Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District District Review

Review conducted May 29–June 1, 2012

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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews focused on "districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations." Districts subject to review in the 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3[1] (in school year 2011 or school year 2012) of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state's six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

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

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

Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District

The site visit to the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District was conducted from May 29–June 1, 2012. The site visit included 30.75 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 99 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 11 high school teachers. Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

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

District Profile[2]

Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical High School (Northeast) is a four-year, public, regional vocational technical high school located in Wakefield, Massachusetts. It is an independent, one-school district whose students come from 12 communities: Chelsea, Malden, Melrose, North Reading, Reading, Revere, Saugus, Stoneham, Wakefield, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn. Based on space availability the district accepts qualified applicants from outside the district. The school committee consists of 12 members, each one representing a sending school district.

At the time of the site visit the superintendent was completing his third year and planning to retire in August before the start of the 2012–2013 school year. The principal was the superintendent-elect, and the administrator of special education was the principal-elect. The leadership team also included: the business manager, the administrator of student services, the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator, and two deans of students who also serve as vocational coordinators.

A change in administration was scheduled to take place in September at the start of the 2012–2013 school year. During the site visit, the review team met with the incoming administrative team (superintendent-elect and principal-elect) who were the principal and administrator of special education, respectively, at the time of the review. The classroom visit schedule during the late May review was not typical of district reviews: seniors were no longer in school and were graduating during the week, and freshmen and juniors were in their shop class rotation. Sophomores were the only students in academic classes. The review team was able to visit 28 classrooms, including 10 academic and 18 shop classes. In 2011, students in grades 10–12 chose

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

from 17 different vocational training programs; grade 9 students participated in an exploratory program before choosing a specific track for their last term in grade 9.

Enrollment

In 2010–2011, 1265 students were enrolled in grades 9 through 12, a slight decrease of 16 students from 2009–2010. The school's proportion of students from low-income families was 50 percent in 2010–2011 and has been above the state rate in recent years. While this proportion of students from low-income families is typical of vocational schools located in urban districts,[3] it is not typical among comparable regional vocational technical schools.[4] In 2010–2011 nearly 40 percent of Northeast's students qualified for free lunch.

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

Table 1a: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010–2011

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	**1,265**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	48	3.8
First Language not English	241	19.1	Asian	23	1.8
Limited English Proficient*	43	3.4	Hispanic/Latino	299	23.6
Special Education**	333	26.3	White	867	68.5
Low-income	632	50.0	Native American	6	0.5
Free Lunch	501	39.6	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	131	10.4	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	22	1.7

*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as "English language learners."
**Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements.
Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data

[3] For example, in 2011 the proportions of students from low-income families in the Greater Lowell Regional Vocational Technical and Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical school districts were 56 percent and 53 percent, respectively.
[4] For example, in 2011 the proportions of students from low-income families in the Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical and Whittier Regional Vocational Technical school districts were 35 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

Table 1b: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011–2012

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	**1,251**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	41	3.3
First Language not English	236	18.9	Asian	17	1.4
Limited English Proficient*	31	2.5	Hispanic/Latino	312	24.9
Special Education**	326	26.1	White	854	68.3
Low-income	626	50.0	Native American	6	0.5
Free Lunch	515	41.2	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	111	8.9	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	21	1.7

*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as "English language learners."
**Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements.
Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data

Finance

In 2011, Northeast's expenditure per in-district pupil was $17,593, a little higher than the median of $17,371 for similar size vocational/technical districts. Expenditure per in-district student dropped 6.9 percent between 2010 and 2011 due to a 3.8 percent decrease in actual spending and a slight increase in FTE pupils. Actual net school spending was 2.3 percent above required in 2010 and 5.4 percent in fiscal year 2011.

As Table 2 below shows, Northeast's net school spending was more than 5 percent below required in fiscal year 2011, a level at which state sanctions can come into play. Spending was projected to be above that threshold, but still below required by 2.3 percent in fiscal year 2012. As discussed further in the report, the district has had difficult relationships with its member communities that have led to insufficient financial support, among other problems.

Table 2: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010–2012

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From school committee budget	19,937,541	18,898,487	19,657,886	18,160,074	20,600,000
From revolving funds and grants	---	4,222,855	---	4,090,073	---
Total expenditures	---	23,121,342	---	22,250,147	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	7,611,122	---	7,787,386	7,985,945
Required local contribution	---	9,906,942	---	10,403,784	11,770,219
Required net school spending**	---	17,518,114	---	18,191,170	19,756,164
Actual net school spending	---	17,920,844	---	17,200,443	19,310,583
Over/under required ($)	---	402,730	---	990,727	445,581
Over/under required (%)	---	+2.3 %	---	-5.4 %	-2.3 %

*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.

**Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.

Sources: FY11 District End-of-Year Report; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.
Data retrieved on September 20, 2012.

Findings

Student Achievement

Because of the gains that students at Northeast made in ELA and mathematics in 2011, the district improved from Level 3 to Level 1. In 2011, several subgroups outperformed their peers statewide.

Improved Proficiency Rates and Lower Warning/Failing Rates

Although the district was still below the state's proficiency rates in both ELA and mathematics in 2011, Northeast has narrowed the gap in both subjects since 2007. Between 2009 and 2011, the percentage of students who scored proficient and above in ELA rose from 66 percent to 78 percent, with a dip to 57 percent in 2010. In mathematics, student performance improved from 57 percent in 2009 to 70 percent in 2011, with a slight dip to 56 percent in 2010 (See Tables C1 and C2, Appendix C).

Concurrently, the percentages of students in Warning/Failing in both ELA and mathematics decreased—from 6 percent in ELA in 2010 to 2 percent in 2011 and from 12 percent in mathematics in 2010 to 3 percent in 2011, dropping the rates in the district below the state's Warning/Failing rates for grade 10 in 2011 of 3 percent in ELA and 7 percent in math. Northeast's Warning/Failing rates in 2011 were its lowest in any year since 1998.

The improved proficiency rates brought Northeast closer to the state's proficiency rates. In 2011, in ELA, the proficiency rate at Northeast was 78 percent compared with 84 percent for grade 10 statewide; in mathematics, it was 70 percent compared with 77 percent for grade 10 statewide (See Tables C1 and C2, Appendix C). In contrast, in 2007 Northeast's ELA proficiency rate was 42 percent compared with a statewide grade 10 rate of 71 percent and the district's proficiency rate in mathematics was 53 percent, compared with a statewide grade 10 rate of 69 percent. Thus from 2007 to 2011 the gap with the state decreased from 29 to 6 percentage points in ELA and from 16 to 7 percentage points in math.

Other Gains in ELA and Math

Between 2009 and 2011, Northeast's grade 10 students also made other gains in ELA and mathematics. Median student growth percentiles (SGPs) improved from 33.0 to 51.0 in ELA, and from 39.5 to 61.0 in mathematics (see Tables C1 and C2, Appendix C). In 2011, grade 10 students at Northeast outperformed their peers statewide on the ELA open-response items: 87 percent of grade 10 students averaged 2 or above on the open-response items, as opposed to 86 percent statewide. In math, 57 percent of Northeast students averaged 2 or above on open-response items, behind the 66 percent statewide. However, in both ELA and math Northeast students' 2011 performance on open-response items represented a substantial improvement over 2009, when 70 percent of district students averaged 2 or above in ELA as compared with 84 percent in grade 10 statewide, and 49 percent averaged 2 or above in math as compared with 69 percent in grade 10 statewide.

Outperformance of Statewide Peers by High-Needs Subgroups

In addition, in 2011, the proficiency levels of what are considered to be high-needs subgroups—students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners—exceeded those of their peers statewide in 5 out of 6 cases (data not in a table):

- Students from low-income families: in ELA, the proficiency rate was 76 percent compared with the statewide rate for this subgroup of 69 percent; in mathematics, it was 67 percent compared with the statewide subgroup's rate of 58 percent.
- Students with disabilities: in mathematics, the proficiency rate for this subgroup was 46 percent compared with the statewide subgroup's rate of 39 percent (in ELA, the proficiency rate for the district subgroup was 44 percent compared to the statewide subgroup's rate of 49 percent).
- English language learners: in ELA, the proficiency rate for this subgroup was 64 percent compared with the statewide subgroup's rate of 28 percent; in mathematics, it was 63 percent compared with the statewide rate of 35 percent for this subgroup.

