

District Review Report

Palmer Public Schools

Review conducted March 4–7, 2013



Center for District and School Accountability
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education

Organization of this Report

Palmer Public Schools District Review Overview	1
Palmer Public Schools Review Findings	9
Palmer Public Schools District Review Recommendations	33

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Replay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner
Published August 2013

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an affirmative action employer, is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public. We do not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Inquiries regarding the Department's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the Human Resources Director, 75 Pleasant St., Malden, MA 02148-4906. Phone: 781-338-6105.

© 2013 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Permission is hereby granted to copy any or all parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes. Please credit the "Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education."

This document printed on recycled paper

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



Palmer Public Schools District Review Overview

Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws, district reviews support local school districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness of system wide functions using the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (ESE) six district standards: leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources and professional development, student support, and financial and asset management. Reviews identify systems and practices that may be impeding improvement as well as those most likely to be contributing to positive results.

Districts reviewed in the 2012-2013 school year included those classified into Level 3¹ of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state's six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. Review reports may be used by ESE and the district to establish priority for assistance and make resource allocation decisions.

Methodology

Reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards above. A district review team consisting of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards review documentation, data, and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to individual schools. The team conducts interviews and focus group sessions with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' association representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classroom instructional practice. Subsequent to the on-site review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE. *District review reports focus primarily on the system's most significant strengths and challenges, with an emphasis on identifying areas for improvement.*

Site Visit

The site visit to the Palmer Public Schools was conducted from March 4–7, 2013. The site visit included 32 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 75 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted 3 focus groups with 27 elementary school teachers, 8 middle school teachers, and 10 high school teachers.

The team also conducted visits to all three of the district's schools. The team observed classes at these schools using ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching.

¹ Districts selected were in Level 3 in school year 2012-2013; all served one or more schools among the lowest 20 percent of schools statewide serving common grade levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(2)(a). The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their respective regions were selected for review from among those districts not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A. A district was exempt if another comprehensive review was completed or scheduled within nine months of the review window.

Further information about the review, the site visit schedule, and the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains the instructional inventory—the record of the team’s observations in classrooms.

District Profile

The Palmer Public Schools has an elected town council/town manager form of government. A five-member elected school committee elects its chairman; several school committee members have served for decades. The school committee meets monthly. Its subcommittees for policy, sick-bank, and athletics meet more frequently.

The current superintendent has been in the position since November 2011. Before that he was acting superintendent for several months after having served as the district’s business manager for 13 years. The district leadership team includes the superintendent, a new finance director, a special education director, and the three school principals. The position of director of curriculum was eliminated eight or nine years ago with the expectation that principals would perform the role of educational leaders for their schools. Central office positions have been mostly stable over the past eight or nine years. There are also assistant principals at each school. Department heads at the high school and grade-level team leaders at the middle school are members of the teachers’ bargaining unit. In the current school year (2012–2013) there are 133 teachers in the district.

District enrollment peaked at 2,251 students in 2001 and since then has decreased by 32 percent (716 students). Enrollment reported in 2013 was 1,535 students. Palmer High School (grades 8–12) enrolled 532 students, Converse Middle School (grades 5–7) enrolled 385 students, and Old Mill Pond Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 4) enrolled 618 students. Since 2008, the student population has decreased by 348 students: 2008, 1,883 students; 2009, 1,840 students; 2010, 1,748 students; 2011, 1,619 students; 2012, 1,582 students; and 2013, 1,535 students. Each year, approximately 100-110 students enter Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School, which is adjacent to the high school/elementary school campus.

Student demographics for the 2012-2013 school year are quite different from the state’s demographics for all subgroups. For 2012–2013, the proportion of white students is 89.4 percent, compared with 66.0 percent in the state, African-American/Black students make up 1.8 percent of enrollment, compared with 8.6 percent in the state, and Hispanic/Latino students make up 5.1 percent of enrollment, compared with 16.4 percent in the state. English language learners (ELLs) make up 1.2 percent of the student population, compared with 7.7 percent in the state, and students whose first language is not English make up 3.1 percent of the total enrollment, compared with 17.3 percent in the state. The proportion of students with disabilities is 18.5 percent, compared with 17.0 percent in the state, and the proportion of students from low-income families is 43.9 percent, compared with 37.0 percent statewide.

In fiscal year 2011 total per-pupil in-district expenditures were \$11,745, slightly lower than the median of \$11,853 for 48 K-12 districts of similar size (1,000-1,999 students); see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing & Finance](#). See Table B3 in Appendix B for in-district per-pupil expenditures for fiscal years 2010-2012. Actual net school spending was 2-5 percent above required for several years, but 2.5 percent below in 2012. The district’s fiscal year 2013 projected actual net school spending is 8.2 percent above required (see Table B2 in Appendix B).

Student Performance

Information about student performance includes: (1) the accountability and assistance level of the district, including the reason for the district's level classification; (2) the progress the district and its schools are making toward narrowing proficiency gaps as measured by the Progress and Performance Index (PPI); (3) English language arts (ELA) performance and growth; (4) mathematics performance and growth; (5) science and technology/engineering (STE) performance; (6) annual dropout rates and cohort graduation rates; and (7) suspension rates. Data is reported for the district and for schools and student subgroups that have at least four years of sufficient data and are therefore eligible to be classified into an accountability and assistance level (1-5). "Sufficient data" means that at least 20 students in a district or school or at least 30 students in a subgroup were assessed on ELA and mathematics MCAS tests for the four years under review.

Four-and two-year trend data are provided when possible, in addition to areas in the district and/or its schools demonstrating potentially meaningful gains or declines over these periods. Data on student performance is also available in Appendix B. In both this section and Appendix B, the data reported is the most recent available.

1. The district is Level 3 because the Old Mill Pond School is Level 3.²

A. The Old Mill Pond School is among the lowest performing 20 percent of elementary schools and the school's students with disabilities subgroup is among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups served by elementary schools.³

B. The district's three schools place between the 17th percentile and the 48th percentile based on each school's four-year (2009-2012) achievement and improvement trends relative to other schools serving the same or similar grades: Old Mill Pond (17th percentile of elementary schools); Converse Middle (48th percentile of middle schools); and Palmer High (30th percentile of high schools).

2. The district is not sufficiently narrowing proficiency gaps.

A. The district as a whole is not considered to be making sufficient progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps. This is because the 2012 cumulative PPI for all students and for high needs⁴ students is less than 75 for the district. The

² Due to the district's Level 3 classification, it received a concurrent determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention of "Needs Technical Assistance (NTA)." This serves as an indication that while areas of the district's performance may be positive, one or more schools (or, in the case of a single school district, the district as a whole) may be experiencing poor outcomes for students with disabilities and/or are having compliance issues.

³ A district is classified into the level of its lowest-performing school unless it has been placed in Level 4 or 5 by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education independent of the level of its schools.

⁴ The high needs group is an unduplicated count of all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and Former ELL students, or low income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch).

district's cumulative PPI⁵⁶ is 46 for all students and 46 for high needs students. The district's cumulative PPI for reportable subgroups are: 51 (low income students), 33 (students with disabilities), and 47 (White students).

3. The district's English language arts (ELA) performance is very low⁷ relative to other districts and its growth⁸ is moderate.⁹ There were variations in performance among grades.

A. The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.¹⁰

B. The district did not meet its annual growth targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

⁵The PPI combines multiple measures of performance data (achievement, improvement, and graduation and dropout rates) over multiple years into a single number. All districts, schools, and student subgroups receive an *annual PPI* based on improvement from one year to the next and a *cumulative PPI* between 0 and 100 based on four years of data. A district's, school's or subgroup's cumulative PPI is the average of its annual Progress and Performance Index scores over the four most recent MCAS administrations, weighting recent years the most (1-2-3-4). A cumulative PPI is calculated for a group if it has at least three annual PPIs. If a group is missing an annual PPI for one year, that year is left out of the weighting (e.g., 1-X-3-4). While a group's annual PPI can exceed 100 points, the cumulative PPI is always reported on a 100-point scale.

⁶The cumulative PPI is a *criterion-referenced* measure of a district or school's performance relative to its own targets, irrespective of the performance of other districts or schools. Conversely, school percentiles are *norm-referenced* because schools are being compared to other schools across the state that serve the same or similar grades.

⁷All districts, schools, and subgroups are expected to halve the gap between their level of performance in the year 2011 and 100 percent proficient by the 2016-17 school year in ELA, mathematics, and STE. The Composite Performance Index (CPI), a measure of the extent to which a group of students has progressed towards proficiency, is the state's measure of progress towards this goal. In this report the 2012 CPI is used to compare the performance of districts, schools, and grades in a particular subject for a given year. For districts, for each level of school, and for each grade the CPIs are ordered from lowest to highest and then divided into five equal groups (quintiles) with the corresponding descriptions: "very high", "high", "moderate", "low" or "very low". In their assignment to quintiles single-school districts are treated as schools rather than districts. Quintiles for grades are calculated two ways: using a ranking of all districts' CPIs for a particular grade, and using a ranking of all schools' CPIs for a particular grade. CPI figures derive from the MCAS Report on the Department's School and District Profiles website: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/mcas.aspx.

⁸Massachusetts uses student growth percentiles (SGP) to measure how much a student's or group of students' achievement has grown or changed over time. At the student level, student growth percentiles measure progress by comparing changes in a student's MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar achievement profiles ("academic peers"). Growth at the district, school, and subgroup levels are reported as median SGPs - the middle score when the individual SGPs in a group are ranked from highest to lowest. Median SGPs are reported for ELA and mathematics. In contrast to the CPI, which describes a group's progress toward proficiency based on the group's current level of achievement, the median SGP describes a group's progress in terms of how the achievement of the students in the group changed relative to the prior year as compared to their academic peers. A group demonstrates "moderate" or "typical" growth if the group's median SGP is between the 41st and 60th percentiles.

⁹For ELA trends in the aggregate, see Table B4a in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5a.

¹⁰A district, school, or subgroup is considered to have met its target when its CPI is within 1.5 CPI points of the target.

C. The district earned extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students. It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

D. In 2012 the district demonstrated moderate performance in grades 6 and 10, low performance in grades 5 and 7, and very low performance in grades 3, 4, 8, and overall relative to other districts.

E. In 2012 the district demonstrated high growth in grade 5, moderate performance in grades 6, 7, 10 and overall, and low growth in grades 4 and 8.

F. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful¹¹ gains in grades 6 and 10 and potentially meaningful decline in grades 3 and 7. These gains and declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

G. The 2012 performance of the Old Mill Pond School (PK-4) is low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 3 and potentially meaningful gains in grade 4. Most of the declines in grade 3 were attributable to its performance between 2009 and 2012, and most of the gains in grade 4 were attributed to its performance between 2011 and 2012.

H. The 2012 performance of the Converse Middle School (5-7) is low relative to other middle schools and its growth is moderate.

I. The 2012 performance of Palmer High School (8-12) is high relative to other middle/high schools, but its growth is low.

4. The district's mathematics performance is low relative to other districts and its growth is low.¹²

A. The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

¹¹ The following changes in measures of achievement and growth, either positive or negative, are potentially meaningful, pending further inquiry: CPI (2.5 points); SGP (10 points); percent *Proficient* and *Advanced* (3 percentage points). Changes are more likely to be potentially meaningful for larger groups of students; higher performing groups tend to demonstrate fewer potentially meaningful changes than lower performing groups; and certain subjects and grade levels are more likely to demonstrate potentially meaningful changes than others. A consistent pattern of potentially meaningful change over several consecutive pairs of consecutive years is more likely to be meaningful than changes from one year to another, whether consecutive or not. In this report, a statement of potentially meaningful change is provided when a district, school, grade level, or subgroup demonstrates three or more instances of declines or gains of the amounts specified above in the CPI, SGP, and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* over the last four years, the most recent two years, or both. Any instance of decline of one of the amounts specified above (or more) prevents three or more instances of gain from being considered potentially meaningful, and vice versa.

¹² For mathematics trends in the aggregate, see Table B4b in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5b.

B. The district did not meet its annual growth targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

C. The district did not earn extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for any reportable group. It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

D. In 2012 the district demonstrated moderate performance in grades 8 and 10, low performance in grades 6, 7, and overall, and very low performance in grades 3, 4, and 5 relative to other districts.

E. In 2012 the district demonstrated moderate growth in grades 7 and 10 and low growth in grades 4, 5, 6, 8, and overall.

F. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 and potentially meaningful gains in grades 8 and 10. Because the district serves one grade span per school, in general these trends were mirrored by its schools. These gains were attributable to its performance over both periods.

G. The 2012 performance of the Old Mill Pond School (PK-4) is low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is low. It demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 3 and overall. Declines in grade 3 were attributable to its performance over both periods, and most of the declines in overall performance to its performance between 2009 and 2012.

H. The 2012 performance of Converse Middle School (5-7) is low relative to other middle schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 6, 7, and overall. Most of the declines were attributable to its performance between 2009 and 2012, except for growth, which declined over both time periods.

I. The 2012 performance of Palmer High School (8-12) is high relative to other middle/high schools, but its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful gains in grades 8, 10, and overall.

5. The district's science and technology/engineering (STE) performance is low relative to other districts.¹³

A. The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

B. The district earned extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for all students, high needs students, low income students and White students.

¹³ For STE trends in the aggregate, see Table B4c in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5c.

It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

C. In 2012 the district demonstrated low performance in grades 5, 8, and overall and very low performance in grades 10 relative to other districts.

D. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 8 and 10. Because the district serves one grade span per school, in general these trends were mirrored by Palmer High School. These gains were attributable to its performance over both periods.

E. The 2012 performance of Converse Middle School (5-7) is high relative to other middle schools. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful gains in grade 5 and overall; most of these gains were attributable to its performance between 2009 and 2012.

F. The 2012 performance of Palmer High School (8-12) is moderate relative to other middle/high schools. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 8, 10, and overall. These declines were attributable to both time periods.

6. In 2012, the district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students for the four-year cohort graduation rate, the five-year cohort graduation rate, and the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate.¹⁴ Over the most recent three-year period for which data is available¹⁵, the four-year cohort graduation rate declined, the five-year cohort graduation rate increased, and the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate declined. Over the most recent one-year period for which data is available, the four-year cohort graduation rate increased, the five-year cohort graduation rate declined, and the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate declined.¹⁶

A. Between 2009 and 2012 the four-year cohort graduation rate declined 3.6 percentage points, from 79.2% to 75.6%, a decrease of 4.5 percent. Between 2011 and 2012 it increased 4.8 percentage points, from 70.8% to 75.6%, an increase of 6.8 percent.

¹⁴ All groups (districts, schools, and subgroups) are expected to make steady progress toward a goal of 90 percent for the four-year cohort graduation rate and 95 percent for the five-year rate by the 2016-17 school year. For accountability determinations in any given year, the cohort graduation rate from the prior school year is used. For example, 2012 accountability determinations for the four-year rate use data from 2011; determinations for the five-year rate use data from 2010. Districts, schools, and subgroups are considered to be on target if they meet the state's federally-approved annual targets in a given year for either the four-or five-year cohort graduation rate, whichever is higher.

¹⁵ Note that the 2012 four-year graduation and dropout rates and the 2011 five-year graduation rate will be used in the 2013 accountability determination; the 2011 four-year graduation and dropout rates and the 2010 five-year graduation rate were used in the 2012 determination. See previous footnote.

¹⁶ For annual dropout rate trends from 2009 to 2012, see Table B6 in Appendix B. For cohort graduation rate trends for the last three years available, see Tables B7a and B7b.

B. Between 2008 and 2011 the five-year cohort graduation rate increased 2.3 percentage points, from 74.4% to 76.7%, an increase of 3.1 percent. Between 2010 and 2011 it declined 0.4 percentage points, from 77.1% to 76.7%, a decrease of 0.5 percent.

C. Between 2009 and 2012 the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate declined 0.9 percentage points, from 3.6% to 2.7%, a decrease of 24.7 percent. Between 2011 and 2012 it declined 4.4 percentage points, from 7.1% to 2.7%, a decrease of 61.8 percent.

7. Palmer Public Schools' rate of in-school suspensions in 2011-2012 was significantly lower than the statewide rate¹⁷ and the rate of out-of-school suspensions was significantly higher than the state rate.

A. The rate of in-school suspensions for Palmer was 1.0 percent, a third of the state rate of 3.4 percent. The rate of out-of-school suspensions for Palmer was 8.2 percent, higher than the state rate of 5.4 percent.

B. There was not a significant difference among racial/ethnic groups for in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions¹⁸. However, due to the high overall out-of-school suspension rate all racial/ethnic groups had higher out-of-school suspension rates than the state, except for Asian students and Hispanic/Latino students. The out-of-school-suspension rate was 24.0 percent for African-American/Black students, 0.0 percent for Asian students, 10.2 percent for Hispanic/Latino students, 7.1 percent for Multi-race (not Hispanic or Latino) students, 16.7 percent for Native American students, 14.3 percent for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 7.9 percent for White students.

C. There was not a significant difference between the in-school suspension rates of high needs students and non high needs students (1.4 percent compared to 0.6 percent), low income students and non low income students (1.6 percent compared to 0.5 percent), students with disabilities and students without disabilities (2.0 percent compared to 0.8 percent), and English language learners and non English language learners (0.0 percent compared to 1.0 percent).

D. There was also a significant difference between the rates of out-of-school suspensions for high needs students and non high needs students (12.0 percent compared to 4.4 percent), low income students and non low income students (11.2 percent compared to 6.0 percent), students with disabilities and students without disabilities (20.0 percent compared to 5.7 percent), and English language learners and non English language learners (20.0 percent compared to 8.0 percent).

E. On average students in the Palmer Public Schools missed 2 days per disciplinary action¹⁹, lower than the state average of 3.1.

¹⁷ Statistical significance based on one sample T test. $P \leq .05$

¹⁸ Statistical significance for racial/ethnic groups and other subgroups based on Chi Square. $P \leq .05$

¹⁹ Disciplinary action refers to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, permanent expulsion, removal by an impartial hearing officer to an alternative setting, or removal by school personnel to an alternative setting.

Palmer Public Schools Review Findings

Strengths

Leadership and Governance

1. The superintendent has begun to provide new direction for Palmer by setting superintendent's goals, fostering stronger communication, and encouraging more collaboration.

- A.** Interviews and documents showed that the superintendent has set personal goals for 2013-2014 to address achievement gaps and to strengthen teaching and learning in the district. The school committee adopted his goals as the district goals in February 2013, according to a document posted on the district's website.
 - 1. The superintendent's goals focus on improving Palmer's Progress and Performance Index (PPI) rating, reducing special education costs, and updating technology.
 - 2. The superintendent said that he was requiring that these goals be included in all future School Improvement Plans (SIPs). They will also be linked to teacher goals to improve teaching and learning.
 - 3. The superintendent said that he has been active in developing and moving forward the district's new educator evaluation system as an integral component of narrowing achievement gaps. The district proposal has been accepted by ESE and is being implemented in a phased process.
- B.** Interviews indicated that the superintendent has made communication with stakeholders a priority.
 - 1. The district's new educator evaluation system was presented and clarified to the entire staff at a February in-service meeting. The president of the teachers' association noted the increased communication from the superintendent.
 - 2. Parent council members said that the superintendent has spoken to the parent councils and asked council members to complete parent questionnaires, identifying their view of the district's strengths and weaknesses.
- C.** Various interviews with the superintendent, members of the school committee, teachers' association members, and principals indicated that the superintendent has stressed collaboration across the district.
 - 1. New SIPs are to be developed with participation from administrators, staff, parents, and students, and are linked to district goals, according to the superintendent.
 - 2. Teachers' association members and members of the school committee said that both the new educator evaluation system and the teachers' association collective bargaining agreement were agreed upon during a relatively small number of collaborative sessions.

3. Principals said that the superintendent initiated a districtwide professional development (PD) committee with representation by teachers and principals. Their recommendations have led to increased PD time for next year and a PD focus on district goals.

Impact: Under the leadership of the superintendent, strides have been made in setting goals that can affect student achievement. Efforts to improve communication and collaboration have built a foundation to involve all stakeholders in efforts to increase student success.

2. Under the leadership of the principal and with staff collaboration, a positive cultural shift and focus on improvement have taken place at the Old Mill Pond Elementary School, the district's Level 3 school.

- A. Interviews with the superintendent and teachers indicated that there has been a renewed and intense focus on improving teaching and learning at Old Mill Pond Elementary School.
 1. Teachers are working with ESE's District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) to update mathematics and ELA curriculum and are beginning to teach to the 2011 Massachusetts standards.
 2. ELA strategies, such as Keys to Literacy and Walk to Read, are being put in place to support improvements in reading skills.
 3. Classroom instruction is being monitored through common assessments and "mini-observations" followed by swift and specific instructional feedback.
- B. Classroom observations and interviews with teachers and leaders provided evidence that the elementary school has been infused with a positive energy and new enthusiasm.
 1. Exactly 85 percent of the staff (27 teachers) attended the review's elementary teacher focus group and described the numerous changes in learning expectations and instructional approaches.
 - a. For example, teachers said that the district had started a family literacy program to provide books for 1st and 2nd graders and to encourage parents to read to their children.
 - b. Teachers also said that they had received professional development in inclusion strategies and that there was "a lot of differentiated instruction going on."
 2. Teachers said that through direction and support from the principal and DSAC they knew more about what needed to be done to improve instruction and how to approach it.
 3. In classroom visits review team members consistently found evidence of positive classroom characteristics. (See the Instructional Inventory, Appendix C.)
 - a. For example, in 72 percent of observed elementary classrooms there was clear and consistent evidence that lessons reflected rigor and high expectations.

- b. In 75 percent of observed elementary classrooms review team members found clear and consistent evidence that students were engaged in productive learning routines.
- c. And in 68 percent of observed elementary classrooms there was clear and consistent evidence that students assumed responsibility for their own learning.

Impact: With renewed energy for improving teaching and learning in the Old Mill Pond Elementary School and focused collaboration between educators and the DSAC, curricula and instruction are being strengthened to promote higher levels of student achievement, though more work is needed to align curriculum with the 2011 state standards and more training is needed for teachers on instructional practice including differentiation.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. In several instances district and school personnel have demonstrated dedication in their efforts to improve student learning and understanding.

In focus groups, teachers described the following efforts:

- A. The high school math department initiated an articulation meeting with the middle school seventh grade math teacher so that learning expectations could be communicated and clarified.
- B. While a common *unit* design template (Understanding by Design) is required at the elementary and high schools, some teachers at both schools have started using Understanding by Design's *lesson* design template, which is not required, to promote better student understanding.
- C. The elementary school now uses data to target literacy instruction in the Walk to Read program. Assessment data is used to identify fluid instructional grouping based on shared learning needs, according to interviewees.
- D. High school students noted how guidance counselors and most teachers supported students well and were highly accessible.

Impact: These educators' dedication to students' needs, to high expectations, and to their own professional growth contributes to a supportive and cohesive learning environment for students.

Assessment

4. The design of the district's assessment system overall is fairly balanced and comprehensive.

- A. Interviews and documents provided evidence that the elementary school is building capacity to use multiple assessment formats and assessment data to measure and understand student progress, guide instructional and

curricular decisions, and inform student grouping. This is especially evident in the Walk to Read program currently implemented through grade 2.

1. Kindergarten ELA assessments include language readiness and beginning reading assessments administered two or three times a year, depending on skill level.
 2. Benchmark assessments include Star Early Literacy (K1), Star Reading (grades 1-4), and Star Math (K-4); these are given two or three times a year or more frequently when needed. Benchmarks measure and monitor progress as well as inform the composition of fluid reading groups. Other benchmark and summative assessments such as quizzes and chapter and unit tests are developed by teachers or derived from instructional programs (e.g., *Everyday Math*).
 3. DRA assessments (K-2) and DIBELS (through grade 2 at teachers' discretion) are also used formatively to progress-monitor students' literacy skills and help define reading groups.
 4. Elementary teachers were observed using on-the-spot formative assessments in nearly two-thirds of observed classrooms (65 percent) during the site visit.
 5. Performance assessments include common grade-level writing prompts used for the *Six Traits of Writing* program in K-4 and mock MCAS long compositions to assess writing skills in grade 4. MCAS writing rubrics guide scoring. Students also complete book reports, projects, oral presentations using rubrics and sometimes use formative assessments such as exit slips.
- B.** Interviewees described a variety of assessments at the middle school to assess student progress and achievement and inform teachers' instructional decisions. (Note: there is one middle school teacher for each subject at each grade level; this makes collaboration and discussion difficult.)
1. Star Math and Star Reading are benchmark assessments given three times a year. Results are emailed to team leaders who share them with teachers at data review meetings where teachers discuss student progress and revisions to teaching strategies and curriculum.
 2. Summative exams at the middle school include lab reports in science, chapter and unit tests, and quarterly examinations developed by each subject teacher or derived from textbooks. Quarterly examinations are supposed to be turned in to the administration.
 3. An administrator noted that middle-school teachers "did not have [use] good formative assessments." Teachers were observed using on-the-spot formative assessments in only one-third of visited middle-school classrooms (33 percent).
 4. Interviewees described using informative classroom assessment techniques such as "thumbs up" as well as performance-based assessments such as projects, research papers in grade 7, journals, notebooks, and computerized accelerated-reader tests in English.
 5. The middle school does not have a formal writing program. ELA teachers (one per grade level) design their own writing assignments and assessments based on MCAS rubrics. A team leader noted that students

sometimes created rubrics. Students also practice writing answers to MCAS-like open-response questions and sometimes students create open-response questions.

- C. According to interviews and documents, the high school has multiple assessment formats in addition to standardized tests. Classroom assessments are mainly used to measure student achievement and sometimes to inform instructional and curricular decisions. Many high-school classes are singletons, which precludes much shared decision-making.
1. High-school students take a number of standardized achievement tests: PSATs in Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing (grades 10 and 11), SAT1 (taken by approximately 75 percent of students in grades 11 and 12), and AP tests in nine content areas (grades 11 and 12). The guidance director shares SAT results with teachers and the school committee.
 2. Star Reading and Star Math are administered to students in grades 8 through 10 twice a year. Results are shared with teachers by department who use them to understand students' learning needs and strategize about instructional choices and modifications to curriculum.
 3. Final exams are administered each term.²⁰ There are few common final exams because most courses are singletons. The same teacher teaches multiple section courses and may give a common exam or a portion of common questions to all sections.
 4. Teachers administer various other formative, summative, and performance-based assessments including essays, research papers, journals, speeches, problem-solving exercises, projects, writing prompts, and unit tests. Because most classes are singletons, results are teacher/class specific; the team found little evidence that teachers frequently shared or discussed results.
- D. Teachers were observed using on-the-spot formative assessments in approximately one-third of observed classrooms (35 percent).
- E. Although there are variations in degree by school, in general, principals disaggregate MCAS results and distribute analyses to regular and special education teachers.
1. Teachers discuss MCAS analyses and other data in grade-level, team, or department meetings, sometimes with leaders, to understand strengths and weaknesses, improve instruction, and modify curriculum.
 2. Teachers and principals described using MCAS results to triangulate data to identify low performing students who need support and to adjust instruction and fine-tune curriculum.
 3. There are after-school and summer MCAS classes for high-school students who are at risk of not achieving proficiency on MCAS tests and MCAS practice is embedded in course work for all students, according to administrators.
 4. The guidance director shares MCAS results by content area with the school committee and departments. At

²⁰ The high school operates in a large block system (84 minute blocks) with two full terms each year.

a monthly department meeting after results have been received, teachers discuss MCAS scores focusing on strengths and weaknesses and identifying at-risk students. They develop revisions to teaching strategies and then follow up at a subsequent department meeting.

