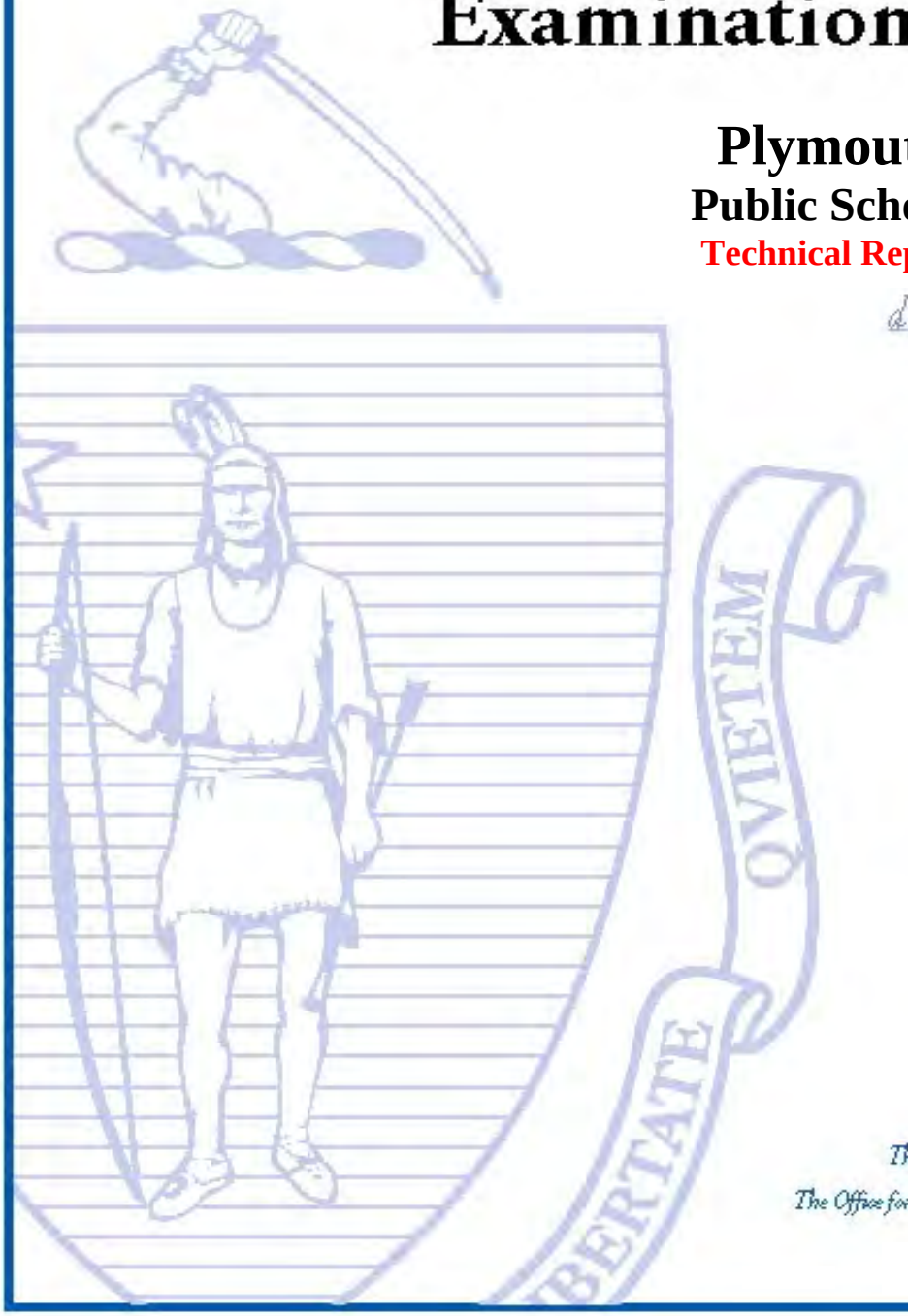
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

School District Examination Report:

Plymouth
Public Schools
Technical Report

data driven
standards based
learner centered



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

2004 - 2006

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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

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

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Executive Summary

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Plymouth Public Schools in March 2007. With an average proficiency index of 82 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006 (89 PI points in English language arts and 75 PI points in math), the district is considered a 'High' performing school system based on the Department of Education's rating system (found in Appendix A of this report), with achievement above the state average. Three-fifths of Plymouth's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests.

District Overview

The town of Plymouth is a coastal community in southeastern Massachusetts, approximately five miles north of the Cape Cod Canal. It is the seat of Plymouth County and has the largest area of any town in the commonwealth. The largest sources of employment within the community are educational, health and social services; retail trade; and professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services. The town is governed by a Board of Selectmen/Town Manager/Representative Town Meeting form of municipal government.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Plymouth had a median family income of $63,266 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 178 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 51,701 with a population of 10,492 school-age children, or 20 percent of the total. Of the total households in Plymouth, 39 percent were households with children under 18 years of age, and 21 percent were households with individuals age 65 years or older. Twenty-six percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2005-2006 the Plymouth Public Schools had a total enrollment of 8,451. The demographic composition in the district was: 92.5 percent White, 2.9 percent African-American, 2.2 percent Hispanic, 0.9 percent Asian, 0.3 percent Native American, 0.4 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.8 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 0.5 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 21.0 percent low income, and 16.6 percent special education. Ninety-three percent of school-age children in Plymouth

attended public schools. The district does not offer school choice. A total of 285 Plymouth students attended public schools outside the district, including 266 students who attended charter schools.

The district has 14 schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 12, including nine elementary schools serving grades pre-kindergarten through 5, two middle/junior high schools serving grades 5 through 8, and three high schools serving grades 9 through 12. The administrative team at the time of the review consisted of a superintendent, an assistant superintendent for administration and instruction, an assistant superintendent for human resources, and a business manager. The district has a seven-member school committee.

In FY 2006, Plymouth's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $10,665, compared to $11,196 statewide, ranking it 158 out of the 325 of 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $69,815,133 to $76,834,972; Chapter 70 aid increased from $16,321,643 to $16,749,443; the required local contribution increased from $46,299,347 to $50,709,654; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 8,789 to 8,556. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 23 to 22 percent during this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total Schedule 1 net school spending reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report decreased from 63 to 62 percent.

Context

The leadership of the Plymouth Public Schools during the past several years has been stable. The superintendent began his career in the district in 1993 as social studies coordinator, then in 1999 became assistant superintendent for human resources, and in 2004 became superintendent. The seven-member school committee has a mixture of both veteran and newly-elected members. Its chairperson has nine years of service, and the time of service for other members ranges from 21 years to 10 months.

Until the last few years, according to EQA interviews, there was very little cooperation among the various town departments, and the school committee and the selectmen did not always work together. The superintendent and the school committee have, during the past few years, made a

concerted and successful effort to open up the lines of communication between the school department and all other town departments.

The town supports the educational system, and in 2006 the citizens voted a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools. These schools are currently overcrowded, and the community has submitted its Statement of Interest in this building project to the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

The town has always met net school spending obligations, even though during the past seven years the funding level for the Plymouth Public Schools has been below the state average. A review of district population data shows that the population is declining. In 2002, district population had reached an all time high of 9,133 students, but has steadily declined since then to a population of 8,451 in 2006. Interviewees said that the community is losing affordable housing, and some even added that the community is losing its middle class.

The Plymouth Public Schools encompasses the largest land area of any town in the commonwealth. This contributes to some extent to a site-based model of administration, which is due more to geography than to administration. Because of the distances between buildings, it is difficult to convene grade-level meetings across the district. Elementary principals find it difficult to meet as a group unlike the high school and middle school principals.

