Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Norton Public Schools

Review of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of Low-Income Students

Review conducted May 2–5, 2011

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Overview of Differentiated Needs Reviews: Low-Income Students

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of reviews of school districts to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom there is a significant proficiency gap. ("Proficiency gap" is defined as a measure of the shortfall in academic performance by an identifiable population group relative to an appropriate standard held for all.)[1] The reviews focus in turn on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students (defined as students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), and students who are members of racial minorities. Spring 2011 reviews aim to identify district and school factors contributing to improvement in achievement for students living in poverty (low-income students) in selected schools, to provide recommendations for improvement on district and school levels to maintain or accelerate the improvement in student achievement, and to promote the dissemination of promising practices among Massachusetts public schools. This review complies with the requirement of Chapter 15, Section 55A to conduct district reviews and is part of ESE's program to recognize schools as "distinguished schools" under section 1117(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows states to use Title I funds to reward schools that are narrowing proficiency gaps. Exemplary district and school practices identified through the reviews will be described in a report summarizing this set of reviews.

Selection of Districts

ESE identified 28 Title I schools in 18 districts where the performance of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch has recently improved. These districts had Title I schools which substantially narrowed proficiency gaps for these low-income students over a two-year period: schools where the performance of low-income students improved from 2008 to 2009 and from 2009 to 2010 in English language arts or mathematics both in terms of low-income students' Composite Performance Index (increased CPI in the same subject both years and a gain over the two years of at least 5 points) and in terms of the percentage of low-income students scoring Proficient or Advanced (at least one percentage point gained in the same subject each year).[2] As

[1]The term "proficiency gap," originally coined by Jeff Howard, a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, was adopted in 2010 by the Board's Proficiency Gap Task Force. BESE Proficiency Gap Taskforce. April 2010. *A Roadmap to Closing the Proficiency Gap*.

[2]To be considered, a school had to be a Title I school and had to have been recognized as a 2010-2011Commendation School (for narrowing proficiency gaps, high growth, or exiting NCLB accountability status). In addition to having an increase in CPI and proficiency rate in English language arts or mathematics both years, the school could not have experienced a decline in CPI or proficiency rate either year in either subject; had to meet the 2010 AYP participation rate and attendance or graduation rate requirements; and had to have had at least 40 low-income students tested each year from 2007-2008 through 2009-2010.

a result of having these "gap-closer" schools, districts from this group were invited to participate in this set of reviews aimed at identifying district and school practices associated with stronger performance for low-income students.

Key Questions

Two key questions guide the work of the review team.

Key Question 1. To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

1. School Leadership (CSE #2): *Each school takes action to attract, develop, and retain an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a well-designed strategy for accomplishing a clearly defined mission and set of goals, in part by leveraging resources. Each school leadership team a) ensures staff understanding of and commitment to the school's mission and strategies, b) supports teacher leadership and a collaborative learning culture, c) uses supervision and evaluation practices that assist teacher development, and d) focuses staff time and resources on instructional improvement and student learning through effective management of operations and use of data for improvement planning and management.*

2. Consistent Delivery of an Aligned Curriculum (CSE #3): *Each school's taught curricula a) are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and to the MCAS performance level descriptions, and b) are also aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course).*

3. Effective Instruction (CSE #4): *Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs. It also ensures that instruction focuses on clear objectives, uses appropriate educational materials, and includes a) a range of strategies, technologies, and supplemental materials aligned with students' developmental levels and learning needs; b) instructional practices and activities that build a respectful climate and enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning; and c) use of class time that maximizes student learning. Each school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.*

4. Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time (CSE #8): *Each school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the district ensures that each school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.*

5. Social and Emotional Support (CSE #9): *Each school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.*[3] *Students' needs are met in part through a) the provision of coordinated student support services and universal breakfast (if eligible); b) the implementation of a systems approach to establishing a productive social culture that minimizes problem behavior for all students; and c) the use of consistent schoolwide attendance and discipline practices and effective classroom management techniques that enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own behavior and learning.*

Key Question 2. How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews explore six areas: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management.** The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that are most likely to be contributing to positive results, as well as those that may be impeding rapid improvement. Reviews are evidence-based and data-driven. A four-to-six-member review team, usually six-member, previews selected documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a four-day site visit in the district, spending about two to three days in the central office and one to two days conducting school visits. The team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the six areas listed above.

[3] The behavioral health and public schools framework was developed by the Task Force on Behavioral Health and Public Schools pursuant to c. 321, s. 19, of the Massachusetts Acts of 2008.

Norton Public Schools

The site visit to the Norton Public Schools was conducted from May 2–May 5, 2011. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: The Henri A. Yelle Intermediate School (Yelle) was identified as a "gap closer" for its low-income students, as described above. 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 student performance information from 2008–2010. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

District Profile[4]

Situated in the southeastern Massachusetts, the town of Norton has a population of 19,315 according to latest census. Similar in political organization to many of its neighbors, Norton has an open Town Meeting form of government with a five-member board of selectmen. The board employs a town manager. The school committee is composed of five members and the chair rotates among the members. The population of the town is 92 percent white and the school population is 94 percent white.

The superintendent has been in her position for six years. There are two additional central administrators. The director of curriculum and instruction, K-12 has been in her position for five years and in the district for 16 years. The director of pupil support services has been in her position for three years. The district expects to employ its first business manager in June 2011.

Although the town's population has grown by more than 1000 since 2000 the district population has been steadily declining since 2007. During this period district enrollment has declined by more than eight percent or 266 pupils. Yelle has mirrored the district's decline. However, during this period of declining enrollment the district's low-income population has increased by more than six percent.

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

Table 1: 2010-11 Norton Public Schools Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	40	1.4	First Language not English	15	0.5
Asian	31	1.1	Limited English Proficient	3	0.1
Hispanic or Latino	40	1.4	Low-income	462	16.6
Native American	0	0.0	Special Education	556	19.7
White	2,614	94.0	Free Lunch	350	12.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	7	0.3	Reduced-price lunch	112	4.0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	48	1.7	Total enrollment	2,780	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 2: Comparison of State, District, and All District Schools by Selected Populations: 2010–2011 (in Percentages except for Total Enrollment)

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	955,563	34.2	29.1	5.1	7.1	17.0
Norton	2,780	16.6	12.6	4.0	0.1	19.7
Yelle	422	16.4	13.0	3.3	0.0	19.7

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

The total appropriation to the Norton Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was $22,184,218 down slightly (1.70%) from the total appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of $22,567,320. School-related expenditures by the town of Norton were estimated at $11,680,442 for fiscal year 2011, down 8.17% from the school-related expenditures of $12,719,997 in fiscal year 2010.

Required Net School Spending for fiscal year 2010 was $26,766,314 and the Actual Net School Spending for fiscal year was $29,000,942.

Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Leadership and Governance

The Yelle principal has marshaled resources to create a learning environment that fosters high achievement for all students.

The Yelle principal has used available resources to configure programs and staff to support high achievement. According to a review of documents and interviews with teachers and administrators, the school has created a carefully woven system of supports and classroom practices rather than a single improvement strategy to foster higher achievement for all students, including students from low-income families. Teachers and administrators told the review team and classroom observations confirmed that special education and Title I services were typically delivered within regular education classrooms in a model maximizing inclusion. In interviews, teachers and district and school administrators identified staff reassigned by the principal to match teacher strengths with student needs. The principal told the review team that after consultation with the superintendent she reassigned teachers in grades 4 and 5 in order to provide departmentalized instruction in ELA and mathematics. The school committee was informed and parents were notified of the change. The purpose was to allow teachers to focus on specific content areas in order to improve their curriculum knowledge, skills and pedagogical strategies and to assign teachers according to their strengths. Grades 4 and 5 teachers were paired with one teaching ELA and social studies and the other mathematics and science. There were some variations. One teacher told the review team that she taught mathematics and social studies because these subjects were her strengths and her partner taught ELA and science. Although teachers were asked to indicate their preferred assignments, the principal retained the final responsibility for the scheduling. This reorganization roughly coincided with the adoption of *Math Expressions* and *Reading Street* programs in 2007–2008 and continued thereafter.

According to a review of the school schedule and interviews with school staff, the principal fosters staff collaboration by providing grade level and professional learning community meeting times during the school day. At these meetings teachers typically analyze data and collaborate on curriculum pacing and instructional strategies in order to improve instruction.

According to interviews and documentation, Yelle staff received professional development regularly and continuously. Because the school has limited resources, priorities are determined through a staff survey. Teachers cited several professional development activities that they characterized as being helpful, particularly the professional learning communities meetings, which are also offered throughout other schools in the district, Improving instruction in

mathematics and differentiating instruction were the 2010-2011 target areas. The principal provided release time during the school day to ensure that all staff had access to timely professional development.

The principal has served at Yelle for five years. Stable school leadership has contributed to the incremental implementation of supports for teachers and students. Through a team approach embedded in the school culture, all staff have a role in raising student achievement. For example, administrators and staff told the review team that as part of a holistic attempt to improve achievement the school nurse introduced nutrition programs to foster healthy eating habits since proper nourishment is so essential to student learning.

The principal has consistently seeks to foster a shared vision of high achievement for all students. This shared vision, discernible in interviews with Yelle teachers, appears to drive a focused effort towards improving student achievement results. The principal has effectively used the available resources to improve the achievement of all students, especially students from low-income families.

Curriculum and Instruction

Instruction at the Henri A. Yelle School is standards-based and consistent with an aligned district-wide curriculum to provide the most efficient access possible to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Through a review of documents and interviews with staff, the review team found that the district has a comprehensive curriculum aligned both vertically and horizontally with the state Frameworks. The curriculum has a consistent format that supports student growth and achievement through standards-based instruction focused on essential questions and essential learning. The district has also implemented a standards-based report card reflecting the curriculum standards. Yelle and other staff participate in curriculum review, modification, and revision through grade level meetings, professional learning communities and by serving on curriculum committees which meet after school, during early or late release days, and during the summer.