Impact: Because the schools administer multiple forms of assessments, they have some excellent data to guide improvement decisions.

Human Resources Management and Professional Development

5. The district has adopted and began implementing a new educator evaluation system in 2012–2013 as required for Race to the Top districts.

- A. At the time of the review the district had begun to implement the new educator evaluation system, with plans to evaluate half of its teaching staff by June 2013, as expected for districts participating in the Race to the Top program.
- B. The district adopted ESE’s model contract language in a collaborative manner and with minor changes.
 - 1. The model contract language is part of the negotiated Agreement between the Palmer School Committee and the Palmer Teachers’ Association, September 1, 2012 through August 31, 2015. (See Appendix E1 of the Agreement.)
 - 2. The superintendent involved administrators, teachers, and association leadership in the adoption process, according to administrators and members of the teachers’ association.
 - 3. As part of its new system, the district was in the process of developing an instructional observation rubric using a format designed by Kim Marshall (who has provided professional development in the district), modifying the model rubric language.
- C. The district is conducting ongoing training on the new evaluation system.
 - 1. Teachers 21 has conducted an initial professional development activity for the leadership team and teachers. At the time of the onsite there were plans for 12 additional training sessions with Teachers 21 to support the new educator evaluation system and with Kim Marshall to develop and implement the new instructional observation rubric.
 - 2. The new educator evaluation system is perceived by the superintendent as an important component in the district’s efforts to improve student achievement.
- D. The district is implementing the new educator evaluation system in a phased approach. In the 2012–2013 school year, all teachers are considered to be on a one-year plan; they have all completed a self-assessment and

written goals. To establish the two-year cycle, half of the teachers will receive a summative evaluation at the end of the current year. The primary focus for the current school year is on the effective delivery of instruction.

1. In the 2012-2013 school year, according to the superintendent, principals completed self-assessments and the superintendent reviewed them; the superintendent allowed them to be considered as the principals' evaluations. The superintendent also completed a self-assessment.
 2. At the time of the review, administrators said that in the 2013-2014 school year the two-year plan would be initiated with formative assessments after one year.
 3. The superintendent expressed the opinion that successful implementation of the new evaluation system will depend on principals using the soon-to-be-completed instructional observation rubric. This will provide evidence to support evaluation ratings. The superintendent also said that he expected each principal to set aside 20-30 minutes each day to do 2 or 3 observations.
- E.** Elementary teachers said that the 10 to 20 minute "mini-observations" conducted by the principal helped monitor and improve the quality of teaching. They said that these walkthroughs, followed by quick feedback via email or discussion on a focused topic, or both, were both positive and instructive.
- F.** Part of the superintendent's first goal is to have all schools attain an accountability rating of at least Level 2. He said that he is relying heavily on the implementation of the educator evaluation system to achieve this.
1. A key intent expressed by the superintendent was that every goal at every level be linked to improving student achievement. All School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are to be aligned to district goals (the superintendent's goals were adopted by the school committee as the district's goals in February 2013) and be focused on teaching and learning.
 2. The superintendent's implementation timeline for principals' goal setting included drafting SIPs between March and June 2013 and their own evaluation goals by June 2013.
 3. The superintendent said that he envisioned the completion and alignment of all goals for SIPs, principals, and teachers by September 2013.
- G.** At the time of the review negotiations were continuing to establish clear and mutually understood criteria for districtwide teacher performance ratings.

Impact: If the implementation of the newly adopted educator evaluation system is carefully monitored and supported, the system is likely to lead to increased professional development and improved performance for teachers, stronger evaluative skills for administrators, and ultimately a coherent districtwide focus on data-driven, effective instruction. This can enhance the likelihood of improvements in student achievement.

6. The district has established a Professional Development Committee to provide a coherent and focused approach to professional development once goals have been aligned across the district.

- A. The Professional Development Committee is composed of teachers and administrators. Members include the superintendent, principals, the special education director, the vice-president of the Palmer Teachers' Association, and one teacher representative from each school chosen by their peers, according to administrators and teachers' association members.
- B. The Professional Development Committee has a retreat in August and then meets the second Monday of every month throughout the year. Meetings take place after school at which time all proposals submitted are collaboratively reviewed. Alignment to improvement goals is a primary criterion for approval of a professional development activity by the committee, according to the superintendent.
- C. Principals noted that teacher representation on the Professional Development Committee is valuable to the process.
- D. The Professional Development Committee added professional development days to the school schedule. The intent is to link professional development programs with improvement goals once they are established and approved.
- E. District principals expressed the opinion that the process was working well, but added that as the Professional Development Committee continued to approve offerings, connection to goals would be increasingly important.

Impact: Once the goals for the superintendent, the district, the principals, and the schools have been aligned, the Professional Development Committee will be better positioned to collaboratively focus district professional development efforts on goal attainment. This can lead to improved instruction and improved student achievement.

Student Support

7. The district is beginning to address achievement gaps using data from MCAS and STAR Math and Reading to identify students performing below grade level and to provide supplemental services for learning or behavioral needs.

- A. In all three schools, according to interviewees, teams look at multiple sources of data to identify students who need targeted interventions in the regular education program or placement in a continuum of special education programs.
- B. At Old Mill Pond Elementary School there is a diverse core of academic services options.
 - 1. Students identified by data as performing below grade level are referred to Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs).
 - 2. If a student's issues are language or learning related, the TAT designs strategies to provide targeted

responses to interventions (RTI) that last between 6 and 22 weeks.

3. RTI services may include speech and language services, Reading Recovery, Soar to Success Reading, Project READ, or math skill building programs.
- C. At the Converse Middle School the principal and teachers look at MCAS and STAR test data to identify students with achievement gaps that appear related to learning challenges.
1. Identified students are referred to TATs, who make a recommendation for supplemental services.
 2. Supplemental services can include tutoring during the scheduled X Block, Title I Reading interventions, or placement in a continuum of special education services.
- D. At the elementary and middle schools, if the TAT identifies behavioral issues, a behaviorist administers a Functional Behavioral Assessment and initiates a plan that may include academic monitoring or social skills training with the guidance staff.
- E. At Palmer High School (PHS), administrators and teachers look at MCAS data to identify students performing below grade level and help them individually.
1. The PHS TAT and the guidance staff review a student's records and develop an Individualized Education Program or a Section 504 plan if needed.
 2. At PHS, available services are mainly MCAS preparation classes or a continuum of special education placements.

Impact: As a result of efforts to use multiple forms of data to identify students with learning or behavior challenges, a variety of learning and behavioral programs are being developed to offer individualized or group services to address specific student needs.

8. The district is attempting to support students with more severe physical, intellectual, social emotional, language or learning challenges within the district.

- A. There are districtwide "Alternative Education" programs designed to promote students' social and emotional development and address behavioral needs at all three levels, according to an administrator.²¹
- B. Interviews and observations showed that there are comprehensive attempts in the district to meet the needs of students with severe developmental disabilities through life skills training programs at the elementary, middle, and high schools.
- C. Students' Individualized Education Programs may include a life skills curriculum where instruction is individualized in literacy and math and other developmental areas.

²¹ These alternative education programs have about 12 students, 1 teacher, and 1-2 paraprofessionals. They offer behavioral or mental health services along with personalized instruction, small group work, and counseling support.

- D. Behavioral modification strategies are used to teach social skills and to address social and emotional or other needs. Related services for speech, language, and physical and occupational therapy are provided in this setting.

Impact: As a result of trying to serve students with severe disabilities in-district in substantially separate programs, the district has to have in place the smaller classes, more specialized educators, and more specialized educational resources required by those programs.

9. The district has taken steps to promote more rigor and higher expectations at the high school.

- A. With targeted grant funding, the high school has increased the number of Honors and AP classes that it offers and increased enrollment in AP classes. Parents on the school council mentioned to the review team the increase in the numbers of AP classes.
 1. According to administrators and students, enrollment in AP courses has increased—from 15 to 125 in two years. The number of AP test takers in the district has increased steadily from 25 in 2009 to 93 in 2012 according to ESE data.
 2. Through the use of grant funds from the Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI), high school teachers have been trained to teach AP classes, learning skills that encourage higher-order thinking and deeper academic work. These skills are transferable to instruction in the regular education program.
- B. Additional programs for talented high school students have been developed. Interested and capable students can take college courses for credit through the dual enrollment in hybrid and online courses. Options include: Gateway to College Program with Holyoke Community College; a College Board online program for college skill development; and independent studies with online offerings through other Massachusetts college courses including MIT and the University of Massachusetts.

Impact: By offering more rigorous and enriching classes and providing dual enrollment opportunities, the high school is helping more students develop higher-order thinking skills and become college and career ready.

Financial and Asset Management

10. All financial systems follow sound business practices. The small business office clerical staff is qualified and the review found no instances of material weaknesses or non-compliance.

- A. The business office under the finance director consists of only two positions, a payroll clerk and an accounts payable clerk.
- B. All purchases are first reviewed by the accounts payable clerk for availability of funds and correct use of the account and are then approved by the finance director and the superintendent;
- C. A sample review of accounts payable records found appropriate documentation.

- D. For payroll, the district uses MUNIS financial software connected to the town's financial system, which handles the paychecks and direct deposits, and postings to the general ledger.

Impact: Managing the district's finances with so few people represents an efficient use of scarce resources.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

It is important to note that district review reports prioritize identifying challenges and areas for growth in order to promote a cycle of continuous improvement; the report deliberately describes the district's challenges and concerns in greater detail than the strengths identified during the review.

Leadership and Governance

11. The district does not have the districtwide leadership for curriculum, instruction, and assessment necessary to move the district forward in these areas.

- A. The district does not have a leader with systemwide responsibility to develop, organize, implement, coordinate, and evaluate curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure that all students can succeed.
 - 1. The districtwide curriculum coordinator position was eliminated more than seven years ago. Also, two teachers at the middle school held stipended positions for ELA and mathematics coordination. When these teachers retired nine years ago the positions were not filled because of budget constraints.
 - 2. Principals said that these positions held curriculum pieces together for teachers and teams and they valued these positions.
- B. Interviews and documents provided evidence that critical elements of curriculum development and articulation are not monitored systemically.
 - 1. High school department chairs and middle school team leaders said that vertical articulation of the curriculum is a problem and that more time is needed for curriculum and assessment work.
 - 2. Administrators noted that a consistent and reliable curriculum review process is needed.
- C. The district does not have a districtwide leader to work collaboratively with other leaders and teachers to develop a framework of research-based, high-quality teaching.
- D. Classroom observations conducted by the review team identified instructional concerns, particularly at the middle school and high school. (See the Instructional Inventory, Appendix C.)
 - 1. At the middle and high school, the review team saw clear and consistent evidence that lessons demonstrated rigor and high expectations in only 40 percent and 45 percent, respectively, of classrooms

visited. Review team members found clear and consistent evidence that students were engaged in challenging academic tasks in only 31 percent of observed middle school classrooms and 29 percent of visited high school classes. Clear and consistent evidence of conducting frequent formative assessments to check for understanding was seen in only 33 percent of the visited middle school classrooms and 35 percent of the visited high school classes.

2. At the middle school, the low incidence of clear and consistent evidence of the communication of clear grade-appropriate learning objectives (0 percent of visited classes) and pacing lessons to engage all students and promote understanding (19 percent of visited classes) surfaced as a concern.
- E. The principals said that they and the superintendent share responsibility for monitoring and supporting instruction. School administrators said that they did the best they could with the resources available using faculty meetings, grade-level, team, and department meetings for this work. However, each of these leaders has other pressing leadership, administrative, supervisory, and evaluative responsibilities.
- F. Achievement results show that the district as a whole and its schools are not making adequate progress on a number of measures.
1. The district's Composite Performance Index (CPI) remained below the state in ELA and math from 2008-2012. It was slightly above the state in science in some years, but in 2012 the science gap with the state was -1.6 points. See ESE's [District Analysis and Review Tool](#), Achievement Gap tab.
 2. In 2012, the district was not considered to be making sufficient progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps. This is because the 2012 cumulative Progress and Performance Index for all students and high-needs students was less than 75 for the district. (See the second paragraph of the Student Performance section above.)
 3. Of particular concern were results for students with disabilities, who had proficiency rates ten points or more below their peers statewide in ELA, math, and science in 2012. See ESE's [District Analysis and Review Tool](#), Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment tab (select for Students with Disabilities).

Impact: Principals' responsibility for instruction and curricular leadership at their own schools in addition to other pressing responsibilities has meant uncoordinated systems and multiple disconnected priorities. Without strong districtwide leadership and oversight for curriculum, instruction, and assessment, it is difficult to ensure a complete, vertically and horizontally aligned curriculum, and unlikely that student achievement will be substantially improved.