The community houses Pilgrim Station, a nuclear power plant, and the district and community have developed a comprehensive Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan that includes the guidelines and procedures should there be a problem at the nuclear power plant.

The EQA Examination Process

The Massachusetts Legislature created the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in July 2000 to provide independent and objective programmatic and financial audits of the 350-plus school districts that serve the cities and towns of the commonwealth. The agency is the accountability component of the Education Reform Act of 1993, and was envisioned in that legislation. The EQA works under the direction of a five-person citizen council, appointed by the governor, known as the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC).

From March 19-22, 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Plymouth Public Schools for the period 2004-2006, with a primary focus on 2006. This examination was based on the EQA's six major standards of inquiry that address the quality of educational management, which are: 1) Leadership, Governance, and Communication; 2) Curriculum and Instruction; 3) Assessment and Program Evaluation; 4) Human Resource Management and Professional Development; 5) Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support; and 6) Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency. The report is based on the source documents, correspondence sent prior to the on-site visit, interviews with the representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers, and additional documents submitted while in the district. The report does not consider documents, revised data, or comments that may have surfaced after the onsite visit.

For the period under examination, 2004-2006, this report finds Plymouth to be a 'High' performing school district with an average proficiency index of 82 proficiency index (PI) points in 2006, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'Moderate' in math on the 2004-2006 MCAS tests. Over this period, student performance declined by approximately one-half PI point in ELA and improved by three PI points in math, which closed the district's average proficiency gap by eight percent.

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

Summary of Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

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

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

On average, three-fifths of all students in Plymouth attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, more than that statewide. More than two-thirds of Plymouth students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), nearly half of Plymouth students attained proficiency in math,

and half of Plymouth students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-seven percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Plymouth's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 82 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points greater than that statewide. Plymouth's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 18 PI points.
- In 2006, Plymouth's proficiency gap in ELA was 11 PI points, five PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of more than one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Plymouth's proficiency gap in math was 25 PI points in 2006, three PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Plymouth's proficiency gap in STE was 22 PI points, seven PI points narrower than that statewide.

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

Between 2003 and 2006, Plymouth'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 two percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Plymouth narrowed from 21 PI points in 2003 to 19 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of nine percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Plymouth remained flat at 88 PI points.
- Math performance in Plymouth showed improvement, at an average of more than one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Plymouth had a slight decline in STE performance. The percentage of students attaining proficiency decreased from 53 percent in 2003 to 50 percent in 2006, although the proficiency index remained the same at 78 PI points.

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Plymouth students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Plymouth in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 22 PI points in ELA and 26 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Plymouth in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, African-American students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than half the students in these subgroups attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, more than three-fifths of 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. Roughly three-fifths of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

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

In Plymouth, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA was 24 PI points in both 2003 and 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 29 to 27 PI points over this period.

- Only African-American students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The performance of the other student subgroups remained relatively flat over this period.
- In math, all subgroups in Plymouth with the exception of African-American students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.

Standard Summaries

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

During the latter part of the period under review, the superintendent and the school committee made a concerted effort to enhance the communication between the district and all other town agencies that focused on district improvement. The superintendent met weekly with the town manager and other department heads to engage in conversations regarding the needs of the entire community.

The school committee members met with the finance committee and selectmen on a regular basis, again opening up the lines of communication in their role as student advocates. The result of this ongoing collaboration produced a better understanding of the needs of both the district and the town as a whole, and the town recently voted to allow the school district to pursue a total of $199 million to upgrade the facilities of both high schools.

The seven-member school committee changed membership on four occasions during the period under review. Micromanagement was not deemed a problem. The committee did not have a formal mentoring program, but the superintendent met with all new members prior to their first meeting to share all pertinent information and the contents of the policy manual. Veteran members also offered their support to new members via meetings, telephone conversations, and e-mail. The school committee had subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and communications, and it assigned a member to serve as liaison to each school. The local cable channel televised all meetings, affording community members the opportunity to share school information. Members of the press in attendance also reported the information in the two local newspapers. The school committee policy manual was not updated on a regular basis and included many policies with revision dates in the 1990s.

The district began strategic planning in 2002 with the adoption of a three-year plan that included three basic goals along with objectives, timelines, financial implications, and expected outcomes

in the areas of ELA, mathematics, and safe and secure schools. A steering committee developed the present plan covering the years 2006-2008 that contained the same three goals. In addition to the strategic plan, the district produced a District Improvement Plan (DIP) that mirrored the strategic plan and contained both mission and vision statements that were in evidence in the buildings as well as in many documents. Plans for ELA and mathematics created during the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process supplemented the new DIP and addressed the needs of both the district and individual schools in need of improvement. The DIP appeared on the district's website and was made available in the form of a brochure.

The SIP for each school contained the same goals as the DIP did and addressed the needs specific to the school. The principals and school councils presented their respective SIPs to the school committee and also reported on the progress of attaining the goals included in their prior SIPs. Regular attendance occurred at school council meetings, and parents and other community members were interested in serving on the school councils, mostly at the elementary level.

The district regularly reviewed assessment data, and members of the teaching staff had one full day and eight half days of professional development to work on areas such as curriculum, assessment, review of data, and differentiated instruction. The district, in accordance with the teachers' contract, provided, in addition to the professional development time, three after-school meeting dates per month to further work in areas deemed necessary by the teaching staff.

The district shared the analyzed MCAS data and district performance packets on a regular basis with the school committee and the community at large. The information contained within each packet included test results, item analysis trends, comparisons, and summary sheets outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each school. Principals met with staff regularly to use analyzed data to improve instruction, and schools made changes to programs based on the data.

Curriculum and Instruction

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

The district had a process and practices in place for developing, reviewing, and revising the curriculum. This included analysis of the MCAS data at the district and building levels when they were first received from the Department of Education (DOE). The district trained all administrators in TestWiz, and they could access the MCAS test data through the DOE security portal as soon as they were available. In addition to a data team at the central office, each building had a data team that analyzed the school's data and then, along with the principal, shared the data at staff meetings for further analysis and interpretation. While other staff members were not trained in TestWiz, they were familiar with using the reports to identify trends and strengths and weaknesses to be addressed. A group then developed an action plan to make any curriculum modifications needed for the balance of the year. The district supported curriculum committees each summer that worked on revisions that became addenda to the curriculum until a major revision was undertaken. In 2005-2006, the district developed a formal curriculum review cycle to create consistency in the process. The cycle included steps for reviewing and revising the current curriculum, adopting new textbooks, providing professional development, and evaluating new programs.

Through the examination of the MCAS test scores and through the PIM process required by its AYP status for subgroups, the district identified mathematics as a districtwide issue needing attention in 2004-2005. The district developed an improvement plan for math in 2005-2006 and completed a major revision of the mathematics curriculum in the summer of 2006. The mathematics textbook used at grades K-5 was a 2000 edition that was not in alignment with the state curriculum frameworks. The textbook was not scheduled to be replaced until at least 2008-2009.

The district aligned its curricula to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks using a format that contained measurable objectives, resources, instructional strategies, and timelines or pacing charts. The district provided curriculum documents to staff in several forms: hard copy, online through the district website, and on CD. Teachers were able to connect to the Internet resources included in the curriculum documents from the website or CD.

The district provided multiple levels of professional development to develop and improve effective instruction. These included two years of professional development on differentiated

instruction and a four-year effort on standards-based instruction and assessment strategies. In response to student need, as indicated by student achievement data, the district brought in a mathematics consultant to work with instructors on teaching techniques, adopted the Six Traits of Writing program, and focused attention on improved methods for teaching special education students, namely in reading and mathematics.

The EQA examiners saw a variety of instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction used in 37 percent of classrooms observed during the site visit. Recently, the district trained all high school staff in brain-based teaching, followed by training for middle school teachers in 2006-2007, with training for elementary teachers planned for 2007-2008. As part of that initiative, the district offered a summer course in brain-based learning that a large percentage of teachers attended.

