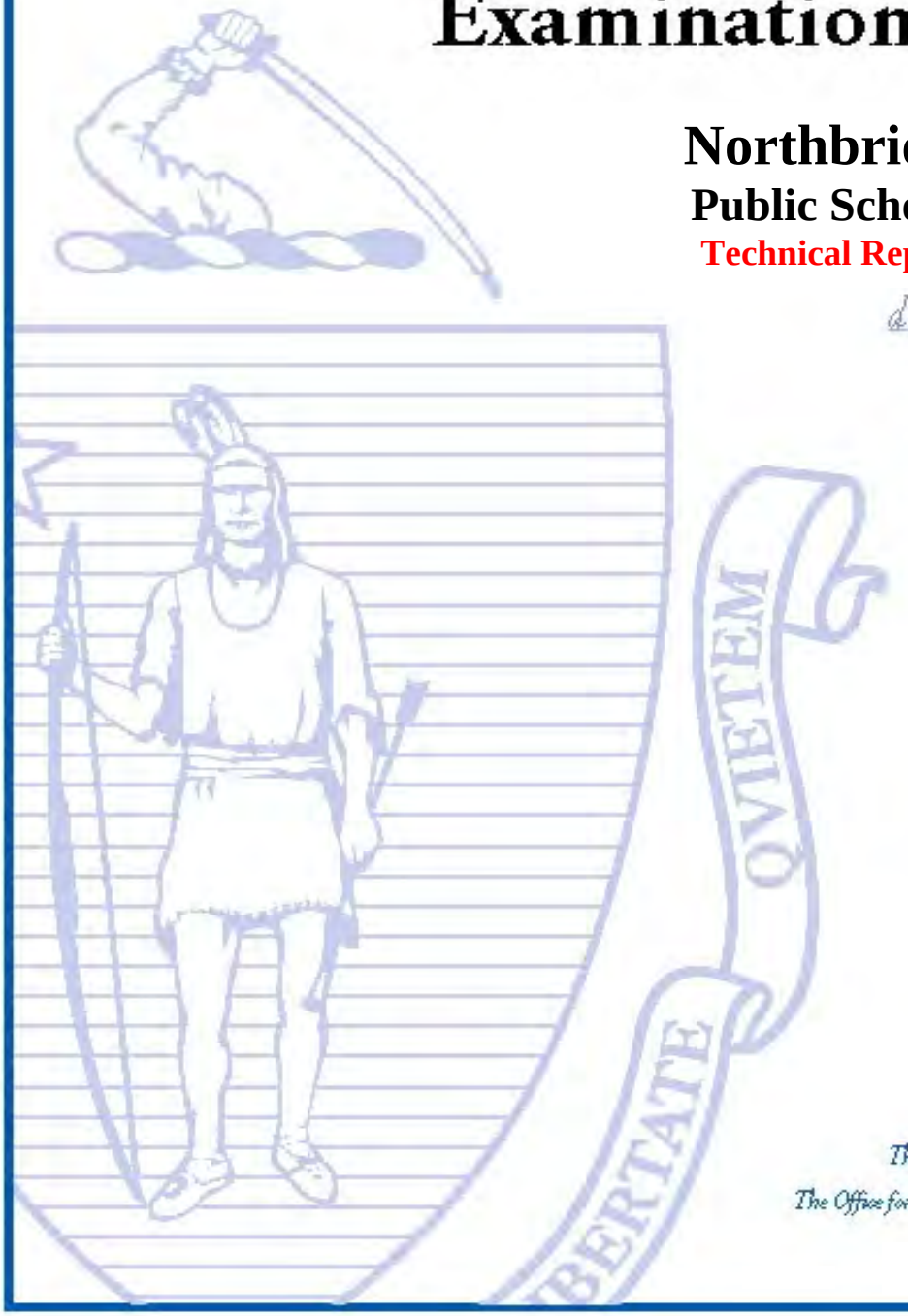
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

School District Examination Report:

Northbridge
Public Schools
Technical Report

data driven
standards based
learner centered



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

2004 - 2006

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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

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

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Executive Summary

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Northbridge Public Schools in March 2007. With an average proficiency index of 81 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006 (88 PI points in English language arts and 74 PI points in math), the district is considered a 'High' performing school system based on the Department of Education's rating system (found in Appendix A of this report), with achievement above the state average. More than half of Northbridge's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests.

District Overview

The town of Northbridge is located in Worcester County in southern central Massachusetts. It is a suburb of Worcester and was incorporated as a town in 1772. It has a rich manufacturing heritage. The Blackstone and Mumford Rivers run through town, and in the early 1800s numerous industrial developments were erected along the riverbanks. Today most of the mill buildings are no longer used to full capacity; however, they do offer valuable incubator space to small businesses. Most of the town's architecture, developed during the 1800s, has been preserved and offers a fascinating view into the past. In fact, the school department offices are located in one of these historic homes on Linwood Avenue. The largest sources of employment within the community are manufacturing; educational, health, and social services; and retail trade. The town is governed by a Board of Selectmen/Town Manager/Open Town Meeting form of municipal government.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Northbridge had a median family income of $62,095 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 188 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth, and about 4.4 percent of families earned incomes below the poverty level. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 13,182 with a population of 2,790 school-age children, or 21 percent of the total. Of the total households in Northbridge, 39 percent were households with children under 18 years of age, and 23 percent were households with individuals age 65 years or older. Twenty-four percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2005-2006 the Northbridge Public Schools had a total enrollment of 2,629. The demographic composition in the district was: 93.7 percent White, 3.5 percent Hispanic, 1.1 percent African-American, 0.6 percent Asian, 0.2 percent Native American, 0.1 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.9 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 0.5 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 20.2 percent low income, and 13.3 percent special education. Ninety percent of school-age children in Northbridge attended public schools. The district offers school choice, and 105 students from other school districts attended the Northbridge Public Schools in 2005-2006. A total of 202 Northbridge students attended public schools outside the district, including 101 students who attended Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School and two students who attended charter schools.

The district has five schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 12, including one preschool, two elementary schools serving grades kindergarten through 4, one middle school serving grades 5 through 8, and one high school serving grades 9 through 12. Northbridge Public Schools' administrative team consisted of a superintendent, curriculum director, district language arts coordinator/Title I director, technology director, special education director, and director of operations. The elementary schools and the high school each had a principal and an assistant principal, and the middle school had a principal and two assistant principals. The principal of Northbridge Elementary School also served as the principal of the preschool. The district has a nine-member school committee.

In FY 2006, Northbridge's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $9,614, compared to $11,196 statewide, ranking it 236 out of 325 of the 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $18,155,625 to $20,849,978; Chapter 70 aid increased from $11,463,830 to $12,970,825; the required local contribution increased from $5,372,729 to $6,253,429; and the foundation enrollment increased from 2,432 to 2,581. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 63 to 62 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report decreased from 65 to 62 percent.

Context

The Northbridge Public Schools has experienced high turnover in town management positions, including both a town manager and interim manager during the review period. Furthermore, at the time of the EQA visit, a new town manager had been in office for less than two weeks.

In 2005-2006, under the leadership of a new superintendent the district began the transformation to meet the requirements of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. Some of these requirements included adherence to student learning time regulations and evidence of a complete written curriculum aligned with the state curriculum frameworks in ELA, math, and science, containing components such as content and skills at each grade, resources and materials, pace of the taught curriculum, and assessments and benchmarks. The district also needed updated policies, a formative and summative assessment system, and wide participation in analysis of data from the MCAS tests and local assessments, so that the professional staff could make data-driven decisions. According to the district report card released subsequent to the EQA site visit, the district did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all subgroups, in all grades, in ELA and math in 2006.

Overall, the district faces the challenge of implementing long-term plans for facilities, capital planning, curriculum and instruction, assessment, equity, professional development, and technology to keep pace with other school districts which adopted education reform policies sooner. The district is facing a significant funding reduction in FY 2008, and in preparation for an override vote the school committee has asked the superintendent to project the impact of a $5 million reduction proposed by the board of selectmen. The district posted reports on its website, warning of the following hardships at all levels: increased class size and reduced offerings, increased special education referrals and out-of-district placements, inability to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Massachusetts Department of Education regulations, limited transportation services, and further deterioration of the school facilities and grounds.

The EQA Examination Process

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

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

From March 12-15, 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Northbridge Public Schools for the period 2004-2006, with a primary focus on 2006. This examination was based on the EQA's six major standards of inquiry that address the quality of educational management, which are: 1) Leadership, Governance, and Communication; 2) Curriculum and Instruction; 3) Assessment and Program Evaluation; 4) Human Resource Management and Professional Development; 5) Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support; and 6) Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency. The report is based on the source documents, correspondence sent prior to the on-site visit, interviews with the representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers, and additional documents submitted while in the district. The report does not consider documents, revised data, or comments that may have surfaced after the onsite visit.

For the period under examination, 2004-2006, this report finds Northbridge to be a 'High' performing school district with an average proficiency index of 81 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'Moderate' in math on the 2004-2006 MCAS tests. Over this period, student performance declined by nearly two PI points in both ELA and math, which widened the district's average proficiency gap by close to nine percent.

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

Summary of Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

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

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

On average, more than half of all students in Northbridge attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, slightly more than that statewide. Two-thirds of Northbridge students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and less than half of Northbridge students attained proficiency in math and in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-nine percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Northbridge's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 81 proficiency index (PI) points, three PI points greater than that statewide. Northbridge's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 19 PI points.
- In 2006, Northbridge's proficiency gap in ELA was 12 PI points, four PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one and one-half PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Northbridge's proficiency gap in math was 26 PI points in 2006, two PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Northbridge's proficiency gap in STE was 22 PI points, seven PI points narrower than that statewide.

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

Between 2003 and 2006, Northbridge's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall and in ELA, math, and STE, although the gains overall and in ELA and math were made between 2003 and 2004 and performance subsequently declined.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by one percentage point between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by four percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Northbridge narrowed from 23 PI points in 2003 to 20 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 10 percent.

- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Northbridge showed improvement, at an average of more than one-half PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Math performance in Northbridge also showed improvement, at an average of nearly one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of nine percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Northbridge had an improvement in STE performance, increasing by three and one-half PI points over the two-year period.

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Northbridge students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Northbridge in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 29 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Northbridge in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than two-fifths of the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, more than half the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gaps for Hispanic and female students were wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. For each of these subgroups, more than half the students attained proficiency.

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

The performance gap in Northbridge between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 36 PI points in 2003 to 26 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 45 to 28 PI points over this period.

- All student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the pattern of change varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in ELA were students with disabilities and Hispanic students.
- In math, all subgroups in Northbridge with the exception of regular education students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The pattern of change in math also varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in math were students with disabilities and Hispanic students.

Standard Summaries

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

The district experienced high turnover rates in leadership positions during the review period and implemented many changes in 2005-2006, including a new administrator evaluation process. The new evaluation procedure highlighted the leadership roles and responsibilities of administrators and called for more accountability through a goal-setting process that was to be piloted in 2006-2007.

Leadership meetings occurred on a regular basis, and communication between and within schools increased through grade K-12 task forces on curricular issues. The district emphasized the use of technology to increase communication by implementing the FirstClass Communications Platform for e-mail, web pages to make more information available to the public, and ConnectEd telephone services to address attendance issues.

Communication increased between the district and the town officials and included regular meetings between the finance committee, selectmen, and school committee members to address fiscal concerns in the community. The superintendent and chair of the school committee conducted an orientation for new school committee members to assist a smooth transition. Copies of budgets, the policy manual, and district and school improvement plans were shared at this meeting.

School committee members were aware of their roles and responsibilities and focused on the "big picture." The committee worked as a whole in order to keep all members informed and involved, suspending the subcommittee structure of the past. Members stated that they were presented information about assessment results along with updates on curriculum work in progress. The majority of the school committee members were parents, and they confirmed that the school improvement councils were very active in the governance of the individual schools.

The long-range planning for the district started with the 2001-2006 Five Year Plan, which was in effect for the period under review, with the exception of a refocus of the district goals in the fall of 2005 under the supervision of the new superintendent. All of the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP), updated annually on the basis of general progress, and included school safety procedures, information on class size, time on learning compliance, extra-curricular and enrichment needs and activities, projected facility needs, program evaluation, and plans for dissemination of the SIPs. Since the district and school goals were not specific or measurable, it was difficult to evaluate progress in quantifiable terms.

The district had a technology plan and a long-range curriculum plan that was not fully implemented but did not have a professional development plan. This slowed the district's progress in reaching its identified goals. The district made modifications to its instructional services in response to data analysis revealing the need for attention to math at the elementary and middle school levels. The district completed the grade K-12 math curriculum, added algebra to the middle school, and introduced Hands On Equations and RM software. It also scheduled the Title I program after school to provide more extensive math support.

Curriculum and Instruction

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

The Northbridge Public Schools completed a major alignment of the district's curriculum to the state curriculum frameworks at all levels except the middle school level as a result of the five-year plan developed by the previous superintendent and the curriculum office in the fall of 2000. The alignment process was completed at the elementary level at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. In math and science, the alignment was fully dependent on the textbooks adopted by the district. The textbooks purchased by the district were perceived to be in alignment with the state curriculum frameworks by the central administrators, principals, and teachers involved with the textbook review and the piloting process used to review and adopt published materials. The curriculum alignment was not completed at the middle school level by the conclusion of the review period. The curriculum was lacking in benchmarks, formative and summative assessments, and instructional strategies for use by teachers. The middle school principal estimated that the middle school curriculum alignment would be completed by the end of the 2007-2008 school year. At the high school level, the curriculum alignment was completed in the fall of 2006, about six months after the review period. The curriculum presented to the EQA team was a comprehensive mapping approach that lacked periodic benchmark assessments for use throughout the school year. This curriculum lacked a regular system of formative assessment that would serve to guide and inform instruction for students in each subject area throughout the 10 months of the school year.

Central office curriculum leaders, the high school principal, and her department heads and teaching staff spent considerable time on the project of curriculum alignment and mapping in the district. EQA examiners noted that the process was somewhat disjointed and directed by different leadership approaches at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and the curriculum did not appear to be unified throughout all levels. According to interviewees, when in doubt they used the state curriculum frameworks, which served as the foundation of all curriculum work in the district. The EQA team also noted that the district did not employ the common practice of dating all curriculum materials as they were reviewed or completed,

rendering it difficult for the EQA team to understand the sequencing of writing and revision in the district. The curriculum revision entered into a period of unclear long-term planning in 2005-2006, in that the original five-year plan was not replaced with a follow-up plan that included curriculum and professional development programs to complement the district's new curricular and instructional goals. The middle school principal shared with the EQA team a monthly curriculum update that he required of all teachers, and this helped him monitor instructional adherence to curriculum expectations.

Due to the restructuring at the elementary level, many grade K-4 teachers were displaced and three were teaching at new grade levels in 2006-2007. In the restructuring, the district created two grades K-4 elementary schools to replace the previous grades K-1 and 2-4 elementary structure, posing a new horizontal alignment challenge that the EQA team could not evaluate at the time of its review.

Administrators informed the EQA team of a number of changes that increased instructional time during the review period. In the elementary teacher focus group, interviewees reported that ELA instructional time was increased from 90 to 150 minutes daily. Math instructional time was increased from 60 to 90 minutes. The high school implemented a double block in the humanities program for students who were struggling in ELA and social studies. In 2005-2006, the district decided to implement an Algebra I program for middle school students, based on their performance results on the Iowa Algebra Assessment Test. The district aimed to improve weak middle school MCAS math scores by offering algebra to eligible upper-level students at grades 7 and 8. The middle school implemented an enrichment block that rotated math and other subject areas through the extended homeroom to give students added support in tested core subject areas.

The EQA team visited 59 classrooms for periods of approximately 20 minutes per classroom, including 31 visits at the elementary school level, 15 at the middle school level, and 13 at the high school level. The data collected in these observations were very positive in the areas of classroom management and the classroom climate in which instruction took place. In the categories of instructional practice, expectations for student work, and student activity and behavior, the team did not see evidence that instruction had moved to the level of highly challenging work with the use of differentiated instruction, which was the district's stated goal.

The lack of planning in the district for short- and long-term professional development programming to assist teachers was also evident. The district's MCAS test scores did not demonstrate high or accelerated levels of student achievement during the review period. Furthermore, from 2003 to 2006 the number of different Advanced Placement (AP) exams administered in the district had expanded from seven to 12, and the number of individual exams administered had expanded from 98 to 143. On the other hand, in 2003 the average score on two out of the seven exams administered was below a 3 (and therefore ineligible for college credit), compared to AP test results in 2006 when the average score on eight out of the 12 exams was below 3.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

District and school administrators used a variety of assessments, particularly for underperforming students, in addition to MCAS tests to measure educational progress and academic needs. Although assessments were employed most widely and effectively at the elementary grades, some progress was noted at the middle and high school levels as well. Benchmarks were established in both ELA and math at the elementary level, and local and norm-referenced criteria were used at regular intervals and at specific grade levels to monitor and analyze student progress. Assessment results were subsequently used to identify students needing additional educational support through Title I, targeted remediation, and special education services, as well as those who were ready for additional academic challenges. At the grades preK-4 level, student assessments included the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation, Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory (ESRI), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), as well as cumulative assessments in math and literacy that were administered in the fall, winter, and spring of each year.

The middle school used Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test (IAAT), which is a national, standardized, norm-referenced assessment, and performance tests from the Scott Foresman Mathematics Program

Assessment Sourcebook. As a result of MCAS data analysis, a middle school task force had developed a schoolwide writing rubric, Because Writing Matters, designed to strengthen student literacy skills across the curriculum. At the high school, a variety of standardized assessments was used to evaluate student progress. In addition to MCAS tests, some students were given SRI and QRI assessments, and many others took PSAT, SAT, AP, and Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) tests. The high school had also developed common final examinations in all subjects. Neither the middle school nor the high school had developed formative assessments or local benchmarks as means of more effectively monitoring student academic progress throughout the course of the year.

Although student assessment results were communicated to all appropriate staff and were used to varying degrees to improve curriculum and instruction as well as to inform some professional development activity, interviewees acknowledged that substantial additional data analysis training for both building administrators and staff was still needed.

The district developed modifications to the core curriculum to improve performance of special education and low-performing regular education students. It introduced "Humanities," a four-year ELA/social studies interdisciplinary program, "Integrated Mathematics," a multi-year program developed for students who scored below standard on the MCAS tests, as well as remedial courses in the science department such as "The Living World" and "Chemistry in the Community" to provide appropriate educational alternatives and support for students with identified learning needs. The high school's Early Intervention Team (EIT) monitored the progress of at-risk students. Additionally, the district offered an Academic Support Center to provide MCAS remedial support, and writing and reading labs for students whose reading, writing, and spelling skills were below average.

Northbridge devoted considerable attention and resources to external audits of its program implementation and service delivery systems. In 2004, the district commissioned a review of its preK-K programs and received a full five-year accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for its educational programs and services. The middle school was evaluated in 2005 by the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS). Although the report did not address student achievement, it contained numerous commendations

as well as specific recommendations that centered on teaming, pedagogical, and curricular issues. The middle school's SIP reflected its extensive efforts to implement the NELMS recommendations. In 2004-2005, Northbridge Public Schools commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of its special education program and services continuum. A detailed report was produced that reviewed the district's speech and language services, resource rooms, occupational and physical therapies, adapted physical education, integrated preschool, and use of paraprofessionals. As a result of the district's major elementary level reorganization that was implemented in 2006-2007, a follow-up special education evaluation was conducted in early 2007. During the review period, the high school was actively engaged in its re-accreditation review process with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). An examination of NEASC progress reports and other pertinent correspondence indicated the high school made efforts to improve its academic programs, services, and assessment practices.

The district's internal assessments of its programs and services have been less formal and systematic than the external audits cited. For example, the district's curriculum revision plan called for regular and thorough reviews of existing curriculum, instruction, and assessment by the curriculum team. Although Northbridge's 2000-2007 curriculum documents clearly identified a specific content area revision sequence, the plan had not been followed consistently or implemented uniformly. In addition, there was little evidence that the district conducted assessments of the cost effectiveness of any of its programs based on student performance data. Further, the EQA examiners learned that, in general, the district was just beginning to disaggregate student achievement data, and that building administrators and staff required more professional development training in data-driven analyses of program effectiveness and student achievement.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

Under the new superintendent's leadership, the district made every effort to hire new teachers who held appropriate certification. In 2005-2006, the new superintendent discovered that 26

teachers, some of whom were long-time employees, did not hold teaching certification. He met with the teachers' association and the teachers, and granted them a deadline of the end of the school year to make adequate progress in attaining appropriate certification. By the end of the 2006 school year, 20 teachers had attained certification and six others had resigned or were non-renewed. In 2006-2007, only two teachers were working on waiver.

The district also employed two long-time staff members as administrators who did not hold administrator or teacher certification. Although the job titles did not match a specific administrator certification, the roles they performed in the district were similar to the roles that required professional certification of some type, according to DOE regulations.

Professional development was organized by central office through the collaboration of the administrative team which assessed the needs in individual schools. It consisted of a collection of activities rather than a focused, long-term plan. Full professional development days were school-based. Another 222 training sessions were held throughout the year, and most in-service professional development focused on "on-the-job data analysis" and implementing or piloting new textbook programs in math and science. Professional development offerings lacked sufficient focus on program assessments, research-based practices, the staff evaluation process, and using student achievement data to make data-driven decisions and write measurable achievement goals for School Improvement Plans.

The district had teacher induction and mentoring programs, but some of the mentors had not been trained, and mentor training had not been held since 2003-2004. The district also offered partial course reimbursement for teachers, and for attendance at conferences for teachers and administrators. Teachers were expected to share the information they gained when they returned to the district; interviewees said this was difficult because of the insufficient common planning time at the elementary and middle levels.

The formal teacher evaluation form consisted of a checklist with little or no opportunity for written feedback. The superintendent improved the effectiveness of the evaluation process in 2006, with a side letter that allowed principals to make one unannounced classroom visit and use that experience to write one evaluation in an annual or alternating teacher evaluation cycle. It also established the responsibility of principals to create a specific improvement plan for teachers

who were struggling or not meeting district expectations, based on prior classroom observations. A review of a sample of 37 teacher files revealed that evaluations in six files were not completed in a timely manner during the review period.

Supervision of instruction was accomplished through walk-throughs, conversations with teachers, and attendance at teacher meetings. The district did not have an established protocol for walk-throughs, and according to interviewees principals were not directly focused on their specific SIP goals in their walk-throughs.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

The district provided services to students who needed extra help in reading, math, and MCAS support in the regular classroom setting, as well as a few special services for those who needed additional help. Academic support teachers at the elementary school assisted with small group instruction within regular classrooms. All middle school students participated in the enrichment block, which provided math support for 58 minutes on two out of every seven days. High school students who failed or were in danger of failing MCAS tests had their ELA course supplemented by a semester of writing lab, assigned periods in the Academic Support Center, and referral to the Learning Academy. Although students could advance from these lower-level courses in order to accelerate their learning, the school did not define policies on the criteria for such transfers. During the review period, the number of staff who provided academic support services declined. After 2005-2006, academic support for math at the elementary and middle schools was limited to a 0.5 FTE position in each building. In the year after the review period, Title I services were provided in math after school for elementary and middle school students who could participate on a voluntary basis, and transportation was provided. The Academic Support Center at the high school was staffed for MCAS review after school and one evening per week.

Although the school did not enforce the 12-student maximum enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, enrollments were small. Performance on the exams was not strong despite the

many requirements for entry to the courses: application, teacher recommendation, interview, and honors-level prerequisites.

Special education students were mainstreamed at all levels. The elementary school had two inclusion classrooms. These classes were taught by two regular education teachers with the assistance of a special education teacher. When required by an IEP, children were accompanied by an aide. Some intensive special needs students were mainstreamed for part of the day.

At the middle school, mainstream placements were supplemented with support in resource rooms. The middle school also had a reading teacher, social worker, and an off-site placement for students with behavioral issues.

The high school mainstreamed students with disabilities when possible, and when necessary these students were accompanied by an aide. The high school offered to special education students resource rooms as well as coursework such as Humanities 1 and 2 and Integrated Math that mirrored the regular education curriculum. In addition, the high school provided a two-year Living Skills program supplemented by an array of vocational offerings.

The district had attendance policies at every school level that administrators enforced. As a result, attendance rates were high at all levels except at the high school, where the rate averaged 91 percent and chronic absenteeism was high.

Teacher absence was high at the elementary schools, particularly in the “other” category. The new superintendent ended the practice of allowing teachers to take vacation days during the regularly scheduled school year.

The district had implemented the Behavior: Uniform Management Policy (BUMP) that rigidly established disciplinary consequences for many infractions, but discontinued its use at the end of the review period in favor of a policy that allowed for more administrative discretion. Despite improvements in the application of discipline policies, the reported in-school and out-of-school suspension rates were still high. The district did not have a program in place to address recidivism. The high school had a dropout prevention plan that involved a variety of school resources including the Learning Academy for academic support, guidance and adjustment

counselors, summer school for credit recovery, and the possibility of combining work and school work with the addition of flexible online courses through Class.com.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

The prior superintendent developed the budget through a participatory process for each year of the review period. Principals and individual directors, with input from staff, prepared needs based budgets for submission to the superintendent. Meetings between the superintendent and the finance committee determined the town's allotment to the schools and resulted in the superintendent's adjustment of budget requests and the development of a budget based on available funds and prior year expenditures. The district allocated resources based on prior year expenditures with a percentage increase, without factoring in an ongoing analysis of student assessment data. The current superintendent prepared only a needs based budget for FY 2007 and requested $900,000 from the stabilization fund, which was ultimately approved by the voters at the December 2006 special town meeting.

School committee members, principals, and appropriate staff received monthly budget reports. Central office personnel regularly reviewed and monitored expenditures to ensure that spending remained within budget limits. The district and the town maintained financial information on the same accounting system. The district did not encumber salary obligations but used purchase orders to encumber expenditures from all funds for goods and services. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure that the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

The district relied on Chapter 70 aid, which was the major source of funding for the school budget, and routinely used funds from the school choice and tuition accounts as well as grants to supplement the district budget. The district exceeded the net school spending requirement in each of the years of the review period. The tax levy was at the maximum allowable, and residential taxes amounted to approximately 90 percent of the amount raised through taxation. The town's tax rate per thousand, which had been lowered during the review period, was the lowest among

the communities in the Blackstone Valley. Misinformation and confusion contributed to the failure of a $1 million general government override in May 2006. The town began FY 2007 with an unbalanced budget, and all departments contributed funds to assist with the financial shortfall. The school department contributed $56,292 from the school choice account.

With the exception of the high school, which was completed in 2002, the district schools were old, although they were in generally good condition, clean, and well maintained by an in-house staff of custodians and maintenance workers. Each building had systems to ensure student safety. The district did not have a formal, written, preventative maintenance plan but contracted outside vendors each year for boiler, HVAC, generator, elevator and fire alarm preventative maintenance.

The district's five-year capital plan, which included projects by school, was reviewed and updated annually by the superintendent and director of operations. Due to lack of funding, projects were moved forward from year to year without resolution.

Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Achievement

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

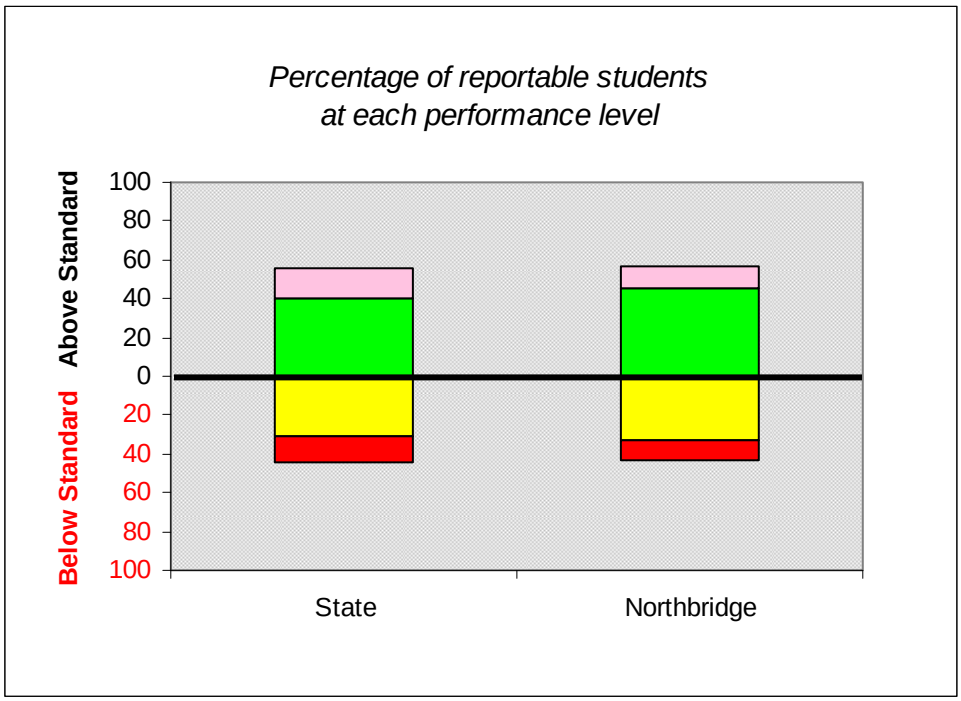
Findings:

- On average, more than half of all students in Northbridge attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, slightly more than that statewide. Two-thirds of Northbridge students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and less than half of Northbridge students attained proficiency in math and in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Northbridge's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 81 proficiency index (PI) points, three PI points greater than that statewide. Northbridge's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 19 PI points.

- In 2006, Northbridge's proficiency gap in ELA was 12 PI points, four PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of one and one-half PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Northbridge's proficiency gap in math was 26 PI points in 2006, two PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Northbridge's proficiency gap in STE was 22 PI points, seven PI points narrower than that statewide.

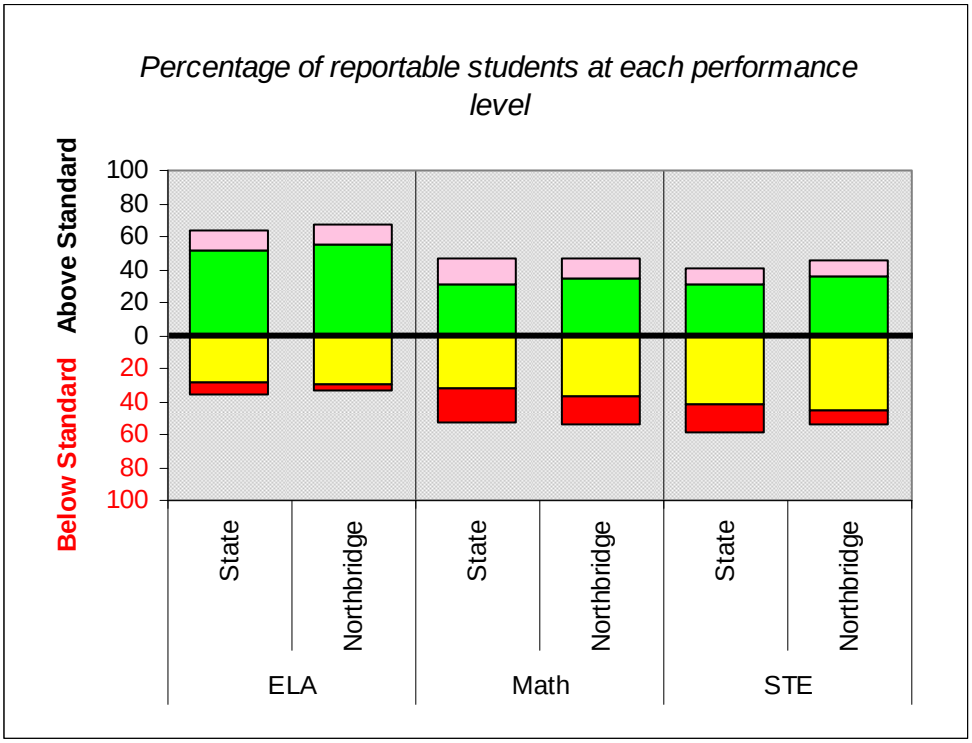
Figure/Table 1: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2006



	State	Northbridge
Advanced	15	12
Proficient	41	45
Needs Improvement	31	33
Warning/Failing	14	10
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	57
Average Proficiency Index (API)	78.3	80.6

In 2006, 57 percent of Northbridge students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests overall, one percentage point more than that statewide. Ten percent of Northbridge students scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category, four percentage points less than that statewide. Northbridge's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 81 proficiency index (PI) points, three PI points greater than that statewide. Northbridge's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 19 PI points.

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



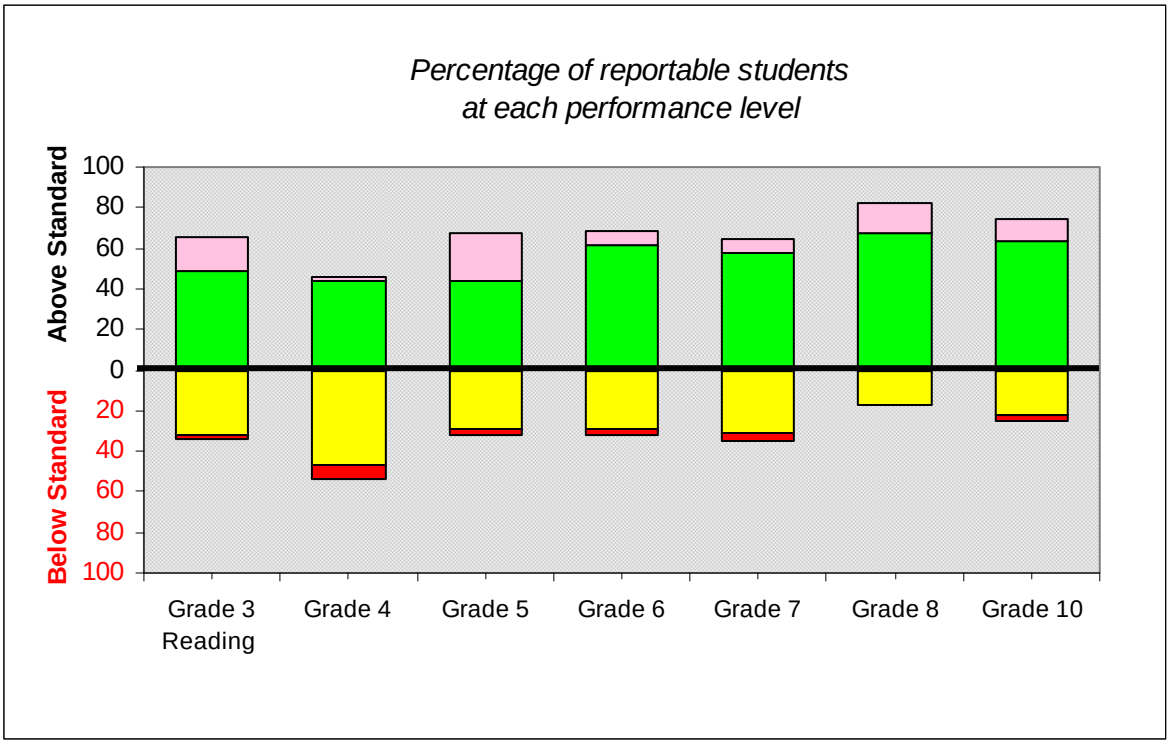
	ELA		Math		STE	
	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge
Advanced	13	12	17	12	10	10
Proficient	51	55	30	34	31	36
Needs Improvement	29	30	33	36	42	46
Warning/Failing	7	3	20	17	17	8
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	67	47	46	41	46
Proficiency Index (PI)	84.3	87.5	72.3	73.7	71.4	77.5

In Northbridge in 2006, 67 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 64 percent statewide; 46 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 47 percent statewide; and 46 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 41 percent statewide.

Northbridge students had stronger performance on the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA than in math and STE. The proficiency index for Northbridge students in ELA was 88 PI points; in math, it was 74 PI points; and in STE, it was 78 PI points. These compare to the statewide figures of 84, 72, and 71 PI points, respectively.

The proficiency gap for Northbridge students was 12 PI points in ELA, 26 PI points in math, and 22 PI points in STE. These compare to the statewide figures of 16, 28, and 29 PI points, respectively. Northbridge's proficiency gaps would require an average annual improvement of one and one-half PI points in ELA and more than three PI points in math to meet AYP.

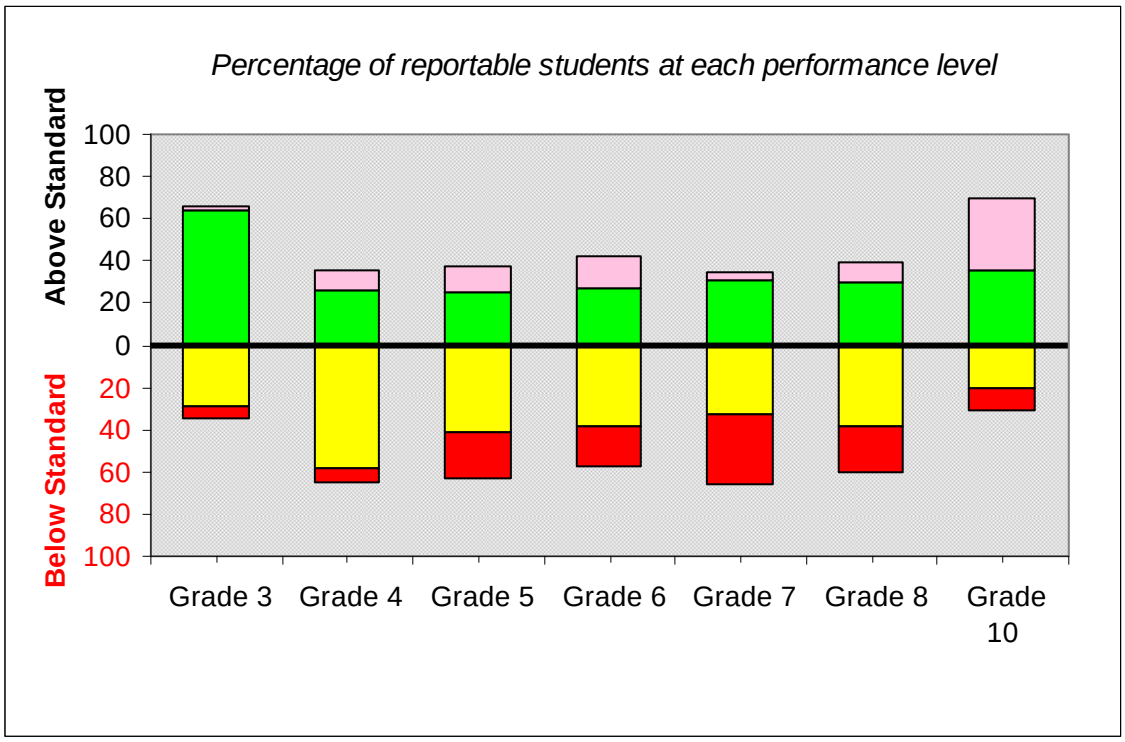
Figure/Table 3: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	18	3	24	6	7	15	11
Proficient	48	43	44	62	57	68	64
Needs Improvement	32	47	29	29	31	17	22
Warning/Failing	2	7	3	3	4	0	3
Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	46	68	68	64	83	75

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining proficiency in 2006 in ELA varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 46 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 83 percent of grade 8 students.

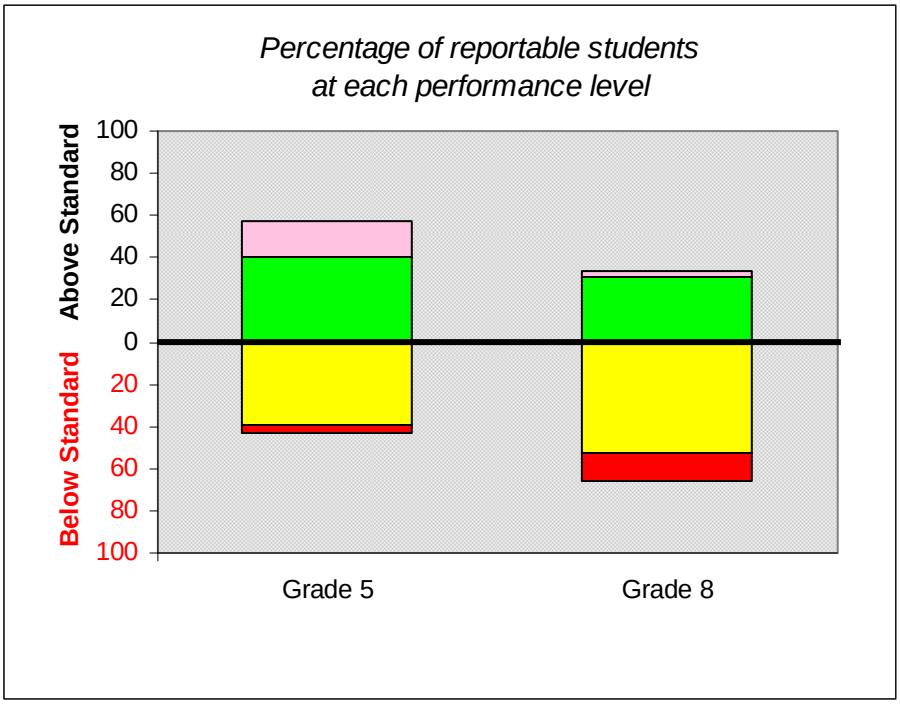
Figure/Table 4: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	1	9	12	16	3	10	34
Proficient	64	26	26	27	31	29	36
Needs Improvement	29	58	42	38	33	38	20
Warning/Failing	5	7	22	19	33	22	11
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	35	38	43	34	39	70

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining proficiency in 2006 in math also varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 34 percent of grade 7 students to a high of 70 percent of grade 10 students.

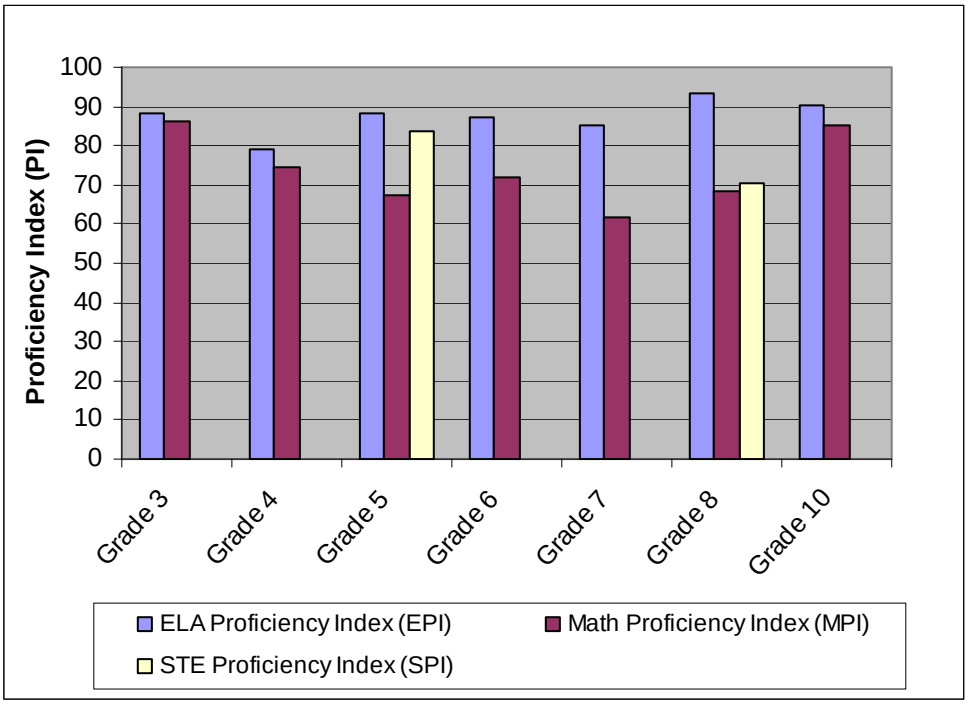
Figure/Table 5: Student MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 5	Grade 8
Advanced	17	3
Proficient	41	30
Needs Improvement	40	53
Warning/Failing	4	13
Percent Attaining Proficiency	58	33

In Northbridge in 2006, 58 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 33 percent of grade 8 students did so.

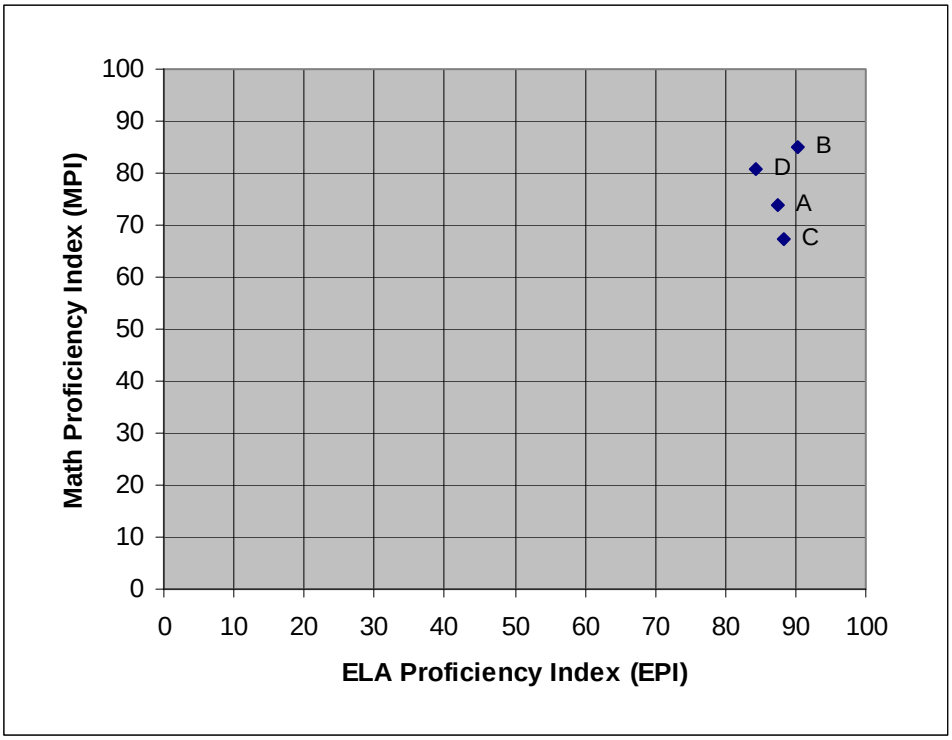
Figure/Table 6: Student MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Grade and Subject, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	88.5	79.2	88.4	87.4	85.2	93.2	90.3
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	86.1	74.6	67.6	71.8	61.9	68.3	85.0
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			83.9			70.6	

By grade, Northbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of seven PI points at grade 8 to a high of 21 PI points at grade 4. Northbridge's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 14 PI points at grade 3 to a high of 38 PI points at grade 7. Northbridge's STE proficiency gap was 16 PI points at grade 5 and 29 PI points at grade 8.

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



		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Northbridge	87.5	73.7	2,767
B	Northbridge High	90.3	85.0	403
C	Northbridge Middle	88.4	67.3	1,577
D	W. Edward Balmer Elem	84.2	80.7	787

Northbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of 10 PI points at Northbridge High School to a high of 16 PI points at W. Edward Balmer Elementary School. Northbridge's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 15 PI points at Northbridge High School to a high of 33 PI points at Northbridge Middle School.

Equity of Achievement

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Northbridge students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Northbridge in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 29 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

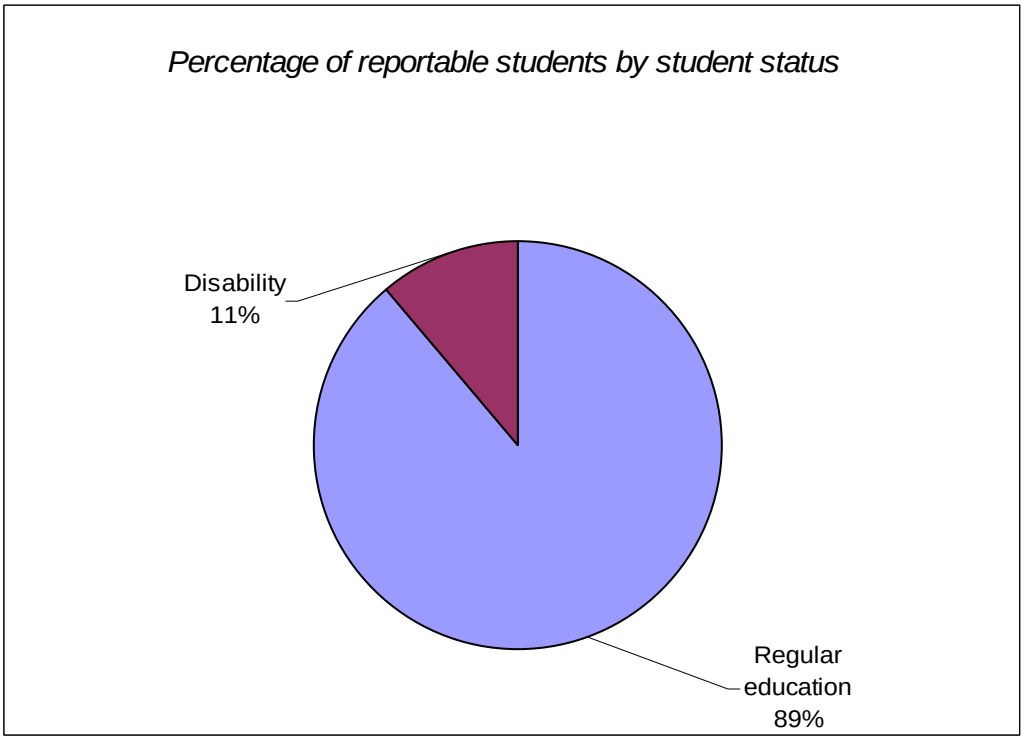
- The proficiency gaps in Northbridge in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than two-fifths of the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.

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

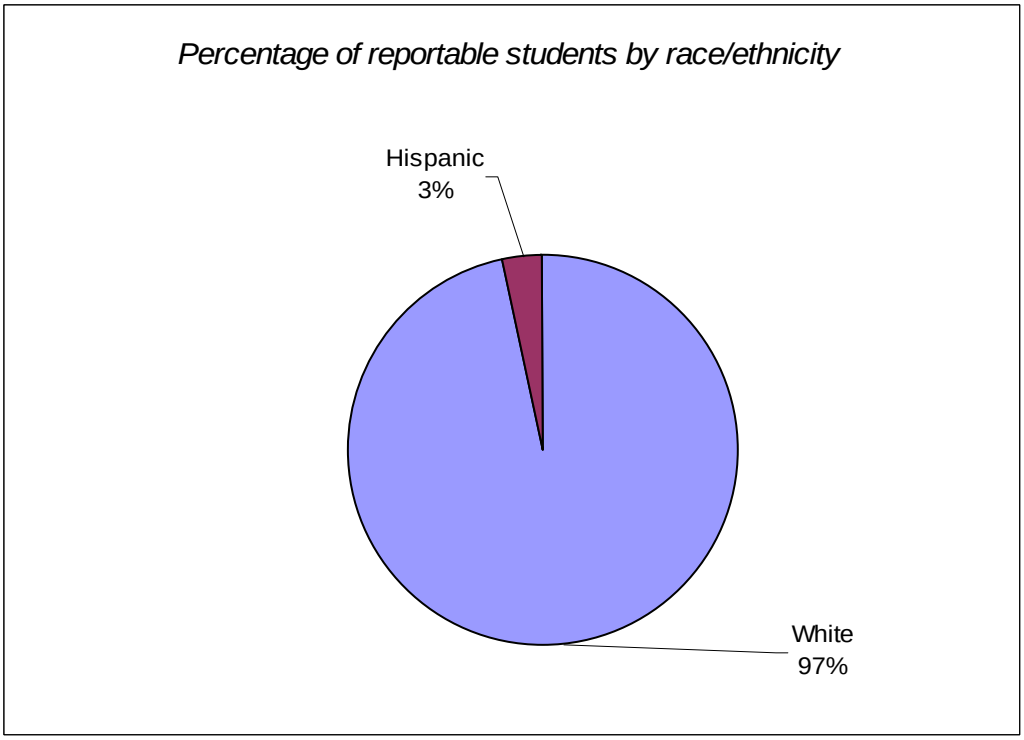
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gaps for Hispanic and female students were wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. For each of these subgroups, more than half the students attained proficiency.

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

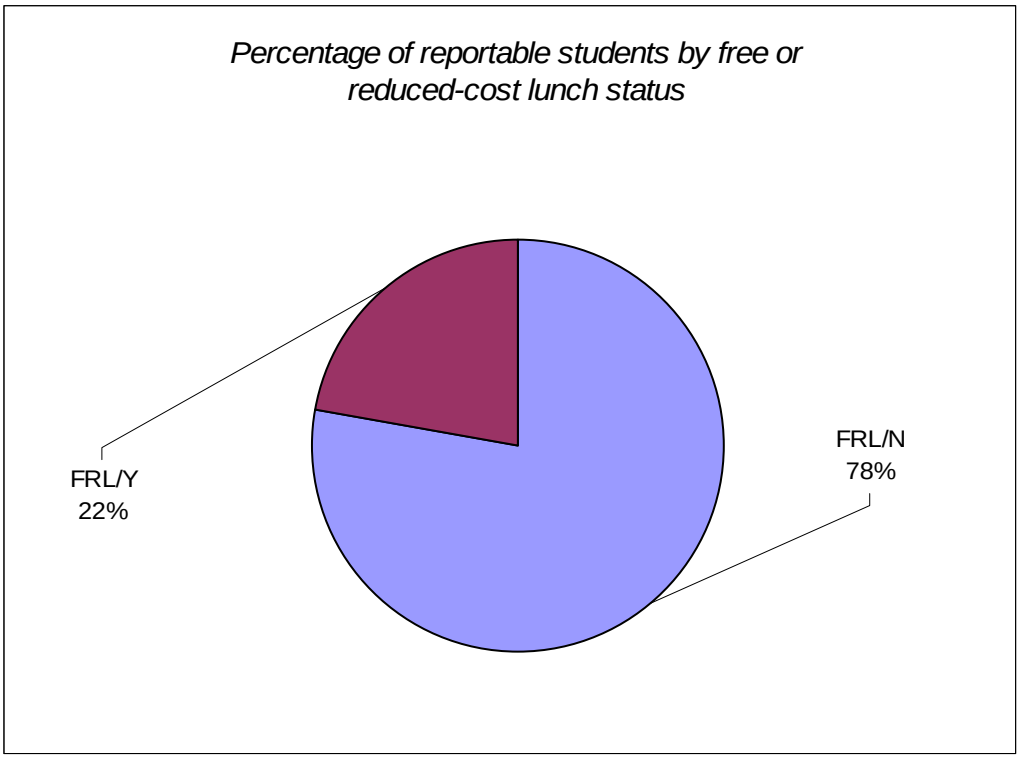
A.



B.



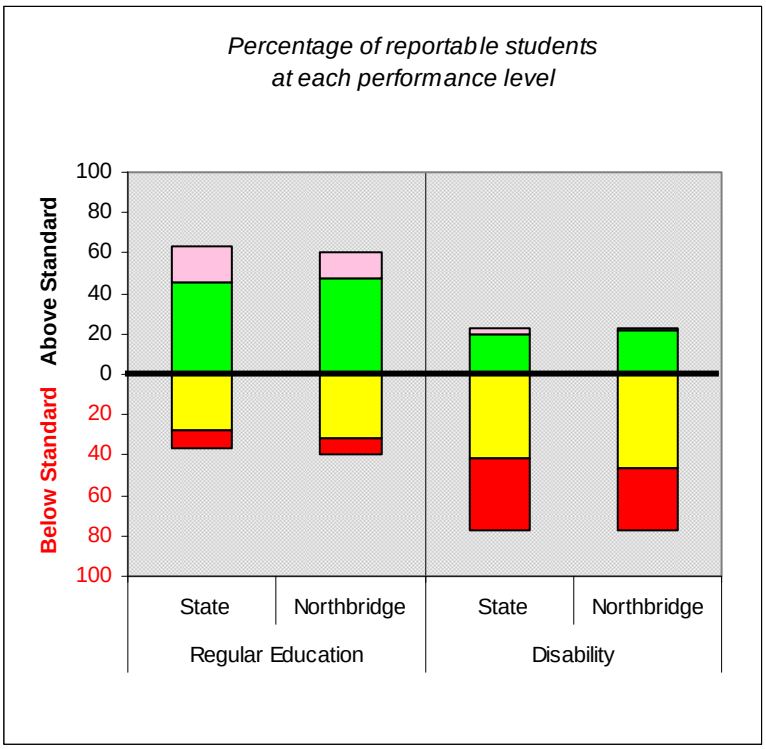
C.