12. The school committee has adopted the superintendent's personal goals as the district goals. The district does not have a districtwide strategic plan or a fully developed District Improvement Plan (DIP) to guide long-term strategy, goal setting, and improvement planning.

- A. As currently configured, the district's goals (not a documented plan) duplicate the superintendent's personal goals.

1. Although the superintendent's goals address several accountability targets and other district needs, they are not a bona fide improvement plan developed by key stakeholders and addressing foundational needs outlined by appropriate components.
 2. Usually, a DIP prioritizes improvement goals over multiple years and outlines multi-year strategies and actions needed to meet those goals. The superintendent's goals are then derived from the DIP so that his goals support the attainment of the district's goals.
- B.** The district has not created and implemented a collaborative planning process to develop district and school improvement plans that includes input from key stakeholders, according to interviewees.
- C.** The superintendent told the review team that the district's last strategic plan ended six years ago. School committee members and the superintendent expressed the view in interviews that given the district's limited resources, it was unrealistic to plan for more than one year at a time or to plan more strategically.

Impact: Without a more long-term, comprehensive improvement plan to detail how the district will strategize and marshal resources to improve teaching and learning for all students, the district cannot chart a course toward systemic improvement.

Curriculum and Instruction

13. The district does not have a documented and shared process for curriculum development and continuous curriculum review.

- A.** Administrators, teachers, and department heads said that curriculum development and revision was school based and that the district did not have a formal process for curriculum review and accountability systemwide.
1. Teachers expressed the need for a consistent and reliable curriculum review process and time to complete the necessary work.
 2. The elementary and middle school principals said that they were responsible for curriculum development and review at their respective levels.
 3. High school department chairs are responsible for curriculum development and revision for grades 8-12. Some teachers have informally assumed this responsibility for their courses' curriculum maps.
- B.** At the elementary and middle levels, the document review by the team showed that aligning district curriculum with current state frameworks in English language arts and literacy, mathematics, and science, technology, and engineering was a work in progress, supported by the Pioneer Valley DSAC.
- C.** Curriculum map templates for K-12 ELA and mathematics and grades 8-12 science include the essential components of a comprehensive curriculum and are in various stages of development.
- D.** A document review by the team also showed that K-12 science curricula learning standards are aligned with the

2006 Massachusetts Science Technology and Engineering framework. K-7 documents do not have several essential components.

Impact: Without a clearly documented and articulated process for curriculum development and review, along with systematic monitoring of curriculum coverage and alignment, the district cannot ensure that curriculum content and implementation are guaranteed and viable for all students or ensure that all students have access to the full curriculum.

14. Administrators and teachers do not have a common understanding of the district’s expectations for effective instruction, and teachers are not teaching in accordance with a shared, research-based instructional model.

- A. Although Understanding by Design (UBD) has been used at various levels, administrators and teachers, when asked, did not indicate that there is a single, districtwide description of “non-negotiables” in the classroom.
- B. Teachers said that there was not consistent pursuit by all teachers of recommended instructional approaches. The review team also heard from teachers that there were “no real, prevalent instructional models” at the middle school. According to one administrator, the UBD design has been “slow to implement” at the high school.
- C. Teachers do not use a common lesson framework that provides clarity in the use of good practices, according to administrators and teachers.
 - 1. Though some teachers at the elementary and high schools have on their own initiative begun to use the UBD lesson template (see Curriculum and Instruction finding under Strengths, above), teachers are not required to use lesson templates, and not all do.
- D. Teachers across the district do not have consistent, frequent, and adequate opportunities to engage in conversations about good instructional practices.
 - 1. Elementary teachers reported regular opportunities for professional growth and discussion involving student achievement and progress during faculty meetings, during grade-level meetings with special education participation, and during common planning time for 30 minutes each week and an additional 60 minutes per month. Examples of outcomes of these meetings include restructuring Walk to Read groups, development of common assessments, and common writing assignments.
 - 2. While there is common planning or team time at the middle school, according to teachers, there is little opportunity to reflect on good practice. Meeting time is often taken up with administrative issues, IEP meetings, and parent requests.
 - 3. High school teachers said that they met for one hour once a month in departments.

Impact: Without a shared instructional model promoted by regular monitoring and support of instruction, with adequate time to discuss it, the district cannot ensure that students will consistently have access to good teaching that meets their diverse learning needs and optimizes their potential.

15. The quality of instruction in 63 observed classrooms was uneven and did not consistently reflect research-based best practices.

The team observed 63 classes throughout the district: 23 at the high school, 18 at the middle school, and 22 at the elementary school. The team observed 22 ELA classes, 9 mathematics classes, and 32 classes in other subject areas. Among the classes observed were 23 special education classes, 0 ELL classes, and 0 career/technical education classes. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. (Please see Instructional Inventory results in Appendix C.)

- A. The review team found the elements of an optimal learning environment to be inconsistently in place in observed classes across the district.
 - 1. The review team found clear and consistent evidence that behavioral disruptions, if present, were managed effectively and equitably in 70 percent of elementary, 67 percent of middle-school, and 39 percent of high-school classrooms visited.
 - 2. Lessons reflected rigor and high expectations clearly and consistently in 72 percent of elementary, 40 percent of middle-school, and 45 percent of high-school classrooms observed.
 - 3. The review team noted clear and consistent evidence of classroom routines, rituals, and appropriate interactions that create a safe intellectual environment in which students take academic risks in 84 percent of elementary, 57 percent of middle-school, and 45 percent of high-school classrooms visited.
 - 4. Of observed lessons, the review team found clear and consistent evidence that 50 percent of elementary, 53 percent of middle-, and 39 percent of high-school classrooms provided students with multiple resources to meet their diverse learning needs.
- B. Observed instructional practices were inconsistent across grade levels and, in general, did not strongly reflect elements of good instructional design and implementation or promote higher-order thinking.
 - 1. Clear and consistent evidence of learning objectives aligned to state standards was observed in 65 percent of elementary lessons, 0 percent of middle-school lessons, and 32 percent of high-school lessons.
 - 2. According to the team's observations, 32 percent of all classrooms showed clear and consistent evidence of students engaging in inquiry, exploration, application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of concepts to demonstrate higher-order thinking. The absence of these characteristics was noted in 48 percent of observed classrooms.
 - 3. The use of varied questioning techniques that require or seek thoughtful responses and promote deeper understanding was observed at lower rates at the secondary levels. This characteristic was clearly and consistently observed in 50 percent of elementary lessons, 17 percent of middle-school lessons, and 18 percent of observed high-school lessons.

4. Of observed elementary classrooms, 45 percent implemented appropriate and varied strategies to meet students' diverse learning needs while 25 percent of middle-school lessons and 27 percent of high-school lessons reflected this practice.
 5. Overall 42 percent of observed lessons were paced to engage all students and promote understanding.
 6. Clear and consistent evidence of the use of formative assessments to check for student understanding and inform instruction was noted in 65 percent of observed elementary-school classrooms. This practice was observed clearly and consistently in 33 percent of middle-school and 35 percent of high-school lessons.
 7. The review team found clear and consistent evidence of the use of technology to enhance learning by deepening understanding of content in 15 percent of observed elementary lessons, 35 percent of middle-school lessons, and 23 percent of high-school lessons.
- C. Observed instructional practices did not consistently engage students in productive learning routines, challenge them to articulate and expand upon their thinking, or ask them to make connections to prior knowledge and to real world experiences.
1. Students in 75 percent of observed elementary lessons, 12 percent of middle-school lessons, and 30 percent of high-school lessons were consistently engaged in productive learning routines.
 2. Students were not clearly and consistently engaged in challenging academic tasks in 59 percent, overall, of the classrooms visited; although clear and consistent evidence of this characteristic was noted in 60 percent of observed elementary lessons.
 3. In observed classrooms, in 68 percent of elementary lessons, students assumed responsibility for their own learning. This characteristic was observed in 24 percent of middle-school lessons and in 29 percent of high-school lessons.
 4. Students were observed using technology as a tool for learning and understanding in 22 percent of classrooms visited overall.
 5. Evidence of student work that demonstrates high quality and can serve as exemplars was found in 18 percent of observed classrooms.

Impact: The absence of a clear, commonly understood, and consistently supported model of good instruction has contributed to inconsistent instructional practice in observed classrooms. Good practices were often infrequently observed, and the quality of instruction in visited classes regularly varied by school level. Strategies to meet students' diverse learning needs and to promote high expectations for learning and higher-order thinking were implemented in varying degrees across observed classrooms.

Assessment

16. Barriers to effective use of data from the district’s fairly balanced and comprehensive assessment system include insufficient time for teacher collaboration; insufficient leadership, support, and professional development; and technological limitations.

- A. There is insufficient time for teachers to collaborate in order to create and sustain small learning communities focused on a continuous improvement process based on inquiry and problem solving. In multiple interviews, teachers at all levels variously described their opportunities for collaboration.
 - 1. Elementary teachers meet in grade-level teams once a week for 30 minutes during the last half hour of the school day and once per month after school for 60 minutes.
 - 2. Middle school teachers meet in grade-level teams once every six-day rotation and once monthly in curriculum teams. As noted earlier, these meetings are often focused on administrative issues, IEP meetings, and parent requests.
 - 3. High school teachers meet once a month in departments.
 - 4. Middle- and high-school teachers tend to work and analyze assessment data more independently, because either most courses are singletons taught by one teacher or one teacher teaches multi-section courses.
- B. Although many and varied assessments are given and considerable assessment data is produced and distributed, interviewees noted that limited oversight, support, and professional development had been allocated to build teachers’ capacity to analyze and use assessment data well.
 - 1. As previously discussed, the district does not have a leader for curriculum, instruction, and assessment who would ultimately be responsible for designing and managing a data-driven improvement process across schools.
 - 2. Interviewees noted that discussions about curriculum and assessment did not have continuity and follow-up and that there was “no articulation between schools.”
 - 3. Interviewees noted that without coordinators (i.e., for curriculum and instruction and assessment), “Sometimes the work gets done but there is no one leader.” An administrator said that teachers who do data analysis do it “on their own,” noting, “It is hard to do as a team.”
 - 4. The district does not have data teams although the middle school had one for one year only, according to administrators.
 - 5. Without a district data team or school based-data teams, the responsibility for collecting, managing, analyzing, disseminating and explaining data falls mainly on principals who already have multiple time-consuming responsibilities at the school and district levels. They have had some professional development in disaggregating data.

6. Teachers participated in some professional development to learn to use MCAS and Star data and in using Test Wiz to analyze data when Star assessments were introduced a few years ago.
 7. Administrators said that while teachers have been taught to use Edline to communicate information to students and parents, they have not had sufficient professional development to use technology well as a teaching tool and to access, analyze, and use data.
- C. The 2012 TELL Mass Survey identified professional development as an issue for the use of assessment data:
1. Forty-six percent of elementary teachers, 44 percent of middle school teachers, and 79 percent of high school teachers noted that they spend either no time or time less than or equal to one hour using the results of assessments during the school day.
 2. Sixty-three percent of elementary teachers, 72 percent of middle school teachers, and 44 percent of high school teachers identified the need for professional development to learn to use benchmark and formative assessments.
 3. Forty-eight percent of elementary teachers, 67 percent of middle school teachers, and 42 percent of high school teachers identified the need to learn to use data to drive decision-making.
 4. Seventy-eight percent of elementary teachers, 56 percent of middle school teachers, and 70 percent of high school teachers noted having clocked less than 10 hours of professional development in using benchmark and formative assessments.
 5. Seventy-eight percent of elementary teachers, 50 percent of middle school teachers, and 85 percent of high school teachers noted having clocked less than 10 hours of professional development in learning to use data to drive instructional decision making.
- D. The superintendent, in describing how “teachers need to look at data,” “see student growth” and “be accountable for growth in student learning,” said that many teachers did not have knowledge of data analysis or use data. Another administrator said that some teachers were not comfortable using data to affect instruction and that some teachers thought that they were using data but really were not.
- E. One administrator noted that not everyone had access to [all] student data; the district does not have an integrated student information system that stores and makes accessible the multiple forms of data and student information that leaders and teachers could use to inform and guide improvement efforts.
- F. The district’s technology hardware and software have limitations and do not yet support an integrated student information system. Teachers have limited access to real-time useable data that would inform their instructional and grouping decisions, apart from Walk to Read in grades 1 and 2. For example, one administrator uses hard copies of data to make her own spreadsheets for teachers to analyze.
- G. To address technology capacity, in collaboration with North Brookfield the district has applied for a Race to the Top District Grant (RTTT-D) to upgrade technology for hardware, software, and administrator and teacher training. The grant would bring Palmer \$3.5 million. The district was recently notified that its application was

rated second in the country but the funds had been sequestered. Meanwhile, the district does not have available district funds to upgrade its technology needs in one year.

H. The review team also found evidence of some limitation in the use of data to make decisions at the district level.

1. One leader said that “As a district, we have not looked at data and made decisions; as a building and as a department we have.”
2. While school committee members noted that the superintendent “kept them abreast” of MCAS data and other student achievement data, the team did not find evidence that they made a practice of considering MCAS data in their budgeting process.

Impact: The existing leadership capacity, the limitations of the technology infrastructure, and the absence of a comprehensive student information system impede the district’s ability to use the excellent data it collects as a powerful driver for improvement. Also, limited oversight, support, time for collaboration, and professional development have meant that too few teachers have developed good data analysis skills to sustain data-driven improvement efforts systemwide.