The district organizational structure for curriculum consisted of subject-area coordinators for grades K-12, a curriculum council, and a curriculum coordinating council that ultimately approved all curricula. The K-12 coordinators worked most closely with the secondary level, while elementary principals monitored curriculum at their level. Administrators monitored teachers' instruction with walk-throughs and formal evaluations. The district did not have a formal protocol or consistent practice for walk-throughs. The district had a lesson plan template on its website that teachers were "strongly encouraged" but not mandated to use. Collection, review, and monitoring of plan books and lesson plans varied across buildings.

Assessments were used to monitor student mastery of subjects but not the effectiveness of teachers' instruction. Data were used to inform and drive instruction through the modification of programs and courses.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

The district designed its assessment program to include the director of student support services as well as district and school assessment teams. The teams analyzed data and disseminated them to

teachers and staff at building as well as team meetings. The teams were responsible for analyzing each respective school's data, presenting them to teachers, and working with teachers to identify student weaknesses and strengths. The data were disaggregated by subgroup, namely the special education subgroup. In addition, the teams provided the data analyses to the district's data director, who then produced a comprehensive report including all the MCAS test data and information related to Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT results.

The district trained all principals in TestWiz, and while teachers had not received such training, they said in interviews that they felt comfortable using data. However, interviewees told the EQA team that while there was a great deal of available data, not all teachers were using the data to impact their instruction. Teachers did extensively use data in reviewing and revising the curriculum on an ongoing, as well as an annual, basis.

While there was a lack of formative assessments in the district, district leaders planned to fully implement the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) in the coming year. At the time of the review, teachers used the DIBELS for diagnostic purposes at grades K-3, and they used the Stanford 9 for diagnostic purposes at grade 7 and also at grade 8 for students enrolled in the Reading for High School course, as well as to determine placement in grade 9 reading lab courses. The district used other assessments including Addison Wesley end-of-chapter tests, Houghton Mifflin themed tests, and common exams at the high school. Schools varied in their use of these assessments.

Student participation on the MCAS tests was near 100 percent for both regular and special education students. Schools had different motivating activities to encourage students to attend the MCAS testing sessions.

In addition to the extensive testing report, the district reported the MCAS test results to parents and to the community through televised school committee meetings. The town's annual report also contained a section devoted to the school district and its accomplishments.

The district engaged in few voluntary external and internal audits, with the exception of a voluntary audit that was administered to students in grades 7-12 regarding their perceptions

about the use of alcohol and drugs. The district invited The Education Alliance at Brown University to conduct a "Climate Review" of the North High School, which resulted in the creation of a Smaller Learning Community at that high school. This program spread to include grade 9 at both high schools and grade 10 at one high school.

Although the district did have a five-year cyclical curriculum plan in place, it had no formal evaluation procedures and rather depended upon the MCAS test results to judge the effectiveness of its programs. The MCAS data revealed districtwide student weaknesses in math and a significant gap between the performance of special education and regular education students. As a result, the district instituted new courses, adopted new instructional techniques, and reviewed the delivery of its special education program. The data also led the district to change the number of class periods at the middle school level to allow for increased instructional time in the core areas, and to move teachers to areas of need in special education and in middle school math.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

The Plymouth Public Schools used a comprehensive process for the identification, recruitment, and selection of professional staff. The district posted new positions with print media outlets at the state and local levels. In addition, the district participated in eight job fairs including two that the Affirmative Action Recruitment Consortium of Eastern Massachusetts administered. Principals at the elementary level and principals and curriculum coordinators at the secondary level did the screening and interviewing of candidates and put together a comprehensive binder that included letters of reference, Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) forms, and a checklist for interviews. The principal would then submit a final candidate to the assistant superintendent for human resources, who would review the personnel binder, interview the candidate, and make the final determination. Interviewees maintained that the district sought out the best candidate regardless of finances. The district announced administrative positions using the same media outlets and job fairs. The superintendent would screen all applicants for an administrative position and form a system-wide screening committee, which would interview the

superintendent's semi-finalists. The screening committee in turn would make five or six recommendations to the superintendent, who would make the final selection.

The assistant superintendent for administration and instruction chaired the district professional development program. The district professional development team, consisting of administrators and teachers, and the curriculum coordinating council, consisting of administrators, collaborated on choosing professional development offerings. Improved student achievement was the top priority for professional development. Initially, teachers would complete a needs assessment and forward it to the professional development team to consider potential offerings. The districtwide data team and the curriculum coordinators also made recommendations in their respective areas for professional development. The district professional development team would make the final determination of courses to be offered.

The district delivered mandated professional development programs during the district's eight half-day and one full-day release days. Best Practices in Assessment and Instructional Strategies represented the theme of the mandated professional development during the period under review. A second layer of professional development offerings focused on building needs in the area of content and consisted of more than 40 in-service offerings that resulted in PDPs or college credit for teachers. The third layer of professional development offerings dealt with individual teacher needs and could be satisfied by matriculating in the in-service programs or by taking a course or attending a conference outside the district. The district reimbursed teachers up to $1,000 per year for tuition for courses. The district also reimbursed teachers for fees and travel expenses related to out-of-district conferences. Administrators had a $1,000 line item in their budget for personal professional development, which included dues and fees for professional organizations and conferences.

The district's evaluation procedure for all administrators was not in compliance with Massachusetts General Laws because assistant principals were not evaluated due to stalled negotiations. The instrument used for the administrator evaluations complied with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. The district's evaluation procedure for teachers complied with 603 CMR 35.00. The instrument used for teacher evaluations complied with the Principles of Effecting Teaching. The instrument written in 1997, when the Principles of

Effective Teaching became a state mandate, closely resembled the instrument the district used in 1987. The district used an effective induction program as part of its supervision and evaluation process. In addition, administrators used individual professional development plans and walk-throughs as part of the overall evaluation process.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

The district provided an array of services for its special education and at-risk students, including early childhood education, the parent center, literacy toolkits, summer reading camp, and tutorials for at-risk students. The district was working toward placing these children in the least restrictive environment, but many were still pulled out of the regular classroom for services. Literacy instruction took various forms such as Reading First, the Three Tier model that included Soar to Success, Project Read, Title I services, and Lexia. Tutoring programs were offered at various times of the day and in the summer, and there was an after-school tutorial program at a local housing project staffed by students, adult volunteers, and certified teachers. The district offered a Chapter 74 vocational education program. Students enrolled in this program participated in the regular academic program on a daily basis. The district provided in-district life skills, autism, and support programs so that students with more intensive needs could remain with their peers. In addition, remedial math and reading classes were provided at the middle schools, and reading and math labs at the high schools.

Several AP and honors courses were offered at the high school. The middle school had an Advanced Readiness Learners (ARL) program that offered Spanish and robotics to students scoring in the 'Proficient' and 'Advanced' categories on the MCAS tests.

The differences in grant funding affected the variety and type of remediation that each school provided. One school, designated a complete Title I school, had a large assortment of materials and staffing. The district provided funding to open math and reading labs and offer the remediation courses at the middle and high schools.

The district attempted to teach students in an inclusionary, co-taught model, but this was not done on a consistent basis. All the schools had pre-referral teams to draw up accommodations for students to participate in the least restrictive environment. The middle school was piloting a model of mental heath accommodations so that students could remain in their classes. Some students at the high school with more serious social/emotional problems remained in their classes with a teacher to monitor them, while others attended a substantially separate program until they earned their way out of it. All students, including those in vocational education, were encouraged to take high-level courses.

