



Northampton Public Schools District Review

Review conducted February 6–9, 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).

Northampton Public Schools

The site visit to the Northampton Public Schools was conducted from February 6–9, 2012. The site visit included 32.0 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 54 stakeholders, ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives, parents, the former interim superintendent, and the regional assistance director from ESE's District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) group. The review team conducted focus groups with 5 elementary, 17 middle school, and 14 high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to all six of the district's schools: Bridge Street Elementary School, pre-kindergarten through grade 5; R. K. Finn Ryan Road Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; Jackson Street Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; Leeds Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; JFK Middle School, grades 6–8; and Northampton High School, 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 of Northampton is located along the western bank of the Connecticut River in the Five College Area of the Pioneer Valley. Originally chartered as the town of Nonotuck in 1654, Northampton was incorporated as a city in 1884. The two and one-half centuries preceding incorporation witnessed many of the well-chronicled struggles of early life in the New World. The valley and the river sheltered warring Native American confederacies that culminated with the infamous King Phillips War against the English colonists in 1675. In the 1740s the region hosted early Christian revivalists such as the preacher Jonathan Edwards and his Great Awakening. Northampton citizens openly rebelled against the economic upheavals in the wake of the Revolutionary War in Shays Rebellion, led by resident Daniel Shays, just before the Constitutional Convention. A Northampton delegate to the Constitutional Convention, Caleb Strong, became Massachusetts' first senator and an eleven-term governor of the Commonwealth. Clearly, the city and its region have shared in the currents of history that shaped our young nation.

² Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources. Information about the city of Northampton drawn from the "History of Northampton" on the city's website, www.northampton.gov, the Narrative for the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and At a Glance report for Northampton from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Today, on Northampton's city shield one finds the motto, *Caritas, Educatio, Justitia*, or Caring, Education, Justice. This motto sheds light on enduring values that have permeated Northampton's identity from the post-revolutionary period to the present. For instance, in the early nineteenth century, the Northampton Educational and Industrial Association, a short-lived, transcendentalist, utopian community concerned with racial and gender justice, developed a silk industry in the village of Florence. The group defined a segment of life in the valley as clearly as Brook Farm and Fruitlands characterized other Massachusetts' communities farther east. Association member Sojourner Truth made her home in Florence for almost a decade during the time she traveled the country as a speaker for abolition and women's suffrage. Fellow abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass frequently visited and spoke there. At the same time, Lydia Maria Child and her husband also settled in Florence to grow sugar beets, hoping to undermine the sugar cane plantation system of the South and force slavery to fail economically. Social justice seems to have always played a role in this community's value system. Tolerance and justice were also identified as themes for the community during the site visit and were reflected in discussions in several teacher focus groups. These themes also stood out on the posters on the high school's walls and were emphasized in several interviews with district and community leaders. In addition to the public schools and a number of independent and charter schools in the area, Northampton is home to the Clarke School for the Deaf, founded just after the Civil War. And Smith College, the largest of the Seven Sister Colleges, was founded in Northampton in 1871. Regionally, the city shares the Pioneer Valley with four other colleges and universities that enrich the cultural, artistic, and economic life of its citizens.

Today, the small city of Northampton presents itself as a lively college community with a socially active and creative/artistic population. Its diverse economic base consists of a resilient retail and commercial sector, a manufacturing sector that blends traditional and innovative operations, three hospitals, and rich natural resources and conservation lands. Its population of 28,549 residents, based on the 2010 census, is proud of its municipal programs in recreation, public safety, public works, and education. Additionally, Northampton has served as the county seat for Hampshire County since the U.S. court system was created.

Schools

The school district is governed by a ten-member school committee that is elected at large and chaired by the mayor. Northampton's six schools enrolled 2704 students in the 2012 school year, a slight increase over the 2681 students in 2011. There are four small neighborhood elementary schools: Bridge Street Elementary School, 313 students; Jackson Street Elementary School, 296 students; Leeds Elementary School, 336 students; and R. K. Finn Ryan Road Elementary School, 237 students. In most instances there are two or three classrooms per grade in the elementary schools; as noted above, all pre-school classes are located at the Bridge Street School. The JFK Middle School serves 641 students. It is organized around an interdisciplinary team structure with teams of teachers who represent core subjects and are responsible for cohorts of 100 or so grade-level students. Northampton High School is a comprehensive high school that enrolled 881 students in 2012. The school was a recipient of a five-year grant from the Massachusetts

Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI) in 2008 and was cited by *Newsweek* magazine for its students' success in Advanced Placement courses.

Student Demographics

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

**Table 1a: Northampton 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	2,681	100.0	---	African-American/Black	84	3.1	8.2
First Language not English	206	7.7	16.3	Asian	112	4.2	5.5
Limited English Proficient*	40	1.5	7.1	Hispanic/Latino	388	14.5	15.4
Special Education**	560	20.5	17.0	White	1,990	74.2	68.0
Low-income	770	28.7	34.2	Native American	9	0.3	0.2
Free Lunch	624	23.3	29.1	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	146	5.4	5.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	98	3.7	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							

Demographic data from ESE’s Education Data Warehouse indicates that the proportion of white students has declined by ten percent in the past decade, from 81.7 percent of all students in 2002 (data not in a table) to 71.6 percent in 2012. This percentage is slightly more than the state’s 2012 rate of 67.0 percent. Alternatively, the Hispanic/Latino subgroup has increased over the past ten years from 10.8 percent of total enrollment in 2002 (data not in a table) to 17.3 percent of all students in 2012. This percentage is slightly more than the state’s 2012 rate of 16.1 percent.

**Table 1b: Northampton 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	2,704	100.0	---	African-American/Black	75	2.8	8.3
First Language not English	213	7.9	16.7	Asian	107	4.0	5.7
Limited English Proficient*	67	2.5	7.3	Hispanic/Latino	469	17.3	16.1
Special Education**	563	20.5	17.0	White	1,935	71.6	67.0
Low-income	801	29.6	35.2	Native American	12	0.4	0.2
Free Lunch	680	25.1	30.4	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.0	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	121	4.5	4.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	105	3.9	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							

The proportion of students whose first language is not English (FLNE) has increased from 1.3 percent of all students in 2002 (data not in a table) to 7.9 percent of enrollment in 2012. The proportion of English language learner students has also increased from 1.3 percent of all students in 2002 (data not in a table) to 2.5 percent of enrollment in 2012, still a small percentage.

There have been other shifts in subgroup demographics since 2002, according to ESE data. For example, the proportion of students from low-income homes has increased from 22.3 percent of total enrollment in 2002 (data not in a table) to 29.6 percent of all students in 2012, undoubtedly a reflection of the economic downturn that began in 2008. The proportion of students receiving special education services has increased from 18.4 percent of total enrollment in 2002 (data not in a table) to 20.5 percent of all students in 2012, above the statewide rate of 17.0 percent. Some in the district, including the new superintendent, noted that some English language learner students may have been classified as students receiving special education services to obtain needed academic support, especially if they were enrolled in an elementary school other than the Jackson Street School.

Financial Profile

Table 2 on the next page describes recent financial trends in the district related to expenditures, Chapter 70 state aid and Net School Spending (NSS) for fiscal years 2010 through 2012. It indicates that actual net school spending was 7.7 percent over required spending in 2010 and 10.2 percent over in fiscal year 2011. The district drew down ARRA funds in FY11 (\$490,808) but not in FY10. Overall, the community has increased its appropriations for the district from fiscal year 2010 (actual) to fiscal year 2012 (estimated) even as state aid has decreased by 5.3 percent, from \$7,228,831 to \$6,843,064 over that same period.

**Table 2: Northampton Public Schools
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	23,035,153	23,035,243	23,157,544	23,157,543	23,942,953
by municipality	12,161,108	12,178,578	11,604,523	11,816,168	11,671,069
Total from local appropriations	35,196,261	35,213,821	34,762,067	34,973,711	35,614,022
From revolving funds and grants	---	4,992,661	---	6,157,896	---
Total expenditures	---	40,206,482	---	41,131,606	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	7,228,831	---	6,806,523	6,843,064
Required local contribution	---	19,225,734	---	19,535,341	20,035,749
Required net school spending**	---	26,454,565	---	26,341,864	26,878,813
Actual net school spending	---	28,495,912	---	29,017,944	30,322,395
Over/under required (\$)	---	2,041,347	---	2,676,080	---
Over/under required (%)	---	7.7%	---	10.2%	---
<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.</p>					

Table 2 indicates that actual NSS was 7.7 percent over required spending in 2010 and 10.2 percent over in fiscal year 2011.

District Leadership

At the time of the review, in early February 2012, a new superintendent had been serving the district since July 2011. He replaced an interim superintendent who had completed the 2010–2011 academic year after the previous superintendent of five years had relocated at mid-year to a neighboring district. Other central office administrators include the director of academic effectiveness, who is responsible for many of the roles typically assigned to an assistant superintendent and then some; the business manager, who was appointed in July 2011; the director of special education; the supervisor of special education; the director of educational technology; and the early childhood coordinator. Two principals are relatively new to the district: one at the Leeds Elementary School with two years of service and one at Northampton High School with four years of service.

Through a series of meetings and interviews with a variety of stakeholders ranging from school committee members, school administrators, teachers, parents, and community officials and leaders, the new superintendent spent the fall of 2011–2012 focused on learning the district's strengths and weaknesses, data trends, and perceptions and policies. In mid-January 2012, the superintendent presented an Entry Plan to the school system and the community. The plan identified a number of trends and themes that described what the district did well, such as a willingness of the teaching staff to learn and grow, small and manageable class sizes, the successful high school offerings and opportunities, and its relationship with Smith College—to name a few. He also cited a number of challenges that included curricular cohesiveness, coherence and alignment, instructional support for subgroups, deployment of professional personnel, and budget and technology. In fact, the review team's examination of the district's systems and practices found similar themes that validated the information in the superintendent's plan and are reflected in the following findings.

In brief, the district is poised for a new cycle of leadership and development led by a new superintendent. He has, in his first half-year, focused on understanding the teaching and learning environment and developed an Entry Plan to begin to address key topics of concern. His skill in listening and seeking to understand the district's needs has already lifted the morale of staff and of the community. As will be explained in the findings below, there is much that needs to be done in the district to move its systems and practices to a higher level of performance and to create stronger opportunities for all students to reach their potential as learners. With clarity of goals, thoughtful planning, and the needed resources, the review team believes that the district has the capacity to succeed at a higher level in providing the quality of education that all its students deserve.

Findings

Student Achievement

From 2009 to 2011, the percentage of Northampton students overall who attained proficient or higher in MCAS test results exceeded the state's in ELA but not in mathematics. The district's higher ELA achievement was primarily because of stronger achievement in the upper grades. The district's lower mathematics achievement was primarily because of lower achievement in the elementary schools.

English Language Arts

In each of the three test administrations (2009–2011), the percentage of all Northampton students who attained “advanced” or “proficient” in ELA MCAS test results exceeded the state’s percentage, but not by wide margins: 69 percent proficient versus 67 percent in 2009, 69 percent proficient versus 68 percent in 2010, and 73 percent proficient versus 69 percent in 2011. See Appendix C, Table C1.

When disaggregated by grade level for each of these three test administrators, data shows that in the upper grades, Northampton’s students’ proficiency rates consistently exceeded state rates, sometimes by margins as wide as 9 or 11 percentage points. In the lower grades, in 2009 and 2010, proficiency lagged behind state rates, often by as many as five or six percentage points. However, by 2011, elementary students had gained ground and the gap between Northampton students’ proficiency rates and the state’s narrowed. In fact, the disparity was reduced to one or no percentage points: in grade 3 the percentage of students who attained proficiency (62 percent) exceeded the state proficiency percentage for grade 3 by one percentage point; at grade 4, it equaled the state rate for grade 4 (53 percent); and at grade 5 it was one percentage point below the state rate, 66 percent versus 67 percent. The stronger performance in the upper grades in 2011 boosted the districtwide proficiency rate to 73 percent proficient, four percentage points above the state rate of 69 percent.

When examining median student growth percentiles (SGPs) for ELA from 2009 to 2011, the review team noticed that median SGPs fall generally in the 40 to 60 range for moderate growth in each of the three years.

The review team offers several systems and practices for consideration in attempting to understand these achievement trends. Although it may be slightly too soon to be certain, the recent improvement in proficiency rates in grades 3, 4, and 5 and improved median SGPs in grades 4, 6, and 8 may perhaps be associated with several ELA programmatic decisions taken by the district during the period discussed. All four elementary schools committed to implement Writers Workshop in 2009 and Readers Workshop in 2011 and the district added two elementary reading interventionists and one literacy coach as well as new professional development in literacy during this same period. Before 2009, literacy instruction in the elementary schools was more fractured from school to school and the current literacy coach and reading interventionists did not figure into the district’s staffing.

As will be explained in more detail in the Curriculum and Instruction and Assessment findings below, there are still conditions in the district's teaching and learning systems that need strengthening in order for these recent gains in proficiency to develop into true and continuous improvement trends. For example, the district does not have a richly documented ELA curriculum for every grade level and high school course. In addition, the district does not have a consistent and cohesive district model of what constitutes excellence in instruction, accompanied by the capacity of professional staff to choose and implement characteristics of that model appropriate to each lesson's clearly defined learning objective(s). Meanwhile, it is encouraging to see improvement in ELA proficiency rates in 2011.

Mathematics

Only at grades 7 and 10 did the percentage of students who attained proficient or higher in MCAS mathematics results exceed or equal the state percentage in each of the three test administrations (2009–2011). In all other grade levels, proficiency rates were below state rates in 2009 and 2010. In 2011, mathematics proficiency rates were below state rates in all grades through grade 6, ranging from 36 percent to 49 percent of students attaining proficient or higher. See Appendix C, Table C2.

When examining median student growth percentiles (SGPs) for mathematics over the past three years, the review team noticed that median SGPs for grade 6 did not reach into the 40 to 60 range of moderate growth in any year from 2009 to 2011. At grade 4, median SGPs fluctuated from 40 in 2009 to 37 in 2010 to 52.5 in 2011. Median SGPs for grades 7 and 10 were strong, ranging from a low of 52 in grade 10 in 2010 to a high of 74 for grade 7 in 2009. Median SGPs for grade 8 have fluctuated from 52 in 2009 to 36.5 in 2010 to 49 in 2011.

The persistent low achievement in mathematics at the elementary level raises programmatic and instructional questions that guided the review teams' investigation into mathematics during the site visit and are discussed in greater detail in several of the findings below. The team found that the elementary mathematics program does not have the support of full-time coaches; instead, mathematics coaches are full-time teachers who do not have the flexibility to observe colleagues' classrooms or work with them during the school day. In addition, although elementary teachers have planning time, it is rarely used as "common" planning time. Rather, individual teachers work mainly independently to plan their work or perhaps collaborate with one or two grade-level colleagues informally, if at all. (The number of same grade-level classrooms at the elementary schools is limited to two and sometimes three in the district's four relatively small elementary schools.) Furthermore, a full and completely documented curriculum for mathematics does not exist for pre-kindergarten through grade 5 and teachers use the teachers' guides from the instructional programs to inform their instructional and curricular decisions. The instructional program, Investigations, is considered highly dependent on solid literacy skills; skills in which students have not exhibited strong proficiency at grades 4 and 5 from 2009–2011, although as noted above, these are improving. There are other conditions described below that have an impact on mathematics achievement such as the absence of a districtwide supervision model, an absence of recent professional development in data analysis that could support teachers in better

understanding and using achievement data, and the absence of capacity of the district's technology infrastructure to enable a more sophisticated and thorough analysis and communication of assessment data. These and other root causes are explored in the findings below.

