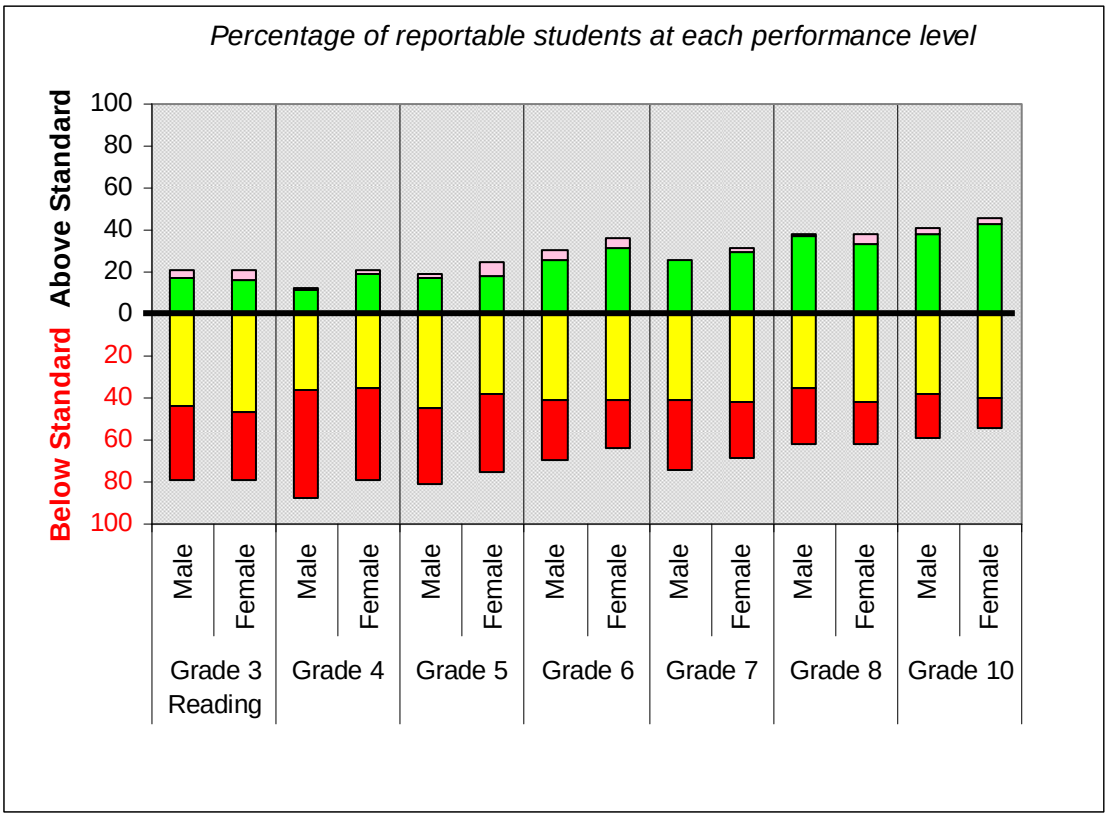



| | | ELA PI | Math PI | Number of Tests |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Holyoke | 60.6 | 45.9 | 6,093 |
| B | Regular Education | 73.6 | 56.1 | 3,782 |
| C | Disability | 40.1 | 29.6 | 1,400 |
| D | LEP | 38.4 | 28.9 | 911 |
| E | White | 80.2 | 66.9 | 1,307 |
| F | Hispanic | 54.6 | 39.6 | 4,509 |
| G | FRL/N | 80.6 | 67.6 | 1,270 |
| H | FRL/Y | 55.4 | 40.2 | 4,819 |
| I | Male | 58.4 | 47.0 | 3,087 |
| J | Female | 63.0 | 44.8 | 3,002 |

Of the nine measurable subgroups in Holyoke in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 42 PI points in ELA and 39 PI points in math (non low-income students, LEP students, respectively).

The proficiency gaps in Holyoke in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, LEP students, Hispanic students, and low-income students. The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA but wider in math.

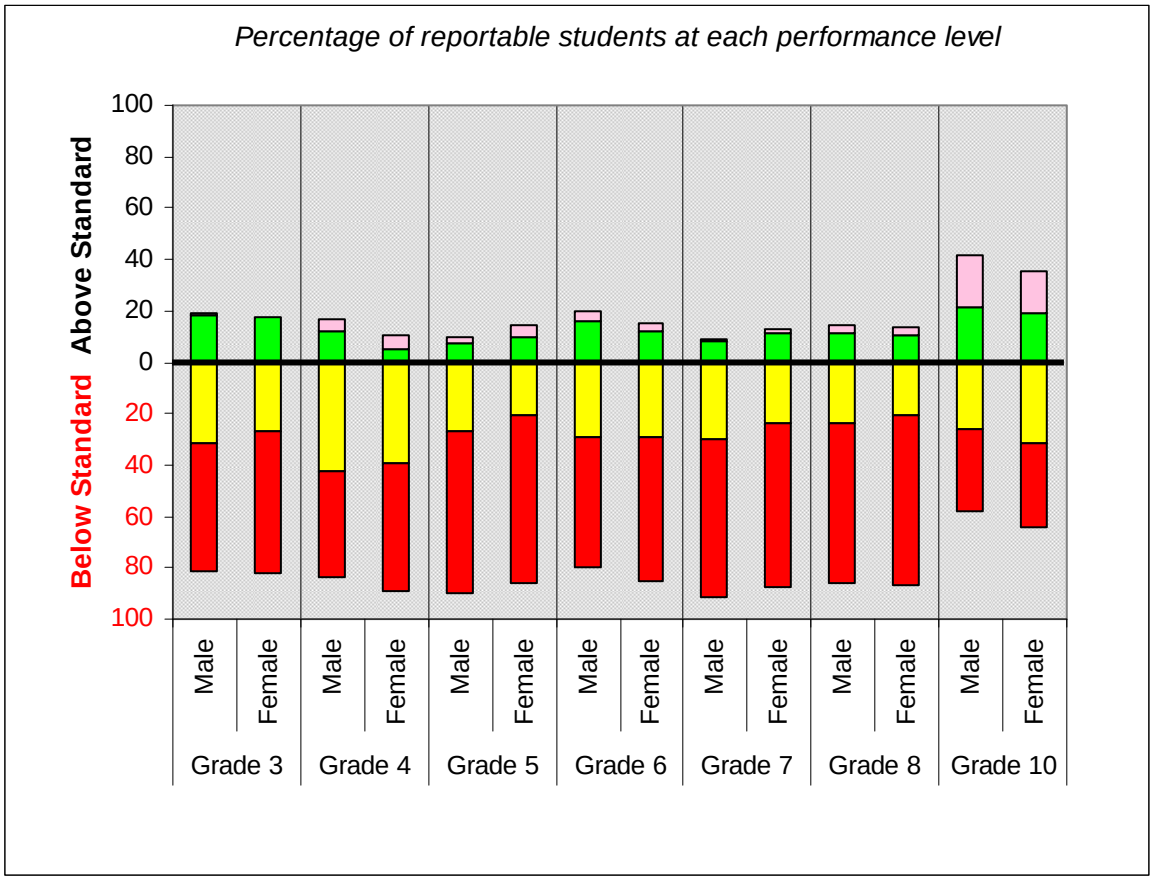
**Figure/Table 13: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006**




| | 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 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Proficient | 17 | 16 | 11 | 19 | 17 | 18 | 26 | 31 | 26 | 30 | 37 | 33 | 38 | 43 |
| Needs Improvement | 44 | 47 | 36 | 36 | 45 | 38 | 41 | 41 | 41 | 42 | 35 | 42 | 38 | 40 |
| Warning/ Failing | 35 | 32 | 52 | 43 | 36 | 37 | 29 | 23 | 33 | 27 | 27 | 20 | 21 | 14 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 21 | 20 | 12 | 21 | 19 | 25 | 31 | 36 | 26 | 31 | 38 | 37 | 41 | 46 |

In Holyoke in 2006, female students outperformed male students on all grade-level ELA tests except at grades 3 and 8.

**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 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 17 |
| Proficient | 18 | 18 | 12 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 8 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 21 | 19 |
| Needs Improvement | 32 | 27 | 42 | 40 | 27 | 21 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 24 | 24 | 20 | 26 | 32 |
| Warning/ Failing | 50 | 56 | 41 | 50 | 63 | 65 | 51 | 56 | 61 | 63 | 62 | 66 | 32 | 33 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 19 | 18 | 17 | 11 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 15 | 8 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 41 | 36 |

On the 2006 MCAS tests in math, male students outperformed female students at all grades with the exception of grades 5 and 7.

