



Leominster Public Schools District Review

Review conducted May 21-24, 2012



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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Leominster Public Schools

The site visit to the Leominster Public Schools was conducted from May 21–24, 2012. The site visit included 34 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 88 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 2 elementary-school, 9 middle-school, and 15 high-school teachers. The team also conducted visits to a representative sample (8) of the district's 11 schools: Bennett (pre-kindergarten), Lincoln (pre-kindergarten), Priest Street (kindergarten), Fall Brook (kindergarten through grade 5), Southeast (kindergarten through grade 5), Johnny Appleseed (kindergarten through grade 5), Northwest (kindergarten through grade 5), Samoset (grades 6–8), Sky View Middle School (grades 6–8), Leominster Senior High (grades 9–12), and the Leominster Center for Technical Education Innovation (grades 9–12). Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

Note that any progress that has taken place since the time of the review is not reflected in this benchmarking report. Findings represent the conditions in place at the time of the site visit, and recommendations represent the team's suggestions to address the issues identified at that time.

District Profile²

The city has a mayor-council form of government and the mayor serves as chairman of the school committee. There are nine members of the school committee; they meet twice a month except in June and July and all meetings are broadcast on local television.

The current superintendent, who was appointed to his position in the spring of 2011, is Leominster's fourth superintendent in less than 10 years. He was preceded by a one-year interim superintendent who followed a superintendent with a tenure of only four years in the district. Three principals were new to the district in 2009 and two additional principals were new in 2010. (Data Pack p 123) On the opening day of the 2011–2012 school year, the new superintendent introduced an additional eight new administrators, including principals at both middle schools, an assistant principal at one of the middle schools, a director of the Center for Technical Education Innovation (CTE), an assistant principal for early childhood, an administrator for pupil personnel services, and two special education coordinators. (Supt.'s Opening Day Presentation 8/11) After the new superintendent took office, the business administrator and the deputy

² Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

superintendent for curriculum and instruction resigned. (Leadership Interview with Superintendent 8/21).

Schools

In October 2011 Leominster served about 6200 students in 11 schools: 2 pre-kindergarten, 1 kindergarten, 4 K–5 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools. In 2010–2011 Leominster was a Level 3 district because 3 of its schools, Northwest Elementary School, Samoset Middle School, and Leominster High School, were in the bottom 20 percent of the state in the Massachusetts accountability system.³ In contrast, Fall Brook Elementary School, a Level 2 school, was commended for high growth and improved proficiency rates in 2010–2011, and the Leominster Center for Technical Education Innovation was a Level 1 school.

Enrollment and Student Indicators

According to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) data, between 2007 and 2011 the district's enrollment remained steady at approximately 6200 students. However, while the district's proportion of students from low-income families remained steady from 2007 to 2010 (33.2 percent to 36.2 percent), it jumped in 2011 to 44 percent, compared to the state rate of 34 percent. In 2011, 5.9 percent of the students in the district were English language learners (ELLs), and 89 percent of ELLs in Leominster came from low-income families. The proportion of ELLs enrolled in the district declined from 11.8 percent in 2007 to 6.3 percent in 2010 and 5.9 percent in 2011. The number of ELLs dropped from 725 students in 2007 to 362 in 2012.

Leominster has a number of positive indicators around its graduation rate:

- The four-year graduation rate has been above state levels since 2007; in 2011 it was 90.6 percent, compared to 83.4 percent statewide.
- Graduation rates for students with disabilities were higher than those for their peers across the state in 2010: 69.6 percent compared to 64.0 percent.
- Graduation rates for ELLs were higher than those for their statewide peers in 2010: 68.6 percent vs. 57.8 percent.
- Graduation rates for students from low-income families were higher than those for their peers across the state in 2011: 86.1 percent compared to 69.8 percent.

In addition, the district caught up with state performance in both ELA and math in grade 4 in 2011. And the gap in proficiency in math between the district and the state in grade 5 was eliminated in 2009, and this continues to be the case in 2011.

Tables 1a and 1b show student enrollment by race/ethnicity and special populations for the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 school years, respectively.

³ In 2012 Northwest Elementary became a Level 2 school and Leominster High School a Level 1 school, though Samoset Middle School remained a Level 3 school and so Leominster remained a Level 3 district.

**Table 1a: Leominster Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010–2011**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State
Total enrollment	6,214	100.0	--	African-American/Black	388	6.2	8.2
First Language not English	1,100	17.7	16.3	Asian	210	3.4	5.5
Limited English Proficient*	368	5.9	7.1	Hispanic/Latino	1,498	24.1	15.4
Special Education**	1,084	17.2	17.0	White	3,946	63.5	68.0
Low-income	2,726	43.9	34.2	Native American	15	0.2	0.2
Free Lunch	2,159	34.7	29.1	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	0.1	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	567	9.1	5.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	153	2.5	2.4
	*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.” **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data						

**Table 1b: Leominster Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011–2012**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State
Total enrollment	6,181	100.0	--	African-American/Black	391	6.3	8.3
First Language not English	1,110	18.0	16.7	Asian	212	3.4	5.7
Limited English Proficient*	362	5.9	7.3	Hispanic/Latino	1,577	25.5	16.1
Special Education**	1,091	17.4	17.0	White	3,817	61.8	67.0
Low-income	2,735	44.2	35.2	Native American	15	0.2	0.2
Free Lunch	2,282	36.9	30.4	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5	0.1	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	453	7.3	4.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	164	2.7	2.5
	*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.” **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data						

Finances

The district’s financial resources are limited. As Table 2 below shows, actual net school spending exceeded the required by only 0.1 percent in 2010, was 0.7 percent below required in 2011, and was projected to be 0.1 percent above in 2012. The district is paying down construction debt with some aid from the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

**Table 2: Leominster
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010–2012**

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From local appropriations for schools					
by school committee	61,003,646	60,084,087		62,670,117	64,088,937
by municipality	6,657,834	6,781,513		9,616,730	5,552,336
Total from local appropriations	67,661,480	66,865,600		72,286,847	69,641,273
From revolving funds and grants	---	11,494,339	---	11,905,744	---
Total expenditures	---	78,359,939	---	84,192,591	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	39,667,839	---	39,420,116	41,456,131
Required local contribution	---	21,186,482	---	21,870,806	23,049,907
Required net school spending**	---	60,854,321	---	61,290,922	64,506,038
Actual net school spending	---	60,993,763	---	60,864,177	64,540,195
Over/under required (\$)	---	79,442	---	-426,745	34,156
Over/under required (%)	---	0.1	---	-0.7	0.1
<p>*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.</p> <p>**Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.</p> <p>Sources: FY10, FY11 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website. Data retrieved on September 26, 2012.</p>					

Findings

Student Achievement

Although Leominster trailed the state in its proficiency rates in ELA and in mathematics in 2011, the gaps between the district and the state have narrowed in both subject areas since 2009. In certain grades, especially grade 4, there have been large gains in the share of students scoring proficient or higher, and the grade 4 students in Leominster outperformed their peers statewide in ELA and mathematics in 2011. While the performance of students from low-income families in ELA and mathematics has been as strong as or stronger than that of their peers statewide, other subgroups, such as students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), trail the proficiency rates of their statewide peers. In addition, the proficiency rates and trends vary between different schools in the district.

The proportion of students in Leominster scoring Proficient or Advanced in both ELA and mathematics trails the rates of their peers statewide (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C). In 2012, 63 percent of Leominster students scored Proficient or Advanced in ELA, compared with 69 percent of students statewide. In mathematics, 58 percent of students scored Proficient or Advanced, compared with 59 percent of students statewide. In both ELA and mathematics, the gap with the state has narrowed since 2009; in ELA, the gap narrowed from 9 percentage points to 6 percentage points between 2009 and 2012, and in mathematics, it narrowed from 4 percentage points to 1 percentage point during the same period.

Gains in Proficiency

In certain grades within the district, there were large gains in the rates of proficiency since 2009 (again, see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C). Notably, in grade 4, the share of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in ELA increased from 40 percent in 2009 to 54 percent in 2011. In 2011, grade 4 students in Leominster outperformed grade 4 students statewide by one percentage point, compared with a gap of 13 percentage points in 2009. There were similar gains in mathematics during this same period. The share of students scoring proficient or higher in math in grade 4 increased from 38 percent to 52 percent, with the Leominster students outperforming grade 4 students statewide in 2011 by 5 percentage points, while in 2009 there was a gap of 10 percentage points with the state proficiency rate.

Areas of Concern

Despite these pockets of strong performance, there are some areas of concern. The gaps with state proficiency rates are the largest in mathematics in middle school. In 2011, the gap in mathematics in grade 6 was 10 percentage points, and in grade 7, it was 13 percentage points. In grade 8, the gap in mathematics was 9 percentage points. In ELA, the biggest gap was 8 percentage points in grade 8.

Students from Low-Income Families

Among the subgroups of students (see Tables C3 and C4 in Appendix C), students from low-income families in the district performed strongly. They either matched or outperformed their peers statewide. In 2011, in both the district and the state, 49 percent of students from low-income families scored Proficient or Advanced in ELA. The proficiency rates for the district's students from low-income families in math have been higher than the state's since 2009 (for example, in 2011: 41 percent vs. 38 percent).

Students with Disabilities

In contrast, the performance of students with disabilities in the district was below state levels in ELA and math. The share of students with disabilities proficient in ELA fluctuated between 2007 (17 percent) and 2010 (10 percent). In 2011, although the rate climbed to 16 percent, it was still well below the state proficiency rate of 31 percent for students with disabilities. Low median student growth percentiles (SGPs) since 2008 (for example, 36.0 in 2011) suggest that this gap is unlikely to change much in the near future. Math proficiency for students with disabilities also fluctuated between 2007 (17 percent) and 2010 (12 percent), and again, although the rate increased in 2011 to 17 percent, it was below the state subgroup's proficiency level of 22 percent.

Of particular concern is the data that indicates that approximately 20 percent of the students with disabilities in the district are served in substantially separate settings. Forty-two and one-half percent of students with disabilities in the district participate in full-inclusion programs, compared with the state rate of fifty-seven percent. More students in the district are enrolled in partial-inclusion programs (36.8 percent) than their peers across the state (20.8 percent). (p. 106, Profiles) *The Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, April 2012, noted that "numerous studies of students across the country indicate that students with disabilities who spend more time with their typically developing peers outperform similar students who are educated in less integrated settings on measures of numerous social, academic and post-school success" (p. 8).

English Language Learners

There has also been a gap in proficiency between the district's English language learners (ELLs) and their statewide peers since 2009. The share of ELLs in the district scoring proficient or higher in ELA increased from 16 percent in 2009 to 18 percent in 2011. Over the same period, the proficiency rate of ELLs statewide increased from 19 percent to 23 percent; thus the gap between the district and the state increased from 3 percentage points to 5. In mathematics, the proficiency rate for Leominster's ELLs increased from 15 percent in 2009 to 19 percent in 2011 while the rate for ELLs statewide increased from 21 percent to 25 percent; thus the gap remained the same. In English language development, 56 percent of the district's ELLs were making progress in 2011, compared with 58 percent for their peers statewide.

The district's limited options for outreach and communication have a negative impact on the engagement of those students and parents whose first language is not English (see the first

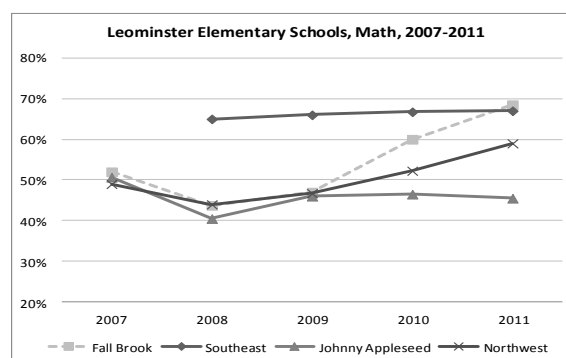
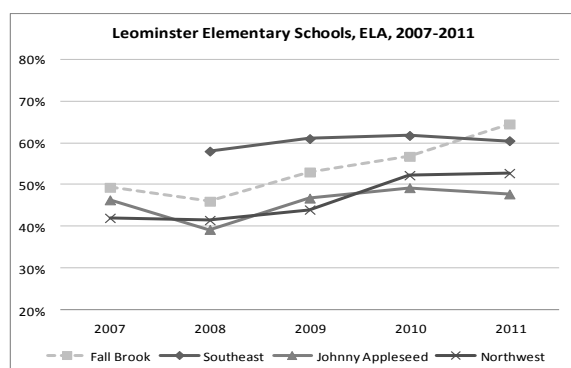
Student Support finding later in this report). In fact, the chronic absence rates of ELLs in Leominster in recent years have been higher than those of their peers statewide. In 2011, 22.6 percent of Leominster ELLs were chronically absent, compared with a state rate of 17.0 percent. In addition, ELLs continue to have higher percentages of in-school suspensions than their counterparts across the state. In 2011 the in-school suspension rate for ELLs was 4.6 percent, compared to the rate of 3.6 percent for their statewide peers.