Human Resources and Professional Development

17. There are many needs for professional development, but funding for it is tight. Although the district has established a Professional Development Committee, at the time of the review it did not have a professional development plan based on identified professional development needs.

- A. While the intent in the district is to plan more long-term professional development to meet improvement goals, funding for professional development is mainly grant dependent.
 1. According to the superintendent, the school budget does not have a professional development line item.
 2. The district received between \$60,000-\$75,000 in District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) funding this year to support its professional development efforts at its Level 3 elementary school; according to the superintendent, it supports its remaining professional development from three grants totaling \$180,000 (Title 2A, Race To The Top, and Special Education).
- B. To successfully implement the new evaluation system, principals will need more direction, support, and coaching, according to the superintendent.
- C. Teachers said in focus groups that there was considerable frustration because they needed more professional development in a number of areas, but they recognized that resources were limited.
- D. Other district needs related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment noted above (e.g., implementing a research-based instructional model and promoting deeper understanding using Understanding by Design templates) all point to the need for teachers to work collaboratively in both embedded and externally-led

professional development.

- E. The district has begun to identify professional development topics that target improved instruction, including using assessments, analyzing and using data, defining and implementing research-based instruction, and working in a full inclusion model; it has also taken steps toward development of a data-based professional development plan.
- F. The superintendent said that all professional development proposals from principals would “focus in one direction” and would have to be related to the following five goals:
 - 1. Moving the district from an accountability rating of Level 3 to a rating of at least Level 2 for all schools mainly through the implementation of the new educator evaluation system (2013-2014) and development of criteria for effective teaching (2013-2015).
 - 2. Reducing special education costs by 25 percent by 2015.
 - 3. Improving student performance in mathematics by 5 percent each year so that the district achieves a cumulative Progress and Performance Index (PPI) score of 75 or higher in three years.
 - 4. Reducing out-of-district enrollment by 50 percent.
 - 5. Requiring all schools to use two forms of assessment (other than MCAS) by December 2014.

Impact: Given the district’s professional development needs, it will be difficult for it to fulfill them without a Professional Development Plan that takes a strategic, systemic, and cost-effective approach to accomplishing embedded as well as externally-led professional development aligned to these needs.

Student Support

18. The district has a lower rate of full inclusion and a higher rate of partial inclusion for students with disabilities than the statewide rates; teachers have not been adequately trained districtwide on how to serve students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

- A. According to ESE data, in Palmer in 2010-2011 35.4 percent of students with disabilities were served in partial inclusion settings, as compared to 20.1 percent statewide, while 42.2 percent were fully included in regular education classrooms, as compared with 57.9 percent statewide.
- B. Although elementary teachers told the review team that they had had professional development in inclusion strategies and “a lot of differentiated instruction was going on,” middle school teachers identified insufficient professional development as a problem in general. In addition, they said that they had not had much training in providing for students with disabilities in regular education: “We have not had help in co-teaching or inclusion practices and this is an issue.”
- C. At all three levels, however, the review team found clear and consistent evidence of the use of “appropriate and

varied strategies that meet students' diverse learning needs" (indicator 13, Appendix C) in less than half of observed classes (45 percent of elementary, 25 percent of middle school, and 27 percent of high school classes observed—33 percent overall).

- D. The team found clear and consistent evidence that "multiple resources are available to meet students' diverse learning needs" (indicator 6, Appendix C) in only about half of observed classes or fewer (50 percent of elementary, 53 percent of middle school, and 39 percent of high school classes observed—47 percent overall).
- E. The elementary school has taken steps to create a tiered system of instruction. Tier 1 support is differentiated grouping through the Walk to Read program; Tier 2 support is provided outside the class, with Reading Recovery; and Tier 3 support is provided offsite at the Curtis Blake Reading Center (AIC) with specialized tutors.
- F. In the middle and high school there are not yet consistent programs for tiered instruction for students who need learning support in ELA or math. These students are more often served outside the regular education program.
 - 1. At the middle school there is Title I tutoring in reading.
 - 2. At the high school some academic support is offered in the resource room.

Impact: The achievement data on students with disabilities raises serious concerns that services provided are not sufficient. ESE data shows that in 2012 Palmer students with disabilities had proficiency rates 10 points or more below those of their peers statewide, in ELA, math, and science (see Table B5a-c). They have much lower four-year graduation rates than their peers across the state, 51.4 percent compared with 68.6 percent in 2012, and higher four-year dropout rates, 32.4 percent compared with 12.8 percent in 2012. Learning supports in place are not meeting the needs of the district's most vulnerable learners.

19. Although small numbers of English language learners (ELLs) are enrolled in all three schools, the district has not developed the capacity to meet students' needs by providing sufficient Sheltered English Immersion in regular education classes or by providing English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction from a certified teacher.

- A. In 2012 Palmer enrolled 1,582 students; 22 were ELLs (1.4 percent)—12 in the elementary school, 6 in the middle school, and 4 in the high school. According to ESE data, the most common languages spoken among the ELLs were Polish and Cantonese.
- B. According to a review of documents and administrator interviews, Palmer does not have an ESL curriculum based on Massachusetts requirements. An administrator said that the district had "found an ESL program on Study Island."
- C. The district does not have a certified ESL teacher. An administrator said that the district was working with an agency to find someone "willing to come to Palmer to do this work."
- D. According to an administrator, some teachers have had partial "category" training on Sheltered English Immersion; yet ELLs are being served in reading and special education resource rooms.
- E. In addition, a review of documents by the team showed that flyers and notices about academic programs and

activities are not consistently translated into languages other than English to notify parents of educational opportunities.

- F. The Department's Coordinated Program Review (CPR) in 2010 showed that all of the above issues existed at that time. The district has had to file numerous progress reports with the Department: it has still not received Department approval for its implementation of all of the corrective action it was required to carry out in the area of English language learner education as the result of that CPR.

Impact: The district continues not to meet the needs of ELLs in terms of adequate Sheltered English Immersion, an adequate ESL curriculum, or a certified ESL teacher; the absence of these necessary supports is a barrier to ELLs developing academic skills and learning in English and having full access to the general education curriculum. Insufficient translation of flyers and notices for the families of ELLs prevents them from taking advantage of opportunities for their children that are available to others.

Financial and Asset Management

20. The district did not meet required net school spending in fiscal year 2012, but has projected meeting it in fiscal year 2013.

- A. The district's actual net school spending has been close to the level of required spending for several years, but remained above that threshold until fiscal year 2012. Although the district had projected meeting net school spending that year, it was 2.5 percent below, causing a carryover to fiscal year 2013's required net school spending. Actual net school spending for fiscal year 2013 is projected to be 8.2 percent over required.
- B. The Palmer student-to-teacher ratio has generally been below the state average, though there has been a reduction in the number of teachers somewhat proportional to the enrollment decline.
 1. From 2008 to 2012, the enrollment declined 16 percent, from 1,883 to 1,582 students.
 2. Over that same four year period, the number of teacher FTEs has gone from 140.0 to 119.8, a 14 percent decline.
- C. The number of district administrators has been reduced from five to three from 2010 to 2012, resulting in the ratio of students to district administrators continuing to rise above the state ratio over this period, as the state ratio decreased. Key administrative roles eliminated were the Director of Curriculum and the Assistant Director of Special Education.
- D. With the exception of one year, fiscal year 2011, the town is taxing up at its Levy Limit.

Impact: From fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2011, total spending decreased by 1.9 percent: from \$25,545,550 to \$25,060,165. Given that the cost of present level services rises every year, this represents a more significant reduction than indicated by this percentage.

21. Despite the district's limited resources, there has been little analytic and strategic thinking by the school committee and district leadership about resource allocation.

- A. The review team did not find evidence of long-range strategic thinking or planning. School committee members said that they did not have the resources to do planning beyond one year.
- B. School committee members noted that regionalizing with other district(s) was discussed a long time ago and has not been revisited.
- C. The only evidence of greater collaboration with neighboring districts to reduce costs was a recent discussion with Monson about combining special education transportation and perhaps the football teams.
- D. The district did not provide any analysis of reconfiguring grades and/or buildings to realize economies.
- E. At the time of the review, all hope seemed to be riding on the state granting a casino license to a developer who had proposed a casino in town. However, this proposal was competing with three other proposals for the western Massachusetts zone, the timing was long, and the odds were uncertain that the Palmer proposal would succeed.

Impact: Given the struggling economic condition of the Town of Palmer described by town and school officials, there have not been enough strategic planning and consideration of new options to meet the challenge of improving student performance by strategic allocation of resources.

22. The budget document is available in each school, in the central office, in the town public library, and online, and does inform the public of dollar amounts and the purpose of the budget funds, but the budget document is not comprehensive and transparent.

- A. The budget document lists expenditures by the chart of accounts for system-wide and building level accounts, showing the previous year's budget and the requested or approved budget for the next year (e.g. fiscal year 2011 and approved fiscal year 2012).
- B. A limited number of confidential copies of the document also list the salaries of all school personnel.
- C. The budget does not include relevant information such as
 - 1. The use of funds from revolving accounts, state and federal grants
 - 2. Actual expenditures from previous years
 - 3. Full-time equivalents (FTEs) of the staff for each account.
 - 4. Narratives explaining each program, and what the funds for that program are expected to accomplish.
 - 5. Enrollments: previous, current and projected.
 - 6. Mission Statement and goals of each program or the district.

7. An organizational chart.

Impact: More complete and transparent budget information would support the district's case to the public about its needs.

Palmer Public Schools District Review Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

1. The school committee and the superintendent should establish and implement a comprehensive and collaborative planning process, involving key stakeholders, to develop a multi-year District Improvement Plan centered on improving student learning and achievement.

Currently, there is no such District Improvement Plan, only a set of district goals and action steps identical to the superintendent's personal goals and action steps for 2013-2014.

- A.** The district should involve district stakeholders in conducting a self-assessment to define what the district does well and what key areas need improvement. Involving representation from the entire Palmer learning community in this effort is essential.
 - 1. ESE's District Self-Assessment (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/district/district-self-assessment.pdf>) is a tool for districts to assess their systems and processes as part of an ongoing cycle of inquiry for continuous improvement.
 - 2. Multiple sources of student achievement data should be analyzed and shared as a central component of the self-assessment and planning process.

- B.** The district should identify and prioritize a reasonable number of measurable improvement goals to meet in the long term, along with short-term benchmarks to gauge progress.
 - 1. Guiding principles to help develop clear, useful goals and benchmarks can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf>.
 - 2. In addition to addressing priorities highlighted by the self-assessment, the district plan should outline how the district will support students with specific and low-incidence learning needs (either in district or by combining with other districts).

- C.** The school committee should ensure that all major district-level decisions, including budget decisions, are carefully aligned with the priorities in the plan.
 - 1. A reference tool that might be useful as the school committee and district leaders consider new ways to approach budget decisions is Smart School Budgeting (<http://www.renniecenter.org/research/SmartSchoolBudgeting.pdf>), a summary of existing resources on school finance, budgeting, and reallocation.

Benefits: Implementing this recommendation could result in more effective long-term planning for the Palmer Public Schools. Involving the entire learning community in improving student learning and achievement can lead to a shared vision for the district's growth, and can help to ensure that the efforts of all stakeholders are directed to helping the district progress toward its goals. More focused, effective planning can also help to guide strategic reallocation of resources to support key district priorities.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The review team recommends that the district establish an infrastructure and process to ensure that high-quality curriculum is developed, aligned, continually updated, and consistently, effectively delivered.

- A.** The district should establish and support a districtwide curriculum leadership position.
 - 1. A districtwide curriculum leadership position is necessary because of the complex nature of instructional leadership and the educational needs of the district and its students.
 - 2. The curriculum leader should be responsible for curriculum development (using agreed-upon criteria and incorporating state standards), horizontal and vertical alignment, and consistent curriculum implementation in all classrooms.
 - 3. The leader should have a deep understanding of Common Core standards. Relevant materials, including implementation resources, model curriculum units, PARCC resources, and information about transitioning to the 2011 frameworks, can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/>.
 - 4. How to Develop Curriculum Maps to Support a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum that Guides Instruction (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/maps/CurriculumMaps.pdf>) is a useful resource that explains curriculum mapping and provides model curriculum maps.
 - 5. The curriculum leader should also identify professional development and support that would be helpful for teachers as they internalize and deliver the curriculum.
- B.** Additionally, the district should develop, document and implement an ongoing, multi-year process for reviewing and updating curriculum.
 - 1. This process of curriculum review should be based on established criteria, should be informed by analysis of MCAS data and district assessment results, and should involve professional staff including teachers and special educators.
 - 2. The district should identify resources (e.g., time during or after school; stipends) that would be needed to support this work.

- C. The district should develop practices to ensure that curriculum materials are regularly monitored for effectiveness.
 - 1. Practices might include classroom observations, systematic review of lesson plans, and regular collaborative discussions about which elements of the curriculum work well and which need revision.
 - 2. Instructional teams could be included in this process through Professional Learning Communities (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/PLCguidance.pdf>). In particular, Stage 4 of the PLC Guidance document (Build and Share Standards-Based Lessons) provides a structure for instructional teams to review curriculum and design lessons that include assessments to gauge students' learning.

- D. The district should continue its work with the Pioneer Valley DSAC to complete the 2011 K-12 English Language Arts and literacy and mathematics curriculum revisions by 2014 so that all students have access to a comprehensive and aligned curriculum. This urgent work should be fully completed before the 2014 round of MCAS assessments in ELA and mathematics.