The schools included information urging good attendance in all student handbooks. Student attendance, tracked by Rediker software, exceeded 90 percent for all levels and all subgroups. The district had a policy for the loss of credit with excessive absences at the high school, and an administrator worked closely with the transient population to assure attendance and full participation. The district effectively tracked and monitored staff attendance. Principals had improvement of staff attendance as one of their goals.

The district worked with Brown University and instituted academies at grade 9 in both high schools and at grade 10 in one high school to better personalize instruction, monitor student behavior, and prevent retentions and dropouts. Each academy had its own housemaster and counselor, as the middle school teams did, and teams of teachers met regularly with them to discuss student progress. The high school had one small, substantially separate program for behaviorally challenged students and was planning an afternoon/evening school for older students at risk for discipline problems and/or dropping out.

To assist students to become successful, the high schools had summer school for those who qualified and online and in-school credit recovery courses. They also had a Failure is Not an Option program for freshmen failing one or more courses, and work-study programs for older students.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The EQA examiners gave the Plymouth Public Schools an overall rating of ‘Satisfactory’ on this standard. They rated the district as ‘Excellent’ on one, ‘Satisfactory’ on eight, and ‘Needs Improvement’ on four of the thirteen performance indicators in this standard.

The district had a formal budget process with numerous benchmarks that encompassed a yearlong process, beginning in April of the current budget year with administrators discussing priorities and guidelines, and concluding the following April with a completed budget presentation at the annual town meeting. Examiners learned in interviews that the process was open and participatory with many stakeholders including the school committee members, central office administrators, school administrators, teachers, parent councils, and municipal boards and administrators having the opportunity to provide input and guidance.

The district developed three levels of budgets for consideration by the school committee and ultimately the town meeting. The first budget was a level service budget, which was the same services and staffing provided in the current budget year adjusted for the subsequent year's cost. The second budget was a program restoration or enhancement budget in which programs that had been reduced in previous budget years were reinstated or new programs were added. The third budget was the one the school committee approved.

The resultant budget document provided clear and accurate information and tables that could be understood by all levels of interest. It was comprehensive in that it contained all funding and expenditure categories by cost centers used in the district.

During the period under review, the district and municipality had experienced reductions in revenues such as having their Chapter 70 aid reduced one year by $4 million and level funded the next year, and the community experienced reductions in revenues due to the deregulation of the power plant. However, there was evidence that the community provided financial support to the school district when the need was apparent. On September 6, 2006, the citizens voted for a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools. The district was experiencing serious overcrowding in its two high schools. Interviewees stated that South High School was built for 1,200 students and now housed 1,600 students; North High School was built for 800 students and now had 1,000 students. Another example was that one year the school committee did not include needed replacement textbooks in its final budget presented at the town meeting. The town finance committee recognized the need and recommended at a town meeting that the school committee budget request be increased to include these textbooks.

Although the expenditure per regular education student was below the state average during the period under review, interviews with some staff members indicated that there were adequate supplies, materials, and technology. However, in other interviews staff members commented that Reading First textbooks were not available and requisite materials were not adequate in schools.

The district, as stated above, had begun to address the problem of overcrowded, aging, and inappropriate facilities in its two high schools by the vote for a $199 million override. The Massachusetts School Building Authority inspected all schools in the commonwealth in 2006, and in Plymouth found that two elementary schools, the Cold Spring School and the Nathaniel Morton School, were in moderate condition with some building systems that may need attention. The other buildings, with the exception of the high schools, were rated as in generally good condition with a few building systems that may need attention.

The NEASC report observed that routine cleaning and maintenance at the high schools was an area of concern, and school administrators developed a plan to reassign custodial labor in conjunction with the implementation of a vendor-furnished, computerized work order system to address the problem. The district also developed a formal facilities service audit program.

Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Achievement

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

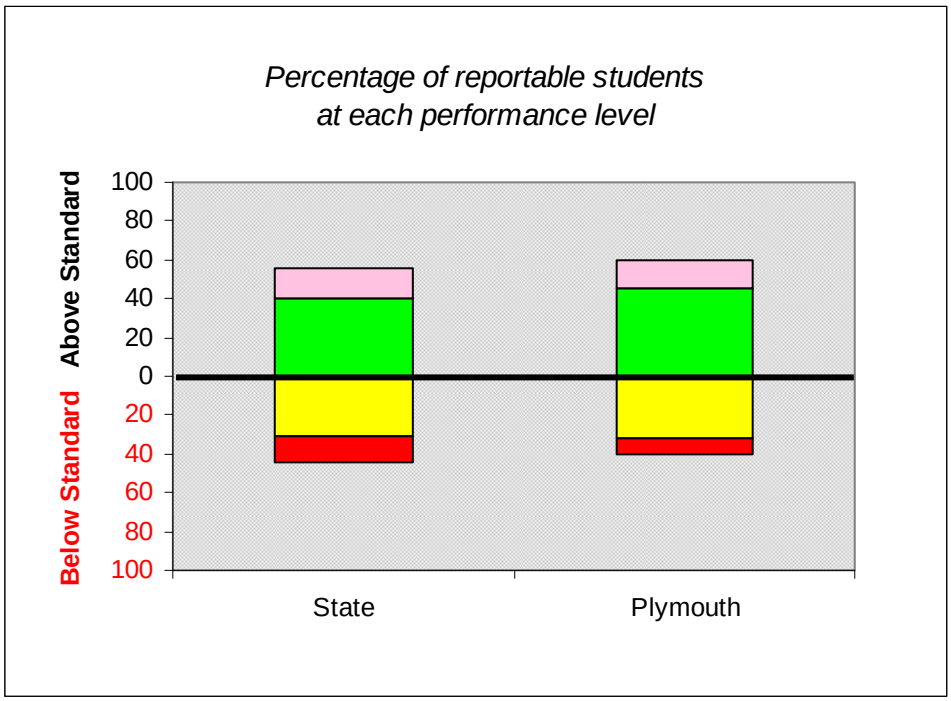
Findings:

- On average, three-fifths of all students in Plymouth attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, more than that statewide. More than two-thirds of Plymouth students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), nearly half of Plymouth students attained proficiency in math, and half of Plymouth students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Plymouth's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 82 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points greater than that statewide. Plymouth's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 18 PI points.

- In 2006, Plymouth's proficiency gap in ELA was 11 PI points, five PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of more than one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Plymouth's proficiency gap in math was 25 PI points in 2006, three PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Plymouth's proficiency gap in STE was 22 PI points, seven PI points narrower than that statewide.

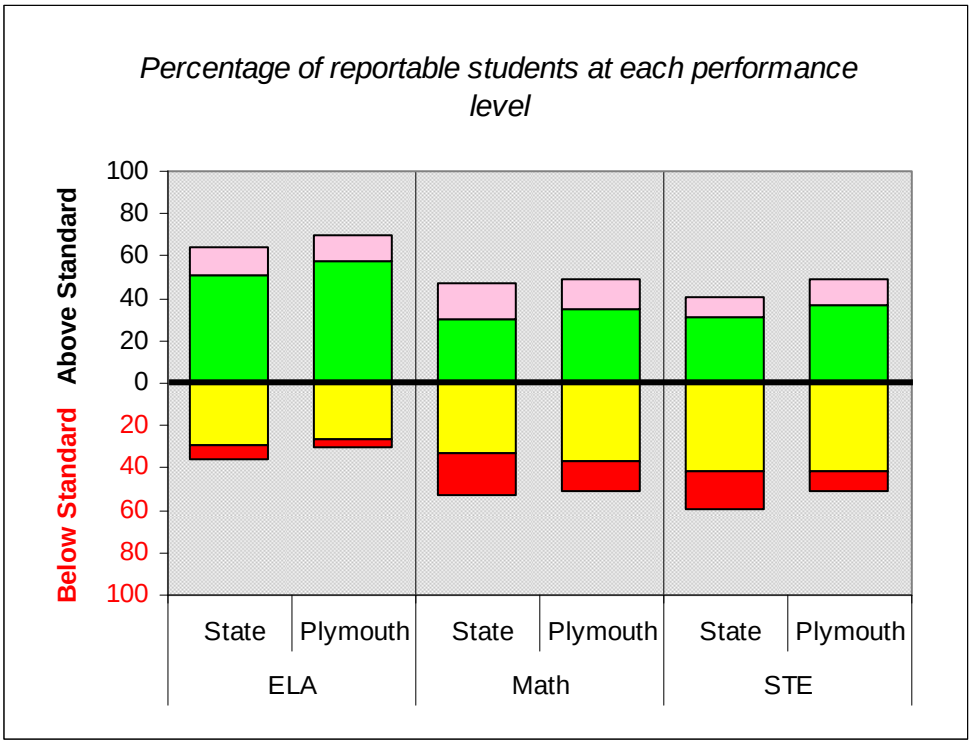
Figure/Table 1: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2006