In 2012, 362 ELLs were enrolled in the district, accounting for 5.9 percent of the district's enrollment. A higher share of ELLs in Leominster are from low-income families (89 percent), compared with ELLs statewide (78 percent). The proportion of ELLs enrolled in the district declined from 11.8 percent in 2007 to 6.3 percent in 2010 and 5.9 percent in 2011. The number of ELLs dropped from 725 students in 2007 to 362 students in 2012.

The Leominster ELL staff consists of a director of language acquisition and cultural integration, with one administrative assistant. While they are the only two district-level personnel to support schools, teachers, students, and parents, the team was told in interviews that both the director and the assistant are very accessible and responsive to the schools. However, issues of program quality, teacher support, and student achievement are compromised with this limited staffing.

Elementary Schools

There are variations in proficiency rates and trends among the four elementary schools in both ELA and mathematics, which the charts below illustrate. The patterns in ELA and mathematics are fairly similar. Fall Brook, the school with the highest percentage of ELLs, stands out as the school that has steadily increased proficiency rates. In 2011, it had the highest proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics. Fall Brook has been commended for its high growth. From 2008 to 2010, Southeast had the highest proficiency rates of the 4 elementary schools in ELA and mathematics, but the rate was essentially flat. In mathematics at the elementary level, proficiency rates at Fall Brook and Northwest are moving upward, while those at Southeast and Johnny Appleseed are relatively flat.



Secondary Schools (not shown in chart)

In ELA, the two middle schools, Sky View and Samoset, tracked one another closely and were relatively flat between 2007 and 2010, until 2011, when Sky View ticked upward slightly. Most notably, a dramatic increase in the ELA proficiency rate took place at Leominster Center for Technical Education Innovation where in 2007 the rate was 36 percent, but by 2011 was 78 percent.

Conclusion

The differences in proficiency rates and trends among the elementary schools and the marked improvement in ELA proficiency at the Leominster Center for Technical Education Innovation warrant a closer examination to determine whether the central office can help facilitate improvements at all schools. More generally, although the district has improved its proficiency rates and narrowed the gaps between the performance of its students and the state's, the gains are uneven. There are grades where Leominster has caught up with state performance and grades where the gap is either large (for example, in grades 6 and 7) or has grown since 2009 (for example, in grades 5 and 8). See Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C. The proficiency rates and the gap with statewide proficiency in middle-school mathematics are an area of concern. In addition, the proficiency rates of students with disabilities in Leominster, combined with low or moderate growth rates, are also worthy of further attention—as are the proficiency rates and chronic absence and in-school suspension rates of English language learners.

Leadership and Governance

The high turnover of central-office and school-level administrators in the Leominster Public Schools in recent years and the absence of a shared mission and collaborative vision for the district have resulted in: uncertainty about roles and responsibilities and confusion, anxiety, and issues of trust, and each school operating independently rather than as part of a system.

Interviews, ESE data, and documentation provided to the review team presented a chronology of turnover in both the central office and the schools.

Leadership Turnover

The current superintendent, who was appointed to his position in the spring of 2011, is Leominster's fourth superintendent in less than 10 years. He was preceded by a one-year interim superintendent who followed a superintendent with a tenure of four years in the district. Three principals were new to the district in 2009 and two additional principals were new in 2010. On the opening day of the 2011–2012 school year, the new superintendent introduced an additional eight new administrators, including principals at both middle schools, an assistant principal at one of the middle schools, a director of the Center for Technical Education Innovation (CTE), an assistant principal for early childhood, an administrator for pupil personnel services, and two

special education coordinators. After the new superintendent took office, the business administrator and the deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction resigned.

The high turnover is seen by at least some members of the school committee as routine. The superintendent describes the turnover as natural attrition, in which well-qualified administrators move on to nearby communities. The superintendent and an administrator state that it is difficult to attract and retain good administrator candidates because of the perception of Leominster as a low-achieving district.

Central Office Restructuring

After his arrival, the superintendent, a former school business official, determined that there was a need to reorganize the business office and moved to replace the departing business manager. The city's finance officers and the school committee supported his assessment.

Having unsuccessfully conducted a series of interviews for the business manager position, at the time of the review the superintendent intended to make use of an interim business official for the 2012–2013 school year. He also intended to restructure the office of the former deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction, but he had yet to determine the structure of that reorganization. According to interviewees, the decision not to immediately put interim administrators in place following the departure of the business administrator and the deputy superintendent exacerbated the confusion and uncertainty brought about by the high turnover in the district.

Initial uncertainty about Roles and Responsibilities

Insufficient clarity about the new roles and responsibilities in light of turnover and restructuring caused some anxiety among staff and raised concerns about leadership in curriculum development and assessment. As roles shifted, a new evaluation protocol was being put in place. Concerns were discussed about the development of a new supervision and evaluation protocol to align with the state's new Educator Evaluation system, which the district must implement during the 2012-2013 school year as a Race to the Top district.

Issues of Trust Following Turnover

The superintendent recognized that the frequent changes in administrative staff can create an atmosphere in which administrators are seen as placeholders, reducing urgency about putting into practice a particular administrator's plans. The superintendent indicated a need to increase the sense of urgency around making final organizational changes in curriculum and pupil personnel services. He hoped to have it happen over the summer.

The superintendent and principals noted issues of trust in the district. Some principals ascribed the problem to the number of superintendents and their differing approaches. Others said that the issue was not just the change in superintendents, but also in assistant superintendents and principals. Principals noted that the district has experienced "lots of changes in leadership" and that "trust grows over time."

A relatively new principal said that at a staff meeting a faculty member began a question by asking “Do you imagine in your tenure here ...?” He said that his staff thinks of him as someone who will depart. There was agreement when principals made the following comments: “We don’t see trust around the leadership table. There are times when people have different philosophies...” “Maybe a lack of trust comes from fear of the unknown,” and “Tough budget times bring anxieties. I sometimes feel that there is competition around a limited amount of money.” At the same time, there was agreement that with a new superintendent in place, administrators are “ready to move forward.”

Absence of a District Improvement Plan to Keep the District’s Focus on Moving Forward

The district does not have a long-range Strategic Plan or a District Improvement Plan. A review of School Improvement Plans shows that there is no uniform template for the plans. And the goals for each school are unique and do not demonstrate any connection to district goals; nor do they reference any districtwide vision or mission. Without a long-range district Strategic Plan, without a District Improvement Plan, and without trust, people move in their own directions.

Members of the Leominster Education Association (LEA) executive board said that they would like to “stay the course for a while.” They said that without consistency in administration, there is no stability in the district. “With each new administration comes a new agenda,” and that creates apprehension among the teachers.

Schools Operating Independently

The absence of an overriding district vision and mission and the high turnover of administrators at all levels have affected the district’s schools and staff in several ways. For example, the LEA executive board said that instability at the top has generated relatively independent schools. Principals have no “regular stability” to rely upon so they create their own agenda. According to the teachers’ association leaders, in the absence of direction at the district level, the LEA provides consistency, advocacy, and stability throughout the district. Teachers know they can go to the teachers’ association for advice.

Superintendent’s Entry Plan

The superintendent developed an Entry Plan for his entry into the district and presented it to the school committee for approval on September 1, 2011. He also presented this to the staff on the opening day of school in August 2011. The superintendent and teachers told the review team that teachers and school leaders had not been involved in developing the superintendent’s entry plan and saw it for the first time on the opening day of school in 2011. Only the superintendent and two members of his cabinet provided input into his plan until it was shown to the district leadership team shortly before its presentation to the school committee.

The Entry Plan includes the superintendent’s “six C’s of School Leadership: Collaboration, Celebration, Communication, Consistency, Creativity, and Culture.” As a part of the District Governance Support Project, the school committee developed a series of protocols and goals aligned with the superintendent’s goals. There are goals for the superintendent and goals for the

school committee; however, there is no district Strategic Plan that would articulate vision, mission, and goals for the district as a whole.

Throughout the district, the team was told that there are positive expectations for the superintendent, but staff and the community were “waiting to see where he wants the district to go.” For example, in an interview with town finance officials, the team was told, “The new superintendent is learning what the issues are and so far he seems to understand what he will need to do,” and “The new superintendent is trying to make the connection between the town and the schools.”

The review team told the superintendent that they had consistently been told that district staff were awaiting his direction and that, without that, teachers, principals, and other staff members were apprehensive. The superintendent said that he understood and that he would be in every school by the end of the 2012 school year. As for staff concerns about his direction, he assured the team that his Entry Plan communicated his direction.

Conclusion

At the time of the review there were no plans or discussions about how to address and reduce the high turnover of administrative staff in the Leominster Public Schools. Despite the high turnover in administration, the confusion and anxiety among the staff, and the fact that the Leominster Public Schools remained a Level 3 school district, there seemed to be little sense of urgency around developing a strong, long-term Strategic Plan with the active and meaningful involvement of teachers, administrators, members of the school committee, town officials, and community and parent representatives.

A strong mission statement commits the Leominster Public Schools to high achievement for all students. Communication about the budget by the school committee and administration is not clearly enough aligned to that mission statement in ways that bridge the gap between the administration’s understanding of adequate resources for teaching and learning and the understanding of principals, curriculum directors, and teachers.

The mission statement for the Leominster Public Schools, as adopted by the school committee, reads, *“The Leominster Public School System stands committed to challenging all of its students to strive for academic excellence within a secure, caring, respectful and student centered environment.”*

The primary advocates for the students, staff, and schools in any school district are the school committee and the school administration. Other than parents, only the school committee, superintendent of schools, and other administrators are charged by their offices with being vocal advocates in support of high achievement for all students and for the resources needed to attain and maintain that high level of achievement.

Leominster’s Fall Brook Elementary School, a Level 2 school in 2011, was commended for high growth and improved proficiency rates in 2010–2011, and the Center for Technical Education Innovation was a Level 1 school in 2011. However, at the time of the review, Leominster

remained a Level 3 school district because 3 of its schools were in the bottom 20 percent of the schools in the state in the Massachusetts accountability system.

Expectations for Student Achievement

The Leominster Public Schools do not have a consistent and explicit message from the school committee and administration that high achievement for every student is the priority of the district. For example, the minutes of the special school committee meeting of December 10, 2011, demonstrate inconsistent messages given by the school committee and administration about expectations for student achievement and the district's support for meeting those expectations. In the section of the meeting labeled Superintendent's Evaluation, the minutes read, "*The budget has to tell the story that not every child wants to learn. The budget has to put dollars into these students who are disruptive and need extra help.*" A mission statement that asserts that the school committee is "committed to challenging all of its students to strive for academic excellence" is not well supported by the message that "not every child wants to learn." Later in the same meeting, under the heading "Goals for School Committee," the minutes read: "By law, the school committee sets the goals. The school committee sets the goals and then they are incorporated into the superintendent's strategy." One of the ten suggested goals was that "the district provides adequate resources to provide adequate potential." However, the review team found that budget advocacy was limited.

Limited budget advocacy

No consideration of the possibility of increased funding was discussed by school committee members during the review. .

When asked about the possibility of seeking an override for school operating expenses, school committee members said that the mayor would not allow it.⁴ Comments made by school committee members included: "This is a poor community. Things wouldn't pass. We are realists." and "It's not all about money. How would we spend the money if we have it?" We are a net-school spending district. We don't have a budget above and beyond." "We are always trying to shift things around. Not just adding, adding." "We have always been lean, doing the best we can with what we have." In fact, the phrase "...we do the best we can with what we have..." was spoken in many interviews conducted by the review team, including interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators.

When reminded about circumstances such as classes with extremely large enrollments, the need for administrators to supervise and evaluate staff, the need for adequate instructional technology, and the recent drastic reduction in instructional coaches⁵, school committee members responded that they did understand the need for more resources for the schools. One school committee member told the review team that the school committee "wants kids to have what is important if

⁴ According to Department of Revenue data, from fiscal year 1983 to the present the Leominster school committee has not sponsored an operational budget override.

⁵ According to ESE data, the number of instructional coaches decreased from 11.0 in 2010 to 1.0 in 2011.

someone can show us a way to make that happen.” Another member said: “We don’t know what we need. We need to find out what we need. We don’t know what we don’t know.”

The superintendent told the review team he has a good working relationship with the mayor and that there is good support for schools. He reminded the team that the municipality only provides required net school spending and “We can work with what we are given.”

The superintendent reported that the zero-based budget led to new programs and suggested staffing needs. He said that class sizes were good and, because schools are to capacity, he might purchase the modular classroom units being used during construction at the high school and move them to elementary schools to provide additional space. He admitted that principals are requesting teachers but said he thinks staffing is “at the level we need it at the schools.” He agreed that the Leominster Public Schools do not have sufficient staff at the district level to provide support; however, he believes that there are enough administrative staff in the schools. In fact, he said that he might work to “get some administrative layers out of there.”

Although the budget process used in 2011–2012 by the superintendent to generate the next fiscal year’s budget, which was characterized as “zero-based budgeting,” was comprehensive and transparent (see the second Finance and Asset Management finding), the superintendent’s fiscal year 2013 budget presentation to the school committee in March 2012 was based on the assumption that staffing levels and classroom resources were adequate to provide quality educational services to the children.