Improvements in Other Key Student Indicators

The school has also improved in several other key indicators noted below:

- Since 2007, Northeast's grade 9 students have been promoted to grade 10 at a higher rate than the statewide rate; the rate was 99 percent in 2011 compared with 91 percent for the state.
- The graduation rate (4-year cohort) for all students is well above the corresponding state rate: 94.5 percent in 2011 compared with 83.4 percent for the state.
- English language learners in 2011 graduated at a much higher rate than their statewide peers: 84.6 percent compared with 56.2 percent statewide.
- Students with disabilities also graduated at a much higher rate in 2011 than their statewide peers: 88.0 percent compared with 65.6 percent statewide.

Area of Concern

One area of concern is the graduation rate of girls. Since 2009, girls' graduation rates have declined, and in 2011, they were below boys' graduation rates (girls: 92.3 percent; boys: 95.9 percent). A lower graduation for girls is neither typical in the state overall nor among comparison districts for Northeast.[5] Between 2008 and 2011, the graduation rate for boys has increased every year, while the rate for girls has declined except in 2009 when it increased.

[5] Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District, Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational School District, and Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School District.

Conclusion

Interviews with school leaders indicated that the school focused its efforts on understanding the reasons behind its low performance in 2010 and developed a targeted program to support students in grades 9 and 10. As described later in this report, students now attend a daily MCAS Enrichment class to narrow the gap in ELA and mathematics, and the school has instituted a new writing program for 9th and 10th graders. School leaders indicated that the initiatives that Northeast had undertaken in the two years before the review have contributed to the improved student performance since 2010. The school noted that the 2011 improved performance may also have been related to "an exceptional class." Although Northeast has implemented programs specifically designed to improve student performance, it does not formally track the effectiveness of its programs nor does it have a planning process for establishing goals for continuous growth.

In the review team's judgment, Northeast's analysis of student MCAS performance data in 2010 resulted in implementation of initiatives that helped Northeast students improve their performance, resulting in an improvement from Level 3 to Level 1 status for the district between 2010 and 2011.

Leadership and Governance

The school committee understands its role as a policy-making board; however, the committee is not fully involved in significant areas of school governance. These include timely involvement in the budget process, conducting yearly evaluations of the superintendent, long-range and strategic planning, and maintaining an up-to-date policy manual that addresses continuous school improvement.

The School Committee

The 12-member school committee is composed of mostly veteran members and represents each of the district's 12 member communities. All members have participated in Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) training sessions and newly elected members attend the sessions as they assume their positions. Approximately six members participate in the local round-table meetings and some members attend various seminars/presentations, usually those associated with their personal interests. Newly elected members are mentored by the chairperson and also meet with the superintendent to discuss their roles and receive MASC information and a copy of the policy manual.

There are a number of subcommittees in place including curriculum, athletics, security, co-operative education, and superintendent searches. When asked whether there was a budget subcommittee in place interviewees said that the committee did not become involved with the budget process until the final budget was brought to the table for a vote. When questioned about the participation of the school committee in the budget process, school leaders said that the committee did not become involved in the development of the budget nor did it define budget goals or receive information from the superintendent or the business manager. The committee

receives the final budget just before the public hearing and votes on the budget immediately after the hearing. The school committee does receive monthly financial updates for the current budget including the overall status of the budget.

Evaluation of the Superintendent

The team reviewed the committee's 2010 evaluation of the superintendent after his first year of service to the district. It was noted that this was the only evaluation during the three-year tenure of the superintendent and the results were directly tied to upcoming raises for the two years after the evaluation. While the evaluation tool addressed the areas of relationships, community/public relations, staff, business and facilities management, management of services, comprehensive planning, and educational leadership, there were no mutually-agreed-upon goals upon which to base the evaluation. The committee used a number system, 1–5, for each of the areas, each member of the committee had input, and the chair tallied the final tabulation. The superintendent received an overall evaluation of 4.6 out of 5.0. The team's review of the 2010 evaluation showed that the committee gave the superintendent the highest marks for educational leadership and the lowest marks for comprehensive planning.

District Technology Plan

It was acknowledged in interviews that the school committee has not addressed the establishment of a strategic plan or a long-range capital improvement plan in concert with the superintendent. Although there are some goals listed in diverse documents, the school does not have a comprehensive and formal School Improvement Plan developed with multiple stakeholders, nor does it have any long-range strategic planning documents. The school does have a well-developed "District Technology Plan 2011–2015," formulated by a district technology committee with four school committee representatives.

Policy Manual

When discussion centered on the policy manual, which was nine years old at the time of the site visit, interviewees said that there was no plan in place for review or revision of the manual. A review of documents and information gathered in interviews did show that the committee has adopted newly regulated policies in the areas of bullying, harassment, and concussions. It was reported that input was sought from the athletic trainer and the athletic director during the development of the concussion policy, parental input was sought during the development of the bullying policy, and outside advice was garnered for the harassment policy. Representatives of the teachers' associations said that the bullying policy had been of help and there was a positive climate within the school, especially in the shop areas. Nevertheless, the team's review of the policy manual indicated that the manual did not reflect a dynamic and improving school.

Conclusion

In the review team's judgment, the school committee is not appropriately or sufficiently engaged in meeting several of its major responsibilities. The school committee's limited involvement in long-range planning has contributed to a school with little direction and without a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of its policies and programs. It has also prevented the district from

taking a long-range view of programs, personnel, and other resource needs that may affect the school's ability to sustain its current level of achievement. Without being involved in the full budget process, the committee is not meeting its responsibilities to ensure a budget that is acceptable to all sending districts and one that meets the needs of all Northeast students. When the committee does not evaluate the superintendent yearly, it is not meeting its obligation to hold the superintendent accountable for student achievement. Finally, the school committee's policy manual is outdated and does not reflect a standards-based, continuously improving school.

Northeast does not have a defined vision about school improvement planning, and there is an absence of involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in planning and decision-making.

Absence of a School Improvement Plan and Other Long-Range Plans

A review of documents and information collected in interviews indicated that the school did not have in place a comprehensive and formal School Improvement Plan (SIP) developed with multiple stakeholders. Interviewees said that an attempt had been made to use an internship program to develop a SIP and while a document had been drafted it had been written without the involvement of stakeholders. The document was not available for the team's review. Interviewees said that nothing has happened since the internship program came to an end when the funding was not renewed.

School administrators acknowledged that they have not addressed in earnest the establishment of a SIP, strategic plan, capital improvement plan, or other long-range planning initiatives in collaboration with the school committee. The team's review of school committee minutes indicated that these areas had not been addressed in open sessions during the 2011–2012 school year. Northeast does not have a long-term strategy for the school that includes improvement goals for teaching and learning, curriculum, professional development, and the infrastructure needs of a nearly-45-year-old school. Interviewees in the municipal focus group said they had repeatedly offered to help the school come up with a reasonable capital improvement plan and would support an amount in the budget to hire a consultant to develop a plan. However, they said, school officials did not accept the offer.

The newly appointed administrative team (who, at the time of the review, were to begin their new roles in September 2012) said that they would begin the process of reviewing the development of a SIP with the assistance of the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator and the school council. They further said they had already reviewed SIPs from other schools that could guide them in the development of their own SIP.

Limited Participation of the School Council

Administrators did acknowledge the existence of a school council made up of parents, administrators, teachers, and community members. Leaders noted that the council's level of participation in planning and decision-making in the district was limited. According to school leaders, the council has never been involved in the creation of a SIP or the establishment of school goals.

Insufficient Involvement of Teachers in Planning and Decision-Making

Teachers in focus groups noted that they were not generally involved in planning and decision-making. They provided two examples: the teacher handbook and the mentoring program. Although the teacher handbook provided by the school to the review team was dated 2011–2012, several interviewees said that they had not seen the document. One interviewee said that he had been given a copy of the handbook when he joined the staff several years before the review. Administrators did acknowledge that the teacher handbook was addressed in a limited fashion just before the start of the 2011–2012 school year and that faculty involvement was not sought. The new administrative team said that they planned to address this issue during the 2012–2013 school year and to seek staff involvement.

The mentoring of new teachers was seen by the faculty as a second example of insufficient involvement in programs that directly affected teachers. One teacher, who started five years before the review, said that he had not been mentored in any fashion. Another teacher said that when he asked the question of what he should teach he was told to make that decision himself. Mentoring was cut from the budget during the 2011–2012 school year; however, it was reported that the mentor program has been included as a formal program in the next budget. Administrators shared their mentor program materials with the review team and when teachers' association officials were asked about the mentoring program they said that they did review the materials though they did not have involvement in their development.