The review team found that the district also has developed kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum maps in each content area in a consistent format, including content, skills, assessment, technology, and other essential questions. According to interviews with staff and administrators these maps have increased consistency in instruction leading to improved student achievement. The maps are reviewed and revised based on from the results of the MCAS tests and local assessments. For example, the district revised the sequence in mathematics based on assessment results, preceding fractions with multiplication and division.

Interviewees stated and a review of documents confirmed substantial changes in the district beginning in 2005–2006. Several of these changes resulted from the of adoption standards-based programs in reading and mathematics. The district selected the *Reading Street* for literacy and the *Math Expressions* program for mathematics. These new programs were implemented

concurrently in kindergarten through grade 5 and the necessary instructional changes were supported by professional development by the publishers in addition to the district professional development program. The 2010–2011 school year was the fourth year for *Reading Street*, and the third year for *Math Expressions.* Students now enter Yelle having had a consistent instructional approach in reading and mathematics based on the same programs and resources. In interviews, teachers told the review team that student achievement had increased because students were building a more solid and consistent foundation. Grade 6 mathematics teachers at the middle school said that students had stronger background in operations with decimals.

According to 2010 MCAS test results, while district low-income students had lower CPI scores than non low-income students in ELA (89.2 compared to 92.5), their median student growth percentiles were higher (63.5 compared to 56.0). In mathematics, while the CPI for low-income-students of 77.1 was lower that the CPI of 87.1 for non-low income students, low-income students made a large CPI gain, increasing to 77.1 in 2010 from 70.7 in 2009. The Title I program at Yelle targeted mathematics and included a mathematics specialist. The teaming instructional model described earlier was also a factor at Yelle, beginning in 2007–2008.

In order to support standards-based instruction, the district implemented an aligned curriculum and curriculum maps in a consistent format in kindergarten through grade 12 with clear expectations for delivery of the curriculum. The district addressed staff needs for professional development to address and implement the standards-based curriculum through targeted and embedded course work and training. New staff are required to enroll in Resources for Better Teaching (RBT) training and offered an on-site course on differentiating instruction that many Yelle teachers have subscribed. The focus and additional training continue to support implementation and strengthening of standards-based instruction.

Administrators and staff showed the review team an example of a kindergarten through grade 5 writing prompt. While the district does not have a written formal protocol for looking at student work, teachers use prompts to establish writing expectations at each grade level and create scoring rubrics. The professional learning communities serve as the vehicle to analyze and summarize student work. When MCAS test results showed student weaknesses in written language, the district offered teachers professional development on *Empowering Writers*, an across grade levels writing program. Teachers at the elementary level told the review team that work on *Empowering Writers* will continue in 2011–2012 because the *Reading Street* program does not have the same level and focus of writing activities.

An important support for standards-based instruction according to staff and coordinators has been the infusion of technology into several areas. Examples include the use of Smart Boards, laptop projection systems, computers on wheels, electronic response systems, and virtual manipulatives, as well as technology supports within the reading and mathematics programs.

District initiatives implemented over the last five years have contributed to growth in achievement for all students, particularly students from low-income families, as demonstrated by improving CPI scores in both ELA and math. In addition, these initiatives have contributed to a

significant narrowing of the achievement gap between low-income and non-low-income students at Yelle.

Assessment

Yelle teachers use assessment data effectively to inform instruction.

According to the superintendent, student success at Yelle results from the collaborative efforts of district and school personnel. In interviews school committee members stated that the culture and environment of the school focused on student achievement. The superintendent confirmed this statement, adding that all principals understand their responsibilities as the educational leaders of their schools. In interviews, district and school leaders, special education personnel, and Title I and regular education teachers all stated that the emphasis at Yelle was on all students rather than on students by subgroup or category.

According to documents provided to the review team, the school has a well-conceived annual assessment calendar for the collection of relevant data in ELA and mathematics. ELA and mathematics benchmark assessment results are collected at the beginning of the school year to provide baseline data and sent electronically to school and district leaders. These results are disseminated to teachers who analyze them to inform their instruction. Four ELA and two mathematics benchmark tests are administered throughout the year to provide information on deficiencies or newly acquired skills, culminating in end of the year ELA and mathematics benchmark tests to be used as a summative assessment. According to interviewees, benchmark test data in combination with assessment data from the MCAS tests provide the staff ample information to identify and remediate student weaknesses and to make necessary changes in the curriculum.

The other assessment tools at Yelle include the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) used for specific populations and the Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE). The GMADE is utilized for Title I placement. The principal and director of curriculum/instruction use TestWiz and Data Warehouse (form 606) to analyze assessment data. Through an item analysis, they identify skill deficiencies and weaknesses in curriculum or instruction that need to be addressed. Teachers have not been trained to access and use TestWiz or Data Warehouse data. The data and differentiated instruction committee looks at aspects of student assessment data and work in conjunction with the professional learning communities.

Professional learning communities are well-established at Yelle. The ELA and mathematics professional learning communities are composed of classroom teachers, special educators and Title I staff at each grade level who meet for thirty minutes weekly to monitor student progress, review the results of baseline, MCAS tests, and benchmark tests, and share successful instructional strategies. They discuss ELA performance on one week and mathematics performance on the next in an alternating pattern. Approximately three quarters of the meeting time is devoted to analyzing assessment results. The professional learning communities also conduct mini-lessons and share resources. Both administrators and teachers agreed that the

communities provide a risk-free environment for teachers to learn and grow. Previously, the director of curriculum and instruction facilitated the meetings; however, the school mathematics specialist became the facilitator in 2010–2011.

Changes are based on assessment data. For example, the district revised the curricular sequence in mathematics by introducing multiplication and division earlier in the school year, before fractions in order to ensure that students were instructed in the content assessed on the MCAS tests. Other changes included additional pre and posttests of student learning, introduction of whole-school and class-based writing prompts with rubrics and a self-assessment component, and increased instructional time in ELA from sixty to ninety minutes.

Yelle staff have established a data wall consisting of a color coded magnetic card for each student. The color of the card indicates the degree of risk: green for no risk, yellow for low risk and red for high risk. Each card contains assessment data from all sources and information about specific student needs and interventions. Interviewees told the review team that this monitoring tool provided a potent visual representation of student progress as the card colors change from red to green over the course of the school year. According to interviewees, Title I and special education teachers played a vital role in the success of Yelle students. Interviewees stated and a review of documents confirmed that the principal and Title I teachers meet with individual teachers twice annually to review each student's achievement on a variety of assessments. Strategies and interventions are discussed and suggestions are implemented in a timely manner.

Title I teachers and special educators are members of both the ELA and mathematics communities and offer input and support. The GMADE is used for placement in Title I skills classes. The data from this test and other assessments are used to re-group students in skills classes every two to three weeks. The review team observed the co-teaching model in several classrooms. Administrators often stated their belief that the inclusion model at Yelle had helped to increase student achievement.

According to the 2010 MCAS test results, Yelle students performed better than district students in mathematics. The district low-income subgroup outperformed the district in ELA and the 4th grade students outperformed the district in mathematics. These increases appear to validate the strategies and techniques implemented in the school to increase student achievement. When asked by the team how teachers hoped to sustain this growth, district and school personnel stated that they were never complacent and always strive to improve instruction. Teachers told the review team that they now "owned" the professional learning communities and that these were integral to the successes in the school. Teachers also said that assessments were key to successfully adjusting instruction to meet the needs of their students and that they had grown more confident in working with data each year.

The growth evident in improved MCAS test scores can be attributed in part to improved instruction informed by an increased level of assessment data generated and made available to Yelle teachers. This data is used extensively in instructing individual students, tracking progress, improving articulation of the curriculum and modifying or re-teaching curricular content. All students benefit to some extent from the school's policies and procedures. Teachers often told

the review team that they did not know which students in their classes came from low- income families, indicating a whole-school orientation to learning.

With the support of the district leadership, the Yelle staff have increased student achievement across all grades and subgroups. Development and implementation of the previously described protocols, procedures, and initiatives by this dedicated staff and their willingness to change long established teaching strategies have produced the success they are now experiencing.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The Yelle principal's supervisory and evaluation practices help to promote high achievement for all students.

According to focus group interviews and interviews with the Yelle principal, the principal used a variety of supervisory methods to hold teachers accountable and the district's evaluation tool to evaluate staff. The day-to-day supervisory practices included walkthroughs, weekly checking of lesson plans, individual student progress monitoring with the teachers, and attending professional learning community meetings. Feedback could be oral or through e-mails. The review team observed that teachers placed copies of their lesson plans in the holders on their classroom doors. The principal checked these plans on Mondays for grade 4 teachers and Tuesdays for grade 5 teachers.

The superintendent, principals and teachers described the evaluation process in Norton. In the fall, the principal meets with professional status teachers to discuss and establish their goals for the year. Teachers set measurable goals aligned with the district and school improvement plans. The Yelle principal told the review team that she observes how teachers are addressing their goals as she conducts walkthroughs. She observes what occurs in classrooms and has conversations with the teachers during the year. For example, she observes whether and how teachers differentiate instruction. Review team members observed students working on different skills in small groups. At the end of the year, teachers submit a self-evaluation on the accomplishment of their goals. In their evaluative year, the principal observes them and provides a summative evaluation. Teachers who do not meet the standards are placed on improvement plans. The principals said that this is the district process to improve teacher performance. The Yelle principal also invites a union representative to participate in the process.

The district's adoption of the *Math Expressions* and *Reading Street* programs has also improved the horizontal and vertical alignment of the curricula and created greater consistency in the two kindergarten through grade 3 elementary feeder schools. The principal and other interviewees told the review team that because of these adoptions and the development of curriculum maps students entered Yelle with better skills contributing to the school's success.