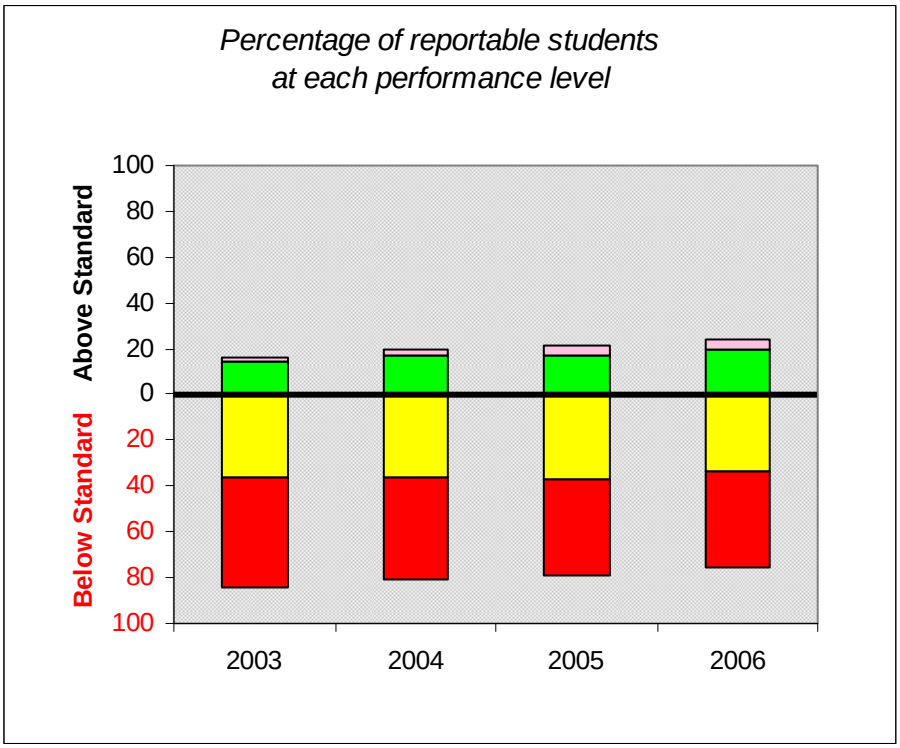
## Improvement

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

**Findings:**

- Between 2004 and 2006, Holyoke's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall, in math, and in STE, and little change in ELA.
- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by four percentage points between 2004 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by two percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Holyoke narrowed from 49 PI points in 2004 to 46 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of five percent.
- Over the two-year period 2004-2006, ELA performance in Holyoke was relatively flat.
- Math performance in Holyoke showed improvement, at an average of more than two PI points annually, during this period. This resulted in an improvement rate of eight percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Holyoke had improved STE performance, increasing by more than one PI point annually, an improvement rate of five percent.

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




**A.**

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Proficient | 14 | 17 | 17 | 19 |
| Needs Improvement | 36 | 36 | 37 | 34 |
| Warning/Failing | 48 | 44 | 42 | 42 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 16 | 20 | 21 | 24 |
| Average Proficiency Index (API) | 47.1 | 50.8 | 52.6 | 53.5 |

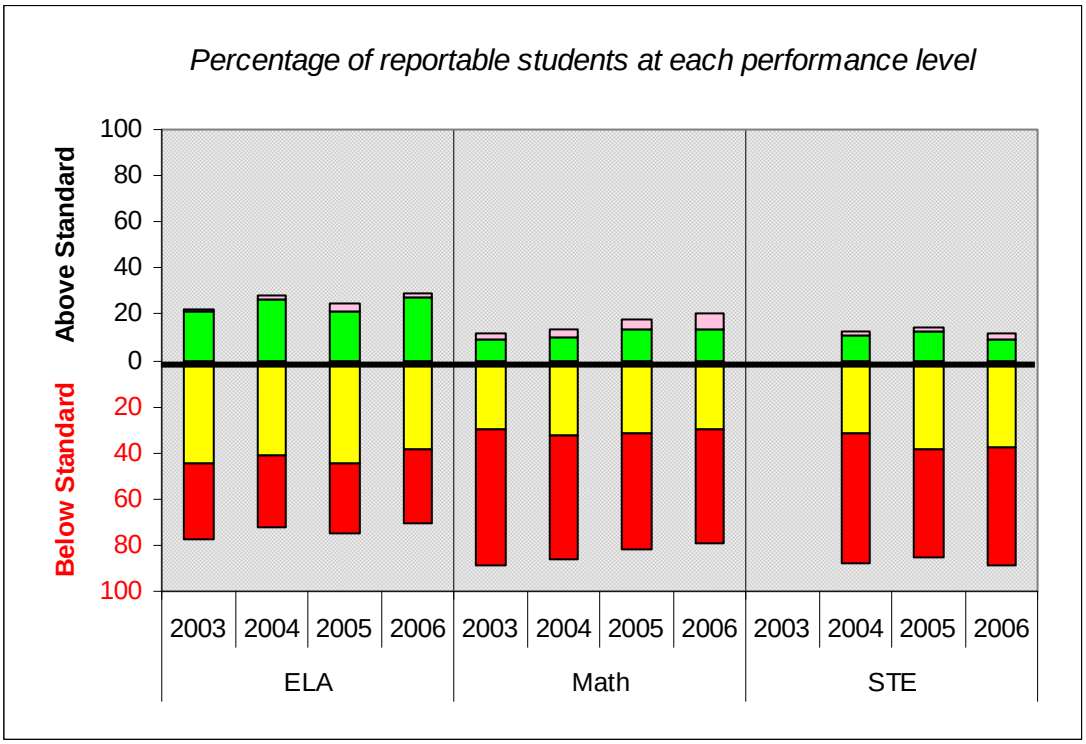
**B. n-values**

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 65 | 92 | 135 | 148 |
| Proficient | 499 | 573 | 556 | 589 |
| Needs Improvement | 1,255 | 1,234 | 1,228 | 1,028 |
| Warning/Failing | 1,684 | 1,502 | 1,374 | 1,279 |
| Total | 3,503 | 3,401 | 3,293 | 3,044 |

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 Holyoke students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests increased from 20 percent in 2004 to 24 percent in 2006. The percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased from 44 percent in 2004 to 42 percent in 2006. The average proficiency gap in Holyoke narrowed from 49 PI points in 2004 to 46 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of five percent.

**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 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 7 | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Proficient | 21 | 26 | 22 | 28 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 13 | | 11 | 13 | 9 |
| Needs Improvement | 44 | 41 | 45 | 39 | 29 | 33 | 31 | 30 | | 32 | 39 | 38 |
| Warning/ Failing | 33 | 31 | 30 | 32 | 59 | 54 | 51 | 49 | | 56 | 47 | 50 |
| Percent Attaining Proficiency | 22 | 28 | 25 | 30 | 11 | 13 | 18 | 20 | | 13 | 15 | 11 |
| Proficiency Index (PI) | 56.3 | 60.3 | 59.6 | 60.3 | 40.4 | 44.0 | 47.2 | 48.6 | | 43.2 | 48.0 | 45.9 |

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 Holyoke students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 28 percent in 2004 to 30 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in ELA was 40 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.

The percentage of Holyoke students attaining proficiency in math increased from 13 percent in 2004 to 20 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 56 PI points in 2004 to 51 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of eight percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Holyoke students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 13 percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2006. However, because the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased, the proficiency gap narrowed from 57 PI points in 2004 to 54 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of five percent.