Conclusion

The absence of an operational SIP prevents the school from establishing goals and timelines to measure student achievement and improvement and curriculum effectiveness, and to determine expected teacher competencies and professional development needs. The absence of effective planning with the involvement of appropriate stakeholders hinders the establishment of a shared vision, common goals, and a defined road map of how the school will meet the needs of its entire student population. The absence of involvement of parents and teachers in the establishment of plans, policies, and program changes diminishes the school's opportunity to build strong advocacy for improving student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

Northeast does not have a systematic process and schedule for the timely review and revision of its academic and career/technical curricula.

Review team members did not find evidence of a systematic process and schedule for the timely review and revision of the school's curriculum in both the academic and career/technical programs. Northeast had no plan or timeline indicating when curricula were to be reviewed or revised and there was no systematic process for developing and evaluating curricula. The school did not have a curriculum steering committee or standing curriculum subcommittees organized by discipline. The career/technical areas' advisory groups were not fully activated.

Curriculum Development

During the two years before the review, according to school administrators, Northeast teachers in the disciplines of science, mathematics, and English language arts were involved in the development of curricular elements. Documentation was far more robust in science and mathematics than in English language arts and social studies. In the disciplines of English language arts and social studies this work was in the elementary stages.

The curriculum work in science and mathematics had resulted in the establishment of instructional pacing guides for all subjects, the creation of common mid-term and final exams for all courses, and the updating of course syllabi. Course syllabi in these disciplines contained course descriptions, goals, grading policies, and other pertinent information. Students and their parents were expected to sign each course syllabus to acknowledge that they understood the expectations for the course. Additional aspects of the curriculum development included the alignment of curriculum goals to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks incorporating the Common Core State Standards. The school's curriculum leaders acknowledged that this work did not include instructional strategies or goal-related teaching activities.

Advisory Groups for the Career/Technical Areas

Massachusetts requires vocational/technical schools to maintain advisory committees, which enhance planning and the operation of programs. Northeast was in the process of re-establishing advisory committees for the career/technical areas; at the time of the review team visit, the career/technical areas' advisory groups were not fully activated.

Curriculum Sources

Curriculum for Northeast's 17 career pathways comes from many sources. These include the Massachusetts vocational technical education frameworks with six strands for each framework. The strands include: safety and health knowledge and skills, technical knowledge and skills, embedded academic knowledge and skills, employability knowledge and skills, management and entrepreneurship knowledge and skills, and technological knowledge and skills. Each career/ technical area subscribes to national standards where applicable for third-party accreditation. For example, the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation regularly reviews Northeast's automotive technology program to ensure its alignment with the industry's national standards. Similar accreditations are maintained by Northeast's other career/technical areas.

Elimination of the Cooperative Education Program

One area of concern to the teaching staff was the elimination of the cooperative education program. Interviewees said that the program was wonderful for the students and a real motivator. Teachers in the vocational classes indicated that Northeast was the only school in Massachusetts that did not have a cooperative program. In interviews with the superintendent it was stated that the program was eliminated because it took employment opportunities away from unemployed workers in the school communities.

Conclusion

Because the school does not have a systematic process and schedule for the timely review and revision of the school's curriculum, and because of the absence of advisory committees in the career/technical areas, it is challenging for the school to align, consistently deliver, and continuously improve curriculum and career/technical programs. Without a process of systematic review and revision of curriculum, it is difficult to ensure alignment with evolving standards. Teachers do not currently have opportunities to determine how curriculum should be integrated and delivered or to make use of student performance data to adjust curriculum and instruction. They also do not have opportunities to make modifications for English language learners and students with disabilities. Advisory committees assist vocational schools with workforce and job development demands, job market trends, and technical developments; without these committees Northeast students may not be well prepared to enter the career/technology fields.

The review team's observations indicated the inconsistent use of effective instructional strategies in Northeast classrooms. Observation data indicated some differences in teaching and learning in career/technical areas and academic classrooms.

The review team conducted 28 observations of the school's career/ technical areas and classrooms: 18 career/ technical areas and 10 academic classrooms were observed. All but one of the career/technical areas were included. The observed academic classes included two English language arts, three mathematics, and five science classes. Because of the time of the review team visit only academic classrooms in grade 10 and career/technical shop classroom areas in grades 9 and 11 were visited. The observations ranged from 20 to 40 minutes in length.

All review team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning to record their observations. The tool contains 35 characteristics within 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of student assignments. Review team members are asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

Strengths in the Career/Technical Areas

In 94 percent of the career/technical areas observed, reviewers noted positive and respectful relationships between students and teachers and in 100 percent of the career/technical areas observers noted students behaving according to rules and expectations. Observers noted the following teacher comments in support of their observations. "Rodney's doing a great job" and "I love your work." An observer in a shop area noted that all students had removed their hats and all were wearing their safety glasses and boots.

In 100 percent of the career/technical areas, observers found teachers prepared and learning materials readily available. One observer noted that in a health tech class the "students had previously prepared the props … right down to the simulated urine."

In 78 percent of the career/technical areas observers found lessons paced in a manner that allowed all students to be engaged in the learning. An observer noted that in the HVAC shop "all students were working at a different pace." In the automotive tech class "every student was engaged." "All students participated in the activity" was noted in plumbing tech. An observer in the culinary arts class noted, "Pace adjusted by teacher if student indicates a need."

Areas of Concern in the Career/Technical Areas

In only 28 percent of career/technical areas observed was there solid evidence of higher-order thinking skills such as students forming predictions, developing arguments, or evaluating information.

In only 39 percent of career/technical areas did observers see evidence of students using various means (orally or in writing) to represent their ideas and thinking or engaged in learning situations that advanced their thinking.

In 44 percent of the career/technical areas observers found evidence of students participating in different or tiered activities based on academic readiness.

In 33 percent of observed career/technical areas there was evidence of at least one informal assessment (e.g., thumb tool, ticket to leave) used to check for understanding or mastery.

Strengths in the Academic Classes

As was found in the career/technical areas, almost all observers noted positive and respectful relationships between students and teachers and students behaving according to rules and expectations in the academic classes. Observers noted the habit of students addressing their teachers as Miss or Mr.

In all the academic classes observed, there was solid evidence that the content of the lesson appeared appropriate for the grade and level. In 90 percent of the academic classes visited, observers found teachers prepared and learning materials available. In 90 percent of academic classes observers noted that lessons were paced in a manner allowing all students to be engaged in the learning.

Areas of Concern in the Academic Classrooms

The team observed 10 academic classes. In many of the classes, observers noted the inconsistent use or absence of effective instructional strategies. For example, in none of the school's observed academic classes was there evidence of informal assessment used to check for understanding or mastery. The school has purchased clickers for interactive student assessment, but these were not observed in use by the team in any classroom observations.

In only 20 percent of the academic classes observed was there evidence of students exploring or problem solving in small groups or pairs. In only 1 (10 percent) of the academic classes did the review team observe evidence of students engaged through the use of a variety of instructional strategies (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) and participating in different or tiered activities based on academic readiness. In none of the academic classrooms did observers find evidence of students engaged in structures that advanced their thinking, i.e., think-pair-share, turn and talk. In only 1

(10 percent) of the academic classes did observers see evidence of students using various means (orally or in writing) to represent their ideas and thinking or engaged in learning situations that advanced their thinking. In only 1 (10 percent) of the academic classes observed was there evidence (posted or explained) of teachers communicating the learning objective to the students.

Conclusion

Although the team was able to only observe a small number of academic classes, the low incidence of some desirable and effective instructional strategies indicates that there are not common expectations for effective instructional practice throughout the school. In only 29 percent of Northeast's learning environments did observers see evidence of students using various means (orally or in writing) to represent their ideas and thinking or engaged in learning structures that advanced their thinking. The infrequent observation of higher-level thinking skills in both academic and career/technical classes points to the absence of a well-articulated vision of excellence in teaching and learning, and unclear expectations for teachers by school leaders.

Assessment

Northeast effectively collects student data, uses it to monitor student achievement, and disseminates it to teachers, students, and parents in a timely way; it has not yet developed a plan nor set improvement goals to ensure full teacher use of data to improve instruction for all students in grades 9–12, and it does not have a long-range plan to use data to sustain improved student achievement.