Contrasting Views of Students’ Educational Needs

However, teachers and parents raised concerns in interviews with the review team, including the following:

- *The New England Association of Schools and Colleges Accreditation Report*, dated April 15, 2011, recommended that Leominster High School “reduce class sizes to support instruction that is more personalized, rigorous, and differentiated.”
- During fiscal year 2012 the Sky View Middle School employed 2 guidance counselors for 901 students, an average caseload of 450 students per counselor. The American School Counselor Association’s recommended ratio is a caseload of 250 pupils per counselor.
- The school district’s instructional leadership capacity was reduced significantly, from 51.6 in fiscal year 2010 to 39.4 (24 percent) in fiscal year 2011. The virtual elimination of instructional coaches has limited direct instructional support to classroom teachers.⁶
- Expenditures for instructional supplies and materials were reduced by close to 25 percent from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2011.

⁶ See previous footnote.

- Middle-school teachers reported physical education classes with more than 40 students and one with 55 students. There was also a report of middle-school Spanish classes with enrollments of well over 30 students.

There is a disparity between the needs of the schools as the district leadership understands them and as they are articulated by principals, curriculum directors, teachers, and parents. Curriculum coordinators said that they do not have enough staff to do all that needs to be done. They told the review team that the district needed an English language arts (ELA) curriculum director, a position that has not been filled for several years. They said that this need has come up regularly in leadership discussions. They also reported the need for the coaches whose positions had been cut. They told the review team that these and similar issues have come up many times but the response always is that it is a budget issue.

Elementary-school teachers gave similar reports. They said that there is support for mathematics but not necessarily for ELA. They indicated that they were unsure about who was in charge of ELA. And they said that the limited availability of administrators affected the quality of evaluations. When middle-school teachers were asked about the adequacy of instructional resources, they replied that in some cases class sizes exceeded 30 children.

Principals told the team that they need systems to support their roles. They reminded the team that they had previously lost academic coaches. They said that they have leeway to use the DSAC to help with their assessment teams. They said, “Every leader is guided by the data. We have new assessments and are learning how to interpret them.” They told the review team that they are conducting learning walks with DSAC help and are going to a collaborative coaching model. They told the team that they try to turn every loss into an opportunity.

Conclusion

Some perceive school committee members and the superintendent to be unaware of school needs. Teachers and administrators and the superintendent told the review team that the superintendent has not often been seen in schools and classrooms this year, and teachers told the reviewers that most staff would not recognize any of the school committee members. Without explicitly and consistently communicated expectations for teaching and learning, aligned to the budget, and strong advocacy from the school committee and the administration for a budget that clearly supports the school district’s efforts, the staff and public receive inconsistent messages about the district’s expectations and needs to ensure a high level of academic excellence for all Leominster’s students. This could have an impact on the district’s ability to create a climate in which there is a shared understanding and sense of mission.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district has limited capacity to help teachers improve their instruction. Weaknesses included unclear instructional objectives, low expectations for student performance, and a low incidence of effective teaching techniques to improve student proficiency.

Under current conditions, Leominster does not have sufficient capacity to help teachers to improve their instruction. According to ESE data, the district had 5 instructional coaches in 2009; these were increased to 11 by 2008 and diminished to 1 by 2011. In interviews, principals told the review team that with the loss of the coaches they and the assistant principals in their schools were primarily responsible for helping teachers improve their instruction. They added that because their schools were large and they had many other responsibilities, they were unable to provide consistent supervision and support for teachers. Teachers told the review team that they relied upon each other as resources. They described positive collegial relationships, but said that this informal network was not equivalent to the growth-promoting partnerships they had formed with some of the coaches. They said that certain coaches had modeled promising instructional practices in their classrooms and helped them to adopt these practices. Some coaches had deep knowledge of a discipline and teachers used them as resources in planning lessons.

Central-office administrators said that while the loss of the coaches had burdened the principals and diminished teacher support and supervision, the only way the district could have kept them was by reducing the number of teachers and increasing class sizes. They added that while the curriculum facilitators of mathematics and science and of ELA and social studies had coaching responsibilities, they were intended to supervise the coaches rather than to replace them. According to administrators, lesson study had been a valuable means of improving instruction, but the district was doing lesson study with “dramatically less frequency” without the leadership of the coaches.

Instructional Observations

The review team observed instruction in 73 district classrooms: 22 at the elementary level, 26 at the middle school level, 17 at the high school, and 8 at the Center for Technical Education Innovation (CTE). These included 14 ELA and 8 mathematics classes at the elementary level; 14 ELA, 7 mathematics, and 5 science classes at the middle school level; 7 ELA, 5 mathematics, 1 science, 3 social studies, and 1 foreign-language class at the high school; and 8 vocational classes at the CTE including auto repair, auto body repair, carpentry, plumbing, culinary arts, mechanical drawing, HVAC, and machine shop. Of the 73 classes 7 were ELL and 9 were special education. The observations averaged 20 minutes in length.

All review team members used ESE’s instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning to record their observations. The tool contains 35 characteristics within 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of assessments. Review team members are

asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

Classroom Climate

In all the elementary school and CTE classes observed by the review team and in 85 percent of the middle-school classes observed, students and teachers demonstrated positive and respectful relationships; however, such relationships were evident in only 76 percent of the high-school classes observed. Students tested the limits with inappropriate language and conduct in some high-school classes, but teachers were typically courteous and constructive in their interactions with them. In 95 percent of the elementary-level and 92 percent of the middle-school level classes observed by the review team, teachers made behavioral expectations, rules, and procedures explicit. In 95 percent of elementary-level and 81 percent of middle-school level classes observed, students complied with the expectations and rules and cooperated with the procedures. After reviewing expectations and procedures, many elementary and middle-school teachers in observed classes checked for understanding by asking students to restate or explain them in their own words. Teachers in some observed classes used strategies such as countdowns and hands-up to remind students of the expectations, and proximity and verbal re-direction to correct off-task behavior.

While all the elementary school and CTE classes observed by the review team had very high frequencies of these characteristics, behavioral expectations, class rules, and procedures were clearly communicated in only 47 percent of the classes observed at Leominster High School, and student compliance and cooperation were observed in only 59 percent of visited classes at the high school. For example, in one upper-level English class, students carried on private conversations while the teacher instructed and the teacher and several students were observed to be drinking coffee or tea during class. In another class, several students used iPods for personal correspondence or to listen to music during the teacher's presentation. Two students in this class began to argue and ignored the teacher's request to desist. In a mathematics class, students chatted among themselves as the teacher circulated to help individual students solve a set of problems assigned as class work.

Learning Objective

The review team found evidence of teachers posting or explicitly communicating a learning objective to their students expressed as a learning outcome that drives the lesson in only 50 percent or fewer of the classes observed at all levels. Although an objective was not always posted or referenced, lessons observed at the elementary-school level and the CTE were clearly purposeful and CTE students could articulate what skill they were working on and its relevance to their trade. At the middle-school level, teachers usually posted a description of an activity such as "write in your journals about a major character," rather than a learning outcome such as "describe a character using evidence from the text."

In the absence of posted objectives, the intended learning outcomes for certain lessons at the middle-school and high-school levels were not readily apparent to review team observers. For example, in one high-school class, several students used a vulgarity to express to the teacher

their view of the value of the work they were doing. In a middle-school class, students put their heads down on their desks as the teacher reviewed a homework assignment that many had apparently not completed. In another high-school class, two students slept and one was seated at the teacher's desk as the teacher haltingly gave directions for an activity.

Content Learning

While the content appeared to be appropriate to the grade level in 95 percent of the elementary-level classes observed by the review team, it seemed to be appropriate in only 77 percent of the middle-school level and 76 percent of the high-school level classes visited. Even though the level of content was relatively low at both the middle- and high-school levels, the review team found that teachers set appropriately high expectations for student learning in a content area in only 54 percent of classes observed at the middle-school level, and in 35 percent of the high-school level classes observed. For example, in a middle-school class students used a one-page summary of the life of an author to help construct a timeline, embellished with cartoons. In another middle-school class, students followed along in the text while listening to a taped chapter. The teacher paused the tape at intervals to pose literal comprehension questions such as "Who was the girl talking to before she left the general store?"

In a high-school foreign language class observed by the review team, students were struggling with the conjugation of a basic verb in preparation for the year-one final examination. In another class, students were completing a worksheet on the Gettysburg Address consisting of several short-answer questions including, "According to Lincoln, what do the American people have to do to make sure that U.S. soldiers who were killed at Gettysburg (and other battlefields) had not 'died in vain'?" In another high-school class, students spent the final 20 minutes doing homework, or nothing, while the teacher worked at his desk. In an ELL class, after students completed a quiz they were allowed to do puzzles or watch a movie.

Use of Class Time

In a high-level mathematics class, instructional time was lost because every transition resulted in a commotion. The pace was extremely slow in many high-school classes observed by the review team, diminishing student engagement. For example, in a biology class, the students were passive as the teacher—before introducing new content—reiterated at length and summarized information that they had apparently mastered.

Content Learning

Many lessons observed were not effectively developed or delivered using instructional strategies intended to promote cognitive growth and development.

The review team did not observe a high frequency of tiered or differentiated instruction in district classes observed at any level, except at the CTE where vocational instruction was competency based and highly individualized. At the CTE, students were working at different levels in each shop under the guidance of instructors who carefully tracked their skill acquisition and identified their instructional needs. Other than at the CTE, tiered or differentiated instruction was evident in fewer than 20 percent of classes observed at each level. Although students left

the classrooms to meet with interventionists and other teachers at the elementary- and middle-school levels, in most classrooms observed by the review team classroom teachers did not vary instructional methods, materials, expectations and outcomes to provide for individual differences.

Activation of Higher-Order Thinking

In fewer than 50 percent of the classes observed at each level, students were engaged in higher-order thinking, such as forming predictions, developing arguments and evaluating information; reflecting on their own thinking, progress, and approach; generating questions related to the goals of the lesson; using various means to represent their ideas and thinking; and inquiring, exploring and problem solving together in small groups or pairs. In contrast, in one elementary class observed by the review team, students in small groups constructed line plots showing the number of teeth lost by grade-level classmates during the year. The teacher rotated among the groups asking them to determine the range, mode, highest value, least high value, and outliers. The level of excitement was high as students discovered the meaning of the data. In a middle-school class, as a way of beginning a rich discussion of setting and tone, the teacher listed on the board the words students used to describe how events in the text made them feel. Approaches such as these, however, were uncommon.

Use of Student Assessments

Except in CTE classes where assessments were used routinely to measure vocational proficiency, the following characteristics about the use of student assessments were evident in fewer than 50 percent of the classes observed at each level: informal assessments aligned to the lesson goals to check for understanding or mastery; instructional adjustments based on on-the-spot or formal assessment; students receiving feedback that tells them where they are in relation to the learning goals; and students revising their work based on feedback.

- Team members observed that “at least one informal assessment aligned to the goals of the lesson is used to check for understanding” in only 25 percent of the K–12 classrooms visited (23 percent of the elementary classes, 27 percent of the middle school classrooms, 12 percent of the high school classes, and 50 percent of the CTE classrooms).
- Also, team observations indicated that the “teacher adjusts instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessment” in 23 percent of the K–12 classes visited (18 percent of the elementary-school level classrooms, 19 percent of the middle-school level classes, 18 percent of the high-school level classrooms, and 63 percent of the CTE classes).
- Further, team members observed that “students receive feedback that tells them where they are in relation to the learning goals” in 40 percent of the K–12 classrooms visited (41 percent of the elementary-school level classes, 38 percent of the middle-school level classrooms, 35 percent of the high-school level classes, and 50 percent of the CTE classrooms).
- Finally, students were observed to “revise their work based on feedback” in 36 percent of the classrooms observed overall (18 percent of the classrooms observed at the

elementary-school level, 42 percent of the classes visited at the middle-school level, 35 percent of the classrooms observed at the high-school level, and 63 percent of the CTE classes).

In one observed class in which the teacher did check for understanding, she asked students to show thumbs up, down, or sideways to indicate whether they understood, did not understand, or were unsure of how to write multiplication and addition sentences. Another teacher asked students to hold up cards on which they had written their solution to a problem and re-taught the concept after scanning students' responses. In another class, the teacher told the students to turn to each other and say what they found "hardest and easiest" about writing a journal reflection. She then requested that they share their responses with the whole class and based the group lesson on the most commonly expressed needs. More typically, however, teachers in observed classrooms taught presumptively, without explicitly and regularly checking for student understanding.

Conclusion

According to data collected from classrooms observations in Leominster, although the classroom climate and student/teacher relationships were conducive to teaching and learning, especially at the elementary- and middle-school levels and at the CTE, instruction was not always clearly purposeful. The expectations for student learning were relatively high at the elementary level, moderate at the middle-school level, and particularly low at the high school. There was little promotion of such higher-order thinking skills as evaluation, analysis, and synthesis throughout the district. The expectations for student learning were not consistently high and the quality of the instruction observed by the review team at all levels did not have sufficient rigor to support improved student achievement. With limited support for teachers to improve practice, the necessary work of continuously improving instructional practice to meet student needs is too often unattended.