	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	1,238
	Disability	155
Race/ethnicity	White	1,310
	Hispanic	47
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	1,087
	FRL/Y	311

In Northbridge in 2006, 11 percent of the students were students with disabilities, three percent were Hispanic, and 22 percent were low-income (students participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).

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

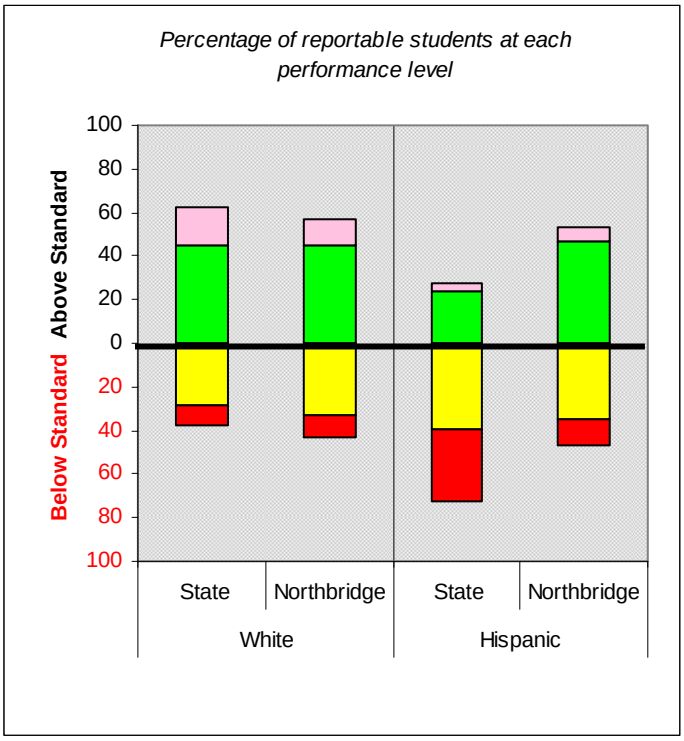


	Regular Education		Disability	
	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge
Advanced	18	13	2	1
Proficient	46	47	20	22
Needs Improvement	28	31	41	47
Warning/Failing	8	8	36	30
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	60	22	23
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.0	83.2	55.9	57.8

In Northbridge in 2006, the proficiency rate of regular education students was more than two and one-half times greater than that of students with disabilities. Sixty percent of regular education students and 23 percent of students with disabilities attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Northbridge's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 17 PI points for regular education students and 42 PI points for students with disabilities. The average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was 25 PI points.

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

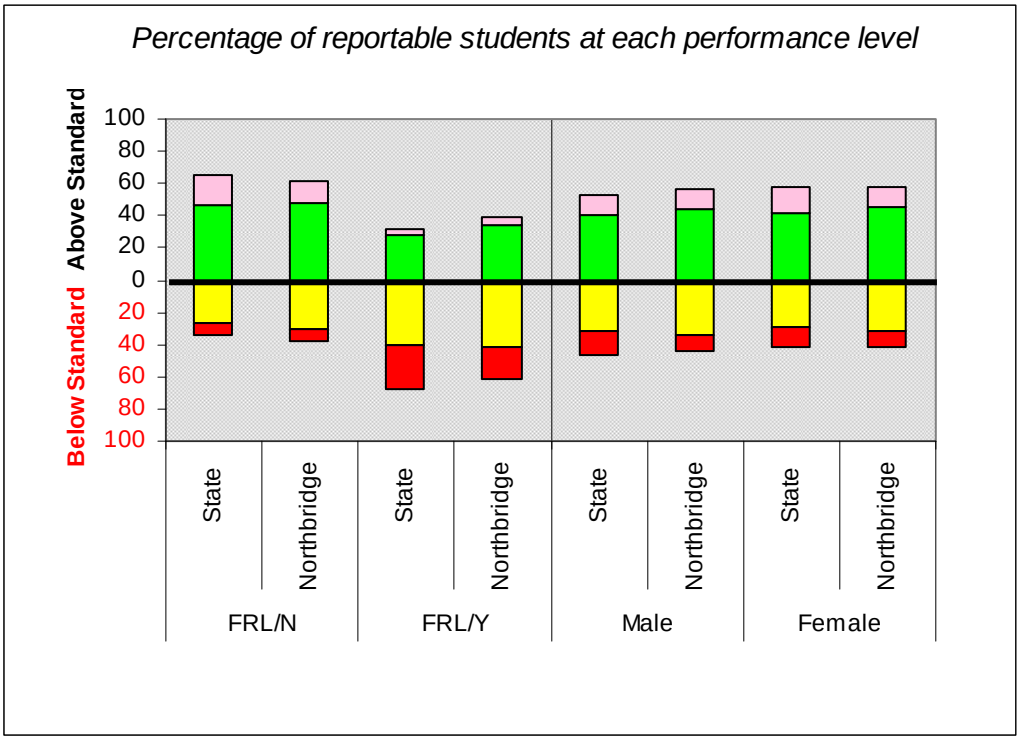


	White		Hispanic	
	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge
Advanced	17	12	4	7
Proficient	45	45	23	47
Needs Improvement	29	33	40	34
Warning/Failing	9	10	33	12
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	57	27	54
Average Proficiency Index (API)	82.9	80.8	59.2	78.9

In Northbridge in 2006, performance on the MCAS tests varied slightly by race/ethnicity, as 57 percent of White students and 54 percent of Hispanic students attained overall proficiency.

Northbridge's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 19 PI points for White students, and 21 PI points for Hispanic students. The average performance gap between White and Hispanic students was two PI points.

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

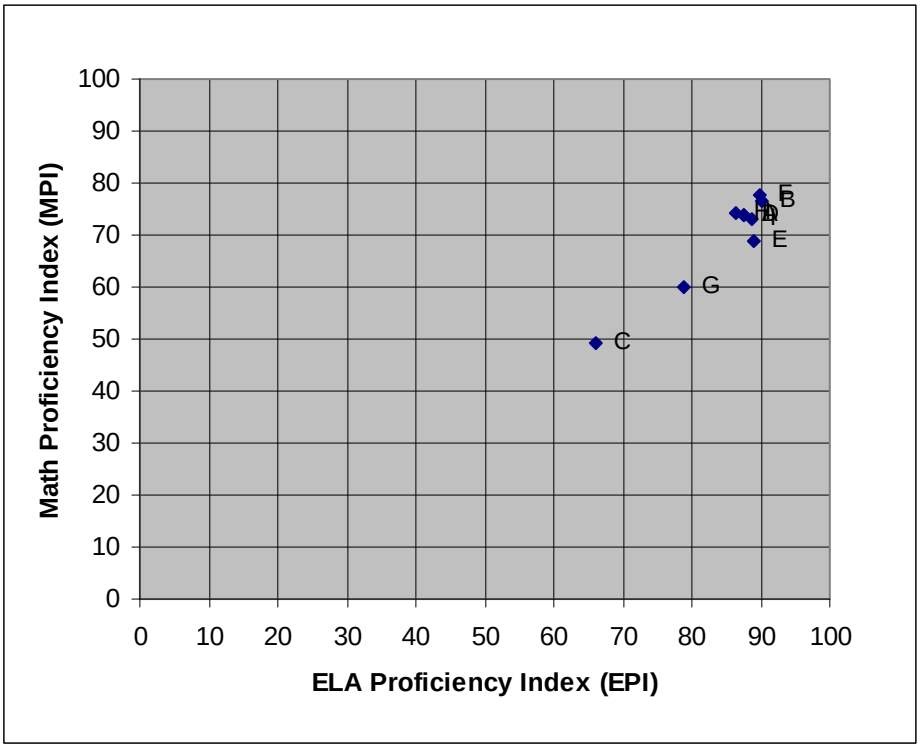


	FRL/N		FRL/Y		Male		Female	
	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge	State	Northbridge
Advanced	19	14	5	5	13	12	17	12
Proficient	46	48	27	34	40	44	41	46
Needs Improvement	27	31	40	42	32	34	29	32
Warning/Failing	8	7	27	19	15	10	13	10
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	62	32	39	53	56	58	58
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.5	83.8	63.5	69.5	77.1	80.3	79.6	80.9

In Northbridge in 2006, 39 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests, compared to 62 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The average proficiency gap was 30 PI points for low-income students and 16 PI points for non low-income students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was 14 PI points.

Performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was comparable for male and female students in Northbridge, with 58 percent of female students and 56 percent of male students attaining overall proficiency. The average proficiency gap was 20 PI points for male students and 19 PI points for female students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was one PI point.

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

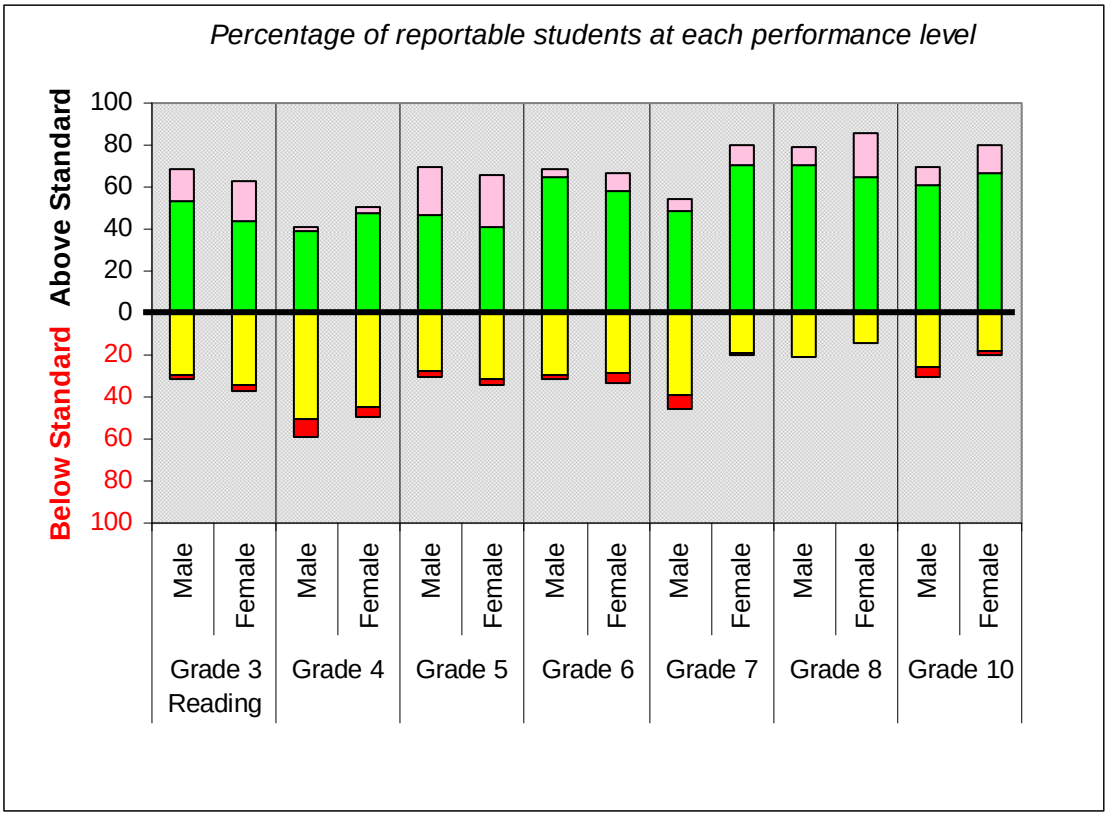


		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Northbridge	87.5	73.7	2,767
B	Regular Education	90.0	76.4	2,475
C	Disability	66.1	49.1	281
D	White	87.6	74.0	2,595
E	Hispanic	88.9	68.9	90
F	FRL/N	89.9	77.6	2,157
G	FRL/Y	78.9	60.0	610
H	Male	86.4	74.2	1,417
I	Female	88.6	73.2	1,350

Of the eight measurable subgroups in Northbridge in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 29 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

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

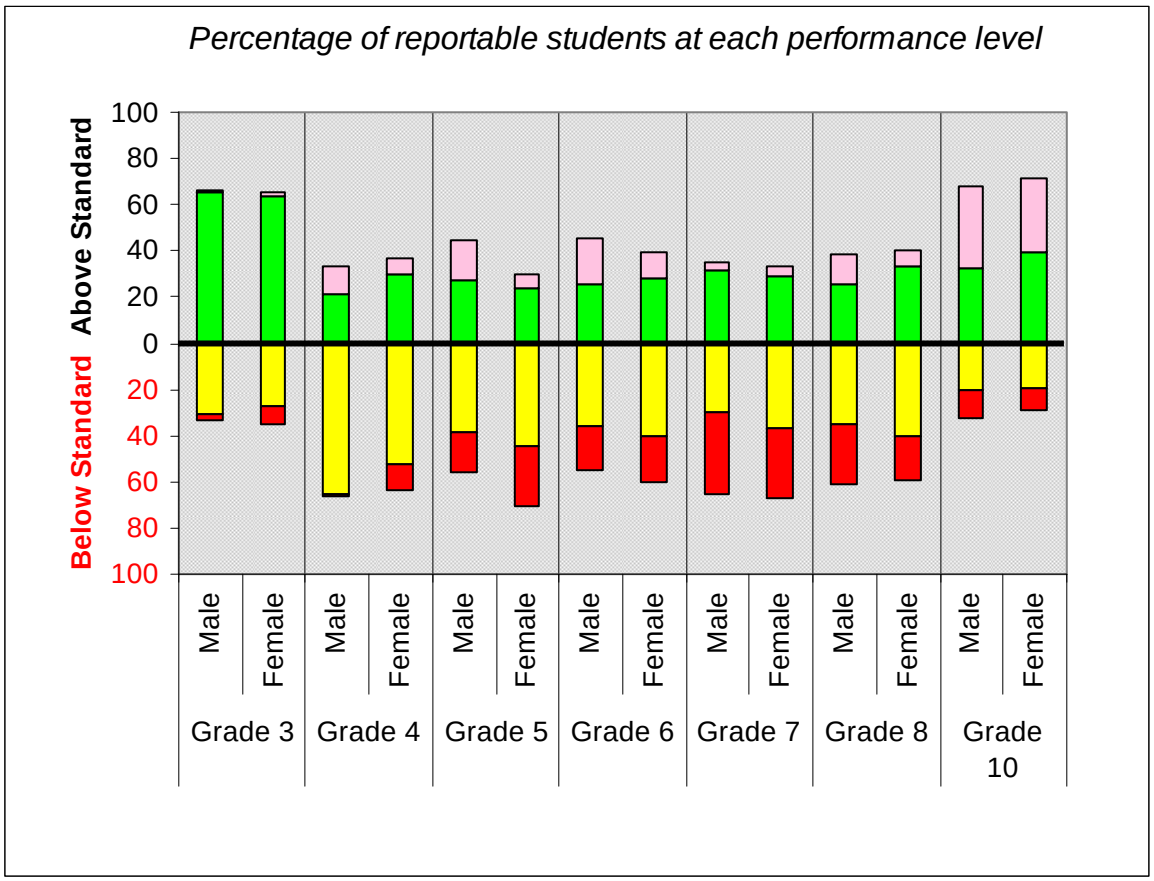
Figure/Table 13: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	15	20	2	3	23	25	4	9	6	10	9	22	9	13
Proficient	53	43	39	47	46	41	65	58	49	70	71	65	61	67
Needs Improvement	30	34	51	44	27	31	29	29	39	19	21	14	26	18
Warning/ Failing	2	3	8	5	3	3	2	4	6	1	0	0	4	2
Percent Attaining Proficiency	68	63	41	50	69	66	69	67	55	80	80	87	70	80

In Northbridge in 2006, female students outperformed male students on all grade-level ELA tests except at grades 3, 5, and 6.

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



	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	1	2	13	6	17	6	20	11	3	4	13	7	35	32
Proficient	65	63	21	30	27	24	25	29	32	29	26	33	32	40
Needs Improvement	31	27	65	52	38	45	36	41	30	36	35	40	20	20
Warning/ Failing	3	8	1	11	17	26	19	20	35	31	26	19	12	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	65	34	36	44	30	45	40	35	33	39	40	67	72

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

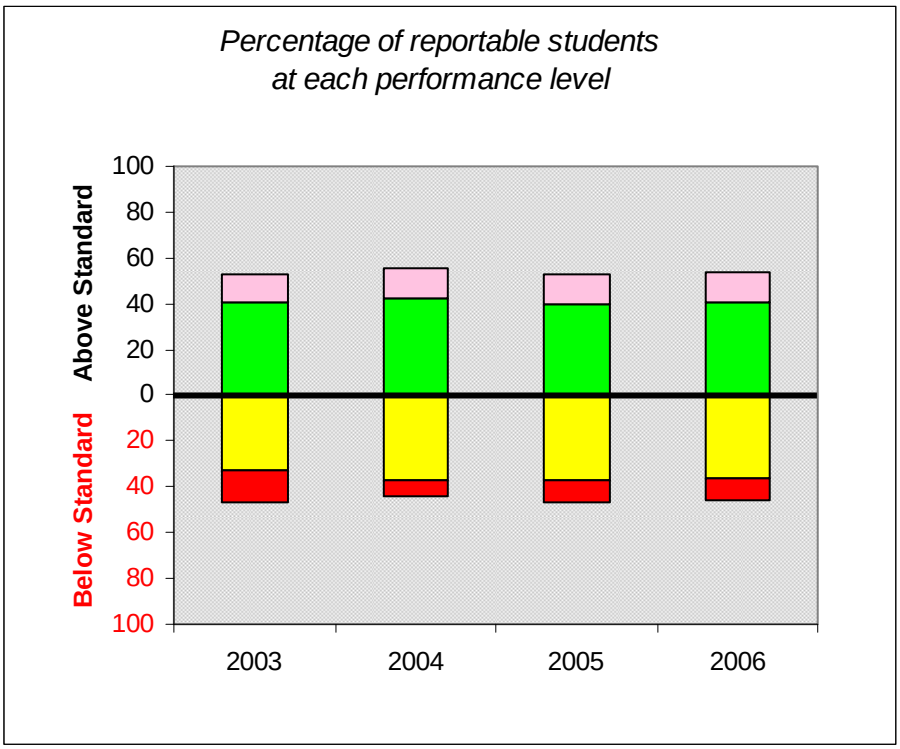
Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2003 and 2006, Northbridge's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall and in ELA, math, and STE, although the gains overall and in ELA and math were made between 2003 and 2004 and performance subsequently declined.
- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by one percentage point between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by four percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Northbridge narrowed from 23 PI points in 2003 to 20 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 10 percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Northbridge showed improvement, at an average of more than one-half PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Math performance in Northbridge also showed improvement, at an average of nearly one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of nine percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Northbridge had an improvement in STE performance, increasing by three and one-half PI points over the two-year period.

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



A.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	12	13	13	13
Proficient	41	42	40	41
Needs Improvement	33	37	37	36
Warning/Failing	14	7	10	10
Percent Attaining Proficiency	53	55	53	54
Average Proficiency Index (API)	77.1	81.1	79.0	79.5

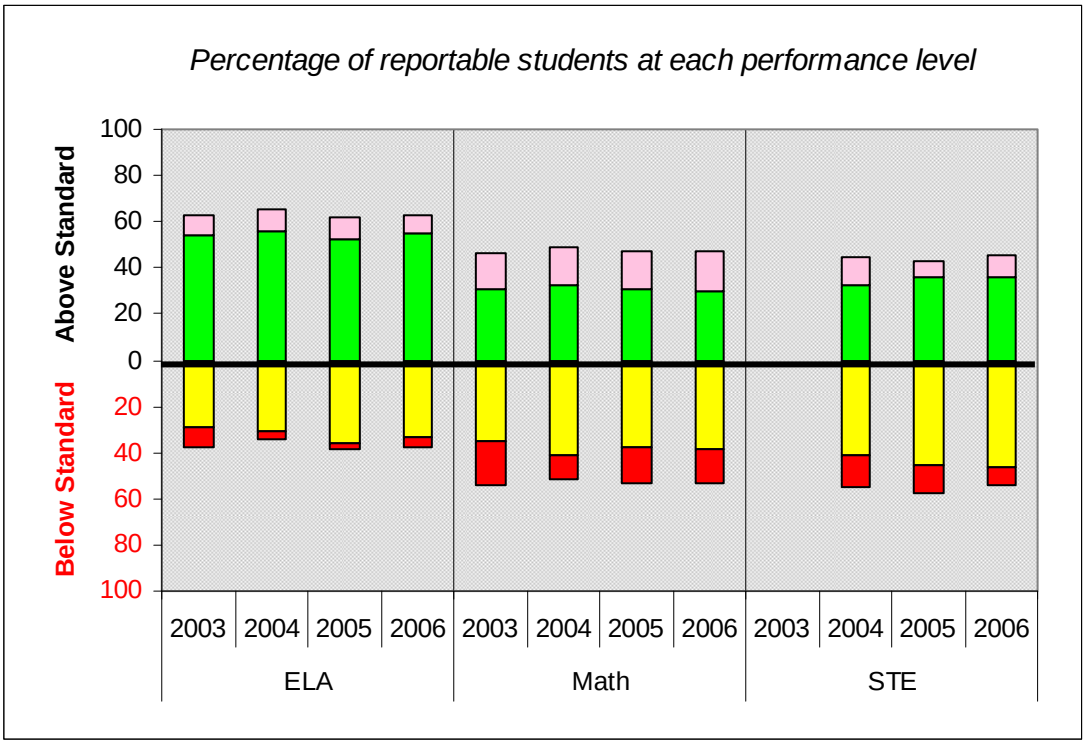
B. n-values

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	160	167	176	175
Proficient	535	536	519	556
Needs Improvement	425	467	482	488
Warning/Failing	185	92	129	139
Total	1,305	1,262	1,306	1,358

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

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests increased from 53 percent in 2003 to 54 percent in 2006. The percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased from 14 percent in 2003 to 10 percent in 2006. The average proficiency gap in Northbridge narrowed from 23 PI points in 2003 to 20 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 10 percent.

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



	ELA				Math				STE			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	8	9	10	7	15	16	16	17		12	7	10
Proficient	54	56	52	55	31	33	31	30		33	36	36
Needs Improvement	29	31	36	33	35	41	38	38		41	46	46
Warning/ Failing	8	4	2	5	19	10	15	15		14	12	8
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	65	62	62	46	49	47	47		45	43	46
Proficiency Index (PI)	82.9	86.9	86.1	85.1	72.6	77.0	73.9	75.1		74.0	74.8	77.5

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

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining proficiency in ELA was 62 percent in both 2003 and 2006. The proficiency gap in ELA narrowed from 17 PI points in 2003 to 15 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining proficiency in math increased from 46 percent in 2003 to 47 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 27 PI points in 2003 to 25 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of nine percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Northbridge students attaining proficiency in STE increased from 45 percent in 2004 to 46 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in STE narrowed from 26 PI points in 2004 to 22 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of nearly 14 percent.

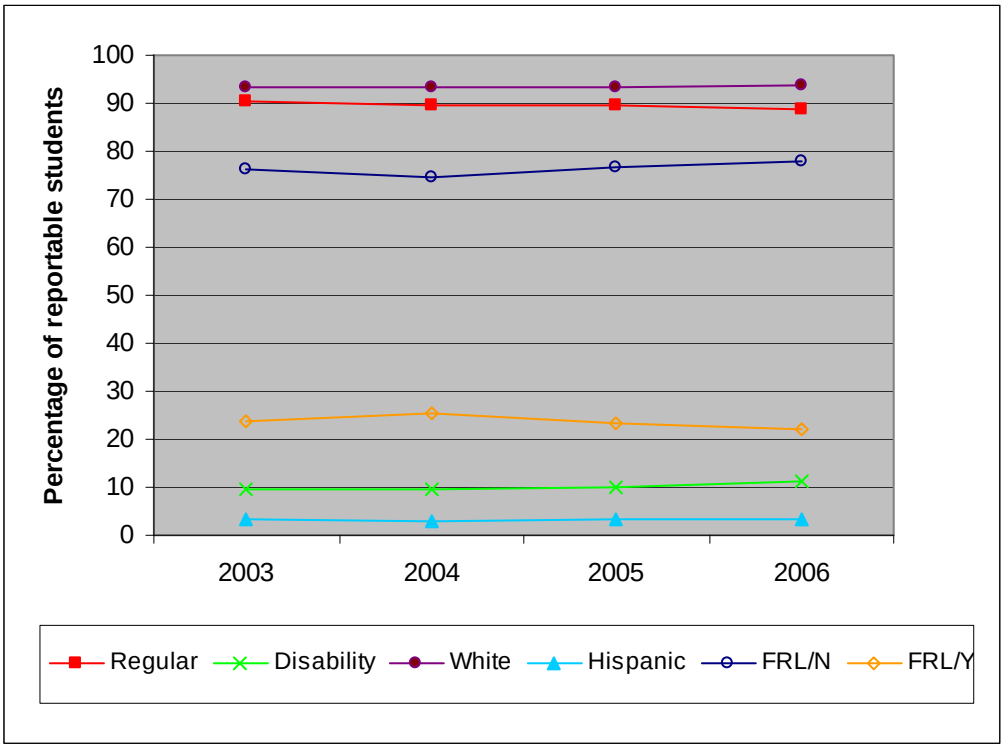
Equity of Improvement

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

Findings:

- In Northbridge, all student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the pattern of change varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in ELA were students with disabilities and Hispanic students.
- In math, all subgroups in Northbridge with the exception of regular education students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The pattern of change in math also varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in math were students with disabilities and Hispanic students.
- The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 36 PI points in 2003 to 26 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 45 to 28 PI points over this period.