Collecting Assessment Data

The school uses a combination of standardized and non-standardized assessment tools. The school administers the following tests:

- The Stanford 10 for students entering grade 9
- The Kuder Career Inventory in grade 9
- Career Vocational/Technical Education (CVTE) tests in all shop areas
- Writing With Colors writing prompt in grades 9–10, administered in the fall and spring
- Pre- and post-tests in grades 9 and 10 in "MCAS Enrichment" classes required for all students.
- Common mid-term and final assessments in all academic areas in grades 9–12
- Common writing prompts for students in grades 9 and 10
- Common open-response math questions in grade 10 with grading rubrics and anchors
- A Junior-Senior Project

Juniors and seniors also must complete a multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary "integration project" as a graduation requirement. This two-year project is graded by academic and shop teachers and is scored through the use of rubrics.

In addition, some students in grades 11 and 12 also take SAT exams: 27 percent of juniors and 42 percent of seniors took the SAT I at least once during the 2010–2011 school year, according to information provided by the district. The school also administers the PSAT annually each fall to interested students. Assessment data is also available for students who take the Skills Tutor program, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, and the Accuplacer (for students preparing for the SATs). The school has also recently purchased clickers for interactive student assessment.

In each of the career/technical areas student progress is monitored by the Vocational Technical Competency Tracking System (VTCTS). The VTCTS assists teachers in monitoring student progress toward mastery of standards in the Massachusetts vocational technical education frameworks.

The assessment program is coordinated by the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator in collaboration with the academic department chairs. The school assesses students upon acceptance by administering the Stanford 10 and the Kuder Career Inventory to identify the skills and interests of incoming grade 9 students. School leaders acknowledged the importance of testing all students upon entry because students come from 28 middle schools in 12 sending communities. This data is used in combination with recommendations from middle-school teachers and grades, MELA-O test results, and Individual Education Program recommendations to place students in one of four levels: honors, college preparatory, standard, and learning center level with co-teachers. English language learners may be placed in small groups or in co-taught classes depending on the MELA-O results.

The school has established Stanford scoring guidelines for initial level placement in grade 9, but school leaders indicated that this was fluid during the first term and that adjustments could be made based on first-term performance and teacher recommendations. The school uses the Kuder Career Inventory to assist students in developing their four-year "career plans" and in identifying their top choices for career/technical program placement.

Disseminating Assessment Data

Assessment information is disseminated in a variety of ways.

- For the two years before the review, as soon as MCAS results were available for release, the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator met with all staff to inform them of school-wide performance, strengths and weaknesses, gaps between the school and the state proficiency rates, and student growth. She has also included the results of the Perkins Core Indicators. After this meeting, teachers were asked to analyze the performance data for their own students from the prior year.
- Data on writing performance using the Writing With Colors assessment tool is provided to grade 9 and 10 teachers by an outside consultant who scores student writing

samples and makes recommendations to the staff. The writing sample is administered in the fall and spring and teachers are provided with findings and follow-up packet.

- Student performance data is made available to teachers, parents, and students through the X2 data program. The deans reported using X2 to generate reports on attendance and discipline patterns. All staff members are required to use X2 for their electronic grade books. Parents reported that they have good access, through X2, to student progress reports and grades. The curriculum coordinator also reported that assessment information is provided to parents during parent-teacher night presentations.

In interviews with school leaders and with teachers, the review team was told that, other than an MCAS Committee formed to address the low MCAS scores in 2010 and now disbanded, the responsibilities for disaggregating the data, informing teachers, and making program decisions was in the hands of the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator and other administrators. At the time of the visit, there were no plans to re-establish a schoolwide data team with teacher participation. Leaders told the team that discussions about data were generally informal. Although the school had recently completed its first year of common mid-term and final assessments for all academic areas, there were neither formal structures in place nor common expectations for teachers to analyze and use the data within their classrooms.

While the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator and two academic department chairs have received Data Warehouse training, the coordinator indicated that not all were equally skilled in data analysis. Teachers have received some training in the use of data. A promising new program, Scantron, has been introduced to the school but its use is not required of all teachers and not all have been trained in its use.

Conclusion

In the review team's judgment, the school has developed an assessment program that measures student learning in grades 9–10 in academic areas and in all grades in the career/technical areas. The school also helps students to identify potential career choices based on interest and aptitude. However, as the school continues to improve its ability to collect meaningful data, it has not yet developed a plan nor set improvement goals to ensure full teacher use of data in improving instruction for all students in grades 9–12.

Northeast uses a balance of formative and summative student assessment data to improve achievement of grade 9 and 10 students.

Teachers and administrators use formative and summative performance data to improve achievement of students in grades 9 and 10. There are five main sources of student data in these grades: MCAS Enrichment Program data; Writing With Colors and open-response practice; common mid-terms, final exams, and writing prompts; Scantron; and the Vocational Technical Competency Tracking System.

MCAS Enrichment Program Data

Pre- and post-test data are used in the MCAS support programs. All students in grades 9 and 10 participate in the school's daily MCAS Enrichment Program in ELA and math. Approximately 200 students participate in the summer transition program; an additional small group receives supplemental MCAS support after school or during a supplemental summer program.

The content of the MCAS student support programs was revised in 20102011 after a committee of administrators and teachers (MCAS Committee) reviewed student MCAS performance information and determined that while the curricular content taught by Northeast was appropriate, students did not have the necessary basic skills to do well on MCAS tests. In addition, they noted that students did not fully understand what was being asked of them in open-response MCAS questions. As a result, the MCAS Enrichment Program shifted its emphasis to providing the required foundational skills in mathematics and ELA, and in developing the skills necessary to understand and effectively answer open-response questions. The school reported that the MCAS Committee no longer existed and that there was no similar team established to continue to analyze data. This responsibility rested with the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator, the academic department chairs, and other administrators.

According to school leaders, there were two additional benefits of the analysis of the MCAS data in preparation for the MCAS Enrichment Program. Students were taught about identifying "distractor" questions to help them to improve the accuracy of their answer choices, and career/technical teachers, who understood the importance of having students skilled in following directions and answering questions, joined with academic teachers in improving these skills.

Writing With Colors and Open-Response Practice

ELA teachers assessed student writing twice yearly in grades 9 and 10 for the first time in 2011–2012 using the Writing With Colors program. Students were provided a writing prompt that was scored using an MCAS rubric. After the scoring of the first writing prompt in the fall, teachers were provided an analysis of the scores, trends and patterns, and suggested follow-up class activities. Test results were shared with all content teachers in grade 9.

The team reviewed the sample reports from grade 9 spring and fall testing and noted improvements. In the fall 2011, 127 (42 percent) of 303 students in grade 9 earned a score of 3 or better on the MCAS scoring rubric. In the spring 2012, 152 (50 percent) of these students earned a score of 3 or better. Suggestions for improving student performance after the first test administration included teaching students how to embed quotations, having students compare their own work to anchor papers, and teaching students how to understand what the questions were asking.

Mathematics teachers provided open-response practice weekly in grade 10; school leaders supplied the questions. Teachers then gave a weekly report about student performance to the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator so that they could track student progress, re-teach, or provide additional support.

Common Mid-Terms, Final Exams, and Writing Prompts

According to several interviewees, the development of common mid-term and final exams was a significant step in improving student achievement. These were fully implemented in the 2011–2012 school year and had never been in place before that year, according to the superintendent. He also said that some teachers had been concerned about this change in testing design and procedures, but that teachers had seen the resulting improvements in student work. The curriculum/MCAS/grant coordinator noted similar positive teacher attitudes.

The team reviewed sample mid-term and final exams and writing prompts. In ELA exams consisted of reading comprehension and open-response questions, and multiple choice questions for grammar, writing mechanics, and vocabulary. The mid-term writing prompts were modeled on MCAS questions and asked students to compare, analyze, and synthesize information from literature that they had read. In science and math, a random sample showed some open-response questions in science, but none in math; samples from both content areas contained primarily multiple-choice questions.

The use of common mid-terms and finals was just beginning to inform teachers and department chairs about trends and patterns in student performance; however, these conversations were reported to be "as needed" and informal, rather than taking place in any systematic or planned way.