Leominster does not have a fully documented curriculum in all core subject areas that is aligned vertically between grades, and horizontally across classrooms of the same grade level, and across sections of the same course. Although the district has a process for curriculum development and renewal, the loss of key central office personnel has jeopardized effective implementation.

Leominster's curriculum is most fully documented in mathematics and least fully documented in social studies. Curricula are the most fully documented at the high school and CTE and least fully documented at the elementary level. According to administrators, the district's Math/Science Team developed a three-year plan for research, interpretation, and integration of the K–12 Common Core mathematics standards. As part of this project, the district developed a curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 based on the strands and standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the Common Core. The review team found that this curriculum contained the following elements: domain, standard, standard in student friendly language, explanations and examples, quarter to be taught, and connections to curriculum

products and resources. The district's mathematics assessments were not incorporated or referenced in the curriculum and there were no instructional strategies.

High school mathematics, English, science, and social studies courses are described generally in the program of studies and in greater detail in curriculum documents consisting of the following elements: standard, content, month, skills/objectives, assessments, and activities/strategies. As currently designed, the curricula do not have resources. The review team found that the CTE has a detailed and complete curriculum for each trade consisting of standards, skills, content, quarter assessments, methodologies, and resources. Leominster has also developed a well-documented writing curriculum for grades 9 through 12 for both the high school and CTE; it consists of standards, content, skills/objectives, assessments, and activities/strategies.

Math Curriculum

Administrators told the review team that the absence of a core program at the middle-school level had compromised vertical articulation of the mathematics curriculum, especially at the junctures between grades 5 and 6 and grades 8 and 9. They said that because teachers were not using a common program there was little consistency in how the mathematics standards were being addressed from class to class and school to school. Additionally, because teachers were using a variety of materials instead of a common program, it was a challenge to select appropriate supplementary materials for at-risk students. Leominster is using Investigations in Number, Data and Space as its core mathematics program in kindergarten through grade 5. Administrators and teachers told the review team that the district's Math/Science Team was conducting a comprehensive review of middle-school mathematics programs and would recommend a core program by the close of the 2011–2012 school year. The 2012–2013 budget includes a provision for purchasing the program selected.

ELA Curriculum

The English language arts (ELA) curriculum in kindergarten through grade 8 consists of documents that vary in content, format, and completeness. Documents developed in 2008 for kindergarten through grade 5 contain the following elements: strand, grade, standard, standard in student friendly language, vocabulary, concept/skills, big ideas/essential questions, Bloom's taxonomy, assessments, and curriculum resources. The documents do not have instructional strategies and timelines for addressing the standards. There is a separate district-developed pacing guide for its K–5 core literacy program, Harcourt Trophies; however, the review team found that interventions and supplements such as Foundations and Lexia were not incorporated into the pacing guide, jeopardizing the consistency and continuity of programs and services for at-risk students.

The review team examined drafts of the grades 6 through 8 ELA curriculum document. The literacy aspect consists of genre study and the template contains the following elements: Massachusetts and Common Core standard, genre theme (fable and myth, poetry, editorial, and biographical sketch), mentor text, monthly timeline, and teacher references. The district is also working on a written-language curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 consisting of the following elements: types of writing, writing components, conventions/grammar skills, steps in

writing process, content areas, strategies/tools, and assessments. Both the ELA and the written-language curricula are being developed.

Science Curriculum

The science curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 consists of the following elements: grade, standard, standard in student friendly language, vocabulary, concepts/skills, and big ideas/essential questions. As currently designed, this curriculum does not have timelines for addressing the standards, resources, and instructional strategies.

Social Studies Curriculum

The social studies curriculum for kindergarten through grade 5 is largely undocumented. The grades 6 through 8 social studies curriculum consists of the following elements: standard, standard in student friendly language, vocabulary, concepts/skills, big ideas/essential questions, Bloom's taxonomy, and assessments. As currently designed, the curriculum does not have resources and instructional strategies.

Curriculum Development and Review

Leominster has a cyclical process for curriculum development and renewal, but does not have sufficient administrative personnel to implement it effectively, especially in ELA and social studies. According to administrators and the organizational chart, the curriculum leadership team consists of the deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction, assisted by two subordinate administrators: one for mathematics and science and the other for ELA and social studies. According to the chart, a facilitator assists each administrator: one for mathematics and science, and the other for ELA and social studies. The deputy superintendency was vacated shortly before the review team's visit. When the incumbent succeeded to the deputy superintendency in 2007–2008, the administrator for ELA and social studies position was not filled. The district retained the position on the organizational chart in hopes of restoring it.

Although the vacancy in the deputy superintendency was too recent to have had an effect, almost everyone interviewed by the review team said that this position was necessary and should be filled by a qualified candidate. According to the job description, the deputy superintendent's role includes "horizontal and vertical continuity and articulation of the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum," "overseeing the preparation review and issuance of curriculum guides," and "directing the administration and coordination of the school system's educational programs." According to interviewees, the deputy superintendent coordinated the district's annual, cyclical process of curriculum review based on an analysis of student achievement data from multiple sources. Interviewees said that the deputy superintendent organized and guided the curriculum review committees composed of teacher representatives and principals. Meeting during the summer and outside of the school day, these committees assessed the adequacy of the curriculum and recommended changes in the sequence or emphasis of the standards by discipline and grade level in order to improve student achievement. Interviewees said that they believed that the ongoing review and revision of the curriculum had resulted in growth in the aggregate on the MCAS tests.

Conclusion

Many interviewees said that the loss of the position of administrator for ELA and social studies had hindered curriculum development and revision in both domains. According to the job description, the role includes “coordination, development, implementation and on-going assessment and revision of the kindergarten through grade 12 English language arts and social studies curricula,” and “assuring consistency in the development of the English language arts and social studies programs across grade levels in all elementary and middle schools and within the high school.” Based on an examination by the review team, the ELA curriculum is incomplete, especially at the middle-school level, and the social studies curriculum is undocumented at the elementary-school level and missing key components at the middle- and high-school levels.

Leominster does not have a fully documented curriculum in all core subject areas and has not put in place key personnel to lead curriculum development and renewal. Under current conditions, it is difficult to ensure that all Leominster students are receiving standards-based instruction at all grade levels in all core subject areas. A fully elaborated and documented curriculum is foundational to improving proficiency rates, interpreting the results of student and programmatic assessments, holding teachers accountable for teaching and learning, and identifying professional development needs.

Assessment

The district has in place in ELA and mathematics some of the elements of an effective assessment system. However, the system needs further development and greater support.

Data Collection and Dissemination

The key assessment in the district is the state’s MCAS tests. They measure student mastery of the objectives in the state frameworks, specifically in ELA, math, and science. To ensure that the district is successfully addressing what the state requires that students know and be able to do, the district has implemented several formal assessments.

The elements of an effective assessment system are strongest in the math content area. There the district has chosen and regularly reviews its selection of the power standards to be addressed through classroom instruction. Then to measure students’ mastery of the power standards, the district collects data by administering Galileo assessments in grades 1–8 5 times a year (a pre-test, a post-test, and three administrations during the school year). At the high school, Galileo benchmark assessments are administered at the close of each quarter in courses such as Algebra 1, Advanced Algebra 1, Honors Algebra 2, Geometry, and Honors Geometry. In the case of the Galileo assessments, given 5 times a year in grades 1–8, this data is collected regularly enough to be used formatively to inform teachers as to how their instruction needs to be modified. The high-school quarterly assessments, because they measure students’ learning over a previous quarter, appear to be summative in nature.

The Galileo is administered online and results are immediately available to both teachers and students. The school principal and the district curriculum office also have immediate access to the results. Dissemination of math results to the appropriate staff members is immediate.

Teachers in interviews and focus groups reported that there are formative and summative assessments beyond the formal system described above. At the elementary level, however, teachers were somewhat dismissive of the Investigations unit tests and said that they do not use them consistently. At the middle-school level, administrators and teachers agreed that the math program needs attention and staff there were close to making a final decision on a new math program. In this developing situation, unit assessments for an approved math program are not in place.

Also, teachers agreed that there are some teacher-developed formative assessments in place in math, but these are not common across classrooms. Rather they are specific to individual teachers. Also, teachers reported using a number of informal strategies to check daily on how successful a lesson has been. However, the 73 classroom observations done by the review team did not support this assertion.

- Team members observed that “at least one informal assessment aligned to the goals of the lesson is used to check for understanding” in only 25 percent of the K–12 classrooms visited (23 percent of the elementary classes, 27 percent of the middle school classrooms, 12 percent of the high school classes, and 50 percent of the CTE classrooms).
- Also, team observations indicated that the “teacher adjusts instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessment” in 23 percent of the K–12 classes visited (18 percent of the elementary-school level classrooms, 19 percent of the middle-school level classes, 18 percent of the high-school level classrooms, and 63 percent of the CTE classes).
- Further, team members observed that “students receive feedback that tells them where they are in relation to the learning goals” in 40 percent of the K–12 classrooms visited (41 percent of the elementary-school level classes, 38 percent of the middle-school level classrooms, 35 percent of the high-school level classes, and 50 percent of the CTE classrooms).
- Finally, students were observed to “revise their work based on feedback” in 36 percent of the classrooms observed overall (18 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary-school level, 42 percent of the classes visited at the middle-school level, 35 percent of the classrooms observed at the high-school level, and 63 percent of the CTE classes).

In ELA, teachers administer the Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) 3 times a year to students in kindergarten through grade 3 as a benchmark assessment of early literacy skills. The DIBELS is further used for progress monitoring for students in grades 4 and 5. Currently the district is administering Children’s Progress in kindergarten twice a year, and it is piloting the use of Primary Measures of Academic Progress (Primary MAP) twice a year in kindergarten. For ELA in grades 2–8, for the second year the district is administering the

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) twice a year because staff have determined that it correlates with the MCAS test better than the Galileo assessment that the district had originally been using. Finally, the district is in its second year of using the MAP for English in grades 9 and 10, again twice a year. While on a positive note by changing from the Galileo assessment to the MAP test in ELA the district has indicated its determination to find the most appropriate assessment, it has chosen to move to an instrument with limited application. With the exception of the DIBELS in kindergarten through grade 3, all formal assessments currently used in ELA are summative in nature because they are administered only twice a year. This means they provide teachers with a summary of student achievement over an extended but closed previous period of instruction. They are not formative because they are not administered frequently enough over short periods of time to provide teachers with data on needed instructional adjustments. In effect, the district does not have a formal system of formative assessments in place in ELA. However, although the ELA MAP results are summative, students, teachers, principals, and curriculum office staff do have immediate access to them.

As is the case in math, elementary teachers report sporadic use of the Harcourt unit assessments in ELA. Also, teacher-made formative assessments are in use in individual classrooms, but not in common use across grade levels. Again, ELA teachers reported daily use of assessment strategies to make on-the-spot determinations of whether students had understood a lesson so far. However, the evidence included above from the classroom observations by the review team indicates that those strategies were not solidly in place in observed classrooms.

The district has practices in place for collection and dissemination of its formal assessment results. However, particularly in ELA, the data available is not formative. There is less evidence of teacher made or daily informal formative assessment practices.

Data-Based Decision-Making

Following this rapid dissemination of formal assessment results, the district has a protocol in place for analysis of the data. A team consisting of a district curriculum staff member, the school principal, and the grade-level teachers meets for a debrief session during which results are analyzed and decisions made about students' instructional needs and levels. In math, these decisions are made based on formative data. However, in ELA infrequently administered summative assessments are used for this purpose. The students are, as one district staff member said "tiered." This means that those in need of re-teaching have been identified. During interviews teachers did not indicate that the data was used to adjust ongoing instruction for the class as a whole, another possible area for instructional decisions.

At the elementary-school, middle-school, and high-school levels, the schedule offers some opportunities for students with specific instructional needs to receive targeted instruction beyond the classroom. At the elementary-school level, this instruction is called "re-teach." At Samoset middle school, students, based on determined need in ELA and math, are assigned to a writing workshop (ELA) or to math or tech ed (math). Unfortunately, teachers in these middle-school workshops "are not necessarily certified in that area". At Skyview middle school, based on determined need in ELA, students are assigned to a reading and writing workshop. In math at

Skyview, students remain with the classroom teacher to be “re-taught.” Retesting follows re-teaching and workshops until each student achieves 80 percent on the Galileo assessment. However, the classroom observations by the review team indicated little evidence of re-teaching. The review team observed “students participating in different or tiered activities” in only 19 percent of the classes visited at the middle-school level. At the high-school level, there is “literacy re-teach” in ELA, but not a similar opportunity in math.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why the district’s limited use of formative assessments is not having a major impact.

- These assessments can only be effective if the instruction that results successfully addresses the student needs identified. However, the review team’s observations of classroom instruction indicated serious issues with instruction.
- With the elimination of the coaches, instructional support for teachers falls to the principals and their assistants. The fine-tuned teaching that should follow the careful analysis of the assessment results requires careful monitoring and supervision. Staffing for this purpose is limited.
- The formal assessments in ELA, the MAP tests, are implemented only twice a year and cannot provide a teacher with regular student achievement data at the point of need.