In summary, the lower achievement in the elementary grades in ELA and particularly in mathematics signaled to the review team that practices that should be well-planned and well-monitored to enhance student learning and understanding are, instead, not strong enough. Until the critical components of the teaching and learning system such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, supervision and evaluation are constructed and aligned to support continuous improvement in student learning and in teacher performance, proficiency rates will not demonstrate the gains the district aspires to achieve for all students.

Student achievement as measured by 2011 MCAS results in ELA and, in particular, mathematics shows gaps compared to the state, especially for Hispanic/Latino students, English language learners (ELLs), and Former English language learners (FELLs).

Table 3 below illustrates that overall, Northampton student performance exceeded statewide performance in 2011; also, the percentage of students in the district's low income and special education subgroups who were proficient or higher MCAS ELA test results exceeded the rates of their peers statewide. The low income subgroup's proficiency rate was 51 percent proficient versus 49 percent for peers statewide. The special education subgroup's rate was 37 percent proficient versus 30 percent for peers statewide. However, Table 4 shows lower achievement in 2011 MCAS mathematics test results at the district level for all grades and overall for all subgroups. Tables 3 and 4 also demonstrate that achievement for the Hispanic/Latino, English language learners (ELL), and former English language learners (FELLs) fell below that of their peers statewide in ELA and mathematics, often by a wide margin. In the district, the number of students in the Hispanic/Latino and ELL subgroups is relatively small (See Tables 1a and 1b) but, as noted in the District Profile above, both subgroups show an increase in their proportion of total students. The 2012 percentage of Hispanic/Latino students in Northampton, at 17.3 percent, now exceeds the proportion of their peers statewide at 16.1 percent, according to ESE data.

In 2011 achievement for Hispanic/Latino students in ELA fell four percentage points below the proficiency rate of peers statewide at 41 percent versus 45 percent. No ELLs in the district achieved proficiency in ELA in 2011. The proficiency rate for FELLs was less than half that of their peers statewide, at 25 percent versus 56 percent.

In 2011 achievement for Hispanic/Latino students in mathematics was 13 percentage points below that of statewide peers, 21 percent versus 34 percent. And only one in ten ELLs (10 percent) achieved proficiency in mathematics in 2011 as opposed to one in four statewide (26 percent)—admittedly already a very low level of attainment. The percentage of FELLs who attained proficiency in mathematics was dramatically below the rate of peers statewide in 2011, at 15 percent versus 50 percent.

**Table 3: Northampton Public Schools
MCAS Proficiency Rates
For All Students and Selected Subgroups, Compared to State
English Language Arts, 2011**

Selected Subgroups	Northampton Public Schools	State
All Grades	73	69
All Grades Low-Income	51	49
All Grades Special Education	37	30
All Grades Hispanic/Latino	41	45
All Grades ELL	0	22
All Grades FELL	25	56
All Grades High Needs*	50	47
Source: ESE Data Warehouse *High Needs includes students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learner/former English language learner students		

The high needs rate for both ELA and mathematics (shown in the last row in Tables 3 and 4), takes into account the results of several subgroups in one data point that includes students with disabilities, students from low-income families, English language learners (ELLs), and former English language learners (FELLs). For ELA test results, the district's high needs subgroup slightly outpaced the state's high needs subgroup in proficiency, 50 percent to 47 percent. In mathematics, however, the proficiency rate of the high needs subgroup was lower than the rate of statewide peers, at 29 percent versus 37 percent.

**Table 4: Northampton Public Schools
MCAS Proficiency Rates
For All Students and Selected Subgroups, Compared to State
Mathematics, 2011**

Selected Subgroups	Northampton Public Schools	State
All Grades	53	58
All Grades Low-Income	29	37
All Grades Special Education	19	22
All Grades Hispanic/Latino	21	34
All Grades ELL	10	26
All Grades FELL	15	50
All Grades High Needs*	29	37
Source: ESE Data Warehouse *High Needs includes students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learner/former English language learner students		

District proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics need to be examined carefully in order to improve student achievement. Clearly, the district's targeted program for ELL students and the supports offered to other students whose first language is not English, such as FELL students and students whose families choose not to enroll them in the ELL pathway, need boosting if students are to succeed in building strong language, literacy and mathematics skills, especially in the

lower grades. Strong language and literacy skills are, after all, the turnkeys to successful learning, understanding, and achievement. In addition, as described earlier, all elements of the mathematics program—curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and supervision—are currently far from meeting the diverse learning needs of all students.

Leadership and Governance

Central office leadership is in transition and the processes associated with leadership assignments are being transformed through the development and application of the newly appointed superintendent's Entry Plan.

The previous superintendent departed the school district in January 2011. An interim superintendent filled the vacancy from February to August 2011 when the current superintendent began his service to the district under a three-year contract.

In addition to the newly appointed superintendent, other central office administrators have had a relatively brief tenure with the district. The director for academic effectiveness (who is second in authority after the superintendent) was hired in August 2011. The business manager was hired in July 2011, and the director of special education is in his fourth year. Finally, there will be a vacancy in the position of supervisor of special education in March 2012.

With the approval of the school committee, the new superintendent has developed, and widely publicized, an Entry Plan that identifies curricular, instructional, and financial priorities and emphasizes improvements in technology and professional development.

The Entry Plan is the product of extensive interviews with elected officials, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community leaders. The superintendent also examined documents, observed classrooms, and attended community events as part of his data gathering.

The superintendent reviewed the contents of the Entry Plan during after-school meetings at the individual schools, in a meeting with the school committee, and at a meeting of the administrative leadership team (ALT). Additionally, a public forum was held on January 12, 2012, to review the plan with parents and members of the community.

In interviews with administrators, members of the school committee, and representatives of the teachers' association, frequent references were made to the superintendent's Entry Plan and to his demeanor. All the references were positive, they were frequently appreciative, and they seemed to capture a spirit of optimism about the future of the district.

Several school committee members observed that the superintendent's Entry Plan, combined with his discussions with the school committee, signaled a strategic planning capability—especially about budget development, improvements in technology, and the integration of the District Improvement Plan with School Improvement Plans. The concept of strategic planning is one with which the district is acquainted. A reference was made to a strategic plan in the previous superintendent's evaluation. And the interim superintendent referred to a strategic plan in his interview with the review team, saying that he did not know what had happened to it.

One school committee member noted that the superintendent is building “a budget that is more program based,” and another noted that the superintendent is “looking out in future years.” Finally, a third member of the school committee observed that the superintendent is “talking about a five- to six-year technology plan. [He is] looking at things long range. Rather than putting up a number, we are creating a soft budget—making it a more collaborative budget.”

Both the superintendent and the director for academic effectiveness expressed the belief that an immediate as well as a long-term capability for problem identification and implementation of solutions will be created as a result of the Entry Plan and the activities that it articulates—including the creation of a District Improvement Plan (DIP) and a Technology Plan. Importantly, the goals of the Entry Plan and the resulting enthusiastic acceptance of the Entry Plan were tied directly to a belief that teacher effectiveness would improve, and that student achievement would increase. The members of the review team agree that this universally positive reaction to the Entry Plan will serve as a foundation to correct a number of weaknesses within the district—including curricular and instructional disarray, outdated technology, and unfocused professional development.

The position of the director of academic effectiveness is insufficiently integrated into the leadership requirements of the district—particularly in regard to curriculum development and instructional delivery. The poorly defined nature and broad responsibilities of this critical role have created conflict and generated frustration among a number of parties—particularly among those who have curricular or instructional responsibilities.

In interviews and in a review of the district profile of personnel for the Northampton Public Schools, the review team noted that six separate functions are assigned to the director of academic effectiveness, as follows: assistant superintendent of schools, curriculum director, English language learner director, MCAS test coordinator, professional development director, and Title I director. Additionally, the director of academic effectiveness also assumes several human resources’ responsibilities in the district.

While it is not uncommon for central office leaders to be assigned multiple responsibilities, the review team was struck by the range of responsibilities and the functional depth commonly associated with those responsibilities.

In terms of his relationships with the principals, in an interview the incumbent director of academic effectiveness noted that the principals had “pushed back” about decisions that had been made about mathematics assessments, modifying instructional time at the elementary level, and the implementation of tiered instruction.

Correspondingly, principals at all three levels, when interviewed, said that the curriculum leadership role of the director of academic effectiveness is unclear: “We don’t have anyone who has coordinated the development of curriculum; we are doing our best at the building level.”

Elementary coaches and department chairs at the middle and high schools said that the director of academic effectiveness “wears too many hats.”

Although the position of director of academic effectiveness was added to the central office leadership team in August 2011, the review team discerned a notable absence of positive impact—particularly at the high school—as perceived by the teachers. In their focus group, the high school teachers noted: “We feel like we get no help from anyone higher up in the district.” Additionally, in reviewing the draft of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) self-study, the review team noted that the Executive Summary of the Standard on Curriculum states “District leadership has been lacking since the removal of the Director of Teaching and Learning in 2008 due to budget concerns.” There does not seem to be any recognition in the district that the creation of the director of academic effectiveness position has filled this perceived void—even partially.

Additionally, there are other structural weaknesses in the district that impede progress to improve instructional delivery and curriculum development. For example, mathematics coaches at the elementary schools are full-time teachers who can only meet with colleagues before or after school. This prevents them from observing classes, modeling lessons, and meeting with grade-level teams during common planning time. Appropriate use of common planning time to develop curriculum, synchronize and adjust instruction, and analyze assessment data has been a missed opportunity at the elementary schools because of the absence of any systematic process or expectation to do so. At the high school level, no common planning time has been set aside during the school day for teachers to collaborate on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

In summary, the decisions of a previous administration to create and maintain a position within the school district with a span of control that is either too wide or poorly defined inherently creates conflict and generates frustration among a number of parties—particularly among those who have curricular or instructional responsibilities. Elements of both were found by the review team. In addition, the absence of decisions to deploy key resources such as regularly scheduled meeting time to take advantage of the curricular and instructional expertise of coaches and department heads has also helped to diminish educational and programmatic leadership in the district.

Without clearer, more frequent, and more specific communication about the critical role of the director of academic effectiveness in assisting in the implementation of the superintendent’s Entry Plan, the district will find it difficult to substantially bolster leadership in curriculum development and in instructional improvement. Unless key constituencies have time to collaborate on important topics about teaching and the curriculum, the district’s programmatic needs and students’ learning needs will not be well served. Without improved communication and additional time for key constituencies to collaborate, barriers will remain to the progress that the district seeks in improving the curriculum development process and the delivery of instruction across all levels.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district has not provided sufficient curriculum leadership to ensure that curricula are updated, consistently used, aligned and effectively delivered, particularly at the elementary level.

From 2007 until the July 2011 appointment of the current superintendent, the district did not provide adequate curriculum leadership throughout all three district levels. District leaders said that the position of associate superintendent for curriculum was eliminated in 2007. Before 2007, elementary school principals were given responsibility for writing curriculum in specific areas. The dates of curricular documents reviewed on-site range from 2000 to 2008 with some exceptions, notably curricular documentation at the high school done in preparation for the upcoming NEASC visit in the spring 2012 and grade 8 ELA units, dated 2009. Documents do not have a standardized format. Varying in completeness and in format, some documents list standards, outcomes, and materials while other documents such as the History and Social Science Curriculum, K-12, dated 2008, use a more complete format. Interviewees confirmed that very little work had been done on the curriculum since 2007.

A documented process for the regular and timely review of the curriculum has not been established in the district. School leaders and teachers said that no one in the district is currently coordinating the development of curriculum and that curricular work in process is school and teacher based. In discussing curriculum and assessment, interviewees said that there is a lot of informal work without a formal process.

In 2010, the former superintendent created the districtwide position of director of academic effectiveness, a position that includes curricular responsibilities and other substantive districtwide responsibilities that encompass instruction, progress monitoring, assessment data, state and federal grants, professional development, and full responsibility for the district when the superintendent is absent. While the director said that his identified responsibilities are to work with teachers to implement the identified curriculum; however, the district has not clearly defined the curriculum responsibilities of this position. Teachers and school leaders said that they were unclear about the curricular responsibilities of the director of academic effectiveness. School leaders and teachers also said that no one is currently coordinating the development of the curriculum and there is no curriculum coordination among the four elementary schools. Within the four elementary schools interviewees said that the principals are responsible for ensuring that the designated curriculum is followed.

Elementary Level, Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5

The district's reading program was not aligned across all four elementary schools until September 2011 when the district adopted the Lucy Calkins Readers' Workshop program. Interviewees said that before the adoption of Readers' Workshop, there were different approaches to reading in different schools and at different levels. Teachers said that the impetus to adopt Readers' Workshop resulted from teachers using the Writers' Workshop, which was implemented in the district through receipt of a literacy partnership grant in 2009. At that time there was a literacy team, which has since disbanded, and a reading interventionist was hired to

facilitate the grant and purchase Writers' Workshop materials (*Columbia Teachers' College Approach to Writing*).

In interviews, teachers reported difficulties with the implementation of Readers' Workshop, a program that requires professional development, collaboration among teachers, and the development of an extensive library of leveled reading books for each classroom. Teachers and school leaders confirmed that Readers' Workshop is not being implemented consistently throughout the district. Furthermore, interviewees said that they did not have a strategic plan to roll it out, professional development to support it, and a robust library of leveled books to support it. Interviewees said that the Readers' Workshop program is where the Writers' Workshop program was in 2009; it is still a work in progress and a quality reading program is still not established. Two reading interventionists, each assigned to two of the four elementary schools, are helping to "roll out" the Readers' Workshop program. In addition, a literacy coach models lessons and coaches teachers.

Interviewees said that the district has used Investigations in kindergarten through grade 5 for over 10 years. The program is a research-based mathematics program developed by Technical Education Research Centers (TERC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Teachers and school leaders said that the implementation of this program is a concern. They described the program as complicated and said that they need professional development and a sophisticated level of knowledge to use it effectively. Recently, the Title I mathematics teachers created benchmark assessments that are aligned to the program. Every elementary school has at least two mathematics teachers who serve as coaches. However, their availability is limited to before and after school or during a common meeting time. Interviewees said that professional development in mathematics was offered during the summer and at the start of 2011–2012 school year when representatives from TERC came to the district.

In interviews, teachers said that the elementary science curriculum has not been updated since 2002. District leaders and teachers said that Full Option Science System (FOSS) kits are used in the district. Although there is a science curriculum, the district has not invested money into replenishing the kits. Teachers use the science curriculum guide as a benchmark and choose their own strategies and methods to teach the strands. Depending upon the school, students are exposed to different science experiences at grade levels. For example, one elementary school has a garden that is used to teach science while another school works with a local environmental center. The state of the curriculum in social studies parallels that of science at the elementary level. Teachers and district leaders confirm that there are different things happening in different schools and that teachers have created their own curriculum for social studies.