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



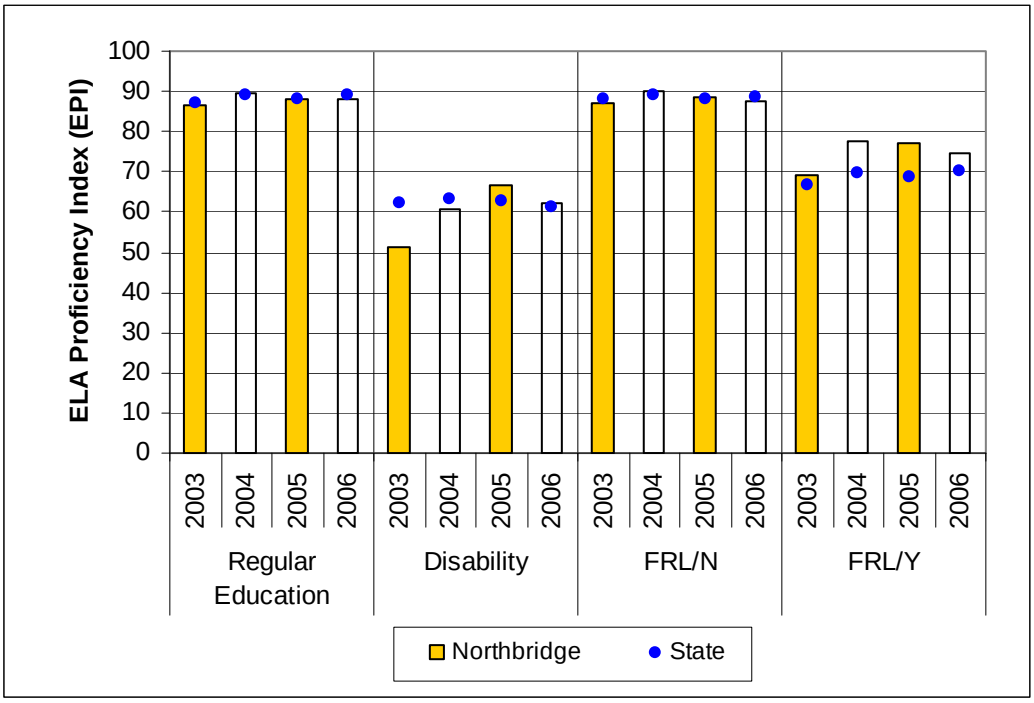
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
Northbridge	940	1,108	1,137	1,398	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	848	993	1,019	1,238	90.2	89.6	89.6	88.6
Disability	90	107	113	155	9.6	9.7	9.9	11.1
White	879	1,036	1,061	1,310	93.5	93.5	93.3	93.7
Hispanic	33	33	40	47	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.4
FRL/N	715	828	870	1,087	76.1	74.7	76.5	77.8
FRL/Y	225	280	267	311	23.9	25.3	23.5	22.2

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

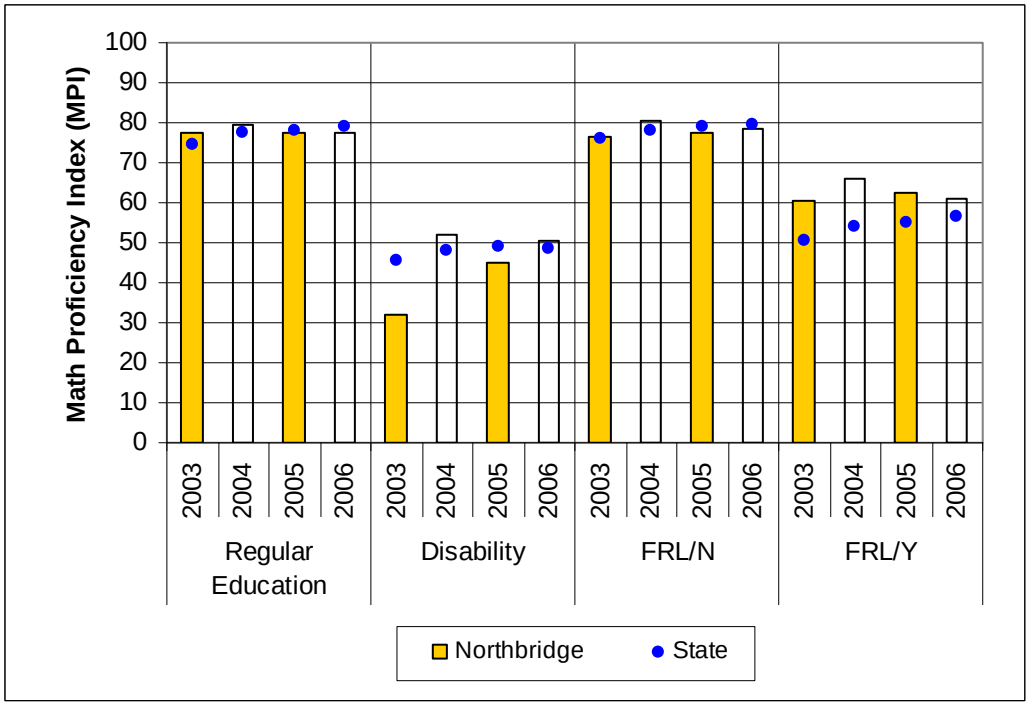
The makeup of the Northbridge student population did not change much between 2003 and 2006. The proportion of students with disabilities increased by one and one-half percentage points and the proportion of low-income (FRL/Y) students decreased by nearly two percentage points. The proportions of White and Hispanic students remained roughly the same over this period.

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

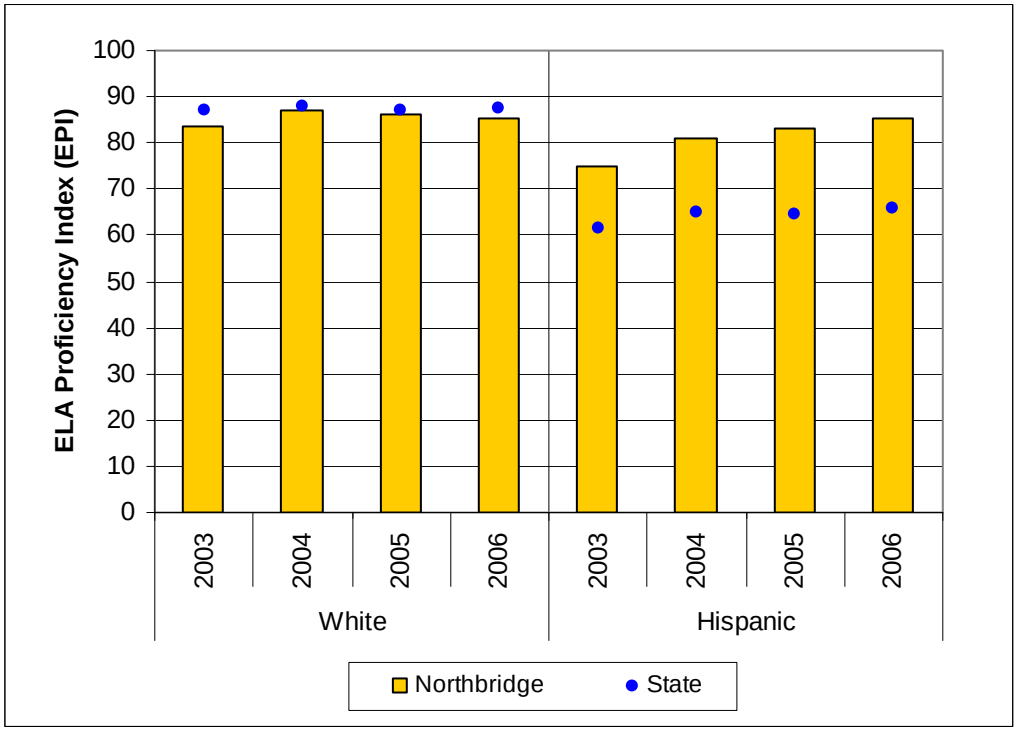
A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



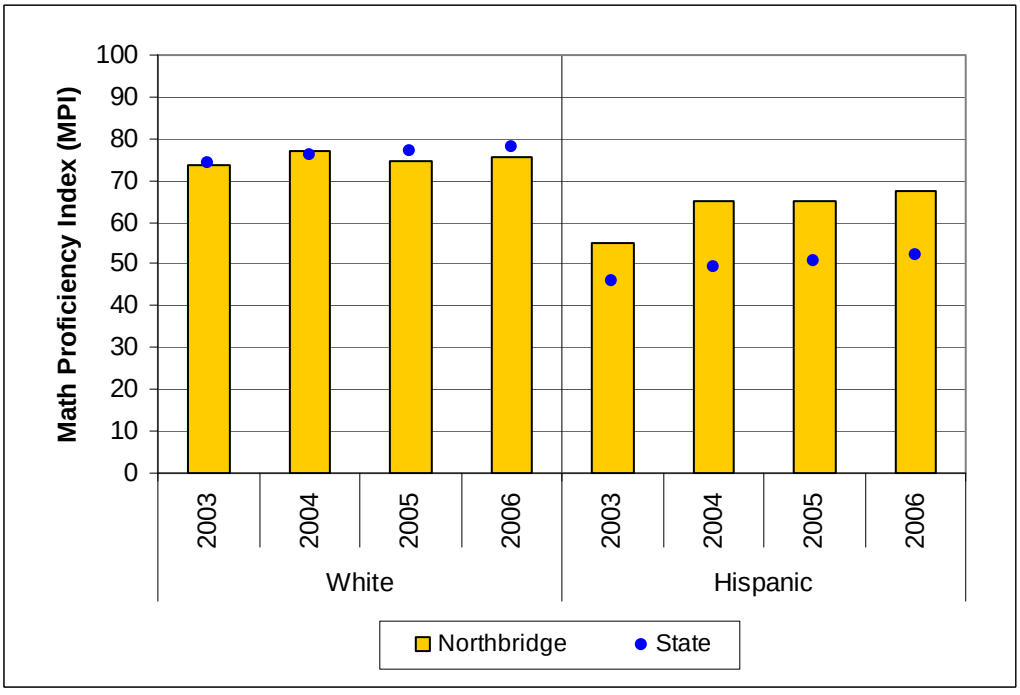
B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



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



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

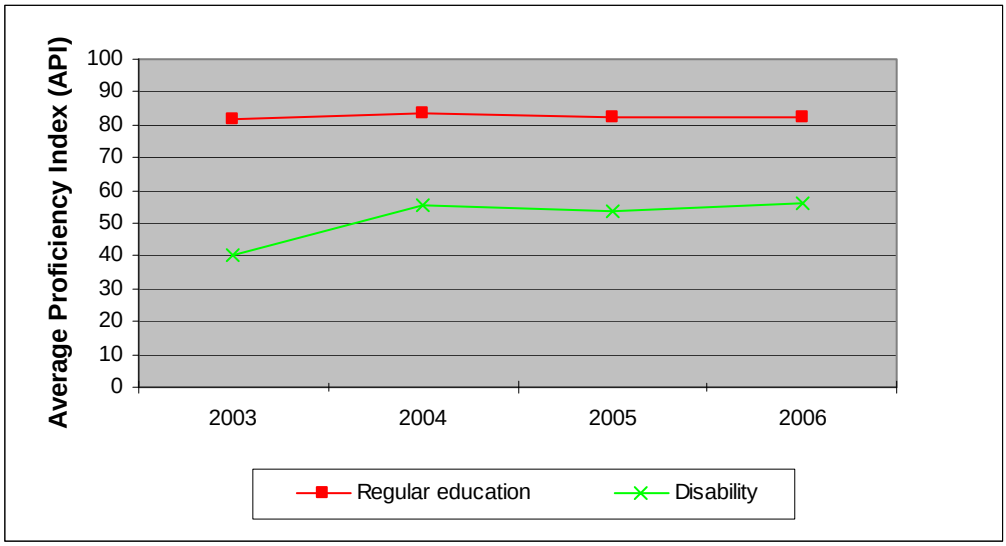


State				Northbridge			
Subgroup	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**	**Subgroup**	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**
Regular Education	2003	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2003	86.7	77.6
	2004	89.2	77.4		2004	89.8	79.5
	2005	88.3	78.2		2005	88.2	77.5
	2006	89.0	78.9		2006	88.1	77.5
Disability	2003	62.1	45.3	Disability	2003	51.3	32.2
	2004	63.3	47.9		2004	60.7	51.9
	2005	62.9	49.0		2005	66.5	45.2
	2006	61.2	48.4		2006	62.3	50.4
FRL/N	2003	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2003	87.0	76.3
	2004	88.9	78.1		2004	90.0	80.3
	2005	88.3	79.0		2005	88.5	77.4
	2006	88.6	79.7		2006	87.8	78.7
FRL/Y	2003	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2003	69.0	60.5
	2004	69.7	53.9		2004	77.8	66.0
	2005	68.8	55.0		2005	76.9	62.4
	2006	70.0	56.3		2006	74.4	61.1
White	2003	86.9	74.4	White	2003	83.4	73.5
	2004	87.7	76.2		2004	87.2	77.1
	2005	87.1	77.2		2005	86.1	74.7
	2006	87.4	77.8		2006	85.4	75.5
Hispanic	2003	61.4	45.7	Hispanic	2003	75.0	55.2
	2004	64.8	49.3		2004	80.9	65.0
	2005	64.6	50.6		2005	83.3	65.3
	2006	65.8	52.2		2006	85.4	67.7

In Northbridge, all student subgroups had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the pattern of change varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in ELA were students with disabilities and Hispanic students. In math, all subgroups in Northbridge with the exception of regular education students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The pattern of change in math also varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in math were students with disabilities and Hispanic students.

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 36 PI points in 2003 to 26 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 45 to 28 PI points over this period.

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

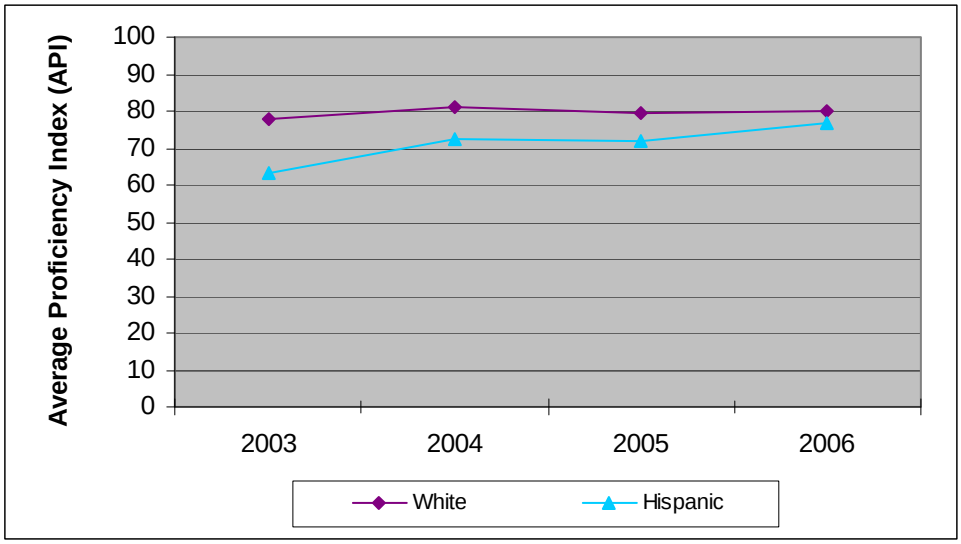


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Regular education	2003	81.5	86.7	77.6	68	52
	2004	83.8	89.8	79.5	71	52
	2005	82.0	88.2	77.5	66	52
	2006	82.1	88.1	77.5	68	50
Disability	2003	40.4	51.3	32.2	17	4
	2004	55.6	60.7	51.9	14	15
	2005	53.4	66.5	45.2	19	10
	2006	56.4	62.3	50.4	22	20

Students with disabilities in Northbridge had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006 while the performance of regular education students was relatively flat. The average proficiency gap for Northbridge's regular education students remained at 18 PI points. For students with disabilities, the average proficiency gap narrowed from 60 to 44 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 27 percent.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities narrowed by 16 PI points.

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

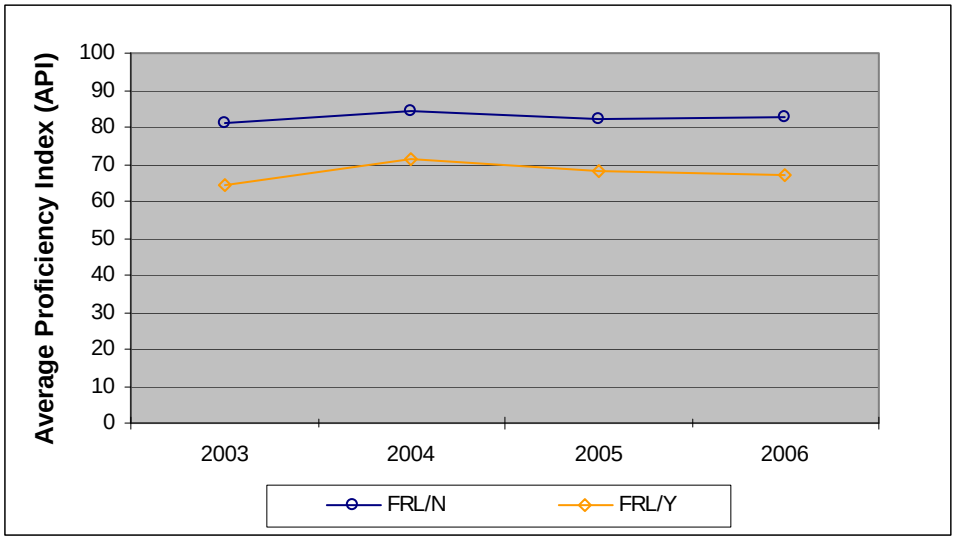


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
White	2003	77.8	83.4	73.5	63	48
	2004	81.3	87.2	77.1	66	49
	2005	79.5	86.1	74.7	62	48
	2006	79.8	85.4	75.5	63	48
Hispanic	2003	63.0	75.0	55.2	47	24
	2004	72.3	80.9	65.0	47	30
	2005	71.9	83.3	65.3	61	29
	2006	76.6	85.4	67.7	58	29

Both racial subgroups in Northbridge had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for White students narrowed from 22 to 20 PI points, and for Hispanic students it narrowed from 37 to 23 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of nine percent for White students and 37 percent for Hispanic students.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by 12 PI points.

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

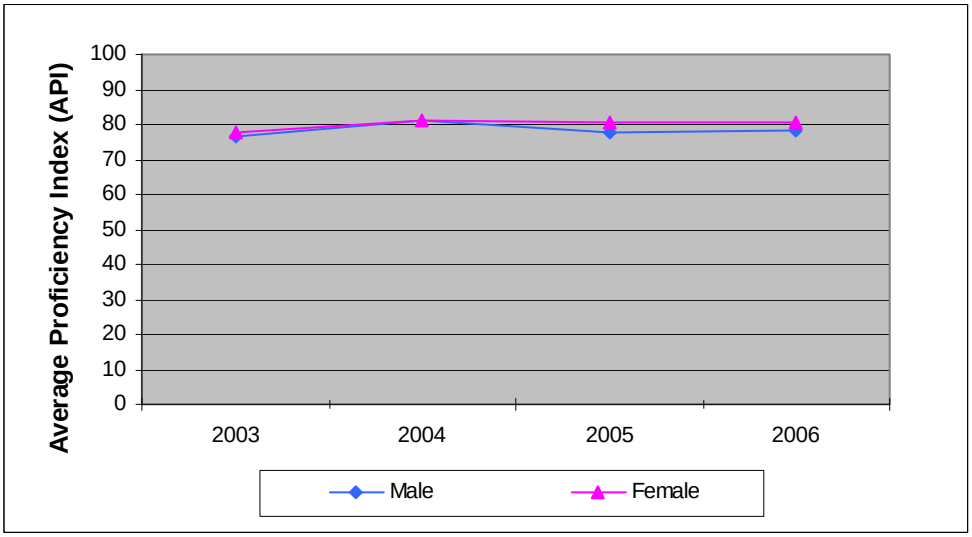


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
FRL/N	2003	81.0	87.0	76.3	69	51
	2004	84.3	90.0	80.3	72	55
	2005	82.1	88.5	77.4	68	53
	2006	82.7	87.8	78.7	67	52
FRL/Y	2003	64.1	69.0	60.5	40	32
	2004	71.2	77.8	66.0	47	28
	2005	68.3	76.9	62.4	39	28
	2006	66.9	74.4	61.1	44	27

Both the low-income (FRL/Y) and non low-income (FRL/N) subgroups in Northbridge had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for low-income students narrowed from 36 to 33 PI points, and for non low-income students it narrowed from 19 to 17 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of nine percent for non low-income students and eight percent for low-income students.

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

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



		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Male	2003	76.4	80.9	73.0	58	48
	2004	81.0	85.4	77.7	62	52
	2005	77.6	83.8	73.2	55	45
	2006	78.4	82.1	75.3	56	47
Female	2003	77.8	84.9	72.2	66	44
	2004	81.3	88.5	76.2	70	46
	2005	80.6	88.3	74.8	69	49
	2006	80.7	88.4	74.9	70	47

Both male and female students in Northbridge had improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for male students narrowed from 24 to 22 PI points, and for female students it narrowed from 22 to 19 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of eight percent for male students and 13 percent for female students.

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

Participation

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Finding:

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

n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2006

Subgroup	Performance Level	ELA	Math	STE
Northbridge	ALL LEVELS	**1,387**	**1,380**	**387**
	Advanced	167	166	39
	Proficient	765	476	138
	Needs Improvement	411	503	178
	Warning/Failing	44	235	32
Regular Education	Advanced	166	163	39
	Proficient	723	451	135
	Needs Improvement	326	453	155
	Warning/Failing	23	170	20
Disability	Advanced	1	2	0
	Proficient	39	22	3
	Needs Improvement	83	49	22
	Warning/Failing	21	64	12
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	0	1	0
	Proficient	3	3	0
	Needs Improvement	2	1	1
	Warning/Failing	0	1	0
White	Advanced	157	159	37
	Proficient	718	448	127
	Needs Improvement	387	471	166
	Warning/Failing	39	216	29
Hispanic	Advanced	4	2	1
	Proficient	26	16	4
	Needs Improvement	13	18	6
	Warning/Failing	2	9	1
African-American	Advanced	2	3	0
	Proficient	12	4	3
	Needs Improvement	6	9	3
	Warning/Failing	3	7	2
Asian	Advanced	3	2	1
	Proficient	4	4	1
	Needs Improvement	2	2	2
	Warning/Failing	0	1	0
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	150	155	37
	Proficient	628	403	118
	Needs Improvement	283	377	128
	Warning/Failing	21	140	21
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	17	11	2
	Proficient	137	73	20
	Needs Improvement	128	126	50
	Warning/Failing	23	95	11
Male	Advanced	69	100	21
	Proficient	390	234	71
	Needs Improvement	226	253	86
	Warning/Failing	26	119	14
Female	Advanced	98	66	18
	Proficient	375	242	67
	Needs Improvement	185	250	92
	Warning/Failing	18	116	18

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2003-2006

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2003	191	0	0
	2004	194	0	0
	2005	187	0	0
	2006	211	210	0
Grade 4	2003	207	207	0
	2004	189	189	0
	2005	200	200	0
	2006	184	182	0
Grade 5	2003	0	0	0
	2004	0	0	199
	2005	0	0	197
	2006	201	200	200
Grade 6	2003	0	182	0
	2004	0	188	0
	2005	0	202	0
	2006	194	193	0
Grade 7	2003	210	0	0
	2004	187	0	0
	2005	189	0	0
	2006	209	208	0
Grade 8	2003	0	202	0
	2004	0	207	206
	2005	0	191	190
	2006	185	187	187
Grade 10	2003	149	148	0
	2004	151	151	0
	2005	162	162	0
	2006	203	200	0
All Grades	2003	757	739	0
	2004	721	735	405
	2005	738	755	387
	2006	1,387	1,380	387

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

Standard Findings and Summaries

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

I. Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district goals were narrowed during the review period due to a change in the superintendent position; the school goals were aligned with implemented changes.
- School committee members were knowledgeable of their roles and responsibilities and advocated for the district.
- Communication of progress on all aspects of attainment of DIP and SIP goals in the district was broad and not specific since the goals themselves were not measurable.
- Annual performance reviews of administrators were completed only in the last year of the period under review, and the evaluations were not directly related to student achievement.
- The MCAS test data were disaggregated regularly for the special education subgroup but not for other district subgroups, such as low-income or minority students.

- Comprehensive safety plans were completed for the district and all schools in collaboration with public safety officials. The district safety plan had not been updated since 2000.

Summary

The district experienced high turnover rates in leadership positions during the review period and implemented many changes in 2005-2006, including a new administrator evaluation process. The new evaluation procedure highlighted the leadership roles and responsibilities of administrators and called for more accountability through a goal-setting process that was to be piloted in 2006-2007.

Leadership meetings occurred on a regular basis, and communication between and within schools increased through grade K-12 task forces on curricular issues. The district emphasized the use of technology to increase communication by implementing the FirstClass Communications Platform for e-mail, web pages to make more information available to the public, and ConnectEd telephone services to address attendance issues.

Communication increased between the district and the town officials and included regular meetings between the finance committee, selectmen, and school committee members to address fiscal concerns in the community. The superintendent and chair of the school committee conducted an orientation for new school committee members to assist a smooth transition. Copies of budgets, the policy manual, and district and school improvement plans were shared at this meeting.

School committee members were aware of their roles and responsibilities and focused on the "big picture." The committee worked as a whole in order to keep all members informed and involved, suspending the subcommittee structure of the past. Members stated that they were presented information about assessment results along with updates on curriculum work in progress. The majority of the school committee members were parents, and they confirmed that the school improvement councils were very active in the governance of the individual schools.

The long-range planning for the district started with the 2001-2006 Five Year Plan, which was in effect for the period under review, with the exception of a refocus of the district goals in the fall of 2005 under the supervision of the new superintendent. All of the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP), updated annually on the basis of

general progress, and included school safety procedures, information on class size, time on learning compliance, extra-curricular and enrichment needs and activities, projected facility needs, program evaluation, and plans for dissemination of the SIPs. Since the district and school goals were not specific or measurable, it was difficult to evaluate progress in quantifiable terms.

The district had a technology plan and a long-range curriculum plan that was not fully implemented but did not have a professional development plan. This slowed the district's progress in reaching its identified goals. The district made modifications to its instructional services in response to data analysis revealing the need for attention to math at the elementary and middle school levels. The district completed the grade K-12 math curriculum, added algebra to the middle school, and introduced Hands On Equations and RM software. It also scheduled the Title I program after school to provide more extensive math support.

Indicators

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The District Improvement Plan (DIP) provided to the EQA team was dated 2001-2006. The plan included an executive summary and overview, mission statement, a five-year vision, five-year goals, fundamental beliefs, assumptions, and additional focus areas. The seven goals were not all standards-based and were not clearly or directly based on student achievement data.

Although this plan was established to guide the district for five years, it was not replaced with a successor five-year plan. In the fall of 2005, it was extended for two years, and the goals were changed to five overarching district goals under the direction of the new superintendent. These new goals were presented to and accepted by the school committee, but a review of school committee minutes did not indicate a vote on the new DIP goals.

These modified DIP goals became the basis for district improvement planning for the 2005-2006 school year and beyond. Beginning in December 2005, the superintendent requested that the SIPs submitted by principals be based on these five overarching goals.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

School committee members told the EQA examiners that they were informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act through attendance at the mandatory and voluntary school committee training sessions, information from the superintendent's reports and enclosures, and from participation in meetings. According to school committee interviewees, all new members were oriented to their responsibilities by the chair of the school committee and the superintendent, soon after their election. At these meetings committee members were given the policy manual, budget book, copies of contracts, and a copy of Massachusetts General Laws applicable to public education.

In addition, the school committee had policies that specified their collective roles and responsibilities under education reform, as well as policies that addressed conferences and workshops to support continued training and development for its members.

School committee members stated that they received more than ample information on student achievement through presentations at school committee meetings, superintendent reports, and review of monthly principal reports. Interviews with school administrators indicated that the school committee regularly received information on MCAS test results during the review period. In other interviews, principals and district administrators reported they had delivered presentations to the school committee on a variety of achievement results, in addition to MCAS, SAT, and PSAT results.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

At the end of the review period, the district had begun to review data and the new superintendent required principals to begin using data to make decisions. The principals stated that they were trained in the use of TestWiz, but that the training was not formal in all cases. Teachers stated in interviews that they were not trained in using TestWiz and that some teachers would like to be trained.

After examining MCAS data, the district focused on the math program and made changes at each level such as time adjustments, the use of different texts, or the addition of technology. The district also narrowed the focus of its DIP goals from seven to five after reviewing a variety of data.

In addition to MCAS data, the district gathered information from other assessments such as the chapter tests in math. Those data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and redistributed to the principals for further analysis in each school. The disaggregation of all data was not yet a standard operating procedure in the district.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The School Improvement Plans were aligned to the DIP for the 2005-2006 school year, but were not directly linked to the analysis of student achievement data. They included objectives, person responsible, budget implications, indicators of success, and a place for status reporting.

SIPs addressed the five overarching DIP goals as revised, but did not address all of the areas in the Education Reform Act. The 2005-2006 revised goals and the SIPs of all the district's schools lacked mentoring and class size goals but contained goals for the following five categories:

academic progress, professional development, student support, budget, and communication/parental involvement. The 2001-2006 DIP had addressed all seven goals.

The revised goals document reviewed by EQA examiners also required SIPs to include the following: class size, time on learning compliance, school safety plan, extra-curricular/enrichment needs/activities, projected facility needs, program evaluation, and plans for dissemination of the SIP.

