How Is Your School District Performing?

A look at

Pittsfield

Public Schools

2004–2006

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Pittsfield Public Schools, Katherine Darlington; the school department staff; and the city officials of Pittsfield.

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INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

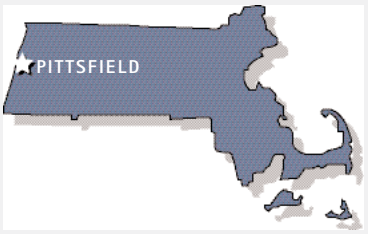
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In April 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Pittsfield Public Schools for the period of 2004–2006. The EQA analyzed Pittsfield students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Pittsfield Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Pittsfield, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 45,793
Median family income: $46,228
Largest sources of employment: Educational, health, and social services; retail trade; and manufacturing
Local government: Mayor-Council

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 7 members
Number of schools: 12
Student-teacher ratio: 12.6 to 1
Per Pupil Expenditures: $10,663
Student enrollment:
Total: 6,472
White: 81.5 percent
Hispanic: 5.4 percent
African-American: 9.7 percent
Asian-American: 1.5 percent
Native American: 0.2 percent
Limited English proficient: 3.6 percent
Low income: 40.6 percent
Special education: 16.6 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

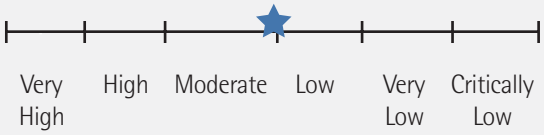
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

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

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	71	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	79	84
Math Proficiency Index	64	72

Performance Rating



The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and subgroups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

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

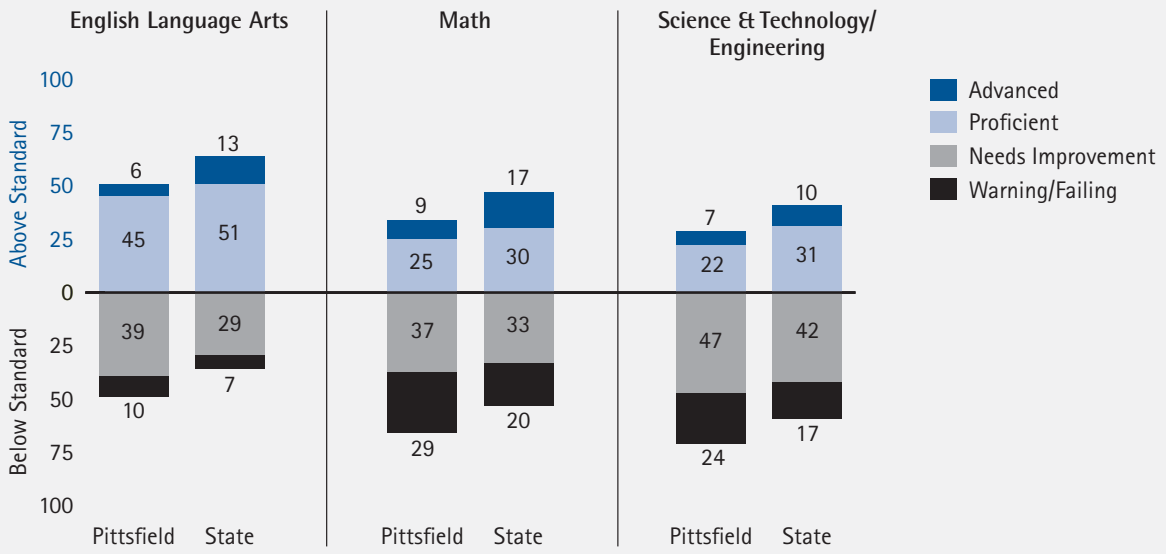
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, more than two-fifths of all students in Pittsfield attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much less than that statewide. Slightly more than half of Pittsfield students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), slightly more than one-third of Pittsfield students attained proficiency in math, and less than one-third of Pittsfield students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-six percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Pittsfield's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 71 proficiency index (PI) points, seven PI points less than that statewide. Pittsfield's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 29 PI points.
- In 2006, Pittsfield's proficiency gap in ELA was 21 PI points, five PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in

PITTSFIELD SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



performance of more than two and one-half PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Pittsfield's proficiency gap in math was 36 PI points in 2006, eight PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of four and one-half PI points per year to achieve AYP. Pittsfield's proficiency gap in STE was 37 PI points, eight PI points wider than that statewide.