	State	Plymouth
Advanced	15	14
Proficient	41	46
Needs Improvement	31	32
Warning/Failing	14	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	60
Average Proficiency Index (API)	78.3	82.0

In 2006, 60 percent of Plymouth students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests overall, four percentage points more than that statewide. Nine percent of Plymouth students scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category, five percentage points less than that statewide. Plymouth's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 82 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points greater than that statewide. Plymouth's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 18 PI points.

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



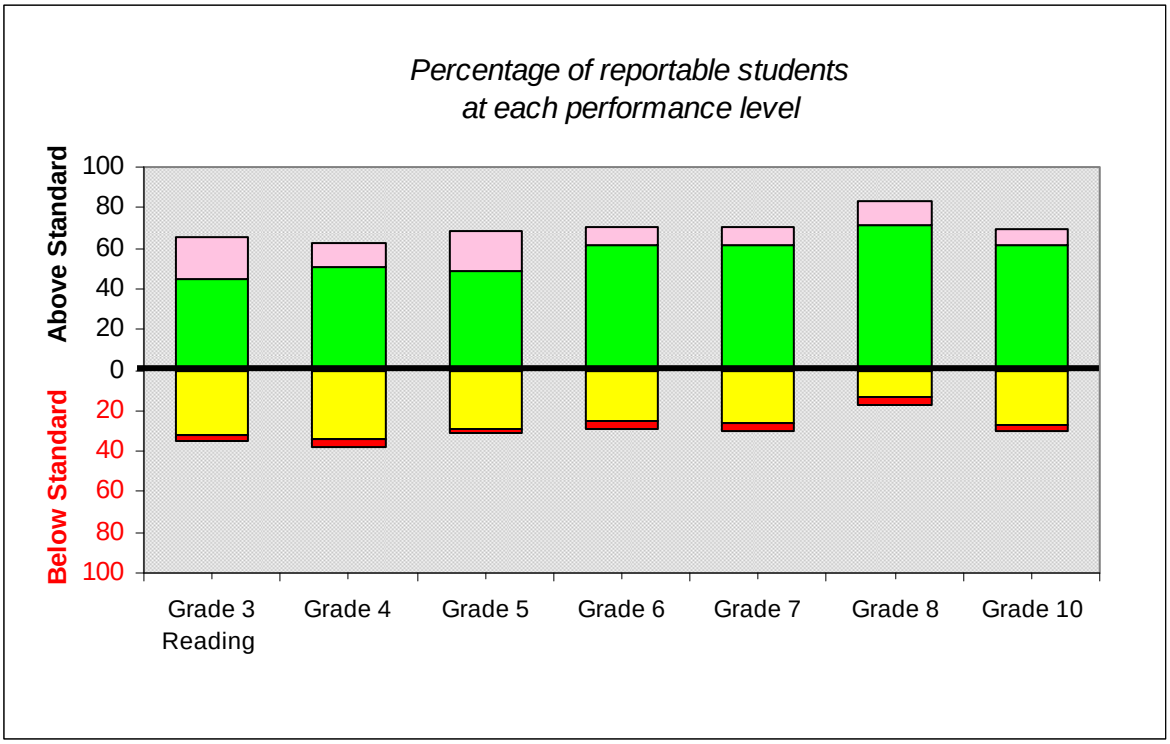
	ELA		Math		STE	
	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth
Advanced	13	13	17	14	10	13
Proficient	51	57	30	35	31	37
Needs Improvement	29	27	33	37	42	42
Warning/Failing	7	3	20	15	17	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	70	47	49	41	50
Proficiency Index (PI)	84.3	88.6	72.3	75.4	71.4	78

In 2006, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was higher in Plymouth than statewide. In Plymouth, 70 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 64 percent statewide; 49 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 47 percent statewide; and 50 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 41 percent statewide.

Plymouth students had stronger performance on the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA than in math and STE. The proficiency index for Plymouth students in ELA was 89 PI points; in math, it was 75 PI points; and in STE, it was 78 PI points. These compare to the statewide figures of 84, 72, and 71 PI points, respectively.

The proficiency gap for Plymouth students was 11 PI points in ELA, 25 PI points in math, and 22 PI points in STE. These compare to the statewide figures of 16, 28, and 29 PI points, respectively. Plymouth's proficiency gaps would require an average annual improvement of more than one PI point in ELA and three PI points in math to meet AYP.

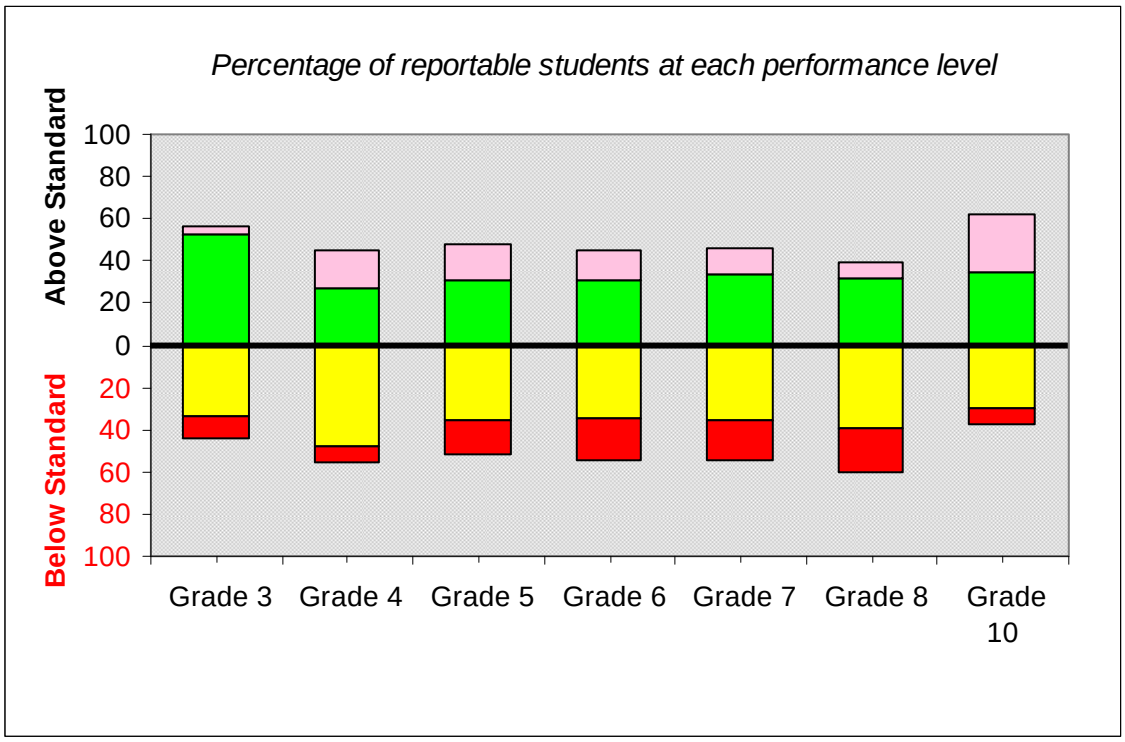
Figure/Table 3: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	21	11	20	9	9	12	8
Proficient	45	51	48	62	62	71	61
Needs Improvement	32	34	29	25	26	14	27
Warning/Failing	3	4	2	4	3	3	4
Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	62	68	71	71	83	69

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining proficiency in 2006 in ELA varied somewhat by grade level, ranging from a low of 62 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 83 percent of grade 8 students.