The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), respect and tolerance, and inclusion in special education were not included. In addition, most of the goals were not specific, measurable, nor focused on student achievement.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The EQA team heard conflicting information about efforts to promote a balance of equity and equality within the district. The budget contained many examples of expenditures to address equity. Some of these allocations included the purchase of RM Math software to assist in math instruction at grades 3-8, the revamping of the Title I program to include more eligible students, and the addition of pre-algebra in grades 7 and 8 to expand accelerated offerings to students at all levels. The high school scheduled students who required intensive academic support into a time block of Academic Support Center during each cycle. The high school also assigned students who performed below standard on the MCAS tests to writing and reading labs and humanities classes to provide support in attaining proficiency.

However, elementary staff interviewees expressed concern about the equality of programs and materials, and about the possibility that the reorganization of those schools might create an imbalance within the town. In addition, the middle school did not specifically offer math or ELA support to students who performed below standard on the MCAS tests, reflecting the variability of support for needy students in the district.

Administrators demonstrated to the EQA team that the district purchased a number of materials in order to achieve equality in the schools in the subject areas of reading and math. SmartBoards were placed in classrooms as needed to respond to students' different learning styles. Teachers received training in their appropriate use.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to staff interviewees, the process of determining the budget changed during the review period. A long-time staff member told the EQA examiners that in the early part of the review period, the budget was determined after an agreement was made with the town officials on a budget figure. In contrast, the administrative team members indicated that they were very involved in the most recent budget process, and that the budget was needs based, especially now that there were two elementary schools with similar grade configurations. The district's schools were formerly organized to serve grades K-1, 2-4, 5-8, and 9-12. In 2005-2006, the administrative team planned for a reorganization, to be implemented in 2006-2007, resulting in two grades K-4 schools, one grades 5-8 middle school, and one grades 9-12 high school.

School committee members stated that they always approved educationally sound budgets and that those budgets were based on data. There was no evidence in the documentation of the budget development process that specific, disaggregated student achievement data were directly used to determine the budget; however, evidence indicated it was influenced by the understanding that students were not performing at the desired level on MCAS tests.

Committee members also stated that they were very involved in the advocacy effort for the school budget, and worked hard to educate parent groups about the impact of the budget on student achievement.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to school committee minutes, the superintendent and central office personnel regularly delivered presentations to the school committee and to the public through cable television. The DIP and SIPs were routinely addressed in the principals' monthly reports, as reviewed by the EQA examiners. Additionally, new SIPs were based on the results of what had been accomplished in the previous year, according to the superintendent and the principals. According to school council members, MCAS data presentations were made to school improvement councils, and those data were used by the respective councils to develop subsequent plans. Since DIP and SIP goals were not specific or measurable, progress on their attainment was stated in general terms.

A review of the annual town report for 2005 revealed that the individual school reports did not mention the SIP or the attainment of the SIP goals. The district report also did not address progress toward and attainment of the goals in the DIP.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The MCAS test data were disaggregated regularly for the special education subgroup but not for other district subgroups, such as low-income or minority students. In interviews, central office personnel stated that they were responsible for the compilation of district data from local assessments and conducted an initial analysis of MCAS test data obtained from the Department of Education (DOE). Central office personnel then sent principals the data for further general discussion with faculty and staff, followed by dissemination to and discussion by grade-level teams of teachers. Department chairs and directors at the secondary level were also responsible

for reviewing data by appropriate subject and grade level. Item and trend analyses were conducted regularly, but subgroup analysis was not.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The EQA examiners confirmed that the district monitored student achievement data throughout the year. School committee members, principals, and central office personnel stated that there were multiple presentations at school committee meetings each month, and each principal was required to make monthly progress reports for each school with respect to student progress in general terms.

The DIP and SIPs were not specifically referenced in regular reports except that increased student achievement in the aggregate was the first and overarching goal in each of the plans. Since the goals were not specific nor measurable, progress on each was not reportable in specific terms.

The superintendent stated that the data analysis emphasized the need for attention to math at the elementary and middle school levels. The grade K-12 math curriculum with grade-level outcomes was completed, algebra was added to the middle school, and Hands On Equations was introduced, along with the use of RM software. In addition, the Title I program was scheduled after school to provide math support for more eligible students.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

A review of 19 personnel files by EQA examiners demonstrated that during the review period administrators were only evaluated in 2005-2006, the last year of the review period. The

superintendent developed a new evaluation process and implemented it in 2005-2006. This new process did not address the areas of diversity and equity in accordance with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. MCAS and other student achievement data were addressed in the new evaluation process only indirectly through a number of indicators, such as Student Achievement and Judgment, which required the evaluation and use of evidence to arrive at logical conclusions, but not specifically through the use of MCAS results.

The development of SIPs and alignment with the DIP were only addressed indirectly in the new process through the Measurable Objectives for Administrators section. The student achievement goals were not specific nor measurable.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, both the prior and the new superintendent delegated educational and operational leadership to the principals and program directors but did not directly use student achievement data to appraise success. This was confirmed in separate interviews with each administrator. Principals were responsible for hiring, evaluating, and supervising staff members, managing the school budgets, and preparing SIPs and upcoming budgets.

At the end of the review period, the superintendent held regular central office staff and administrative cabinet meetings each month, with agendas that reflected reporting on issues of concern. The EQA examiners reviewed these agendas and confirmed that individual contributions were made by principals and the directors of operations, curriculum, special education, and Title I, as well as the superintendent. In interviews with principals, the EQA examiners found that principals understood their roles and responsibilities as the instructional leader in their respective building, as well as their role as administrator and manager.

Student achievement data were reviewed at administrative meetings and at individual meetings between the principals and the curriculum director. There was no clear, specific reference to student achievement data in the evaluation reports as a result of these meetings.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

At the end of the review period, the school committee and superintendent worked with town officials such as the members of the finance committee, selectmen, and town manager at regular meetings to address the critical budgetary issues impacting town and school district operations. The open town meeting attendance had increased dramatically at the end of the review period, due to the work of both the superintendent and the school committee. Northbridge employed both a town manager and interim manager during this period. During the EQA visit, Northbridge's new town manager had been in office for only 13 days.

In interviews, the teacher association leadership told the EQA examiners that there was a good working relationship between the superintendent and the association president. Both parties felt able to call one another in order to discuss concerns.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Individual school safety plans were reviewed on an annual basis, but an administrator stated that the district plan had not been reviewed since it was first written in 2000, and explained that the plan was scheduled for a review in 2007.

The comprehensive safety plan had been developed in 2000 in collaboration with the fire and police departments, and included topics such as emergency response, general instructions for

evacuation and lockdown, crisis command centers, media and community communications, and student release. Each school had developed its own school safety plan which was included in each SIP, and as a part of the SIP was published on each school's website.

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

II. Curriculum and Instruction

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district completed a major effort to align its elementary and high school level curricula to the state curriculum frameworks, and was in the process of aligning its middle school level curriculum.
- Curriculum in many areas was textbook-dependent for both content and formative and summative assessment.
- As the district completes curriculum writing in the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years, the approach in use differed at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, impeding achievement of vertical alignment.
- The use of formative assessments to inform instruction at all district levels was not a common practice across the district.
- The district began to introduce effective educational technology into the classrooms despite the lack of a written technology plan.
- The district did not demonstrate any marked improvement in MCAS test results in the aggregate or for subgroups from 2003 to 2006.

Summary

The Northbridge Public Schools completed a major alignment of the district's curriculum to the state curriculum frameworks at all levels except the middle school level as a result of the five-year plan developed by the previous superintendent and the curriculum office in the fall of 2000. The alignment process was completed at the elementary level at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. In math and science, the alignment was fully dependent on the textbooks adopted by the district. The textbooks purchased by the district were perceived to be in alignment with the state curriculum frameworks by the central administrators, principals, and teachers involved with the textbook review and the piloting process used to review and adopt published materials. The curriculum alignment was not completed at the middle school level by the conclusion of the review period. The curriculum was lacking in benchmarks, formative and summative assessments, and instructional strategies for use by teachers. The middle school principal estimated that the middle school curriculum alignment would be completed by the end of the 2007-2008 school year. At the high school level, the curriculum alignment was completed in the fall of 2006, about six months after the review period. The curriculum presented to the EQA team was a comprehensive mapping approach that lacked periodic benchmark assessments for use throughout the school year. This curriculum lacked a regular system of formative assessment that would serve to guide and inform instruction for students in each subject area throughout the 10 months of the school year.

Central office curriculum leaders, the high school principal, and her department heads and teaching staff spent considerable time on the project of curriculum alignment and mapping in the district. EQA examiners noted that the process was somewhat disjointed and directed by different leadership approaches at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and the curriculum did not appear to be unified throughout all levels. According to interviewees, when in doubt they used the state curriculum frameworks, which served as the foundation of all curriculum work in the district. The EQA team also noted that the district did not employ the common practice of dating all curriculum materials as they were reviewed or completed, rendering it difficult for the EQA team to understand the sequencing of writing and revision in the district. The curriculum revision entered into a period of unclear long-term planning in 2005-2006, in that the original five-year plan was not replaced with a follow-up plan that included curriculum and professional development programs to complement the district's new curricular

and instructional goals. The middle school principal shared with the EQA team a monthly curriculum update that he required of all teachers, and this helped him monitor instructional adherence to curriculum expectations.

Due to the restructuring at the elementary level, many grade K-4 teachers were displaced and three were teaching at new grade levels in 2006-2007. In the restructuring, the district created two grades K-4 elementary schools to replace the previous grades K-1 and 2-4 elementary structure, posing a new horizontal alignment challenge that the EQA team could not evaluate at the time of its review.

Administrators informed the EQA team of a number of changes that increased instructional time during the review period. In the elementary teacher focus group, interviewees reported that ELA instructional time was increased from 90 to 150 minutes daily. Math instructional time was increased from 60 to 90 minutes. The high school implemented a double block in the humanities program for students who were struggling in ELA and social studies. In 2005-2006, the district decided to implement an Algebra I program for middle school students, based on their performance results on the Iowa Algebra Assessment Test. The district aimed to improve weak middle school MCAS math scores by offering algebra to eligible upper-level students at grades 7 and 8. The middle school implemented an enrichment block that rotated math and other subject areas through the extended homeroom to give students added support in tested core subject areas.

The EQA team visited 59 classrooms for periods of approximately 20 minutes per classroom, including 31 visits at the elementary school level, 15 at the middle school level, and 13 at the high school level. The data collected in these observations were very positive in the areas of classroom management and the classroom climate in which instruction took place. In the categories of instructional practice, expectations for student work, and student activity and behavior, the team did not see evidence that instruction had moved to the level of highly challenging work with the use of differentiated instruction, which was the district's stated goal. The lack of planning in the district for short- and long-term professional development programming to assist teachers was also evident. The district's MCAS test scores did not demonstrate high or accelerated levels of student achievement during the review period. Furthermore, from 2003 to 2006 the number of different Advanced Placement (AP) exams

administered in the district had expanded from seven to 12, and the number of individual exams administered had expanded from 98 to 143. On the other hand, in 2003 the average score on two out of the seven exams administered was below a 3 (and therefore ineligible for college credit), compared to AP test results in 2006 when the average score on eight out of the 12 exams was below 3.

Indicators

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Throughout the planning process that the district followed from 2000 to 2005, curriculum leaders and principals described and wrote curricula that were aligned with the state frameworks. The directors of curriculum, ELA/Title I, and math supervised curriculum development in the district. However, at the beginning of the review period the math director retired and the position was left unfilled. The curriculum director assumed responsibility for the development of the math curriculum in the district. At the high school level, the math department head was responsible for aligning curriculum.

Throughout the review period, the district finalized the curriculum alignment to the state frameworks, with the exception of the middle school level. A single template was used at the elementary school level, and curricula in ELA, math, and science were aligned to the frameworks. In ELA, the district changed from a basal reader program to a guided reading approach. In math and science, the alignment and the curriculum description were implemented via textbook adoption. In math, the alignment was accomplished through the adoption of the Scott Foresman series at the elementary level and at grades 5 and 6; district curriculum personnel and teachers reviewed this series and determined that it was aligned with the frameworks. The district chose the McDougal Littell guided pre-algebra curriculum for grades 7 and 8. The math curriculum was dependent on this textbook series to guide instruction. In science, different texts

were piloted during the review period. In school year 2005-2006, the district chose the Macmillan science series as the textbook for the elementary and middle schools. The science curriculum became dependent on this textbook series as well as on the Glencoe series, chosen for grades 6-8, with implementation planned for school year 2006-2007.

Each district level presented the curricula to teachers utilizing a different model. The EQA team received different documents and binders, with CD-ROMs, from district personnel as it reviewed curricula. Curriculum documents in most cases were not dated, which at times impeded analysis of progress in the respective curriculum areas. The focus of the central office administrators for curriculum development during the review period was at the elementary level. The district curriculum document for grades K-4 listed goals and benchmarks, standards, scope and sequence, assessments, core authors and booklists, resources, and a bibliography. The district curriculum binder for the middle school level was under development. The middle school had created a 27-page "curriculum guide" that listed the objectives of the courses at each grade level and the texts that were in use: Scott Foresman for math, along with McDougal Littell in pre-algebra and Dolciani for algebra, beginning in 2006-2007; Macmillan/McGraw-Hill and Prentice Hall for ELA; and Macmillan/McGraw-Hill and Glencoe for science. This curriculum guide did not include resources, instructional strategies, timelines, or articulation maps with measurable outcomes and assessments.

Teachers, the principal, and the curriculum office leaders all stated that the grades 5-8 curriculum was a "work in progress." In interviews, they stated that the middle school curriculum might be completed in the 2007-2008 school year. At the high school level, the staff completed a comprehensive curriculum mapping project during the review period. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) advised the school that it needed to complete this curriculum task as the next decennial visitation in the spring of 2008 approached. In interviews, the principal and teachers stated that the high school completed the curriculum maps for all courses in the late fall of 2006. The curriculum was comprehensive with clear listings of skills, subject area knowledge, expectations for student mastery, teacher activities, and assessments, and relation to the School Improvement Plan and technology. Each course listed specific learning standards, drawn from the state curriculum frameworks, for student mastery. The timeline varied

by department and was measured by duration rather than by content to be mastered with particular benchmarks during the school year.

At the elementary level, benchmarks were clearly established by grade level and core subject area and published in the elementary curriculum binder. Assessment tools and procedures were clear for ELA. The district used the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) as its main tools to monitor student growth and inform instruction at the elementary and middle school levels. At the middle and high school levels, benchmarking through the core content areas and ongoing assessment for those benchmarks had not yet entered into district instructional practice during the review period.

The district expended considerable time on curriculum description. District curriculum leaders, principals, and teachers all demonstrated commitment to the task, and made significant progress toward the goal of writing a complete K-12 curriculum in ELA, math, and science/technology. By the end of 2006, the district did not have a comprehensive grades K-12 plan for a unified process to describe curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment procedures with measurable outcomes and methods at all grade levels.

The EQA team's review of curriculum documents indicated lack of a consistent process, format, and product that was articulated across all three levels. At the elementary level, the district office structured and drove the process. At the middle school level, the principal held curriculum leadership responsibility, and he focused on piloting texts for future adoption. At the high school level, the principal and department heads supervised the process with an eye toward including the NEASC requirements. At the middle school level, there was a vacuum in mathematics leadership since the retirement of the math curriculum director three years ago. The district sought to resolve this situation in 2006-2007 by hiring back a retired high school math department head to serve as a consulting mathematics specialist, focused on middle level mathematics curriculum and instruction.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, the district curriculum director, the ELA coordinator/Title I director, and the special education director implemented a major review and overhaul of the entire curriculum. Building principals, particularly at the high school level but to some degree at all levels, were fully involved with this major districtwide effort. The curriculum review was a direct result of the five-year plan that had as goals improved student achievement, higher MCAS test results, and use of "best teaching practices." In 2003-2004, horizontal and vertical alignment of the curriculum could not be verified, since there were no completed curriculum documents available for the EQA examiners to review. By 2006, the curriculum documents for the elementary level were finished, but still subject to ongoing review by principals and teachers. Many components were still missing or left in various stages of completion in June 2006. The high school mapping project was nearing completion, and in interviews the principal, teachers, and department leaders stated that the curriculum description for the high school was fully completed in the fall of 2006. The middle school curriculum was not written at the time of the EQA review, and interviewees projected that they needed 18 months to complete a comprehensive articulation of the middle school curriculum that would include instructional strategies, measurable outcomes, resources, and formative and summative assessment procedures.

Because the written curriculum in the district was not in any way complete during the review period, the EQA team could not discern evidence that the grades K-12 curriculum was aligned both horizontally and vertically. However, it was clear from interviews with central office curriculum leaders, principals, and teaching staff that all personnel had been involved in the curriculum writing project for the district and were committed to a full alignment to the state frameworks. This commitment would likely result in vertical alignment upon completion of the curriculum description.

Principals were fully involved in the process at each school level, and they worked closely with the district curriculum leadership. Elementary team leaders, middle school facilitators, and high school department heads all assisted in the process. Most of these curriculum teacher-leader positions had been eliminated in the FY 2007 budget. Only the high school department heads continued into the 2006-2007 school year. The EQA team observed evidence of teamwork, as all

parties addressed the need to define and write curricula. However, the team also noted that the district used varying curriculum description models at different levels and at different times during the curriculum writing project, rendering it more difficult for the participants.

Due to restructuring at the elementary level, many grades K-4 teachers were teaching at new grade levels in 2006-2007. The district created two grades K-4 elementary schools to replace the previous grades K-1 and 2-4 elementary structure. Elementary teachers followed the clearly defined grades K-4 curriculum document that was completed during the review period. In interviews, teachers and building administrators stated that the state curriculum frameworks served as the guide for instructional content and that teachers also followed the curriculum guide that had been developed by the district during 2001-2006. The elementary principals' commitment to the district's curriculum documents, as well as the ongoing supervisory role of the central office curriculum leaders, indicated the presence of vertical and horizontal alignment as the district instituted the newly written curriculum at the elementary level. With two parallel elementary schools commencing in the 2006-2007 school year, there was a new horizontal alignment challenge created in the district that the EQA team could not evaluate at the time of the review.

In interviews, high school teachers and administrators stated that common final exams were administered at the high school. The high school's departmental structure, including department heads and regular meetings under the direction of the principal, ensured that there was consistency of instruction both horizontally and vertically within each department. At the middle school level after the elimination of curriculum facilitators, the principals, two vice principals, and the central office curriculum leaders had to monitor vertical and horizontal alignment and consistency of curriculum delivery. The elementary schools each had an assistant principal who assisted with curriculum efforts.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The EQA team met individually with the four principals of the district. They stated without reservation that they were the curriculum leaders of their schools. They also acknowledged that the director of curriculum, the ELA coordinator/Title I director, and the special education director played key supporting, and at times initiating, roles in the curriculum review, curriculum alignment, and curriculum writing in the district. In a focus group, teachers and department heads confirmed that the principals were the primary curriculum leaders within each building. They confirmed that the central office district curriculum leaders also played a key role in the curriculum development process. Principals conveyed that it was their responsibility to direct and organize curriculum writing efforts; however, EQA examiners noted that responsibility was sometimes delegated. For example, when the elementary curriculum documents were needed for EQA review, the central curriculum office supplied them. When a comprehensive curriculum document was needed at the high school level, the recently appointed grades K-12 math specialist was directed to supply the EQA team with it. When some documentation was still missing at this level, the high school principal produced the comprehensive curriculum description. At the middle school level during 2005-2006, the principal was new. When discussing the lack of a comprehensive and complete middle school curriculum guide, he took full responsibility and indicated that he intended to have it completed within 18 months. The EQA examiners could not determine the middle school's written curriculum prior to 2005-2006, when the new principal was hired.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, the Balmer Elementary School and the Northbridge Middle School experienced a change of leadership. Aldrich Preschool and the Northbridge High School had stable leadership by principals who had served for at least two years prior to the review period. Also, soon after the new superintendent arrived, the district recognized that classes at the Balmer and Aldrich schools would have to be reconfigured to effectively accommodate all elementary

children. In 2005-2006, much administrative effort focused on preparing for the district's restructuring. At the high school, the principal dedicated most teacher professional in-service time to the curriculum mapping project. The academic year included one day prior to the arrival of students and four days during the school year for professional growth and development activities. The district dedicated the October in-service day for analysis of the MCAS test data and began the development of MCAS action plans.

Principals at each school worked with the support of the central office curriculum leaders to guide teachers in implementing effective instructional strategies. Elementary and middle school teachers received guidance in the use of SRI and DRA, which became a central part of the formative assessment process in ELA at those levels. The EQA team did not uncover evidence that a multi-year professional development plan was developed and followed that would guide teachers toward research-grounded methodologies to improve the achievement of all students. Teachers learned data analysis simply by participating each fall in the MCAS data analysis in-service. During the review period, school and district leaders did not provide training in the use of TestWiz for disaggregating MCAS data. Teachers were left to learn independently by enrolling in courses or "learn[ing] by doing" by analyzing MCAS, SRI, and DRA data and writing portfolios at the elementary and middle school levels with other teachers, principals, and curriculum leaders. Principals were trained in using TestWiz or had trained on their own and taught some teachers, although they stated in interviews that they needed additional TestWiz training.

The EQA team visited 59 classrooms and did not find evidence that differentiated instruction, technology integration, or other "best practices" had become institutionalized in the schools during the review period. This was the case despite a five-year plan culminating in 2006, a goal of which was the "improvement of instruction and the use of assessment data to inform curriculum and practice… [and the creation of] student-centered, standards-based classrooms where all students obtain content knowledge, acquire skills, develop work habits and practice the application of all three in 'real world' situations." It appeared to the EQA team that plans to support staff in providing more effective instruction for all students were delayed in implementation, due to the tremendous need to define and align the curriculum and adjust to leadership changes and building use changes within the district.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

District policy IGA addressed curriculum development. It required regular evaluation of the education program and recommendations for "modifications of practice and changes in curriculum content…." The district had no policy to require curriculum review based on data analysis, nor to require or ensure a regular and timely review and revision of curriculum in an organized cyclical manner. Policy IGD required that the school committee be informed of "all new courses and substantive revisions in curriculum."

The five-year plan described the curriculum review cycle to be followed by the district. This plan added guided reading to ELA instruction, Scott Foresman math and middle school algebra to math instruction, and the Macmillan textbook series to science instruction. It also focused the district's curriculum efforts on the three tested core content areas during the years under review. The EQA team noted that the district's curriculum development efforts at this time reflected a lack of comprehensive curriculum writing in the earlier years of MCAS test implementation. The starting point of all curriculum revision was a "review," yet there was no written curriculum to review in this case since it had not been defined or organized in Northbridge in the first seven years of education reform. The district did not demonstrate any marked improvement in MCAS test results in the aggregate or for subgroups from 2003 to 2006. In interviews with teachers and administrators, EQA team members heard that curriculum planning and the piloting of materials had been removed from any long-range planning in the 2005-2006 school year. Since the five-year plan did not have a successor plan with a clear charting of the next five years of curriculum work, some district staff considered review work as reactive, rather than proactive, to curriculum needs. Throughout the curriculum review cycle, there was little indication that subgroup data analysis was an integral part of curriculum decision-making and the textbook adoption process.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

All the principals had an awareness and knowledge of the use and applications of TestWiz. In interviews, they said they needed more training in this area. The principals and the central office curriculum team assisted some teachers in the use of this data analysis tool. The district did not provide all teaching staff with the training needed so that teachers could review aggregated and disaggregated achievement data for their students.

Disaggregated data from the MCAS tests in 2006 indicated that the low-income, Hispanic, and special education subgroups in Northbridge performed better than the state average for those subgroups. Northbridge's regular education students' MCAS test results were lower than the state average. In interviews, administrators and teachers were aware to varying degrees of weak math performance at the middle school level. Some were aware that special education students performed well compared to the state average for special education students. At the same time, the EQA team saw no districtwide action plans that indicated there was a concerted focus on disaggregated data analysis leading to specific curricular or instructional action for subgroups.

The AP results were reported to the school committee annually. There was little evidence that the school and central office curriculum leaders reviewed the AP data to determine the effectiveness of the program in supporting academic achievement for the highest performing students in the district. Seven AP courses were offered at the high school during the review period. The district offered one AP science course, Chemistry. In reviewing the results of the six tested AP courses, the passing rate, indicated by the number of students scoring a 3 or above, varied significantly: 58 percent in 2004, 38 percent in 2005, and 64 percent in 2006. Passing rates varied from a high of 82 percent in History in 2004 to a low of 20 percent in Calculus, Chemistry, and Psychology in 2005. Participation in AP courses increased throughout the review period.

In interviews, administrators informed the EQA team of a number of changes which increased instructional time. The high school implemented a double block in the humanities program for students who were struggling in ELA and social studies just prior to the review period.

According to the principal, the district implemented dropout prevention, and changed Title I at the elementary level to an after-school program in 2006-2007. This change was made to help students who lost standard instructional time in ELA and math under the previous service model at the elementary level. In 2005-2006, the district decided to implement an Algebra I program for middle school students, based on their performance results on the Iowa Algebra Assessment Test. The district aimed to improve weak middle school MCAS math scores by offering algebra for eligible upper-level students at grades 7 and 8. For the other middle school students, the district adopted the Addison-Wesley program with an algebra component. The middle school implemented an enrichment block that rotated math and other subject areas through the extended homeroom to give students added support in tested core subject areas. In the elementary teacher focus group, interviewees reported that ELA instructional time was increased from 90 to 150 minutes, and math instructional time was increased from 60 to 90 minutes.

In interviews and through document review, the EQA examiners saw little evidence of long-range planning based on documented multi-year analysis of MCAS trends for all students and for specific subgroups that would result in adjustments in instructional time for either all students or for targeted subgroups of students. Data analysis in the district focused more on responding to individual students' needs.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not have a technology plan. The five-year plan which guided the district from 2001 to 2006 did not have a specific instructional technology component. During the review period, no administrator held the specific task of supervising and directing the implementation of effective technology integration into the grades K-12 curriculum. The presence of technology in the schools to assist instruction appeared to be tied to building construction at the high school in 2001, previous technology infusions, or directed actions by the new superintendent. In the 2005-2006 school year, he purchased SmartBoard technology for all schools. Although there were

some software purchases and professional development activities at each level to improve technology integration, they were discrete efforts that lacked coherence.

Despite the lack of a technology plan, some solid technological equipment was present in all the schools by 2005-2006. The district allocated four SmartBoards to the high school and four to the middle school for use in the 2006-2007 school year. Each elementary school had two SmartBoards for use in 2006-2007. During middle school classroom visits, EQA team members noted that the entire math department had complete sets of graphing calculators and students were actively using them during the observed instructional time. Computer labs were available for the math and science departments and at the media center in the high school. Two laptop rolling carts were available for shared departmental use at the high school. Every high school teacher had a laptop for use at school and at home; interviewees reported that this technology greatly assisted them in their work. The world language department had a language lab at the high school. Three computer labs were available for students at the middle school. In interviews, some teachers expressed frustration that the district tended to allocate academic support such as technological equipment to the high school more liberally than to other schools. Assistive technologies were present in some of the special education and regular education classes to assist students with hearing impairments.

The EQA team visited 59 classrooms in the district. In these classroom settings, the student-to-computer ratios were as follows: 8.9 students per computer in total, 7.0 at the elementary level, 15.8 at the middle school level, and 10.4 at the high school level. Two computers were almost universally available for student use in all classrooms of the district. However, in the 59 observations conducted by the EQA team, there was very little computer use as a component of classroom instructional practice. Some of the computers were outdated and examiners could not determine if they significantly and positively impacted instruction in the district. The district was in the beginning stages of technology and curriculum integration during the review period.

Teacher and administrator interviewees nearly unanimously reported that the district made great progress in the effective use of technology for teacher and administrator communication for the improvement of educational endeavors in the district. E-mail was the method of communication throughout the district. The high school's shared drive supported the curriculum mapping and

other instructional activities. The superintendent reported in interviews that communication with parents was improved due to the district website that served to orient and assist them as they navigated the district on behalf of their children.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Principals monitored teachers' instruction during the review period with the observation and evaluation instrument available to them under the teachers' contract and with informal walk-through visits that were not permitted as part of the standard teacher evaluation process. Interviewees reported that the superintendent joined principals and assistant principals in walk-throughs from time to time, and these were informal and unannounced. Principals also gained knowledge at all levels by monitoring teacher plan books and by checking that daily instructional goals were posted at the front of the classrooms. Principals and central office curriculum administrators started to require this practice during the curriculum alignment process. Teachers reported that the new superintendent visited classes, and central administration and principals monitored teacher attendance with more care and attention in the 2005-2006 school year. Some interviewees stated that the superintendent discontinued some past practices that had led to excessive teacher absences in some situations.