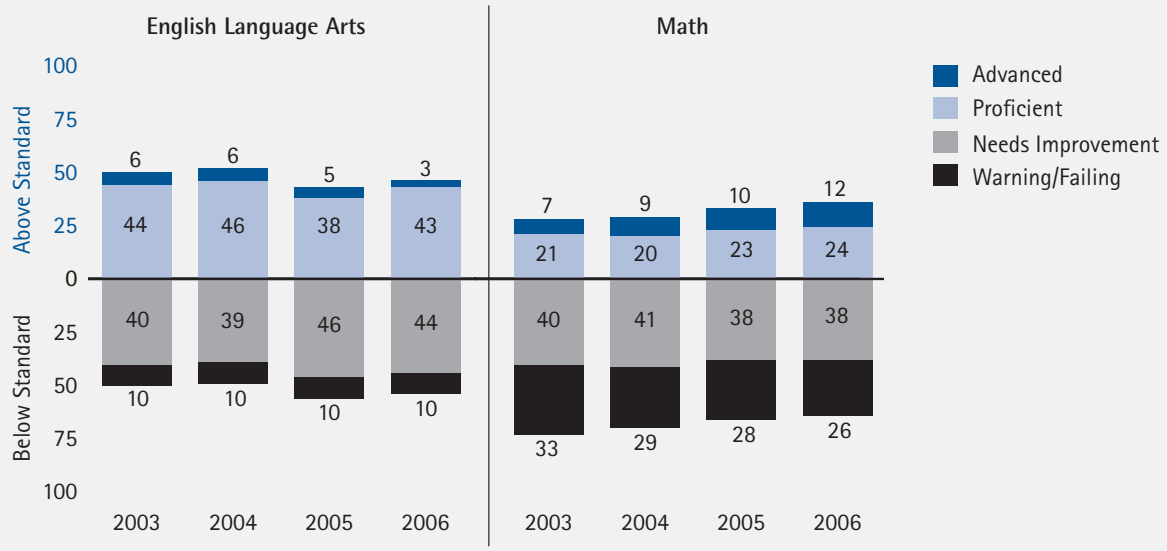
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Pittsfield's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall, some improvement in math, and a slight decline in ELA and STE.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by three percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by four percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Pittsfield narrowed from 32 PI points in 2003 to 29 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 10 percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Pittsfield showed a slight decline, at an average of approximately one-third PI point annually.
- Math performance in Pittsfield showed improvement, at an average of two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 16 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

PITTSFIELD ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



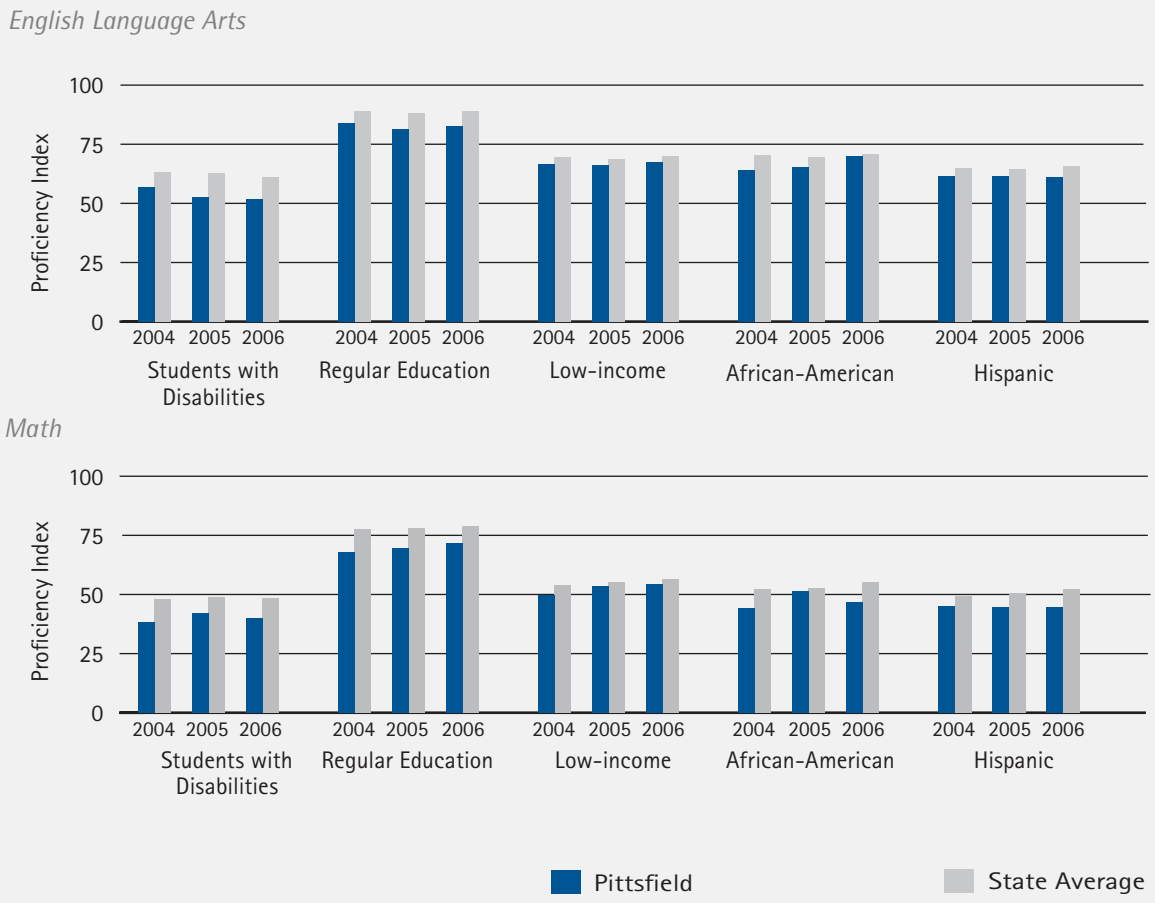
- Between 2004 and 2006, Pittsfield had a decline in STE performance, decreasing by approximately one and one-half PI points over the two-year period.