Middle School, Grades 6–8

The organizational structure of the middle school supports vertical and horizontal alignment of the taught curriculum. School leaders and teachers said that there are department heads for ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies with both curricular and instructional roles and responsibilities. Teachers meet once-a-month by grade level, once-a-month as a department, and by teams of four interdisciplinary teachers who share the same cohort of students. Interviewees

said that the principal meets monthly with team leaders and again with department heads. Meetings of the principal and the department heads focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The principal also meets with grade 6 teachers all of whom are reading teachers. In addition, the grade 6 teachers attend ELA department meetings every other month. The department chairs oversee curricular alignment, pacing, and ensure that teachers use the same materials.

Interviewees said that the Connected Mathematics Project (CMP) is used at the middle school and there are pacing guides and other resources to guide instruction. Although CMP is an extension of the Investigations mathematics program that is used at the elementary level, interviewees said that they noted gaps in what the middle school expects and how entering students are prepared. At the middle school a mathematics teacher who serves as math coach has one period each day that is dedicated to coaching.

There is strong horizontal and vertical alignment in ELA at the middle school level. Teachers said that they work in teams revising and tweaking the ELA curriculum at the school level. Teachers also said that the issue of curriculum coordination at the middle school level is huge. However, vertical alignment between the elementary level and the middle school is not evident. Teachers said that they do not know what is going on at the elementary level and mentioned having recently (in the two months before the site visit) heard about the literacy coaches at the elementary level.

High School, Grades 9–12

High school teachers are in the process of updating the curriculum. In interviews, the review team was told that the high school is preparing for a NEASC accreditation visit scheduled to take place in the spring 2012. Interviewees said that the faculty has been working on standardizing the format of written curricula and syllabi over the past two summers (2011 and 2010). This process included discussions of the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. Not all the standardization has been completed; however, interviewees said that the upgrades will be done once the new template for the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks has been released.

The syllabi posted on the school's website show a range of completeness. A syllabus for an accelerated mathematics course is 36 pages in length and includes a pacing guide, twenty-first century learning expectations, standards, local outcomes, materials, activities, formative and summative assessments, and rubrics. A syllabus from another mathematics course is three pages in length with units, topics, a pacing guide, and a general testing schedule. While the documents reviewed are in various stages of completion, there are many examples of quality written syllabi from college preparatory, honors, and AP courses.

The high school has department heads with very limited curricular responsibilities. Interviewees said that department heads facilitate monthly meetings where they may work on common assessments for unit and final exams. Department heads at the high school have no supervisory or evaluative role and with the exception of the English department head, are full-time teachers. Interviewees said that although the district's written description of the role of a department head

includes the facilitating of the “already established curriculum development process,” the process was not evident to them.

Summary

In summary, the evidence makes it clear that the district, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels, does not have updated, documented curricula to guide and inform instruction in core content areas to ensure that students have opportunities to achieve at the highest levels. In addition, existing curriculum documents were not designed with a complete format to provide a rich resource for teachers to deliver effective instruction.

Without complete curriculum guides in ELA and mathematics, teachers at the elementary level use commercial programs and pacing guides as curriculum guides. There has been little coordination and support of curriculum across the four elementary schools to ensure consistency in implementing the existing curriculum. This results in possible gaps and redundancies for students in ELA and mathematics as they enter the middle school. Although the district now has a unified reading program at the elementary level, it is not providing enough support and resources to ensure that the program is implemented with fidelity and equity across the district’s schools.

The organizational structure at the middle school level has supported vertical and horizontal alignment of the existing curriculum, but teachers at the middle school level have not had the benefit of updated and complete curriculum guides to promote higher levels of student achievement. At the high school level, the impetus for curriculum revision has been the upcoming NEASC visit; however, while there remains insufficient curriculum oversight because of the present departmental leadership structure in which department heads have full-time teaching responsibilities or other duties and no authority to supervise or participate in teacher evaluations. This has resulted in inconsistencies in the quality of curriculum documentation across subjects.

It is the judgment of the review team that the district has not established a process for the timely review and revision of curriculum. Nor has the district provided enough leadership and resources to ensure that the curriculum at all levels is aligned, both vertically and horizontally, and that there is consistency and coherency in delivery of key programs, particularly at the elementary level. Without updated, consistently used, aligned, and effectively delivered curricula at every level, it will be challenging for the district to provide high-quality instruction to all its students.

The district does not have a common understanding of instructional design and delivery contributing to the uneven and insufficient implementation of instructional practices at all levels.

The review team observed instruction in 74 classrooms in the district: 39 elementary classrooms, 10 classrooms at the middle school level, and 25 classrooms at the high school level. These included 25 ELA classes (including 3 classrooms where English language learners (ELLs) students were clustered); 13 mathematics classes (4 classrooms where ELLs were clustered); and 1 ELL class at the elementary level; 5 ELA, 4 mathematics, and 1 science class at the middle

school level; and 9 ELA, 9 mathematics classes, 6 science classes, and 1 social studies class at the high school level. Of the ELL classes observed, seven were at the elementary level and one class was in the alternative program at the high school (described in the second Student Support finding below).

The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning. 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 student 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

Overall in classroom observations, the review team found that students follow school rules and teachers and students demonstrate positive and respectful relationships. Under the category of classroom climate, expectations such as class rules and procedures were clearly communicated in 100 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 90 percent at the middle school level, and 80 percent of classrooms observed at the high school level. At the elementary level transitions in observed classrooms were made with classical music, soft chimes, or gentle signals. In one grade 2 classroom there was an emphasis on respectful listening with students applauding each others' ability to alternate between boys and girls. At the middle school level review team members characterized observed classrooms as having a "positive tone" with an "aura of respect" and students as focused and engaged in their work. Observed high school classrooms were described as "respectful, orderly and having a "gentle tone" with students "well-behaved and focused."

The setting of high expectations was observed at the high school in 72 percent of the classrooms visited but was not solidly established at the elementary and middle levels. A grade 9 biology class provided an example of how teachers set high expectations. Students were given a layered curriculum in which they worked at their own pace and in teams. The curriculum required students to understand each layer before moving to the next. Student materials included a curriculum sheet with the flow of the unit along with objectives and standards covered. Lab materials were set up so that students could access them as needed and consult with the teacher as they moved along. Oral and written exams and quizzes were administered when students noted that they were prepared for assessment.

Learning Objective

The practice of communicating learning objectives and identifying learning outcomes that drive instruction has not been established in the district. At all levels in visited classrooms, observers noted that agendas were posted and activities for the day listed, but learning objectives identifying student learning outcomes that drive what the students will learn and understand at the end of the lesson were neither typically present nor consistently communicated orally.

Use of Class Time

Review team members found the practice of teachers being prepared with materials ready for instruction very solidly in place in 97 percent of observed classrooms at the elementary level, 100 percent at the middle school level, and 96 percent at the high school level. In 79 percent of classrooms observed at the elementary level, teachers explained tasks and gave choices when tasks were completed, while students responded to routines by making smooth transitions between learning activities. In one grade 1 classroom, the teacher asked “When you finish your story, what should you do? I’m noticing friends have folders out.” In 68 percent of classrooms observed at the high school level, teachers explained tasks and provided choices with some exceptions. In one classroom when the free writing task was completed students were allowed to “talk softly.” Consistent with a more teacher-centered instructional approach, at the middle school teachers were not observed explaining tasks and providing choices.

Students at the high school responded to transitions smoothly and quickly in 80 percent of the classrooms observed while this characteristic was seen in 60 percent of classrooms at the middle school level where review team members observed a range of practices. In one middle school English class the teacher passed back essays with rubrics and students quickly moved to work with a partner to correct each other’s essays. In another English class at the middle school level there was whole-group, teacher-centered instruction for twenty minutes with no opportunity for students to transition to a different activity.

Content Learning

Under the category of content learning, the review team reported solid evidence throughout the district that students were making connections to prior learning. This characteristic was noted in 77 percent of observed classrooms at the elementary level, 70 percent at the middle school level, and 76 percent at the high school level. Furthermore, there was solid evidence that teachers were communicating academic content with clarity and accuracy. This was the case in 77 percent of observed classrooms at the elementary level, 80 percent at the middle school level, and 84 percent at the high school level. In one grade 3 mathematics class students were exploring “tricky triangles” with the teacher clarifying the properties needed to make a triangle. In a grade 8 mathematics class, students were graphing absolute equations while the teacher engaged students in a discussion and probed by asking “How do you know?” In a grade 9 biology class, the teacher and the students were discussing how biceps work using a student-constructed cardboard and rubber band model; the teacher carefully scaffolded questions to include and explain how tendons work as well.

While the use of appropriate content for grade and level is solidly established throughout the district’s schools, the review team found more limited opportunities for students to engage in a variety of curriculum resources including, especially, technology to enhance their learning. Students were seen engaging in a variety of curriculum resources in 31 percent of observed elementary classrooms, in 10 percent of middle school classrooms, and in 52 percent of high school classrooms visited. Engaging students with content through a variety of strategies to accommodate their learning styles was not observed at the middle school. At the elementary

school this characteristic was noted in 51 percent of the observed classrooms and in 52 percent of the high school classrooms. The review team found the use of tiered instructional activities in 24.1 percent of the classrooms observed at all levels in the district.

The review team found that in 64 percent of the classrooms observed at the high school level, students were applying new conceptual knowledge during the lesson; however, the practice was not solidly established at the elementary and middle school levels. Another category indicating an inconsistency across the district was in the area of student thinking. In 67 percent of observed classrooms at the high school level and in 72 percent at the elementary level the review team saw students using a variety of means to represent their ideas and thinking, but the review team did not observe the practice at the middle school level.

Instructional Techniques

The review team observed a variety of instructional techniques in high school classrooms, including direct instruction, guided practice, the use of small groups, and independent practice — with small group work being observed in 52 percent of the classrooms visited. Observed elementary classrooms also indicated a variety of instructional techniques; however, direct, whole-group instruction was the dominant mode in 69 percent of the observed classrooms. At the middle school, direct, whole-group instruction was observed in 70 percent of the classrooms visited, with small group learning and independent practice less evident, in 30 percent of classrooms observed.

Activation of Higher-Order Thinking

The activation of higher-order thinking skills was most evident at the high school level where the review team observed students examining, analyzing, and interpreting information in 84 percent of the classrooms visited. Observers noted typically classroom activities in which students analyzed questions such as “What makes this closing argument effective?” and “What does this say about children in this era?” or students responded to probing questions about homeostasis in which the teacher encouraged them to “go deeper.” The review team observed this characteristic at the elementary level in 72 percent of the classrooms visited. Observers described one grade 3 ELA class with students “in pairs analyzing and evaluating oral book reports.” In a grade 1 mathematics class students were analyzing data from a graph that they had made entitled “How old are you?” while the teacher probed “Did anyone notice anything different about the data from the other class?” Students replied, “One student was eight. Nine people were six.” Finally, the teacher asked “Is that the same or different from our class?” At the middle school, the review team found the practice of examining, analyzing, and interpreting information in 60 percent of the classrooms visited. While there were examples of the activation of higher-order thinking at the middle school, it was not apparent in some observed classes. In one ELA class students “examined and analyzed each other’s narrative essays” using a rubric to guide them; however, in a science class, students were given no opportunities to explain their experiment and in another ELA class, the teacher did the interpretation and provided all the examples.

Instructional Pacing

Across the district the review team found solid evidence that lessons were paced to allow all students to be engaged. This characteristic was observed in 95 percent of elementary classrooms visited, in 70 percent of middle school classrooms, and in 92 percent of visited high school classrooms. While engagement was apparent at all levels, the use of wait time to allow for student responses was noted more typically at the elementary level where this practice was seen in 69 percent of the classrooms observed. In one grade 2 ELA class the teacher asked a student “What emotion did you work on?” and waited while encouraging the student to rephrase her answer until she was able to describe the emotion.

Student Groups

While the review team observed opportunities for students to inquire, explore, or solve problems together in small groups and pairs in 62 percent of the classrooms visited at the elementary level, this practice was not solidly established at the middle and high school levels.

Use of Student Assessments

The review team did not find in observed classrooms the use of student assessments including informal assessments to check for understanding and to give feedback to students about the learning outcomes. The use of informal assessments to check for understanding was observed in 44 percent of classrooms visited at the elementary level, in 30 percent at the middle school level, and in 40 percent at the high school level.

Overall, based on evidence from observed classrooms, there are areas of instructional strengths throughout the district that include establishing a strong classroom climate, effective teacher preparation, effective teacher communication in content areas, appropriate content for grade and level, the use of higher-order thinking skills by having students examine and interpret information, and effective pacing techniques that support student engagement. While these areas of instructional strength are evident, there are inconsistencies in instructional design and delivery across the three levels in the district and areas that indicate weak implementation in instructional design and delivery at all three levels.

At present, the district does not have a common understanding of effective instructional delivery that includes the posting and communicating of learning objectives that identify student learning outcomes. Throughout the district the use of informal student assessments is inadequate. Without learning objectives to drive instruction, the use of informal student assessment is weakened. The effective use of student groups is not established in the district nor is there opportunity for students to engage in a variety of curriculum resources including technology to enhance their learning. Students at all levels do not have enough opportunities to participate in tiered instruction. In good practice, curriculum, instruction, and assessments are inherently interconnected. Effective instructional practices are supported by a robust curriculum (see Curriculum and Instruction finding above); such a curriculum is not established at all levels in the district. In the judgment of the review team, without a robust curriculum and further

development and enhancement of instructional practice, it will be difficult for the district to ensure that all students have opportunities to experience high-quality instruction.

Assessment

Although pockets of good assessment practice are evident in some schools, the district does not yet have a balanced and comprehensive assessment system from kindergarten through grade 12 or a shared and documented strategy to develop one.

At the time of the review, one district leader said that although the district did not have a comprehensive assessment system, it hoped to build one slowly and had started with common benchmark assessments in ELA and mathematics at the elementary level. However, the use of assessments and assessment data is inconsistent districtwide. And there are no commonly understood districtwide expectations, policies, or procedures to guide the collection, analysis, and use of assessment data to inform decision making for curriculum and instruction. Nevertheless, there are examples of good assessment practice in the schools, although these vary by school and level.

Assessment in the Elementary Schools

In 2009, the district allocated a portion of a \$40,000 state literacy partnership grant to implement the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) to coincide with the launch of a common literacy program across all elementary schools, starting with the Writers' Workshop. This was followed by the introduction of Readers' Workshop in 2011. Teachers now use the BAS to assess students' literacy skills in the fall and spring. At their discretion, they also administer the BAS to struggling students or others at mid-year. The BAS informs teachers of the levels of students' reading skills and places students on a continuum of literacy learning using levels a-z. By design, the workshop model enables students' literacy levels to guide teachers in selecting appropriate leveled books and provide differentiated instruction to either individual students or student groups. According to interviews with teachers and school leaders, in practice, the workshop and the BAS model still need more consistent implementation and monitoring across elementary schools.