Scantron Testing Program

Science teachers, who were farthest along in analyzing test data, according to the curriculum/MCAS/grants/ coordinator, began to use a new Scantron testing program purchased in 2011–2012 to identify gaps in student learning and to produce reports on their classes. Scantron was also used to analyze pre- and post-test data in the MCAS Enrichment Program. At the time of the review teachers had not yet been fully trained in the use of Scantron; interviewees said that it was not widely used in the school and there were no plans to increase its use in classrooms.

Vocational Technical Competency Tracking System (VTCTS)

Non-academic department chairs told the review team that they used several measures to assess student progress and competencies. National, state, and industry standards require students to demonstrate specific competencies in each shop area. They all reported administering the VTCTS tests and the team verified this on the ESE website. All chairs noted that one of their most important indicators of student success was employability. In the 2011 Annual Report, the school reported that 272 of 277 students entered military service, were employed, or were seeking further education.

Conclusion

Northeast's use of formative and summative student assessment data has helped to improve the achievement of students in grades 9 and 10. The school's analysis of MCAS data, followed by program changes in the MCAS Enrichment program for grade 9 and 10 students likely

contributed to the substantial student progress made in ELA and mathematics MCAS proficiency rates between 2010 and 2011: an improvement of 21 percentage points in ELA and 14 percentage points in math. The use of formative and summative data has enabled leaders and teachers to monitor student improvement and provide appropriate support services. However, at the time of the review the school did not have a similar program of monitoring progress in grades 11 and 12 and had no plans to do so.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The professional development planning process, while satisfying to teachers, has been generated by the district without formal teacher involvement and without an evaluation of effectiveness.

Process of Professional Development Planning

According to administrators, the professional development planning process began with a review of teachers' individual professional development plans discussed with the principal during the previous spring. Additional information was obtained using the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Technology Self-Assessment Tool, which is focused on technology professional development, as well as input from department meetings in December and January, analysis of data from the district's X-2 portal, and informal questions from staff members. Administrators described the process of professional development planning, providing minutes of administrative meetings where potential professional development activities were discussed. Samples notes and handouts provided at professional development events were made available to the review team, including a session from January 2012 that helped teachers to connect mathematical and CVTE concepts. Particular attention was paid to the technology needs of the teaching faculty, with training provided on newly acquired student response systems and on special education issues. The administration seemed to pay substantial attention to perceived needs of teachers, even engaging consultants to provide additional training to teachers on alternative instructional strategies in support of the district curriculum accommodation plan. Spending on professional development in 2010–2011 was $282 per pupil, exceeding the statewide average of $241 per pupil and comparing favorably with similar districts. In comparison with three other similar regional vocational school districts, spending per in-district pupil for professional development ranked second highest, at $17,593. [6]

Attention was paid not only to specific offerings in the professional development plan, but also to providing follow-up activities. For example, a consultant who provided training to the ELA department on curriculum mapping in 2010 returned in 2011 to provide training on literacy and to be the keynote speaker to the faculty on opening day.

[6] Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical spent $546 per in-district pupil, Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational Technical spent $253, and Whittier Regional Vocational Technical spent $122.

Course Reimbursement

In focus groups with teachers and the teachers' association, teachers referred to the practice of course re-imbursement provided within their bargaining agreement. Teachers were reimbursed "for any course successfully completed for the purpose of the teacher's professional improvement, if such tuition and course shall have been approved by the Administration in writing." There is no written limit in the collective bargaining agreement to the number of courses reimbursable for each teacher, and "successfully completed" is defined as receiving a grade of C for an undergraduate, or B for a graduate-level course. No teacher who spoke to the review team was ever denied permission to take a reimbursable course, nor did any teacher know of any other teacher who had been denied.

Professional Development Planned Without Teachers' Involvement

Both teachers and the teachers' association leadership expressed satisfaction with their professional development offerings. There did not, however, appear to be any participation by teachers in the planning process for professional development. While teachers appreciated the district's efforts in providing professional development, they said that they had no voice in actually planning the program. In fact, the professional development plan appeared to be a collection of topics, and did not detail times allowed, specific activities provided, persons responsible for training, or projected timeframes.

School Council

When administrators were asked about involvement of the school council, they said that the special education parents' advisory council was very active and that in 2012–2013 they hoped to increase their attention to teachers' input in professional development. There was little evidence that the school council was involved with planning professional development in 2011 or 2010.

Support for Professional Development

In 2010, there was a substantial, one-time increase in professional development expenditure. Administrators related this increase in funding to a newly appointed administrator who assumed responsibility for coordinating professional development activities. These administrators also identified a change in emphasis from the previous online professional development application to district-planned experiences. During the 2011–2012 school year, additional support was provided for the district's professional development activities by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's District and School Assistance Center (DSAC). The Center provided both fiscal ($36,000) and consultant support to the district as a part of services provided to all Level 3 districts. During the 2012–2013 school year, with the district classified as Level 1, DSAC support was to be diminished.

Evaluation of the Professional Development Program

Evaluation of the delivery and use of the professional development offerings were problematic for the district. When asked about evaluation of the offerings, administrators identified teacher feedback forms that were collected and analyzed following the actual offerings. However, during

its review of 31 teacher personnel files, the team found neither recommendations for professional development to improve teachers' instruction nor evidence that teachers were actually making use of professional development training. Administrators pointed out that they believed increased student achievement would indicate that the professional development activities were making a difference. This approach would assume that no other activities would have had any effect on student achievement. When asked about the absence in teachers' evaluations of references to professional development effectiveness or recommendations for professional development, administrators said that while there had been training in teacher evaluation some years earlier, "about half" of the department chairpersons who did most of the teacher evaluations had been appointed after that training.

Conclusion

While the district did design and deliver professional development activities to its staff, the absence of teacher involvement in the design and execution of the program deprived the district of a valuable resource. Although teachers expressed satisfaction with the professional development program, it was not planned in support of goals enunciated in a School Improvement Plan and was not responsive to student achievement, and so did not contribute to a firm instructional system to the extent that it could have.

Student Support

The school does not make use of an organized strategic approach for the design, implementation, and evaluation of student support services and communication about them.

Northeast offers support services to its students, most notably through its grade 9 and 10 MCAS Enrichment program. However, other support services are underdeveloped and seem to be part of a "collection" rather than an integral part of a student support system. The primary areas of concern are:

- The absence of an appropriate and comprehensively designed, implemented, and evaluated leveled intervention system that considers the academic and behavioral needs of all students,
- The assignment of the district English Language Education Program to the special education program, possibly creating the perception that English language learners (ELLs) are students with disabilities,
- The placement and transition of students in the district's English Language Education Program which may lead to the absence of coordination in the delivery of services

- The absence of fully developed communication structures and procedures to inform teachers and parents about student support programs.

Piloting Response to Interventions Practices

The district has not yet implemented a formal tiered intervention program to support all students. Administrators in the district acknowledged that they did not have a formal tiered intervention program. They told the team that the district was piloting Response to Interventions (RTI) practices in the grade 9 academy and they aimed to formalize this process. In 2011–2012 adjustments were made to one staff member's teaching assignment, giving a .5 teacher responsibilities for working with students who are struggling in classes, but at the time of the review that was the extent of the district's tiered intervention support program. The district has trained about 20 teachers and stated its intention to do a feasibility study about the implementation of tiered support program in the near future. The district acknowledged that it looked at student success and grades but did not conduct any formal program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of particular approaches to interventions.

Support for English Language Learners

The review team had concerns about how the needs of English language learners (ELLs) and former English language learners (FELLs) were met given the decrease in enrollment and the organization of program services and delivery. The administrative responsibility and oversight for the district's English Language Education Program was not listed on the responsibilities chart provided by the school. However, in interviews it was determined that the administrator for special education assumed that responsibility. While this may be efficient in terms of the leadership structure, it may also reinforce the incorrect notion that ELLs are students with disabilities.

District leaders described the English Language Education Program as greatly improved since the Coordinated Program Review (CPR) conducted in 2009. At the time of the review, Sheltered English Immersion training had been provided to some staff, the district ensured it had school personnel onsite who are certified to offer category training in the district, and the MELA-O was used as a placement tool. There is an English Language Learner Academy in grade 9 and students being supported under the English Language Education Program are mainstreamed by grade 10, although many start their grade 9 year in the English Language Learner Academy. According to program leaders, the district has found that their students need Sheltered English Immersion only for two years. The data shows that the performance of the small number of ELLs at Northeast (3.4 percent of the population in 2011) increased in 2011 to over the state performance for ELLs.