The principal meets weekly with the ELA leadership team consisting of the principal and Title I reading specialist and the mathematics leadership team consisting of the principal and Title I mathematics specialist. The director of curriculum and instruction assists the leadership team.

The Title I specialists assist classroom teachers by leading professional learning community meetings, reviewing assessment data with the teachers, modeling lessons, and instructing small groups of students.

The district provided professional development on professional learning communities. The principal scheduled common planning time for teachers to meet weekly. According to interviews with focus groups and the principal, Yelle teachers look at student work, analyze formative assessments, benchmark assessment, and MCAS test results, and plan and share strategies for helping students achieve in their professional learning community meetings. In these meetings, staff analyze assessment data continuously in order to identify at-risk students. They also identify students' strengths and needs and use data to place them in flexible instructional groups. The review team observed students grouped for instruction specific to their needs. According to the principal and interviews with administrators and staff, the professional learning community meetings were key to improving teachers' instructional practices and identifying and addressing student needs. The communities provided a forum for teachers to discuss best practices and share instructional material. The principal has a strong ELA curriculum background and shares her expertise at these meetings.

The principal's reorganization plan, supervisory practices, implementation of professional learning communities and respect for all school personnel have contributed to a school culture that is unified and focused on improving student achievement. The Yelle principal has built a culture of collaboration as well as teacher accountability for student success that has contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for students from low-income families and a higher level of achievement for all students.

Student Support Services

A wide network of support programs contribute to improved achievement at Yelle.

Yelle supports student achievement through a wide variety of student support programs. The culture of collaboration fostered by school leaders has led to instructional changes that support student achievement. School staff members told the review team that they ask whether a program is right for a student and do not hesitate to change or adapt programs to meet individual student's needs. They also stated that they always look for alternatives when students are not achieving, adding that they "do whatever it takes" to help students succeed.

There is a strong commitment to inclusion through differentiated instruction and inclusion classrooms. Two inclusion classes are co-taught by a regular educator and a special educator. The teachers co-plan and co-teach. The review team's classroom observations of co-taught classrooms confirmed that the teachers shared instruction and moved about the classroom helping all students. The review team also observed differentiated instructional practices in the classrooms they visited.

Teacher assignments were changed to enable teachers to teach to their strengths. In addition, teachers with demonstrated success in teaching certain student populations are assigned to them for their two years at Yelle. These changes have increased focus and expertise in these areas.

Title I services are provided in both reading and mathematics at Yelle. The Title I mathematics specialist formerly served the two primary schools, but was shifted to Yelle to target mathematics. The Title I model has changed from mostly pull-out to mostly push-in, and according to the director of curriculum and instruction the additional specialist has also changed the manner of instruction. For example, the Title I specialist coached classroom teachers on how to break down released open response questions on the MCAS tests. Title I resources were coordinated with the implementation of the new reading series, *Reading Street.* The *Reading Street* series encompasses kindergarten through grade 5, bringing a targeted focus on reading strategies such as fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and word walls.

Additionally, at the Yelle, Title I teachers respond to data from benchmark testing and provide skills intervention for a period of two weeks after they receive the information. Interviewees stated that communication was an important factor in identifying students needing intervention services, adding that communication takes place early and often among school leaders, coordinators, teachers, and parents. Teachers discuss their documented student concerns with an established Instructional Support Team (IST) team that meets regularly. The IST team suggests intervention strategies and if these strategies are unsuccessful after an implementation period, students may be referred for an evaluation under the special education law.

Yelle support programs are well-organized and effectively utilized by staff, and should be highly effective for all students, including those from low-income families, as suggested by student achievement data. The focused leadership of the principal, commitment of the support team and classroom teachers to inclusion and high expectations, and availability and variety of support programs have contributed to improving the academic achievement of students from low-income families.

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Leadership and Governance

The Norton Public Schools directs its resources toward the goal of higher achievement for all students.

District leaders promote high student achievement in a many ways supporting and enabling all of its schools, including the Henri A. Yelle Elementary School. The district improvement plan provides a blueprint for increasing the achievement for all students. In addition, the achievement, school climate and community partnership goals in the planning documents examined by the review team were student-centered, making students the primary focus of the district's activities. Review of each of the school improvement plans revealed that in all cases, school goals mirror the district goals, laying the foundation for a clearly articulated commitment to raising achievement.

According to interviews by the review team, and corroborated by review of school committee minutes, the superintendent keeps student achievement in the forefront of district conversations in a variety of ways. MCAS tests results are the subject of discussions at school committee meetings several times each year. The annual budget presentation tells the story about improving student achievement. Over several years of limited budgets and reduced resources for education, the district has reallocated available resources as needed with a stated focus on maintaining the quality of instruction. District resources are continually reassessed to meet the needs of students. Principals, district administrators and academic coordinators said that all discussions about the deployment of resources are predicated on raising student achievement. In interviews, school committee members concurred. In addition, administrators stated that their raises are conditioned upon their meeting individual goals and CPI improvement targets.

District administrators have worked in close collaboration with the Yelle principal. District and school administrators told the review team that they have supported the work at Yelle by providing teachers professional development opportunities through federal grant funding. They have also worked with the principal to create a teamed approach to delivering special education services in regular education classrooms. Additionally according to a review of documents and interviews with school committee members and superintendent, non-recurring funding sources such as AARA have been used to augment the ELA and mathematics programs with supplementary materials. The district further supports the school's efforts to raise student achievement by providing a collegial support group for the principal. District administrators and the school principal stated that they are integrally involved in the improvement efforts at the school. The district plans and initiatives provide a framework for school improvement. Principals and teachers told the review team that school staff are encouraged to set a direction and implement strategies to raise student achievement in each school based on the needs of the

school population. Individual schools meet students' needs in a variety of ways resulting in high achievement. The district effectively sets the direction and parameters for improvement efforts that result in higher achievement for all students, particularly students from low-income families.

Communication systems within the district are not contributing as much as possible to effective organization and delivery of improvement efforts.

The district developed, modified, and supported a number of initiatives described in this report in its effort to improve student achievement. During interviews, however, it became apparent that, despite various district efforts to communicate to all of its stakeholders, many of the interviewees were not as well informed about those initiatives as they could have been to make maximum use of the resources provided.

For one example, although the district has a well-articulated professional development plan to support the desired changes in instruction, in interviews teachers were often unaware of professional development opportunities other than tuition reimbursement for courses. There was a professional development committee at the district level that surveyed staff to determine professional development needs that crossed school interests. In each school, however, principals described a more localized professional development mechanism that occurred, according to interviews, predominantly during faculty meetings. Alignment between both parts of the system seemed less connected at some buildings than others.

During other interviews, although teachers and administrators described internal efforts that have significantly improved student achievement, there were fewer examples provided of increased parental participation as part of the overall improvement strategy. Some teachers, in fact, expressed misgivings of the level of community support to the district, citing examples such as a failed Proposition 2½ override and the steady decline in enrollment since 2007. Interviewees at the elementary, middle and high school level described differing levels of parental participation and involvement. Communication with parents was cited by interviewees as one of the barriers needing to be overcome. Teachers and principals told the review team that the loss of unit and team leaders at the elementary and middle school levels respectively had the effect of reducing communication about the implementation of grade level improvement plans. Furthermore, teachers said that the administrative functions of the unit and team leaders had not been assumed by others leaving some important coordinating duties unfulfilled. At the time of the review, the district planned to reinstate Unit/Team leaders for the 2011-2012 school year. According to teachers, professional learning communities helped bridge the gap at the elementary level, but this was not possible at the middle school level where the professional learning communities were not team based.

The review team found that teachers and administrators differed in the depth of understanding of the district goals for student achievement other than simply improving test scores. In interviews, principals were able to clearly articulate the district framework and emphasis for improving student performance. However, although teachers were able to describe improvement efforts related to their grade levels and schools, they were unable to articulate system-wide initiatives.

The development of a shared vision is important in continuing and maximizing the effect of the many strong efforts being made to improve the quality of education in Norton. The team believes that the communication of a shared vision at the Yelle has contributed to its success in lowering the achievement gap, but the challenge of making that happen among many schools in the district has proven to be a more difficult goal to attain completely. The contribution of each member of the community is necessary to maintain the level of effort that continuous improvement requires. Effective communication among parents, teachers, students and community members is a driving force in making sure that everyone understands their role in reaching that shared vision.

Curriculum and Instruction

While many of the classroom instructional practices observed at the Henri A. Yelle School were similar to those observed in other district schools, they differed in several other ways.

The review team observed 42 classrooms, 24 of those at the Yelle, and recorded the presence or absence of 17 characteristics on the ESE Support Learning Walk Characteristics Continuum grouped in three categories: Organization of the Classroom; Instructional Design and Delivery – General; and Instructional Design and Delivery – Higher–Order Thinking. Review team members observed classes at the L. G. Nourse Elementary School and the J. C. Solmonese Elementary School. Both of those schools sent children to the Yelle. They also observed classes at the Norton Middle School, to which Yelle students normally matriculate.

Review team members recorded whether evidence related to examples of practice for each characteristic was solid, partial or not observed for each characteristic within the categories during the time spent in the classroom. Typically, review team members observed classroom instruction for 25 minutes at the beginning, middle, or end of class. The observation results are represented as percentages calculated by summing the number of observations receiving a partially observed or solid rating and dividing by the total number of observations.

Organization of the Classroom includes the characteristics of classroom climate, presence of learning objectives, and how the teacher maximizes the use of classroom time. Review team members observed the tone of the classroom as well as the behavior of students and whether the teacher maintained order and structure. Review team members also looked for evidence of verbal or written references to learning objectives or goals for the class, and observed levels of student engagement, the pace of the class, and the smoothness of transitions. In all of classrooms visited, there was partial or solid evidence of a classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. In all of classrooms visited, there was partial or solid evidence that available classroom time was maximized for learning. This was consistent at both the Yelle and at all of the other buildings visited. One difference between the observed schools, however, was that review team members noted the solid evidence of a daily or class learning objective present in written form in 76 percent of the classrooms visited at the other buildings, but only four percent at the Yelle School. This was not seen as a serious problem by team members, since they commented on the observation of effective and efficient classroom organization, and several

even noted discussions of the class learning objective orally by Yelle classroom teachers. Comments such as "good routines; knew what to do," and "transitions easily, everyone gets down to work quickly" were common.