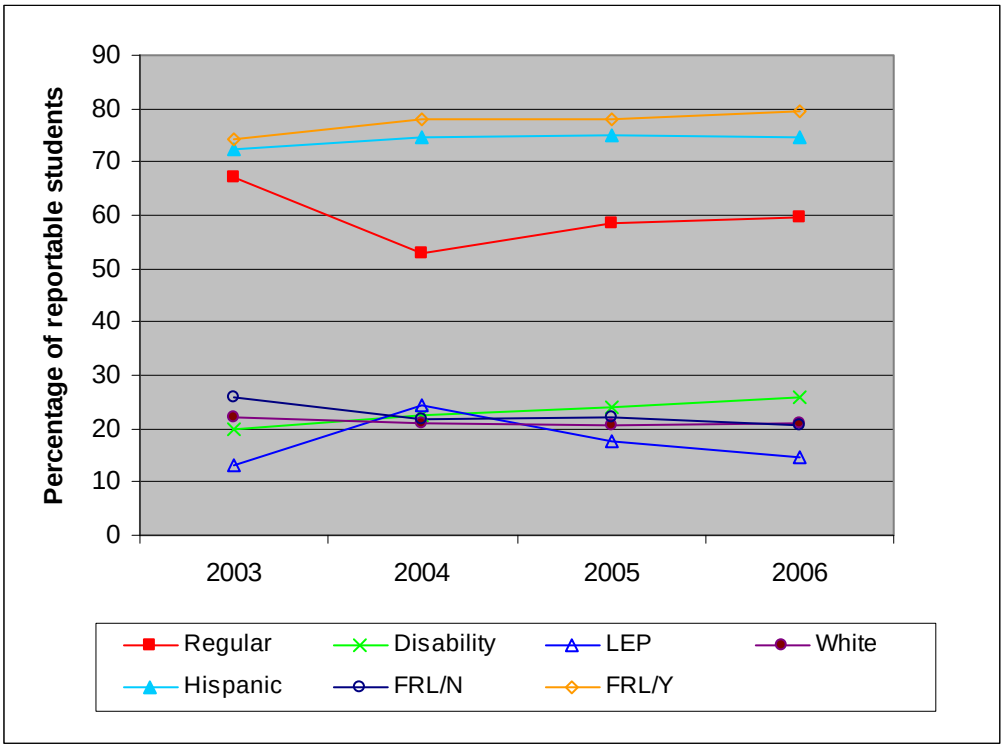
## Equity of Improvement

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

**Findings:**

- In Holyoke, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 43 PI points in 2004 to 45 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 36 to 43 PI points during this period.
- Regular education students, Hispanic students, and non low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students; the improvement of regular education and Hispanic students was very slight.
- In math, all student subgroups in Holyoke with the exception of limited English proficient (LEP) students showed improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was also non low-income students; the improvement of students with disabilities was slight.
- LEP students had substantial declines in both ELA and math performance between 2004 and 2006, by more than seven PI points in ELA and five PI points in math.
- Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by nearly four PI points, and between regular education and LEP students it widened by nine PI points. The average performance gap between low-income students and non low-income students widened by five PI points during this period.

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



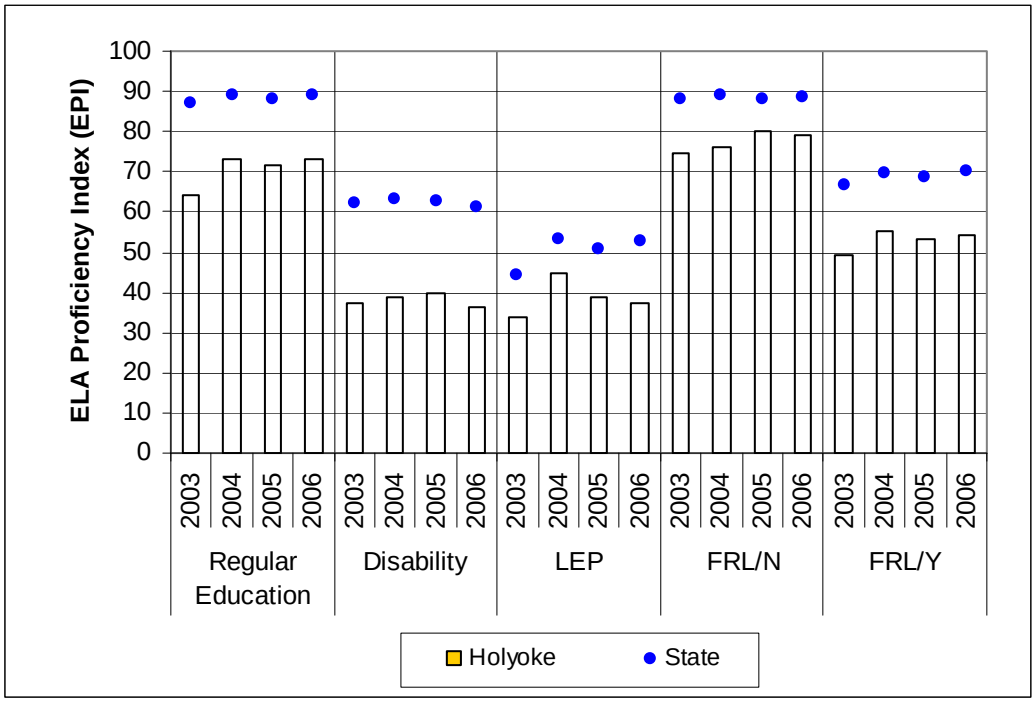

| | Number of Students | | | | Percentage of students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2003** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2003** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** |
| Holyoke | 2,622 | 2,978 | 2,975 | 3,194 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Regular | 1,759 | 1,574 | 1,742 | 1,907 | 67.1 | 52.9 | 58.6 | 59.7 |
| Disability | 518 | 674 | 714 | 825 | 19.8 | 22.6 | 24.0 | 25.8 |
| LEP | 345 | 730 | 519 | 462 | 13.2 | 24.5 | 17.4 | 14.5 |
| White | 581 | 620 | 612 | 672 | 22.2 | 20.8 | 20.6 | 21.0 |
| Hispanic | 1,894 | 2,225 | 2,231 | 2,378 | 72.2 | 74.7 | 75.0 | 74.5 |
| FRL/N | 677 | 652 | 659 | 654 | 25.8 | 21.9 | 22.2 | 20.5 |
| FRL/Y | 1,945 | 2,326 | 2,316 | 2,540 | 74.2 | 78.1 | 77.8 | 79.5 |

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.

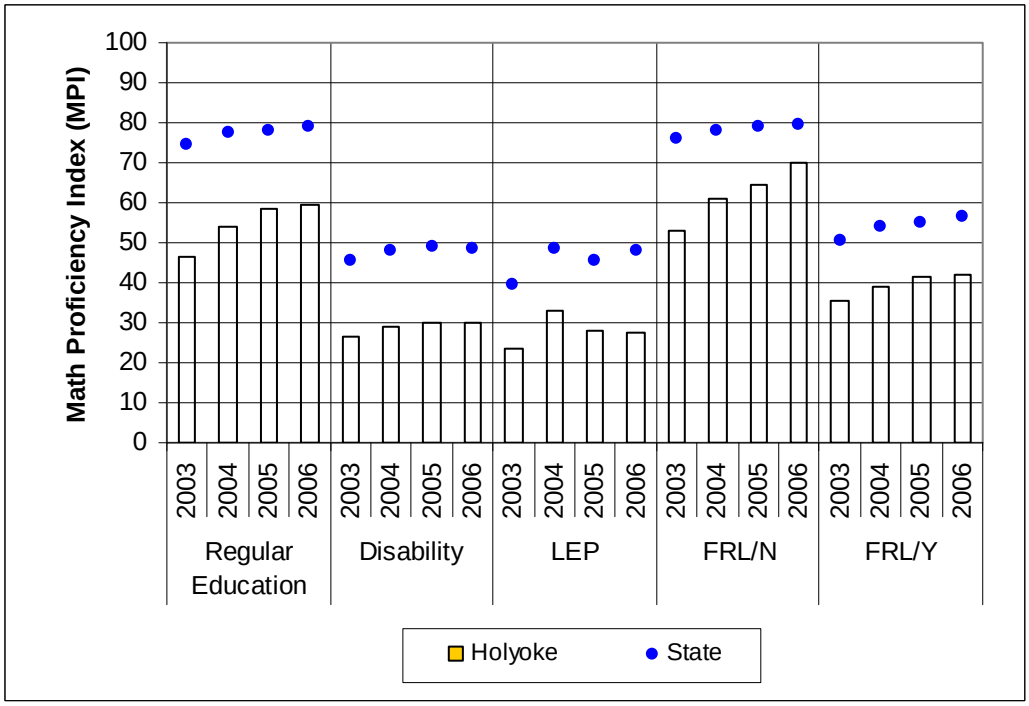
Between 2004 and 2006 in Holyoke, the proportion of students with disabilities in the tested grades increased by more than three percentage points, that of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) decreased by 10 percentage points, that of Hispanic students remained the same, and that of low-income (FRL/Y) students increased by more than one percentage point.