Teacher Handbook

The teacher handbook neither documents the current support programs and goals nor reflects changes that have been made since 2009. The district has contracted to redo sections and is seeking legal advice on the handbook.

Anti-Bullying Initiative

Since the implementation of a strong new anti-bullying initiative approved by the school committee in 2010–2011, there is a mandated three-day, in-school suspension for bullying. The X2 online electronic grade book allows staff to access information about disciplinary issues and other related concerns. Teachers have to check the system if they want to know what happened as a result of a student being seen by a dean. The district told the team that it was making progress in monitoring the appropriate and consistent use of this tool.

Parent Advisory Council

The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) for special education is very active and a good source of information for parents about special education programs. It serves the function of the PAC as well as those of a traditional parent/teacher organization. Parents and school staff concur that the PAC also serves in an advisory and advocacy role not just for students and families supported through special education programs but also for the whole community. Parents described the PAC's advocacy for getting accommodated materials to support summer reading for all students. They also described its involvement in community building events and in fundraising for scholarships available to all students. The PAC reaches out to the communities and encourages families to participate in PAC meetings and serve on subcommittees. This active parent group appeared to be the main communication channel to parents about support programs for students; while it is commendable that the school has an active PAC for special education, it might be creating the impression that all support programs are special education programs for which students must be declared eligible.

Conclusion

While the school has made a comprehensive commitment to providing support to students in grades 9 and 10, it has not yet provided an integrated services model to address the needs of students in grades 9 through 12. The school's current approach may inhibit its effectiveness in ensuring sustained improvement in the achievement of all students.

Financial and Asset Management

Relationships among the superintendent, school committee, and member communities became extremely difficult in the last few years, leading to financial problems for the district including being more than 5 percent below required net school spending in fiscal year 2011.

Net School Spending in Fiscal Year 2011

The state can sanction a district and its municipalities in various ways when actual net school spending drops to more than 5 percent below the required net school spending set by the state's Chapter 70 aid program. Northeast Metropolitan dropped below this critical threshold in fiscal year 2011. A penalty of $81,168 was subtracted from their June 30, 2012 Chapter 70 distribution. The rest of the amount below required spending ($909,559) was carried over to

fiscal year 2012 by adding it to required net school spending. A letter to this effect was sent to the superintendent in January 2012. Spending was projected to be 2.3 percent below required in fiscal year 2012, a level that escaped the sanctions but required the district to again spend more the following year by rolling the difference into required net school spending.

Contentious Relationships

These problems are the result of difficult relationships with member communities. According to community leaders, a superintendent refused to meet with community officials to explain the budget and review operational and capital needs. The school committee has been considered part of the problem; city and town officials described members as representing the school and not the community and having limited contact with them. Community officials expressed hopes that the new superintendent who was to assume the position in fiscal year 2013 would improve these relationships.

Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Process

The nadir of district-community relations took place in the fiscal year 2010 budget process. According to district and community leaders, in 2009 all 12 member communities voted down the district's proposed 2010 budget. When the district resubmitted the budget, as allowed under state law governing regional districts, more than one-third of the communities organized special meetings to vote it down again. The budget rejection by member towns had reportedly been standard practice in prior years, and budgets were approved by default on resubmission simply because not enough member towns successfully organized special town meetings to vote on the budget a second time. By fiscal year 2010, however, this already problematic practice no longer worked. After two rejections, the budget was set by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, who reduced the proposed 13 percent increase to 8 percent, an $820,000 decrease according to district leaders.

Absence of Trust and Ineffective Communication

Community leaders reported that there had been three superintendents in the five years before the review, and though some positive comments were made about the most recent superintendent at the time of the review stabilizing the situation and also bringing together state and local officials with a legislative breakfast, the level of mistrust still appeared very high. They said it was not their intent to insist on level funding for the district budget, and they believed that vocational/technical education was needed and that the school did a good job. However, a superintendent's refusal to meet with community officials to explain the budget and review operational and capital needs contributed to the acrimony of the 2010 budget process.

Community officials described an absence of communication with their local school committee representatives. School committee members said they received the final budget document just before the public hearing, at which the superintendent made a presentation on the budget but no community officials were in attendance. The committee had no budget subcommittee and no budget review process before the public hearing. These comments suggest that the school committee is not effectively carrying out its responsibilities for managing the district in concert

with the superintendent, and for representing and communicating with the towns and cities that elected them.

A point of contention among member communities has been that the per-pupil cost varies widely among them, from $3,083 for Chelsea to $14,402 for Stoneham. It is the school committee's and superintendent's responsibility to explain how the net school spending and state aid formulas provide an equal allocation for each student, with state aid making up various levels of the total depending on the wealth of the community in which the student resides.

Conclusion

The adversarial relationships among district leaders, school committee and community officials resulted in the collapse of the budget process for fiscal year 2010. While community officials expressed cautious optimism about working with the recently appointed superintendent, there was a long way to go toward a reasonable and transparent budget process with budget approval voted by member towns.

Recommendations

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

Leadership and Governance

The school committee should fulfill its role regarding the evaluation of the superintendent, the development of the budget, and the revision of the school committee policy manual.

The school committee only evaluated the superintendent in one out of the three years of his tenure and therefore has not fulfilled one of its important roles. The mutually agreed upon evaluation tool should address the attainment of goals in a School Improvement Plan, the ongoing and sustained improvement of student MCAS performance, and the improvement in other student success indicators. An annual evaluation will serve to hold the superintendent accountable for ongoing improvement in student achievement and keep the school committee informed of school and student growth and areas for improvement.

The school committee should become more involved in the development of the budget from the beginning through the final adoption. When interviewees were questioned about the involvement of the school committee in the budget process it was repeatedly stated that the committee does not become involved in the development of the budget, nor does it either define budget goals or receive budget information from the superintendent or business manager. Members of the school committee are not viewed as sources of information about the school or the budget by the sending towns. As a result, the school is missing an opportunity for advocacy for programs and for adequate resources. Further, the school committee is not sufficiently informed or knowledgeable about the school's budget to make sound decisions about programs and resources.

It is further recommended that the committee establish a defined protocol for the revision of the school committee policy manual. The current manual was nine years old at the time of the review, and interviewees said that there was no plan in place for review or revision. Although the school committee has added policies about bullying, harassment, and concussions, it has not revised the main body of its policies to reflect the changing needs of the school and its students.

In addressing these areas the school committee will be fulfilling major governance responsibilities; it will be holding the superintendent accountable for student progress, taking an active role in designing and monitoring an appropriate school budget, and maintaining up-to-date policies to guide the school and ensure continuous improvement in student achievement.

The leadership team and the school committee should begin the process of establishing a Strategic Plan and a School Improvement Plan to help sustain improved student performance.

At the time of the review the school committee had not addressed the establishment of a Strategic Plan or a long-range capital improvement plan in concert with the superintendent. Although some goals are listed in documents, the school does not have a comprehensive and formal School Improvement Plan developed with multiple stakeholders, nor does it have any long-range strategic planning documents. The school does have a well-developed "District Technology Plan 2011–2015" formulated by a district technology committee with four school committee representatives.

It is recommended that the leadership of the school collaborate with all member communities on two key documents: a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and a multi-year Strategic Plan. A strategic planning committee made up of community leaders, parents, students, school committee members, administrators, teachers, and other school personnel would ensure that representative voices and points of view from the entire educational community could be heard.

Currently the absence of a SIP has an impact on all areas of the school. The school does not have the opportunity to establish goals to use to measure student achievement and program effectiveness or to provide timelines for faithful curriculum implementation. It is prevented from constructively evaluating the steps toward improvement taken by administrators and staff.

The administrative team should start the process of creating a SIP to ensure that the school has defined goals and objectives directly related to the ongoing improvement of student achievement. School plans should be developed and refined through an ongoing process that includes input from the school council—parents, staff, students, and community members—on school goals, initiatives, policies, and programs. The SIP should be brought to the school committee and reviewed in its entirety annually.

With a long-range Strategic Plan and with an annual SIP, the school committee, school leaders, teachers, students, and parents will be given clear focus and direction.

Curriculum and Instruction

Northeast should formulate a long-term plan that systematizes a process and schedule for the timely review and revision of the school's curriculum.

Northeast does not have a plan or timeline indicating when curricula will be reviewed or a systematic process for developing and evaluating curricula. The career/technical areas' advisory groups are not fully activated. A cyclical, long-term plan that identifies when each discipline is scheduled for the planning, production, piloting, and implementation of revised or developed curricula is necessary if the school is to have an up-to-date curriculum to effectively prepare students for college and careers.