Instructional Design and Delivery includes the level of teacher content knowledge, instructional techniques, depth of student questioning, pacing of the lesson, differentiation of instruction, in class assessment, and whether opportunities were provided for students to apply their knowledge. The review team found partial or solid evidence of the 11 characteristics of instructional design and delivery in 80 percent of the classes observed. It was in this category, however, where most of the differences in instruction between classrooms at the Yelle and other district buildings appeared.

Seven of the categories in Instructional Design and Delivery are referred to as "general" to distinguish them from the five categories specifically identified as focusing on higher order thinking skills. In five of those categories the review team identified partial or solid evidence in every one of the classrooms visited.

One standard specifically commented on by the review team members was the extent to which academic concepts were linked to students' prior knowledge and experience. Across the district, team members found solid or partial evidence in all of the classrooms. The difference between classroom at the Yelle Elementary School and others, however, was the number of instances of solid evidence identified, with the Yelle outperforming the other district schools by 76 percent to 65 percent. In one math and science class, observers noted questions like "What kinds of things can you see through when you use a flashlight?" In one classroom students brought former readings to illustrate the current story, while in another, students were asked to relate the characteristics of a chosen character to "someone in your life."

Similarly, in looking for alignment of instructional materials with the students' developmental level, the district figures were again impressive at 100 percent demonstrating either partial or solid evidence, but the Yelle led again in observations of solid evidence by 83 to 76 percent. Manipulatives were commonly noted by observers in math and science classes, where students were investigating concepts such as measuring perimeter and classifying objects by light transmission. Sugar cubes, flashlights, rulers and tape measures were used in appropriate investigations. Other language-based classrooms were looking at analyzing previously released MCAS questions, organizing a word wall, or doing activities in a writers' notebook.

In observing the instances where the presentation of content was described as within the students' English proficiency and developmental level, while all of the schools were rated at 100 percent with either partial or solid evidence, the Yelle observations came in at 91 percent solid evidence, as opposed to 65 percent solid at the other buildings. Here observers noted teachers stressing math vocabulary in some classrooms, or focusing on challenging students to identify difficult vocabulary words like "pandemonium," "excruciating," "agony," and "robotic" in classrooms working on ELA.

Solid evidence of the depth of the teachers' content knowledge was identified in 83 percent of the classrooms visited. This number was statistically consistent both at Yelle and the other schools visited.

The delivery of instruction focusing on higher order thinking skills is more difficult to achieve, since it requires more time to carry out, by a teaching staff more trained and sensitized to its importance. Here again, review team members identified solid or partial evidence of teachers asking questions that required students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis or evaluation in 76 percent of the classrooms visited other than at the Yelle Elementary School. At the Yelle, however, this figure was substantially higher at 92 percent. Refocusing student questions for other students to answer, having students restructuring questions, asking 'why might that be?' questions, and asking students to develop a time-line for a story the class was reading were specific examples cited by the classroom observers.

Metacognition, the practice of looking at one's own learning, is thought by educational psychologists to be an important component of problem-solving. Instances of partial or solid evidence of instruction where students were asked to articulate their own thinking and reasoning were identified in other schools at a level of 77 percent of the classrooms visited. That number was 86 percent at the Yelle Elementary School. Working in collaborative groups or teams, one of the 21st Century Skills, was identified in 59 percent of the classrooms visited at the Nourse, Solmonese and Middle School, and at 69 percent of the classrooms visited at the Yelle.

Another category observed by review team members was the percentage of the classrooms visited where opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content were embedded in the lessons. In the other schools, they noted partial or solid evidence in 64 percent of the classrooms. In the Yelle, this characteristic was noted in 73 percent of the classrooms visited. Questions such as "What information did they give me that I didn't need?" and "What other figures can you make using (a specific number) of cubes?" were given as examples.

It is important to note that the presence or absence of a particular characteristic at a particular level is not, in itself, indicative of particularly effective instruction. Since the Yelle is the only district school servicing grades 4 and 5, direct comparisons with other district schools are not appropriate. The review team also recognizes that particular instructional design and delivery skills may be more appropriately used with a particular group or students at a particular developmental stage. And failure to note the presence of a particular characteristic during a classroom visit does not necessarily mean that it was not present before the observer entered the room or after he or she left it, merely that it was not observed during that particular 25 minute period. Such information can and should be used by principals and district staff to confirm their own observations and to add to the data on which they base conclusions, school improvement plans and professional development activities.

The district provides comprehensive structures for curriculum and instruction that support standards-based instruction creating a learning environment focused on student growth and achievement.

The Norton Public Schools curriculum is vertically and horizontally aligned with the state Frameworks. According to an examination of curriculum documents and interviews with administrators and staff, the kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum has a consistent format including essential questions, essential learning, topics, concepts and skills, curriculum framework learning standards, objectives, resources and supplementary materials, and assessment/evidence of student learning. The revision of the ELA curriculum scheduled for completion in August 2011 will align the district curriculum with the Common Core standards and includes suggested lessons in addition to the above components.

The mathematics curriculum revision scheduled for completion by June 2012 will align the district curriculum with the Common Core standards for mathematics. All other curriculum areas were completely revised beginning in 2006–2007 using the district curriculum template. These included science, history/social science, wellness, and world languages. According to administrators and staff, curriculum development and revision is an on-going process. Staff meet by school and grade level to work on the curriculum and gather on professional development release days to compile their drafts and align the standards both horizontally and vertically. Curriculum work continues during the summer funded by grants.

According to documentation, the district also has curriculum maps for kindergarten through grade 12 in all content areas with a consistent format including content, skills, assessment, technology, and other/essential questions. In interviews, staff and administrators said that these maps have helped bring consistency to instruction, leading to improved student achievement.

Interviewees stated and a review of documents confirmed that the district began several substantial initiatives following an examination by the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in 2005–2006. These nearly concurrent initiatives included curriculum review and revision; researching, piloting and selecting standards-based reading and mathematics programs for kindergarten through grade 5; focusing on data analysis; developing and implementing curriculum maps; establishing professional learning communities; offering targeted, embedded professional development; and moving toward more inclusive Title I reading support services support in kindergarten through grade 3, and reading and mathematics services in grades 4 and 5 at Yelle. Prior to the adoption of *Reading Street* and *Math Expression,* programs in the district were neither standards-based nor consistent across the grades. The district has also implemented a standards-based report card effective in the 2009–2010 school year.

According to administrators and staff, the district process for selecting standards-based reading and mathematics programs included researching scientifically based programs; conducting meetings to develop selection criteria; meeting with publishers of a variety of program; using the

criteria to select two programs to pilot; and piloting of the Scott Foresman *Reading Street* and Houghton-Mifflin *Math Expressions* programs. Following the piloting, staff applied the original criteria to finally evaluate the programs and implemented both simultaneously in kindergarten through grades 5. *Reading Street* was implemented in 2007-2008 and *Math Expressions* in 2008–2009. The publishers provided two years of professional development for teachers on the programs in addition to professional development provided by the district. Administrators told the review team that teachers especially at Yelle were finding that their students had a more solid foundation as they progressed through the grades with these programs, resulting in increased achievement. Grade 6 Mathematics teachers at the middle school also told the review team that students have a stronger background in decimals.

According to staff interviews and a review of documents, the district also supports standards-based instruction through the development of professional learning communities; a lesson plan protocol with expectations; elementary grade level meetings; professional development; technology resources; and common strategies, such as looking at student work. Professional learning communities were introduced during the 2009–2010 school year and are most strongly established at the elementary level where staff meet weekly during the day, before school or at lunch. Teachers set the goals and agenda. They discuss ELA and mathematics on alternate weeks with a focus on "digging into data." Professional learning communities are less formal at the middle and high school levels because the time for meeting by content area is limited.

The district has focused professional development on curriculum, differentiated instruction, and Resources for Better Teaching, a required course for new teachers. Much of the professional development at the elementary level is embedded during the day with the district hiring substitutes to release teachers. Principals look for evidence of the classroom implementation of the strategies, methods and techniques learned in professional development.

Staff told the review team that technology is abundant at the elementary level and that most staff were comfortable using it. According to interviewees, the district provides training when new technology becomes available. For example, five teachers at the L.G. Nourse Elementary School received training on the new interactive Epson Bright Link Interactive Smart Boards. Other examples of the provision of technology include Smart Boards, overhead computer projection systems, virtual manipulatives, electronic response systems, computer laptop carts, and computer labs. Staff commented that devices such as the electronic response systems had "changed everything," allowing immediate student response, teacher feedback, and re-teaching or correcting misunderstandings.

While observers saw objectives posted in 76 percent of the classrooms they visited, interviewees stated and documents provided evidence that standards, objectives, and essential questions are an integral part of lesson and unit plans. Elementary teachers place these plans in a document holder on the classroom door for easy access by observers. At all levels, teachers' plans are reviewed by their principals and or the curriculum coordinators and posted on the district Ed-Line, a web-based portal for student and parent interaction with teachers. District documents, teacher homework assignments and resources needed for assignments are also posted on Ed-Line.

Coordinators and principals stated that Essential Question should always be posted in the classroom and that they look for them in walkthroughs.