4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Of the nine measurable subgroups in Pittsfield in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 30 PI points in ELA and 34 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

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

PITTSFIELD STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

In Pittsfield, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 28 PI points in 2003 to 31 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 32 to 34 PI points during this period.

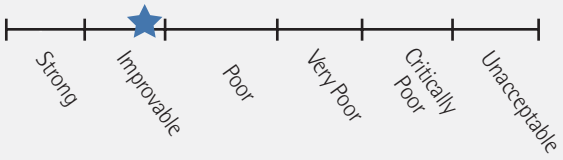
- Only regular education students, non low-income students, and African-American students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in ELA was African-American students.
- In math, all subgroups in Pittsfield showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was non low-income students.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Pittsfield received the following rating:

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

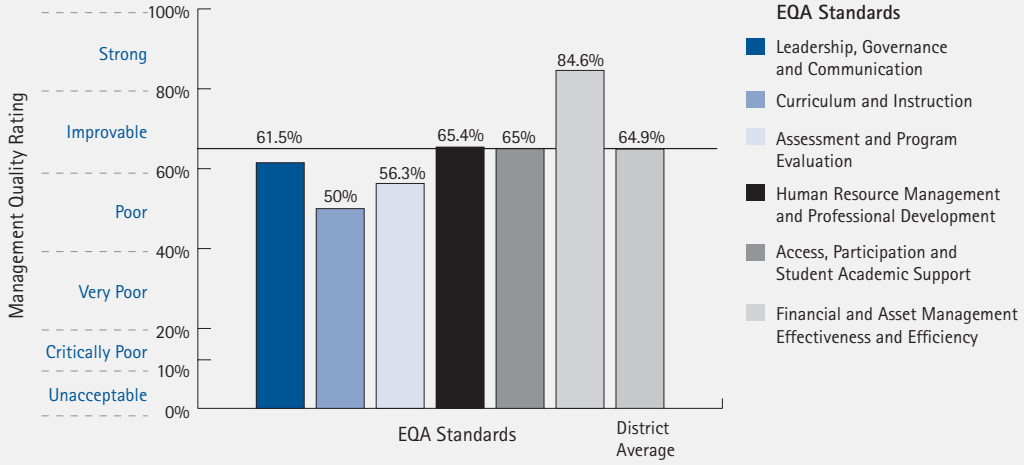
Overall District Management

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Pittsfield received an overall MQI score of 'Improvable' (64.9 percent). The district performed best on the Financial Management standard, scoring 'Strong.' It was rated 'Poor' on both the Curriculum and Instruction and Assessment and Program Evaluation standards. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance declined by two points in ELA and improved by four PI points in math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Pittsfield, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by 2006 MCAS test performance, Pittsfield ranked among the 'Moderate' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'Moderate' in ELA and 'Low' in math.

Leadership and Governance

The leadership of the Pittsfield Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the seven-member school committee. Major changes took place in the leadership of the Pittsfield Public Schools in 2005 with the arrival of a new superintendent and deputy superintendent. The district also hired new principals and curriculum coordinators effective August 2006. The new leadership placed strong emphasis on standards-based instruction and planning, accompanied by professional development for administrators and teachers in using data to make instructional and programmatic decisions. The new superintendent prioritized the systemic use of student achievement and attendance data, including analysis of subgroup data, to identify student needs. The district delegated appropriate authority to principals and administrators to hire staff and to manage their respective schools and programs. Student achievement data had not yet been a major factor in assessing their leadership.

School committee members interviewed by the EQA were knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities and shared a new commitment to standards-based decision-making. They received reports on dropouts, graduation rates, class size, attendance, and the MCAS test results. School committee interviewees cited recent examples in which they had used data to make budgetary and programmatic decisions, such as the decision to implement remedial programs and alternative pro-

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- In 2004, after the loss of over 90 positions, the district secured a commitment from the city for a level service budget with no layoffs. The district was able to create new and improved programs by reducing services/costs in other areas.
- The district began to analyze and use data more consistently, and in 2006-2007 began to develop new technological tools to gather and analyze data to improve its instructional programs.

Areas for Improvement

- Examiners found that the superintendent evaluated only eight of 36 administrators in 2005-2006.
- The district has developed several programs and services to promote equity for at-risk students. However, some interviewees contended that school and student needs varied widely across the district and that staffing and services were not necessarily proportionate to needs.

grams for at-risk students. Using student achievement data, the district also decided to maintain half days in September as part of the kindergarten transition plan, allowing teachers to meet with all kindergarten parents and students on an individual basis. School committee policy provided for an orientation for each new member conducted by the superintendent and chair of the committee, and new school committee members participated in Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) training.

Communication

Communication and collaboration have been priorities of the district. The school committee, superintendent, and city officials have worked closely together to prepare and approve school budgets over the last two years. Administrators participated in professional development and worked together on teams. Principals formed Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSGs) and encouraged grade-level and departmental meetings at which teachers worked together to analyze data and use the data to develop and modify instruction. Communication with parents, community members, and business partners was achieved through websites, newsletters, public meetings, and interaction with parents at after-school and evening programs. The district encouraged the participation of these groups in school programs, which benefited from their funding. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) included goals for parental involvement.