The district’s assessment system is compromised by the limitations of some of the assessments, by the ineffective instruction in the district, and by the limited availability of support for teachers.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The performance evaluation processes for licensed staff in effect in Leominster at the time of the review did not reflect school committee policy, did not encourage professional growth, and limited the district’s efforts to reach high and rigorous standards of instructional excellence as described in the district’s mission statement.

As noted above in the second Leadership and Governance finding, the Leominster school committee’s mission statement reads as follows: “*The Leominster Public School System stands committed to challenging all of its students to strive for academic excellence within a secure, caring, respectful and student centered environment.*” The vehicles to monitor the delivery of programs that promote the academic excellence cited in the mission statement are the approved evaluation systems that are used to insure high and rigorous instructional and supervisory performance standards that promote a culture of academic excellence. To address this obligation, the district has developed three separate performance evaluation systems for licensed staff of the Leominster Public Schools: the Unit A evaluation system, the Unit B evaluation system, and the principal evaluation system for principals and central office administrators.

The team reviewed 40 randomly selected Unit A personnel folders, as well as those for all principal and central office administrators under individual contracts. Each personnel file contained a history of the employee's performance evaluations. In addition, the team reviewed school committee policies (G series) and relevant articles in the Unit A and Unit B collective bargaining agreements that contain guidelines for evaluation of licensed staff. Finally, the team interviewed the district's human resources director.

The approved Unit A and Unit B evaluation forms and procedures are contained in the respective employment agreements. However, there is no administrative handbook in use as an internal regulation to provide guidance to evaluators about what an effective evaluation should include. This has an impact on the district's ability to maintain high levels of consistent supervisory practice, especially when a turnover of administrators takes place. The district outsources its evaluator training to an external consultant, Research for Better Teaching.

Unit A Teacher Evaluations

State regulations governing teacher evaluation protocols under 603 CMR 35.00 are a minimum set of guidelines. School committees may add additional requirements as they see fit. The minimum state regulations are met in the district. Unit A evaluations are timely, in that they are conducted annually for teachers without professional status and biennially for professional status teachers. Also, the Principles of Effective Teaching⁷ appear in district publications and contracts.

The Leominster school committee has had in effect since 2006 a set of policies that contain requirements beyond the state requirements. These policies are not fully reflected in the evaluation documents reviewed by the team. School committee policy GCO requires a self-evaluation. No teacher evaluation document reviewed by the team contained or referred to a self-evaluation, despite school committee policy. That same policy requires that "interpretation of the information gained in the evaluation process in terms of the instructional program" be included in the process. Unit A evaluation documents reviewed by the team were not systematically connected to the impact on the instructional program. No interview or document reviewed by the team suggested any link between performance evaluation documents and districtwide instructional practice. Finally, only one school altered the district evaluation form to connect a current evaluation with a previous one, a practice also required by school committee policy GCO.

⁷ The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect through the 2010-2011 year. On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. See the School/District Profiles on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2.aspx?linkid=25&orgcode=02840000&fycode=2011&orgtypecode=5&>.

Policy GCO also states: The evaluation process will include “the application of the information gained to the planning of staff development and in-service training activities, which are designed to improve instruction and increase teacher competence.” Of the 40 evaluation documents reviewed by the team, only 1 suggested that a Unit A member enroll in district-based professional development as a means of improving her performance. No specific recommendations for professional development were found in Unit A evaluation documents.

Unit B Administrator Evaluations

Unit B administrator evaluations are covered under state regulation 603 CMR 35.00, school committee policy GCOC, and the Unit B contract. The Unit B contract evaluation process is not consistent with state regulations and the school committee policy that govern administrator evaluations. The contract requires an evaluation of a probationary administrator annually, and every other year thereafter. However, the 603 CMR 35.00 regulation requires an annual evaluation for all administrators. Also, unit B evaluation forms do not contain a section for annual goals, despite a school committee policy requiring them. School committee policy GCOC requires that administrators set annual goals, but no Unit B evaluation documents reviewed by the team contained goals.

The Unit B contract has a required evaluation form that contains 7 areas of competency that are aligned with regulations at 603 CMR 35.00. Each competency has indicators. Each indicator has four ratings.⁸ Ninety-eight percent of Unit B performance ratings reviewed by the team were positive.

Evaluations for Principals and Central Office Administrators (Non-Unit B Administrators)

Evaluations of non-unit B administrators contained annual goals, as required by school committee policy GCOC. And some principal evaluations reflected progress on School Improvement Plan goals. It was the only evidence in official files that tied annual evaluations to any references to teaching and learning.

Effect of Turnover in Superintendents on Evaluation

There is evidence in the personnel files that the development and the evaluation of year-to-year goals for central office personnel and principals have been affected by the recent turnover of superintendents. Superintendents establish their own relationships with those who report to them directly. A new superintendent breaks the previous professional connection. A new superintendent with a different style starts the evaluation process anew. This is an inefficient model of long-term performance monitoring; important interactive history about goals is lost.

ESE Educator Evaluation Model

Also, the district has not yet begun planning to align its evaluation system with the ESE educator evaluation model voted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2011.⁹ These regulations require that— in order to implement these new regulations by the beginning of

⁸ Highly Competent/Proficient/Needs Improvement/Not applicable.

⁹ See footnote 7 above.

the 2013–2014 school year—collective bargaining language be in place by September 1, 2012, three months after the ESE onsite visit that generated this report. In interviews the team was told that the Massachusetts Teachers Association has already briefed district Unit A and B personnel. But the district has not yet begun to plan its required process of implementation.

The inconsistency of the district’s performance evaluation protocols with school committee policies and state regulations weakens the district’s efforts to meet high and rigorous standards of educational excellence as described in the district’s mission statement.

Although the district provides an array of professional development activities, they are not systematically linked for the purpose of improving teaching and learning and the district does not have a professional development committee or plan. Its return on investment in terms of its effects on improved staff performance and student achievement is unclear.

According to ESE data, in 2011 the district spent \$945,000 for professional development. Of this amount, approximately one-third came from district funds and two-thirds from grants. Under guidelines outlined in the Unit A bargaining agreement, \$22,500 is allocated to Unit A tuition reimbursements. This money is established by the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement for the purpose of “compensating teachers for the cost of taking graduate courses necessary for their professional development plans.” The district does not have a coordinating administrator who tracks professional development planning and assesses the effects of professional development on performance. Also, none of the evaluation documents read by the visiting team referred to specific professional development as a recommendation for improved performance.

Absence of a Districtwide Professional Development Committee and Plan

There is not an active districtwide professional development committee, although one is required by the collective bargaining agreement. The district does not have a professional development plan although one is required by school committee policy, but there are an adequate number of professional development days, half-days, and required after-school times in the district’s schedule. A document entitled District Professional Development Plan (2010–2013) is a guide to developing a professional development plan framework, not a stand-alone professional development plan. It is a thoughtful document, but is only a preamble to what should be a full-blown document that describes a districtwide professional development plan that captures all information related to professional development in one place and that should, according to the document, be updated annually. There was no such professional development plan in the array of documents provided to the team.

Professional Development in the District

The district has a number of professional development events, processes, and documents. There is an array of offerings influenced by grants and re-licensing requirements as well as authentic, but unconnected workshops and discussions around various topics that may or may not include improving teaching and learning. Various departments in the district or individual schools generate the documents about professional development. These documents, provided to the team as evidence of the characteristics of the district’s recent professional development history,

provide a mosaic of details rather than a systematic professional development plan developed under the framework outlined in the district's guide.

The professional development offered in the district cannot be described as a system. It is an array of offerings and events loosely connected by memos, schedules, and collective bargaining agreements, rather than a purposeful effort to systematically improve teaching and learning across the district. The effects of the professional development activities in the district are not systematically measured, although the district provided the review team with written materials that provided evidence of evaluations by participants of individual professional development events.

In addition, with the exception of School Improvement Plans and forms to apply for professional development financial support, the professional development documents provided to the team could not be traced to an author. It was not clear who wrote these documents or who was in charge of the professional development program in the district. From interviews it was determined that these documents may have originated in the office of the deputy superintendent who had recently left the district. Staff members who had previously reported directly to the deputy superintendent were said to be carrying on the work.

While there was written evidence that individual participants completed evaluation documents about the district-sponsored professional development events that they had attended, there was no evidence in any district documents that professional development was tied to improved performance in any individual's assignment.

Although the district has an array of professional development activities, the evaluation documents reviewed by the team did not contain any recommendation for an educator to participate in any workshop or other event to improve that educator's performance. According to evidence in documents reviewed by the team, the district treats evaluation and professional development activities as two independent processes. In addition, it does not measure the effects of professional development events by reference to student achievement or onsite follow-up monitoring of the effects of a professional development event on instructional performance.

Conclusion

As it plans strategies for improvement, connecting evaluations, professional development, and student outcome data will be a powerful one. Not to connect these three components and carefully measure the effects of professional development on student learning limits the district's efforts to move toward higher levels of achievement.

Student Support

The programs and services provided to students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) in the Leominster Public Schools have not supported the students in attaining substantially higher levels of proficiency over time. Proficiency rates for students with disabilities and ELLs in Leominster have been below state rates for those groups over the last several years.

The district has made progress in improving proficiency rates for students in the aggregate, especially in certain grades, as well as in improving student engagement. For example, the four-year graduation rate for all students has been higher than the state's rate since 2007; in 2011 it was 90.6 percent compared with a statewide rate of 83.4 percent. In 2011, the gap in proficiency between Leominster students and state students was eliminated in grade 4 ELA and mathematics and in grade 5 mathematics, and since 2007 the district has been narrowing the gaps with the state in ELA proficiency in grades 5 and 10. Several individual schools, including Fall Brook and Northwest elementary schools, have shown strong progress. At the same time, however, there have been persistent gaps between the proficiency rates of Leominster students with disabilities and ELLs and their peers statewide.

Students with Disabilities

The share of students with disabilities proficient in ELA fluctuated between 17 percent in 2007 to 10 percent in 2010. Although it increased in 2011 to 16 percent, it was still well below the state proficiency rate for students with disabilities of 31 percent. In a similar pattern, the share of students with disabilities showing proficiency in mathematics fluctuated between 17 percent in 2007 to 12 percent in 2010. Although, again, the rate increased to 17 percent in 2011, it was below the proficiency level for the state subgroup of 22 percent. The low or moderate growth rates in 2011 (median SGP in ELA: 36.0; in mathematics: 41.0) suggest that these gaps are unlikely to change much in the near future. Of particular note is the data that indicates that approximately 20 percent of the students with disabilities in the district are served in substantially separate settings. In 2011 45.7 percent of students with disabilities in the district participated in full-inclusion programs, compared with the state rate of 57.9 percent. A larger proportion of students in the district were enrolled in partial-inclusion programs in 2011 (34.4 percent) than of their peers across the state (20.1 percent). Although in looking at this issue, it did not control for severity of disability, *The Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (April 2012, page 8) noted that “numerous studies of students across the country indicate that students with disabilities who spend more time with their typically developing peers outperform similar students who are educated in less integrated settings on measures of numerous social, academic and post-school success.”

The thrust of the special education program expansions planned for fiscal year 2013 is to provide a K–12 in-district continuum for students with autism and for students with social/emotional/behavioral challenges. These new programs, when introduced, will increase the district's internal capacity to serve existing students. For example, the district requested funding

for an expansion of the autism program to serve students in grades 3–5 and grades 6–8. The autism program currently serves only students in kindergarten through grade 2.

English Language Learners

There has also been a gap in proficiency between the district's English language learners (ELLs) and their statewide peers since 2009. The share of ELLs in the district scoring proficient or higher in ELA increased from 16 percent in 2009 to 18 percent in 2011. Over the same period, the proficiency rate of ELLs statewide increased from 19 percent to 23 percent; thus the gap between the district and the state increased from three percentage points to five. In mathematics, the proficiency rate for Leominster's ELLs increased from 15 percent in 2009 to 19 percent in 2011 while the rate for ELLs statewide increased from 21 percent to 25 percent; thus the gap remained the same. In English language development, 56 percent of the district's ELLs were making progress in 2011, compared with 58 percent for their peers statewide. In addition, the chronic absence rates of ELLs in Leominster in recent years have been higher than those of their peers statewide. In 2011, 22.6 percent of Leominster ELLs were chronically absent, compared with a state rate of 17.0 percent. In 2012, 362 ELLs were enrolled in the district, accounting for 5.9 percent of the district's enrollment. A higher share of ELLs in Leominster are from low-income families (89 percent), compared with ELLs statewide (78 percent). The proportion of ELLs enrolled in the district declined from 11.8 percent in 2007 to 6.3 percent in 2010 and 5.9 percent in 2011. The number of ELLs dropped from 725 students in 2007 to 362 students in 2012.

The Leominster ELL staff consists of a director of language acquisition and cultural integration, with one administrative assistant. While they are the only two district-level ELL personnel to support schools, teachers, students, and parents, the team was told in interviews that both the director and the assistant are very accessible and responsive to the schools. However, issues of program quality, teacher support, and student achievement are compromised with this limited staffing.