- E. The curriculum should include extensions, support materials, and strategies for students with learning and language challenges.
 - 1. The Resource Guides to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html>) identify "entry points" for each standard that allow educators to help students who are performing below grade-level expectations to approach the grade-level standard. (Note that many students with disabilities benefit from challenging, grade-appropriate instruction, without the need for entry points; see Figure 1 on page 3 of the mathematics resource guide for an example of how to determine the appropriate level of complexity for each student.)

Benefits to Palmer for implementing this recommendation include dedicated and comprehensive curriculum leadership and oversight and a more effective system to manage, monitor, and improve curriculum design and delivery. Curriculum will be more cohesive and functional, ensuring that all students have access to a viable curriculum that meets their diverse learning needs. A workable cycle of curriculum improvement and renewal ensures that curricula are dynamic and continuously evolve as frameworks are revised at the state level. Additional benefits include the creation of other teaching and learning systems and practices to support student learning, i.e., planning and evaluating professional development and creating more structured small learning communities that use and analyze data in an inquiry-based process to improve education.

3. In order to improve instruction and ultimately student achievement, it is recommended that the district develop and communicate a common understanding of the components of effective instruction, establish a system to monitor instruction, and provide time and support for teachers to engage in meaningful conversations about teaching.

- A. The district should define what good instruction should look like in the district.
 - 1. Professional development focused on elements of effective instruction could be useful.

2. The district should create a collaborative team that includes the district curriculum leader (see Recommendation 2 above), principals, and teachers from all levels.
3. The team should examine research-based instructional models and identify instructional strategies that will become the district's non-negotiables and will be included in every teacher's repertoire of instructional tools.
4. Characteristics of a Standards-Based Mathematics Classroom (http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/mathclass_char.doc) and An Effective Standards-Based Science and Technology/Engineering Classroom (http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/scitechclass_char.pdf) are references for mathematics and science instructional planning and observation, intended to support activities that advance standards-based instructional practice.

Characteristics of Standards-Based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice

(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/walk/04.0.pdf>) is a tool designed to provide a common language or reference point for looking at teaching and learning. (This document is part of the Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide; see below.)

- B.** The administrative team should take all necessary steps to develop a plan for phasing in components of the district's instructional model.
 1. Some instructional strategies should be identified for initial implementation, with other strategies identified for implementation at appropriate intervals.
 2. Teachers who struggle with the implementation of new strategies could be supported by identified peers or through other internal or external professional development.
 3. Discussions of exemplary teaching practice could be scheduled during faculty meetings and other available time.
- C.** Frequent observations (formal and informal) and timely feedback are critical elements of monitoring instructional practice. The district should continue to develop, document, and implement a district plan to monitor instruction, and should articulate that plan to all stakeholders.

A comprehensive plan might include: a common protocol for conducting formal and informal classroom observations; initial walkthroughs conducted in groups (teachers and administrators) to calibrate observations and ensure a transparent process; and a process for sharing generalized information, trends, and impressions with teachers to improve teaching.

1. The Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/walk/ImplementationGuide.pdf>) is a resource to support instructional leaders in establishing a Learning Walkthrough process in a school or district. It is designed to provide

guidance to those working in an established culture of collaboration as well as those who are just beginning to observe classrooms and discuss teaching and learning in a focused and actionable manner.

- D.** Common planning time can provide an important opportunity for professional conversations about teaching, learning, and curriculum.
1. The high school schedule should allow for regular common planning time that is more frequent than once a month.
 2. Elementary teachers should have common planning time for more than 30 minutes per week (with an additional 60 minutes per month).
 3. The district should consider reconfiguring common planning time at the middle school to ensure that teachers can engage in structured discussions about teaching and learning for as much time as possible.
 4. The Common Planning Time Self-Assessment Toolkit (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/CPTtoolkit.pdf>) is a guide designed, in part, to help districts raise student achievement by using thoughtful action planning to improve support for the use of common planning time.

Benefits to Palmer from implementing this recommendation include clear expectations on the part of teachers and administrators as to what constitutes good teaching. Ongoing, focused monitoring and timely, specific feedback are powerful levers for helping teachers to improve their practice. Effective teaching can empower students as learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers and can increase student achievement.

Assessment

- 4. To create a culture of continuous improvement, the district should develop a more systematic, collaborative, and frequent process to collect, analyze, discuss, and use data at the district and school levels.**
- A.** The district should establish a district data team with representation from each school and content area, as well as school-based data teams.
1. The role and responsibilities of the data teams should be clearly defined.
 2. Professional development should be provided for data team members to gain the skills to identify, collect, analyze, and disseminate data, and to lead data-rich small group discussions at grade-level or subject-based meetings for core academic subjects. Discussions should guide teachers in using data to improve teaching, curriculum and assessment and—above all—achievement.
 3. The District Data Team Toolkit (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf>) is a set of resources to help a district establish, grow, and maintain a culture of inquiry and data use through a District Data Team.

- B. Data team meetings should aim to create and foster learning communities built on mutual trust and respect. Data should be considered as a lens to better understand and address problems of student achievement, instruction, curriculum, and assessment.
- C. The district should establish more frequent and structured common planning time (see Recommendation 3 above) to ensure that data team representatives from each school can meet frequently with instructional teams.

Benefits to the Palmer Public Schools from implementing this recommendation could include more effective use of data to revise curriculum and teaching materials, strengthen instructional practice, and improve student achievement. In addition, the district and each of its schools can create and sustain professional learning communities that promote data-driven, continuous improvement.

5. The district should consider ways to reallocate resources in order to strengthen its technology leadership and infrastructure to support a data-driven process of continuous improvement.

- A. Unequivocally, in addition to the curriculum leader described above, the district should have a technology leader who can oversee and manage technology and data input, analysis, and dissemination districtwide.
 1. The technology leader should work closely with the curriculum leader to ensure that the district’s technological infrastructure supports the delivery of high-quality curriculum and provides assessment data as efficiently as possible.
 2. The technology leader should also be responsible for facilitating the use of ESE’s data resources throughout the district.
 3. One such resource is the Early Warning Indicator System (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/ewis.html>), a tool to provide information to districts about the likelihood that their students will reach key academic goals.
- B. The district should upgrade technology infrastructure at each school and at the central office to support evolving expectations for instruction and assessment.
 1. This may need to be accomplished using a multi-year plan if the RTTT-D Grant does not materialize in a timely way.
 2. This might require a creative use of resources, such as reallocation, regionalization, or reorganization of schools or classes.
 3. ESE’s Office of Digital Learning (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/>) provides policies, guidance, professional development, and support for district technology and infrastructure capacity.
 4. The Massachusetts School Technology and Readiness Chart (STaR Chart; <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/sac/edtech/STaR.pdf>) is a component of the overall technology planning and evaluation process. The STaR Chart describes what technology looks like in Teaching and Learning,

Educator Preparation and Development, Administration and Support Services, and Infrastructure for Technology at four progressively more sophisticated levels.

Benefits to the Palmer Public Schools from implementing this recommendation: improved technology leadership and infrastructure will help to ensure that the district's technological tools and systems support its curricular and instructional priorities.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. In order to implement the new educator evaluation system fully, the district should complete negotiations with the Palmer Teachers' Association to establish clear and mutual understandings as to what will constitute teacher performance ratings of proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory across the district. This is a necessary component in completing implementation.

- A.** The district has adopted and partially implemented a new educator evaluation system. The district now should focus its efforts and prioritize full implementation.
 - 1. At the time of the review negotiations were continuing to establish clear and mutually understood criteria as to what will constitute the teacher performance ratings of proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory across the district.
 - 2. At the time of the review the challenge to the district was to negotiate the details of the evaluation rubric, to establish clear understandings as to how to apply the rubrics among all evaluators, and to complete evaluations of half of the teaching staff in the few remaining months of 2012-2013 to meet the expectations for Race to the Top districts.

Benefits: If the district is able to negotiate the teacher performance rubric and implement consistent application districtwide, it will be an important step on the path toward making the new educator evaluation system an instrument of districtwide improvement.

7. The review team recommends that the district develop a more coherent system to plan professional development.

- A.** While the district is off to a good start with the establishment of the Professional Development Committee, it now should collaboratively develop a district Professional Development Plan.
- B.** The district curriculum leader should facilitate the process of developing the Professional Development Plan in order to ensure that the plan represents a coherent approach to professional development that supports teachers as they implement the district's new expectations related to curriculum and instruction.
- C.** Planning for professional development should be aligned with key goals and priorities found in the District Improvement Plan and in School Improvement Plans.

- D. Working with the Professional Development Committee, the curriculum leader can set priorities for both external and job-embedded professional development.
- E. The Professional Development Plan can include low-cost systems for supporting teachers' growth, such as a structure for common planning time and other job-embedded professional development initiatives.
- F. Faculty meeting time, which the district is already using for some professional development, is an existing resource that could be used to support the Professional Development Plan.

Benefits: A district Professional Development Plan aligned to district and school goals would provide a systematic districtwide focus on continually improving teachers' practice.

Student Support

8. It is recommended that the district train regular educators and paraprofessionals in research-based strategies so that more students can be successfully included in the regular education program.

- A. Regular classroom teachers and paraprofessionals would benefit from specific training on creating inclusive classrooms, including using strategies for co-teaching, co-planning, differentiating instruction, using assistive technologies, and designing assessments to better accommodate students with diverse learning styles and ability levels.
 1. Access to Learning: Assistive Technology and Accessible Instructional Materials (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/assistive/AccessToLearning.pdf>) provides information about tools, materials, and resources to support students' learning. Other resources on assistive technology and accessibility can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/assistive/resources.html>.
- B. The district's regular classroom teachers and paraprofessionals, especially staff at the high school (see indicator 2 in Appendix C's instructional inventory), would also benefit from specific training on strategies for managing student behavior effectively and equitably.
- C. Additional training for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals should include strategies to effectively teach English language learners using Sheltered English Immersion approaches.
 1. WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment; <http://www.wida.us/downloadLibrary.aspx>) is a resource designed to advance academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators. The WIDA Download Library provides resources and materials for educators, including standards, guiding principles, and sample items.
 2. An overview of some key concepts and strategies related to supporting English language learners in the mathematics classroom can be found on pages 39-46 of the presentation *The 2011 MA Curriculum*

Framework for Mathematics & The Language of Mathematics
(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/resources/amaos.pdf>).

Benefits to Palmer for implementing this recommendation would include providing more students with access to the regular curriculum in the least restrictive environment, thereby raising expectations and increasing achievement for these students.

9. The district leadership should review and implement strategies based on the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model.

- A. The district can adapt systems from the MTSS model (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/>) that outline key components of tiered instruction, including a behavioral management system and a pyramid support system for academics and social behavioral supports at all developmental levels.
- B. Leaders can help provide ongoing training for faculty in the middle and high schools to better support students with learning and behavioral challenges in regular education classes using the MTSS tiered system, which includes using differentiated instruction with mixed ability groups, adaptive testing, assistive technologies, and resources and accommodations as needed.
- C. It is recommended that district leaders, teachers, and department chairs create a research-based, data-driven reading support program for grades 5-12, along with relevant professional development, that allows a greater number of secondary students to learn in regular education classrooms.

Benefits to Palmer for implementing the MTSS model will include enabling all students – including students with disabilities and English language learners – to be better served in regular education programs. This could address proficiency gaps and could lower the number of suspensions, retentions, and dropouts.

10. It is imperative that the district improve services for English language learners; services must include sufficient Sheltered English Immersion and sufficient English as a Second Language instruction, provided by a certified ESL teacher. It is recommended that the district collaborate with another district to strengthen its ELL leadership and oversight for these improvements and to facilitate provision of the required services.

- A. It was noted in interviews that ESL services, capacity, and personnel have been challenges in the district for several years.
- B. Though these problems were noted by the Department’s 2010 Coordinated Program Review, they still have not been corrected. The district does not have a certified ESL teacher, it does not have an ESL curriculum, and it does not provide adequate Sheltered English Immersion in regular education classrooms.
- C. Combining resources with another district or regionalizing can assist the district in addressing the need for leadership and oversight to bring ELL services up to required levels and also in providing the required services.

- D. Examples of services that Palmer could more easily provide in partnership with other districts include parent notifications in their native languages, professional development for educators to better meet students' language and learning needs, and support and resources for ESL and SEI programs.
- E. The district could share a licensed ESL teacher with another district. With an eye to the future, the district might also consider providing incentives to its current teachers to become licensed in ESL.

Benefits: By partnering for ELL leadership and services with other districts to solve the challenges of meeting ELLs' needs given limited resources and their low incidence, the district could bring its ELL program into compliance with state and federal law.

Finance and Asset Management

11. The district needs to use its available resources as strategically as possible. Several suggestions for consideration:

- A. Review the use of facilities and configuration of grades and schools to minimize facility costs and reduce some administration costs.
- B. The district should explore regionalization and other collaborations with surrounding school districts.
 1. Regionalizing would secure new state aid for transportation reimbursement. It would also allow administrative positions to be streamlined and at the same time more specialized.
 2. Short of regionalization, the district could explore shared positions with adjacent districts such as an ELL coordinator, since Palmer has a small ELL population.
 3. The district and/or the town should explore more collaborative efforts with adjacent districts, such as:
 - a. Special Education transportation, since neighboring districts are sending students to some of the same residential placements in separate vans.
 - b. Medical Insurance Health Group similar to existing health groups as the Cape Cod Health Group, which includes all towns and school districts on Cape Cod, or the Minuteman-Nashoba Health Group, which includes the Town and School Districts of Concord and surrounding towns and districts.
- C. The number of teachers and their teaching assignments should be carefully reviewed in light of research showing that for most grades, allowing class sizes to be a little larger as a trade-off for other resources, e.g. instructional leadership, can result in improvements. Strategies for reducing low-incidence small classes, whether they are specialized subjects at the high school level or special education, could be pursued within the district and with neighboring districts.