Planning

During the period under review, the District Improvement Plan (DIP) was narrative, but new administrators prepared and the school committee adopted a new template and standards-based DIP for 2006-2007. SIPs used the same template and were aligned with the DIP in appropriate district goals. Principals reported on the progress of their SIPs to the school committee. Instructional decisions, such as those pertaining to use of flexible grouping, remediation, and acceleration, have begun to be based on achievement data, especially in elementary ELA and middle school math. Administrators proposed programmatic changes at the secondary level, especially in the areas of instruction and attendance, as a result of data analysis. Budgets for FY 2006 and FY 2007 avoided layoffs and provided level services. Reductions in other areas permitted the implementation of new and improved programs.

Each school developed its own safety and evacuation plan and made it available to staff members during the period under review. The district has begun working with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and fire and police officials to prepare an updated districtwide safety plan.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Pittsfield Public Schools did not perform effectively in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

During the period under review, the district had just begun to lay the structure for creating, documenting, revising, and communicating curricula, guided by the district's strategic plan and SIPs under the leadership of a new superintendent, deputy superintendent, and re-instituted curriculum leaders at the central office. Schools used different instructional programs in the core content areas during the review period, and the district planned to have schools conform in the use of a single program for consistency. Some horizontal and vertical alignment was present, but further work needed to be done to avoid gaps or redundancies in instruction. The district established a framework of curriculum committees, spanning grades preK-12, to work on curriculum and its alignment. By the end of the review period, the district had yet to document curricula that consistently aligned to the state curriculum frameworks and contained all key components: objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, measurable outcomes, and common assessments. Since the district had little completed curricula, a regular cycle of curriculum review and/or revision had yet to be established.

All district administrators were required to attend a two-year National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training to learn how to implement standards-based instructional systems and to provide instructional leadership in their buildings. The staff received training in the WFSG model of professional development, and principals were expected to be actively involved with them to focus school efforts on using data to

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- A new deputy superintendent overseeing curriculum development was creating a structure of collaborative and distributive leadership to monitor the alignment, use, and effectiveness of curricula.

Areas for Improvement

- During the period under review, the district did not have comprehensive or complete curricula in ELA, math, or science spanning grades preK-12.
- The district did not consistently use formative and summative data from all levels to improve instruction and reallocate instructional time in the tested core content areas.
- The availability of educational technology and computers was inequitable at different levels for both teachers and students, according to interviews and observations.
- Instructional practice that reflected highly skilled delivery, frequent student engagement, multiple learning styles, and consistently high expectations varied across the district's schools.

improve instruction. Through the reinstitution of central office curriculum leaders, staff members were beginning to work on data analysis, curriculum development, and effective programs grounded in research to improve instruction. They had not looked at disaggregated data thoroughly nor had they allocated extra time consistently to ensure that all students would become proficient. Middle school students who were struggling in math were assigned to two math courses during the school year, one of which was remedial and called Encore math. More staff had been trained in the analysis of data since the district purchased licenses for TestWiz.net to organize and analyze the results of local assessments and the MCAS tests. According to data from the Merrimack Education Collaborative (MEC), the percentage of Pittsfield students who attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests was 39 percent in 2004, 38 percent in 2005, and 41 percent in 2006.

Effective Instruction

Administrators monitored teachers for effective instruction by the using the walk-through protocol in the district. All district leaders were supposed to use the effective daily instruction (EDI) protocol to monitor walk-throughs and assess instruction. According to district interviewees, they did not consistently implement this protocol nor was it necessarily linked to teacher evaluations in practice. Department chairs at the secondary level monitored teachers for effective instruction, and the principal facilitated the summative evaluation with the respective chair and teacher.

The district had recently made the use of technology and common assessments two priorities for effective instruction. The inequitable availability of up-to-date technology at all schools impeded the integration of technology into classroom instruction. Teachers were just beginning to create common exams and had not yet analyzed the results for strengths and weaknesses to determine the quality of the instructional program and student achievement. Although the district used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Galileo to assess student progress in addition to the MCAS tests, these assessments were used inconsistently districtwide and were not used to evaluate staff or school performance.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

The district was in the process of using formative assessments at the elementary level for reading and at the middle school level for mathematics. The district had mandated the use of the DIBELS and AIMSweb for ongoing assessment at the elementary level in reading and ELA, but had no similar assessment for math at grades K-5. The results of these assessments were used to implement the three-tiered intervention model for ELA. This model allowed for increased time on learning, more individualized attention for those in need, and less pullout intervention for those most in need.

Pittsfield Public Schools also created districtwide quarterly assessments in math at grades 6-8, using Galileo software, but did not have similar assessments at grades 6-8 in ELA or reading. The high schools had created partially common midterms and finals as summative evaluations, but had not yet implemented a system of standardized formative assessments. Benchmarks were not used at any level for science.

The district had yet to develop a written districtwide curriculum at each grade level and, therefore, a common assessment system at grades K-12 in ELA, math, and science based on that curriculum. The district relied primarily on the MCAS test results to determine what types of academic support were needed for students regarding placement and additional time on learning. Principals had the latitude within their buildings to assign staff appropriately to serve students in need.

In 2006, the district purchased 23 site licenses for TestWiz.net in order to manage and analyze the results of local and MCAS assessment data. Each

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- All eligible students participated in the MCAS testing at levels that exceeded the state requirement of 95 percent.
- Common NISL training for principals and curriculum directors was moving the district toward developing a standards-based curriculum and creating a collaborative culture of leadership.