Leaders and teachers said that there were impediments to the intended use of the BAS data and other assessment data. First, although there has been professional development by a trainer and coaches, principals said that not all teachers know how to use the BAS well and a few continue to use DRA or DIBELS or other assessments. Teachers said that the district has not provided the needed professional development to help them learn how to analyze and discuss assessment data. Second, not all elementary schools have the funds to purchase enough leveled books for all grade levels to ensure that the literacy program can be implemented with fidelity. As a consequence, some teachers lapse to using basal readers. Therefore, the benchmark assessments may not be measuring skill development derived from a common instructional program. Other interviewees expanded on these descriptions by saying that the BAS assessments are given but that some teachers hoard assessment data and there is no accountability mechanism to provide a common

assessment database and no required grade-level meetings to discuss the data. This leads to the third obstacle. Although there is common planning time during the school day³, a district leader, principals, and teachers told the team that the schools may not structure regular meetings for grade-level teams to collect and share data, but the district “hopes” that “they will structure time to be beneficial—to collect and share [data] in a useful way.” When grade-level meetings do take place at some schools, principals may or may not attend. Also, at the teacher’s discretion, some schools use formative assessment strategies such as work sampling (that is, looking at student work), running records, and progress monitoring; yet, interviewees said that nothing about formative assessments has been formalized systemwide.

In mathematics classes at the elementary schools, teachers give a benchmark pretest and posttest that were recently developed by the three Title I teachers under the leadership of the director of academic effectiveness. These benchmark assessments are given in the fall and spring to assess students’ abilities and progress in mastering the skills and concepts taught in grade-level units in Investigations, the district’s elementary mathematics program. However, in an interview, principals noted that the teachers do not necessarily know how to use the benchmark assessments. Furthermore, the grade-level analysis and discussion of mathematics benchmark assessments are subject to the same conventions as the BAS literacy assessments: an absence of systemwide monitoring that results are shared outside individual classrooms in grade-level team meetings (when they do take place) and an absence of a systemwide accountability system that monitors progress within or across schools. In addition, there is minimal expectation that the benchmark results can inform decisions to modify curriculum and instruction because the Investigations program *is* the curriculum and instruction is guided by the program’s teaching/pacing guide. But this, too, varies across schools. For example, in one school, the Title I teacher said that she does meet with the principal to plan mathematics team meetings to discuss assessments such as summative chapter tests from Investigations. Her record keeping is logged on graph paper. District leaders and teachers did not provide evidence of any formal reporting mechanism or system to monitor assessment results districtwide or to evaluate progress across classrooms.

A district leader noted that there had been no recent training in formative assessments in ELA. This was underscored by the infrequent use of formative assessments in the 39 elementary classrooms observed by the review team. In 44 percent of observed elementary classrooms teachers used at least one informal assessment to check for understanding or mastery. In 13 percent of observed classrooms, teachers adjusted instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessments. Students received feedback telling them where they were in relation to learning objectives in 31 percent of observed classrooms and students revised their work based on that feedback in 23 percent of observed classrooms.

³ According to a district leader, three elementary schools have common planning time five days each week and the fourth elementary school has common planning time four days each week.

Assessment at the Middle School

The middle school's team structure supports the development, use, and analysis of assessments in all core subjects. Teachers' use of common planning time in multiple teams helps ensure that assessment practices are fairly consistently applied across subjects at grade levels. Teacher teams with members who teach each core subject and share the same student cohorts meet once a month during common planning time. Department teams and grade-level teams also meet once monthly. All these meetings are monitored by both the principal and the department heads who also meet once monthly. According to interviewees, middle school teachers use assessment results to review student learning, drive instructional decisions, and decide on intervention tools to use with struggling students.

At the middle school, BAS is administered twice a year only to grade 6 Title I students as a pretest and posttest in their reading class. Other grade 6 students take the Gates-MacGinitie reading diagnostic twice a year as a pretest and posttest. BAS is given three times a year to at-risk students. All reading assessment results are shared with English teachers and discussed in team meetings and department meetings. Teachers design the English curriculum by unit, guided by state standards, and also develop unit assessments. The principal noted the goal to develop more common unit assessments to ensure consistency across teams.

Since 2009, middle school teachers have also given Galileo tests for ELA and mathematics three times a year—in the fall, winter, and spring. These assessments are derived from the Galileo online test bank items that are aligned to state standards, according to the publisher. Teams and departments alike discuss Galileo results, particularly because Galileo is often considered a predictor of success on MCAS tests. For mathematics, the middle school uses the Connected Mathematics Program (CMP), an extension of Investigations, and administers CMP unit benchmark assessments at the end of units of study. Multi-discipline teams at the middle school also look at student work three times a year to develop common expectations for instruction and for student work. The principal would like this assessment to be done at least six times a year.

The review team's observation of only ten classrooms at the middle school gave a limited sample of classroom practice at that level and may not, therefore, be reflective of schoolwide practice. However, the data did provide a glimpse of how formative assessments are used at the school. In three classrooms, or 30 percent of observed classrooms, at least one formal assessment aligned to the lesson goals was used to check for understanding or mastery. In 20 percent of observed classrooms, teachers adjusted instruction based on on-the-spot assessments. Students received feedback about where they were in relation to the learning objective in 30 percent of observed classrooms and revised their work based on that feedback in one class, or 10 percent of observed classrooms.

Assessment at the High School

In a focus group at the high school and in an interview, teachers and department heads were purposeful and clear about the expectations for how assessments are used in all core academic subjects at the high school. This clarity is partly linked to the just-completed self-study for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reaccreditation visit that was

scheduled for April 2012. In fact, the review team was given the final draft of the self-study section that dealt with the Assessment Standard.

In interviews and in NEASC documentation leaders and teachers indicated that high school teachers develop and use assessments that are regular, thoughtful, and thorough. Teachers use formative assessments in class for group practice and to guide instruction. Teachers and the NEASC draft of the self-study for the Assessment Standard described formative assessments such as journal writing, pretests, questionnaires, individual or group conversations with students, student self-assessments, and students' use of electronic response "clickers." The review team observed several of these formative techniques in classroom visits. In fact, classroom observations of 25 high school classrooms that included English, mathematics, and science classes revealed the strongest observed use of formative assessments in the district, although there is room for improvement. In 40 percent of observed classrooms, teachers used at least one informal assessment to check for understanding or mastery, and in 40 percent they adjusted instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessment. In 56 percent of classrooms visited, students received feedback that told them where they were in relation to the learning objective. And in 44 percent of observed classrooms, students revised their work based on that feedback.

Teachers administer summative assessments at the end of chapters or units of study and at the end of term.⁴ Summative assessments may consist of paper/pencil tests, research or laboratory projects, performances, oral examinations, and essays, to name just a few. Although the goal is to give common unit tests and common final exams across multisection courses, there appeared to be some variation, by subject, about the commonality of unit tests. Some teachers noted some "wiggle-room" for individual teachers to include 20 to 30 percent of questions about the material covered in a specific classroom. However, teachers noted that final exam results are monitored only informally, if at all, because of the absence of time between terms and an absence of common meeting time.

Rubrics are also used at the high school to model qualities of good work for students and as a grading tool for teachers. For example, teacher-designed common writing rubrics are shared by the English and history departments and science rubrics are distributed at the start of every unit of study. The NEASC self-study has produced new, schoolwide, analytic rubrics that address twenty-first century academic, social, and civic learning expectations and professional development is anticipated to support teachers' integration of the new rubrics into their practice.

In addition to course-based assessments, during the 2011–2012 school year the high school paid for all grade 10 students to take the PSAT; the scores will be used to identify students eligible to enroll in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The school was also the recipient of a five-year Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative grant (MMSI) in 2008. The grant paid for professional development for teachers and for Saturday courses for students. Since then, the proportion of students of color who are enrolled in AP courses and who receive qualifying

⁴ The high school operates on a two term, four-by-four block schedule. Final exams are given twice a year, at the end of each term. A year-long course using a typical high school schedule would be completed in just one term at Northampton High School.

scores on the AP exam has increased by 300 percent, according to district data. According to ESE's Education Data Warehouse, of 806 AP exams taken by Northampton students in 2010 (the latest available data), 80.1 percent received scores of three or higher.

Assessment Overall

Overall, current district assessment practices vary in terms of variety and consistency across schools and across school levels—elementary, middle, and high school. Although the district has clearly achieved the goal to use more common assessments, the absence of variety and the inconsistency in assessments across schools and levels emanate from the absence of districtwide guidance and of procedures to evaluate the results. The schools have been left to their own initiatives, guided by principals and department heads, to develop their own systems. Some have been more successful than others.

At the elementary schools, the goal to launch common ELA and mathematics instructional programs and implement common benchmark assessments as pretests and posttests to guide instruction and measure progress has been only partially met. This initiative has been hampered by the absence of adequate teaching materials for ELA across schools and the absence of commonly shared expectations for how and when assessment data should be analyzed and discussed using structured common planning time and who should participate in those discussions. In addition, the absence of a richly documented curriculum in both ELA and mathematics from pre-kindergarten through grade 5 has resulted in a reliance on commercial instructional programs and pacing guides to guide all instruction. This means that curricular revisions that are informed by student achievement results are at best tenuous or even non-existent.

At the middle school, the various team structures provide ample opportunities for teachers to develop shared assessments and discuss assessment results. Discussions can focus on specific classes, grade levels, or academic departments and even take place across department lines. Certainly, it is easier to standardize procedures when there is only one middle school. However, using input from teachers and leaders, this school has established systems and practices to facilitate the effective use of assessments to inform teaching and to improve student achievement.

At the high school, most teachers and department heads have demonstrated a firm grasp of assessment practice with an applied variety and depth of multiple measures of student progress, both formative and summative. Assessments guide high school students as they take ownership of their learning and guide teachers in informing their practice, as individuals—and only sometimes as colleagues because of an absence of common planning time. The variety of assessment formats offers both students and teachers multiple views of student growth and achievement. The depth and breadth of assessment practice at the high school has taken place because of the capacity of many staff members to understand and implement good practice rather than from clarity of expectations emanating from district leaders, at least up until now.

There is much that the elementary and middle schools can learn from the multiple assessment models used at the high school. There are lessons that elementary and high school teachers can

learn from how the middle school uses common planning time to discuss assessment results and fine-tune classroom practice and curriculum. Without districtwide multiple assessment models and common planning time to discuss assessment results and fine-tune curriculum and classroom practice, it will be difficult for the district to have a comprehensive and balanced assessment system—a system that will enable the district to use assessment data well to inform both students and teachers about achievement, to guide instruction, and to adjust curriculum.

The limited technology capacity in the district and generally low data literacy of educators impinges on their ability at all levels to access, collect, analyze, distribute, and use assessment data, including MCAS test data, to improve student achievement.

The new superintendent has identified the upgrading of technology as a priority in the district and has convened a planning team that has already begun to develop a new district technology plan. In addition, several school improvement plans have also identified the need to improve teachers' capacity to use technology well. This finding supports making the upgrading of technology a priority.

According to interviews with district and school leaders and teachers and a review of data reports, it is clear that the director of technology is the main gatekeeper for access to data and data reporting in the district. He shares MCAS reports with principals and district leaders as soon as results are available and provides comparative data analyses drawn from ESE's Education Data Warehouse by item/strand, subgroup, classroom, teacher, AYP, CPI, student growth profiles, or other customized options, upon request. In an interview, the director of technology noted that some principals request more complex data reports than others.

The strength of procedures that guide school-based reviews of MCAS test data and the use of data reports vary by school. Once principals receive MCAS reports, they typically "clean it and unpack it" and then share and discuss results with staff at a faculty meeting. There is no formal and commonly understood system to guide principals. Teachers may also discuss MCAS test data at team or department meetings and identify areas in need of improvement. One example of improvement was the development of more effective teaching strategies for open-response questions at almost all school levels. The high school, for example, had a half-day of professional development to address the topic of open-response questions. Another strategy was to give additional support to students who scored Needs Improvement on MCAS tests to move them to Proficiency. One elementary school ranked students by MCAS test scores and then sent letters to parents of low-performing students to encourage attendance at school tutoring sessions. At the middle school, department teams analyze MCAS test results to develop more effective instructional strategies. The high school provides an MCAS support class and supplemental tutoring for students at risk of not achieving proficiency on MCAS tests. Two principals noted that they collect individual teachers' MCAS test results over several years and discuss them during performance reviews. It was unknown whether or not this practice took place at other schools.

According to interviews and a review of data reports before the 2011–2012 school year, the school committee has received MCAS test data to inform members of the district's progress and

achievement rather than as input to its deliberations and decision making for policy or budget development. School committee members said that they have received school-to-school comparisons and MCAS test progress tracked from year-to-year. However, as a group, they have not used data to set goals but hope to do so with new leadership. School committee members also recognized the need to provide professional development for teachers to enable them to analyze data more effectively.

Based on a review of documentation, observed technology in classrooms, and comments by interviewees, it is clear to the review team that the district has missed opportunities to consider other options for using data with more agility and effectiveness in real time. Apart from the above noted strategies to address MCAS test results, interviewees and focus group attendees at all levels consistently noted that the district has not developed a systematic accountability mechanism with hardware and software capacity to maintain a database of the results of multiple standardized tests and other student data. In fact, there is much potential data available for analysis in the district and at the schools. There are other obstacles, too, that prevent more robust data analysis. High school department heads and teachers explained that they do not have the time to drill down in MCAS test results, mainly because there is no common planning time during the school day within departments at the high school. Teachers and principals frequently said that they do not have in-depth capacity to analyze data well and use it in more than just superficial ways. Data teams are being formed, but they have different titles and different roles in the various schools, according to a district leader.

In addition, apart from assessment and student profile data the district does not uniformly seek other forms of data that could support improvement initiatives. For example, there is neither a program evaluation process nor a systematic way to review curriculum in the district. Also, there is no systemwide protocol to conduct walkthroughs that could provide teachers and leaders with data about qualities of instructional practice and prioritize areas for improvement. A form of instructional rounds has begun this year with a first cycle conducted in three schools in January 2012 after the leadership team read and discussed *Instructional Rounds* (Richard Elmore, et al.) and *Strategy in Action* (Rachel Curtis and Elizabeth City) in the fall. Yet in multiple interviews not one principal raised this new initiative in a meaningful way as an up and coming strategy to improve teaching practice.

In addition to the impediments such as the absence of capacity, of commonly understood procedures, and of common planning time, there is the issue of the absence of resources. The technology infrastructure in the district is in as much need of investment as is the human capacity infrastructure. One telling metaphor for the state of technology in the district rests in the data provided by the review team's observations of 74 classrooms across the district. When noting how frequently students engaged with a variety of curriculum resources and technology that enhanced their learning, review team members observed the characteristic in 31 percent of elementary classrooms visited, in 10 percent of middle school classrooms, and in 52 percent of high school classrooms. At the high school, some observed classrooms were science labs where students were using non-technical equipment such as scales and beakers. In another example, while the high school has adopted an online program that provides access to student grades and

progress to students, parents, and administrators only, the elementary and middle schools have no easy access to comprehensive student data using a technology platform. Unless principals or teachers are skilled in the manipulation of data from ESE's Education Data Warehouse, they must ask the director of technology to produce reports. In focus groups, teachers told the review team that there has been no training in learning to analyze and use assessment data and, furthermore, there are no clear guidelines about how this should take place.