Benefits to the Palmer Public Schools from reallocating resources would be opportunities to provide leadership and support to teachers to improve instruction and student performance.

12. The school budget document should be more comprehensive and transparent.

A. Examples of what could be added to the current document include:

1. Use of funds from revolving accounts, state and federal grants.
2. Actual expenditures from previous years.
3. Full-time equivalents (FTEs) of the staff for each account.
4. Narratives explaining each program and what the funds for that program are expected to accomplish.
5. Enrollments: previous, current and projected.
6. Statement and goals of each program or the district.
7. An organizational chart.

Benefits to the Palmer Public Schools for implementing this recommendation would be having a budget document that was closely aligned with strategic planning, and showed past and projected resource allocations with explanations for changes. Such a document would make a stronger case to town government and the public for the district's budget proposal, with related cost/benefit analyses and proposed trade-offs.

ESE and other resources and tools:

State Regulations on School Finance and Accountability at 603 CMR 10.00:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr10.html>

School Building Issues: Funding opportunities, guidelines, and resources related to school buildings.

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/sbuilding/>

LABBB-EDCO Special Education Transportation <http://www.labbb.com/Transportationsub.html>

Minuteman-Nashoba Health Group <http://www.minuteman-nashoba.org/index.htm>

Site visits and discussions with small school districts that already have a combined middle school and high school.

Site visits and discussions with school districts that have recently regionalized such as Avon and Harwich.

Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Schedule, Site Visit

Review Team Members

The review of the Palmer Public Schools was conducted from March 4-7, 2013, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

1. Russ Dever, Leadership and Governance
2. Michele Kingsland-Smith, Curriculum and Instruction
3. Linda L. Greyser, Ed. D., Assessment, review team coordinator
4. William J. Contreras, Human Resources and Professional Development
5. Evangeline Harris Stefanakis, Ed. D., Student Support
6. Gerald Missal, Ed. D., Financial and Asset Management

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted during the review of the Palmer Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Palmer Public Schools financial personnel: finance director.
- The review team conducted interviews with two members of the school committee.
- The review team conducted interviews with the president of the Palmer Teachers' Association.
- The review team conducted interviews/focus groups with representatives from the Palmer Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, director of special education. The review team visited the following schools in the Palmer Public Schools: Old Mill Pond Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 4), Converse Middle School (grades 5-7), and Palmer High School (grades 8-12).
- During school visits, the review team conducted three focus groups: one with 27 elementary school teachers, one with 8 middle school teachers, and one with 10 high school teachers.
- The team observed classes throughout the district: 23 at the high school, 18 at the middle school, and 22 at the elementary school.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
 - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.

- Data on the district’s staffing and finances.
- Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).
- District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks, school schedules, and the district’s end-of-year financial reports.
- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Palmer Public Schools, conducted from March 4-7, 2013.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers’ association.	Interviews with district staff and principals; interview with town manager and town accountant; visit to the high school, classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents, interview with teachers’ association.	School visits to elementary school and middle school, interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; interview with two school committee members.	School visits to elementary school, middle school and high school, classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix B: Enrollment, Expenditures, Performance

**Table B1a: Palmer Public Schools
2012-2013 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

D. Student Group	E. District	F. Percent of Total	G. State	H. Percent of Total
Asian	22	1.4%	56,517	5.9%
Afr. Amer./Black	28	1.8%	81,806	8.6%
Hispanic/ Latino	78	5.1%	156,976	16.4%
Multi-race, Non-Hisp. /Lat.	23	1.5%	26,012	2.7%
Nat. Haw. Or Pacif. Isl.	6	0.4%	1,020	0.1%
White	1,373	89.4%	630,150	66.0%
All students	1,535	100.0%	954,773	100.0%

Note: As of October 1, 2012

**Table B1b: Palmer Public Schools
2012-2013 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

Student Group	District			State		
	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of District	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of State
Students w/ disabilities	290	35.2%	18.5%	163,921	35.5%	17.0%
Low income	674	81.8%	43.9%	353,420	76.5%	37.0%
ELL and Former ELL	20	2.4%	1.3%	95,865	20.7%	10.0%
All high needs students	824	--	52.5%	462,272	--	47.9%

Notes: As of October 1, 2012. District and state numbers and percentages for students with disabilities and high needs students are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Total district enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 1,569; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 965,602.

**Table B2: Palmer Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending Fiscal Years 2011–2013**

	FY11		FY12		FY13
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From local appropriations for schools					
By school committee	14,637,305	14,637,305	14,122,956	14,183,731	15,686,637
By municipality	7,039,841	7,548,287	6,256,325	7,092,930	6,962,216
Total from local appropriations	21,677,146	22,185,592	20,378,381	21,276,661	22,648,853
From revolving funds and grants	---	2,874,573	---	2,701,346	---
Total expenditures	---	25,060,165	---	23,978,007	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	10,463,070	---	10,519,240	10,585,480
Required local contribution	---	6,331,779	---	6,390,223	6,896,940
Required net school spending**	---	16,794,849	---	16,909,463	17,482,420
Actual net school spending	---	17,141,518	---	16,483,392	18,911,637
Over/under required (\$)	---	346,669	---	-426,071	1,429,217
Over/under required (%)	---	2.1	---	-2.5	8.2

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

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

Sources: FY11, FY12 District End-of-Year Reports, Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website

Data retrieved June 20, 2013

**Table B3: Palmer Public Schools
Expenditures Per In-District Pupil
Fiscal Years 2010–2012**

Expenditure Category	2010	2011	2012
Administration	\$335.54	\$354.24	\$332.38
Instructional leadership (district and school)	\$586.81	\$590.04	\$705.83
Teachers	\$4,510.03	\$4,603.52	\$4,460.02
Other teaching services	\$684.17	\$820.88	\$745.75
Professional development	\$76.25	\$132.01	\$112.37
Instructional materials, equipment and technology	\$568.50	\$381.55	\$381.34
Guidance, counseling and testing services	\$241.19	\$277.27	\$330.34
Pupil services	\$1,136.46	\$1,413.75	\$1,364.42
Operations and maintenance	\$669.22	\$843.78	\$707.73
Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs	\$2,131.24	\$2,328.02	\$2,247.73
Total expenditures per in-district pupil	\$10,939	\$11,745	\$11,388

Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](#)

**Table B4a: Palmer Public Schools
English Language Arts Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI, SGP)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
3	CPI	138	83.9	83.2	78.5	78.3	-5.6	-0.2	Yes	Very Low
	P+	138	61%	63%	55%	51%	-10	-4		--
4	CPI	135	73.4	73.0	70.9	71.3	-2.1	0.4	--	Very Low
	P+	135	41%	32%	38%	42%	1	4		--
	SGP	123	47.0	21.0	31.5	37.0	-10.0	5.5		Low
5	CPI	139	83.5	79.4	88.4	80.2	-3.3	-8.2	--	Low
	P+	139	54%	55%	64%	58%	4	-6		--
	SGP	125	55.5	56.0	55.0	61.0	5.5	6.0		High
6	CPI	127	86.6	84.0	84.9	88.8	2.2	3.9	Yes	Moderate
	P+	127	64%	62%	63%	67%	3	4		--
	SGP	106	43.0	46.0	56.0	52.0	9.0	-4.0		Moderate
7	CPI	130	86.8	89.3	88.2	85.8	-1.0	-2.4	Yes	Low
	P+	130	68%	71%	69%	65%	-3	-4		--
	SGP	115	52.0	56.0	67.0	55.0	3.0	-12.0		Moderate
8	CPI	142	91.4	89.1	86.3	89.8	-1.6	3.5	--	Very Low
	P+	142	77%	72%	70%	76%	-1	6		--
	SGP	129	52.0	52.0	25.0	39.0	-13.0	14.0		Low
10	CPI	102	89.3	92.6	93.9	97.3	8.0	3.4	Yes	Moderate
	P+	102	75%	78%	86%	90%	15	4		--
	SGP	89	35.5	37.5	39.0	44.0	8.5	5.0		Moderate
All	CPI	913	85.3	84.5	84.1	84.0	-1.3	-0.1	--	Very Low
	P+	913	63%	62%	63%	63%	0	0		--
	SGP	687	49.5	44.0	45.0	50.0	0.5	5.0		Moderate

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in MCAS tests for the first time. The “2012 Performance” column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts’ CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 7 in the Student Performance section above. The “2012 Performance” column also gives the level of the median SGP. Median SGPs from 0 to 20 are considered to be Very Low; from 21 to 40, Low; from 41 to 60, Moderate; from 61 to 80, High; and from 81 to 100, Very High.

**Table B4b: Palmer Public Schools
Mathematics Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI, SGP)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
3	CPI	138	84.9	82.4	80.5	75.0	-9.9	-5.5	Yes	Very Low
	P+	138	64%	66%	63%	54%	-10	-9		--
4	CPI	136	75.6	72.3	73.1	71.3	-4.3	-1.8	--	Very Low
	P+	136	40%	31%	36%	40%	0	4		--
	SGP	123	58.0	26.5	41.0	39.0	-19.0	-2.0		Low
5	CPI	139	72.8	74.5	74.6	70.9	-1.9	-3.7	Yes	Very Low
	P+	139	45%	51%	43%	42%	-3	-1		--
	SGP	125	47.0	57.0	33.0	36.0	-11.0	3.0		Low
6	CPI	127	76.3	82.8	79.3	76.0	-0.3	-3.3	Yes	Low
	P+	127	48%	61%	59%	47%	-1	-12		--
	SGP	107	65.0	56.0	60.0	38.0	-27.0	-22.0		Low
7	CPI	128	77.8	77.6	80.8	75.4	-2.4	-5.4	Yes	Low
	P+	128	55%	52%	58%	51%	-4	-7		--
	SGP	113	73.0	62.0	63.0	48.0	-25.0	-15.0		Moderate
8	CPI	140	66.6	64.0	65.1	77.3	10.7	12.2	Yes	Moderate
	P+	140	37%	33%	37%	55%	18	18		--
	SGP	130	35.0	24.5	30.0	35.5	0.5	5.5		Low
10	CPI	101	84.1	90.3	89.3	94.3	10.2	5.0	Yes	Moderate
	P+	101	69%	79%	75%	85%	16	10		--
	SGP	89	37.5	52.0	51.0	55.0	17.5	4.0		Moderate
All	CPI	909	76.1	77.2	77.3	76.5	0.4	-0.8	--	Low
	P+	909	50%	53%	52%	52%	2	0		--
	SGP	687	53.0	47.0	46.0	40.0	-13.0	-6.0		Low

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in MCAS tests for the first time. The "2012 Performance" column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts' CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 7 in the Student Performance section above. The "2012 Performance" column also gives the level of the median SGP. Median SGPs from 0 to 20 are considered to be Very Low; from 21 to 40, Low; from 41 to 60, Moderate; from 61 to 80, High; and from 81 to 100, Very High.

**Table B4c: Palmer Public Schools
Science and Technology/Engineering Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
5	CPI	139	78.2	76.2	80.6	80.6	2.4	0	--	Low
	P+	139	46%	47%	50%	58%	12	8	--	--
8	CPI	142	73.9	68.5	70.3	70.4	-3.5	0.1	Yes	Low
	P+	142	37%	28%	37%	30%	-7	-7	--	--
10	CPI	90	83.4	83.1	86.4	81.9	-1.5	-4.5	Yes	Very Low
	P+	90	57%	58%	67%	51%	-6	-16	--	--
All	CPI	371	77.6	75.1	78.5	77.0	-0.6	-1.5	--	Low
	P+	371	45%	42%	50%	46%	1	-4	--	--

Notes: P+ = percent *Proficient* or *Advanced*. Students participate in STE MCAS tests in grades 5, 8, and 10 only. Median SGPs are not calculated for STE. The “2012 Performance” column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts’ CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 7 in the Student Performance section above.