Areas for Improvement

- The district developed and implemented benchmarks and an assessment system only at grades K-5 in ELA and grades 6-8 in mathematics.
- Implementation of the three-tiered interventions was a site-based decision. Elementary, middle, and high schools varied widely on materials used, how personnel were used to provide interventions, and how much time was spent teaching ELA, math, and science.

principal and at least one teacher-leader per school was required to attend TestWiz.net training. The deputy superintendent was beginning to use past MCAS performance to predict future performance in the aggregate. This information would be sorted by school and teacher in the future to give feedback on how to modify instructional practices in order to improve student achievement.

Program Evaluation

The district was just beginning to look at the MCAS and local assessment results to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs at all levels. The district implemented the use of PowerSchool and PowerGrade as a means to collect student data, including grades, attendance, retentions, and dropouts, and to make the data easier to analyze. In addition, the technology allowed parents who had attended the training to get a password and then monitor their child's progress online. According to the district's technology professional development coordinator, so far 1,024 parents were trained to use PowerSchool. In April 2007, all secondary students received a password and instructions for use of PowerSchool, mailed to their respective homes. The district provided the training by means of in-person workshops to address the issue of scheduling parents to attend a workshop on using PowerSchool before they would receive a password. The district developed a videotape presentation to make it more convenient and accessible to all. In addition, all parents can also access a teacher's website. In 2007-2008, the district hoped to include assignment information in teachers' new PowerTeacher online grade books, which would also be available to parents through PowerSchool. This will make it easier to publish information about upcoming assignments, tests, and projects that parents and students can access at home.

New leadership at the central office created some districtwide initiatives to involve all administrators and teachers to work collaboratively toward the same district goals. All administrators and curriculum directors were required to attend a two-year program of NISL training, use the same EDI protocol for classroom walk-throughs to assess instruction, and use the WFSG model of professional development to focus school efforts on using assessment data to improve instruction. The district engaged only in audits that were mandated by the Department of Education or a grant funding entity to assess the effectiveness of its programs.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

The Pittsfield Public Schools had practices in place that allowed the district to recruit, select, and hire highly qualified professional teaching staff. According to the documentation presented by the district, over 91 percent (513 of 561) of the district's teachers had appropriate Massachusetts licensure for the teaching assignments that they held. Ten licensed teachers were teaching out of field for one of more periods a day. Forty-eight teachers were not licensed at all. During the period under review, the district employed 29 licensed administrators. Twenty of them were licensed for the job they held, and nine administrators were not licensed for the job they currently held.

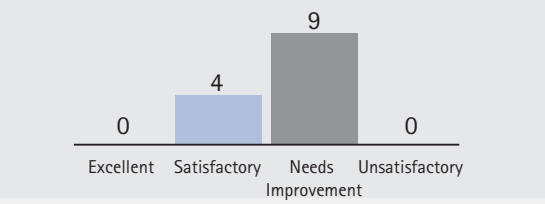
In those instances in which the district was unable to find highly qualified teachers, it hired non-licensed staff members and monitored their progress toward licensure. The district supported these unlicensed teachers through the district mentoring program and through professional development funds to subsidize the coursework necessary to gain teacher licensure.

The district also had a formal mentoring program in place for new teachers. However, due to a large teacher turnover and the retirement of trained mentors during the period under review, there was an insufficient number of mentors for new teachers in the latter part of the review period. Principals mentored new teachers, several at a time, in order to fill this gap. The district's mentoring program for administrators was informal, and those new administrators interviewed stated that mentoring consisted of the new administrator seeking out experienced administrators for support. Administrators indicated that the district

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Teacher evaluations conformed with state law requiring biennial evaluations for professional status teachers and annual evaluations for non-professional status teachers.

Areas for Improvement

- Teacher evaluations did not hold teachers accountable for student achievement.
- For 2005-2006, the school committee did not evaluate the superintendent of schools, nor did the superintendent evaluate central administrators, as required by statute.
- The district implemented the use of a common EDI form for improving student achievement, but administrators did not uniformly use it or give feedback in the same way.

encouraged professional growth and development for principals and coordinators through the NISL training, a grant-funded program designed to strengthen leadership skills in schools to impact student achievement.

Professional Development

Based on a 2005 survey of teachers, the district provided professional development in the areas of effective teaching, assessment, and positive learning environment. The school committee allocated $100,000 a year for professional staff reimbursement of tuition fees and expenses related to attending workshops, seminars, and conferences.

Prior to 2005-2006, professional development in the district was unfocused. In 2005-2006, the district began to concentrate on the use of data to improve student achievement. Under the leadership of the new superintendent, all principals and professional staff received professional development training in using WFSGs, which became the starting point of the analysis of data in the schools. In 2006, the district purchased 23 licenses for TestWiz.net and trained staff members to use the program. This allowed the schools to analyze the MCAS data and to analyze subgroup data using the district's Macintosh operating system. In the WFSGs, faculty and principals analyzed data from the MCAS tests, the DIBELS, the Advanced Placement (AP) tests, program-based assessments, and attendance records to create action plans to address student achievement.