In summary, several obstacles have inhibited the district's data and technology literacy. Some leaders and teachers do not have sufficient capacity to use technology and analyze data well. There is no time during the school day to provide forums for data-rich discussions of teaching and learning at the high school. There is an absence of a state-of-the-art technology infrastructure in the district. This has prevented stakeholders from taking advantage of the real-time benefits of 21st century educational technology in the classroom and in its leadership and communication systems. Without providing additional resources of time for teachers and leaders to meet, improved hardware and software, and more developed human capacity to use technology well, it will be difficult for the district to overcome obstacles to its data and technology literacy and move forward in improving student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

A districtwide supervision model does not exist and the process used to evaluate the district's teachers varies greatly from school to school. With the exception of the district's middle school, the processes used to inform instruction and promote professional growth are ineffective.

It became apparent to the review team shortly after it arrived in Northampton that the district was unique in several ways and that its character was closely aligned with the culture of the community, one of individualism and independence. The former superintendent allowed the principals to run their schools as they saw fit in a site-based management model and the interim superintendent, who led the district for part of the 2010–2011 school year, did not attempt to change this practice during his brief tenure.

The absence of a districtwide supervision model has led to principals supervising their teachers and their respective schools in vastly different ways. Furthermore, all six principals said that they do not require lesson plans to be formally written or turned in to be examined. There is no formal walkthrough process at any of the schools; however, all principals stated that they walk into classrooms to observe what was going on "all the time."

When asked how feedback was given to the teachers whose rooms were visited, the responses varied widely. Some principals said that they did not necessarily give any feedback unless they saw that something was awry. Others said that they had brief conversations with the teachers and still others said that they would sometimes place a note in a teacher's mailbox or email a particular teacher a day or two after the visit. These varying practices have led to inconsistencies

and unevenness in the supervision of teachers and, in many cases, an absence of comprehensive feedback to inform and improve instruction.

At the high school, for example, where there are more than 60 teachers and only 2 administrators (a principal and a vice-principal) to supervise and evaluate, the principal admitted that a regular walkthrough process was, at best, difficult to accomplish. Department heads at the high school, other than in the English department, are full-time teachers and do not have any supervisory or evaluative responsibilities so they cannot help school administrators. In the 2011–2012 school year, for the first time, a part-time “academic dean” (who also serves as the English department head) has been appointed to assist the principal in academic matters and to support at-risk students but his responsibilities do not extend to supervision or evaluation of teachers.

At the middle school, creative scheduling has made it possible for the principal and her assistant principal to meet monthly with each of the two teacher groups, the subject matter department heads, and the interdisciplinary team leaders. This practice has greatly helped in making the supervision of the staff more manageable. Middle school teachers told the team that they have common planning time weekly to meet with their team members and their department colleagues, ensuring that both vertical and horizontal articulation in curriculum and assessment matters are discussed. These regularly scheduled meetings also give teachers an opportunity to discuss the academic progress of each student. The principal of the middle school also told the team that she has recently introduced a walkthrough protocol complete with a specific form that she uses to give feedback to the teachers whose classrooms she visits.

The review team examined the personnel folders of 32 randomly selected teachers and found each teacher to be duly certified; however, the folders contained little evidence that teachers were held accountable for student achievement. The team found a wide variance in the types of documents included in the teachers’ files in large part because of the absence of districtwide expectations in what was to be submitted and how often. It should be pointed out that the district’s bargaining agreement with the teachers’ association stipulates that teachers with professional status only have to be officially evaluated every three years. The 2006 report from the former Office of Educational Accountability (EQA) noted that this practice was out of compliance with state regulations (603 CMR 35.00), yet the practice has continued to the present day.

Part of the district’s difficulty in keeping an up-to-date paper trail of district personnel is that the city’s human resources director also serves as the district’s human resources director. The director, whose office is in city hall that is adjacent to the district’s central office building, said in an interview that her office’s main responsibility for the district is its payroll and her human resources responsibilities do not extend to keeping track of up-to-date certification, evaluation, or other personnel matters.

To improve student learning and administrators’ awareness of instruction in the schools, the district organized an Instructional Rounds protocol that began shortly before the review team arrived in the district. Teams of administrators and teachers observed a number of classes in a particular school (three schools were visited in January 2012) and then debriefed on what they

had observed. Although results of the first round of visits had not been gathered and summarized by the time of the review team's visit, interviewees who had participated in the program had mixed feelings as to whether the exercise was worthwhile or had informed improved instruction.

The varying evaluative practices that are used at the different schools were evident as the team reviewed personnel files. Of the 13 randomly selected teacher folders from the 4 elementary schools, only 3 (23 percent) were timely. In fact the folders of three veteran elementary teachers revealed that their most recent evaluations were dated 2002, 1998, and 1995, respectively. The summative evaluation of almost all these teachers consisted entirely of a checkmark in the most complimentary box ("exceeds expectations") on the evaluation form and very few, if any, comments that could be considered informative or instructive.

Although high school teacher evaluations were found to be timelier—seven of nine, or 78 percent, had been submitted from 2010–2012—none of the documents reviewed included instructive comments. The evaluations consisted almost entirely of checkmarks in the "exceeds expectations" box.

At the other end of the spectrum, an examination of ten middle school teachers' files revealed that each was timely and all the evaluations included informative and instructive comments. The principal had also included in each evaluation at least one area for professional growth that she believed would enhance the pedagogy of that particular teacher.

At all three teacher focus groups conducted by the review team, teachers agreed that the district's evaluation system is ineffective in promoting professional growth. They also confirmed that administrative walkthroughs and subsequent feedback varied greatly across the district. Teachers' comments about walkthroughs ranged from regularly seeing a principal in their classrooms to "practically never" seeing an administrator in their classrooms.

When the topic of teacher evaluations was raised in interviews, almost everyone said that they were looking forward to implementing the new Educator Evaluation Framework that has been mandated in districts chosen to receive Race to the Top funding. Those interviewed agreed that the new evaluation system should prove to be a positive step forward in an area that, for the most part, had been ineffective in the past. At the time of the review, a committee of administrators, teachers, and teachers' association representatives were studying the new ESE evaluation protocol and the district plans to introduce and describe the new system to all the teachers in the district in the spring 2012 and implement it fully in the fall 2012.

A review of all administrators' personnel files revealed that the former superintendent had annually required all principals to set goals based on their School Improvement Plans and there was evidence in the folders that a midyear meeting took place to review the progress made in attaining those goals. There was also evidence in the files that the superintendent annually awarded administrators "performance bonuses" ranging from \$200 to \$900. At the end of each year, the superintendent wrote a summative evaluation of each administrator or principal that identified at least one area for professional growth. None of the specific recommendations or observations, however, held the respective administrators accountable for student achievement.

The team was able to review the evaluation of the former superintendent that was submitted by a member of the school committee for 2010, a year before the former superintendent's departure. The review team found that the evaluation comprehensive in nature and followed the Principles of Effective Leadership; the document included a number of areas of strengths that this member believed the superintendent had demonstrated as well as a couple of areas in the superintendent's job description that needed her full attention.

The absence of proper leadership and of a districtwide model for the effective supervision of staff has hindered the professional growth and development of teachers' instructional practices. Implementing the new Educator Evaluation Framework in the fall of 2012 should greatly improve the timeliness of the evaluation process throughout the district and should also help make evaluation a more informative, reflective, and instructive process for professional growth and development as well as a tool to improve instruction at all levels. Unless the district creates and implements a comprehensive supervision model that all administrators can use effectively, it will be difficult for the district to positively inform instruction at all grade levels, to improve classroom teaching, and to support improved student achievement.

The professional development program in the district has not been well organized or implemented through the central office and has primarily been a school-based program. Additionally, insufficient time and inadequate funds have compromised the effectiveness of the program.

The Northampton teachers' bargaining agreement states that a systemwide professional development committee composed of administrators and teachers from all the schools as well as central office personnel is responsible for developing goals, planning and implementing professional development opportunities, and evaluating and making adjustments to the program as needed.

In interviews with school committee members, central office personnel, principals, and teachers, the review team was told that such a committee has not existed in recent years and that the only districtwide mandatory professional development sessions were for topics such as anti-bullying and restraint training; school principals were free to select the type of professional development that would benefit their teachers and their particular school. For the last few years, the district's annual calendar provided only two full days for professional development, usually designated in the first half of the school year. Release days for professional development were not included in the calendar. The first of these two full days (in September in the 2011–2012 school calendar) was the only day in which the district brought teachers together from different schools to offer mandated programs and, importantly, to organize vertical articulation meetings between school levels. The second professional development day (in November in the 2011–2012 school calendar) was site-based and the professional development offerings varied from school to school. Elementary principals said that it was difficult for them to provide teachers with meaningful professional development because teachers' schedules were very tight; however, recently the introduction of reading interventionists and mathematics coaches who work with teachers individually or in small groups has helped to improve the situation. Although

grade-level teachers at the elementary schools have common planning time, appropriate use of common planning time for teacher collaboration has been problematic in the elementary schools and further exacerbates the problem of providing meaningful professional development (see the second Leadership and Governance finding above).

In the middle school, common planning time has been scheduled and provided weekly for both team meetings and department meetings and the teachers there said that they had ample time to exchange ideas and best practices with colleagues. At the high school, the entire staff has spent any and all available professional development time during the two years before the site visit collaborating and working on completing their comprehensive self-study in preparation for the NEASC accreditation team's visit scheduled for the spring 2012. Still, high school teachers in interviews and in a focus group noted that common planning time is only coincidental. In fact, several departments choose to meet during lunchtime to have more frequent contact time.

When inquiries were made as to whether professional development topics such as data-analysis procedures, using technology in the planning and teaching of daily lessons, and research-based instructional strategies were offered in recent years the answers indicated that very little, if any, time was spent on those topics. One interviewee voiced a concern that the district has not been actively encouraging teachers to participate in some of the recommended professional development sessions offered by ESE, including the Massachusetts Common Core session offered during the summer 2011. Although in the past a mentoring program had been provided to teachers new to the district, the program has been offered sporadically in recent years in large part because of poor program administration and the absence of ownership. Interviewees noted that the mentoring program scarcely existed during the 2011–2012 school year.

Evidence was provided, however, that there were pockets of successful professional development initiatives in the district in the recent past. For example, both teachers and administrators said that training in differentiated instruction had been successfully offered to all the district's teachers for a number of years leading up to and including the 2009–2010 school year and implemented in classrooms throughout the district. Although it is often difficult to observe tiered instruction in the 20 minute visits that the review team conducts, this characteristic was evident in almost 25 percent (24.1 percent) of the 74 observed classrooms, though the incidence at the three different levels varied. It was higher in the district's four elementary schools where the use of many paraprofessionals, called educational service professionals (ESPs), who mostly were working one-on-one with students, was evident in almost every classroom visited by the review team. Another positive aspect of professional development in the district is the ongoing constructive relationships with colleges and universities located near the city, particularly the relationship with Smith College, located in the center of Northampton. Smith professors have provided specialized professional development opportunities to district staff members for many years and have assisted teachers in their instructional practices particularly at Northampton High School (NHS), which is across the street from the Smith campus. Smith students have also tutored NHS students and many Smith education majors do their student teaching in the district. The college also offers a unique and interesting dual-enrollment program. Upperclassmen from Northampton High School who have a cumulative

GPA of 3.4 or higher can and do enroll in courses at Smith during the school day and as many as 60 students take advantage of this unique experience every semester.

In response to ESE's 2009 Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report, which found that "assessments are not tailored to assess specific areas of educational or related development," the district has focused its professional development resources on improving interventions and services for students with learning difficulties. Grant funds were initially used to hire two reading interventionists and a literary coach who assist teachers at all four elementary schools. Those positions are maintained through local funding now that the grant funding has ended. Nine staff members have recently become certified in the Orton-Gillingham reading program and three of those teachers have continued their training to earn Level 2 certification and become trainers.

The district has also annually sent a number of special education teachers and ESPs (up to 30 staff each year) to the Western Massachusetts Mary Lyon's conference held at Deerfield Academy in March. This two-day conference has a number of concurrent sessions dealing with educating children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Additionally, Response to Intervention (RTI) training has been ongoing at the elementary schools as has the training of pre-school and kindergarten teachers and ESPs in many aspects of how to best educate young children with learning and emotional difficulties. This training has encompassed strategies for dealing with children with autism as well as implementing state standards and frameworks appropriately with these students.

As of October 2011 the district had 67 English language learners (ELLs) (2.5 percent of the total student enrollment), 42 at the Jackson Street Elementary School, where all ELLs in kindergarten through grade 5 in the district are educated, 13 at the middle school, and 12 at the high school. Efforts have been made in the recent past to provide training in sheltered English immersion (category training) for regular education teachers through the Hampshire Education Collaborative (HEC), the district's associated collaborative. For instance, according to the principal, 10 of the 14 classroom teachers at the Jackson Street School had been trained in at least one category.

Funding for professional development in the district has been lean for many years. During the 2010–2011 school year, for instance, financial reports furnished to the review team indicated that approximately \$520,000 was spent on professional development with more than half coming from state or federal grants. That amount equates to the district spending \$178 per student on professional development, far below the state average of \$226 per student spent on professional development. Interviewees said that funds for professional development have been lean for a number of years. The review team also was told that even the \$25,000 specified in the teachers' bargaining agreement to be made available annually to reimburse teachers for graduate courses or to pay for conferences was hard to access and is typically consumed early in the school year.

In summary, the professional development component of the district's systems has not maximized its potential to positively influence teachers' professional growth and development. This has happened because of the failure of the professional development committee to play an

active role in planning professional development opportunities for both the school and district levels, the absence of central office participation and oversight of a viable and comprehensive professional development program, and the district's inability to provide enough time and allocate enough resources to support such a program. In the review team's judgment, the district's teachers and administrators eagerly anticipate improvement in professional development opportunities. Without allotting more time in the school calendar for professional development, developing a more equitable and expansive planning process, and devoting ample funds to support a viable and comprehensive program, it will be challenging for the district to maximize its potential to positively influence teachers' professional growth and development—and ultimately to improve student achievement.

Student Support

Although the district has established academic support practices in kindergarten through grade 12, it is not meeting the academic needs of some at-risk students.

Elementary Schools

The district has invested in reading interventionists to provide direct services to at-risk students. Reading interventionists, funded in part from Title I, also provide professional development for teachers through coaching and modeling of lessons. In interviews administrators and teachers said that the district does not have a general education intervention program. Title I is the only program to support struggling readers and three of the four elementary schools receive Title I funds. Services at the elementary schools vary and include one full-time math and three part-time reading interventionist teachers at one school, one full-time math and a part-time reading interventionist teacher at a second school, and a .8 reading interventionist and math teacher/coach at a third school. The one non-Title I elementary school has a .5 reading interventionist; interviewees said that it is difficult for a half-time teacher to meet students' needs.

The elementary schools use student support teams (SSTs) to identify students who are beginning to fall behind. SSTs work with classroom teachers to help develop goals and strategies for students. Classroom teachers use Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) results, classroom performance, and behavior to identify these students. SSTs develop an action plan with specific goals and activities. Paraprofessionals, referred to as educational service professionals (ESPs), classroom teachers, parent volunteers, and college students work in classrooms to fulfill SST action plan goals. The teams review student progress after three to four weeks of academic support.

Individual elementary schools have established practices to meet students' needs. Practices include a Morning Math Club and Math Recovery at the Jackson Street Elementary School and tutoring in the morning at Leeds Elementary School. In addition, homework club and after-school MCAS tutoring take place at several schools. Not all programs are offered at every school and most programs are open to all. Participation in the before and after-school programs is

limited because the district does not provide early- or late-bus transportation. Review team members were told that the district does, however, provide transportation to and from school for homeless students. While there is some support at individual schools, one elementary school interviewee said “The district doesn’t have any specific programs in place for struggling students without IEPs.”