Interviews and a review of both the Language Acquisition and Cultural Integration Program Handbook and the FY '12 New Teacher Handbook indicated that the district has made progress in addressing compliance and programmatic issues cited by the 2009–2010 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Coordinated Program Review¹⁰ (CPR) and the 2011 Title III: Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO)¹¹. Licensed ESL teachers now serve all ELLs instead of ESL tutors, as was formerly the case. ELLs are now grouped for instruction by language proficiency instead of by age. ESL materials have been purchased for every level and materials are available in the classrooms. District and school personnel define the ESL curriculum as a research-based, commercially prepared program recently purchased and available in all ESL classrooms. However, the district does not have an ESL curriculum document aligned to the curriculum frameworks and core district curriculum,

¹⁰ See the report at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2010/0093.pdf>

¹¹ See the report at http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/amao/amao_report.aspx?linkid=35&fycode=2011&orgtypecode=5&orgcode=01530000

with a scope and sequence, specific instructional materials, and curriculum maps available to guide the instruction. As a result, individual ESL teachers make curriculum implementation decisions without a blueprint.

Communication with Families

Because there are Spanish-speaking personnel at every school, the schools use that staff to provide translating and interpreting services for Spanish-speaking families. However, in interviews the review team was told that in some schools academic services are interrupted when staff is pulled from instructional responsibilities to interpret. Outreach and communication is to some extent limited with families with a home language other than Spanish. District written communication from the Language Acquisition and Cultural Integration Department is available only in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Interpreter and translator services for the low-incidence language groups, such as Hmong, are contracted out, or communications are provided in English only, as in the case for speakers of Twi. This limitation on the district's capacity to communicate with families in their home languages hinders schools from establishing a connection with the family after entry into the district and affects students' and families' engagement with the schools. Chronic absence rates for ELLs in the district (22.6 percent in 2011) in recent years have been higher than those of their peers in the state (17 percent in 2011).

Conclusion

Some aspects of the district's support and services may contribute to the fact that proficiency rates of students with disabilities and ELLs are below those of their peers statewide. Full-inclusion rates are below those of the state; a greater proportion of district students with disabilities learn in partial inclusion settings than of their peers across the state. Research indicates that the educational achievement of students with disabilities improves with exposure to the mainstream curriculum, though this may depend on the severity of the disabilities. Also, the district does not have an ESL curriculum document to guide its ESL teachers and has some limitations on its capacity to communicate with families of ELLs. This restricts the district's ability to work as partners with the parents of these students and may partially explain chronic absence rates for ELLs that are higher than those for their peers statewide.

The Leominster Public Schools do not provide comprehensive and coordinated districtwide supports; rather, varying supports are offered by different schools.

The district's proportion of students from low-income families jumped from 36.2 percent in 2010 to 43.9 percent in 2011, more than more likely, given the challenges created by their financial circumstances, to be at high risk of missing key K-12 benchmarks culminating in high school graduation a 7 percentage point gain, increasing the proportion of students who are. Through interviews with school and district personnel, the team identified the supports available for students who may be at risk. Every school has a Teacher Assistant Team (TAT) in place, with a stipend offered only for the high-school TAT members. The elementary-school and middle-school TAT teams meet voluntarily before, during, and after school. These TAT teams meet every week, discuss referred students, and determine specific interventions. It is unclear who serves as the coordinator of the elementary-school and middle-school teams and who becomes

the case manager for referred students. At the high school, one of the headmasters is the coordinator and manager.

There is a limited multi-tiered system to implement the proposed interventions from the TAT meetings, and the process and available supports vary from school to school. Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions consist of regular education accommodations that include guidance/counseling services, Title I tutoring in reading only, and re-teach or enrichment periods. The review team determined through interviews and focus groups that responsibility for the management and planning of the re-teach or enrichment periods falls to the classroom teacher.

The review team did not observe a high frequency of tiered or differentiated instruction in district classes at any level, except at the CTE where vocational instruction was competency based and highly individualized. Other than at the CTE, tiered or differentiated instruction was evident in fewer than 20 percent of classes at each level. In most observed classrooms, teachers did not vary instructional methods, material, expectations, or outcomes to provide for individual differences.

The current state of limited curriculum alignment in ELA and math, as described in the second Curriculum and Instruction finding in the report, compromises the consistency and continuity of programs and services for at-risk students. For example, interviewees said that because teachers were not using a common program at the middle-school level, there was little consistency in how math standards were being addressed from class to class and from school to school. Also, because teachers were using a variety of materials instead of a common program, it was a challenge to select supplementary math materials for at-risk students. Furthermore, the ELA curriculum pacing guides for the K-5 core literacy program, Harcourt Trophies, does not specify interventions and supplements such as Foundations and Lexia, again affecting the consistency and continuity of programs and services for at-risk students.

The need to have a comprehensive and coordinated social/emotional/behavioral program at the K-8 level and the need “to teach kids how to behave” emerged during interviews of school support staff. However, there is no comprehensive K-8 district program to develop and reinforce positive social skills and appropriate school behavior, as well as to provide school administration, faculty, staff, parents and students with a common language and approach to social and behavioral situations. Second Step, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), and Northwest Elementary School’s PAWS are programs used at various elementary schools, with bullying prevention addressed at all schools.

Extended-day programs and support exist only in the three schools with 21st Century after-school programs: Northwest Elementary, Johnny Appleseed Elementary, and Samoset Middle School. The 21st Century programs provide an extended-day opportunity for students from low-income families who need interventions and enrichments that will support and promote learning. Program specifics include free transportation; healthy snacks; safety, health and wellness discussions led once a week by a nurse; homework assistance; targeted academic assistance through various programs such as Lexia, Education City, and Fast Math; enrichment opportunities such as zumba, yoga, and art classes provided through community partnerships;

and other enrichment opportunities provided by school staff such as science units developed by Boston's Museum of Science, Reader's Theater, and math games. The review team was told in interviews that the district has not evaluated the impact that the three extended-day programs have had on improving student achievement for participating at-risk students. In general, research indicates the benefit of comprehensive and coordinated extended-day academic, sports, and enrichment opportunities in meeting the needs of at-risk students and keeping them engaged in school.

Currently, the district offers a limited number of support programs, with different schools having different programs and processes in place to identify and support students. The current state of alignment of both the ELA and math curricula contributes to inconsistency and absence of continuity in support programs and services. There is not a high frequency of tiered or differentiated instruction except at CTE; instruction, as observed by the review team, does not incorporate a variety of instructional methods, materials, expectations, and outcomes to provide for individual differences. And there is not a comprehensive and coordinated social/emotional/behavioral program at the K–8 level. The limited availability of programs and services prevents some students from achieving higher proficiency levels and encourages unnecessary referrals to special education.

Financial and Asset Management

The Leominster Public School District uses the Munis software purchase order and payroll system, which is incompatible with the city's accounting software. This results in needless duplication of effort for the school department's business office, and compromises the school district's ability to track, reconcile, and report data accurately and in real time.

The Leominster Public School District's inability to electronically link and reconcile accounts with accurate real time data from the city comptroller's office detracts from financial stability and accountability. In three separate interviews, staff reported that the Munis software system employed by the school department and the Harper Payroll System employed by the treasurer's office are incompatible, requiring the school staff to create crosswalks to interface with city hall. As a result of the electronic incompatibilities between the school department and the city comptroller's office, both offices must expend time and energy generating duplicate data for payroll and purchasing paperwork.

The payroll clerk is required to submit payroll warrants to the treasurer's office seven days in advance of payroll distribution dates. Once all school data has been entered into the Munis system, a hard-copy payroll warrant is sent to the treasurer's office for data entry into the city's Harper payroll system. As with the payroll warrant, the purchase order warrant is sent to the comptroller's office in hard copy. Once the school department has received the goods requested, the comptroller's office is notified and a check is processed.

Within the district's offices, reports are generated using Munis for both employee payroll and purchase order functions. For instance, the school district tracks all personnel using the Munis

Salary Software Module. This software allows the school district to accurately calculate negotiated salary increases, lane change information, and step increases. The business office staff encumbers all purchase orders and generates copies for the vendor, school or department, business office, and the comptroller's office.

The review team is concerned about the incompatibility of the financial reporting systems used by the school department and the city, and about the mistrust and ineffective communication that result at least in part from having two systems. For instance, when asked for the most current reconciliation statement, the district business office produced a copy of a hand-written ledger with a date of October 2011, and told the interviewer that this was what the school department received from the comptroller's office.

The superintendent expressed concern about the current checks and balance system employed by the city. His internal auditing procedures indicated a possible surplus in fiscal year 2012, and he decided that in the best interests of the school department he would have an independent audit conducted before the end of fiscal year 2012. At the time of the site visit, the superintendent had not received a management letter from the auditors. If there is indeed a surplus in fiscal year 2012, district leaders' credibility in the community would be eroded because nine instructional coaches were eliminated in fiscal year 2012.

When questioned by the review team, two of the city's finance officials said the city would not transition to Munis or any other system, indicating instead that practices in the schools' business office could be improved by anticipating purchases and establishing a systemwide inventory control or purchasing plan.

An electronically linked integrated reconciliation process between the city and the school department would allow the district to better track, manage, and allocate its resources including local appropriations, grants and revolving funds. Reluctance on the part of either party to pursue a solution to the incompatibility issue will result in further duplication of time and effort for financial personnel and the continuing inability on the part of the district to track encumbrances, expenditures, and balances accurately in a timely way.

The budget process used in 2011-2012 by the superintendent to generate the next fiscal year's budget, which was characterized as "zero-based budgeting," was comprehensive and transparent. However, the district's resources do not seem to be aligned with strategies to address the need for improved instruction.

In a memorandum dated November 29, 2011, the superintendent provided district administrators with an economic forecast based on national, state, and local economic trends, and raised the need for long-term thinking about staffing trends, programming, technology, capital planning, professional development, and maintenance of infrastructure. The memorandum addressed the budget's goals, including a focus on the instructional core, academic needs, and goals from his entry plan. A core element in the superintendent's entry plan was a zero-based approach to budget development.

The proposed budget reflected educational units (schools) and administrative units such as finance operations, technology, personnel, student transportation, special education, athletics, and facilities maintenance. It included a timeline from the submission of the individual budgets to the budget's approval. Administrators were responsible for creating budgets for their school or department; each was expected to provide the superintendent with pertinent demographic information, student performance data, and staffing needs. In February 2012, principals and department heads met individually with the superintendent to review and justify their budget submissions, and the superintendent then facilitated a meeting with his administrators to prioritize the needs of the district overall.

The superintendent's fiscal year 2013 budget presentation to the school committee in March 2012, conveyed to the review team by the superintendent, reflected the assumption that staffing levels and classroom resources were adequate to provide quality educational services to the children; however, teachers and parents raised concerns in interviews with the review team, including the following:

- The New England Association of Schools and Colleges Accreditation Report dated April 15, 2011 recommended that Leominster High School “reduce class sizes to support instruction that is more personalized, rigorous, and differentiated.”
- The school district's instructional leadership capacity was reduced significantly, from 51.6 in fiscal year 2010 to 39.4 (24 percent) in fiscal year 2011. The virtual elimination of instructional coaches has limited direct instructional support to classroom teachers.¹²
- Instructional supplies and materials expenditures were reduced by close to 25 percent from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2011.
- Middle school teachers reported that physical education classes with more than 40 students, and one with 55 students. There was also a report of middle-school Spanish classes with enrollments of well over 30 students.

The superintendent's zero-based budgeting approach for fiscal year 2013 did not seem to lead to changes in areas of concern to the review team, such as the reinstatement of instructional coaches and additional administrators. There was no evidence that substantiated that supervisory personnel and class size were given a high priority in the budgeting process.

Improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement depends on the superintendent and his staff developing a budget based on an accurate assessment of the school district's needs.

¹² According to ESE data, the number of instructional coaches decreased from 11.0 in 2010 to 1.0 in 2011.

Recommendations

The priorities identified by the review team at the time of its site visit and embodied in the recommendations that follow may no longer be current, and the district may have identified new priorities in line with its current needs.

Leadership and Governance

The superintendent, with the meaningful collaboration and participation of all stakeholders, should immediately develop a long-term strategic plan (LTSP) and an annual District Improvement Plan (DIP) to be shared throughout the district and community. The LTSP should include a vision statement and a mission statement and should serve as the basis for all decisions made by the school committee and district leadership.

The district does not have a long-range strategic plan or a District Improvement Plan. The superintendent developed an Entry Plan for his entry into the district and presented it to the school committee for approval on September 1, 2011. The superintendent and teachers told the review team that teachers and school leaders had not been involved in developing the superintendent's Entry Plan and saw it for the first time on the opening day of school in 2011. (Only the superintendent and two members of his cabinet provided input into his plan until it was shown to the district leadership team shortly before its presentation to the school committee.

The superintendent should make the process for the development of the LTSP and the DIP inclusive by involving administrators, teachers, parents, community members, local business people, and town officials. When all members of the school community have an opportunity to participate in the development of plans to improve student achievement, they develop a sense of ownership in the outcomes of their efforts.

In addition to assisting in the preparation of the LTSP and DIP, principals and their stakeholders should prepare School Improvement Plans (SIP) that are closely aligned with the DIP and LTSP. All SIPs should be prepared using a standard template. Principals should then provide regular updates on how their progress on the SIPs is furthering the district's goals.