Evaluation

According to a random sample of teacher evaluations reviewed by EQA examiners, the district annually evaluated teachers without professional status and biennially evaluated teachers with professional status, as required under Massachusetts General Laws and school committee policy. All teacher evaluations reviewed were considered to be timely, most were informative, and only some were instructive and considered to be conducive to overall professional growth and effectiveness. This was substantiated by the presence or absence of statements made in the written evaluations.

For 2005-2006, the Pittsfield school committee did not evaluate the superintendent, nor did the superintendent evaluate all central administrators, as required under statute. Neither teacher nor administrator evaluations were specifically linked to student achievement goals.

During the review period, the district developed the EDI form to monitor classrooms and provide feedback to teachers. The EQA examiners found that not all administrators used the EDI in conducting walk-throughs and that they did not consistently use it to provide feedback.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

Services

Pittsfield Public Schools had early intervention literacy programs at the primary level, and the district used Early Reading Intervention for all its students along with several other reading support programs for its at-risk students. Thirty-six percent of the students reached the proficiency level or higher on the grade 4 MCAS test in ELA in 2006.

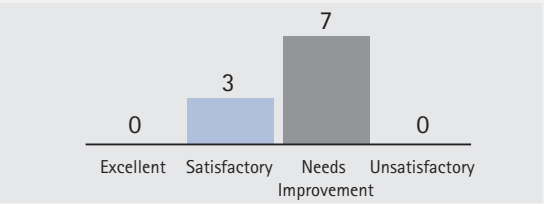
The district used aggregate achievement data, especially the MCAS test results, to identify the student needs at each grade level and determine the scope and sequence of the academic assistance. The district mandated that all grade K-5 teachers schedule 90-minute ELA instructional blocks each day, and that the teachers assess students at least three times per year using the DIBELS. When teachers noted deficiencies in student performance, they provided additional ELA services (Tier II and/or Tier III interventions) through a combination of reading specialists, Title I teachers, and paraprofessionals. In contrast, no common, ongoing math assessment was in place at the elementary schools, and although the district was planning a three-tiered intervention program for math, it was just in the planning stages.

At the district's two middle schools, the district assigned all grade 6-8 students to a double period of ELA and students who had done poorly on their previous MCAS math test to an additional daily math class. There were few formal, academic, after-school support programs at the middle level, but summer programs were offered to middle school students if they had failed one or more courses. The high schools offered MCAS tutoring in math and ELA to grade 9 and 10 students who had performed poorly on the grade 8 math test and to grade 11 and 12 students

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Early intervention programs were available to primary grade students, and the district offered an integrated preschool program for special education children needing services.
- During the period under review, the district had a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and identified at-risk students, providing them with additional programs and academic support.

Areas for Improvement

- The district student attendance rate was below the state average throughout the period under review, but a high number of students were chronically absent starting at middle school and continuing into high school.
- The dropout rate for the district was more than twice the state average, which administrators and principals perceived as problematic and requiring attention.
- The district offered after-school and/or summer programs on a very limited basis.

who had not achieved a passing score on either the grade 10 math or ELA test. High school students could make up course credits at summer school. Neither high school offered a formal after-school support program for its at-risk students, but homework help, peer tutoring, and tutoring at the Juvenile Resource Center (JRC) were available on a voluntary basis.

The district had discipline policies in place at each level and published the discipline code in each school's handbook. According to interviewees, implementation of these policies and practices varied from school to school. The district's two middle schools used in-school suspension as their main disciplinary tool, but teachers also used team leaders as the first point of referral. The two high schools, conversely, used out-of-school suspension as their main disciplinary tool and also used the services of the Berkshire County Sheriff's Office through its Juvenile Resource Center for habitual offenders and excessive truants. The percentage of students disciplined with in-school or out-of-school suspension at the secondary level was well above the state average in each category.

The high schools' reported dropout rate was more than twice the state average, and the cohort group dropout rate in 2006 approached 33 percent. The district used several dropout prevention methods including the JRC and a five-year graduation plan. Several programs were available for those students who did drop out; they could return to school or continue their education in a GED certificate program or the Adult Diploma Program.

The district's overall attendance rate in 2005-2006 was 93.8 percent, which was below the state and NCLB targets of 95 percent. Overall, the rate of chronic absenteeism, defined as absent more than 10 percent of the school year, was very high. This rate jumped to 14.1 percent in grade 5 and peaked at 29.5 percent in grade 9. The district employed one full-time attendance officer, two attendance coordinators at each high school, and each of the secondary schools had a Pittsfield police officer stationed at the school. All of these individuals worked with school administrators on dealing with students who had attendance problems. They frequently visited the homes of truant students and filed Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petitions, especially for grade 8 and 9 students.