Middle School

Academic support at the middle school includes the services of a .5 Title I mathematics teacher and a mathematics coach. At-risk students receive an extra period of mathematics every three days. Although grade 6 is departmentalized, all grade 6 teachers also teach reading. Schedules for grade 6 students include two periods of ELA/reading each week. Interviewees said that there is a learning strategies class for those students who need it. Additionally, interviewees said that the student service team operates like the student support teams (SSTs) in the elementary schools. The middle school’s student service team considers student referrals from concerned teachers. The team develops a plan and does follow-up check-ins. The middle school also provides after-school homework help and MCAS support classes—all of which have limited participation because of the absence of late-bus transportation.

High School

Academic support at the high school is developing. The new academic dean monitors at-risk students. Educational service professionals (ESPs) provide support and are assigned to specific student groups in English, math, and biology classes. The high school developed a student support class in September 2011 for students who are not in special education. Interviewees said that the program is very successful, given the lower rate of students earning D or F grades. The academic dean oversees the student support class and also meets with any grade 9 or 10 student who receives a grade lower than C in a course. High school students also have the opportunity to recover credits through an independent study class run by the high school technology specialist. All grade 9 students are assigned to a writing class. Additionally, interviewees said that students on an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) also take a mandatory writing class and may be asked to repeat it if the results are not satisfactory. The high school relies on many volunteers for tutoring and homework club including honor students, Smith College students, and parents. Several interviewees said that the new high school alternative program also provides struggling students with academic support. The alternative program has approximately 20 students—60 percent are students with disabilities and 40 percent are typical students.

Interviewees at the high school said that professional development for teachers and Saturday courses for students (funded by a five-year Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI) grant) have helped increase the overall number of students who successfully take AP courses and exams and the number of African-American students and students from low-income homes who successfully take AP courses and exams, thus narrowing the achievement gap. In the 2010 school year, 806 Advanced Placement tests were taken and 80.1 percent of the tests received scores between three and five.

Although the high school is successfully meeting the needs of honors and AP students, it has faced some obstacles in meeting the needs of non-AP and non-honors students. In interviews teachers said “There are kids who are ‘left over.’” These are disproportionately students with IEPs or EPPs or at-risk students who cannot function well in school. Students with high needs⁵ take up 50 percent of the non-AP and non-honors classes and there is no help or resources for them.

According to ESE data, Northampton High School’s annual drop-out rate was 2.1 percent in 2006 and 0.9 percent in 2011, below the state rate of 2.9 percent. In addition, the four-year cohort graduation rate for 2011 was 89.2 percent, compared to 83.4 percent for the state. The five-year cohort graduation rate was 92.4 percent in 2009, compared to 84 percent for the state. Although, the drop-out rate has clearly improved in recent years and the graduation rates are higher than the state’s rates, approximately 10 percent of NHS students do not graduate with their four-year cohort. It is clear that some students are still “falling between the cracks.”

In the judgment of the review team, there is no thoughtful, districtwide coordination of academic interventions. Support for elementary students is uneven and erratic with certain programming available only at some of the elementary schools. Furthermore, the absence of before- and after-school transportation prevents many students who could benefit the most from participating in before and after-school programs and tutoring. In addition, although funding from the MMSI grant brought professional development for teachers and Saturday courses for students with excellent results for honors and AP students at the high school, teachers with little help and an absence of adequate resources are struggling to provide needed support for non-honors and non-AP students. All students deserve to have the academic support services that they need to succeed in school. At this time, the district has not established the support required to reach all students, particularly those most in need of help. This absence of support and of adequate programs compromises students’ ability to reach their highest potential.

The district has established procedures and practices to ease the transitions from school to school and to increase access and equity in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses; however, there are areas that would benefit from additional supports for smoother transitions and better access.

Before students enter kindergarten there are several opportunities for students and families to meet teachers and other families. The district sponsors information nights for parents, visiting days throughout the winter and spring, and playground play days during the summer. In addition, interviewees said that there are meetings scheduled with parents to discuss their students’ individual needs before the children arrive in kindergarten. The district also offers opportunities for families, through a group called Families with Power, to come together informally over potluck dinners to discuss school related topics such as parent-teacher conferencing.

⁵ “High Needs” includes students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learner/former English language learner students.

When parents were asked in a focus group how the schools involve and engage parents in their children's education, one parent responded "It's different for each school." There are literacy and math nights and Tools of the Mind at the Bridge Street School. The Jackson Street School created a volunteer coordinator position to organize parent volunteers. The schools also work with Families of Color and hold family dinner nights with the principal. The same parents said, however, "When it comes to parent involvement, it's the same parents, not the parents with children below the threshold. The real question is how to engage parents who really need to be engaged; especially with one principal and the only one to do that."

The district has centralized elementary English language learner services at the Jackson Street Elementary School, but the program is not sufficiently staffed. According to interviewees, there is one full-time and one .6 ESL teacher assigned to the school—not enough to give the 2.5 hours of recommended daily ESL instruction to the many beginners among the school's English language learners.⁶ ESE data shows that ELL enrollment at Jackson Street rose from 15 students in October 2010 to 42 in October 2011; during the site visit in February 2012 the review team was told that the school had 53 ELLs. One class at each grade level is the designated English language learner (ELL) class. Interviewees said that they are not sure they have what is needed for those ELLs to succeed. They still need tutors who speak French and Urdu.

According to school leaders, transitions from the four elementary schools to the middle school are smooth, with opportunities for students to share their social and emotional needs with teachers and counselors at the next school level. Curriculum-related transitions, however, are less smooth. Review team members were told that grade 6 students arrive at the middle school with a wide range of ELA experiences, knowledge, and skills.

The middle school is structured to maximize access to needed services and provide students opportunities for academic success. Each teacher belongs to an interdisciplinary team. One team includes the ESL teacher and is designated as the ELL team. English language learners are assigned to classes taught by that teacher team. In 2012 there were 13 ELLs at the middle school. Teachers on the ELL team have received training in sheltered English immersion (category training). The ESL teacher may provide "push-in" or "pull-out" services, depending on students' needs.

The middle school also has Title I reading support. An administrator said that students arrive from the district's elementary schools with different backgrounds in ELA, noting "Grade 6 teachers have had to make sense of it and get kids going." One way in which the middle school addresses the confusion of multiple ELA experiences is having all grade 6 students take a reading course in addition to English.

⁶ According to data reported to ESE by the district, the district had 1.7 ESL teachers in 2010-2011, 1.0 at the middle school and 0.7 at the high school, and none at the elementary level. See the District Analysis and Review Tool for English Language Learners for Northampton, School Overview tab, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>. However, for the elementary level this was contradicted by several interviewees.

The middle school is currently discussing changing the shape of mathematics program by eliminating leveled mathematics classes and offering Algebra I to all grade 8 students. Interviewees said that in 2012–2013 incoming grade 6 students will not be leveled. Everybody will be “accelerated” to enable them to complete Algebra I at grade 8. One administrator said “This will allow us to get more students of color into advanced mathematics classes at the high school.” The mathematics program is supported by a middle school mathematics coach. To help foster a smooth transition to high school, guidance counselors from the middle school and the high school come together to discuss incoming grade 9 students. In the words of one interviewee “We try to make first semester a soft landing” Students who may need help to succeed in high school are identified early and scheduled in classes with the support of educational service professional (ESPs). Review team members observed ESPs supporting groups of students in several high school classrooms.

Although there are few ELLs at the high school, it is unlikely that the available resources and support adequately meet their needs. According to ESE data, in 2012 there were 12 ELLs at the high school. According to interviewees, one half-time ESL teacher is the primary support for these students. Interviewees said that there was a wide variety of skill levels among the high school’s ELLs and that few high school teachers had participated in category training. Another interviewee, who attended category training at Hampshire Education Collaborative (HEC) for a week, stated that every teacher should have this training. It was reported that if teachers had the training they were more likely to have ELLs in their classes.

Overall, the district has provided several promising practices and procedures to ensure access, equity, and smooth transitions to excellent education; but these practices are inconsistently offered at the four elementary schools. ESL supports and services are insufficient for the growing population of English language learners. This conclusion was apparent from the Student Achievement finding above that isolated the proficiency rates of ELLs and others. Without more support and resources districtwide it will be challenging for ELLs and others to successfully transition and achieve their academic potential.

With no early- or late-bus transportation, only students whose parents are able to provide early or late transportation can attend critical before- or after-school programs; this may eliminate the very students who need the interventions the most. Thus, the impact of programs such as after-school tutoring at the elementary and middle schools is limited. The MMSI grant, which paid for professional development for teachers and for Saturday courses for students, and the practice of paying for all grade 10 students to take the PSAT, as noted in the first Assessment finding above, have increased the participation of students of color and students from low-income families in AP and honors classes. This is admirable and other districts would benefit from hearing about what Northampton has done and what members of the school system have learned from this experience. However, teachers told the review team that the grant has stratified the school. An unintended consequence of the training provided by the MMSI grant and the practice of paying for all grade 10 students to take the PSAT has been an increase in the proportion of at-risk students in non-AP classes without the help or strategies needed to support their diverse learning

needs. As the new superintendent noted in his Entry Plan, some programs have become “victims of their own success.”

The emphasis on increasing student participation in AP and honors classes is clearly narrowing one gap for students of color and students from low-income families. However, the at-risk students in non-AP and non-honors classes do not have the support and resources that they need. Without providing more support and resources to at-risk students in non-AP and non-honors classes, it will be challenging for the district to provide these students with the high-quality education that all students deserve.

Financial and Asset Management

The fiscal year 2012 budget document reflects costs by school, but does not provide a breakdown of costs by program, nor sufficient supplemental data to explain and justify program needs based on student achievement data. The supplemental data is absent from budget planning as well.

In the district’s mission statement posted on the website, Goal #4 states the need to develop a multiyear financial plan that clearly describes the relationship between the budget, instruction and student performance. The district has a new superintendent as well as a new business manager in FY2012, so FY2013 budget preparation is in new hands. The former superintendent prepared the FY 2012 budget, and her Executive Summary provided notes on the programs the district was funding. She was aware of the relationship between programs and costs but described the programs without substantial depth. Other than staff costs, she did not mention other financial data to support the allocation of funds for instructional programs.

A review of the fiscal year 2012 budget showed that the former business manager used pertinent documents exhibiting all funding sources, with trends, graphs, and several pages of school-by-school detail regarding staff and school expenses. The final budget presentation, however, did not include a breakdown or summary of total district staffing costs using ESE categories except in budget documents used internally by individual schools.

A review of budget and other documents showed no evidence that the district had a policy or process to evaluate existing programs, with criteria for costs and benefits; the district did not appear to have considered student achievement data in budget decision-making. (The 2006 EQA report stated, “The mayor, who serves as chair of the school committee, mentioned that the district had not based the budget on an analysis of student achievement data.”) Interviews indicated that possible reasons include: 1) the need for more expertise in making the connection between achievement data and budget decisions, 2) a lack of coordination of a variety of data assessment methodologies and, 3) the need for cost-benefit data for current and recommended programs.

Regarding evaluation of current programs based on student achievement data to inform the instructional budget, the assessment finding earlier in this report noted that there were inconsistencies inherent in the district’s assessment procedures and that there was not a program evaluation process. When the review team remarked that the budget does not appear to relate

program effectiveness and the allocation of funds, responses indicated that financial decisions were not based on data. When the new superintendent was asked about integrating assessment results as input to budget decisions, he was unable to respond because he did not yet know enough.

When the review team inquired whether or not the district's financial resources were adequate, there were recurrent themes in several responses. A teacher focus group responded in the negative and several teachers listed programmatic or personnel cuts and out-of-pocket contributions to buy supplies and other materials. An elementary teacher focus group similarly echoed the concern and stated that "finances are diminishing as well as staff." Principals in an interview replied in the negative, claiming that "without the Parent Teachers Organization, the Northampton Educational Foundation and grants, we'd be in trouble." In the same interview principals responded that "in the past we were given a dollar figure budget and principals just worked with it."

Northampton's budget does not make full use of the capabilities of its Municipal Information System (MUNIS) accounting software to provide budget data that is more transparent to internal and external audiences. The current budget presents expenditures only by school, though a review of other district websites indicated that some show budgeted expenses sorted in several different ways, such as by school, program, or object code. These different presentations could be derived from a MUNIS system. Currently the district's stakeholders see the internal "fiscal workings" of the district from a single angle. Providing multiple perspectives facilitates comparison and contrast within and across programs and makes it easier to assess costs and benefits and spending trends.

The MUNIS chart of accounts has been modified recently to replicate ESE's function and object codes, simplifying end of year reporting to the state, and incidentally allowing the budget to be arranged or sorted using these familiar and commonly used expense codes and object codes. When the review team asked the new business manager if there were plans to use the ESE codes in the fiscal year 2013 budget presentation to enhance the information offered, he responded that there had been discussions about possible changes to the current budget format.

When the review team asked the business manager whether or not he had discussed the district's need to evaluate instructional practices and link the results to reflect fiscal changes to instructional costs in the fiscal year 2013 budget, he responded that "this year will show a new approach" and said that the new superintendent had the experience to help build a better budget. In a school committee interview, a veteran member mentioned that the business manager had been charged to be as transparent as possible.

Another indicator that the district intends to think more strategically is that the new superintendent's Entry Plan noted that he had "reviewed student achievement data looking for trends, patterns and specific incidents indicating the need for further research and/or a recommended remedy." The mission statement referred to at the beginning of this finding, and the changes being made in systems and budget approach, along with the district's newly formed data teams, indicate that the district is moving in the right direction.

In summary, the district's budget planning data can be more meaningful and valuable if developed and viewed from a broader variety of perspectives. Data that may appear logical to one individual may leave unanswered questions for another. By providing a budget with a variety of ways of presenting expenditures, the district can be more transparent and demonstrate good fiscal practice. Likewise, using the budget document to provide information about the costs and benefits of educational programs is good fiscal practice. These practices can mean a more robust and credible fiscal document and stronger budget management directly focused on improving student achievement.

According to ESE data for fiscal year 2010⁷, the district's special needs costs were 24.3 percent of budgeted operations, compared to the state average of 19.9 percent.

The Director of Special Needs said the district was aware of the higher than average costs for special needs services and indicated that the district has tried to provide more in-district services for students with IEP's, particularly for evaluations and speech, occupational, and physical therapies.

ESE trend data on per-pupil expenditures indicated that Northampton spent considerably more per-pupil for medical/therapeutic services than was spent statewide, as shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Per-Pupil Cost for In-District Medical/Therapeutic Services
Northampton Public Schools, 2008-2010 (in dollars)**

	2008	2009	2010
Northampton Public Schools	281	286	310
State	193	213	222
Source: Data from School Finance portion of ESE website			

The special needs director suggested that independent contractors' therapeutic service costs are high, mentioning that it was difficult to retain therapeutic staff as district employees when they were able to command higher salaries elsewhere.