The middle school principal shared with the EQA team a monthly curriculum update that he required of all teachers, and this helped him monitor instructional adherence to curricular expectations. The process was unique to the middle school, rather than a districtwide expectation of all teachers. Other principals used varied methods including regular review of lesson plans delivered by teachers, either electronically or by hard copy.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Most testing in the district was summative in design and use. At the elementary and middle school levels, assessments were products of the textbooks that the district adopted in the 2005-2006 school year. The high school level used common final exams in all departments. The curriculum also listed tests, quizzes, and presentations as part of the curriculum assessment.

During the review period, formative assessment was used extensively at the elementary level with the DRA in grades 1 and 2, and the SRI in grades 3 and 4 and at the middle school. The district curriculum office had extensive binders of collected test results. Tests were administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Central office curriculum administrators collected and reviewed data from these assessments. Principals reviewed the assessment results with teachers and with central office curriculum leaders. Teachers reviewed data and formulated instructional ELA goals. At the elementary level the results were used to inform instruction in the ELA and guided reading program that the district had implemented during the review period. The high school was beginning testing in ELA at grades 9 and 10 for students identified as underperforming, using SRI and Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) tests. Beyond this, there was little evidence of formative testing used that would guide instruction in math or science. With the adoption of the Scott Foresman math and Macmillan science programs to be implemented in 2006-2007, the possibility of pre-testing learning objective areas became possible in those two subjects, but it was yet to be implemented.

There was little evidence that the district monitored the effectiveness of teachers' instruction via the ongoing use of formative and summative student assessment data. Administrators had not received professional development training on using assessment data to monitor teacher effectiveness. Until March 2006, the negotiated instrument for teacher evaluation did not allow for effective monitoring of instructional practice within the district.

The district collected and analyzed data and developed action plans as MCAS data arrived each September and October. It reviewed writing folders of students and AP and SAT results, but these analyses did not lead to either monitoring teacher effectiveness or developing short- and long-range plans for teacher professional development training. District curriculum documents referred to differentiated instruction training prior to the five-year plan. However, for the review

period the EQA team saw no evidence of districtwide training in differentiated instruction, teaching to multiple intelligences, developing a professional learning community, or using the available and appropriate methods of effective data analysis for meeting the varied student learning needs. The district did not use collected data to develop a professional development plan that would assist teachers to improve instructional quality and delivery in the district.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 59 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 26 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching. The attributes were grouped into five categories: classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student activity and behavior, and climate. The EQA examiners checked the attributes that they observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. Observations were conducted at the district's four schools as follows: 31 at the elementary schools, 15 at the middle school, and 13 at the high school. In total, the EQA examiners observed 25 ELA classrooms, 22 math classrooms, and 12 classrooms in which other subjects were taught.

Classroom management refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 96 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 96 percent at the elementary level, 93 percent at the middle school level, and 100 percent at the high school level.

Instructional practice was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher's questions transcend direct recall and include open-ended questions that require the use of higher order thinking skills. Students should be encouraged to go beyond their initial responses, to analyze, to synthesize, to compare and contrast, and to explain their own thinking. Class time should be focused on student learning.

Students who have finished their work should be provided with other appropriate tasks; students who are off-task should be redirected to their task. The work should engage all students; it should be age-appropriate, and attuned to many learning modalities, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The pace of the class should be appropriate, challenging, and engaging for all students. Instruction should be differentiated so that all learners are challenged. The lesson should be clearly aligned with the state curriculum frameworks and either posted on the board or cited in the teacher's planner. The lesson's objectives should be clear and explicitly articulated. The teacher should use standards-based instruction to set objectives, to plan activities, to assess the effect of the lesson, and to measure progress for all learners. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 76 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 81 percent at the elementary level, 67 percent at the middle school level, and 75 percent at the high school level.

Expectations refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. Evidence of high expectations could include recent examples of high quality student work posted in the classroom. In addition, high quality work should be evident through rubrics that may sometimes be generated by students. Tasks should be challenging for all students, and all students should have access to the same curriculum, although the instruction and strategies may be adapted to the needs of students. The teacher should clearly maintain and communicate high expectations for student work during class time. All students should be expected to be on task and engaged in the lesson. High expectations for students were evident in 78 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 85 percent at the elementary level, 62 percent at the middle school level, and 81 percent at the high school level.

Positive student activity and behavior are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They must show a clear understanding of the objective of the lesson and interact with the teacher and each other in accomplishing the tasks at hand. They should be attentive and responsive. While the environment may be busy and constructive, it must also be controlled and orderly. There should be few distractions, and the learning process must be clearly evident. Indicators of positive student activity and behavior were evident in 67 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 74 percent at the elementary level, 61 percent at the middle school level, and 59 percent at the high school level.

Finally, the concept of *climate* is considered evident when the classroom is welcoming, and the teacher is an active listener and treats all students with respect. Students should listen attentively to and be respectful of all other students. Many resources and means beyond the textbook should be available for learning; these may include technology, manipulatives, cassettes, visuals, overhead projectors, and a classroom library. Positive indicators of climate were evident in 89 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 94 percent at the elementary school level, 84 percent at the middle school level, and 82 percent at the high school level.

A primary district goal in the five-year Plan was to expand the use of "best teaching practices." A review of each of the five categories in which the team collected effective teaching data indicated the following areas where the percentage score indicated improvement could take place: 1) classroom management: "Interactions between teacher and students are positive and respectful" (93 percent observed); 2) instructional practice: "The teacher uses questioning techniques that encourage elaboration, thought and involvement" (61 percent observed), "The teacher plans multiple tasks that engage all levels of learners" (49 percent observed), and "The teacher engages in a variety of instructional techniques such as differentiated instruction" (34 percent observed); 3) expectations: "The student work is of high quality, modeled, displayed, and evident in the classroom" (53 percent observed); 4) student activity and behavior: "The interaction between students is constructive and productive" (53 percent observed), and "Students use available technology appropriately" (29 percent observed); and 5) climate: "The classroom is filled with multiple resources for student learning which addresses learning styles" (81 percent observed).

Summary of Classroom Observations

	Number of Classrooms				Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Computers		
	ELA	Math	Other	Total			Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Elementary	18	11	2	31	18.8	0.7	88	84	7.0
Middle	1	8	6	15	21.0	0.6	25	20	15.8
High	6	3	4	13	15.9	0.0	32	20	10.4
Total	25	22	12	59	18.7	0.5	145	124	8.9

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity & Behavior	Climate
Elementary					
Total observations	119	225	105	137	87
Maximum possible	124	279	124	186	93
Avg. pct. of observations	96	81	85	74	94
Middle					
Total observations	56	91	37	55	38
Maximum possible	60	135	60	90	45
Avg. pct. of observations	93	67	62	61	84
High					
Total observations	52	88	42	46	32
Maximum possible	52	117	52	78	39
Avg. pct. of observations	100	75	81	59	82
Total					
Total observations	227	404	184	238	157
Maximum possible	236	531	236	354	177
Avg. pct. of observations	96	76	78	67	89

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

III. Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district had a formal school committee policy that addressed the expectations and responsibilities of both administrators and teachers regarding the collection, analysis, and use of student assessment results.
- Although the district's aggregate MCAS participation rates exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement, special education student participation varied significantly, especially at the high school.
- During the review period, the district engaged in a number of external audits of its academic programs and delivery systems.
- Although district and school improvement plans were aligned on the goal of improving processes and procedures for program evaluation and accountability and substantial data were collected, there was little evidence of ongoing, systematic, comprehensive, internal program evaluation in the district.
- Central office and school leaders complied with the district assessment policy relative to reporting procedures and appropriate communication of student progress. Parents indicated that student achievement data were widely disseminated and readily available in the community.

Summary

District and school administrators used a variety of assessments, particularly for underperforming students, in addition to MCAS tests to measure educational progress and academic needs. Although assessments were employed most widely and effectively at the elementary grades, some progress was noted at the middle and high school levels as well. Benchmarks were established in both ELA and math at the elementary level, and local and norm-referenced criteria were used at regular intervals and at specific grade levels to monitor and analyze student progress. Assessment results were subsequently used to identify students needing additional educational support through Title I, targeted remediation, and special education services, as well as those who were ready for additional academic challenges. At the grades preK-4 level, student assessments included the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation, Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory (ESRI), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), as well as cumulative assessments in math and literacy that were administered in the fall, winter, and spring of each year.

The middle school used Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test (IAAT), which is a a national, standardized, norm-referenced assessment, and performance tests from the Scott Foresman Mathematics Program Assessment Sourcebook. As a result of MCAS data analysis, a middle school task force had developed a schoolwide writing rubric, Because Writing Matters, designed to strengthen student literacy skills across the curriculum. At the high school, a variety of standardized assessments was used to evaluate student progress. In addition to MCAS tests, some students were given SRI and QRI assessments, and many others took PSAT, SAT, AP, and Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) tests. The high school had also developed common final examinations in all subjects. Neither the middle school nor the high school had developed formative assessments or local benchmarks as means of more effectively monitoring student academic progress throughout the course of the year.

Although student assessment results were communicated to all appropriate staff and were used to varying degrees to improve curriculum and instruction as well as to inform some professional development activity, interviewees acknowledged that substantial additional data analysis training for both building administrators and staff was still needed.

The district developed modifications to the core curriculum to improve performance of special education and low-performing regular education students. It introduced "Humanities," a four-year ELA/social studies interdisciplinary program, "Integrated Mathematics," a multi-year program developed for students who scored below standard on the MCAS tests, as well as remedial courses in the science department such as "The Living World" and "Chemistry in the Community" to provide appropriate educational alternatives and support for students with identified learning needs. The high school's Early Intervention Team (EIT) monitored the progress of at-risk students. Additionally, the district offered an Academic Support Center to provide MCAS remedial support, and writing and reading labs for students whose reading, writing, and spelling skills were below average.

Northbridge devoted considerable attention and resources to external audits of its program implementation and service delivery systems. In 2004, the district commissioned a review of its preK-K programs and received a full five-year accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for its educational programs and services. The middle school was evaluated in 2005 by the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS). Although the report did not address student achievement, it contained numerous commendations as well as specific recommendations that centered on teaming, pedagogical, and curricular issues. The middle school's SIP reflected its extensive efforts to implement the NELMS recommendations. In 2004-2005, Northbridge Public Schools commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of its special education program and services continuum. A detailed report was produced that reviewed the district's speech and language services, resource rooms, occupational and physical therapies, adapted physical education, integrated preschool, and use of paraprofessionals. As a result of the district's major elementary level reorganization that was implemented in 2006-2007, a follow-up special education evaluation was conducted in early 2007. During the review period, the high school was actively engaged in its re-accreditation review process with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). An examination of NEASC progress reports and other pertinent correspondence indicated the high school made efforts to improve its academic programs, services, and assessment practices.

The district's internal assessments of its programs and services have been less formal and systematic than the external audits cited. For example, the district's curriculum revision plan

called for regular and thorough reviews of existing curriculum, instruction, and assessment by the curriculum team. Although Northbridge's 2000-2007 curriculum documents clearly identified a specific content area revision sequence, the plan had not been followed consistently or implemented uniformly. In addition, there was little evidence that the district conducted assessments of the cost effectiveness of any of its programs based on student performance data. Further, the EQA examiners learned that, in general, the district was just beginning to disaggregate student achievement data, and that building administrators and staff required more professional development training in data-driven analyses of program effectiveness and student achievement.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the review period, Northbridge had a formal school committee policy in place that addressed the expectations and responsibilities of both administrators and teachers relative to the collection, analysis, and use of student assessment results. An examination of the district's assessment policy revealed that its primary requirements included use of multiple measures, use of assessments to inform and guide teachers, training and support for teachers, measurement of student achievement by both local curricular benchmarks and state and national academic norms, and assessment and reporting procedures that would complement the state's MCAS standards and practices.

In interviews with examiners, administrators reported that district assessment practices and procedures were consistent with its assessment policy. Multiple student assessments were used at all grade levels for a wide variety of educational purposes. In addition to regular classroom, grade-level, and content area local assessments, district and school leaders employed an array of standardized assessments to identify and evaluate student academic abilities and needs. Further, assessment results were used to inform classroom instruction, modify curriculum, determine

elementary level groupings and secondary class leveling, track student academic progress, and compare achievement results from class to class.

Those interviewed identified a number of assessment programs used across the district to achieve these goals. At the elementary level they included Phonemic Awareness, the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation, Ekwall/Shanker Phonics, Developmental Reading Assessment, Scholastic Reading Inventory, and the Qualitative Reading Inventory. At the middle school level, assessments that were cited included the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test and cumulative norm-referenced assessments from Scott Foresman and McDougal Littell, as well as the SRI and QRI assessment programs. The high school also made use of a battery of student assessments. In addition to the continued use, as appropriate, of the SRI, QRI, and Wilson spelling and reading programs, high school staff indicated that the PSAT, which was administered during school time, ASVAB, SAT, and AP tests provided extensive student assessment results. Furthermore, high school faculty had developed common final examinations in all content areas as a means of collecting data relative to student content mastery, placement, and curricular validity. Interviewees acknowledged that little work had yet been completed to create reliable formative benchmarks to monitor student academic progress and achievement.

At all grade levels, the collection, analysis, and dissemination of MCAS data was a priority, as reflected in all interviews, and was an overarching goal in the district and school improvement plans. District and building leadership concentrated considerable time, ongoing attention, and resources to this work. Despite these efforts, little evidence was presented to examiners that student performance data were analyzed in a disaggregated manner by administrators and staff. District and school leadership were just beginning to recognize regular and systematic analysis of subgroup performance for subgroups other than special education as an essential diagnostic tool.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

District administrators reported that as a result of their concerted efforts to communicate with parents and students, the district achieved generally strong MCAS participation rates throughout the review period. This high rate is made more remarkable because DOE data revealed that rates of absenteeism, average number of days absent, and chronic absenteeism at Northbridge High School were considerably higher than the districtwide and statewide averages.

Although the district's aggregate MCAS participation rate exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement, an examination of DOE data revealed that special education student participation, especially at the high school, varied significantly. For example, in 2006 the special education participation rate on the grade 10 ELA test was 88 percent, and on the grade 6 math test it was 94 percent.

Interviewees reported that special education students were included, as appropriate, in all other school-based testing programs. School psychologists conducted additional testing for special education students, as necessary, utilizing a variety of assessment instruments and procedures consistent with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Testing for Title I students, as well as for limited English proficient (LEP) students, was conducted in a timely manner and met all state and federal requirements.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Based on a review of documentation and interviews with administrators, examiners verified that school leaders had implemented district-generated reporting procedures to report student progress and achievement. According to the district's assessment policy, "Schools and classroom teachers are responsible for reporting and interpreting assessment information to parents and students," and "administrators are responsible to communicate results and interpretation to the school committee, school councils, and community." In addition, the District Improvement Plan

and all School Improvement Plans were aligned regarding the importance of program evaluation and accountability and increasing parent and community engagement in student learning.

Interviewees indicated that a variety of reporting procedures that focused on student achievement were used within the district to communicate, as appropriate, to staff, community members, parents, and students. In grades preK-12, interim progress reports, quarterly report cards, and regularly scheduled parent conferences provided meaningful opportunities for parents and students to be informed about academic progress and achievement. Administrators and teachers reported the use of a variety of appropriate formative and summative assessments to determine grades. In addition to standardized tests provided by program publishers, e.g., Scott Foresman and McDougal Littell mathematics programs, anthology assessments, quizzes, tests, homework assignments, cooperative group work, portfolios, writing exercises, oral presentations, written reports, and high school common final examinations were all components of student assessment. The elementary grades issued report cards that were aligned with the state's ELA, math, and STE curriculum frameworks. They also included standards for personal and social growth and work habits. At the secondary level, interim and quarterly academic reports were computer-generated and included traditional letter grades as well as ample space for teacher comments. All report cards encouraged parents to contact teachers or school staff if they had any questions or concerns.

Information from interviews and document review confirmed that district and school leaders reported on student achievement to staff and community members using a number of suitable vehicles and forums. Central office administrators provided regular reports to the school committee and media on the results of standardized assessments, such as MCAS, SAT, and AP exams, as did building principals to their respective staffs. Results of MCAS and other standardized testing were posted on the district website. At the building level, faculty, grade-level, and departmental meetings and professional development programs were occasions for administrators and teachers to focus attention on standardized and summative assessments.

Additionally, principals communicated information about MCAS testing and test results to their school communities in a variety of ways, including newsletters, parent information nights, school websites, and through their school improvement councils (SICs). In interviews, parent SIC

members reported that the schools effectively communicated with them about their child's academic progress and learning needs, and that relevant information was widely disseminated and readily available.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, district and school administrators used a variety of assessments in addition to MCAS tests to measure student academic progress. Benchmarks were established in both ELA and math in grades preK-4. Interviewees reported that in the elementary schools, a combination of local and norm-referenced criteria were used by grade level and at regular intervals to monitor and analyze student progress. Assessment results were used to identify students who needed additional educational support through Title I, targeted remediation, and special education services, as well as those who were ready for additional academic challenges. Further, administrators and staff used student assessment results to inform instructional grouping practices, placement, and promotion and retention decisions at all grade levels. In addition to determining student knowledge and skill levels, interviewees explained that assessment results were employed to track students' educational progress over time and to compare results from teacher to teacher and class to class. Assessment records were maintained in each student's collection of yearly assessments (CYA) folder.

District and school leaders reported that they looked closely at MCAS and other test results and that these analyses had resulted in revisions to the curriculum or to instructional practices in specific content areas, grade levels, or schools. Little evidence was presented that the district analyzed disaggregated data in a regular or systematic manner for students other than the special education population.

A variety of tests and testing programs in addition to the MCAS tests were used by the district, primarily at the elementary level, to evaluate and diagnose student development and achievement in ELA and math. Interviews and document review revealed that at the preK-4 level, assessments

such as Yopp-Singer, Ekwall/Shanker Phonics, and DRA were administered extensively, as appropriate, and at regular intervals throughout the school year. Additionally, cumulative assessments in math and literacy were administered in the fall, winter, and spring to monitor student achievement. At the middle school, several standardized assessments, including SRI, QRI, and the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test, were used for specific student populations and grade levels. At the high school, department heads with the support of the principal used departmental meetings, common planning time, and professional development sessions to develop common end-of-year assessments in all subjects. They also worked to improve vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment, as well as instructional and assessment practices within content areas. Interviewees reported that this process had been hindered at the middle school as a result of the elimination of its content area curriculum leaders. At both the middle and high schools, administrators had not yet developed standardized formative assessments and local benchmarks to better monitor student academic progress and diagnose educational needs.

Student assessment results were communicated to all appropriate staff and were used to improve curriculum and instruction, as well as to inform some professional development. However, interviewees acknowledged the need for more specialized training to enhance the ability of both building administrators and faculty to use and analyze assessment data as a tool to inform instructional practice and measure student progress.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, district and school leadership, particularly in the elementary schools, endeavored to use student assessment results and other pertinent data such as running records, chapter and unit tests, local benchmarks, and formative and summative assessments to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs. Central office administrators asserted that “assessment drives instruction” in the district, and this sentiment was echoed by many interviewees and was consistent with district documentation. At the elementary level, teachers, specialists, and building principals met frequently by grade level or content area to review and

analyze results from an array of student diagnostic and achievement tests. These meetings served as a primary vehicle to develop needed support services or strategies for individual students, to identify patterns of curricular strength or weakness, to inform curriculum revisions and adjust instruction, as well as to determine flexible instructional groupings. Assessment results were documented on class summary sheets and submitted electronically to the central office on predetermined due dates. At the end of the school year, all assessment results were compiled in each student's collection of yearly assessments folder, which followed students through grade 8.

Interviewees described focused efforts by the high school to analyze MCAS and other data to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs. Transition meetings between middle and high school special education teachers, guidance staff, and student support specialists were conducted at timely intervals to identify student learning needs and develop an appropriate schedule of academic classes and augmentative services. The high school's Early Intervention Team (EIT) monitored student academic performance and proactively provided interventions, assistance, and services as individual needs required. The principal employed faculty and departmental meetings as well as in-service time, as appropriate, to examine MCAS data, review student achievement results, and assess the effectiveness of academic programs and instructional practices. Department heads also used departmental, common planning, and professional development meetings to focus on MCAS, PSAT, SAT, AP, teacher-made assessment, and common summative test results.

The curriculum director and ELA coordinator/Title I director supervised the collection, distribution, and examination of student assessment results in the district. Those interviewed indicated that during the review period, many of these responsibilities had been shared with or delegated to the building principals. According to the district's professional development calendar, four full days were annually included to allow the individual schools, as well as the district as a whole, to address the academic and instructional needs that emerged from analysis of data generated by MCAS testing and other standardized and local assessments. In addition to providing outside consultants to support targeted faculty training, Northbridge provided in-district ELA and English language learner (ELL) professional development training, and for the 2006-2007 school year added a math specialist to provide coaching and mentoring for middle school staff.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the review period, the district engaged in several external audits and some less formal internal assessments to inform the effectiveness of its program implementation and service delivery systems. In 2004-2005 the district commissioned a comprehensive review of its preK-K program by NAEYC and was awarded a full five-year accreditation for its educational programs and student services. Northbridge Middle School was evaluated in 2005 by the New England League of Middle Schools. Although it did not address student academic achievement, the NELMS report cited the middle school's supportive administration, dedicated staff, and caring community as among its strengths. Many of the report's recommendations centered on teaming, pedagogical, and curricular issues. Administrators asserted and the middle school's improvement plans confirmed that much effort had been devoted and progress made in implementing the NELMS report's recommendations.

In addition, in 2004-2005 Northbridge commissioned a full evaluation of its special education programs and services continuum. A consultant was engaged to produce a detailed report that reviewed the district's speech and language services, resource rooms, occupational and physical therapies, adapted physical education, integrated preschool, and use of paraprofessionals. The complete report contained many commendations for the district, as follows: a dedicated, well trained staff, strong parental involvement, effective administrative support, high student achievement, and inclusion levels in the general curriculum and life of the school. Areas identified as benefiting from more attention were: increased use of assistive and instructional technology, review of existing services continuum for any unmet needs and for increased efficiency, and creation of a range of professional development opportunities for professional and paraprofessional staff. As a result of a major reorganization of the district's elementary schools, a follow-up special education program evaluation was conducted during the 2006-2007 school year.

EQA examiners noted the efforts of high school administration and staff in producing and submitting full, detailed, and timely regular and special progress reports to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges during the review period. A review of the high school's comprehensive five-year report, as well as subsequent reports and correspondence with the accreditation commission, revealed the school's ongoing commitment to improving learning opportunities, academic programs, and assessment practices.

Interviewees indicated that the district also engaged in periodic internal assessments as part of its curriculum review process. During the first year of the five-year curriculum revision cycle, the curriculum team was to conduct a thorough review of existing curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Although the district's 2000-2007 curriculum plan clearly identified a specific content area revision sequence, those interviewed indicated that the plan had not been consistently followed or uniformly implemented.

Administrators also cited their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the district's teacher mentoring program as an example of an internal program assessment. A review of relevant documentation confirmed that a considerable amount of information had been collected from both mentors and mentees. The district provided examiners with little evidence that systematic data analysis informed changes or improvements to the mentor program. Similarly, the district had not conducted regular or systematic assessments of the cost effectiveness of any of its programs based on student performance data.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the review period, district and school leaders conducted regular reviews of student assessment results and other pertinent data in an effort to maximize effectiveness in assigning staff, prioritizing goals, and allocating resources. Interviewees cited a number of examples of administrators' use of student achievement results to improve program design and delivery, as well as to inform personnel decisions. In the primary and elementary grades, data from a wide

range of diagnostic assessments in ELA and math were routinely employed to evaluate, prescribe, accelerate, or remediate instruction. Principals, support specialists, and classroom and grade-level teachers carefully examined results in order to determine flexible instructional groupings, assign additional educational support or instructional time in ELA and math, and identify curricular strengths and weaknesses. Among examples of use of data to inform actions, administrators described deficiencies in student letter recognition, sound isolation, and matching skills that were revealed through a careful analysis of the results of the Phonological Awareness Assessment. As a result, the district designed and delivered a variety of appropriate curricular and instructional modifications targeted to enhance student phonemic awareness.

Administrators at the middle school made extensive use of SRI test results to identify students who required additional academic support or services, as well as those who were ready for greater academic challenges. In addition, during the review period the middle school introduced the use of the Iowa Algebra Aptitude Test. This test was used to serve as a screening tool to help staff determine algebra readiness for students in grades 7 and 8. Further, interviewees explained that as a result of MCAS data analysis, a middle school task force had developed a schoolwide writing rubric, Because Writing Matters, designed to strengthen student literacy skills across the curriculum.

High school administrators and staff also provided examples of how student assessment results were employed to enhance curriculum and instruction. Based on analyses of both local and state assessment data, a variety of modifications to the core curriculum were developed to better meet the needs of special education and low performing regular education students. These included the introduction of “Humanities,” a four-year ELA/social studies interdisciplinary program, “Integrated Mathematics,” a multi-year program developed for students who scored below standard on the MCAS tests, and remedial courses in the science department such as “The Living World” and “Chemistry in the Community” to provide appropriate educational alternatives and support for students with identified learning needs. Spring transition meetings between middle and high school special education teachers, student support specialists, and guidance staff carefully assessed student strengths and weaknesses in order to determine the most appropriate academic programs and services for each student. Subsequently, the high school’s Early Intervention Team (EIT) monitored the progress of at-risk students, and their interventions were

often informed by data. Among the support services and programs that interviewees indicated had been developed to meet the range of identified student needs were the Academic Support Center, which provided the targeted student population with educational assistance and MCAS remedial support, and the writing and reading labs, into which students whose reading, writing, and spelling skills were below level were assigned.

District and school leaders asserted that numerous student assessment results, including MCAS scores, were used to establish priorities for professional development programming. A review of professional development calendars for the review period confirmed that the district had used its four annual professional development days to offer faculty workshops on a variety of standardized tests, including DRA, SRI, QRI, and a number of math programs, as well as the use of data to better inform decision-making.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

District and school leadership asserted that the results of program evaluation were used to initiate, modify, and discontinue programs and services in order to improve the delivery of instruction and student achievement. Interviewees cited examples. Based upon local and standardized assessment data, intensive-level special education classes for multi-handicapped students were introduced at both the preschool and high school. New or piloted programs in math, science, and reading were introduced at a variety of grade levels. Extended day and summer programs offering remediation and enrichment were added in grades K-8, and standards-based report cards were introduced in the elementary schools for grades K-4.

In response to MCAS results and specific recommendations contained in the NELMS report, the middle school focused on the development of improved academic programs and services to promote learning. These priorities were articulated by middle school administrators and staff and were included in their School Improvement Plan. Examples cited include the following: exploratory academic trimesters; establishing a uniform rubrics-based writing program across the

curriculum; improvements to the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) process to serve as a teacher resource; adding academically challenging programs such as the Olympiad in social studies and science; creation of extended day and summer programs for students with identified learning needs; improved "bridging" or transition procedures and services for incoming grade 4 and outgoing grade 8 students with the sending/receiving schools to ensure a smoother transition, proper placement, and provision of appropriate services; and the introduction of a new algebra program in grades 7 and 8.

At the high school, interviewees reported on a number of actions influenced by the examination of relevant program results. Among the most significant of those were the adoption of a new bell schedule that faculty believed allowed for increased academic continuity and curricular integrity; the creation of new courses, remedial programs/services, and enrichment offerings, including online courses and elective classes, to better meet the interests, abilities, and identified needs of students; and the development of content area rubrics that established measurable, attainable, and rigorous academic goals for all learners. Academic expectations were linked to the high school's mission statement. Further, administrators explained that schoolwide student performance data were collected and distributed as part of the faculty feedback loop and that student performance was reflected in the quarterly progress reports.