Pittsfield Public Schools' access policies stated clearly that the district would allow all students to participate in all course offerings, including the accelerated and/or AP courses offered at the two high schools. The district routinely honored parental requests, and, according to interviewees, the percentages of minority students in those classes closely resembled the percentages of minority students in the total school population. The district took pride in the fact that it offered as many as 16 AP courses at each high school; however, the average score, out of a maximum score of 5, for those students who chose to take the AP exams was 2.92 at Pittsfield High School and 1.83 at Taconic High School.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

Budget Process

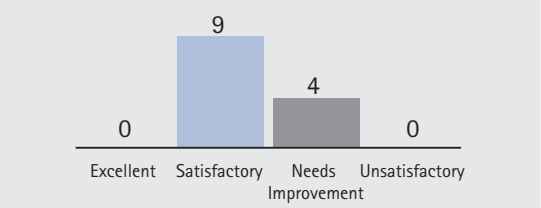
The Pittsfield Public Schools' budget process was open and participatory. All administrators with budget authority solicited input from their staffs. The administrative team reviewed all requests to develop a superintendent's budget that was presented to the school committee's finance subcommittee, and then to the committee as a whole. The school district was in the beginning stages of analyzing and using data in its decision-making process, including budget development. At the time of the review, aggregate data, but little disaggregated data, were used. The main focus in developing the budget was on maintaining small class sizes. In addition, the district offered more AP courses at the high schools in an attempt to address school choice outflow.

The school district did not have adequate resources to address all perceived needs. However, there was a much better relationship with the city than seen in the prior EQA review in March 2003, and there was a much better understanding on the part of the mayor and city officials regarding what the school department needed to make improvements. The district relied on business partnerships and parent teacher organizations for routine operational expenses, including the salaries for two positions in the vocational program. The district budget booklet was easily readable and included detailed information regarding historical expenditures, revenues, personnel, grants, and other pertinent information to make the budget deliberations easily understood by all stakeholders. The district reviewed its programs and activities for cost effectiveness and provided several examples of its decisions to allocate resources more

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Pittsfield received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The school district's internal control structure was adequate to ensure sound business practices for purchasing and processing of payroll expenditures.
- The city and school district had a written agreement that detailed the expenditures paid for the district by the city.
- Buildings varied in condition and availability of technology, yet had safety features such as locked doors with bells needed for entry.

Areas for Improvement

- Equity of resources was an issue among schools; with differing degrees of success, parent teacher organizations and individual school business partnerships helped to raise additional funds.

efficiently. These included providing in-district professional development, serving as a center for NISL training for other school districts, and partnering with the sheriff's office in the JRC program.

Financial Support

The city, under the new mayoral administration, focused its budget and resources for the school district on "no layoffs," which demonstrated a marked improvement in the financial picture than that seen in the prior EQA review. The city contributed above the minimum required local contribution each year under review. The school district did not request funding above the amount needed for level services and relied on outside sources of funding to supplement the city-provided budget.

The district's financial management practices were sound. It had systems in place to ensure that the budget was spent within its limits, purchasing regulations were followed, and proper procedures were in place to process payroll.

Facilities and Safety

The district's facilities varied regarding their condition. Schools had individual, building-based safety plans. Some schools had doors locked with a doorbell or buzzer, and some had to have a staff member physically let people enter. The district addressed preventative maintenance primarily through contractual arrangements with vendors and through a work-order system. The city maintenance department provided the maintenance plan for the schools and the district's capital plan. Therefore, the district did not have a formal, long-term capital plan, but needs were addressed on a yearly basis through the city.

CONCLUSION

The Pittsfield Public Schools was considered to be a 'Moderate' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Moderate' in ELA and 'Low' in math during the review period as measured by the 2006 MCAS test results. Less than half of Pittsfield's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Improvable,' with the highest rating in Financial Management, and the lowest in Curriculum and Instruction.

At the end of the 19th century, when Pittsfield was a bustling metropolis, the Electric Manufacturing Company relocated from Great Barrington to Pittsfield. This was the forerunner of the internationally known corporate giant, General Electric (GE). While GE Advanced Materials (plastics) continues to be one of the city's largest employers, the workforce that once topped 13,000 has been reduced to less than 700 employees, with the relocation of the aerospace portion of the GE empire.

Pittsfield contains an area designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a Superfund site, due to the high content of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a suspected carcinogen, and the EPA selected the City of Pittsfield as a Superfund Development Pilot. Currently the economic redevelopment authority is using this fund to create a "reuse plan" for the GE site. One of the district's schools sits next to a currently active GE dumpsite and authorities monitor for possible pollution and/or contamination, with optional monthly blood tests for the employees of the school and the children attending the school.

The 2007 visit was the EQA's third visit to Pittsfield, and although the district has made progress on the EQA standards and indicators, the MCAS scores have remained relatively flat. Overall, the district was attempting to centralize its curriculum and improvement efforts, which had been extremely site based during the EQA's first visit in 2004. The district aligned School Improvement Plans with the District Improvement Plan, using the same template and similar goals. The district was also just beginning to use student achievement to measure progress toward SIP goals. The district has developed several programs and services to promote equity for at-risk students. Some interviewees told the EQA that pupil needs vary widely across the district, and staffing to provide needed services is not proportionate to respective school needs. Additionally, the district lost over 90 positions since FY 2002, and although the FY 2007 budget avoided layoffs and provided level services, the financing of new or improved programming had to be balanced with budget reductions in other areas.

By 2006-2007, the district had begun to implement the use of formative assessments from the bottom up in order to make better decisions about instruction. The district was trying to implement a three-tiered intervention plan in both literacy and math to improve student achievement. The district used technology to increase the efficiency of giving formative assessments. The use of disaggregated student achievement data, as well as data on attendance, retentions, suspensions, student and teacher absences, and chronic absenteeism, was in the formative stage. The district rarely did an analysis of policies and procedures at the root level.