The superintendent and the principals should develop a protocol to allow the superintendent and principals to jointly visit classrooms and observe progress against the district and school goals. The superintendent should then discuss the progress toward SIP goal attainment with teachers and should include summary references to SIP progress in the principals' evaluations.

With a collaboratively developed long-term strategic plan, a District Improvement Plan, and School Improvement Plans all in alignment, and progress on the plans' goals tracked and made part of evaluations, district and school personnel will all be pulling in the same direction, accelerating student achievement.

The superintendent should visit schools and classrooms regularly and develop a collaborative team involving all district administrators. These steps will help him better understand the conditions in the schools and the district's needs. He should then keep the school committee informed of these conditions and needs; together, they should keep the community at large informed and set high standards for student achievement.

It is important that the superintendent visit schools and classrooms regularly both to establish a connection with teachers and students and to see the reality of conditions within the schools. He must develop a collaborative team involving all district administrators. Administrative staff should be included in planning and decision-making if they are expected to understand the district's direction and help implement programs, and if the superintendent is to have the benefit of their input. The staff should see the superintendent in the schools and he should see the conditions under which they work. He can then pass on his understanding to the school committee (whose members may also find it helpful to visit schools and classrooms). Then the superintendent should be clear with the school committee and they should be clear with the community of Leominster about what should be done to enable all students to achieve.

The school committee and the superintendent have not had a practice of consistently setting high expectations for learning and teaching. If the school committee and superintendent, the top education officials in the community, say that "not every child wants to learn," some within the district, including staff, parents, and the students themselves, may begin to believe them; staff and students may then stop working toward greater achievement, and parents may stop encouraging their children. The superintendent and school committee must hold and communicate the expectation that all students can learn and that achievement can be improved for all; they must accept that it is the responsibility of the district leadership to remove the barriers to learning and put in place the conditions for improved achievement.

Knowledge of classroom conditions and district needs, collaboration among administrators, and the setting of high expectations for teaching and learning at the highest levels will also accelerate student achievement. Also, increased visibility on the part of the school committee and superintendent would serve to build stronger connections with teachers and other school staff while providing both the administration and the school committee a clearer knowledge about the reality of needs within the schools.

Curriculum and Instruction

The quality of the instruction observed in Leominster was not strong enough to support Leominster students in attaining high levels of proficiency. In the absence of other funding sources, Leominster should consider reallocating resources to restore the coaching model in all district schools in order to improve teaching and learning.

According to data collected from observations conducted by the review team in 73 Leominster classrooms, although the classroom climate and student/teacher relationships were conducive to teaching and learning, especially at the elementary-school and middle-school levels and at the

CTE, the quality of the instruction was not high enough to support improved student achievement. For example, there was little evidence at all levels of teachers posting or communicating learning objectives. The intended learning outcomes for many lessons were not readily apparent, especially at the middle-school and high-school levels. Most of the lessons observed at all levels were not developed or delivered using instructional strategies to promote cognitive growth and higher-order thinking.

Except in CTE classes where assessments were used routinely to measure vocational proficiency, there was little evidence of assessments aligned to the lesson goals to check for student understanding or mastery. The team also found a low incidence of tiered or differentiated instruction in district classes at all levels, except at the CTE where vocational instruction was competency based and highly individualized. The academic instruction observed at all levels did not have rigor; this was particularly true at the high school.

Under current conditions, Leominster does not have sufficient capacity to help teachers improve their instruction. The district's staff of 11.0 instructional coaches in 2010 diminished to 1.0 in 2011. With the loss of the coaches, the principals and assistant principals have assumed primary responsibility for helping teachers improve their instruction; however, they said in interviews that they were unable to provide a consistent level of supervision and support. Teachers told the review team that they relied upon each other as resources and described positive collegial relationships, but went on to say that this informal network was not equivalent to the growth-promoting partnerships that they had formed with some of the coaches.

The review team recommends that the district reallocate resources to restore the coaching model in all the schools. Research has shown that class size is not as highly correlated with student achievement in grades 4 through 12 as it is in kindergarten through grade 3. In addition, according to research on school effectiveness described in *A 50 State Strategy to Achieve School Finance Adequacy*, small class sizes were not a primary consideration in districts that had successfully implemented the coaching model. Instead, these districts increased class sizes moderately at the upper grades in order to retain the coaching model based on student achievement data demonstrating that instructional coaches had helped teachers improve core classroom instruction for all students.

Leominster must focus its resources on improving teaching and learning. Financial constraints must not be used as a rationale for not making continuous progress. In the absence of other funding sources, the district should reallocate resources as a means of providing teachers the support they need to improve student achievement.

Leominster should fill the central office position that has responsibility for curriculum development with a highly qualified, experienced candidate capable of facilitating the development of a fully-documented curriculum in each core subject and every grade level, containing all required components.

Leominster's curriculum is most fully documented in mathematics and least fully documented in social studies. Curricula are most fully documented at the CTE and the high school and least well documented at the elementary level.

The district has developed a mathematics curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 based on the strands and standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the Common Core. The English language arts (ELA) curriculum in kindergarten through grade 8 consists of documents that vary in content, format, and completeness. The science curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 does not have timelines for addressing the standards, resources, or instructional strategies. The social studies curriculum for kindergarten through grade 5 is largely undocumented and the social studies curriculum for grades 6 through 8 does not have either resources or instructional strategies.

High school mathematics, English, science, and social studies courses are described generally in the program of studies and in greater detail in curriculum documents that currently do not have teaching resources. The CTE has a detailed and complete curriculum for each trade.

Leominster has a cyclical process for curriculum development and renewal, but does not have sufficient administrative personnel to implement it effectively, particularly in ELA and social studies. According to documentation and interviews, the curriculum leadership team consists of the deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction, assisted by two reporting administrators: one for mathematics and science, and the other for ELA and social studies. A facilitator assists each administrator, one for mathematics and science, and the other for ELA and social studies. The district currently has two vacancies with curricular implications: the deputy superintendent left the district shortly before the review team's visit in May 2012 and the administrator for ELA and social studies position was not filled in 2007–2008 when the incumbent succeeded to the deputy superintendency. Evidence indicates that there has been little curriculum development and modification in ELA and social studies since this position was vacated and left unfilled.

According to the job descriptions, the deputy superintendent's role includes major responsibility for district curriculum development, articulation, and revision, and the role of the administrator for ELA and social studies includes responsibility for development, implementation, coordination, and continuous assessment and revision of the K–12 ELA and social studies curricula, as well as for assuring consistency in the development of the ELA and social studies programs across grade levels in all elementary and middle schools and within the high school. Based on an examination by the review team, the ELA curriculum is incomplete, particularly at the middle-school level, and the social studies curriculum is largely undocumented at the elementary-school level and missing key components at the middle-school and high-school levels.

The review team recommends that Leominster select a highly qualified replacement for the deputy superintendency, or for any newly created position that has overall responsibility for district curriculum development, articulation, and modification. The person chosen may then determine the need for the position of administrator for ELA and social studies and make a recommendation. Curriculum development and revision require specialized expertise including currency in research and practice, and advanced organizational, management, and interpersonal skills. The stakes are high in Leominster because the district does not have a complete K–12

curriculum in any core subject area as it prepares to integrate the new Massachusetts curriculum standards. Although Leominster has a standards-based approach to curriculum development, standards are not the curriculum. Standards provide a vision of the appropriate content and processes by outlining what students should know and be able to do in every discipline at each grade level. Curriculum specifies what takes place in shorter periods of time such as a unit, quarter, or month and provides a coherent plan for focusing classroom instruction and assessment, sequencing outcomes so that they build on each other, and ensuring that students have the prerequisite skills to succeed at the next level. Only a highly qualified, experienced candidate can position the district for success in this critical work of providing a solid foundation for instruction.

Assessment

The district should build its K–12 assessment system to completion to ensure coherency and effective use. Part of the strategy to ensure its effectiveness should be to provide teachers with sufficient support for implementing that system.

The review team commends the district for recognizing the role that assessment can play in increasing student achievement and for actively pursuing the development of an effective assessment system. The district has in place formal formative assessments for math in grades 1–8, but does not have a similar formative assessment system in place for ELA. The high school does not have formal formative assessments. In ELA, there are summative assessments in grades 9 and 10 and in math there are benchmark assessments at the end of several math courses. At the elementary level, unit assessments for the ELA and math programs are not consistently in use. Also, the review team’s classroom observations indicated little use of daily assessments of student understanding.

To further its progress toward the development of a strong system of assessments, the district should implement formative assessments in ELA. Also, if the district determines that the elementary ELA and math program unit assessments are not satisfactory, it should consider revising them to provide teachers with additional formative data for decision-making. And the sooner instructional programs in math at the middle-school level are in place, the sooner a complementary system of assessment will follow.

Further, teachers need professional development on the use of informal classroom “checks for understanding.” The classroom observations indicated that these strategies were not in use as much as teachers in interviews thought that they were. Beyond this, teachers need on-the-job professional development that supports them in their classrooms as they work to improve their instruction. Other than support from already busy principals, little support is available for classroom teachers. The positions of the deputy superintendent and the administrator for ELA and social studies are both vacant, and all coaching positions save one have been eliminated.

In the end, however, an assessment system can only be as effective as the classroom instruction that results. Assessments should be in place not only to identify those students who need tiered

instruction, but also to provide perspective on the instruction that led to the specific assessment results. Teachers and administrators need targeted professional development to strengthen their understanding of effective instruction and to provide them with opportunities to practice the implementation and the monitoring of effective practice.

Once a formative assessment system is adopted for ELA, those teachers will have the data they need to make regular instructional modifications. Also, when the district begins improving and administering its program unit assessments, teachers will have data beyond the formal assessments now in place. And once the district has improved the instructional practice in its classrooms, the understandings drawn from the review of assessment results will be put to good use.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should expeditiously implement the new educator evaluation system. In doing so, the district should align its educator evaluation system with its mission statement and district Improvement Plan. The District Improvement Plan should also drive professional development, expectations for teaching, and support for learning.

The performance evaluation system in effect in Leominster at the time of the review did not reflect school committee policy, did not encourage professional growth, and limited the district's efforts to reach high and rigorous standards of instructional excellence as described in the district's mission statement. And although the district had an array of professional development activities, its return on investment in terms of improving staff performance and student achievement was unclear. Educator evaluation and professional development were not connected.

As a participant in the Race to the Top grant program, the district is required to implement a new evaluation system consistent with the new ESE system during the 2012-2013 school year. The specifics should be negotiated into collective bargaining agreements. Each collective bargaining agreement already has existing language to get started with this process. Plans for implementation of the new district system should be designed and implemented and should require that the school committee monitor progress with the new system over time.

The school committee should review its policies on professional development and performance evaluation to make sure they reflect changed district systems. Many features of the new ESE educator evaluation system with which the district system must be aligned require the integration of performance evaluation data with professional development. Evaluations will be connected to the district's professional development efforts.

Included in the discussions should be a realistic appraisal of the capacity in the district to adequately supervise educational practice. Training and training support for the supervisory skills required by the new regulations should be embedded into the district's professional development efforts.

The new educator evaluation model provides opportunities for school districts to develop and implement

- Professional development for evaluators;
- Training to develop meaningful professional practice and student learning goals;
- Systems to ensure
 - that evaluators have the time and support to carry out the new system with fidelity and
 - that district and school goals are aligned with administrator goals
- Professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the goal-setting and evaluation process.

Along with resulting in the integration of personnel evaluation and professional development and encouraging professional growth, expeditious implementation of a new evaluation system aligned with state model will enhance the district's efforts to provide high quality instruction and support to its students.

A clear approach to professional development should be developed to ensure educators are supported to meet their educator goals, which are aligned with district goals.

The district has many regularly scheduled times for training, meetings, discussions, and focused professional development events. However, it does not have an active districtwide professional development committee, though one is required by the collective bargaining agreement, or a district professional development plan, though required by a school committee policy. According to job descriptions reviewed by the team and interviews, no administrator has been officially assigned responsibility for the oversight of professional development.

The district should consider organizing a professional development committee that is representative of the various stakeholders; it should meet strategically and use data such as surveys, walkthroughs data and evaluations, to plan training events. The committee should have the responsibility for creating the professional development plan. A professional development plan in a school district should reflect the training needs of employees in its planning and measure the effects of training on performance.¹³ It should also include schedules, topics, and locations of training, names of trainers, and mechanisms for follow-up evaluations.¹⁴ There should also be a system to follow up with professional development with support and supervision to ensure effective implementation of new practices. A central office administrator should have responsibility for overseeing the committee and the plan.

Creating a professional development plan and organizing a professional development committee as the district implements an evaluation system consistent with the state's new educator

¹³ See the Kirkpatrick Four Stage Professional Evaluation Plan.

¹⁴ See MyLearningPlan.com for an electronic professional development tracking and evaluation model.

evaluation system will strengthen the district's ability to create an efficient and effective internal human capital system that supports the district's mission.

Student Support

The district should build upon the progress it has made in improving student engagement and proficiency by taking steps to improve supports for all students—in part by ensuring students are placed in the least restrictive environment, developing an ESL curriculum, further developing tiered supports, and ensuring any social/emotional/behavioral programs are well coordinated K–8.