To produce effective curricula districts need systems and require structures such as a steering committee or a curriculum planning council, individual curriculum task forces, and curriculum writers—structures that are not in place at Northeast. Such structures, including active advisory committees, should be provided for in the plan for curriculum review and revision. Curriculum guides should include objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, and assessments. Teachers should have opportunities to determine how curriculum ought to be integrated and delivered. Making use of student performance data to adjust curriculum and instruction should be a part of the process. And teachers should be provided opportunities to make modifications to meet the needs of English language learners, students with disabilities, and other students.

A review cycle sustains curriculum development and renewal. Continuous development and modification of curriculum enhances student learning, provides a focus for instruction, and facilitates the design, delivery, and assessment of learning experiences. With a process of systematic review and revision of curriculum, alignment with evolving standards can be ensured.

To continue improving achievement for all students, Northeast's teachers should increase their use of research-based, best instructional practices.

Observation data indicated that effective instructional strategies should be more consistently present in all Northeast's classrooms. Review team members found insufficient evidence of a breadth of instructional strategies in the 28 academic classrooms and career/technical areas visited.

- The use of informal assessments for the purpose of checking for understanding or mastery was not observed in academic classrooms and noted in only 33 percent of the career/ technical areas visited in the school.
- In only 29 percent of Northeast's visited learning environments did observers see evidence of students using various means (orally or in writing) to represent their ideas and thinking or engaged in learning structures that advanced their thinking, for instance, think-pair-share or turn-and-talk.
- In only 5 of 13 (28 percent) of learning environments visited did observers note students activating higher-order thinking by expressing predictions, developing arguments, or evaluating information.
- In only 1 of 10 (10 percent) of academic classrooms visited did observers record evidence of the class's learning objective being communicated (posted or explained) to students.
- In only one visited academic class did observers see evidence of students being engaged in content through the use of a variety of instructional strategies (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) or participating in tiered activities based on academic readiness.
- In only 20 percent of the academic classes observed was there evidence of students exploring or problem solving in small groups or pairs.

The district enrolls students from 12 communities who arrive with a diverse set of elementary and middle-school experiences. Northeast's academic and career/technical teachers face a considerable challenge in providing remediation and enriching the education of its students. In order to be successful the instructional staff should be able to determine each student's preparedness to learn, and instructors should possess an instructional repertoire to match the variety of needs that their students present. A richer variety of techniques is critical to the success of educating a diverse population of learners.

Assessment

In order to help all staff understand data and use it fully to inform their instruction and improve student learning, the school should establish a data team that involves academic and career/technical teachers in whole-school data analysis.

The school once had an effective data committee that was instrumental in the design of the ongoing MCAS Enrichment program. At the time of the review the disaggregation and analysis of schoolwide data was completed by the curriculum/MCAS/grants coordinator, with assistance from the two academic chairs. In the absence of a School Improvement Plan to provide guidance on school priorities, decisions about data and its use rested with these three staff members.

All teachers are not yet expected to use and are not yet trained in the use of student achievement data to improve performance. Following the disbanding of the MCAS committee, teachers no longer participate in the analysis of whole-school student performance data or in decisions about the use of assessments in the classrooms and shops. The establishment of common mid-terms and finals in the academic classes was a significant school accomplishment; however, the school did not have a plan for how it would analyze and use the resulting data to find patterns and trends, to evaluate its program of studies, or to improve instruction and student achievement. In addition, some promising practices had recently been introduced but there was no systematic training on these practices or stated expectation for their use. For example, Scantron was primarily used by one academic department (science) and by administrators for MCAS enrichment; the school had purchased clickers for interactive student assessment, but these were not observed in use by the team in any classroom observations.

Since 2010, when it developed an effective program to assist students as the result of good data analysis by school leaders and the MCAS committee, Northeast has shown its commitment to using data to design programs to address the needs of students in grades 9 and 10. The team that served as the MCAS committee, or one similar to it, should be re-instated. Membership on a new data team should be broadened to include representatives from both the academic and the career/technical program. This team's responsibilities should include long-range planning and priority-setting for data use by all teachers throughout the school, developing protocols for interpreting and using the newly implemented common assessments in the academic areas, and building teacher skills in the use of formative assessment in the classroom.

As the school and its teachers in all grades develop their capacity to collect and analyze student performance data, they will be better able to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom and program interventions and to sustain continuously improving student performance.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should improve the professional development that it provides to its staff by:

- **involving more participants in planning professional development and managing its delivery by establishing a professional development committee composed of both teachers and administrators;**
- **under the leadership of the professional development committee, revising the professional development plan to link it to student achievement and the priorities in the SIP (recommended above) and to detail specific activities, persons responsible, and timeframes; and**
- **linking professional development in the district to the new educator evaluation system it is required to implement during the 2013-2014 school year.**

The professional development plan that was presented to the review team was well funded, contained good activities, and in some cases, good delivery practices, but it was developed by the administrative team without the involvement of teachers. While teachers appreciated the district's efforts in providing professional development, they said that they had no voice in actually planning the program.

Though teacher feedback on professional development offerings was collected, professional development was not linked to the evaluation system either by planning professional development in areas of need identified by educator evaluations or by using educator evaluations to monitor the effectiveness of particular professional development initiatives.

Also, the professional development plan appeared to be a collection of topics, and did not detail specific activities provided, persons responsible for training, or projected timeframes. As it was not planned in support of goals enunciated in a School Improvement Plan and was not responsive to student achievement, it did not contribute to the extent that it could have to a firm instructional system.

The district should establish a professional development committee with representation from teachers as well as administrators. This committee should revise the professional development plan to address weaknesses in student achievement and the priorities in the School Improvement Plan (see the second Leadership and Governance recommendation above). The plan should include specific activities, persons responsible, and timeframes.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education amended the regulations at 603 CMR 35.00 in June, 2011. All districts are required to adopt and implement new evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations by the 2013-2014 school year. The specifics should be

negotiated into collective bargaining agreements. This work will take time and should be assigned a high priority.

Among the opportunities provided by the state's new educator evaluation system is the opportunity for school districts to develop and implement professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the new goal-setting and evaluation process. Another opportunity is closer, more frequent supervisory visits to classrooms. Both of these opportunities can be used by Northeast to link its professional development to educator evaluation, both by using teacher needs identified in the evaluation process to plan professional development, and by using follow-up monitoring to determine the effectiveness of particular professional development initiatives.

The team believes that improving the planning and follow-up for professional development in these ways will greatly facilitate continuous improvement of student achievement.

Student Support

The district should develop a strategic approach to the design, implementation, and evaluation of student support services and to communication about them.

While Northeast has made a comprehensive commitment to providing support to students in grades 9 and 10 through its MCAS Enrichment program for those grades, other support services are underdeveloped and seem to be part of a collection of services rather than an integrated system. Northeast should focus on eliminating gaps in the current student support systems with attention to designing comprehensive program elements, including program evaluation.

The district has just begun implementation of Response to Intervention; administrators told the review team that they aimed to formalize this process. A more thoroughly developed Response to Intervention system requires a wide range of services as well as program review, assessment points, and specific instructional and behavioral strategies. It also requires staff training. Strategies should be designed with multiple tiers or levels to enhance the quality of services and matched to students' academic and behavioral needs in classrooms as well as in other settings. All administrators and faculty should be trained on the rationale for and the implementation of the school's evolving system of leveled interventions. A system of periodic program review or evaluation should be established as part of the district's long-range planning efforts.

The district does not have clearly articulated and understood procedures, practices, and programs for student support.[7] Without these, students may experience uncoordinated service delivery. Also, the ability of parents to fully engage in their roles as partners is hindered by insufficiently developed communication structures and procedures to inform them about student support programs. At the time of the review the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) appeared to be the main channel of communication to parents about support programs for students; however, its

[7] For instance, the teacher handbook did not reflect changes made since 2009 or document current support programs or goals.

assumption of an advisory and advocacy role for students and families other than those supported through special education programs carries the risk of creating the impression that all support programs are special education programs for which students must be found eligible.