Through a grant from the Department of Education, principals and curriculum directors attended common National Institute for School Leadership training to move the district toward developing a standards-based curriculum and worked to develop a collaborative culture of leadership through the use of the Whole-Faculty Study Group (WFSG) model. The WFSGs comprised almost all of each school's site-based professional development which was, according to interviewees, still focused on "unpacking state curriculum frameworks" in order to create curriculum maps. The district had yet to create periodic and measurable benchmarks in ELA, math, and science that would culminate in a K-12 districtwide curriculum and assessment system.

The district budget development process centered on maintaining level services with adjustments made within this amount. Even though student achievement data indicated that more needed to be done with associated costs, administrators usually prioritized a long list of needs and might be able to fund one or two. Although each school principal worked on fostering business partnerships as well as relationships with respective parent teacher organizations, which could help raise additional money for the schools, equity was an issue among schools in different neighborhoods. Even though data were used in budget development, the focus was clearly on maintaining small class size and, to a lesser degree, funding what was considered necessary to serve student needs based on the analysis of a school's student achievement data.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts — those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education — received an even more detailed review.

Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis

ADA: Average Daily Attendance

ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment

API: Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)

ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress

CAP: Corrective Action Plan

CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures

CD: Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates

CMP: Connected Math Program

CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information

CPI: Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)

CPR: Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE

CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test

CSR: Comprehensive School Reform

DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIP: District Improvement Plan

DOE: Department of Education

DPDP: District Professional Development Plan

DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment

ELA: English Language Arts

ELL: English Language Learners

EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index

ESL: English as a Second Language

FLNE: First Language Not English

FRL/N: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No

FRL/Y: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes

FTE: Full-Time Equivalent

FY: Fiscal Year

Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency

GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board

GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADU: The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry

IEP: Individualized Education Program

Improvement Gap: A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time

IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan

IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan

ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan

LASW: Looking at Student Work

LEP: Limited English Proficient

MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials

MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS-Alt: Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency

MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official

MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral

MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment

MPI: Math Proficiency Index

MQI: Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system

MUNIS: Municipal Information System

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NRT: Norm-Referenced Test

NSBA: National School Boards Association

NSS: Net School Spending

Performance Gap: A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district

PI: Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency

PIM: Performance Improvement Management

PQA: Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process

Proficiency Gap: A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency

QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory

Rate of Improvement: The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap

SAT: A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

SIMS: Student Information Management System

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPED: Special Education

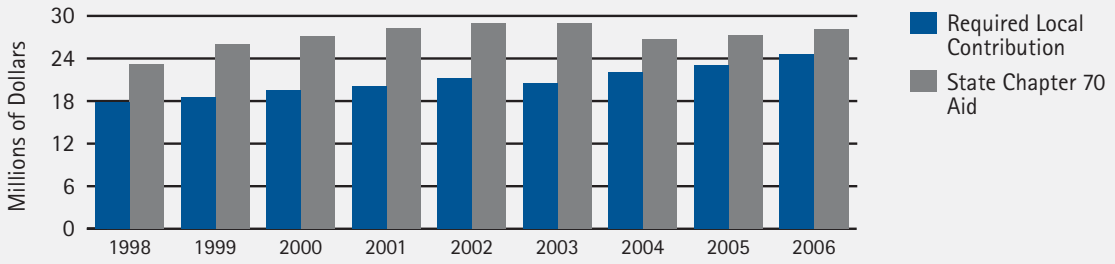
STE: Science and Technology/Engineering

TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

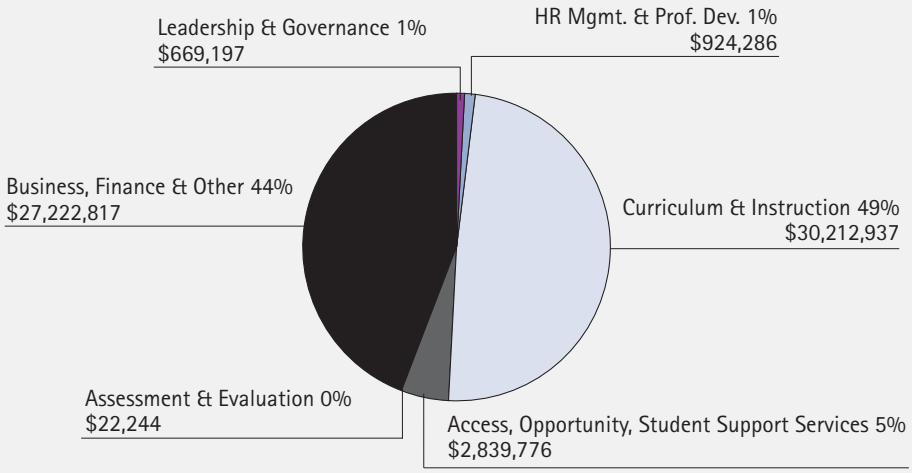
A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program — the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Pittsfield's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. The district exceeded the state net school spending (NSS) requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, NSS increased from $51,709,394 to $57,138,077; Chapter 70 aid increased from $26,664,443 to $28,114,213; the required local contribution increased from $22,057,033 to $24,611,444; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 6,641 to 6,516. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual NSS decreased from 52 to 49 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total NSS decreased from 62 to 59 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR PITTSFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR PITTSFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

FY05 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)



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