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

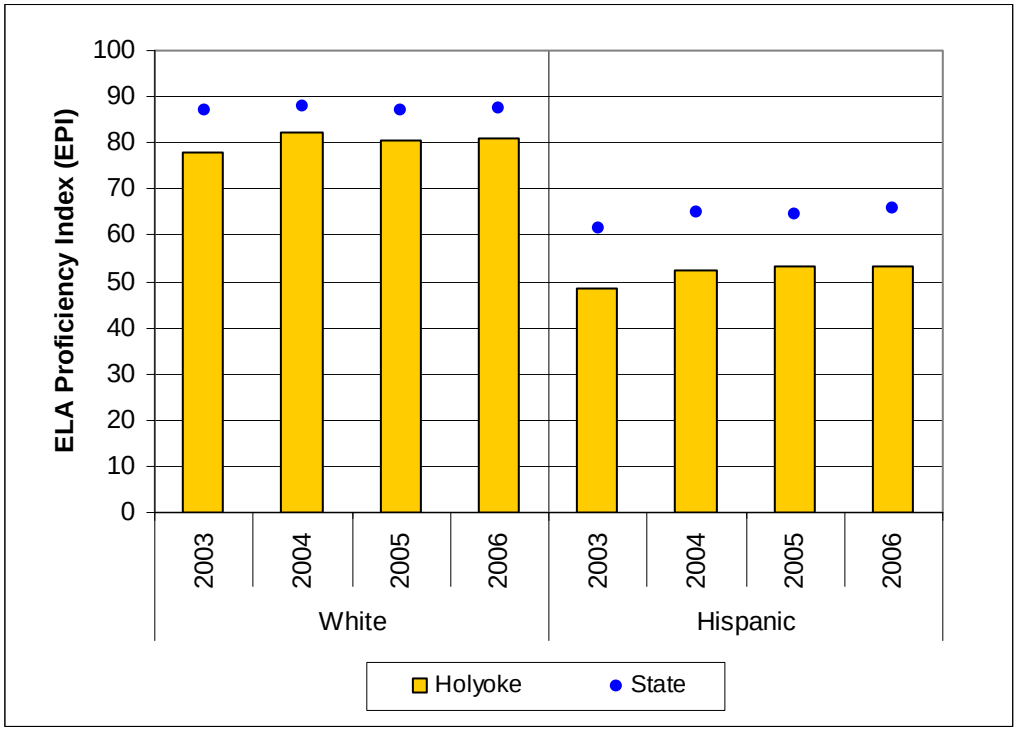
**A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups**



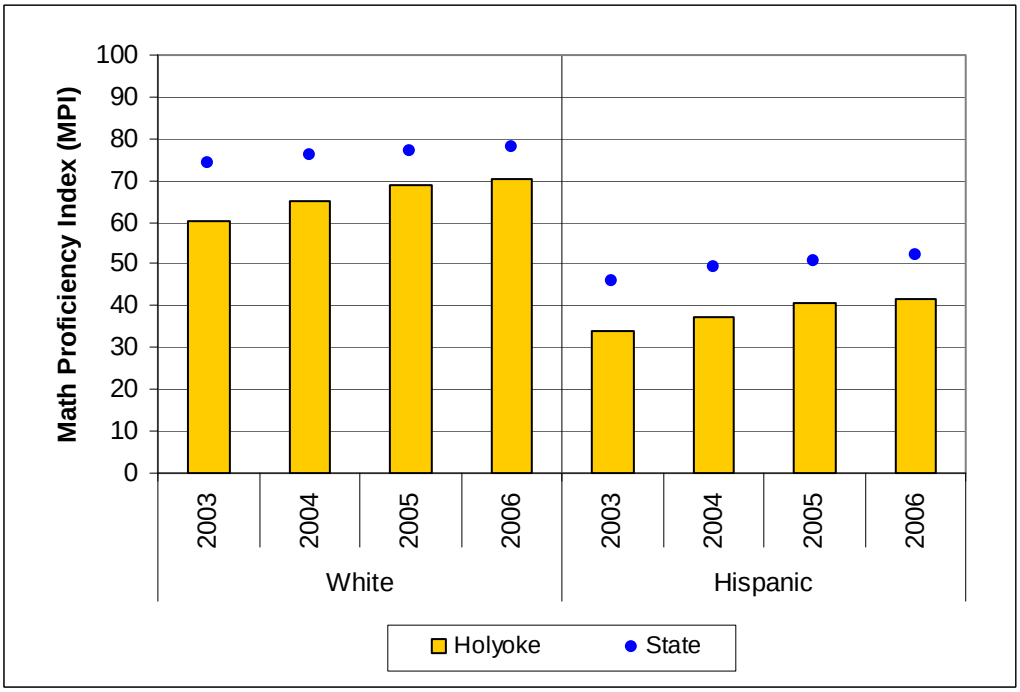

**B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups**



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




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

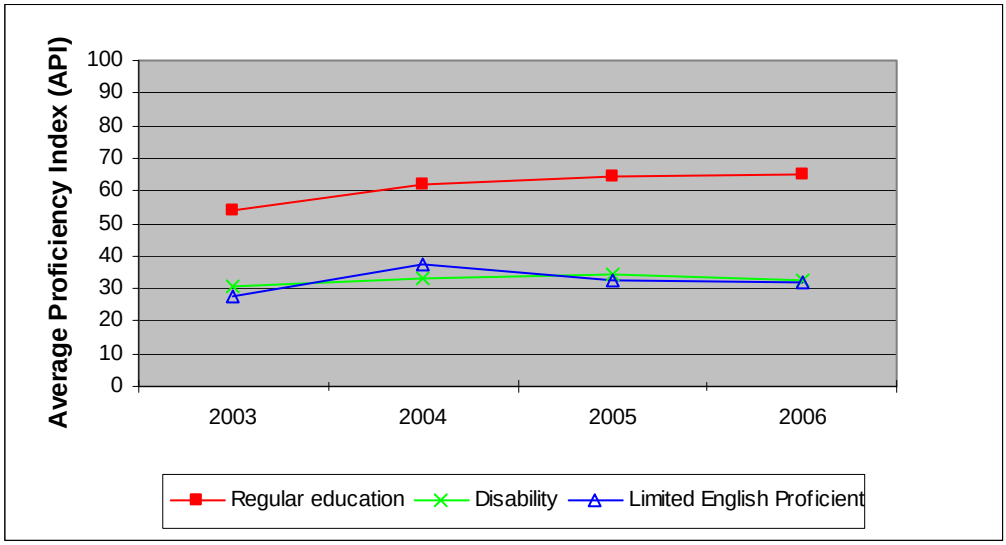


| State | | | | Holyoke | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Subgroup** | **Year** | **EPI** | **MPI** | **Subgroup** | **Year** | **EPI** | **MPI** |
| Regular Education | 2003 | 87.3 | 74.7 | Regular Education | 2003 | 64.3 | 46.4 |
| | 2004 | 89.2 | 77.4 | | 2004 | 72.9 | 53.9 |
| | 2005 | 88.3 | 78.2 | | 2005 | 71.8 | 58.3 |
| | 2006 | 89.0 | 78.9 | | 2006 | 73.3 | 59.3 |
| Disability | 2003 | 62.1 | 45.3 | Disability | 2003 | 37.2 | 26.3 |
| | 2004 | 63.3 | 47.9 | | 2004 | 39.0 | 28.8 |
| | 2005 | 62.9 | 49.0 | | 2005 | 39.6 | 30.0 |
| | 2006 | 61.2 | 48.4 | | 2006 | 36.1 | 29.8 |
| LEP | 2003 | 44.4 | 39.6 | LEP | 2003 | 33.7 | 23.4 |
| | 2004 | 53.4 | 48.4 | | 2004 | 44.6 | 32.8 |
| | 2005 | 50.9 | 45.6 | | 2005 | 38.6 | 27.9 |
| | 2006 | 52.9 | 47.9 | | 2006 | 37.2 | 27.7 |
| FRL/N | 2003 | 87.9 | 75.9 | FRL/N | 2003 | 74.4 | 53.2 |
| | 2004 | 88.9 | 78.1 | | 2004 | 76.0 | 61.1 |
| | 2005 | 88.3 | 79.0 | | 2005 | 80.2 | 64.3 |
| | 2006 | 88.6 | 79.7 | | 2006 | 79.1 | 70.2 |
| FRL/Y | 2003 | 66.6 | 50.7 | FRL/Y | 2003 | 49.3 | 35.7 |
| | 2004 | 69.7 | 53.9 | | 2004 | 55.1 | 38.8 |
| | 2005 | 68.8 | 55.0 | | 2005 | 53.1 | 41.7 |
| | 2006 | 70.0 | 56.3 | | 2006 | 54.1 | 41.8 |
| White | 2003 | 86.9 | 74.4 | White | 2003 | 77.8 | 60.1 |
| | 2004 | 87.7 | 76.2 | | 2004 | 82.3 | 65.0 |
| | 2005 | 87.1 | 77.2 | | 2005 | 80.5 | 68.8 |
| | 2006 | 87.4 | 77.8 | | 2006 | 81.0 | 70.3 |
| Hispanic | 2003 | 61.4 | 45.7 | Hispanic | 2003 | 48.6 | 34.1 |
| | 2004 | 64.8 | 49.3 | | 2004 | 52.4 | 37.2 |
| | 2005 | 64.6 | 50.6 | | 2005 | 53.1 | 40.8 |
| | 2006 | 65.8 | 52.2 | | 2006 | 53.1 | 41.4 |

In Holyoke, regular education students, Hispanic students, and non low-income (FRL/N) students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students. In math, all student subgroups in Holyoke with the exception of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) showed improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was non low-income students.