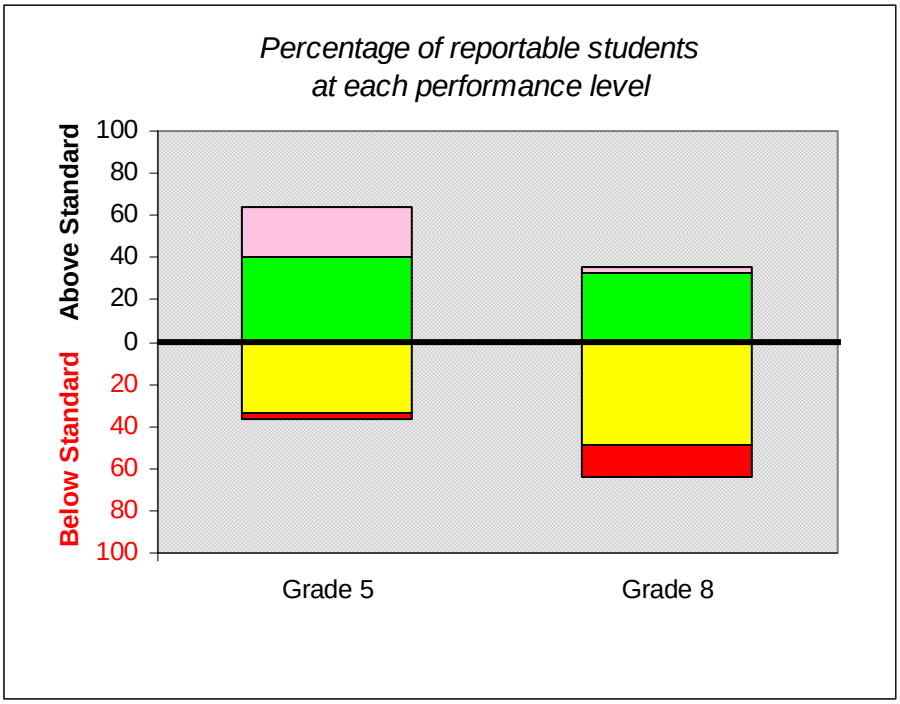
Figure/Table 4: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	3	17	17	14	12	8	28
Proficient	53	27	31	31	34	31	34
Needs Improvement	34	48	35	34	36	39	30
Warning/Failing	10	8	17	21	19	21	8
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	44	48	45	46	39	62

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining proficiency in 2006 in math also varied somewhat by grade level, ranging from a low of 39 percent of grade 8 students to a high of 62 percent of grade 10 students.

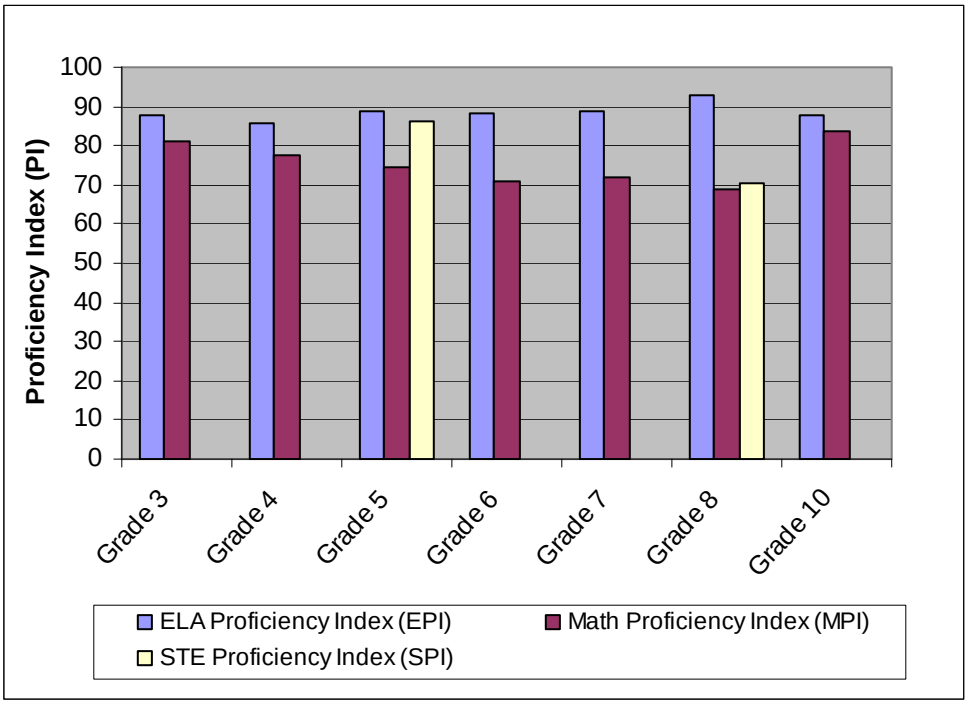
Figure/Table 5: Student MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 5	Grade 8
Advanced	23	3
Proficient	41	33
Needs Improvement	34	49
Warning/Failing	3	15
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	36

In Plymouth in 2006, 64 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 36 percent of grade 8 students did so.

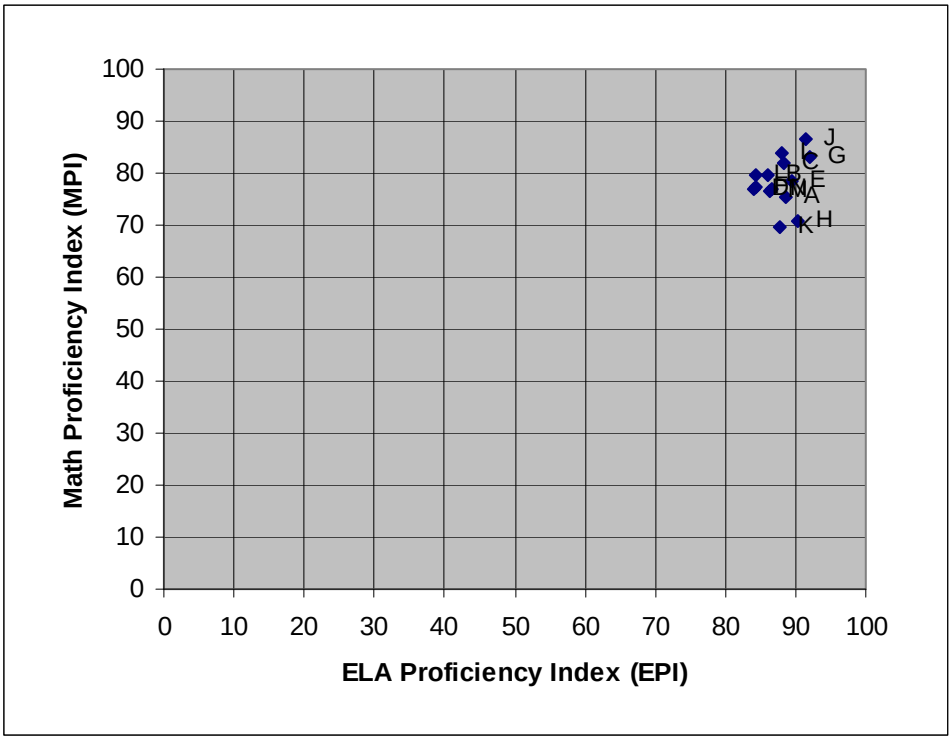
Figure/Table 6: Student MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Grade and Subject, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	87.8	85.7	88.8	88.2	88.6	92.8	88.0
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	81.0	77.5	74.6	71.1	71.8	69.0	83.5
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			86.0			70.5	

By grade, Plymouth's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of seven PI points at grade 8 to a high of 14 PI points at grade 4. Plymouth's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 16 PI points at grade 10 to a high of 31 PI points at grade 8. Plymouth's STE proficiency gap was 14 PI points at grade 5 and 29 PI points at grade 8.