In a leadership interview, a similar question regarding special needs staffing and high private placement costs was asked. The response indicated that there was no coordinated regular education intervention program in place and what interventions did exist were not succeeding well in the schools. Interviewees noted that the district was developing intervention programs and beginning to build an infrastructure to keep students in-district with proper educational support. To reduce special education costs, the district is searching for social workers, plans to strengthen the in-district autism program, and sees a need for staff professional development; taken together these can improve the balance of internal and out-of-district program costs, resulting in cost savings.

⁷ 2010 data is the latest available data for special needs costs.

Principals told the review team that the number of paraprofessionals, called Educational Service Professionals or ESPs in the district, has had the effect of decreasing general support such as remedial services, particularly behavioral support. Some school committee members expressed interest in using interventions early on to reduce the number of students identified for special education.

The district's special education costs totaled \$7,149, 517 in fiscal year 2011, based on the fiscal year 2011 End-of-Year Report, Schedule 4. The steps the district is currently taking to develop a special needs plan covering all aspects of the program could result in freeing up funding to reallocate to other instructional needs. In summary, Northampton, like many districts, does not currently have a strong plan for its special education program to help control a very complex component of school district. The district has taken several steps, but still needs to develop a more comprehensive plan. Without a thorough analysis of the current program and its costs, and the identification of targeted strategies to contain program costs, funds will continue to be stretched thinner and thinner.

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

With the broad acceptance by the school community of the superintendent's Entry Plan, the district has established a firm foundation to integrate a long-range planning process as a central component of decision making. The review team recommends that the district continue this process by developing a strategic plan to guide the district in annual, short-term, and long-term visions for the future, and further, that the director of human resources be included in this process.

With the approval of the school committee, the new superintendent developed and widely publicized an Entry Plan that identified curricular, instructional, and financial priorities and emphasized improvements in technology and professional development. The Entry Plan was the product of extensive interviews with elected officials, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community leaders. The superintendent also examined documents, observed classrooms, and attended community events as part of his data gathering. He reviewed the contents of the Entry Plan during after-school meetings at the individual schools, in a meeting with the school committee, at a meeting of the administrative leadership team (ALT), and at a public forum for parents and members of the community.

The concept of strategic planning is one with which the district is acquainted. A reference was made to a strategic plan in the previous superintendent's evaluation, and the interim superintendent referred to a strategic plan in his interview with the review team, saying that he did not know what had happened to it. These were the only references to a strategic plan encountered by the review team. Although strategic planning was dormant, the superintendent's Entry Plan can serve to reignite a strategic approach to planning. Indeed, in interviews, several school committee members said that the superintendent's Entry Plan, combined with his discussions with the school committee, signaled a strategic planning capability—especially in regard to budget development, improvements in technology, and the integration of the District Improvement Plan with School Improvement Plans. One school committee member noted that the superintendent was building “a budget that is more program based,” and another noted that the superintendent was “looking out in future years.” Finally, a third member of the school committee said that the superintendent was “talking about a five- to six-year technology plan” and “looking at things long range.”

As well as continuing with this strategic planning mind-set and developing a strategic plan, the review team recommends that the director of human resources be included in all meetings of the administrative leadership team. Such an inclusion will broaden the conversation about the future

vision of the district and allow input into the plan from a human resources perspective, particularly as the district reviews leadership assignments associated with curriculum development at the district and school levels (namely, those of the director of academic effectiveness, the math and literacy coaches, and the department heads); engages in the hiring process; and ultimately deploys personnel to make that vision a reality.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should provide sufficient districtwide curricular leadership to ensure that a process for the timely review and revision of curriculum is implemented. Further, the district should provide sufficient oversight to ensure that curriculum at all levels is aligned both vertically and horizontally and supply the necessary resources for core programs to be delivered consistently and coherently, particularly at the elementary level.

A process for the regular and timely review of curriculum documents has not been established in the district. With the exception of recent curriculum revisions at the high school in preparation for a New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) visit and in grade 8 on ELA units (dated 2009), little work has been done on the curriculum since 2007 when the position of associate superintendent for curriculum was eliminated. The position of director of academic effectiveness, created in 2010, has many substantive district responsibilities beyond the scope of the curriculum and does not concentrate on curriculum issues. There are no curriculum specialists at the elementary level, and at the high school curriculum specialists are hard pressed to coordinate and champion curriculum reviews because of an absence of time and resources.

Complete kindergarten through grade 8 curriculum documents in the core subjects have not been updated and in some cases do not exist. When these documents were designed, they were written without a common format and did not include the necessary components to guide instruction. Although documentation is strongest at the high school level, there is a range in the quality and completeness of some of the course syllabi. The high school is not fully benefiting from the leadership of its department heads, who have very limited curricular responsibilities.

There has been little coordination of curriculum across the elementary schools to ensure consistency and coherency in implementing the existing curriculum. Because teachers at the elementary level do not have complete and district-documented curriculum guides in ELA and mathematics, they use textbook programs and their pacing guides as curriculum guides. The full implementation of the mathematics program at the elementary level is in question. Until the fall of 2011, the district did not have a uniform reading program. Although there is now a unified reading program at the elementary level, the district is not providing sufficient support to ensure that teachers implement the program with fidelity and equity across schools.

Vertical and horizontal alignment is strongest at the middle school, but teachers there have not had the benefit of updated and complete curriculum guides to guide instruction. Vertical alignment between levels in the district is also in question because there are limited opportunities for cross-level conversations and an absence of leadership to monitor alignment.

In consideration of these factors, the review team recommends that the district give careful consideration to providing sufficient curriculum leadership districtwide. The curriculum leader(s) should fully develop and implement important curricular practices. They should:

- Revise and update curriculum in all content areas
- Create a common curricular template that includes standards, objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, assessments, and extensions to accommodate diverse learning needs
- Create curriculum guides and provide needed resources to support the programs that are in place in ELA and mathematics at the elementary level
- Establish a regular cycle for the review and renewal of the curriculum
- Coordinate the curriculum across the four elementary schools
- Coordinate the vertical alignment between levels in the district
- Consider expanding the role and responsibilities of department heads at the high school level to include oversight of the curriculum

The review team believes that much of the curricular work delineated above can be accomplished without considerable additional resources or personnel, through more effective use of common planning time and professional development opportunities. With an aligned, fully developed, consistently delivered, and improving curriculum, the district will ensure that its taught curriculum is aligned to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and to the MCAS performance standards, thus assuring that all students in the district have the opportunity to attain high levels of achievement.

The district should take steps to establish a common understanding among teachers of the characteristics of high-quality instruction while providing opportunities for teachers to further develop and enhance their instructional practices.

According to the review team's observations, the district has some notable strengths in instructional practices. Throughout the district the classroom climate is respectful and positive. Teachers are prepared for instruction and help students make prior connections to learning. Academic content is delivered with accuracy and clarity and the activation of higher-order thinking skills is often evident throughout the district as students examine, analyze, and interpret information in the observed classrooms. And across the district the review team found solid evidence that lessons are paced to allow all students to be engaged.

While these areas of instructional strength are evident, there are inconsistencies in instructional design and delivery across the three levels, as well as areas of weak implementation of effective instructional practices. At present, the district does not have a common understanding of high-quality, evidence-based, instructional practices. The practice of communicating learning objectives that identify student learning outcomes and drive instruction has not been established throughout the district. The use of informal student assessments is inadequate. Without clear learning objectives to drive instruction, the use of informal student assessment is weakened. The

effective use of student groups is not in place in the district nor do students consistently have an opportunity to engage with a variety of curriculum resources—including technology—to enhance their learning. Students at all levels do not have enough opportunities to participate in tiered instructional activities.

There is a direct link between a high-quality curriculum and the delivery of high-quality instruction. Documents in the district and interviews with teachers and school leaders indicate that in kindergarten through grade 8, teachers cannot reap the benefits of updated and complete curriculum guides to drive instruction. Although there are many examples of high-quality syllabi at the high school to guide and inform instruction, the quality of the syllabi is inconsistent and some are incomplete. A more consistently rich and documented series of syllabi would greatly enhance instruction at all levels of the high school program.

With these factors in mind, the review team recommends that district and school leaders facilitate opportunities for teachers to develop a common understanding of the characteristics of high-quality instruction that meets the increasingly diverse needs of its students. At the same time, district and school leaders should provide professional development opportunities to increase and expand teachers' capacity to deliver high-quality instruction—in regular education, in inclusion settings, and for English language learners—to ensure that all students have the benefit of opportunities to learn at high levels.

Assessment

The district should develop and clearly communicate districtwide strategies and procedures to ensure that groups of teachers and leaders

- **regularly collect, share, and analyze assessment data and**
- **use the analysis of data to revise and fine-tune curriculum and select and adjust teaching strategies, particularly differentiated instruction, to improve student achievement.**

Assessment practices vary in variety and consistency across Northampton's schools and across school levels—elementary, middle, and high school. Some elementary schools do not have enough leveled books; this compromises both instruction and assessments, as evidenced by the Readers' Workshop program. The absence of a rich and documented ELA curriculum in pre-kindergarten through grade 5 limits the leverage that assessment results can have through modifications to what is taught. Also, without required, structured, grade-level and subject-level meetings for teachers, principals and coaches in the elementary schools, it has been difficult for educators to effectively process student achievement data and uncover the implications of the results for teaching, learning, and leading at the school level.

At the elementary and middle schools, formative assessments have not been the focus of in-depth exploration as a valuable tool to support teaching and learning. At the high school, the absence of common planning time has meant that there is only coincidental or informal time for department

members to probe and discuss pedagogy, curriculum planning, and assessments. While high school teachers have been able to work at a fairly high level by dint of their professionalism, intelligence, and concern for their students, their practice would be strengthened greatly if they had more time to collaborate by department, by course, and as a whole faculty.

Several strategies can help. There is much that teachers and leaders can learn from colleagues at different school levels in the district, as noted in the Assessment finding above. Exemplars shared among different schools can drive these conversations at school-level or district-level forums. Fundamentally, however, district and school leaders in collaboration with teachers from all levels need to be in agreement on the following important aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment—the essential and very much linked components of the learning system:

- A rich curriculum document (beyond the published instructional program) for all subjects that identifies what to teach and how to teach to provide a more complete and tailored instructional platform that meets the needs of all Northampton students
- Formative and summative assessments in multiple formats and measures to inform teachers and leaders about student progress and attainment, pedagogy, and the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum
- Assessment data and other data (both academic and non-academic) that is systematized and easily accessible to all teachers and leaders to inform practice and identify topics in need of improvement and students in need of support and intervention
- Time set aside during the school day to meet in grade level or department teams to analyze and discuss assessment data, instruction, curriculum, and student work
- Strong communication systems between teachers and leaders at the classroom and grade levels, in and between schools, and with the district leadership about what has been learned from data analysis and what strategies and innovations teachers and school leaders have developed to address weaknesses in the curriculum, instructional practice, and student achievement
- Dependable follow-up to ensure that planned modifications have been made and either deemed successful or adjusted (in which case they will need additional follow-up)
- A multiyear cycle of program review using student achievement data as reference points to enable the district to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of its academic and support programs and interventions and enable program adjustments or decisions about program replacement and renewal

It is important for the district to institute at all school levels a cycle of continuous improvement leading to stronger practice and a higher level of student learning and understanding. A cycle of continuous improvement will bring with it a culture of continuous improvement.

The district should continue its pursuit to upgrade its technology infrastructure and the ability of personnel to use it, improving access to and analysis and use of assessment and other data and bringing the district's systems and practices into the 21st century.

Several obstacles have inhibited the district's data and technology literacy. As many in the district recognize, little up-to-date hardware or software is uniformly provided to teachers and

leaders to realize the benefits of real-time analysis, easy communication, and consistent action planning/monitoring. There is insufficient ability on the part of some leaders and teachers to use technology and analyze data well. And there is an absence of time at the high school, and of well-structured time at the elementary schools during the school day, for data-rich discussions of teaching and learning.

To overcome these obstacles and move forward, the district should:

- Develop its technology plan and seek the needed resources to improve the hardware and software in use by leaders, teachers, students and support staff at all school levels
- Jointly develop ongoing professional development for teachers, leaders, and support staff on using technology's analytical tools to better understand assessment and other student data to improve teaching and learning
- Carve out common meeting time at all school levels during the school day so that teachers and leaders can meet in communities of practice to engage in professional conversations and explorations of teaching and learning— in particular, using student work, curriculum, and assessment data to guide their insights and decision-making
- Use technology more effectively for better communication across all subunits and among all stakeholders by investigating, selecting, and investing in a data portal to provide all stakeholders—leaders, teachers, support staff, students, and parents—access to relevant student, school, and district data, and other information

Because these efforts may take several years, it would be useful for the district to think incrementally and use a carefully thought-through and coordinated plan. The review team also recommends that Northampton educators consider consulting and perhaps visiting other districts that have put in place any of these various components of good practice.

Human Resources and Professional Development

As it implements a new evaluation system aligned with the new Massachusetts educator evaluation system, the district should also develop and implement a districtwide system of supervision.

The site-based management model that has been used in the district for several years has created uneven supervision practices in each school. These vary greatly in both quality and comprehensiveness. Having a more consistent and comprehensive supervision model for the entire district that all principals can use effectively would benefit all concerned.

Specifically, even though there will be variations in teachers' instructional choices by lesson and classroom and multiple ways for principals to supervise teaching, there should be common expectations for teachers about how instruction is monitored to ensure high quality. These common expectations should include how principals will consider and review lesson plans, conduct walkthroughs, and give feedback based on walkthroughs and observations. The impact

of such a supervision model would inform and improve professional practice at all grade levels and help improve student achievement for all students.

While the district is developing these common expectations, it should be borne in mind that frequent, unannounced observations and observations of teachers outside the classroom are both important aspects of an effective educator supervision and evaluation system. See ESE's guide on this subject, entitled *Strategies and Suggestions for Observations* (available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>). Specifically, the guide outlines the following:

- ***Frequent, unannounced observations.*** *Frequent observation of classroom practice – with feedback—is essential to improving practice, but only feasible if most observations are short, unannounced and followed by brief, focused feedback. There will be times when an evaluator is in a classroom or other work site and it becomes apparent that the visit needs to be extended, but a visit of approximately 10 minutes can yield a great deal of useful information. With short, unannounced visits, many more samples of practice can be collected, and many more powerful conversations about teaching practice can be had: when the typical observation of classroom practice is 10 minutes in duration and does not have to be preceded by a pre-observation conference or followed by a period-long post-observation conference, then evaluators can reasonably be expected to conduct 2 to 5 such observations on a typical day.*
 - *3 observations conducted each day on 150 of the 180 days in a school year translate to 450 observations each year, or 10 observations per year for each of 45 teachers. 7-10 brief observations followed by focused feedback should be a sufficient number to secure a representative picture of practice and promote the reflection and discussion needed to support improving practice.*
 - *Feedback can be provided during a conversation or in writing. Providing feedback through conversation promotes discussion of practice; providing feedback in writing creates an opportunity for the educator to more easily reflect on the feedback on an ongoing basis. Whenever possible, an evaluator should have a conversation with the educator and follow up with brief written feedback summarizing the conversation and/or offering targeted advice for improvement.*
 - *It should be noted that not all observations can or should be 5 to 15 minutes. There will be circumstances where longer observations are appropriate. Novice or struggling teachers may benefit from longer observations on occasion.*
- ***Observations outside of the classroom.*** *Observation of practice need not be limited to classroom observation. Conferences with individual teachers or teacher teams that focus on unit planning or ways the team is responding to interim assessment data can yield useful information and provide opportunities for feedback and growth. They can also be well-aligned with school and team goals. Most schools have goals that depend on effective*

collaboration among educators, so observation of educators in settings where they are developing their skills in collaboration can support school-wide goals. That said, care needs to be taken to ensure that observation does not interfere with the free exchange of ideas that is important in any healthy collegial environment. Therefore, collecting, reviewing and giving feedback on specific artifacts from department and team meetings can serve a purpose similar to observation of meetings. Similarly observing educators with parents and/or reviewing a team's analysis of representative samples of home-school communications can support collaborative work, reinforce school goals, and provide opportunities for useful feedback.