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 43 PI points in 2004 to 45 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 36 to 43 PI points during this period.

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

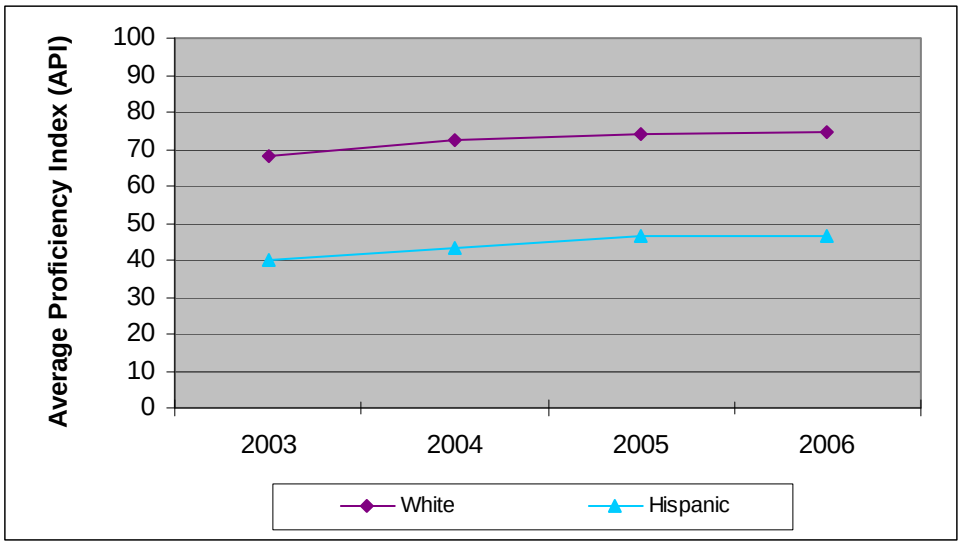



| | | API | EPI | MPI | Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA | Percent Attaining Proficiency Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regular education | 2003 | 54.0 | 64.3 | 46.4 | 29 | 15 |
| | 2004 | 62.0 | 72.9 | 53.9 | 41 | 21 |
| | 2005 | 64.3 | 71.8 | 58.3 | 38 | 27 |
| | 2006 | 65.2 | 73.3 | 59.3 | 42 | 30 |
| Disability | 2003 | 30.9 | 37.2 | 26.3 | 5 | 2 |
| | 2004 | 32.9 | 39.0 | 28.8 | 7 | 4 |
| | 2005 | 34.1 | 39.6 | 30.0 | 4 | 3 |
| | 2006 | 32.5 | 36.1 | 29.8 | 6 | 3 |
| Limited English Proficient | 2003 | 27.7 | 33.7 | 23.4 | 6 | 3 |
| | 2004 | 37.5 | 44.6 | 32.8 | 10 | 4 |
| | 2005 | 32.6 | 38.6 | 27.9 | 2 | 1 |
| | 2006 | 31.7 | 37.2 | 27.7 | 4 | 2 |

Regular education students in Holyoke had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006. The performance of students with disabilities remained the same and the performance of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) decreased during this period. The average proficiency gap for Holyoke's regular education students narrowed from 38 to 35 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of eight percent. For students with disabilities, the average proficiency gap remained at 67 PI points, and for LEP students it widened from 62 to 68 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by nearly four PI points, and between regular education and LEP students it widened by nine PI points.

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

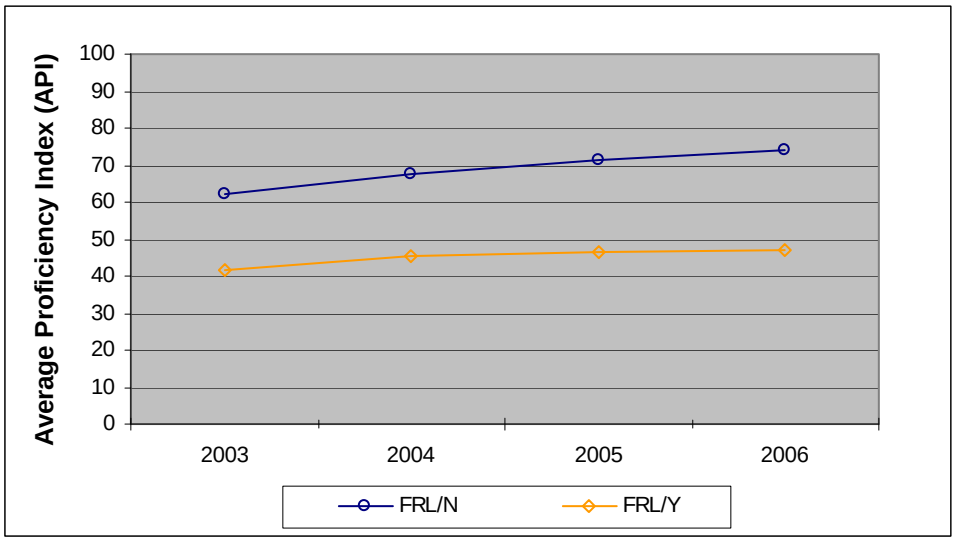



| | | API | EPI | MPI | Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA | Percent Attaining Proficiency Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 2003 | 67.8 | 77.8 | 60.1 | 49 | 28 |
| | 2004 | 72.4 | 82.3 | 65.0 | 59 | 34 |
| | 2005 | 74.0 | 80.5 | 68.8 | 53 | 40 |
| | 2006 | 74.8 | 81.0 | 70.3 | 57 | 45 |
| Hispanic | 2003 | 40.2 | 48.6 | 34.1 | 13 | 6 |
| | 2004 | 43.4 | 52.4 | 37.2 | 17 | 7 |
| | 2005 | 46.2 | 53.1 | 40.8 | 17 | 12 |
| | 2006 | 46.3 | 53.1 | 41.4 | 20 | 12 |

Both racial subgroups in Holyoke had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for White students narrowed from 28 to 25 PI points, and for Hispanic students it narrowed from 57 to 54 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of nine percent for White students and five percent for Hispanic students.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by one-half PI point.

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

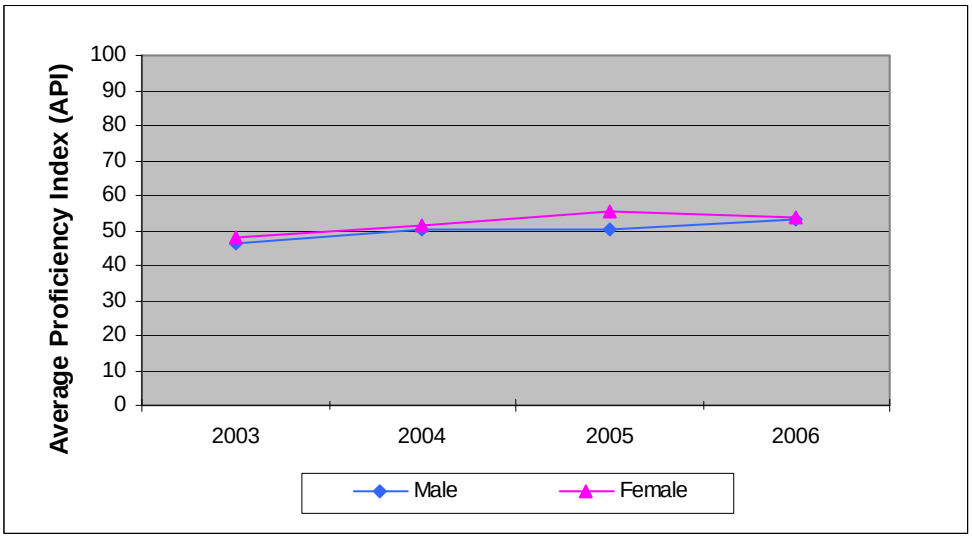



| | | API | EPI | MPI | Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA | Percent Attaining Proficiency Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FRL/N | 2003 | 62.4 | 74.4 | 53.2 | 46 | 24 |
| | 2004 | 67.5 | 76.0 | 61.1 | 52 | 31 |
| | 2005 | 71.3 | 80.2 | 64.3 | 53 | 37 |
| | 2006 | 74.0 | 79.1 | 70.2 | 55 | 45 |
| FRL/Y | 2003 | 41.4 | 49.3 | 35.7 | 13 | 7 |
| | 2004 | 45.5 | 55.1 | 38.8 | 20 | 8 |
| | 2005 | 46.7 | 53.1 | 41.7 | 16 | 12 |
| | 2006 | 47.0 | 54.1 | 41.8 | 21 | 13 |