Administrators supervise and monitor implementation of the standards-based curriculum in walkthroughs, reviews of lesson plans, formal observations, and summative evaluations. Principals have a primary role in data collection and analysis and dissemination of information to staff for informing curriculum changes. Principals also allocate resources including staff to best meet the needs of students and support student growth. Rubrics are used to demonstrate expectations for work and performance quality. The high school has developed written academic expectations by department for reading effectively, writing and communicating effectively, problem-solving, working cooperatively, working independently, accessing information, and demonstrating visual, artistic, and kinesthetic modes of expression.

According to interviewees, the district has set expectations for standards-based instruction at all levels and school improvement plans are all aligned to the district plan. Staff set individual goals for personal development aligned to district goals. Both administrators and staff said that the highest priority goals were setting high expectations for instruction and increasing student achievement. According to interviewees, principals exercise instructional leadership by initiating and leading improvements and gradually releasing responsibility for sustaining them to staff. They added that because district programs and strategies are consistent throughout the grades, students understand the expectations for them. In the observed classrooms, teachers' use of higher level questioning supported a culture where analysis, synthesis, and evaluation were important learning activities.

The district's unified system of curriculum instruction and supports has created a standards-based environment focused on the improvement of student achievement. This system and emphasis has contributed to narrowing of the achievement gap between low-income and non-low-income students at Yelle.

Assessment

The assessment polices and protocols established in the district are comprehensive, and encompass a range of assessment instruments designed to support instructional change to increase student achievement.

According to district documents and interviews with administrators and teachers although there is no written, district-wide policy on the collection, analysis, and use of student achievement results, the district has systematic procedures and central leadership under the direction of the kindergarten through grade 12 director of curriculum and instruction. The district has a system for continuous dissemination of student assessment data for decision-making intended to improve student achievement in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Building principals disseminate student assessment data using TestWiz and Data Warehouse to their teachers. Meetings are held to review this data and plan for instructional adjustments.

The 2006-2010 strategic plan calls for a comprehensive data-driven analysis of student

performance that must analyze data to include the development of measurable student performance goals. The year-four strategic plan update at the close of the 2010 year report cited the achievement of AYP in 2009 both in the aggregate and for all subgroups in both ELA and mathematics as evidence of the success of this initiative.

The district improvement plan (DIP) consists of five goals the first of which is student achievement. This document is reviewed annually and the year-four DIP progress report year for 2009–2010 stated that dedicated systems are now in place for providing training in methods of data collection and analyzing data. Monitoring of growth and examination of data are used to inform instruction. The strategic plan and DIP are working documents used as templates for the school improvement plans. Each has a goal stating that individual schools must analyze data to include development of measurable student performance goals. The district curriculum accommodation plan states that standardized and criterion-referenced assessment data are used to measure student learning and references use of the district-wide common assessments based on the ELA and mathematics programs as an example.

Interviewees described the comprehensive MCAS test analysis process beginning with the receipt of the MCAS test data. The director of curriculum and instruction receives and analyzes the MCAS test data using TestWiz and Data Warehouse software. Following this, the data is sent to building principals, academic coordinators, Title I staff, special education staff, and classroom teachers. At the elementary level, teachers examine the data to inform and adjust instruction during professional learning community meetings. For example, when a weakness in fractions was identified, the district scheduled a course for teachers including free classroom materials. At the middle school level, according to interviewees, the results are sent to instructional teams. These are not subject specific groups, and so the analysis is somewhat different. At the high school level, one of the academic coordinators downloads assessment data into Test Wiz, distributes it to teachers, and is available to go over individual questions. The high school interviewees mentioned going over the student growth figures specifically. In interviews with the review team, administrators and teachers often commented on the excellent grade level collaboration in the district.

According to documents and interviews with administrators, academic coordinators and teachers, benchmark assessments in ELA and mathematics are administered three to eight times annually throughout the district, depending on the grade level. At the kindergarten through grade 5 level, the first baseline benchmark assessment is administered during the first week of school, with principals requesting the data by the end of September. The results are sent electronically to principals, the superintendent, the director of curriculum /instruction, academic coordinators, and special education and Title I teachers. The elementary school teachers created a data wall as a tool to assist the PLCs in reviewing the data. The middle school had just begun using the benchmark indicators during the current year. Interviewees reported that the data was used to provide guidance on the most effective course placement for students the following year, and to re-teach missed information. The high school interviewees reported that the data was used mostly during September to determine the accuracy of course placement decisions, but was also used in making curricular decisions, such as the implementation of double math periods in grade

9 and the acquisition of a new multi-cultural reader.

The director of curriculum and instruction provided the review team with a document entitled *Looking at Data Protocol*. This document explains the step-by-step procedure used by professional learning communities to analyze data, identify areas of weakness, determine possible causes of weaknesses, identify possible solutions, and brainstorm instructional strategies and plans to rectify the problem. The four steps include First Look to identify general strengths and weaknesses; Closer Look to break them down into six categories including areas of concern, who is affected, what is causing the problem, what to do about it, potential road blocks to the solution, and other data sources to turn to; School Wide Look to identify areas of strength and concern, some of the issues involved , and what you can do at your school to support your peers and administrators; and Action Plans to develop instructional strategies, classroom interventions, and other solutions necessary to implement the plans.

This "Cycle of Inquiry" includes generating the data, reviewing the data, drawing conclusions, implementing action plans, and assessing and generating new data. This clear and concise procedure streamlines the process of looking at and analyzing assessment data from multiple sources.

Student self-assessment results are used throughout the district to help students focus on their own learning and take responsibility for their work. After completing an activity, students use exemplars graded one through four to rate their work. They decide where their piece fits on the spectrum and reflect on what is needed to attain a four, the highest rating. Through this process, students evaluate themselves and think critically about the steps necessary to improve their work.

Teachers at the elementary level analyze whole-school writing prompts at professional learning community meetings. Whole-school writing prompts are scored with related rubrics and utilized as part of the assessment matrix. Formative assessments including, but not limited to chapter tests, oral reading fluency, and writing pieces constitute a wide range of assessment information available to teachers and staff. At the middle school level, three benchmark assessments were instituted in 2010-2011. A review of assessment data led to the division of ELA into ELA and literature, an increase in instructional time for mathematics from sixty to seventy minutes and the addition of a half-year class of fun mathematics activities. At the high school level, the MCAS tests and common assessments including mid-term and final exams are used to inform and modify curriculum and instruction.

The effective analysis of data provides the district with an accurate way of determining the effectiveness of instructional design and classroom teaching. In addition, it provides a baseline against which progress can be measured and the effectiveness of programs and innovations can be tracked. The policies and protocols described in documents provided by the district related to student achievement and assessment are detailed and comprehensive. More importantly, according to interviewees and documentation, they are being implemented districtwide contributing to improved student achievement across the system, although interviewees reported varying levels of analysis and use from school to school. Under the direction of the director of curriculum and instruction, all schools have the same vision and goals for student achievement

for all students in the district. The statement often heard by the review team in interviews that "assessments guide instruction in this district" is truly a guiding principal of the Norton Public Schools. The district effectively collects, analyzes, and disseminates data to support school initiatives to improve student achievement, particularly for students from low-income families.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district has an established evaluation system that promotes student achievement, but is only linked to it at the administrative level.

The district has an established evaluation process for administrators and teachers to support the district's goal of improving student achievement. In interviews, administrators said that they submit their measurable goals to the superintendent by October 1 on a form entitled, Statement of Professional Objectives and Goals. They discuss their goals with the superintendent and report on them at mid-year on form entitled, Administrator's Self Evaluation Report. At the end of the year they submit a self-evaluation on the accomplishment of their goals and the superintendent responds to each goal. Principals told the review team that their merit increases are conditioned upon their meeting their goals and their students achieving the CPI improvement targets in ELA and mathematics on the MCAS tests. Principals stated that since their salary increases are based on meeting their goals they could earn a full or partial merit increase or no increase at all.

The review team examined the superintendent's evaluations of principals and found that the principals' annual goals were measurable and addressed student achievement. Some examples of these goals included meeting AYP in mathematics by achieving the state target CPI of 92.2; implementing intervention blocks focused on differentiated instruction and flexible grouping; having each teacher address the needs of struggling students by trying and documenting a minimum of two new techniques on Form C, Faculty Member Self-Evaluation Report.

Teachers prepare three to five measurable goals and objectives related to the district and school goals. By October 15, teachers submit a form entitled, Faculty Member Annual Goals and Objectives. The principals respond to the goals by November 1. During the evaluative year, the teachers prepare a form entitled, Faculty Member Self Evaluation Report and submit it to the principal for comment. Principals observe teachers using a form entitled, Faculty Member Formative Evaluation Report, and enter their summative comments on a form entitled Faculty Member Summative Evaluation Report by June 10. The summative evaluation consisting of a compilation of information from these documents and informal observations is forwarded to the superintendent. In the non-evaluative year, teachers submit their goals and their self-evaluations on the accomplishment of their goals to the principal or their evaluator.

The team examined principals' evaluations of teachers. The review team found that teachers' annual goals were measurable and addressed student achievement. Some examples of these goals follow: "I will administer DIBELS to assess student strengths and weaknesses and then use data to differentiate instruction within the classroom." "I will work cooperatively with my partner teachers to plan and implement regular guided reading groups and use Baseline and Benchmark

results to guide grouping and instruction." "I would like to use center activities at least two times per week, and student progress can be noted by formal and informal observations." In focus groups teachers told the review team that the goals were helpful because they promoted self-reflection and helped them to realize what they were doing well and needed to improve.

According to interviews with administrators and teachers and a review of the documents, professional status teachers are evaluated every two years and non-professional status teachers are evaluated every year until they attain professional status. The teachers' association and the school district agreed to evaluate teachers according to the Professional Teaching Standards for the Norton Public Schools. The district's evaluation procedures are in compliance with 603 CMR 35.0. The teachers' evaluation form, "Form B" as included on the collective bargaining agreement, did not address the teacher's ability to influence student achievement. There was an opportunity for the evaluator to check-off and comment on "seeks and uses the input of various resources," but it did not appear that this phrase was being interpreted by evaluators to including student achievement results. In addition, there was no reference to the implementation of instructional design or teaching strategies introduced during professional development activities. The review team examined 32 teacher personnel files, and found that the evaluations were timely for 28 of the teachers. The evaluations for 31 teachers were endorsed, 29 were aligned with Principles of Effective Teaching, 30 were informative, 19 were instructive, and 8 had recommendations for professional development.