Nevertheless, it was made clear to examiners that although the district had started to pay increased attention to data in general, it had only begun to use disaggregated data in formal or systematic ways. The collection and analysis of student subgroup performance data for students other than the special education subgroup was completed infrequently and informally, if at all. Principals and their faculties agreed that the district needed substantial additional training in data analysis techniques, as well as the use of item analysis and disaggregated data, to better inform instructional and assessment practices and modify academic programs.

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

IV. Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The new superintendent checked for updated professional certifications and took action to remedy the lack of certification for 26 employees.
- In 2005-2006, all elementary grade-level leader and middle school curriculum facilitator positions were eliminated, leaving teachers few opportunities for promotion.
- The district had a mentoring program, but mentor training was not held on an annual basis and some teacher mentors had not received appropriate training.
- The mentoring of administrators was informal, and they expressed the need for more training in TestWiz, analysis of student achievement data, and updated supervision and evaluation strategies.
- The former superintendent completed no evaluations of administrators in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. In 2005-2006, the district's evaluation of administrators' performance was not aligned with the requirements of education reform.
- In 2006, the new superintendent brought the district's teacher evaluation system into alignment with the requirements of the Education Reform Act.

- The district was just beginning to disaggregate student achievement data, and the administrative team needed more professional development in making data-driven decisions to write more specific and measurable academic, school, and programmatic goals.
- School buildings were locked and equipped with buzzer systems. The district safety plan had yet to be updated and reviewed with all town officials and regional safety service providers.

Summary

Under the new superintendent's leadership, the district made every effort to hire new teachers who held appropriate certification. In 2005-2006, the new superintendent discovered that 26 teachers, some of whom were long-time employees, did not hold teaching certification. He met with the teachers' association and the teachers, and granted them a deadline of the end of the school year to make adequate progress in attaining appropriate certification. By the end of the 2006 school year, 20 teachers had attained certification and six others had resigned or were non-renewed. In 2006-2007, only two teachers were working on waiver.

The district also employed two long-time staff members as administrators who did not hold administrator or teacher certification. Although the job titles did not match a specific administrator certification, the roles they performed in the district were similar to the roles that required professional certification of some type, according to DOE regulations.

Professional development was organized by central office through the collaboration of the administrative team which assessed the needs in individual schools. It consisted of a collection of activities rather than a focused, long-term plan. Full professional development days were school-based. Another 222 training sessions were held throughout the year, and most in-service professional development focused on "on-the-job data analysis" and implementing or piloting new textbook programs in math and science. Professional development offerings lacked sufficient focus on program assessments, research-based practices, the staff evaluation process, and using student achievement data to make data-driven decisions and write measurable achievement goals for School Improvement Plans.

The district had teacher induction and mentoring programs, but some of the mentors had not been trained, and mentor training had not been held since 2003-2004. The district also offered partial course reimbursement for teachers, and for attendance at conferences for teachers and

administrators. Teachers were expected to share the information they gained when they returned to the district; interviewees said this was difficult because of the insufficient common planning time at the elementary and middle levels.

The formal teacher evaluation form consisted of a checklist with little or no opportunity for written feedback. The superintendent improved the effectiveness of the evaluation process in 2006, with a side letter that allowed principals to make one unannounced classroom visit and use that experience to write one evaluation in an annual or alternating teacher evaluation cycle. It also established the responsibility of principals to create a specific improvement plan for teachers who were struggling or not meeting district expectations, based on prior classroom observations. A review of a sample of 37 teacher files revealed that evaluations in six files were not completed in a timely manner during the review period.

Supervision of instruction was accomplished through walk-throughs, conversations with teachers, and attendance at teacher meetings. The district did not have an established protocol for walk-throughs, and according to interviewees principals were not directly focused on their specific SIP goals in their walk-throughs.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

District policy GA stipulated that the district must implement procedures for recruiting, screening, and retaining candidates "with the highest capabilities, strongest commitment to quality education, and the greatest probability of effectively implementing the system's learning program."

The district advertised for open teaching positions in local newspapers. All application materials of teacher candidates were kept in the central office. In the event of an open teaching position, the principal was responsible for reviewing applications from among those available and then

scheduling an interview. The district generally received enough teacher applications for a satisfactory pool of candidates. The superintendent stated that certain special education positions could be harder to fill, and he used a special education collaborative network to find certified candidates.

Policy GCF indicated that the district administrator held responsibility for establishing a representative screening committee to hire a staff member. According to the policy, the administrator determined who would be hired, but weighed the screening committee's input as a factor. The district had to conduct a thorough background check on all recommended applicants for staff positions prior to their appointment. Principals said they created interview teams consisting of grade-level or same subject teachers. The district did not have one specific protocol regarding the number of interviewees or the composition of the interview team and left it up to the building-level administrators. A principal could request the assistance of central office administrators in the process. Principals were responsible for checking references; the administrative person in change of payroll and certification could assist by verifying certification status. When the superintendent received a recommendation from the principal, he set the salary step but did not need to interview the candidate before offering a teaching contract. Under the former superintendent, the principals also set the salary step. The superintendent became much more involved in the interview process when the district was searching for an administrative or district support staff position.

2. <u>All professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.</u>

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The new superintendent, upon arrival, found that at least 28 professional staff members held no DOE certification for the positions they held. Under his leadership, the district made progress in remedying this problem to attain the goal of a highly qualified staff. In a random sample of teacher files reviewed, all teachers in the sample held current and updated certification. The district listed two teachers employed on waiver in 2006-2007.

Likewise, most administrators held appropriate and updated certification. The district listed two administrators on its documentation and on the administrative funding lines who did not hold

administrator certification for the positions held. When asked, the superintendent told the EQA examiners that both were long-time employees and both positions had job titles and job descriptions which did not require either a teaching or administrative certificate. When high school teachers were interviewed by EQA examiners, they stated that from their perspective, the dean of students managed discipline for minor issues, coordinated MCAS testing, called in substitute teachers, and had handled in-school suspension for 11 years, and the director of operations performed some business management responsibilities, despite lack of relevant certification.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

In 2006-2007, two teachers were on waiver status and their progress toward certification was frequently monitored by central office staff. They were mentored by the combined efforts of the director of curriculum, the ELA/Title I coordinator, and principals.

According to interviewees, for the most part new professional staff members were hired with appropriate certification. According to the new superintendent, upon his arrival in the district he found that a number of long-term professional employees did not have any certification. The superintendent then checked the certification status of employees for currency and appropriateness for the position held. He found that 26 teacher employees, some of whom were long-term, did not hold current teacher certification. He told the EQA that he met with the teachers' association and with the 26 teachers, and gave them until the end of the 2006 school year to attain certification. As a result of this action, six teachers resigned or were terminated, and 20 completed the requirements for obtaining appropriate certification.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district provided teachers who were new to the district or their assignments with coaches or mentors in their respective roles. The superintendent, at the recommendation of principals, appointed mentors to new staff members, and the mentors received a stipend for their services. New staff members attended a teacher induction program and had regular meetings with mentors. Mentors were required to log activities and meetings, for collection by the central office.

The elementary schools were restructured in 2006-2007 to create two grades K-4 schools in place of the existing configuration, a grades K-2 school, Northbridge Elementary School, and the grades 3-4 school, Balmer Elementary School. In the reorganization, half the grades K-1 teachers shifted to the Balmer Elementary School and half the grades 2-4 teachers shifted to the Northbridge Elementary School. According to teacher interviewees, some of the teachers already serving at Northbridge Elementary School had been asked to mentor newcomers in order to help them adjust. According to interviewees, the district had not provided mentor training since 2004. Only some of the mentors had undergone mentor training provided by the district.

Administrators new to the district did not regularly meet for the purpose of mentoring with another administrator or retired administrator, and were provided only informal mentoring.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to district policy GCIA, the district was required to provide opportunities for professional development "beyond those that may be attained through the performance of their assigned duties and assistance from supervisors." During the review period, the district's professional development consisted of a collection of activities, rather than a focused, long-term plan. Full professional development days were school-based. There were 222 other training sessions throughout the year, covering the following topics: ELL and reading skill testing, physical restraint training, Open Circle Training, textbook support in math and science, training

to use software such as FirstClass e-mail, NCS Mentor, and RM Math, SmartBoard use, and training for paraprofessionals.

The district's professional development programs did not include specific sessions in the development of data analysis skills and the use of item analysis and disaggregated data to address all students' achievement, according to the documentation provided. Rather, teachers were provided instruction on analyzing trends and creating action steps to address the weaknesses identified in particular trends and strands in MCAS testing. Teachers confirmed that they had received on-the-job training.

When central office staff received student performance data, the director of curriculum and the ELA/Title I coordinator analyzed them and distributed them to principals. Although principals were able to use TestWiz, principals at the elementary and middle levels expressed the need for additional and in-depth training in its use. Overall, the district was only beginning to conduct subgroup analysis.

At the October in-service day, all teachers and principals were involved in looking for trends and patterns and conducting an item analysis for types of questions that a large number of students were answering incorrectly. The district used the same worksheets throughout all schools, which sent this information back to the central office where the director of curriculum and the ELA/Title I coordinator worked together to enter the data by strand for each subject. With this information, they created an annual report that they sent to the superintendent and the school committee. According to interviewees, special education teachers completed this same kind of analysis with more individualized analysis on the progress of students on IEPs.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the review period, the district had no human resources policies or practices that specifically encouraged growth and recognition or created promotional opportunities for

teachers. Under the former superintendent, the district did not carefully monitor DOE certification, complete and properly file evaluations, and effectively manage personnel files. In 2005-2006, all elementary grade-level leader and middle school curriculum facilitator positions were eliminated, leaving teachers few opportunities for promotion.

The new superintendent published a monthly newsletter that provided a vehicle to recognize teachers for professional growth and recognition. Interviewees stated that there was little staff turnover in the district, and vacancies were mostly due to recent staff retirements.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to interviewees, the district administrative team, which included principals, worked together to address the professional development needs of the entire teaching staff. When there were specific needs at individual schools, these were discussed and planned into the remaining two professional days of the school year, after the October in-service day which focused on review of MCAS test scores. Overall, the professional development lacked sufficient offerings regarding program assessments, research-based practices, the staff evaluation process, and using student achievement data to make data-driven decisions and write measurable achievement goals for School Improvement Plans.

During the review period, much professional development time had been focused at the elementary and middle level in piloting and implementing an updated math series and piloting a new science series. The district engaged in using piloted materials and then transferring them to the next teacher or grade level. This left unanswered questions about the fidelity of both the vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum during the review period. Common planning time at these levels was limited and relied on after-school monthly meetings or professional development days so that teachers in the same grade or subject area could meet to discuss common issues in curriculum and instruction. At the high school, administrators had recently

changed the schedule to grant all teachers specific time, in addition to preparation time, on a rotating basis to work on curricular issues that the principal deemed important.

When asked, teachers indicated that their perception was that most professional development was decided by central office, although they did have the opportunity to take partially reimbursed college or university courses, and professional-status teachers could attend conferences with the principal's and superintendent's approval. Teachers were asked to share information learned at conferences with others. There was no formal protocol or expectation that they would share or use the information gained with others in their respective school or department. Very little information about teachers' individual needs was indicated in the sample of evaluations reviewed by the EQA examiners, since for the most part evaluations were not instructive or used to promote growth and overall effectiveness.

In 2006, the new superintendent created goal-setting forms for the district's principals. The principals could list the type of support they needed, and the superintendent stated that he hoped to use this information to develop a professional development plan for administrators.

Principals indicated that more training in using TestWiz and common training in supervising and evaluating teachers would be useful. The superintendent stated that at times he invited specific principals to regional meetings attended by other administrators and superintendents, in an effort to provide professional growth opportunities.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

District policy GCO indicated that teacher evaluations were designed primarily "to improve instruction," and "meet established performance expectations," although the district also used them for the purpose of "encouraging professional growth and development."

The policy further acknowledged that the district administration held "responsibility [for] observ[ing] teaching and to plan varied exposures to student learning activities with efforts to

provide informal feedback and reinforcement for teachers … beyond the formal process of teacher evaluation."

The district presented little definitive evidence that expectations for programs and practice were monitored and supported by changed supervision and evaluation standards or in the professional development plans of staff, with the exception of using technology in the schools. Principals stated that they tried to spend more time doing walk-throughs in classes. Primarily, they were looking for consistency in using new curricula and the technology available in the schools. The interviewees did not mention focus on the use of either a specific walk-through protocol or on attainment of individual professional development goals.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The former superintendent completed no evaluations of administrators in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. In 2005-2006, the district's evaluation of administrators' performance was not completely aligned with the requirements of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. It did not contain all of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership; specifically, "appreciation of diversity" was a missing component.

The superintendent stated that he used the previous year's evaluation, if completed, and respective school issues to create goals for each principal, with the exception of the high school principal. The high school principal created her own goals, and the superintendent approved them. He incorporated administrative goals into the schools' SIPs, previous evaluations, and student achievement performance objectives.

The superintendent evaluated the director of operations, who was employed on an individual contract, and the dean of students.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The evaluation procedure for teachers was not completely aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act. Alignment with Strategies for Effective Teaching was only approximate, there was no formal process for awarding professional status, and there was no formal provision to write an improvement plan if necessary to help a struggling teacher. This was addressed in March 2006, with the addition of a side letter to the contract. The components of Strategies for Effective Teaching replaced the six components that had been previously used with the exception of respect for diversity, which was inadvertently missing. The side letter also instituted a procedure for the drafting of a formal improvement plan if the teacher's performance was not meeting district expectations, and to formally grant professional status at the end of three years of meeting the district's expectation for performance.

During the review period, the district's evaluation procedure for teachers' performance consisted of formal notification by September 20 if a teacher was to be evaluated in the current year. Non-professional status teachers were evaluated annually and professional status teachers were evaluated in alternating years. The procedure consisted of a pre-conference and three classroom observations prior to March 1. According to the teacher contract, the notes taken during the observation were to be descriptive rather than evaluative. A post-observation conference was to take place following classroom visits.

Prior to March 1, the teacher and supervisor were to rate a "Self and Supervisory Evaluation," which was an appraisal of tasks and responsibilities exceeding the immediate scope of the classroom but which were important to the teacher's overall performance and effectiveness, according to the contract. Upon completion of three observations, the evaluator was to complete a summary reaction sheet which contained a synopsis of the major conclusions of the classroom

observations. The summary evaluation was due by March 15 and was to include commendations and recommendations based on the "Evaluation Criteria" discussed in the pre-evaluation conference as well as performance observed and recorded in classroom observations. The categories were classroom management, classroom climate, lesson planning, instructional activities, knowledge of subject matter, and meeting students' instructional needs.

The indicators outlined in the teacher contract book were roughly aligned with components of education reform and recommended by the DOE, even though the title headings of the categories were not aligned. On the form entitled "Teacher Responsibilities Checklist," the supervisor could rate the teacher on a number of different indicators, such as instructional/curriculum development, pupil personnel, staff personnel, and school/community, rather than the overall performance. The "Composite Profile Form" explicitly stated that it was intended for informational purposes only, was optional, and was to be completed by March 15. Also, teacher-initiated goals had to be reviewed prior to its completion. All documents were to be submitted to the superintendent by March 20 and made available to the school committee by April 1. Supervisors and teachers completed the final evaluation of "Teacher Initiated Goals" by June 1. The evaluator could concur or not with the teacher, but the next steps were not defined in the contract. The process used during the review period did not provide the opportunity for the evaluator to create an improvement plan. This was remedied in March 2006 with the sidebar agreement drafted by the current superintendent.

A review of a sample of 37 teacher files revealed that evaluations in six files were not completed in a timely manner during the review period, in that they did not have completed evaluations in each year for non-professional status teachers and in alternating years for professional status teachers. When they were recommended for professional status at the end of year three, teachers were not informed in writing and did not receive a letter from the superintendent stating that he had granted the status upgrade. This was also remedied in 2006.

All evaluations in the random sample were descriptive with the exception of four evaluations, and the EQA examiners considered all to be informative. Moreover, six of the evaluations contained recommendations that were considered to be instructive, and two were considered to have recommendations that promoted individual growth and overall effectiveness.

According to district interviewees, principals could recommend to the superintendent whether to re-hire a non-performing teacher on non-professional status. Professional status teachers who did not meet expectations either remained on staff or resigned, since the system lacked means of addressing their poor performance. At the time of the visit, there were no improvement plans in place for any teacher, and most principals stated that they considered none of their teachers to be in need of one. In 2006, the district was beginning a formal procedure for documenting, allowing for due process, and taking action against persistently low-performing teachers.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

District administrators did not use effective supervision systems to implement district/school programs and goals for improving student achievement in their respective assignments during the review period. Although supervisors stated that they frequently visited classrooms and made many walk-throughs, these walk-throughs had no formal protocol or focus on professional growth in a specific identified area, such as a specific goal for improving student achievement. According to teacher interviewees, principals verified that students were actively engaged and teachers were using time effectively. They also looked for evidence of posted homework assignments, an agenda displayed on the board, and embedded use of technology in curriculum and instructional services. In fact, informal observations were not used unless a problem had been identified in a prior evaluation. There was little evidence presented that administrators made unannounced classroom observations. According to the contract, after three classroom visits a summary reaction would be written and would specify both recommendations and commendations based on the “Evaluation Criteria” discussed in the pre-evaluation conference as well as performance observed and recorded in classroom observations. The contract also stated that if an administrator deems further evaluation necessary, he or she would discuss with teachers, prior to finalization, details such as whether additional classroom observations would be announced and whether they would be included in the teacher’s evaluation packet. Based on

this stipulation in the contract and the documentation reviewed, all observations in the teacher files reviewed had been based on pre-arranged observations.

Overall, there was little evidence presented during interviews or in documentation that during the review period the district had developed systems to address the strengths and needs of assigned staff, based on effective systems of supervision that were focused on district or school goals to improve student achievement. According to principal interviews, starting in 2006-2007 one unannounced classroom observation could count as one of the three observations required under the teacher contract. The district was in the beginning stages of developing common informal methods of supervision. Most principals agreed that they had individual training in supervision and evaluation many years ago and were in need of updated and common training within the school district.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the DOE, professional development costs were $274,517 for salaries on the two full and two half days, and $44,914 for stipends, outside providers, and expenses.

Interviewees stated that, with the exceptions already cited, professional development was available, linked, and supported with appropriate levels of funding. The four full days were building based. Other trainings offered through central office throughout the year were: ELL category 2 and 3, a Teachers as Writers course, Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing (LIPS) training for Title I and special education, Key Math, physical restraint training, guided reading, Open Circle, training in using software, technology training for paraprofessionals, and preparation for the NEASC visit.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district provided ongoing and regular training in managing crises and emergencies to all staff. According to the superintendent, the district plan was developed in 2000 but had not been updated, as confirmed by the table of contents. Some schools had plans that no longer worked; for example, one school was supposed to evacuate to the armory, but no one had the key and people at the armory were not aware of the arrangements.

Individual SIPs included safety plans which the fire and police departments reviewed. The district has conducted lockdowns at some of the buildings, although the superintendent considered this a work in progress and plans to collaborate with the town on it.

The district purchased new phones at the high school so teachers and administrators could communicate in different parts of the building. All of the buildings had locked exterior doors. Visitors were required to ring a buzzer to enter the school buildings. At the middle school, classroom doors could lock but some classrooms lacked intercoms.

The ConnectEd system was installed in 2005-2006 in all school buildings so that administrators could better communicate with parents and staff in the event of school emergencies.

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

V. Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district provided supplemental services to all grade K-12 students in reading and math, although the amount of in-school time and staff dedicated to these services declined over the review period.
- Less than half of all grade 4 students attained proficiency on the MCAS ELA test in 2006, the final year of the review period.
- Special education students were mainstreamed when possible. Services such as reading instruction, resource rooms, aides, co-teachers trained in special education, and a behavior program for middle school students supplemented inclusion.
- The district encouraged regular student attendance and responded to absences with calls and letters to the home. Despite these efforts, the high school reported relatively high rates of absence and chronic truancy, and a low MCAS participation rate among the special education population.
- Discipline referrals declined during the review period as both the middle and high schools sought to adapt the district's behavior management policy. Despite these efforts, referral rates were high, and there was little evidence that the district developed plans to address the needs of a small core of repeat offenders.

- The district offered a summer school and implemented retention policies designed to allow students to recover credit and graduate with their class. Dropout rates were low.
- Enrollment in AP courses was limited, and there was little evidence that the high school encouraged students to aspire to these courses. Although students could move between course levels, the number of requirements for entry into AP courses, including honors-level prerequisites, prevented students from seriously considering enrolling.

Summary

The district provided services to students who needed extra help in reading, math, and MCAS support in the regular classroom setting, as well as a few special services for those who needed additional help. Academic support teachers at the elementary school assisted with small group instruction within regular classrooms. All middle school students participated in the enrichment block, which provided math support for 58 minutes on two out of every seven days. High school students who failed or were in danger of failing MCAS tests had their ELA course supplemented by a semester of writing lab, assigned periods in the Academic Support Center, and referral to the Learning Academy. Although students could advance from these lower-level courses in order to accelerate their learning, the school did not define policies on the criteria for such transfers. During the review period, the number of staff who provided academic support services declined. After 2005-2006, academic support for math at the elementary and middle schools was limited to a 0.5 FTE position in each building. In the year after the review period, Title I services were provided in math after school for elementary and middle school students who could participate on a voluntary basis, and transportation was provided. The Academic Support Center at the high school was staffed for MCAS review after school and one evening per week.

Although the school did not enforce the 12-student maximum enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, enrollments were small. Performance on the exams was not strong despite the many requirements for entry to the courses: application, teacher recommendation, interview, and honors-level prerequisites.

Special education students were mainstreamed at all levels. The elementary school had two inclusion classrooms. These classes were taught by two regular education teachers with the

assistance of a special education teacher. When required by an IEP, children were accompanied by an aide. Some intensive special needs students were mainstreamed for part of the day.

At the middle school, mainstream placements were supplemented with support in resource rooms. The middle school also had a reading teacher, social worker, and an off-site placement for students with behavioral issues.

The high school mainstreamed students with disabilities when possible, and when necessary these students were accompanied by an aide. The high school offered to special education students resource rooms as well as coursework such as Humanities 1 and 2 and Integrated Math that mirrored the regular education curriculum. In addition, the high school provided a two-year Living Skills program supplemented by an array of vocational offerings.

The district had attendance policies at every school level that administrators enforced. As a result, attendance rates were high at all levels except at the high school, where the rate averaged 91 percent and chronic absenteeism was high.

Teacher absence was high at the elementary schools, particularly in the “other” category. The new superintendent ended the practice of allowing teachers to take vacation days during the regularly scheduled school year.

The district had implemented the Behavior: Uniform Management Policy (BUMP) that rigidly established disciplinary consequences for many infractions, but discontinued its use at the end of the review period in favor of a policy that allowed for more administrative discretion. Despite improvements in the application of discipline policies, the reported in-school and out-of-school suspension rates were still high. The district did not have a program in place to address recidivism. The high school had a dropout prevention plan that involved a variety of school resources including the Learning Academy for academic support, guidance and adjustment counselors, summer school for credit recovery, and the possibility of combining work and school work with the addition of flexible online courses through Class.com.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Although the district examined data for at-risk populations, the focus at the building level was on improving the performance of the student body as a whole. During the review period, the Balmer Elementary School, which served grades 2-4, offered two inclusion classrooms co-taught by a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. In 2006-2007, the elementary program was reorganized into two K-4 buildings, each of which had two inclusion classrooms. In this model, one special education teacher assisted the two regular education teachers of the inclusion rooms. Observations indicated that this staffing was augmented by paraprofessionals. The decision to double the number of inclusion classrooms was a result of the increase in enrollment of students needing special education services. The additional classes permitted better application of inclusion and smaller class sizes. Some high-needs students were also placed in other regular education classrooms and accompanied by an aide when the IEP indicated the need.

At the middle school, special education students were mainstreamed, and when needed received additional instruction in one of the grade-level resource rooms. The district placed middle school students with behavioral issues at Project Grow, a service of the Worcester County Collaborative. The same mainstreaming model was followed at the high school. An assortment of vocational courses and a two-year Living Skills program were available to augment the program of services. The high school offered a series of courses such as Humanities 1 and 2, Integrated Math, and Biology of the Living World that mirrored the curriculum for lower-level college prep students. At all levels, the services of social workers, guidance staff, and adjustment counselors were also available. The special education director examined the MCAS scores of special education students; however, she was not aware of these students' relatively low participation rate on the spring 2006 administration of the MCAS tests at the high school.

The district had a small English language learner population. Documents and interviews revealed that the district had undertaken some teacher training for the administration of the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) examination. ELL students were mainstreamed and received some pullout instruction from a part-time tutor used at both the middle and high school levels.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

In interviews, school administrators stated that many of the students who needed additional help to improve their MCAS performance were members of the low-income subgroup. During the review period, services to improve academic achievement were directed at all under-performing students during the school day. Student performance was evaluated using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). Administrators and teachers spoke about the Academic Support Program which, for most of the review period, was provided by a combination of Title I and regular district staff at grades K-8 and regular staff at the high school, according to interviewees. During this time, both Northbridge Elementary School and Balmer Elementary School had assigned staff who worked in each classroom for 45 minutes daily to offer small group instruction for Title I students, lead a guided reading group, model MCAS strategies, assist with math lessons, and model good teaching strategies. Part of their time was also devoted to pullout instruction for the neediest students as identified by testing, teacher reports, the DRA, and other school and district assessment instruments. In the year following the review period, the district only offered Title I services in math after school in order not to subject students to pullout instruction during class math time. Bus transportation was provided for students who participated.

According to interviewees, at the middle school Title I teachers augmented the services of the reading teachers, pulled students aside for additional assistance, and provided help in math.

Student performance was evaluated using the SRI and QRI. The middle school handbook and staff interviews detailed the functioning of the enrichment block from which all children benefited. This was a 58-minute daily period which was rotated among the staff. A portion of this time was dedicated to extra work in math based on the MCAS math test results. Students in need of additional MCAS help were also encouraged to attend the summer school program offered by the middle school.

According to the principal, the Media Center at Northbridge High School was staffed by a librarian and a math or ELA teacher who could provide homework help and additional study. Under-performing students were assigned to this Academic Support Center. This program was also available each afternoon after school and one evening per week. In recent years, the high school also began a summer school program which students in need of MCAS help were strongly advised to attend. During its initial years, the district offered the summer school program free of charge. In recent years, the summer school had two four-week programs in ELA and math, running four hours daily, offered at a cost of $100. Administrators said that students who could not afford to pay were not turned away. The high school also identified lower-performing students for a special level of courses that included Integrated Math, special hands-on versions of Biology and Chemistry, and a Humanities course composed of ELA and social studies. Students enrolled in the Humanities course were also required to take an accompanying one-semester writing lab if they scored 226 or below on the MCAS ELA test. This coursework provided an opportunity to meet minimum requirements, but not to accelerate learning. Interviewees could not describe specific benchmarks by which to identify students who were ready to advance from this level.

Over the review period the district reduced the number of support staff. In the last year of the review period, there was one academic support staff person at the Northbridge school and two at the Balmer. In the year subsequent to the review period, all Title I services at the elementary and middle schools focused principally on math and were offered after school on a voluntary basis, although the children who needed to attend were strongly encouraged to do so. Late transportation was provided for these students. Similarly, the Academic Support Program at the high school was limited to an after-school schedule in the year subsequent to the review period.

The district had written a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) which was subsequently revised to make it more user friendly. Interviews revealed that all teachers received a copy of this document at the beginning of school and reviewed the recommendations for adjusting instruction. When students were recommended to the Early Intervention Teams (EITs), which were formerly known as Teacher Assistance Teams, the classroom teacher was given the checklist portion of the DCAP with a request to identify the accommodations that had been tried. Subsequently, additional recommendations were made as the team sought to find an appropriate educational plan for the student.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

In Northbridge, 65 percent of all grade 3 students attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS reading test, and 46 percent of all grade 4 students attained proficiency on the MCAS ELA test. In the years before the review period, the district was using a basal reader. Interviewees said that the basal text was retained, but teachers received training in guided reading. The district purchased leveled trade books for the book closets. At the end of the review period, they purchased additional trade books due to the lack of materials for the strongest readers. The district provided professional development in administering the Developmental Reading Assessment for teachers of younger students and the Scholastic Reading Inventory for teachers of grade 3 and above. Teachers used these assessments to determine appropriate reading groups and refer students for services. The Academic Support Program assisted teachers and students to enhance reading skills. The Title I program was restructured for implementation after school during the 2006-2007 school year.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Administrative staff described a transition process that allowed parents to participate and children to visit their new school in order to provide a satisfactory transition to the next school building. Preschool children from the Aldrich Preschool attended a "step-up day," during which they were paired with kindergarten students for part of the day. In the spring, parents of the Northbridge school attended an information session at the Balmer school. In June, the grade 1 students visited the elementary building, accompanied by interested parents. The Balmer School also hosted an informational evening for parents a week before school. Interviews revealed that school social workers conveyed IEPs and other information on special education students moving from the Northbridge school to the Balmer school.