Both the low-income (FRL/Y) and non low-income (FRL/N) subgroups in Holyoke had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for low-income students narrowed from 54 to 53 PI points, and for non low-income students it narrowed from 32 to 26 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of three percent for low-income students and 20 percent for non low-income students.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between low-income students and non low-income students widened by five 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 | 46.2 | 54.0 | 40.5 | 21 | 13 |
| | 2004 | 50.4 | 57.7 | 45.1 | 26 | 15 |
| | 2005 | 50.0 | 55.4 | 45.9 | 19 | 16 |
| | 2006 | 53.3 | 57.4 | 50.4 | 26 | 23 |
| Female | 2003 | 48.2 | 58.8 | 40.4 | 24 | 10 |
| | 2004 | 51.2 | 62.9 | 43.0 | 30 | 12 |
| | 2005 | 55.5 | 64.2 | 48.6 | 31 | 19 |
| | 2006 | 53.8 | 63.2 | 46.8 | 32 | 18 |

Both gender subgroups in Holyoke had improved overall performance between 2004 and 2006 on the MCAS tests. The average proficiency gap for male students narrowed from 50 PI points to 47 PI points, and for female students it narrowed from 49 PI points to 46 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of six percent for male students and five percent for female students.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between male and female students remained at less than one PI point.

## Participation

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

**Findings:**

- On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Holyoke 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 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Holyoke | ALL LEVELS | **3,046** | **3,047** | **906** |
| | Advanced | 90 | 148 | 19 |
| | Proficient | 794 | 388 | 86 |
| | Needs Improvement | 1,231 | 872 | 344 |
| | Warning/Failing | 931 | 1,639 | 457 |
| Regular Education | Advanced | 87 | 146 | 18 |
| | Proficient | 717 | 350 | 78 |
| | Needs Improvement | 831 | 660 | 248 |
| | Warning/Failing | 256 | 735 | 204 |
| Disability | Advanced | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| | Proficient | 51 | 24 | 7 |
| | Needs Improvement | 243 | 129 | 69 |
| | Warning/Failing | 399 | 550 | 151 |
| Limited English Proficient | Advanced | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | Proficient | 26 | 14 | 1 |
| | Needs Improvement | 157 | 83 | 27 |
| | Warning/Failing | 276 | 354 | 102 |
| White | Advanced | 62 | 96 | 6 |
| | Proficient | 303 | 168 | 41 |
| | Needs Improvement | 222 | 218 | 88 |
| | Warning/Failing | 64 | 174 | 41 |
| Hispanic | Advanced | 20 | 46 | 10 |
| | Proficient | 452 | 200 | 42 |
| | Needs Improvement | 942 | 604 | 242 |
| | Warning/Failing | 841 | 1,404 | 406 |
| African-American | Advanced | 7 | 2 | 2 |
| | Proficient | 31 | 16 | 3 |
| | Needs Improvement | 47 | 35 | 10 |
| | Warning/Failing | 20 | 50 | 8 |
| Asian | Advanced | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| | Proficient | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| | Needs Improvement | 16 | 14 | 3 |
| | Warning/Failing | 4 | 6 | 2 |
| Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No | Advanced | 62 | 106 | 9 |
| | Proficient | 305 | 163 | 36 |
| | Needs Improvement | 198 | 204 | 83 |
| | Warning/Failing | 67 | 165 | 37 |
| Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes | Advanced | 28 | 42 | 10 |
| | Proficient | 489 | 225 | 50 |
| | Needs Improvement | 1,031 | 667 | 261 |
| | Warning/Failing | 863 | 1,474 | 420 |
| Male | Advanced | 33 | 78 | 5 |
| | Proficient | 381 | 207 | 51 |
| | Needs Improvement | 614 | 463 | 186 |
| | Warning/Failing | 510 | 801 | 217 |
| Female | Advanced | 57 | 70 | 14 |
| | Proficient | 413 | 181 | 35 |
| | Needs Improvement | 615 | 408 | 158 |
| | Warning/Failing | 420 | 838 | 240 |

## n-Values by Grade and Year, 2003-2006

| Grade | Year | ELA | Math | STE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 3 | 2003 | 548 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 508 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 514 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 422 | 419 | 0 |
| Grade 4 | 2003 | 511 | 518 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 514 | 522 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 499 | 500 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 431 | 430 | 0 |
| Grade 5 | 2003 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 0 | 0 | 499 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 0 | 517 |
| | 2006 | 423 | 423 | 424 |
| Grade 6 | 2003 | 0 | 533 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 0 | 548 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 502 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 430 | 429 | 0 |
| Grade 7 | 2003 | 568 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 494 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 525 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 442 | 446 | 0 |
| Grade 8 | 2003 | 0 | 561 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 0 | 519 | 518 |
| | 2005 | 0 | 432 | 437 |
| | 2006 | 486 | 489 | 482 |
| Grade 10 | 2003 | 403 | 409 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 406 | 398 | 0 |
| | 2005 | 420 | 415 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 412 | 411 | 0 |
| All Grades | 2003 | 2,030 | 2,021 | 0 |
| | 2004 | 1,922 | 1,987 | 1,017 |
| | 2005 | 1,958 | 1,849 | 954 |
| | 2006 | 3,046 | 3,047 | 906 |

## 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 grade and 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.

# Appendix B: 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 C: Chapter 70 Trends, FY1997 – 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 | 7,623 | -0.4 | 55,483,957 | -0.3 | 3,490,807 | 46,301,377 | 8.9 | 49,792,184 | 8.6 | 54,978,488 | 15.9 | 5,186,304 | 10.4 |
| FY98 | 7,800 | 2.3 | 59,156,026 | 6.6 | 3,432,038 | 50,932,268 | 10.0 | 54,364,306 | 9.2 | 58,906,145 | 7.1 | 4,541,839 | 8.4 |
| FY99 | 8,143 | 4.4 | 62,271,740 | 5.3 | 3,543,338 | 56,463,750 | 10.9 | 60,007,088 | 10.4 | 62,235,115 | 5.7 | 2,228,027 | 3.7 |
| FY00 | 7,551 | -7.3 | 58,991,227 | -5.3 | 5,939,606 | 57,596,400 | 2.0 | 63,536,006 | 5.9 | 63,536,006 | 2.1 | 0 | 0.0 |
| FY01 | 7,576 | 0.3 | 60,778,390 | 3.0 | 6,324,967 | 58,922,200 | 2.3 | 65,247,167 | 2.7 | 62,518,551 | -1.6 | -2,728,616 | -4.2 |
| FY02 | 7,370 | -2.7 | 61,394,691 | 1.0 | 9,303,617 | 59,511,422 | 1.0 | 68,815,039 | 5.5 | 72,864,114 | 16.5 | 4,049,075 | 5.9 |
| FY03 | 7,378 | 0.1 | 62,234,064 | 1.4 | 6,582,891 | 59,511,422 | 0.0 | 66,094,313 | -4.0 | 72,419,293 | -0.6 | 6,324,980 | 9.6 |
| FY04 | 7,356 | -0.3 | 62,880,952 | 1.0 | 6,433,459 | 56,447,493 | -5.1 | 62,880,952 | -4.9 | 73,298,100 | 1.2 | 10,417,148 | 16.6 |
| FY05 | 7,412 | 0.8 | 66,570,138 | 5.9 | 6,445,683 | 60,124,455 | 6.5 | 66,570,138 | 5.9 | 74,110,248 | 1.1 | 7,540,110 | 11.3 |
| FY06 | 7,289 | -1.7 | 67,827,362 | 1.9 | 6,811,798 | 61,015,564 | 1.5 | 67,827,362 | 1.9 | 74,187,880 | 0.1 | 6,360,518 | 9.4 |

| | 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 | 7,278 | 6,074 | 7,212 | 83.5 | 89.7 | 99.1 | 84.2 |
| FY98 | 7,584 | 6,530 | 7,552 | 86.1 | 91.9 | 99.6 | 86.5 |
| FY99 | 7,647 | 6,934 | 7,643 | 90.7 | 96.4 | 99.9 | 90.7 |
| FY00 | 7,812 | 7,628 | 8,414 | 97.6 | 107.7 | 107.7 | 90.7 |
| FY01 | 8,022 | 7,777 | 8,252 | 96.9 | 107.4 | 102.9 | 94.2 |
| FY02 | 8,330 | 8,075 | 9,887 | 96.9 | 112.1 | 118.7 | 81.7 |
| FY03 | 8,435 | 8,066 | 9,816 | 95.6 | 106.2 | 116.4 | 82.2 |
| FY04 | 8,548 | 7,674 | 9,964 | 89.8 | 100.0 | 116.6 | 77.0 |
| FY05 | 8,981 | 8,112 | 9,999 | 90.3 | 100.0 | 111.3 | 81.1 |
| FY06 | 9,305 | 8,371 | 10,178 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 109.4 | 82.2 |

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.