**Table B5a: Palmer Public Schools
English Language Arts (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	499	76.0	75.4	75.5	75.3	-0.7	-0.2
		P+	499	44%	43%	46%	46%	2	0
		SGP	345	45.0	42.0	45.0	43.0	-2	-2
	State	CPI	235,216	75.3	76.1	77.0	76.5	1.2	-0.5
		P+	235,216	44%	45%	48%	48%	4	0
		SGP	177,719	45.0	45.0	46.0	46.0	1	0
Low income	District	CPI	403	79.1	77.3	78.4	78.0	-1.1	-0.4
		P+	403	50%	49%	53%	51%	1	-2
		SGP	281	45.5	42.0	45.0	44.0	-1.5	-1.0
	State	CPI	180,261	75.5	76.5	77.1	76.7	1.2	-0.4
		P+	180,261	45%	47%	49%	50%	5	1
		SGP	137,185	45.0	46.0	46.0	45.0	0.0	-1.0
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	205	63.5	65.3	59.7	58.5	-5.0	-1.2
		P+	205	17%	20%	18%	18%	1	0
		SGP	127	38.5	35.0	42.0	41.0	2.5	-1.0
	State	CPI	91,757	67.8	67.3	68.3	67.3	-0.5	-1.0
		P+	91,757	28%	28%	30%	31%	3	1
		SGP	66,785	40.0	41.0	42.0	43.0	3.0	1.0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	19	61.5	58.3	60.3	64.5	3.0	4.2
		P+	19	31%	13%	24%	37%	6	13
		SGP	14	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	State	CPI	45,367	64.8	66.1	66.2	66.2	1.4	0.0
		P+	45,367	30%	32%	33%	34%	4	1
		SGP	29,933	51.0	51.0	50.0	51.0	0.0	1.0
All students	District	CPI	913	85.3	84.5	84.1	84.0	-1.3	-0.1
		P+	913	63%	62%	63%	63%	0	0
		SGP	687	49.5	44.0	45.0	50.0	0.5	5.0
	State	CPI	497,549	86.5	86.9	87.2	86.7	0.2	-0.5
		P+	497,549	67%	68%	69%	69%	2	0
		SGP	395,772	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B5b: Palmer Public Schools
Mathematics (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	494	66.2	67.1	66.7	66.5	0.3	-0.2
		P+	494	33%	37%	36%	37%	4	1
		SGP	343	50.0	42.0	40.0	36.0	-14.0	-4.0
	State	CPI	235,552	64.5	66.7	67.1	67.0	2.5	-0.1
		P+	235,552	32%	36%	37%	37%	5	0
		SGP	178,144	45.0	46.0	46.0	46.0	1.0	0.0
Low income	District	CPI	401	69.4	69.5	69.4	69.5	0.1	0.1
		P+	401	37%	41%	41%	42%	5	1
		SGP	281	49.0	42.0	39.0	38.0	-11.0	-1.0
	State	CPI	180,433	64.5	67.1	67.3	67.3	2.8	0.0
		P+	180,433	33%	37%	38%	38%	5	0
		SGP	137,529	44.0	47.0	46.0	45.0	1.0	-1.0
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	201	54.3	55.6	51.0	47.5	-6.8	-3.5
		P+	201	14%	20%	15%	11%	-3	-4
		SGP	125	50.0	42.0	40.0	30.0	-20.0	-10.0
	State	CPI	91,876	56.9	57.5	57.7	56.9	0.0	-0.8
		P+	91,876	20%	21%	22%	21%	1	-1
		SGP	66,876	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	0.0	0.0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	19	63.5	66.7	70.3	71.1	7.6	0.8
		P+	19	38%	40%	38%	47%	9	9
		SGP	14	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	State	CPI	45,695	59.2	61.5	62.0	61.6	2.4	-0.4
		P+	45,695	29%	31%	32%	32%	3	0
		SGP	30,189	49.0	54.0	52.0	52.0	3.0	0.0
All students	District	CPI	909	76.1	77.2	77.3	76.5	0.4	-0.8
		P+	909	50%	53%	52%	52%	2	0
		SGP	687	53.0	47.0	46.0	40.0	-13.0	-6.0
	State	CPI	497,984	78.5	79.9	79.9	79.9	1.4	0.0
		P+	497,984	56%	58%	58%	59%	3	1
		SGP	396,357	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B5c: Palmer Public Schools
Science and Technology/Engineering (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	177	66.8	63.3	70.3	68.4	1.6	-1.9
		P+	177	26%	22%	33%	31%	5	-2
	State	CPI	96,996	62.1	64.3	63.8	65.0	2.9	1.2
		P+	96,996	25%	28%	28%	31%	6	3
Low income	District	CPI	142	68.5	63.8	72.2	71.3	2.8	-0.9
		P+	142	29%	25%	36%	36%	7	0
	State	CPI	74,300	61.1	63.6	62.8	64.5	3.4	1.7
		P+	74,300	25%	28%	28%	31%	6	3
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	75	58.2	57.7	61.1	53.0	-5.2	-8.1
		P+	75	11%	11%	19%	8%	-3	-11
	State	CPI	38,590	58.1	59.0	59.2	58.7	0.6	-0.5
		P+	38,590	18%	19%	20%	20%	2	0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	10	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	60	60
		P+	10	0%	0%	0%	20%	20	20
	State	CPI	15,271	50.8	51.8	50.3	51.4	0.6	1.1
		P+	15,271	15%	16%	15%	17%	2	2
All students	District	CPI	371	77.6	75.1	78.5	77.0	-0.6	-1.5
		P+	371	45%	42%	50%	46%	1	-4
	State	CPI	211,464	76.8	78.3	77.6	78.6	1.8	1.0
		P+	211,464	50%	52%	52%	54%	4	2

Notes: Median SGPs are not calculated for STE. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B6: Palmer Public Schools
Annual Grade 9-12 Dropout Rates, 2009-2012**

	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
All students	3.6%	4.9%	7.1%	2.7%	-0.9	-24.7%	-4.4	-61.8%	2.5%

Notes: The annual dropout rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who drop out over a one-year period by the October 1 grade 9–12 enrollment, multiplied by 100. Dropouts are those students who dropped out of school between July 1 and June 30 of a given year and who did not return to school, graduate, or receive a GED by the following October 1. Dropout rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B7a: Palmer Public Schools
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2009-2012**

Group	Number Included (2012)	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
		2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
High needs	70	63.5%	58.2%	52.7%	64.3%	0.8	1.3%	11.6	22.0%	74.1%
Low income	57	66.7%	55.6%	55.8%	63.2%	-3.5	-5.2%	7.4	13.3%	72.4%
Students w/ disabilities	37	33.3%	53.8%	45.0%	51.4%	18.1	54.4%	6.4	14.2%	68.6%
English language learners (ELL) or Former ELL	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	61.1%
All students	127	79.2%	75.7%	70.8%	75.6%	-3.6	-4.5%	4.8	6.8%	84.7%

Notes: The four-year cohort graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular cohort who graduate in four years or less by the number of students in the cohort entering their freshman year four years earlier, minus transfers out and plus transfers in. Non-graduates include students still enrolled in high school, students who earned a GED or received a certificate of attainment rather than a diploma, and students who dropped out. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B7b: Palmer Public Schools
Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2008-2011**

Group	Number Included (2011)	School Year Ending				Change 2008-2011		Change 2010-2011		State (2011)
		2008	2009	2010	2011	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
High needs	55	58.0%	65.4%	61.2%	61.8%	3.8	6.5%	0.6	1.0%	76.5%
Low income	43	58.5%	68.9%	57.4%	65.1%	6.6	11.3%	7.7	13.4%	75.0%
Students w/ disabilities	20	40.0%	33.3%	56.4%	55.0%	15.0	37.5%	-1.4	-2.5%	70.8%
English language learners (ELL) or Former ELL	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	64.2%
All students	120	74.4%	80.8%	77.1%	76.7%	2.3	3.1%	-0.4	-0.5%	86.3%

Notes: The five-year cohort graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular cohort who graduate in five years or less by the number of students in the cohort entering their freshman year five years earlier, minus transfers out and plus transfers in. Non-graduates include students still enrolled in high school, students who earned a GED or received a certificate of attainment rather than a diploma, and students who dropped out. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B8: Palmer Public Schools
Attendance Rates, 2009-2012**

	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
All Students	95.2%	94.9%	94.9%	95.5%	0.3	0.3%	0.6	0.6%	94.9%

Notes: The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of days students attended school by the total number of days students were enrolled in a particular school year. A student's attendance rate is counted toward any district the student attended. In addition, district attendance rates included students who were out placed in public collaborative or private alternative schools/programs at public expense. Attendance rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B9: Palmer Public Schools
Suspension Rates, 2009-2012**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
In-School Suspension Rate	8.6%	1.7%	2.0%	1.0%	-7.6	-88.4%	-1.0	-50.0%	3.4%
Out-of-School Suspension Rate	11.7%	11.8%	7.3%	8.2%	-3.5	-29.9%	0.9	12.3%	5.4%

Note: This table reflects information reported by school districts at the end of the school year indicated. Suspension rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

Learning environment	By school type:	No evidence	Partial evidence	Clear & consistent evidence	Overall:		
		0	1	2	#	%	
1. Interactions between teacher & students & among students are positive & respectful.	Elementary	5%	5%	90%	0	1	2%
	Middle	0%	11%	89%	1	7	11%
	High	0%	17%	83%	2	54	87%
2. Behavioral standards are clearly communicated & disruptions, if present, are managed effectively & equitably.	Elementary	0%	30%	70%	0	3	5%
	Middle	6%	28%	67%	1	23	38%
	High	9%	52%	39%	2	35	57%
3. Classroom procedures are established & maintained to create a safe physical environment & promote smooth transitions among all classroom activities.	Elementary	0%	9%	91%	0	2	3%
	Middle	6%	12%	82%	1	9	15%
	High	4%	22%	74%	2	51	82%
4. Lesson reflects rigor & high expectations.	Elementary	0%	28%	72%	0	7	13%
	Middle	27%	33%	40%	1	19	35%
	High	14%	41%	45%	2	29	53%
5. Classroom rituals, routines & appropriate interactions create a safe intellectual environment in which students take academic risks & most behaviors that interfere with learning are prevented.	Elementary	0%	16%	84%	0	3	6%
	Middle	7%	36%	57%	1	17	32%
	High	10%	45%	45%	2	33	62%
6. Multiple resources are available to meet students' diverse learning needs.	Elementary	8%	32%	50%	0	12	20%
	Middle	27%	20%	53%	1	20	33%
	High	17%	43%	39%	2	28	47%
7. The physical arrangement of the classroom ensures a positive learning environment & provides all students with access to learning activities.	Elementary	0%	20%	80%	0	4	7%
	Middle	17%	17%	67%	1	10	17%
	High	5%	14%	82%	2	46	77%

Teaching	By school type:	No evidence	Partial evidence	Clear & consistent evidence	Overall:		
		0	1	2	#	%	
8. Demonstrates knowledge of subject & content.	Elementary	5%	32%	63%	0	4	7%
	Middle	0%	27%	73%	1	12	21%
	High	14%	9%	77%	2	40	71%
9. Communicates clear grade-appropriate learning objectives aligned to state standards. Applicable ELL language objectives are evident.	Elementary	15%	20%	65%	0	16	33%
	Middle	67%	33%	0%	1	13	27%
	High	37%	32%	32%	2	19	43%
10. Uses appropriate & varied strategies matched to learning objectives & content.	Elementary	14%	33%	52%	0	13	23%
	Middle	43%	21%	36%	1	17	30%
	High	18%	32%	50%	2	27	47%
11. Requires inquiry, exploration, application, analysis, synthesis, &/or evaluation of concepts individually, in pairs or in groups to demonstrate higher-order thinking. (circle observed skills)	Elementary	37%	21%	42%	0	27	48%
	Middle	60%	27%	13%	1	11	20%
	High	50%	14%	36%	2	18	32%
12. Uses varied questioning techniques that require/seek thoughtful responses & promote deeper understanding.	Elementary	25%	25%	50%	0	27	45%
	Middle	56%	28%	17%	1	16	27%
	High	55%	27%	18%	2	17	28%
13. Implements appropriate & varied strategies that meet students' diverse learning needs.	Elementary	23%	32%	45%	0	25	42%
	Middle	63%	13%	25%	1	15	25%
	High	45%	27%	27%	2	20	33%
14. Paces lesson to engage all students & promote understanding.	Elementary	5%	30%	65%	0	14	25%
	Middle	50%	31%	19%	1	18	33%
	High	26%	37%	37%	2	23	42%
15. Conducts frequent formative assessments to check for understanding & inform instruction.	Elementary	20%	15%	65%	0	8	15%
	Middle	13%	53%	33%	1	22	40%
	High	10%	55%	35%	2	25	45%
16. Makes use of technology to enhance learning.	Elementary	85%	0%	15%	0	37	63
	Middle	41%	24%	35%	1	8	14
	High	59%	18%	23%	2	14	24

Learning	By school type:	No evidence	Partial evidence	Clear & consistent evidence	Overall:		
		0	1	2	#	%	
17. Students are engaged in productive learning routines.	Elementary	10%	15%	75%	0	8	13%
	Middle	6%	82%	12%	1	28	47%
	High	22%	48%	30%	2	24	40%
18. Students are engaged in challenging academic tasks.	Elementary	5%	35%	60%	0	11	20%
	Middle	38%	31%	31%	1	21	39%
	High	24%	48%	29%	2	22	41%
19. Students assume responsibility for their own learning.	Elementary	16%	16%	68%	0	18	30%
	Middle	24%	53%	24%	1	18	30%
	High	46%	25%	29%	2	24	40%
20. Students articulate their thinking or reasoning verbally or in writing either individually, in pairs or in groups.	Elementary	30%	30%	40%	0	24	41%
	Middle	53%	29%	18%	1	17	29%
	High	41%	27%	32%	2	18	31%
21. Students' responses to questions elaborate about content & ideas. (not expected for all responses)	Elementary	39%	22%	39%	0	25	48%
	Middle	63%	25%	13%	1	15	29%
	High	44%	39%	17%	2	12	23%
22. Students make connections to prior knowledge, real world experiences & other subject matter.	Elementary	32%	26%	42%	0	24	43%
	Middle	73%	20%	7%	1	16	29%
	High	32%	36%	32%	2	16	29%
23. Students use technology as a tool for learning &/or understanding.	Elementary	80%	10%	10%	0	43	78%
	Middle	73%	13%	13%	1	6	11%
	High	80%	10%	10%	2	6	11%
24. Student work demonstrates high quality & can serve as exemplars.	Elementary	74%	11%	16%	0	43	81%
	Middle	80%	20%	0%	1	5	9%
	High	89%	0%	11%	2	5	9%