Additionally, because the district is a Race to the Top district, it is mandated to implement a new evaluation system consistent with the new ESE educator evaluation system in the 2012-2013 year. 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.

A review of 32 randomly selected teacher folders at the time of the review showed that the district's longstanding evaluation process was not effective in promoting professional growth and was out of compliance with state regulations. It is essential that the district fully commit to using the new ESE system by dedicating the time, people, and training of supervisors to do so. As a result, the evaluations of the professional staff will be more timely and effective in promoting professional self-awareness and growth. In addition, the new evaluations will emphasize student learning and inform professional practice to a much greater degree than the previous system did.

The district should commit to organizing, allotting sufficient time for, and adequately funding a viable and comprehensive professional development program for teachers and administrators. Such a program should be aligned with the priorities in a new District Improvement Plan (DIP).

Interviewees at all levels said that recent professional development opportunities offered by the district did not have enough time and funds to be highly effective. Most professional development opportunities, beyond the state-mandated programs, came from school-level initiatives. Meaningful professional development topics such as data-analysis procedures, using

technology in the classrooms, or research-based instructional strategies that are offered regularly in districts throughout the state were either not offered or minimally covered in Northampton.

In focus groups, teachers said how eager they were to participate in professional development that was effective and meaningful. The district should find ways to allot more time for professional development, provide enough funds to support a viable and comprehensive program, and organize and activate the districtwide Professional Development Committee already provided for in the collective bargaining agreement with teachers. This committee, composed of representatives from each school and leaders from the school and district levels, should oversee and evaluate the entire professional development program, making sure that it is aligned with the district priorities in the DIP. There is little doubt that an effective professional development program will contribute to improved student achievement across the board.

Student Support

The district should identify and implement the academic support and interventions necessary to address the diverse needs of all students, including allocating appropriate resources to respond to the needs of its growing English language learner (ELL) population.

Interviewees said that academic student support varied across the four elementary schools. A “patchwork” of support programs is being developed at the schools, including morning mathematics clubs, tutoring, and afterschool MCAS support. Many of the programs are run by committed staff, volunteer college students, and parents and are unique to a school setting, but are not systematized across schools. The district does not provide transportation for students who elect to come before school or stay after school. This prevents many students from obtaining the support that they need. While the individual schools are creative and thoughtful in trying to address students’ needs, the district should take responsibility for identifying adequate resources for all schools to meet the diverse needs of all students.

In-class support is expanding with the inclusion of reading interventionists, mathematics coaches, and ESL teachers. At the same time, the number of English language learners (ELLs) is growing. In one year, enrollment of ELLs at the Jackson Street School⁸ more than doubled, jumping from 15 in 2010-2011 to 42 in 2011-2012. The district should be prepared with the trained staff and resources to meet the needs of ELLs as well as those of students whose language and literacy skills may not be at a high level but whose families choose not to enroll them in the ELL program.

The district should provide more support for non-AP and non-honors students and for the high school teachers who teach them. Interviewees noted on several occasions that the high school is becoming bifurcated with the success of increased enrollment in AP and honors classes and the absence of support for teachers and students in non-AP and non-honors classes. More support

⁸ Where all elementary level ELLs are enrolled.

and resources are needed to strengthen general college preparatory classes to ensure that Northampton will continue to provide for the academic success of all students.

At the time of the review the district was poised to address this recommendation. In his Entry Plan the newly appointed superintendent acknowledged the challenges of the growing ELL enrollment. He also mentioned that the district should consider a drop in fees for bus transportation and activities. Furthermore, there is an overall commitment to promoting student learning through professional development and classroom support throughout the district. The review team is confident that the district is prepared to identify and implement the supports and services needed for all students to be successful.

Financial and Asset Management

To be more transparent and justify expenditures, budget documents presented to the public should include summarized profiles of academic and support programs and some criteria for assessing their effectiveness, and present financial data in several different ways, such as by program, school, function and object.

The district's MUNIS software has the capability to provide more extensive presentations of budget data. In interviews, the new business manager and his staff appeared to be proficient in using MUNIS. The recent change in the chart of accounts to use ESE function codes allows more comparison to other districts, and reports to the school committee are already classified by ESE function codes.

The district should develop a process and the capacity for reviewing student data of several kinds to assess program effectiveness and direct budget allocations. The review team is aware that the new superintendent and business manager are sorting and clarifying issues with financial systems and budget presentations. The review team, however, recommends that leaders begin to think in the direction of the strategies described above to make the budget more transparent and justifiable internally and externally.

With respect to the district's somewhat high percentage of funds allocated to programs for students with disabilities, district leaders should review current practices and their cost and effectiveness, and develop and implement strategic policies that outline more consistent delivery of intervention programming that may reduce the identification of students with disabilities and/or allow better targeting of services for them.

The district is developing intervention programs and building an infrastructure to keep students in-district with proper educational support. It would be useful to do some comparative study of costs; for example, costs for paraprofessionals, medical/therapeutic services, outside placements, and referrals, to name a few. The district could evaluate services currently being provided, comparing them with resource room and intervention standards in other districts, and develop its capacity to provide fully inclusive classrooms, possibly using a co-teaching strategy.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Northampton Public Schools was conducted from February 6–9, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Owen Conway, Ph. D., Leadership and Governance

Suzanne Kelly, Curriculum and Instruction

Linda L. Greyser, Ed. D., Assessment and review team coordinator

William Wassel, Human Resources and Professional Development

Lenora Jennings, Student Support

Richard Scortino, 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 Northampton Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Northampton financial personnel: business manager, assistant business manager, city finance director, and three accounting clerks.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Northampton School Committee: six of the nine school committee members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Northampton Association of School Employees (NASE): president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, grievance chair, ESP (paraprofessional) coordinator, and publications officer
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the central office administration of the Northampton Public Schools: superintendent, director of academic effectiveness, director of technology, director of special education, supervisor of special education, director of human resources for the city of Northampton, and previous interim superintendent.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Northampton Public Schools: Bridge Street Elementary School, pre-kindergarten through grade 5; R. K. Finn/Ryan Road Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; Jackson Street Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; Leeds Elementary School, kindergarten through grade 5; JFK Middle School, grades 6–8; and Northampton High School, grades 9–12.
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, the high school academic dean, teachers, two reading interventionists, the literacy coach, the mathematics coach, two Title I mathematics teachers, several middle school and high school department chairs, the early childhood coordinator, the ELL coordinator, the school psychologist, the school adjustment counselor, guidance department chairs for grades 6–8 and 9–12, and chairs of the NEASC Core Values Standard and Assessment Standard. The team interviewed 5 elementary teachers, 17 middle school teachers, and 14 high school teachers in focus groups and 6 teachers in interview sessions.
 - The review team conducted 74 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 6 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 Northampton Public Schools, conducted from February 6–9, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
February 6 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with school employees' association.	February 7 Interviews with district staff and principals; interview with city finance director and city human resources director; school visit to JFK Middle School; classroom observations; review of personnel files; testing of payroll; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents.	February 8 Interviews with district and school staff; school visits at Bridge Street Elementary School, Jackson Street Elementary School, RK Finn/Ryan Road Elementary School, Leeds Elementary School; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews.	February 9 School visit to Northampton High School; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

**Table C1: Northampton Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)⁹
2009–2011 English Language Arts**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	69	52	69	50	73	53.5
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
Grade 3—District	56	NA*	60	NA*	62	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	48	41	49	39	53	49
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
Grade 5—District	57	55	57	47	66	49
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
Grade 6—District	75	52	71	57	69	56.5
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
Grade 7—District	74	49	81	47.5	74	47
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
Grade 8—District	81	58	82	60.5	90	70
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
Grade 10—District	90	49.5	83	50	91	46
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						

⁹ “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, and 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: Northampton 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	49	50	51	45	53	51
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 3—District	51	NA*	50	NA*	49	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	30	40	35	37	36	52.5
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
Grade 5—District	36	50	44	45	49	42.5
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
Grade 6—District	52	36	45	39.5	42	37
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 7—District	52	74	56	61	51	71
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
Grade 8—District	44	52	42	36.5	56	49
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
Grade 10—District	80	54	78	52	84	63
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: Northampton Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups, English Language Arts, 2011**

	Northampton Public Schools				State		
	Number of Students Included	Percent Proficient	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	CPI	Median SGP
All Students	1,416	73	88.6	53.5	69	87.2	50
African-American/Black	46	55	77.7	64.5	50	77.4	47
Asian	60	60	83.3	39	77	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	204	41	71.7	40	45	74.2	46
White	1,050	82	93.1	55	77	90.9	51
ELL	18	0	36.1	---	22	59.4	48
FELL	20	25	58.8	---	56	81.7	54
Special Education	332	67	71.2	46	30	68.3	42
Low-Income	438	51	77.6	47	49	77.1	46
High Needs	616	50	77.8	48	47	77.0	46

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.

5. "High Needs" includes students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learner/former English language learner students.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

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

Northampton Public Schools					State		
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	<i>Percent Proficient</i>	<i>CPI</i>	<i>Median SGP</i>	<i>Percent Proficient</i>	<i>CPI</i>	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	1,418	53	76.4	51	58	79.9	50
African-American/Black	46	13	50.5	33	34	65	47
Asian	60	41	67.1	31	77	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	205	21	56	43	34	64.4	46
White	1,053	63	82.6	54	65	84.3	50
ELL	20	10	35	---	26	56.3	52
FELL	21	15	44	---	50	75.1	53
Special Education	331	19	53.9	43	22	57.7	43
Low-Income	440	29	61.3	45	37	67.3	46
High Needs	620	29	61.4	45	37	67.1	46

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.

5. "High Needs" includes students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learner/former English language learner students.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. From 2009 to 2011, the percentage of Northampton students overall who attained proficient or higher in MCAS test results exceeded the state's in ELA but not in mathematics. The district's higher ELA achievement was primarily because of stronger achievement in the upper grades. The district's lower mathematics achievement was primarily because of lower achievement in the elementary schools.
2. Student achievement as measured by 2011 MCAS results in ELA and, in particular, mathematics shows gaps compared to the state, especially for Hispanic/Latino students, English language learners (ELLs), and Former English language learners (FELLs).

Leadership and Governance

3. Central office leadership is in transition and the processes associated with leadership assignments are being transformed through the development and application of the newly appointed superintendent's Entry Plan.
4. The position of the director of academic effectiveness is insufficiently integrated into the leadership requirements of the district—particularly in regard to curriculum development and instructional delivery. The poorly defined nature and broad responsibilities of this critical role have created conflict and generated frustration among a number of parties—particularly among those who have curricular or instructional responsibilities.

Curriculum and Instruction

5. The district has not provided sufficient curriculum leadership to ensure that curricula are updated, consistently used, aligned and effectively delivered, particularly at the elementary level.
6. The district does not have a common understanding of instructional design and delivery contributing to the uneven and insufficient implementation of instructional practices at all levels.

Assessment

7. Although pockets of good assessment practice are evident in some schools, the district does not yet have a balanced and comprehensive assessment system from kindergarten through grade 12 or a shared and documented strategy to develop one.
8. The limited technology capacity in the district and generally low data literacy of educators impinges on their ability at all levels to access, collect, analyze, distribute, and use assessment data, including MCAS test data, to improve student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

9. A districtwide supervision model does not exist and the process used to evaluate the district's teachers varies greatly from school to school. With the exception of the district's middle school, the processes used to inform instruction and promote professional growth are ineffective.
10. The professional development program in the district has not been well organized or implemented through the central office and has primarily been a school-based program. Additionally, insufficient time and inadequate funds have compromised the effectiveness of the program.

Student Support

11. Although the district has established academic support practices in kindergarten through grade 12, it is not meeting the academic needs of some at-risk students.
12. The district has established procedures and practices to ease the transitions from school to school and to increase access and equity in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses; however, there are areas that would benefit from additional supports for smoother transitions and better access.

Financial and Asset Management

13. The fiscal year 2012 budget document reflects costs by school, but does not provide a breakdown of costs by program, nor sufficient supplemental data to explain and justify program needs based on student achievement data. The supplemental data is absent from budget planning as well.
14. According to ESE data for fiscal year 2010¹⁰, the district's special needs costs were 24.3 percent of budgeted operations, compared to the state average of 19.9 percent.

¹⁰ 2010 data is the latest available data for special needs costs.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. With the broad acceptance by the school community of the superintendent's Entry Plan, the district has established a firm foundation to integrate a long-range planning process as a central component of decision making. The review team recommends that the district continue this process by developing a strategic plan to guide the district in annual, short- term, and long-term visions for the future, and further, that the director of human resources be included in this process.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The district should provide sufficient districtwide curricular leadership to ensure that a process for the timely review and revision of curriculum is implemented. Further, the district should provide sufficient oversight to ensure that curriculum at all levels is aligned both vertically and horizontally and supply the necessary resources for core programs to be delivered consistently and coherently, particularly at the elementary level.
3. The district should take steps to establish a common understanding among teachers of the characteristics of high-quality instruction while providing opportunities for teachers to further develop and enhance their instructional practices.

Assessment

4. The district should develop and clearly communicate districtwide strategies and procedures to ensure that groups of teachers and leaders
 - regularly collect, share, and analyze assessment data and
 - use the analysis of data to revise and fine-tune curriculum and select and adjust teaching strategies, particularly differentiated instruction, to improve student achievement.
5. The district should continue its pursuit to upgrade its technology infrastructure and the ability of personnel to use it, improving access to and analysis and use of assessment and other data and bringing the district's systems and practices into the 21st century.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. As it implements a new evaluation system aligned with the new Massachusetts educator evaluation system, the district should also develop and implement a districtwide system of supervision.

7. The district should commit to organizing, allotting sufficient time for, and adequately funding a viable and comprehensive professional development program for teachers and administrators. Such a program should be aligned with the priorities in a new District Improvement Plan (DIP)

Student Support

8. The district should identify and implement the academic support and interventions necessary to address the diverse needs of all students, including allocating appropriate resources to respond to the needs of its growing English language learner (ELL) population.

Financial and Asset Management

9. To be more transparent and justify expenditures, budget documents presented to the public should include summarized profiles of academic and support programs and some criteria for assessing their effectiveness, and present financial data in several different ways, such as by program, school, function and object.
10. With respect to the district's somewhat high percentage of funds allocated to programs for students with disabilities, district leaders should review current practices and their cost and effectiveness, and develop and implement strategic policies that outline more consistent delivery of intervention programming that may reduce the identification of students with disabilities and/or allow better targeting of services for them.