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



		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Plymouth	88.6	75.4	8,678
B	Cold Spring Elementary School	85.9	79.5	220
C	Federal Furnace Elementary	88.4	82.1	444
D	Hedge Elementary School	84.0	77.0	172
E	Indian Brook Elementary	89.6	78.4	523
F	Manomet Elementary School	84.4	77.5	359
G	Nathaniel Morton Elementary	92.0	83.2	587
H	Plymouth Community Intermediate Middle School	90.2	70.8	2,720
I	Plymouth North High School	88.0	84.0	465
J	Plymouth South High School	91.4	86.4	373
K	Plymouth South Middle School	87.8	69.6	1,595
L	Plymouth South Technical School	84.3	79.7	341
M	South Elementary School	86.3	76.7	547
N	West Elementary School	86.7	77.0	332

Plymouth's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of eight PI points at Nathaniel Morton Elementary School to a high of 16 PI points at Hedge Elementary School, Manomet Elementary School, and Plymouth South Technical School. Plymouth's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 14 PI points at Plymouth South High School to a high of 30 PI points at Plymouth South Middle School.

Equity of Achievement

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Plymouth students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Plymouth in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 22 PI points in ELA and 26 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

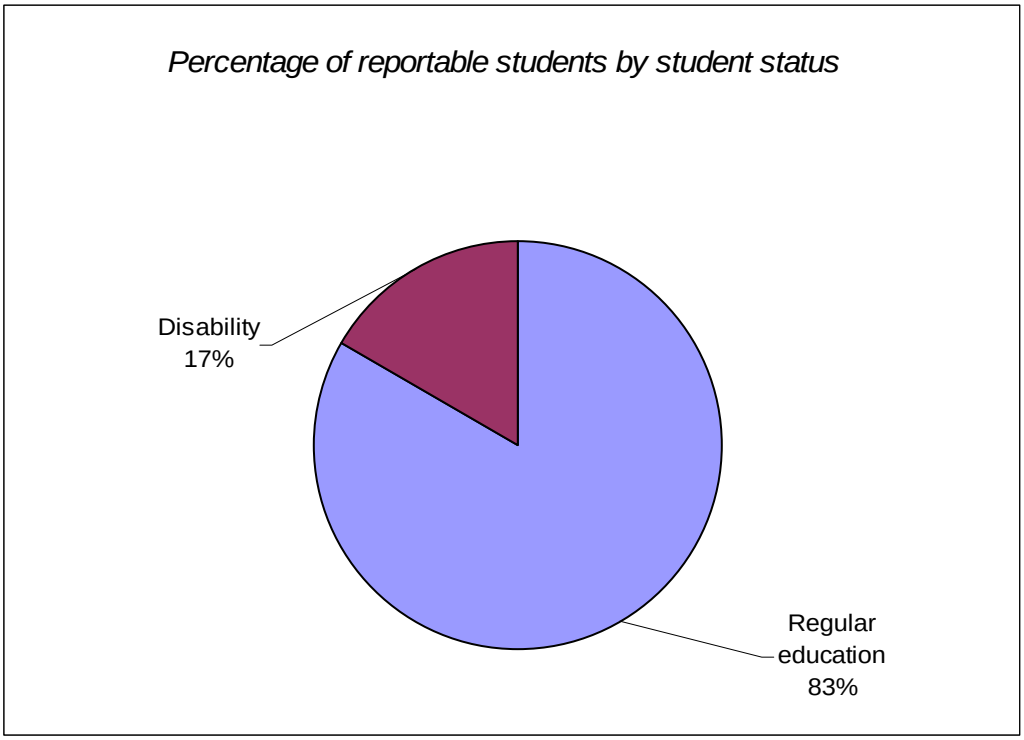
- The proficiency gaps in Plymouth in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, African-American students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than half the students in these subgroups attained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

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

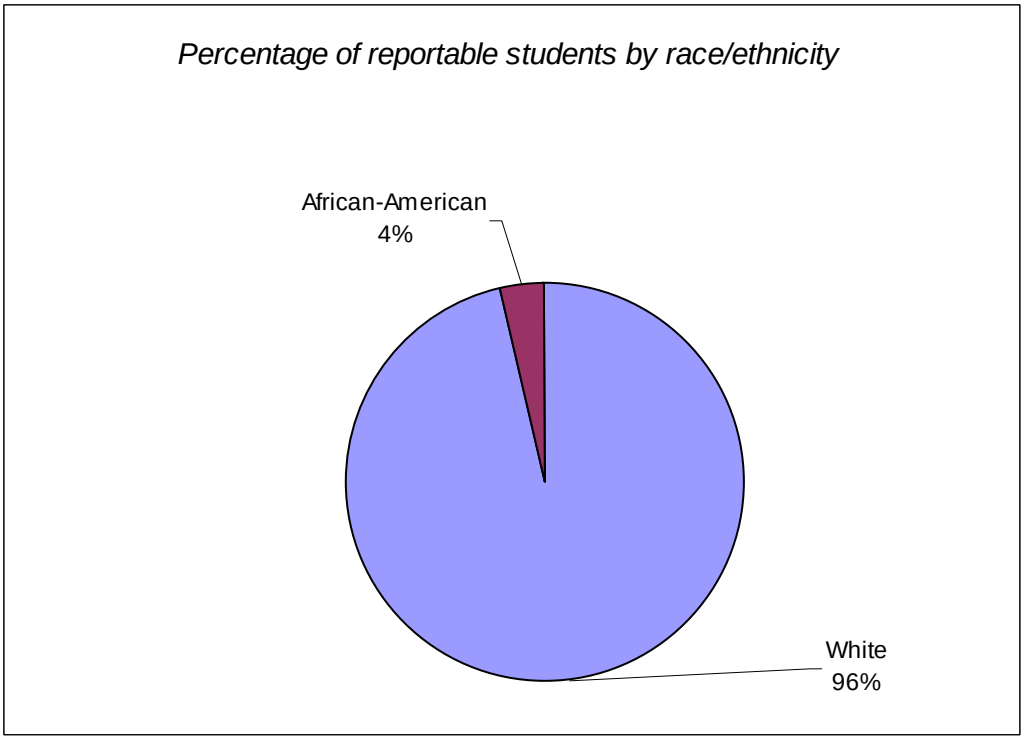
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. Roughly three-fifths of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