# Appendix D: Crisis and Security Indicators

All districts reviewed by the EQA are evaluated on the crisis and security indicators approved by the EMAC in light of the recent spate of school violence and the need to ensure student safety. The ratings on these indicators and the relevant evidence found by the EQA examiners did not influence the evaluation of the District Turnaround Plan, but are provided for informational purposes only.

Crisis and Security Indicator 1: 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.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

Leadership personnel stated that the district had a comprehensive safety and security plan developed by the District Emergency Crisis Management Team (DECMT). This team consisted of the executive director of finance and operations, a captain from the fire department, a captain from the police department, a principal or assistant principal from each school, the school nurse manager, the district emergency coordinator, and four resource officers. The executive director of finance and operations mentioned that the DECMT met quarterly to review and update the comprehensive safety plan and to align the school safety plans. The mission statement of the safety and security plan stated, "The care and protection of students and staff of the Holyoke Public Schools is of primary concern to the Holyoke School Committee. Therefore, the Committee is determined to establish a comprehensive safety and security policy for the system." A review of the safety and security plan showed three sections: 1) the needs assessment; 2) the procedures for emergency codes; and 3) the evacuation plan.

Also, the district provided the EQA team members with a binder that contained the Emergency Response Plan 2006-2007 for each of the schools. The plans included the members of each school's emergency response team and sections devoted to: a) code red

– evacuation and relocation plans; b) code white – security; and c) code blue – medical. The format for each plan basically followed the same template.

Furthermore, the mayor and the superintendent mentioned that the city had a Holyoke Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP). The CEMP included seven parts: 1) purpose, authorities, and references; 2) emergency management response organizations; 3) emergency management processes and protective procedures; 4) specific hazards; 5) local emergency planning committee: hazardous materials emergency plan; 6) terrorism incident response plan; and 7) resource manual.

Administrators stated that the district had four resource officers: one for Holyoke High School, one for Dean Technical High School, one for the Peck Middle School and two other K-8 schools, and one for the Lynch Middle School and two other K-8 schools. Also, administrators indicated that all schools had locked exterior doors. Schools used a buzzer entry system with coverage of the main entrance by a camera. Each visitor had to sign in and out at the main office of the school and received a visitor's pass. The central office administrators commented that all teachers had identification and all students at the middle and high schools had identification. In addition, the superintendent mentioned that all teachers had keys to their classrooms in case of a lockdown.

Crisis and Security Indicator 2: The district provided all staff with ongoing training in dealing with crises and emergencies; provided safety procedures for substitutes, student-teachers, and volunteers responsible for students; and provided opportunities to practice emergency procedures with all students.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district had a crisis emergency plan in place and an oversight committee which met four times per year. The district took steps to lock and mark external doors in schools, to install cameras in critical locations, and to assign resource officers to some schools. Administrators had hand-held wireless phones to communicate with their offices in schools.

A review of district training materials revealed no district training in crisis management. In interviews, the EQA team learned that crisis training for staff, both permanent and casual, was done at the school level. Handbooks and knowledgeable trained staff were configured closest to the students. Lockdown procedures in schools were discussed during EQA interviews.

Crisis and Security Indicator 3: The schools were secure and had systems in place to ensure student safety.

**Rating: Satisfactory**

**Evidence**

The district addressed the issue of student safety in its buildings. Schools had motion detectors, surveillance cameras, door buzzers and cameras at entries, personnel located in some buildings, and all doors in all schools individually numbered.

# Appendix E: Classroom Observations Chart

| | Number of Classrooms | | | | Average Class Size | Average Paraprofs. per Class | Computers | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ELA | Math | Other | Total | | | Total Number | Number for Student Use | Average Students per Computer |
| **Elementary** | 18 | 13 | 3 | 34 | 16.1 | 0.4 | 45 | 41 | 13.3 |
| **Middle** | 9 | 16 | 8 | 33 | 12.6 | 0.5 | 85 | 68 | 6.1 |
| **High** | 7 | 11 | 2 | 20 | 13.2 | 0.2 | 67 | 61 | 4.3 |
| **Total** | 34 | 40 | 13 | 87 | 14.1 | 0.4 | 197 | 170 | 7.2 |

| | Classroom Management | Instructional Practice | Expectations | Student Activity & Behavior | Climate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Elementary** | | | | | |
| Total observations | 126 | 240 | 114 | 140 | 91 |
| Maximum possible | 136 | 306 | 135 | 203 | 102 |
| Avg. percent of observations | 93% | 78% | 84% | 69% | 89% |
| **Middle** | | | | | |
| Total observations | 112 | 219 | 84 | 116 | 78 |
| Maximum possible | 132 | 295 | 128 | 193 | 99 |
| Avg. percent of observations | 85% | 74% | 66% | 60% | 79% |
| **High** | | | | | |
| Total observations | 55 | 89 | 36 | 50 | 27 |
| Maximum possible | 80 | 179 | 78 | 118 | 60 |
| Avg. percent of observations | 69% | 50% | 46% | 42% | 45% |
| **Total** | | | | | |
| Total observations | 293 | 548 | 234 | 306 | 196 |
| Maximum possible | 348 | 780 | 341 | 514 | 261 |
| Avg. percent of observations | 84% | 70% | 69% | 60% | 75% |

# Appendix F: Organization of Findings

**General Finding I: The current implementation of Holyoke Public Schools' turnaround plan prioritizes thoughtful process over analysis.**

***Related findings concerning the development and oversight of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 1. The turnaround plan development process supported successful collaboration among the district leadership and between district leadership and the DOE. Although the process for developing and revising the plan did not fully consider Holyoke's readiness or all the district's needs be to addressed by a selected turnaround partner, the impact of the implementation was mostly considered a step in the right direction.

Finding 2. The role of the turnaround partner has helped the district create more consistency and uniformity across K-8 classrooms.

Finding 3. The superintendent was effective in communicating district needs through a process which galvanized district and community support for Holyoke Public Schools.

***Related findings concerning the implementation of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 9. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, the district leadership has collected more data than it has evaluated, and is largely unable to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of new programs and initiatives to date.

***Related findings concerning the provisioning for the turnaround plan:***

Finding 20. There was no financial plan associated with the DTAP and the DTAP itself does not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies.

Finding 21. FY 2006 spending on professional development averaged approximately $3 million, or $17,000 per day, but the district lacked measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs.

Finding 22. The district did not have a clear accounting mechanism to assess all of its unexpended encumbrances.

Finding 23. Holyoke Public Schools' lack of budget forecasting hindered the implementation of the DTAP, caused hiring and purchasing delays, and resulted in budget freezes. The need for budget forecasting in the district was especially important because of Holyoke's reliance on Chapter 70 aid and grants, student mobility in the district, and the district's loss of students to charter schools.

**General Finding II: Holyoke Public Schools lacks a systems approach in implementing its plan.**

***Related findings concerning the development and oversight of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 4. While implementing the DTAP, the leadership communicated district priorities, but the multiple plans did not create clarity for the focus of the district and its schools.

***Related findings concerning the implementation of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 10. Interdependent priorities in key district plans and documents were not systemically interwoven and translated into sustainable, focused practices in all needed areas.

Finding 11. The turnaround plan does not address some components for key pieces of district work necessary for a whole-district turnaround.

Finding 12. The professional development program provided ample offerings and has become more developed. While improved, it still falls short of a cohesive approach in a district experiencing substantial shifts with subsequent changes in district strategies and classroom approaches.