The middle school principal stated that he visited each of the classes at the Balmer school to talk to the children about the middle school before holding a step-up day in June, to which he invited parents. He invited parents and children to visit the school during the summer if they were uncomfortable about finding their way around the building due to the many additions made over the years. The school kept a collection of yearly assessment (CYA) folder for each child and passed it from school to school. Teachers in grades K-8 reviewed the folders of incoming students on the first administrative day of the school year. Principals used the information for placement. These folders were not transferred to the high school. Middle school adjustment counselors met with high school counselors to convey folders and information on special education students. Interviews revealed that the current superintendent initiated a meeting of principals and special education personnel at the grade 4-5 and grade 8-9 transition times.

The high school principal invited parents to an evening meeting each spring with a step-up day in June. All students received their schedule before leaving school in June. During the summer, parents received a full packet of information providing most of the information that they needed for the start of school in September. In order to help the entering grade 9 students transition to high school, the principal initiated a Partners in Education program, expanded to grades 10 and 11 during the review period. As part of a service learning project, several pairs of seniors functioned as facilitators of a small group of freshmen under the leadership of a teacher for one period, six or seven times per year. During this Rams Block, the group explored organizational,

social, and academic skills as well as financial management needed to orient them to expectations at the high school.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Document review and interviews revealed that the district had implemented programs and policies to reduce discipline referrals and minimize the number of students retained. During the review period, the district had a disciplinary policy, BUMP, that established rigid consequences for many infractions. Both the middle and high school principals believed that the consequences were appropriate for the most serious offenses, but left little room for the judgment of the administrator in the case of minor offenses. As a result, both principals applied a more considered approach to discipline which allowed for mitigating circumstances. BUMP ceased to be the official district policy in the year following the review period.

According to document review and interviews, both the middle and high schools had in-school and out-of-school suspension programs, although the high school's in-school suspension program began in the final year of the review period. Over eight years, the number of reported offenses at the middle school dropped from 800 to 400, despite an increase in enrollment. Between 42 and 47 percent of discipline referrals involved repeat offenders. The high school had instituted a Saturday School but found it ineffective, although the in-school suspension program functioned successfully. The school reported that 18 students accounted for 450 disciplinary infractions in one year. The reported rates of in-school and out-of-school suspension did not clearly indicate improvement. The district's rate of suspension exceeded the state average in two of the three years under review. The state rate averaged between 9.0 and 9.5 percent for combined in-school and out-of-school suspension. The district reported rates of 11.0, 9.0, and 11.7 percent in fiscal years 2004, 2005 and 2006, respectively. During the review period, the middle school's in-school suspension rate declined from 12.3 to 7.6 percent, while the out-of-school suspension rate increased from 5.9 to 7.6 percent. The high school's out-of-school

suspension rate declined from 17.2 to 9.8 percent. However, in 2005-2006 the newly instituted in-school suspension rate was 14.6 percent.

According to interviews, both the middle and high schools ran a summer school which served to limit retentions and provided support for students who needed MCAS test remediation. The middle school served 50 to 60 students every summer. A child who failed one or two core subjects could make up the subject in summer school. Some also signed a "contract" holding them to a probationary period during the first half of the first term, when they were required to maintain at least a 'B' average. Students who failed three subjects were automatically retained. Usually the number of retentions did not exceed two or three per year.

Document review and interviews revealed that the high school had a number of recovery programs, including summer school, the Learning Academy, Class.com, doubling up on subjects, and a recent effort to change the retention policy featured in the student handbook. Students could make up an ELA or math course during a four-week summer session. Students identified as in need of support might also be assigned to the Learning Academy for one or more periods every day in order to receive the kind of academic support that was needed. Such a student was also pulled out of non-core academic classes to meet with the guidance or adjustment counselor. Students were not permitted to take two ELA courses to make up failed credits until junior or senior year, in order to avoid placing an undue academic burden on them. Some students could also avail themselves of Class.com, an online course which was part of the dropout prevention plan. Finally, in the year after the review period, the principal planned to change the student handbook language to permit students earning as few as 15 credits in the first year, as opposed to the previous 25 credits, to avoid the retention label and still be defined as on track for graduation.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the program of studies and administrative interviews, the district maintained several programs, called Credit Plan for Recovery (CPR), designed to prevent students from dropping out. In this plan, the student was offered a continuum of services, including the Early

Intervention Team (EIT), which referred students to the Academic Support Program, or Learning Academy. An individual program of studies could be assembled that included time in the Learning Academy, an assortment of vocational, hands-on courses, some regular coursework, employment, service learning, and a limited number of online courses through Class.com that could be completed from home. The flexible schedule allowed students to manage the demands of real life without fully withdrawing from school. The summer school also permitted credit recovery, assisting students to graduate with their class. The high school's dropout rate averaged two percent, a figure well below the state average.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to interviews, the transient and homeless students of Northbridge were already students in the system when their living status changed. As a result, they were already receiving all regular services to which they were entitled. The special education director, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, was charged with providing additional transportation and other services when the principals notified her of the students' new living conditions.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Document review revealed that the district had an attendance policy, and all student handbooks encouraged good attendance. When children were absent, the schools required parents to call the school. During the review period, the district purchased ConnectEd which delivered regular messages home in the case of student absence. Principals discouraged absence due to family vacation but reported that such absences were a recurring issue in the district. According to interviews, principals regularly checked frequent or extended absences. They or a subordinate called the home after a string of student absences. When absence totaled seven or more days, the

school sent parents an initial letter. If attendance did not improve, the principal sent a more strongly worded letter. Principals visited the home or enlisted the services of the resource officer. In persistent cases, the principals filed a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition.

The student attendance rate at the high school was lower than at other schools. The principal attributed some of this to tardiness, which was subject to input error. Since linking frequent tardiness to loss of credit, the district reported decreased tardiness. Nevertheless, the attendance rate averaged 91 percent. The percentage of students chronically absent ranged from 23 to 31 percent, with the highest numbers at grades 10 and 12. The principal decided to keep 20 to 25 students on the rolls each September, even though they did not appear for classes, making every effort during this time to locate students and return them to school. But the data did not support that this was the reason for the high rate of chronic absenteeism.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to administrative interviews, staff attendance was regular. At the middle and high schools, teachers were absent eight or nine days per year, including professional development time. Nevertheless, at the Aldrich, Northbridge, and Balmer schools, teacher absence averaged 12 days per year and approached or exceeded 10 days per year when professional development days were included. These schools reported a large quantity of days in the "other" category, covering absence for non-medical and non-personal reasons. Administrative and teacher interviews revealed that the prior superintendent had permitted some vacation days, often unpaid, during the school year. According to staff interviews, the new superintendent who began his service in the final year of the review period had stopped this practice.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district offered seven Advanced Placement courses for which the program of studies described an enrollment policy requiring interview, teacher recommendation, minimum grades, and prerequisites. Enrollment was limited to 12 students. Documentation and interviews revealed that despite the wording in the program of studies, the high school did not limit enrollment to 12, and parents could insist that the child be admitted to a course if the prerequisites were met. Although the figures for subgroup representation were not available, the system of course leveling posed a barrier to students who were not enrolled in honors-level courses and therefore could not meet the prerequisites. Despite the prerequisites, between 36 and 62 percent of all AP students did not receive a creditable score during the review period, nor was there a trend toward improvement. There was no evidence that the school actively encouraged promising students to consider an AP track, who might not otherwise opt for the challenge without mentoring. In addition, the system of providing a lower level of college preparatory courses for some students, one that was described as more superficial and activity-oriented, meant that not all children were held to the same high standards. The lack of specific criteria for advancing a level did not allow these students to accelerate their learning.

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

VI. Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- Northbridge's per pupil expenditure ranked below the state average during each of the years under review. The town's tax levy limit was at the maximum allowable, and the town's tax rate per thousand, which was lowered during the review period, was the lowest among the Blackstone Valley communities.
- The district did not allocate resources based on the ongoing analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data and inconsistently funded district goals and school improvement plans during the review period.
- The district did not evaluate the cost effectiveness of its programs based on student performance data and needs.
- During the review period, the superintendent and town officials annually signed a written agreement related to 603 CMR 10.0 that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district by the town. The district has undertaken a review of the charges, but has not signed an agreement, for FY 2007.

- Under the new superintendent, the district developed a policy and procedures for the collection and expenditure of student activities funds based on a consultant's recommendations.
- Central office administrators stated the use of funds from the school choice and tuition accounts to pay salaries was a routine practice and acknowledged that continued dependency on the unpredictable revenues in these accounts to meet rising salary obligations was problematic.
- Each school had a crisis plan that the current superintendent reviewed with the police and fire departments, and the school buildings had systems in place to ensure student safety, including locked exterior doors during the school day.

Summary

The prior superintendent developed the budget through a participatory process for each year of the review period. Principals and individual directors, with input from staff, prepared needs based budgets for submission to the superintendent. Meetings between the superintendent and the finance committee determined the town's allotment to the schools and resulted in the superintendent's adjustment of budget requests and the development of a budget based on available funds and prior year expenditures. The district allocated resources based on prior year expenditures with a percentage increase, without factoring in an ongoing analysis of student assessment data. The current superintendent prepared only a needs based budget for FY 2007 and requested $900,000 from the stabilization fund, which was ultimately approved by the voters at the December 2006 special town meeting.

School committee members, principals, and appropriate staff received monthly budget reports. Central office personnel regularly reviewed and monitored expenditures to ensure that spending remained within budget limits. The district and the town maintained financial information on the same accounting system. The district did not encumber salary obligations but used purchase orders to encumber expenditures from all funds for goods and services. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure that the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

The district relied on Chapter 70 aid, which was the major source of funding for the school budget, and routinely used funds from the school choice and tuition accounts as well as grants to supplement the district budget. The district exceeded the net school spending requirement in each of the years of the review period. The tax levy was at the maximum allowable, and residential taxes amounted to approximately 90 percent of the amount raised through taxation. The town's tax rate per thousand, which had been lowered during the review period, was the lowest among the communities in the Blackstone Valley. Misinformation and confusion contributed to the failure of a $1 million general government override in May 2006. The town began FY 2007 with an unbalanced budget, and all departments contributed funds to assist with the financial shortfall. The school department contributed $56,292 from the school choice account.

With the exception of the high school, which was completed in 2002, the district schools were old, although they were in generally good condition, clean, and well maintained by an in-house staff of custodians and maintenance workers. Each building had systems to ensure student safety. The district did not have a formal, written, preventative maintenance plan but contracted outside vendors each year for boiler, HVAC, generator, elevator and fire alarm preventative maintenance.

The district's five-year capital plan, which included projects by school, was reviewed and updated annually by the superintendent and director of operations. Due to lack of funding, projects were moved forward from year to year without resolution.

Indicators

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district employed two superintendents during the review period. The prior superintendent developed the district budget for each year of the review period and developed an initial budget through a participatory process. Principals met with department heads and staff members who provided input in the preparation of a needs based budget. Individual directors and principals

submitted proposals to the superintendent. A budget subcommittee of the school committee participated in discussions with principals, department heads, and district administrators at the beginning of the review period. The entire school committee reviewed the subcommittee's recommended budget, a step which the administration considered necessary prior to the adoption of a preliminary bottom line budget. The new school committee chairman eliminated all subcommittees, and the committee as a whole participated in the budget presentations for the FY 2006 budget. Interviewees stated the school committee approved an educationally sound budget each year of the review period.

The former superintendent and the finance committee met to determine the amount that the town could allot to the school department. The superintendent adjusted the budget requests and developed a budget based on available funds and prior year expenditures. The district used funds from the school choice and tuition accounts as well as grants to augment the district budget.

The budget document each year contained clear information on fund sources. Other information presented varied from year to year. Budgetary history, enrollment projections, and categorical and staffing increases were not consistently provided each year of the review period.

In FY 2006, the superintendent developed the FY 2007 school budget through an open, participatory process. Principals and central office administrators provided the superintendent with proposed budgets developed with staff input. For FY 2007, the superintendent developed only a needs based budget, which the school committee approved.

At the May 2006 town meeting, the district requested $900,000 from the stabilization fund for the FY 2007 school budget, but action was delayed until more financial information was available. The town faced a financial shortfall and began FY 2007 with an unbalanced budget. In December 2006, at a well attended special town meeting, the voters approved a town budget as well as $900,000 from the stabilization fund for the FY 2007 school budget. The superintendent, described by interviewees as an advocate for education, conveyed to the former town manager and later the board of selectmen the school department's intention to seek the $900,000 from the stabilization fund. The successful vote to transfer the funds from the stabilization fund caused hard feelings among some town officials.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not allocate resources based on the ongoing analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student assessment data. Resources were allocated based on prior year expenditures with a percentage increase.

Central office administrators stated in interviews with the EQA examiners that although principals met with staff and provided input into the development of the budget during the period under review, meetings between the former superintendent and the finance committee determined the town's allotment to the school district.

Central office interviewees stated that no major budget focus was tied to the curriculum. Funding of goals in the district and school improvement plans was inconsistent. Student assessment data were collected and disseminated by the curriculum director and the ELA coordinator/Title I director. Principals and staff analyzed test results. EQA examiners found limited evidence indicating a connection between student performance data analysis and budget decisions.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The school district's per pupil expenditure ranked below the state average each year during the review period. The district relied heavily on Chapter 70 state aid, which was the major source of funding for the school budget. According on a review of DOE documents, the district received $11,483,830 in Chapter 70 funds in FY 2004, a decrease of 0.4 percent. In FY 2005, the district

received $12,150,287, an increase of 6.0 percent; and in FY 2006 the district received $12,970,825, an increase of 6.8 percent. Interviewees expressed conflicting opinions about the use of Chapter 70 funds.

Information obtained from the DOE website revealed that the number of tuitioned-in school choice students increased from 90.8 FTEs in FY 2004 to 103.2 FTEs in FY 2006. Interviewees stated that the students came primarily from the towns of Uxbridge, Sutton, and Douglas. School choice tuition received by the town of Northbridge totaled $468,002 in FY 2004, $469,019 in FY 2005, and $584,272 FY 2006. The district allocated an amount slightly less than the tuition it had received to cover tuition costs for those Northbridge students who opted to attend schools in other districts through the choice program.

Central office administrators and school committee members stated in interviews with EQA examiners that the school committee approved an educationally sound budget each year during the review period. Interviewees stated that the town provided inadequate financial support for the schools. The district used funds from the school choice and tuition accounts as well as grants to augment the district budget. The FY05 Expenditures by Function, All Funds – Summary, a newly developed format distributed by the DOE, reported 87.2 as the percentage of overall spending from the general fund in FY 2005. The Preliminary FY06 Expenditures Per Pupil by Function, All Funds – Summary listed 86.7 as the percentage of overall spending from the general fund in FY 2006. Central office administrators stated the use of funds from the school choice and tuition accounts to pay salaries was a routine practice. They acknowledged that continued dependency on the unpredictable revenues in these accounts to meet rising salary obligations was untenable.

Principals interviewed indicated that the district had limited funds, but stated that resources were adequate. Residential taxes amounted to approximately 90 percent of the amount raised through taxation. In an interview with EQA examiners, town officials stated the tax levy limit was at the maximum allowable. Central office administrators as well as town officials stated that the tax rate had been reduced. The 2005 *Annual Town Report* indicated a tax rate set at $9.06 per thousand for the taxable period of July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005. Information posted on the Department of Revenue website listed an $8.62 unified tax rate for FY 2006, and an $8.54

unified tax rate for FY 2007. Town officials stated the tax rate per thousand was the lowest among the Blackstone Valley communities.

A $1 million general override failed in May 2006. Central office administrators as well as town officials stated that the attempt failed due to misinformation and confusion about the actual amount needed. The town faced a financial shortfall and began FY 2007 with an unbalanced budget. All departments contributed funds to assist in reducing the town shortfall. The school district contributed $56,292 from the school choice account. In December 2006 at a special town meeting, the voters approved a town budget as well as $900,000 from the stabilization fund for the FY 2007 school budget. Town officials indicated approximately $353,000 remained in the stabilization fund and $40,000 was available in free cash.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviews and a review of documents provided no evidence that the district implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of its programs, initiatives, and activities or that student performance data and needs were considered.

Central office interviewees stated that during FY 2006 some review of cost-effective practices began, resulting in the purchase of spelling books instead of consumables and hard copy reading materials instead of duplicated copies. The district evaluated its pupil transportation services prior to issuing a new invitation for bid. An evaluation of the district's out-of-district special education expenditures resulted in the development of a new program and students returning to the district.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A written agreement existed between the school district and the town that detailed the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating indirect charges levied on the school district by the community. During the review period, the superintendent, town manager, chairman of the board of selectmen, and chairman of the school committee signed an agreement yearly.

The percentage used by the town to calculate the indirect charges remained the same during the review period. Neither school district personnel nor town officials interviewed could provide information as to how the percentage used in each category had been determined. A review of the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating the indirect charges for FY 2007 began between the superintendent and the former town manager; school district personnel expected it to continue with the new town manager.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirement of the Education Reform Act for each of the years under review. A review of the latest DOE document entitled Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1998 through FY 2007 (updated as of January 29, 2007) indicated the district exceeded the NSS requirement in FY 2004 by 7.8 percent, or $1,319,066; in FY 2005 by 12.2 percent, or $2,190,653; and in FY 2006 by 8.5 percent, or $1,625,724.

In FY 2005, health insurance costs reported for active and retired employees increased approximately 54 percent. Central office staff attributed this to a change in carriers, while town officials attributed it to a problem in the mechanism for reporting the town's self-insured status.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

School committee members received a monthly detailed line item financial report which included transfers, expenditures, encumbrances, and balance remaining. School committee members stated they reviewed the percentage expended in each account, and when questions were posed the director of operations readily responded. The business office kept transfers within the local budget to a minimum. The school committee approved transfers from the school choice and revolving accounts to address deficits in the local budget at the end of the fiscal year. The school committee periodically received revolving account and grant fund reports.

The business office distributed cost center reports to principals and appropriate personnel on a monthly basis. Other staff members and the public did not receive formal budget reports, but the taped school committee meetings aired over cable television publicized the budget information.

The district filed the end-of-year report and grant final financial forms within the DOE timeframe. The district also filed the amendment to the FY 2004 end-of-year report in a timely manner.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district used a fund based accounting system that was in compliance with all financial reporting requirements. The computer software provided not only for total budget reports but also individual cost center reports by Department of Education function.

The district and the town accounting systems were connected and both maintained financial information on an older version of MUNIS for the past eight years. Business office and town office personnel stated they had received a minimal amount of training on the use of the software. Town officials indicated plans to upgrade both the software and hardware.

Interviewees and a review of district documents indicated the district regularly used forecast mechanisms to ensure spending within fiscal limits. The budget document displayed not only the original appropriation but also a revised budget based on transfers and adjustments. The document included year-to-date actual expenditures and encumbrances as well as the available budget. Central office personnel monitored the line item budget for the percentage used and remaining funds available on a monthly basis.

In FY 2006, the school district's new superintendent hired a consultant to examine the method of processing payroll and accounts payable warrants by the business office. The consultant noted that minimal, if any, documentation existed pertaining to financial and administrative policies and procedures. Following the review of internal controls of purchasing and payment of salaries, the consultants concluded that staff in the schools and departments nearly always abided by established guidelines to obtain goods and services and to pay staff. The guidelines were a result of either institutional knowledge or trial and error. The district implemented the consultant's recommendations.

The district's business office processed all payroll and accounts payable warrants that were reviewed by the director of operations. The financial budget system did not allow for salary obligations to be encumbered prior to the expenditure of funds. Personnel interviewed in the district's business office and in the town offices expressed confidence that monthly monitoring of the percentage of salary expenditures was adequate to ensure spending within the budget appropriation.

The district used purchase orders to encumber expenditures for goods and services. The district used the purchase order system for not only expenditures from the local budget but also from grants and revolving accounts. Principals and directors submitted purchase orders to the business office. The director of operations reviewed purchase order requests and verified the availability of funds prior to processing requests. The superintendent approved all purchase orders.

The business office distributed cost center reports, which included open purchase orders and account balances, to principals and appropriate personnel on a monthly basis. They tracked their budgets and directed questions concerning the status of their respective budgets to the director of operations. They did not have access to the financial accounting system but were able to transfer funds within their non-salary accounts. The business office kept transfers to a minimum.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

School committee policy DD encouraged the administration "to seek and secure all possible sources of state, federal, and other special funds that will enhance the educational opportunities for the children."

Central office administrators provided EQA examiners with a list of foundation and state and federal competitive grants that the district had pursued both successfully and unsuccessfully during the review period.

A review of Department of Education documents indicated that the district received $1,157,418 in federal and state grants in FY 2004; $1,142,052 in FY 2005; and $1,171,728 in FY 2006. The special education 94-142 allocation increased from $497,123 in FY 2004 to $625,561 in FY 2006. During the same period, the Title I distribution decreased from $270,772 in FY 2004 to $212,154 in FY 2006. The district relied on grant funds to cover salaries.

The director of operations reviewed and monitored all supplemental expenditures prior to the superintendent's approval. The business office controlled and monitored all grant and revolving funds. The district implemented the purchase system for the expenditure of goods and services from the grants, student activity accounts, and revolving accounts, and the superintendent approved all purchase orders.

The business office processed all grant and revolving accounts payroll and vendor payments, and the director of operations reviewed all warrants to ensure expenditures were appropriate. Adequate internal controls existed in the business office to ensure the district adhered to procurement laws and processed payroll correctly.

Measures existed to ensure complete or accurate deposits in revolving accounts and to ensure the expenditures were for the purposes the account intended. Following receipt of the consultant's report, the district addressed the student activity accounts at each school and developed a policy and procedures for the collection and expenditure of student activities funds. Policies and procedures existed for the handling of cash and for preparing and processing the student activity deposits and expenditures.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

School committee policy DJE: Bidding Requirements required that the district base purchases exceeding $10,000 on competitive bidding. In an interview, the director of operations indicated that the district required three quotes for items costing $5,000 and above and formally bid goods and services above $25,000 as required by Chapter 30B. The district advertised invitations to bid in the local newspapers and, when applicable, in the Central Register and the Goods and Services Bulletin. An examination by the EQA examiners of purchase orders and bid specification documents for the review period indicated that the district followed state procurement laws. The district also participated in cooperative purchasing and procured goods and services from state contracts.

The district did not employ a certified school business administrator or a purchasing agent with MCPPO credentials. The director of operations, who was already employed by the district and had prior banking experience, assumed the fiscal responsibilities in FY 2005. In accordance with school committee policy DJ: Purchasing, the superintendent served as purchasing agent for the school department. Town officials interviewed did not have MCPPO credentials and were unable to identify a town employee with MCPPO credentials.

The town employed Powers & Sullivan to conduct a yearly audit of the town's financial statements during the review period. A different audit firm had been used prior to the review period as the town's and the school district's independent auditor. A review of documents and interviews failed to provide evidence as to whether the services of the new audit firm had been procured through a bidding process. The school district submitted an amendment to the FY 2004 end-of-year report based on the auditors' findings. Documents reviewed revealed no evidence of audit findings in FY 2005 or FY 2006.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district did not have a formal, written, preventative maintenance plan. The district employed maintenance and custodial personnel and contracted each year for boiler, HVAC, generator, elevator, fire alarm, and fire extinguisher preventative maintenance. Each school maintained logs and regularly recorded scheduled service and inspections. During the review period, the district purchased SchoolDude, a software program that tracked work orders and maintained equipment and supply inventories.

After visiting all district buildings, the EQA examiners determined that the district had educational and program facilities which, although old with the exception of the high school, were in generally good condition, clean, and well maintained by an in-house staff of 11 custodians and two maintenance workers. The Aldrich Preschool building was constructed in

1890 and renovated in 1966 for its current use. Originally constructed in 1905, the middle school had undergone a number of renovations and additions, the most recent in 2000. There had been no major projects in the district since the completion of the $28 million high school project in 2002.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a five-year capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected the district's future capital development and improvement needs that included educational and program facilities of adequate size. The director of operations and the superintendent reviewed and updated the plan annually. Lack of funding impacted the completion of capital projects. During the review period, the former superintendent received a one-time approval for an emergency boiler replacement to be paid with funds received through Medicaid reimbursement. Repairs to the middle school roof were approved by town meeting vote.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district school buildings had systems in place to ensure student safety, including locked exterior doors during the school day. Visitors and late students gained entrance to the buildings via a buzzer system at the main door, where posted signs directed them to report to the school office to sign in once granted access. The superintendent periodically conducted a walk-around at the schools to ensure all exterior doors remained locked during the school day. Red visitor badges were available and distributed at each school. The director of operations obtained a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check on all volunteers in the schools, who wore green identification badges. Each school had a crisis plan that the current superintendent reviewed with the police and fire departments.

Appendix A: Proficiency Index (PI)

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

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B: Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1997 – FY2006

	Foundation Enrollment	Pct Chg	Foundation Budget	Pct Chg	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid	Pct Chg	Required Net School Spending (NSS)	Pct Chg	Actual Net School Spending	Pct Chg	Dollars Over/Under Requirement	Percent Over/ Under
FY97	2,113	7.9	11,892,943	10.6	3,887,033	6,973,991	20.1	10,861,024	14.9	11,000,979	9.6	139,955	1.3
FY98	2,246	6.3	12,861,021	8.1	4,108,097	8,170,545	17.2	12,278,642	13.1	12,323,885	12.0	45,243	0.4
FY99	2,246	0.0	13,417,798	4.3	4,442,643	8,882,578	8.7	13,325,221	8.5	13,376,818	8.5	51,597	0.4
FY00	2,406	7.1	14,270,556	6.4	4,680,595	9,783,914	10.1	14,464,509	8.5	14,651,710	9.5	187,201	1.3
FY01	2,399	-0.3	15,703,781	10.0	4,914,457	10,789,324	10.3	15,703,781	8.6	16,065,375	9.6	361,594	2.3
FY02	2,475	3.2	16,147,617	2.8	5,171,062	11,352,677	5.2	16,523,739	5.2	17,194,399	7.0	670,660	4.1
FY03	2,505	1.2	16,899,222	4.7	5,384,898	11,514,324	1.4	16,899,222	2.3	17,695,265	2.9	796,043	4.7
FY04	2,432	-2.9	16,836,559	-0.4	5,372,729	11,463,830	-0.4	16,836,559	-0.4	18,155,625	2.6	1,319,066	7.8
FY05	2,510	3.2	17,954,762	6.6	5,804,475	12,150,287	6.0	17,954,762	6.6	20,145,415	11.0	2,190,653	12.2
FY06	2,581	2.8	19,224,254	7.1	6,253,429	12,970,825	6.8	19,224,254	7.1	20,849,978	3.5	1,625,724	8.5

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	
FY97	5,628	3,301	5,206	58.6	91.3	92.5	63.4
FY98	5,726	3,638	5,487	63.5	95.5	95.8	66.3
FY99	5,974	3,955	5,956	66.2	99.3	99.7	66.4
FY00	5,931	4,066	6,090	68.6	101.4	102.7	66.8
FY01	6,546	4,497	6,697	68.7	100.0	102.3	67.2
FY02	6,524	4,587	6,947	70.3	102.3	106.5	66.0
FY03	6,746	4,597	7,064	68.1	100.0	104.7	65.1
FY04	6,923	4,714	7,465	68.1	100.0	107.8	63.1
FY05	7,153	4,841	8,026	67.7	100.0	112.2	60.3
FY06	7,448	5,026	8,078	67.5	100.0	108.5	62.2

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