The self-evaluation component provides staff an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishment of its goals and evaluate the effectiveness of its practices. The summative evaluations are informative although fewer of them were instructive. The district's staff evaluation process, as currently designed and implemented, holds teachers and administrators accountable for setting measurable goals that promote individual growth and contribute to improving student achievement. It links administrator performance to increased student achievement, but does not do so for teachers.

Professional development in the district is focused on student achievement, but is limited by available resources in its ability to improve the instructional practices.

According to interviews and documentation, the district professional development planning committee is responsible for planning professional development in Norton. This committee is composed of the direction of curriculum and instruction, director of pupil support services, principals, high school and middle school assistant principals, high school academic coordinators and the literacy and mathematics coaches. In interviews, planning committee members told the review team that they typically met after school in grade level subgroups rather than as a full committee because their schools were dismissed at different times. For example, the high school academic coordinators met monthly with the director of curriculum and instruction to plan professional development offerings.

The district has a professional development calendar listing topics by date and intended audiences. According to the professional development planning committee, the district offers mentor training and a new teacher orientation in August. The time available for professional

development consists of one full professional development day and four early release or late starts for pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Some examples of professional development activities for the 2010-2011 school year are "differentiated instruction," "Handwriting Without Tears," "Writing Across the Curriculum," "Second Step," "bullying," "data monitoring and analysis," "bully blockers," "intervention block training," and "school improvement planning." Technology trainings focus on the use of district technology tools such as FASST Math, a mathematics intervention program for early grades focusing on acquisition of math-facts; ThinkCentral, a classroom management and teaching resource interactive web site created by Houghton-Mifflin primarily for K-6; and SuccessNet, a web-based application from Pearson that provides curriculum and assessment support tools appropriate for K-12 settings. According to the planning team, needs assessment surveys are administered to identify priorities for the next year. They said that their greatest needs continues to be differentiated instruction, technology hardware and software training, co-teaching with special education staff, collaboration, and professional learning communities.

The district's appropriated budget for professional development is approximately 20 percent of the state average. According to 2009 ESE data, Norton expended an average of $44 per pupil compared to the state average of $226 According to the fiscal year 2009 budget, the district had planned to expend $127,210 on professional development. In addition to the budget appropriation, the district utilized ARRA and grant funding to underwrite professional development. For example, a $10,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation provided training in developing hands-on learning using graphic technologies for teachers in grades 4 through 8. This grant was intended to improve science and mathematics achievement. In addition, in FY09 and FY10, the district added additional money from a Title IIA grant to fund professional development activities. According to interviewees, because the budgeted funds are limited, the district's professional development program is directed toward improvement of instructional practices that will result in higher student achievement.

The planning teams provide professional development based on district goals, including providing teachers with content-specific training; training and support in the implementation of new programs; and professional development that addresses pedagogy in order to meet the range of individual needs through strategies for differentiating instruction. Training on differentiating instruction and co-teaching for teachers and staff in pre-school through grade 12 was ongoing during the time of the review.

The district also makes use of the expertise of its staff to provide professional development. For example, the director of curriculum and instruction worked with the schools' professional learning communities and coaches to develop model lessons for teachers in ELA and mathematics. Teachers may subscribe and be reimbursed for courses and workshops with the prior approval of the principal and superintendent. According to interviewees, teachers who have attended conferences or completed courses were eager to share what they had learned with their colleagues. For example, when Title I teachers brought back information on Empowering Writers workshops after attending Title I conferences, the district purchased materials for other teachers to use. Teachers have subsequently requested workshops on expository writing.

Planning committee members and administrators said that the professional learning communities were critical to improving teachers' instructional practices and identifying and addressing students' needs. Professional learning communities provided an important form of job-embedded professional development. Through professional learning communities, teachers have a forum for looking at student work, discussing student data, sharing best practices and reflecting on student learning. Teachers become learners through these reflective dialogues and also work collectively to improve student achievement. Furthermore, they are able to measure the effectiveness of instruction by looking at student performance data. The director of curriculum and instruction has participated in and facilitated professional learning community discussions and provided teachers with protocols and data tools.

High school teachers and administrators told the review team that professional development is provided for advanced placement course teachers. Through a US history grant, teachers have access to best practices and lesson exchanges.

In an interview with the review team, some middle school staff raised concerns about the adequacy of professional development offerings. They expressed the view that professional development was not targeted to middle school teachers' needs, and went on to say that middle school professional development "seems to be lumped in with the high school." They told the review team that they have had three principals in four years and no longer have team leaders to guide them. They also said that they needed more time to meet and work together to discuss student needs and exchange ideas, since their planning time was inadequate.

The district offers professional development activities that are prioritized to improve student achievement. The offerings do not encompass all grade level needs because of limited funding and limited time scheduled for professional development. A teaching staff that is relatively stable requires supervisory and professional development efforts that are aligned and focused on encouraging growth in instructional planning and strategies as well as assessment tools and skills. The team believes that efforts to further enhance the professional development of its staff would be helpful in improving student achievement.

Student Support Services

The Norton Public School District has a comprehensive network of support services that positively affect student achievement.

The district has structures that support teachers' efforts to raise student achievement. The director of curriculum and instruction leads the district's effort to improve instruction through professional development and data analysis. The district accommodation plan states that students learn best in classrooms that support accommodations for all students' learning styles. This plan cites professional development, collaboration among staff, providing support services within regular classrooms and working closely with parents as instrumentalities.

The district's professional learning communities focus on student achievement by analyzing data and making data-based changes such as differentiating instruction. The director of pupil

personnel services/special education director leads district efforts in this area. For example, the district conducted an independent study of its special education programs and made programmatic changes based on the recommendations. The district has also moved toward a push-in rather than a pull out model and in some instances replaced paraprofessionals with certified special educators.

There are a number of models of academic service provision in kindergarten through grade 12 including small group, pull-out, or in-class, based on the TEAM recommendation. Occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language services are offered districtwide at all grade levels.

The district also offers targeted programs: The STEP program serves students with lower cognitive functioning and significant language-based learning disabilities. This program provides vocational and life skills opportunities as well as an alternative curriculum and small group instruction. The program has five levels: grade 3, grade 4, grade 5, grades 6 through 8, and grades 9 through 12. The district program for students on the autism spectrum currently serves students in classes at two grade spans: kindergarten through grade 3 and grades 5 through 7. Students are taught individually and in small groups. The program is supported by two paraprofessionals who work under the direction of the teachers and accompany students to inclusion and special subject area classes. In fact, all special education programs have the support of paraprofessionals. Students diagnosed with behavioral and emotional disabilities are served districtwide in classes at four grade spans: kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4 and 5, grades 6 through 8 and grades 9 through 12. Students receive small group instruction in a highly structured setting, participate in small group and individual counseling, and are included in the mainstream classes considered appropriate by the TEAM.

In addition to its special education offerings, the district offers other programs. Title I programs provide tutoring support by means of intervention blocks for students identified as most at need. Supplemental materials are also provided. The district monitors the success of these intervention programs through parent surveys, parents' nights, and monitoring MCAS growth, as well as other assessment initiatives described elsewhere in this report. Representatives of the three elementary schools are gathered to review and analyze the data gathered through DIBELS and GRADE assessments, Data Warehouse or Test Wiz analyses. Delivery of Title I support in reading involves reading specialists assigned to each elementary school. At the Nourse, students are grouped using data analysis to identify common needs. Title I teachers provide support in each grade level for up to 3 periods per week. At the Yelle, support is provided through a comprehension skills group that goes into each classroom three times per week. Student participation in this program is determined by performance on benchmark tests. Title I math support is delivered by a single specialist based primarily at Yelle, but shared by both the Yelle and Nourse students.

The Homework Heroes groups offered as a part of the MCAS Academy program is available after school and is seen by interviewees as a mechanism for the improvement of study skills. There is a five-dollar tuition fee, although scholarships are available, and at least one special

education teacher is available one day per week to provide assistance. All teachers stay after school at least one afternoon per week as well. Transportation, however, is not provided by the district, potentially having an impact on student participation. Other interventions include a tuition-based summer school for credit recovery, and instructional support teams (IST) at each building to identify intervention strategies for students identified as in need of assistance for academic, attendance, behavioral, or emotional issues. While the structure differs slightly at each building, the IST considers students referred by teachers or administrators, and interventions are proposed, tried, and evaluated. In some cases, referrals to special education or outside agencies sometimes follow.

According to documentation and interviews, the district has many programs to support the social and emotional well-being of all students. The school psychologist, adjustment counselor and school guidance counselors conduct groups such as lunch bunch and social skills to support students in the school environment.

Yelle offers the Second Step and DARE programs. Anti-bullying policies and programs are well-established both at Yelle, and at the other district schools. For example, anti-bullying posters were evident in the hallways at Yelle and the middle school offers the Bully Guard program. In kindergarten through grade 3, the Karate Guy teaches students about personal responsibility and making good choices. Schoolwide and individual classroom positive incentive programs include citizen of the month, bucket-filling behavior calendar, Terrific Tuesday, and end-of-the- month Friday.

The school psychologist, adjustment counselor and guidance counselors provide social and emotional support for students. The district has established programs to help students make transitions at three junctures: grade 3 to grade 4, grade 5 to grade 6, and grade 8 to grade 9. The transition programs include school visits and orientations for students and their parents. As part of the grade 5 to grade 6 program, grade 6 students correspond with their grade 5 pen pals and later meet with them.