Finding 13. Unlike administrators, teachers were not sufficiently prepared to be held accountable for carrying out responsibilities directly related to district or school goals.

Finding 14. The district improved its services and programs for ELL and special education students, although it continued some program-based approaches rather than a district-based approach to address student needs in programs designed for all students.

Finding 15. With some exceptions, and to a lesser extent than in previous years, district resources were not deployed to maximize the district's ability to improve its capacity, to maximize cost-effectiveness, and to institutionalize a long-term strategy in a sustainable way.

***Related findings concerning the provisioning for the turnaround plan:***

Finding 24. Interviewees indicated that the district needed more staff in key positions to better support improved instruction and diverse student needs.

Finding 25. Students had access to technology, but teachers did not have adequate access to effective technology, software, and support to improve instruction, planning, and communication.

Finding 26. The district did not have a plan to improve aging building systems or classroom spaces that were ill equipped or not conducive to learning.

**General Finding III: The implementation of the plan has moved the district toward greater alignment of activities in Holyoke, especially in K-8 leadership, assessment, curriculum, and instruction, but the high schools have minimal connection with the DTAP.**

***Related findings concerning the development and oversight of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 5. Accountability for implementing the DTAP was embedded in the superintendent's assignment of responsibility areas to administrators, and in the evaluations of the superintendent and principals.

***Related findings concerning the implementation of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 16. The DTAP has started to gain traction in the district to promote changes that the district expects to improve student achievement in grades K-8, but not in grades 9-12.

Finding 17. The implementation of the plan has brought more consistency and uniformity through common curricula with common learning expectations in grades K-8, although the curriculum development process was still being formed.

Finding 18. The district's use of student assessments had improved, although work on Initiative 1 has experienced the greatest stagnation.

***Related findings concerning the provisioning for the turnaround plan:***

Finding 27. Beginning with the FY 2007 budget process, the district changed its method of developing the budget from a percentage increase of the current budget as determined by the central administration to a process based on student needs and other data initially developed at the school site. However, results were speculative by the end of the review because the district had not produced its budget for the upcoming year.

**General Finding IV: The plan was in its early implementation stage and has not been related to improved student achievement on the MCAS tests at this point. Implementation of the plan was slowed by both anticipated and unanticipated factors. The district has addressed some obstacles hindering the implementation, while other challenges remain.**

***Related findings concerning the development and oversight of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 6. Internal district capacity was a limiting factor in the speed of the implementation of the plan. The leadership frequently used consultants to address issues in the school system rather than build internal capacity.

Finding 7. The district perceived that major challenges in implementing the DTAP included budget constraints, recruitment of qualified staff, limits in the teachers' contract, inadequate availability of social services, and reactions to the district's underperforming label.

Finding 8. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had

not gathered adequate data by the time of the 2006-2007 review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges.

***Related findings concerning the implementation of the turnaround plan:***

Finding 19. Being in the early implementation stage, the turnaround plan has launched some changes that have promise, but were not necessarily deeply embedded.

***Related findings concerning the provisioning for the turnaround plan:***

Finding 28. The district improved in its provision of materials and supplies, so that the resources were equitable among the K-8 schools and most staff members felt they had the resources they needed for the core program.

# Appendix G: Order of Findings

**General Finding I: The current implementation of Holyoke Public Schools' turnaround plan prioritizes thoughtful process over analysis.**

**General Finding II: Holyoke Public Schools lacks a systems approach in implementing its plan.**

**General Finding III: The implementation of the plan has moved the district toward greater alignment of activities in Holyoke, especially in K-8 leadership, assessment, curriculum, and instruction, but the high schools have minimal connection with the DTAP.**

**General Finding IV: The plan was in its early implementation stage and has not been related to improved student achievement on the MCAS tests at this point. Implementation of the plan was slowed by both anticipated and unanticipated factors. The district has addressed some obstacles hindering the implementation, while other challenges remain.**

Finding 1. The turnaround plan development process supported successful collaboration among the district leadership and between district leadership and the DOE. Although the process for developing and revising the plan did not fully consider Holyoke's readiness or all the district's needs be to addressed by a selected turnaround partner, the impact of the implementation was mostly considered a step in the right direction. (I)

Finding 2. The role of the turnaround partner has helped the district create more consistency and uniformity across K-8 classrooms. (I)

Finding 3. The superintendent was effective in communicating district needs through a process which galvanized district and community support for Holyoke Public Schools. (I)

Finding 4. While implementing the DTAP, the leadership communicated district priorities, but the multiple plans did not create clarity for the focus of the district and its schools. (II)

Finding 5. Accountability for implementing the DTAP was embedded in the superintendent's assignment of responsibility areas to administrators, and in the evaluations of the superintendent and principals. (III)

Finding 6. Internal district capacity was a limiting factor in the speed of the implementation of the plan. The leadership frequently used consultants to address issues in the school system rather than build internal capacity. (IV)

Finding 7. The district perceived that major challenges in implementing the DTAP included budget constraints, recruitment of qualified staff, limits in the teachers' contract, inadequate availability of social services, and reactions to the district's underperforming label. (IV)

Finding 8. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, administrators indicated that they felt they were moving in a positive direction, but had not gathered adequate data by the time of the 2006-2007 review to determine whether the new steps implemented were effective in addressing the district's challenges. (IV)

Finding 9. With the 2005-2006 year considered as the start of implementation, the district leadership has collected more data than it has evaluated, and is largely unable to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of new programs and initiatives to date. (I)

Finding 10. Interdependent priorities in key district plans and documents were not systemically interwoven and translated into sustainable, focused practices in all needed areas. (II)

Finding 11. The turnaround plan does not address some components for key pieces of district work necessary for a whole-district turnaround. (II)

Finding 12. The professional development program provided ample offerings and has become more developed. While improved, it still falls short of a cohesive approach in a district experiencing substantial shifts with subsequent changes in district strategies and classroom approaches. (II)

Finding 13. Unlike administrators, teachers were not sufficiently prepared to be held accountable for carrying out responsibilities directly related to district or school goals. (II)

Finding 14. The district improved its services and programs for ELL and special education students, although it continued some program-based approaches rather than a district-based approach to address student needs in programs designed for all students. (II)

Finding 15. With some exceptions, and to a lesser extent than in previous years, district resources were not deployed to maximize the district's ability to improve its capacity, to maximize cost-effectiveness, and to institutionalize a long-term strategy in a sustainable way. (II)

Finding 16. The DTAP has started to gain traction in the district to promote changes that the district expects to improve student achievement in grades K-8, but not in grades 9-12. (III)

Finding 17. The implementation of the plan has brought more consistency and uniformity through common curricula with common learning expectations in grades K-8, although the curriculum development process was still being formed. (III)

Finding 18. The district's use of student assessments had improved, although work on Initiative 1 has experienced the greatest stagnation. (III)

Finding 19. Being in the early implementation stage, the turnaround plan has launched some changes that have promise, but were not necessarily deeply embedded. (IV)

Finding 20. There was no financial plan associated with the DTAP and the DTAP itself does not contain a requirement that the district develop a cost-effective analysis of its initiatives or strategies. (I)

Finding 21. FY 2006 spending on professional development averaged approximately $3 million, or $17,000 per day, but the district lacked measures to assess the impact or the cost-effectiveness of the training programs. (I)

Finding 22. The district did not have a clear accounting mechanism to assess all of its unexpended encumbrances. (I)

Finding 23. Holyoke Public Schools' lack of budget forecasting hindered the implementation of the DTAP, caused hiring and purchasing delays, and resulted in budget freezes. The need for budget forecasting in the district was especially important because of Holyoke's reliance on Chapter 70 aid and grants, student mobility in the district, and the district's loss of students to charter schools. (I)

Finding 24. Interviewees indicated that the district needed more staff in key positions to better support improved instruction and diverse student needs. (II)

Finding 25. Students had access to technology, but teachers did not have adequate access to effective technology, software, and support to improve instruction, planning, and communication. (II)

Finding 26. The district did not have a plan to improve aging building systems or classroom spaces that were ill equipped or not conducive to learning. (II)

Finding 27. Beginning with the FY 2007 budget process, the district changed its method of developing the budget from a percentage increase of the current budget as determined by the central administration to a process based on student needs and other data initially developed at the school site. However, results were speculative by the end of the review because the district had not produced its budget for the upcoming year. (III)

Finding 28. The district improved in its provision of materials and supplies, so that the resources were equitable among the K-8 schools and most staff members felt they had the resources they needed for the core program. (IV)