To clarify its supports for students and minimize confusion, the district should develop updated documents related to student services and disciplinary procedures that reflect a coherently articulated set of expectations about procedures. The district should also clearly delineate appropriate expectations for communications among school personnel and the community in order to unify understandings of critical procedures and expectations with an impact on the school environment and student achievement. Setting clear boundaries between the PAC and other formally mandated structures will ensure their clarity of purpose and allow parents informed access to the roles in which they can serve as partners in educating students at Northeast.

It is important for the school to articulate how it serves its English language learners (ELLs) so that all stakeholders are clear about how to access support. The administrator for special education has the administrative responsibilities for the English Language Education Program and ELLs, potentially leading to misperceptions about ELLs. To ensure access for ELLs and FELLs to all academic and shop experiences offered at Northeast, attention should be paid to how students are assessed for entry into and exit from the ELL program as well as how former ELLs are supported after they have exited. Care should be taken that students are not exited from the ELL program before they are determined to be proficient in English.

While the district has made gains in student performance, questions remain about the sustainability of efforts and the further development and refinement of student support structures. By providing a strategic approach to the design, implementation, and evaluation of student supports and to communication about them Northeast will better serve its students.

Financial and Asset Management

A top priority for district leaders and the school committee must be to manage the budget process better and to provide community leaders with complete information in a timely way. School committee members and community leaders must communicate both the district budget and educational priorities to citizens in the member towns.

The nadir of district-community relations took place in the fiscal year 2010 budget process, when member towns twice voted down the budget and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education had to set the budget. Although new district leadership provides an opportunity to re-set these critical relationships, it will require good faith efforts by all parties to approve an adequate budget in a timely way. The budget document itself will be a key tool, and should be clear, comprehensive, and timely to support a more transparent process and support the superintendent's and school committee's requests to member towns for adequate funding.

District officials should ensure that information about the needs of the district is communicated to officials in the sending towns and to the wider community. Means for regular communication

should be established so that information about educational issues and needs in the district is widely disseminated to residents and town officials in writing, through formal presentations, and through informal communications. These means could include regular joint meetings between the school committee and a budget subcommittee, presentations by the superintendent to these joint meetings or to meetings in the member towns, written explanations of the background for various budget needs, and the establishment of a position for a liaison between a budget subcommittee and the school committee. Making sure that communication is regular and that important information about the district is conveyed should improve relations between the district and the sending towns and lead to greater understanding of and support for the needs of the district.

The definitive test of improved relations will be a budget that is passed by a majority of member towns on the first vote, with assessments that meet or better required net school spending and include a reasonable level of capital funds.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District was conducted from May 29–June 1, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Rena Shea, Leadership and Governance

Dr. Peter McGinn, Curriculum and Instruction

Christine Brandt, Assessment, Review Team Coordinator

Dr. John Roper, Human Resources and Professional Development

Dr. Marilynne Smith Quarcoo, Student Support

Dr. Wilfrid Savoie, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Chelsea and Reading financial personnel: city manager and town manager.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School Committee: one member.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Northeast Teachers' Association: president, vice-president academic, vice-president CTE, secretary, and treasurer.
    - The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District central office administration: superintendent, principal, administrator of special needs, business manager, administrator of student services, and curriculum coordinator/MCAS/grants coordinator.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School.
    - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with the school principal, teachers, and deans. The team interviewed 11 high school teachers.
    - The review team conducted 28 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the high school.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
    - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
    - Data on the district's staffing and finances.
    - Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

- District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks for students/families and faculty, school schedules, and the district's end-of-the-year financial reports.
- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District, conducted from May 29–June 1, 2012.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
May 29	May 30	May 31	June 1
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association.	Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits (high school); classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents.	Interviews with town or city personnel; school visits (high school); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews.	School visits (high school); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

Table C1: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)[8]
2009–2011 English Language Arts

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***
Grade 10—District	**66**	***33***	**57**	***33***	**78**	***51***
Grade 10—State	81	*50*	78	*50*	84	*50*

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C2: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009–2011 Mathematics

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**Percent Advanced/ Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Advanced/ Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Advanced/ Proficient**	***Median SGP***
Grade 10—District	**57**	***39.5***	**56**	***46***	**70**	***61***
Grade 10—State	75	*50*	75	*50*	77	*50*

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

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

Table C3: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District and State Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts

	Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	**CPI**	***Median SGP***	**CPI**	***Median SGP***
All Students	***315***	**92.1**	***51***	**87.2**	***50***
African-American/Black	*12*	91.7	---	77.4	*47*
Asian	*6*	---	---	90.2	*59*
Hispanic/Latino	*65*	90.8	*53*	74.2	*46*
White	*226*	92.4	*51*	90.9	*51*
ELL	*11*	84.1	---	59.4	*48*
FELL	*9*	---	---	81.7	*54*
Special Education	*79*	79.4	*46*	68.3	*42*
Low-Income	*164*	91.5	*51*	77.1	*46*

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.
2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C4: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District and State Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics

	Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	**CPI**	***Median SGP***	**CPI**	***Median SGP***
All Students	***316***	**88.7**	***61***	**79.9**	***50***
African-American/Black	*12*	72.9	---	65	*47*
Asian	*6*	---	---	89.5	*64*
Hispanic/Latino	*65*	91.5	*64*	64.4	*46*
White	*226*	88.6	*61*	84.3	*50*
ELL	*11*	84.1	---	56.3	*52*
FELL	*9*	---	---	75.1	*53*
Special Education	*80*	77.8	*63.5*	57.7	*43*
Low-Income	*163*	86.8	*61*	67.3	*46*

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.
2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. Because of the gains that students at Northeast made in ELA and mathematics in 2011, the district improved from Level 3 to Level 1. In 2011, several subgroups outperformed their peers statewide.

Leadership and Governance

2. The school committee understands its role as a policy-making board; however, the committee is not fully involved in significant areas of school governance. These include timely involvement in the budget process, conducting yearly evaluations of the superintendent, long-range and strategic planning, and maintaining an up-to-date policy manual that addresses continuous school improvement.
3. Northeast does not have a defined vision about school improvement planning, and there is an absence of involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in planning and decision-making.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. Northeast does not have a systematic process and schedule for the timely review and revision of its academic and career/technical curricula.
5. The review team's observations indicated the inconsistent use of effective instructional strategies in Northeast classrooms. Observation data indicated some differences in teaching and learning in career/technical areas and academic classrooms.

Assessment

6. Northeast effectively collects student data, uses it to monitor student achievement, and disseminates it to teachers, students, and parents in a timely way; it has not yet developed a plan nor set improvement goals to ensure full teacher use of data to improve instruction for all students in grades 9–12, and it does not have a long-range plan to use data to sustain improved student achievement.
7. Northeast uses a balance of formative and summative student assessment data to improve achievement of grade 9 and 10 students.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. The professional development planning process, while satisfying to teachers, has been generated by the district without formal teacher involvement and without an evaluation of effectiveness.

Student Support

9. The school does not make use of an organized strategic approach for the design, implementation, and evaluation of student support services and communication about them.

Financial and Asset Management

10. Relationships among the superintendent, school committee, and member communities became extremely difficult in the last few years, leading to financial problems for the district including being more than 5 percent below required net school spending in fiscal year 2011.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The school committee should fulfill its role regarding the evaluation of the superintendent, the development of the budget, and the revision of the school committee policy manual.

2. The leadership team and the school committee should begin the process of establishing a Strategic Plan and a School Improvement Plan to help sustain improved student performance.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Northeast should formulate a long-term plan that systematizes a process and schedule for the timely review and revision of the school's curriculum.

4. To continue improving achievement for all students, Northeast's teachers should increase their use of research-based, best instructional practices.

Assessment

5. In order to help all staff understand data and use it fully to inform their instruction and improve student learning, the school should establish a data team that involves academic and career/technical teachers in whole-school data analysis.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. The district should improve the professional development that it provides to its staff by:

    - involving more participants in planning professional development and managing its delivery by establishing a professional development committee composed of both teachers and administrators;
    - under the leadership of the professional development committee, revising the professional development plan to link it to student achievement and the priorities in the SIP (recommended above) and to detail specific activities, persons responsible, and timeframes; and
    - linking professional development in the district to the new educator evaluation system it is required to implement during the 2013-2014 school year.

Student Support

7. The district should develop a strategic approach to the design, implementation, and evaluation of student support services and to communication about them.

Financial and Asset Management

8. A top priority for district leaders and the school committee must be to manage the budget process better and to provide community leaders with complete information in a timely way. School committee members and community leaders must communicate both the district budget and educational priorities to citizens in the member towns.