The level of academic, social and emotional support makes a substantial difference to academic success. Students need to be ready to learn, and it is the degree of support that they receive from home and school that help to bring about the state of readiness. The team believes that the district focus on academic achievement and high expectations for all students through a strong network of support services has contributed to the success of students from low-income families.

Financial and Asset Management

The superintendent has had a positive impact on the relationship between the school committee and town finance committee, with a more detailed and comprehensive budget document and presentations.

According to interviewees, the initial development of a document entitled “FY12 Estimated Operating Revenues and Expenditures” and referred to as ‘the control sheet’ provides revenue

estimates from the tax levy and new growth. Other estimated revenues such as Chapter 70 School Aid, local receipts and fund transfers are also determined. The total operating revenue is followed by operating expenditures not subject to appropriation, such as overlay reserve, state and county assessments, and charter school and school choice tuition. Next, operating expenditures subject to Town Meeting approval are subtotaled, including regional vocational and agriculture school assessments, general government town departments, the school department and their fixed and shared expenses. The school district, board of selectmen, finance committee and other town departments are provided an early version of the control sheet. According to interviewees, the town manager provides frequent updates to the finance committee as new information becomes available. However, updated control sheets are not routinely provided to the school department and must be requested according to the school superintendent

The finance committee chairman and former town manager stated in interviews with the review team that they focused on the availability of funds and avoided micromanagement of the school department. In an interview with the review team, a finance committee member described the relationship between the finance committee and school committee "as agreeing to disagree," adding that the finance committee allows the school committee and superintendent to manage the school department.

In an interview, members of the school committee stated that the superintendent has had a positive impact on the relationship between the school committee and the finance committee and had changed it from hostile to supportive. They attributed this change to the superintendent's budget presentation, which included detailed district, school and program function accounts, supplemental financial and program information, and MCAS tests student achievement results. Copies of this comprehensive document are provided to finance committee members, the board of selectmen, and town manager in addition to school committee members. A PowerPoint presentation informed by this document is made to the school committee, governmental bodies and at the public hearing.

During the fiscal year 2012 budget deliberations, the finance committee initially recommended level-funding of the school budget based solely on the bottom line of available town funds. In an interview with the review team, a finance committee member said that there was a second meeting with the school committee and superintendent to review an impact study of the effect of level-funding on the school department. When it became evident that level-funding would result in significant teacher layoffs and increased class sizes, the finance committee reconsidered and added $327,350 to the school department budget to avoid layoffs.

Recommendations

Note on the delay of this report and the currency of these recommendations:
The finalization of this report has been delayed long past the time the Department recognizes would have been desirable. As a result, 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

The Norton Public Schools should consider strengthening both its internal and external communication systems to broaden staff, parental and community participation, further supporting the effective instruction that results in higher achievement for all students.

Although the planning documents in the Norton Public Schools are well-articulated at the district and individual school levels, staff involvement in planning professional development to improve instruction was inconsistent. Teachers expressed varying degrees of knowledge of district initiatives to improve student learning. Additionally, access to professional development to strengthen instruction appears to be equally inconsistent. The elimination of long-standing unit and team leader positions has exacerbated this problem. The district planned to reestablish those positions for the 2011-2012 school year, and the team supports their intention.

Parents did not appear to be intimately involved in the improvement efforts being carried out at each school. Professional learning communities were very valuable at the elementary level, but their impact diminished at the secondary grade levels. They function as an important vehicle for internal communication, and the team believes that increasing their impact at the middle and high school level will bring benefits to students. As Yelle students move through the system their success will depend upon the continuation of the supports that the school and the district currently provide to them and their teachers.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should continue to support improved achievement with the same level of professional development, standards-based resources, and expectations, especially for high level questioning and critical thinking in classrooms as students move into the middle school.

The review team observed forty-two classrooms in grades 2 through 6 in the district with only a small number in grade 6 at the middle school. Classrooms were universally well organized and possessed a positive and respectful atmosphere that the team judged to be conducive to learning. In general, instructional design, delivery and materials were appropriate both for language skills and developmental level of the students. The team found solid evidence of the teachers' content

knowledge in 83 percent of the classes visited. While those results are commendable, they are not unique in Massachusetts schools.

What was more interesting to the review team members was that they observed partial or solid evidence of questions requiring students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in 92 percent of the classes observed, and partial or solid evidence of students explaining their thinking and reasoning in 86 per cent of classes observed. Development of higher order thinking abilities such as these fosters continued growth and achievement for all students, helping to close the achievement gap and contributing to the student's ability to solve problems and acquire other 21st Century Skills.

The impact of an environment that supports and values higher level thinking and questioning and student understanding of the learning goals through posting and review of objectives should lead to improved student growth and achievement. The district should explore all means possible, especially professional development, standards-based resources, evolving systems of data analysis, and communicating high expectations, to encourage the diffusion of these instructional practices not only to the middle school but also throughout the entire district.

Assessment

The Norton Public Schools should consider documenting its assessment data system as a comprehensive district procedure book accessible to all staff.

According to district documents and interviews with administrators and teachers there is no written, district-wide policy on the collection, analysis, and use of student achievement results. The district relies on a document entitled *Looking at Data Protocol*, which is used inconsistently across the district.

The 2006-2010 strategic plan calls for a comprehensive data-driven analysis of student performance that must analyze data to include the development of measurable student performance goals. The year-four strategic plan update at the close of the 2010 year report cited the achievement of AYP in 2009 both in the aggregate and for all subgroups in both ELA and mathematics as evidence of the success of this initiative.

At the present time, teachers compile and analyze student assessment data from common benchmarks administered in core subjects throughout the year. MCAS data is analyzed through TestWiz and Data Warehouse. According to documents and interviews with administrators, academic coordinators and teachers, benchmark assessments in ELA and mathematics are administered three to eight times annually throughout the district, depending on the grade level. Teachers at the elementary level analyze whole-school writing prompts at professional learning community meetings. Whole-school writing prompts are scored with related rubrics and utilized as part of the assessment matrix. Formative assessments including chapter tests, oral reading fluency, and writing pieces constitute a wide range of assessment information available to teachers and staff. At the middle school level, three benchmark assessments were instituted in 2010-2011. A review of assessment data led to the division of ELA into ELA and literature, an

increase in instructional time for mathematics from sixty to seventy minutes and the addition of a half-year class of fun mathematics activities. At the high school level, the MCAS tests and common assessments including mid-term and final exams are used to inform and modify curriculum and instruction.

While customization of some data use and review practices at each level is necessary, the team believes that it would be helpful for the district to document the individual school-based assessment policies, strategies and assessment testing schedules in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 in a concise working document accessible to all stakeholders in the district. The English Language Arts and Math, K-5 Assessment Calendar developed by the district, and the assessment matrix the district completed in preparation for this review are examples of the kind of information that might be included. The written strategies already established within the schools could be centralized and made easily accessible to all staff.

A district wide assessment procedural handbook would ensure that school-based data and assessment teams have common protocols and that all district and school administrators and teaching staff have access to assessment data. Annual updates would keep the document current reflecting changes to improve the use of data to inform instruction. This living document could be maintained and regularly updated by the professional learning communities, serving as a blueprint for assessments while encouraging an environment of collegiality among schools and subject areas.

Written policies and procedures will enable the district to use data purposefully to improve curriculum, instruction, programs, and services that result in high student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should consider fully implementing effective professional learning communities by providing the resources necessary to establish them at all levels.

Although the district has a well-organized and articulated professional development plan that supports changes in teachers' instruction, it has had to limit its offerings because the district budget allocation for professional development is only 20 percent of the state average per pupil expenditure. Professional development time is limited to one full-day and four early release or late start days. Some teachers expressed the view that professional development did not address their needs and that they had too little time for exchanging ideas and planning.

The review team found that administrators and teachers appreciated the value of professional learning communities. Yelle staff have implemented effective professional learning communities and said that they were key to improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The review team recommends that the district consider exploring ways to provide additional professional development on professional learning communities based on evidence of their effectiveness. Furthermore, the review team suggests that the district consider providing more planning time for middle school staff and restoring team leaders to help them implement professional learning communities.

Professional learning communities provide an important form of embedded professional development and are a forum for exchanging ideas, sharing best practices, planning, looking at student work, analyzing data and reflecting on student learning. The district, its teachers and its students would reap numerous benefits from the establishment of effective professional learning communities.

Student Support Services

The district should continue to maintain and expand its student support services.

The Norton Public Schools have high expectations for all students. These expectations are realized in large part because of a comprehensive network of student support services. Title I services make use of outside funding in an effective way at the elementary level. Services provided are data informed and assessed, and delivered to students most in need. Group counseling sessions before school and at lunch time conducted by the school psychologist, adjustment counselor and guidance counselors help support student's social and academic needs. School-based programs such as Second Step, DARE, Bully Guard, Homework Helpers, Terrific Tuesdays, the MCAS Academy and others, help to fill a support need and round out a strong academic program.

The review team commends the district for its highly organized, clearly articulated and flexible support programs that are designed to meet the needs of all learners, including those from low-income families, and recommends that it continue to provide them and expand their availability as extensively as possible.

Finance and Asset Management

The budget approach taken by the superintendent should be used again, as the detailed and comprehensive information provided last year led to some additional funds appropriated for the schools in a tight fiscal context.

Members of the school committee stated that the superintendent has had a positive impact on the relationship between the school committee and the finance committee and had changed it from hostile to supportive. They attributed this change to the superintendent's budget presentation, which included detailed district, school and program function accounts, supplemental financial and program information, and MCAS tests student achievement results.

The finance committee chairman and former town manager stated in interviews with the review team that they focused on the availability of funds and avoided micromanagement of the school department. In an interview with the review team, a finance committee member described the relationship between the finance committee and school committee "as agreeing to disagree," adding that the finance committee allows the school committee and superintendent to manage the school department.