The review team commends the Leominster school district for the progress that it has made in increasing proficiency rates, especially in specific grades, and in improving student engagement, as shown by its graduation rates for all students being substantially higher than the statewide rates. However, both English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities have had lower proficiency rates than their peers across the state in recent years, and ELLs have higher percentages of chronic absence than their counterparts across the state. The review team found that some aspects of the district's support for ELLs and students with disabilities might be contributing factors here. Also, the team found that the district did not have a comprehensive and coordinated districtwide program of supports for all students.

The special education program expansions included in the fiscal year 2013 budget increase the district's capacity to meet the needs of existing students with disabilities. There are a number of suggestions that follow from the team's findings for other steps the district should take to increase supports for students:

For students with disabilities:

- In light of the discrepancy between the proportion of students placed in full inclusion in Leominster as compared to the proportion of students in full inclusion statewide, review the placement of students with disabilities to make sure that all students are being placed in the least restrictive environment.

For ELLs:

- Develop an ESL curriculum aligned to the curriculum frameworks and core district curriculum, with a scope and sequence, specific instructional materials, and curriculum maps.
- Contact neighboring districts that may be able to point out resources for Two-way translation and interpretation services.

For all students:

- Clarify the procedures for the elementary and middle school Teacher Assistance Teams, given that it appeared to be unclear who serves as the coordinator of these teams and who becomes the case manager for referred students.

- Further develop tiered supports into a coordinated, consistent districtwide system; currently the process and available supports vary from school to school.
- As recommended above, develop the district's capacity to help teachers improve their instruction, particularly their ability to differentiate instruction.
- As recommended above, complete the development of a fully-documented curriculum to provide a solid foundation for instruction, and for supports and interventions.
- Develop a coordinated K-8 social/emotional/behavioral program to provide school administration, faculty, staff, parents and students with a common language and approach to social and behavioral situations, given that different such programs are used at different schools.
- Investigate the possibility of expanding the number of extended day programs.

Taking these steps will help the district continue the progress it has made in improving student achievement and student engagement.

Financial and Asset Management

The Leominster Public Schools should work with the city comptroller's office to adopt a common finance data system that is electronically linked, compatible, and integrated, and to reduce redundancies and increase efficiencies between the district and municipality around managing expenditures and revenues.

The Leominster school district's inability to link electronically with the city's comptroller's office to reconcile accounts with accurate real-time data detracts from financial stability and accountability. An electronically linked, integrated reconciliation process between the city and the school department would allow the district to better track, manage, and allocate its resources. As a result of the electronic incompatibilities between the school department and the comptroller's and treasurer's office, the school district's business office staff is required to expend time and energy generating paperwork in a duplication of effort.

The superintendent requested an independent audit for fiscal year 2012 to try to determine whether an expected surplus could be identified and reallocated, something that should be easily discovered in local reports. The city's finance officials referred to deficiencies in district purchasing procedures.

The superintendent and the school committee should work with town government to address these issues, both to make the district and city software compatible in some way and to build communication and collaboration so that both parties trust reports and procedures used to manage resources.

The superintendent of schools and his administrative team are strongly encouraged to assess personnel and programs to determine how resources might best be allocated to further improve instruction and student performance in ways aligned to the District Improvement Plan.

The budget that the superintendent presented to the school committee in March 2012 does not adequately address the instructional needs of the system. In interviews, staff expressed frustration about the superintendent's belief that staffing levels and classroom resources are adequate to provide quality educational services to children. The review team found evidence that guidance services may be understaffed, resources may be spread inequitably across schools, and the loss of instructional coaches may have reduced the district's capacity to address its instructional needs.

The superintendent's budget philosophy for fiscal year 2013 was predicated on the principle of zero-based budgeting. The review team suggests that the superintendent develop a more robust process for fiscal year 2014 and following years, with advice and counsel from school principals, to conduct an internal personnel and program assessment that would help to guide reallocation of resources to the best uses, within the available funds.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Leominster Public Schools was conducted from May 21–24, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Richard Silverman, Leadership and Governance

Dr. James McAuliffe, Curriculum and Instruction

Patricia Williams, Assessment, Review team coordinator

Dr. Thomas Johnson, Human Resources and Professional Development

Maria Iglesias, Student Support

Dr. John Moretti, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Leominster financial personnel: comptroller, purchasing agent, and collector/treasurer.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Leominster School Committee: vice-chair, seven members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Leominster Education Association: president, four members of the executive board.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Leominster Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, director of pupil personnel services, director of human resources, director of language acquisition and cultural integration, administrator for math/science, facilitator for English language arts and social studies.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Leominster Public Schools: Johnny Appleseed Elementary (kindergarten through grade 5), Fall Brook Elementary (kindergarten through grade 5), Southeast Elementary (kindergarten through grade 5), Northwest Elementary (kindergarten through grade 5), Samoset Middle School (grades 6–8), Skyview Middle School (grades 6–8), Leominster Senior High School (grades 9–12), and the Center for Technical Education Innovation (grades 9–12).
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals and teachers. The team interviewed 12 elementary-school teachers, 9 middle-school teachers, and 16 high-school teachers.
 - The review team conducted 73 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 8 schools visited.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
 - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
 - Data on the district's staffing and finances.
 - Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining

agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks for students/families and faculty, school schedules, and the district's end-of-the-year financial reports.

- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Leominster Public Schools, conducted from May 21–May 24, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
May 21 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; review of personnel files, interview with teachers' association.	May 22 Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits (Fall Brook Elementary School, Southeast Elementary School, Leominster Senior High); classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents; interview with teachers' association.	May 23 Interviews with city personnel; school visits (Northwest Elementary School, Sky View Middle School, Samoset Middle School,); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews.	May 24 School visits (Appleseed Elementary School, Sky View Middle School, Center for Technical Education Innovation, Leominster Senior High); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

**Table C1: Leominster Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)¹⁵
2009–2011 English Language Arts**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	58	45	58	45	62	44
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
Grade 3—District	49	NA*	60	NA*	53	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	40	42	41	44	54	55
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
Grade 5—District	57	56	60	62	59	48
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
Grade 6—District	56	47	57	42	58	35
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
Grade 7—District	56	41	56	36	60	36
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
Grade 8—District	76	47	68	42	70	50
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
Grade 10—District	74	35	72	44	82	45
Grade 10—State	81	50	78	50	84	50
Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP. *NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website						

¹⁵ “Student growth percentiles” are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student’s MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see “MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide” and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

**Table C2: Leominster Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009–2011 Mathematics**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Grades—District	51	52	54	47	56	47
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 3—District	55	NA*	67	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	38	51	41	47	52	58
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
Grade 5—District	53	60	56	70	58	54
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
Grade 6—District	58	61	55	50	55	43
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 7—District	51	54	49	37	48	45
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
Grade 8—District	38	43	47	42	44	45
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
Grade 10—District	67	40	71	47	73	43
Grade 10—State	75	50	75	50	77	50
<p>Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.</p> <p>*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>						

**Table C3: Leominster Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

	Leominster Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	3,302	83.7	44	87.2	50
African-American/Black	204	79.4	47	77.4	47
Asian	101	83.4	45	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	789	72.4	42	74.2	46
White	2,114	88.1	45	90.9	51
ELL	188	55.5	50	59.4	48
FELL	220	70	49	81.7	54
Special Education	606	57.2	36	68.3	42
Low-Income	1,469	76.1	42	77.1	46
<p>Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.</p> <p>2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.</p> <p>3. "ELL" students are English language learners.</p> <p>4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>					

**Table C4: Leominster Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics**

	Leominster Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	3,317	78.6	47	79.9	50
African-American/Black	203	71.1	45	65	47
Asian	101	79.7	51	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	791	65.7	43	64.4	46
White	2,127	84.1	49.5	84.3	50
ELL	191	52.7	51	56.3	52
FELL	219	63.6	46	75.1	53
Special Education	610	52.8	41	57.7	43
Low-Income	1,480	69.5	43	67.3	46
<p>Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different. 2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students. 3. "ELL" students are English language learners. 4. "FELL" students are former ELLs. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>					

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. Although Leominster trailed the state in its proficiency rates in ELA and in mathematics in 2011, the gaps between the district and the state have narrowed in both subject areas since 2009. In certain grades, especially grade 4, there have been large gains in the share of students scoring proficient or higher, and the grade 4 students in Leominster outperformed their peers statewide in ELA and mathematics in 2011. While the performance of students from low-income families in ELA and mathematics has been as strong as or stronger than that of their peers statewide, other subgroups, such as students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), trail the proficiency rates of their statewide peers. In addition, the proficiency rates and trends vary between different schools in the district.

Leadership and Governance

2. The high turnover of central-office and school-level administrators in the Leominster Public Schools in recent years and the absence of a shared mission and collaborative vision for the district have resulted in: uncertainty about roles and responsibilities and confusion, anxiety, and issues of trust, and each school operating independently rather than as part of a system.
3. A strong mission statement commits the Leominster Public Schools to high achievement for all students. Communication about the budget by the school committee and administration is not clearly enough aligned to that mission statement in ways that bridge the gap between the administration's understanding of adequate resources for teaching and learning and the understanding of principals, curriculum directors, and teachers.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. The district has limited capacity to help teachers improve their instruction. Weaknesses included unclear instructional objectives, low expectations for student performance, and a low incidence of effective teaching techniques to improve student proficiency.
5. Leominster does not have a fully documented curriculum in all core subject areas that is aligned vertically between grades, and horizontally across classrooms of the same grade level, and across sections of the same course. Although the district

has a process for curriculum development and renewal, the loss of key central office personnel has jeopardized effective implementation.

Assessment

6. The district has in place in ELA and mathematics some of the elements of an effective assessment system. However, the system needs further development and greater support.

Human Resources and Professional Development

7. The performance evaluation processes for licensed staff in effect in Leominster at the time of the review did not reflect school committee policy, did not encourage professional growth, and limited the district's efforts to reach high and rigorous standards of instructional excellence as described in the district's mission statement.
8. Although the district provides an array of professional development activities, they are not systematically linked for the purpose of improving teaching and learning and the district does not have a professional development committee or plan. Its return on investment in terms of its effects on improved staff performance and student achievement is unclear.

Student Support

9. The programs and services provided to students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) in the Leominster Public Schools have not supported the students in attaining substantially higher levels of proficiency over time. Proficiency rates for students with disabilities and ELLs in Leominster have been below state rates for those groups over the last several years.
10. The Leominster Public Schools do not provide comprehensive and coordinated districtwide supports; rather, varying supports are offered by different schools.

Financial and Asset Management

11. The Leominster Public School District uses the Munis software purchase order and payroll system, which is incompatible with the city's accounting software. This results in needless duplication of effort for the school department's business office, and compromises the school district's ability to track, reconcile, and report data accurately and in real time.
12. The budget process used in 2011-2012 by the superintendent to generate the next fiscal year's budget, which was characterized as "zero-based budgeting," was comprehensive and transparent. However, the district's resources do not seem to be aligned with strategies to address the need for improved instruction.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The superintendent, with the meaningful collaboration and participation of all stakeholders, should immediately develop a long-term strategic plan (LTSP) and an annual District Improvement Plan (DIP) to be shared throughout the district and community. The LTSP should include a vision statement and a mission statement and should serve as the basis for all decisions made by the school committee and district leadership.
2. The superintendent should visit schools and classrooms regularly and develop a collaborative team involving all district administrators. These steps will help him better understand the conditions in the schools and the district's needs. He should then keep the school committee informed of these conditions and needs; together, they should keep the community at large informed and set high standards for student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. The quality of the instruction observed in Leominster was not strong enough to support Leominster students in attaining high levels of proficiency. In the absence of other funding sources, Leominster should consider reallocating resources to restore the coaching model in all district schools in order to improve teaching and learning.
4. Leominster should fill the central office position that has responsibility for curriculum development with a highly qualified, experienced candidate capable of facilitating the development of a fully-documented curriculum in each core subject and every grade level, containing all required components.

Assessment

5. The district should build its K–12 assessment system to completion to ensure coherency and effective use. Part of the strategy to ensure its effectiveness should be to provide teachers with sufficient support for implementing that system.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. The district should expeditiously implement the new educator evaluation system. In doing so, the district should align its educator evaluation system with its mission statement and district Improvement Plan. The District Improvement Plan should also drive professional development, expectations for teaching, and support for learning.
7. A clear approach to professional development should be developed to ensure educators are supported to meet their educator goals, which are aligned with district goals.

Student Support

8. The district should build upon the progress it has made in improving student engagement and proficiency by taking steps to improve supports for all students—in part by ensuring students are placed in the least restrictive environment, developing an ESL curriculum, further developing tiered supports, and ensuring any social/emotional/behavioral programs are well coordinated K-8.

Financial and Asset Management

9. The Leominster Public Schools should work with the city comptroller's office to adopt a common finance data system that is electronically linked, compatible, and integrated, and to reduce redundancies and increase efficiencies between the district and municipality around managing expenditures and revenues.
10. The superintendent of schools and his administrative team are strongly encouraged to assess personnel and programs to determine how resources might best be allocated to further improve instruction and student performance in ways aligned to the District Improvement Plan.