During the fiscal year 2011 budget deliberations, the finance committee discussed whether education should be considered a top priority together with public health and safety. They added that additional funding of the police and fire departments was not at the expense of the school department. During the 2012 budget consideration, the finance committee initially recommended level-funding of the school budget based solely on the bottom line of available town funds. When anticipated revenues were further clarified, however, there was a second meeting with the school committee and superintendent to review an impact study of the effect of level-funding on the school department. When it became evident that level-funding would result in significant teacher layoffs and increased class sizes, the finance committee reconsidered and added $327,350 to the school department budget to avoid layoffs.

Regular communication and an open sharing of information are essential tools in ensuring a positive working relationship between the district and the community. The review team believes that the superintendent and the community officials have attained such a relationship, and recommend that it form the model for future interaction with the town.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Norton Public Schools was conducted from May 2–5, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Magdalene P. Giffune, Leadership and Governance Coordinator

Joanne Grenier, Curriculum and Instruction

Josephine Napolitano, Assessment

Helen Apostolides, Human Resources and Professional Development

Melanie Gallo, Student Support

Dr. Wilfrid Savoie, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Norton financial personnel: town manager, town accountant, town treasurer, and chair of finance committee.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Norton School Committee: chair and three other members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Norton Teachers Association: president and two vice presidents.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Norton Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, and director of pupil personnel services.
- The review team visited the following school(s) in the Norton Public Schools: H. A. Yelle School, grades 4 and 5; Solmonese School, grades 1–3; Nourse School, grade 3; and Norton Middle School, grade 6.
    - During visits to the Yelle School, the review team conducted interviews with principal, Title I staff, and classroom teachers and conducted a focus group with teachers. The review team also conducted 24 classroom observations in ELA, math, art and special education.
    - During visits to the Nourse School, the review team also conducted two classroom visits for different grade 3 ELA.
    - During visits to the Solmonese School, the review team conducted 11 classroom observations in ELA, math, social studies and science.
    - During visits to the Norton Middle School, the review team conducted four classroom observations in grade 6 ELA and math.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
    - District profile data
    - District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)
    - Data from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
    - Latest Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report and any follow-up Mid-cycle Report
    - Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report

- Any District or School Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) or ESE in the past three years
- Teacher's contract, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile

- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
  - Organization chart
  - District Improvement Plan
  - School Improvement Plans
  - School committee policy manual
  - School committee minutes for the past year
  - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
  - Curriculum guide overview
  - K-12 ELA, mathematics, and science curriculum documents
  - High school program of studies
  - Matrix of assessments administered in the district
  - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
  - Descriptions of student support programs
  - Program evaluations
  - Student and Family Handbooks
  - Faculty Handbook
  - Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
  - Teacher certification and qualification information
  - Teacher planning time schedules
  - Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
  - Classroom observation tools not used in the teacher evaluation process

- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Commissioned report on effectiveness of special education programs
- Report to the Town of Norton
- Town Meeting Warrant
- FY12 School Budget and presentation
- FY12 School Budget back up data
- NELMS report for Norton Middle School
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the Henri A. Yelle School visited because it was identified as a "gap-closer" for low-income students:
  - School Improvement Plan
  - Calendar of formative and summative assessments for the school
  - Copies of data analyses/reports used in the school
  - Descriptions of student support programs at the school
  - Student and Family Handbooks for the school
  - Teacher planning time/meeting schedules at the school
  - Classroom observation tools/Learning walk tools used at the school

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Differentiated Needs (Low-Income) Review of the Norton Public Schools, conducted from May 2–5, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
May 2 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association.	May 3 Interviews with district staff and principals; classroom observations in the Henry A. Yelle Elementary School; review of personnel files; focus group with parents; interview with teachers' association; interview with town personnel; school committee interviews.	May 4 School visits; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; teacher focus groups.	May 5 School visits; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2008–2010

Table C1: 2008–2010 Norton Public Schools Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State: by Grade
ELA

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*
Grade 3—District	61	*NA**	60	*NA**	75	*NA**
Grade 3—State	56	*NA**	57	*NA**	63	*NA**
Grade 4—District	46	*48*	67	58	60	52
Grade 4—State	49	*48*	53	50	54	50
Grade 5—District	59	*43*	59	47	72	58
Grade 5—State	61	*51*	63	50	63	50
Grade 6—District	77	*61*	72	55.5	73	54
Grade 6—State	67	*50*	66	50	69	50
Grade 7— District	79	*61*	82	65.5	87	76
Grade 7— State	69	*50*	70	50	72	50
Grade 8— District	82	*46*	80	38	80	35.5
Grade 8— State	75	*49*	78	50	78	50
Grade 10— District	92	---	91	62	93	61.5
Grade 10— State	74	---	81	50	78	50
All Grades— District	70	*52*	72	52	77	57
All Grades—State	64	*50*	67	50	68	50

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.
*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C2: 2008–2010 Norton Public Schools Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State: by Grade
Mathematics

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	*Median SGP*
Grade 3—District	69	*NA**	67	*NA**	76	*NA**
Grade 3—State	61	*NA**	60	*NA**	65	*NA**
Grade 4—District	38	*49*	63	59.5	64	59
Grade 4—State	49	*49*	48	50	48	49
Grade 5—District	48	*42*	46	49.5	70	52
Grade 5—State	52	*51*	54	50	55	50
Grade 6—District	47	*44.5*	59	59	54	48
Grade 6—State	56	*50*	57	50	59	50
Grade 7— District	49	*70.5*	58	72	62	61
Grade 7— State	47	*50*	49	50	53	50
Grade 8— District	51	*47*	46	44	55	49
Grade 8— State	49	*51*	48	50	51	51
Grade 10— District	87	---	82	58	88	67
Grade 10— State	72	---	75	50	75	50
All Grades— District	54	*51*	59	59	66	56
All Grades—State	55	*50*	55	50	59	50

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.
*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C3: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Henri A. Yelle Intermediate School, Norton Public Schools, and State, Compared to All Students
ELA

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*
State Low-Income Students	41	73.2	45.0	45	75.5	45.0	47	76.5	46.0
State All Students	64	85.2	50.0	67	86.5	50.0	68	86.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	55	82.5	46.0	54	85.8	47.0	68	89.2	63.5
District All Students	70	89.3	52.0	72	91.1	52.0	77	92.0	57.0
Henri A. Yelle Low-Income Students	31	75.8	42.5	44	84.5	47.0	61	86.1	70.0
Henri A. Yelle All Students	53	83.5	46.0	64	88.4	51.0	67	87.8	56.5

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C4: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Henri A. Yelle Intermediate School, Norton Public Schools, and State, Compared to All Students
Mathematics

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	*Median SGP*
State Low-Income Students	33	63.1	45.0	33	64.5	44.0	37	67.1	47.0
State All Students	55	77.7	50.0	55	78.5	50.0	59	79.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	33	69.9	48.5	33	70.7	43.5	48	77.1	51.5
District All Students	54	80.3	51.0	59	83.2	59.0	66	85.4	56.0
Henri A. Yelle Low-Income Students	15	65.6	41.5	29	69.6	41.0	54	84.0	51.0
Henri A. Yelle All Students	43	77.4	46.0	55	83.7	54.0	68	88.3	55.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C5: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Henri A. Yelle Intermediate School, Norton Public Schools, and State
ELA**

Grade	Yelle	Norton	State
4	45 (31)	43 (32)	31
5	77 (30)	75 (32)	40

Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.

*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C6: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Henri A. Yelle Intermediate School, Norton Public Schools, and State
Mathematics**

Grade	Yelle	Norton	State
4	49 (31)	47 (32)	28
5	60 (30)	60 (32)	33

Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district.

*Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Key Question 1: To what extent are the conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

1. The Yelle principal has marshaled resources to create a learning environment that fosters high achievement for all students.
2. Instruction at the Henri A. Yelle School is standards-based and consistent with an aligned district-wide curriculum to provide the most efficient access possible to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
3. Yelle teachers use assessment data effectively to inform instruction.
4. The Yelle principal's supervisory and evaluation practices help to promote high achievement for all students.
5. A wide network of support programs contribute to improved achievement at Yelle.

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

1. The Norton Public Schools directs its resources toward the goal of higher achievement for all students.
2. Communication systems within the district are not contributing as much as possible to effective organization and delivery of improvement efforts.
3. While many of the classroom instructional practices observed at the Henri A. Yelle School were similar to those observed in other district schools, they differed in several other ways.
4. The district provides comprehensive structures for curriculum and instruction that support standards-based instruction creating a learning environment focused on student growth and achievement.
5. The assessment polices and protocols established in the district are comprehensive, and encompass a range of assessment instruments designed to support instructional change to increase student achievement.

6. The district has an established evaluation system that promotes student achievement, but is only linked to it at the administrative level.
7. Professional development in the district is focused on student achievement, but is limited by available resources in its ability to improve the instructional practices.
8. The Norton Public School District has a comprehensive network of support services that positively affect student achievement.
9. The superintendent has had a positive impact on the relationship between the school committee and town finance committee, with a more detailed and comprehensive budget document and presentations.

Recommendation Statements:

1. The Norton Public Schools should consider strengthening both its internal and external communication systems to broaden staff, parental and community participation, further supporting the effective instruction that results in higher achievement for all students.
2. The district should continue to support improved achievement with the same level of professional development, standards-based resources, and expectations, especially for high level questioning and critical thinking in classrooms as students move into the middle school.
3. The Norton Public Schools should consider documenting its assessment data system as a comprehensive district procedure book accessible to all staff.
4. The district should consider fully implementing effective professional learning communities by providing the resources necessary to establish them at all levels.
5. The district should continue to maintain and expand its student support services.
6. The budget approach taken by the superintendent should be used again, as the detailed and comprehensive information provided last year led to some additional funds appropriated for the schools in a tight fiscal context.