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

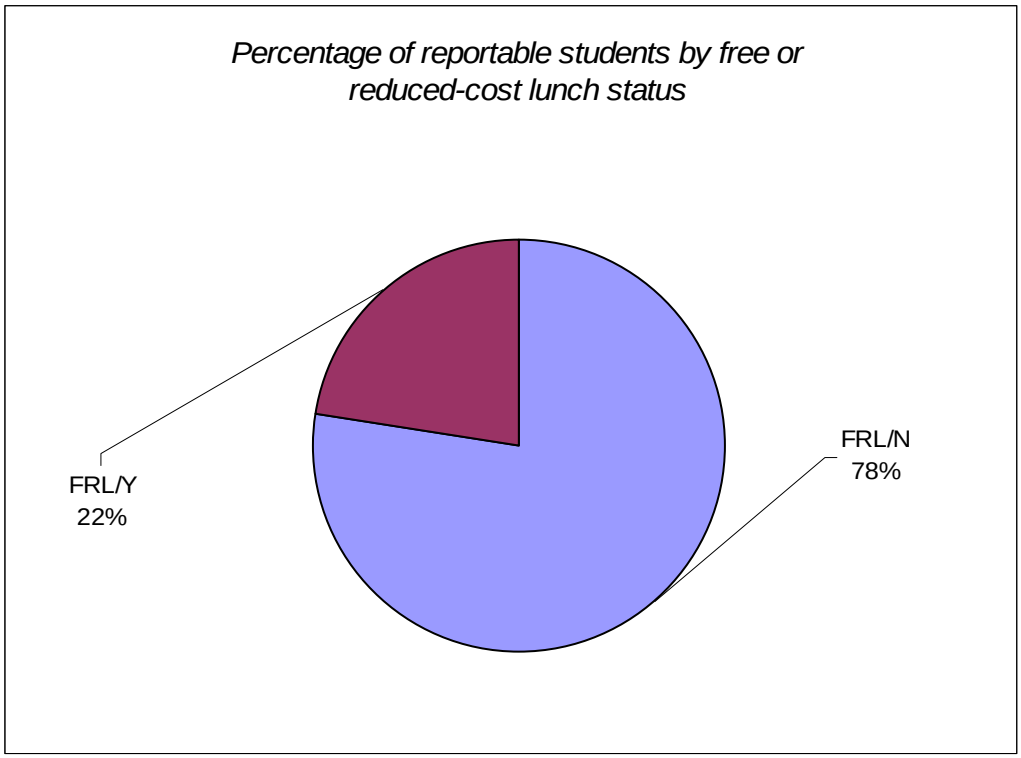
A.



B.



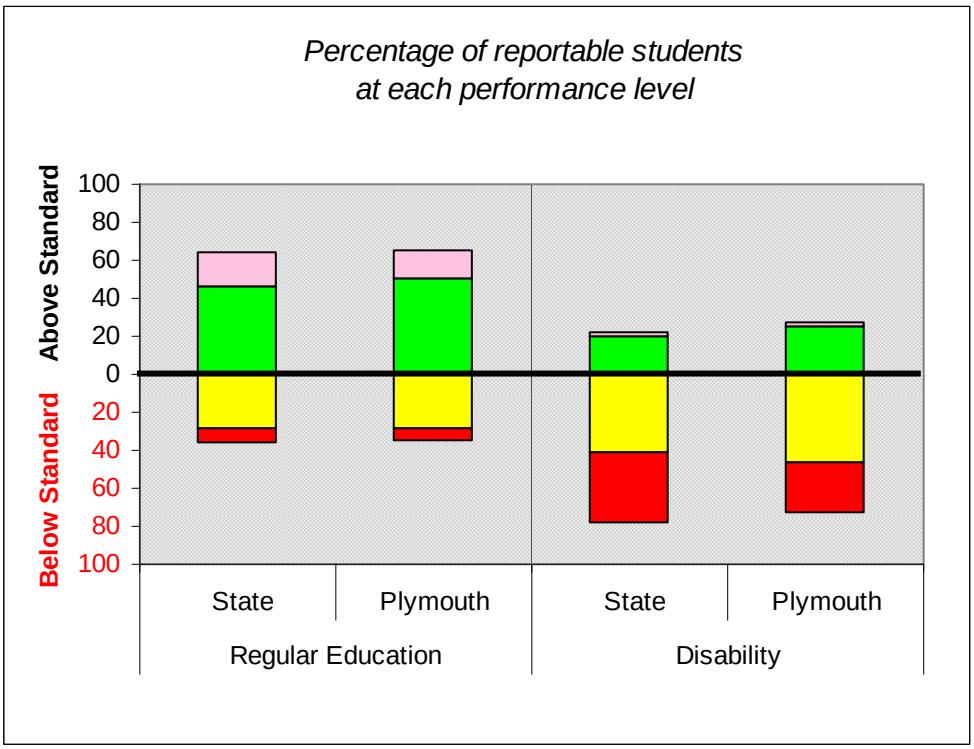
C.



	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	3,632
	Disability	728
Race/ethnicity	White	4,062
	African-American	154
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	3,393
	FRL/Y	978

In Plymouth in 2006, 17 percent of the students were students with disabilities, four percent were African-American students, and 22 percent were students participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program.

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

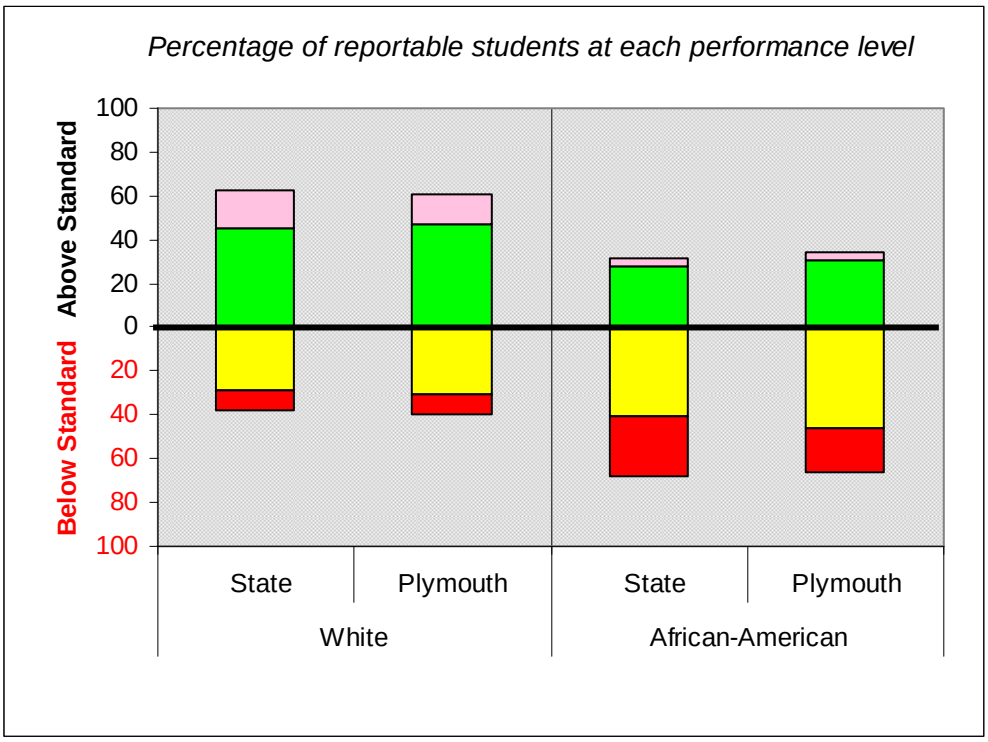


	Regular Education		Disability	
	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth
Advanced	18	16	2	2
Proficient	46	50	20	25
Needs Improvement	28	29	41	46
Warning/Failing	8	6	36	27
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	66	22	27
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.0	85.9	55.9	62.2

In Plymouth in 2006, the proficiency rate of regular education students was more than two times greater than that of students with disabilities. Sixty-six percent of regular education students and 27 percent of students with disabilities attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Plymouth's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 14 PI points for regular education students and 38 PI points for students with disabilities. The average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was 24 PI points.

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

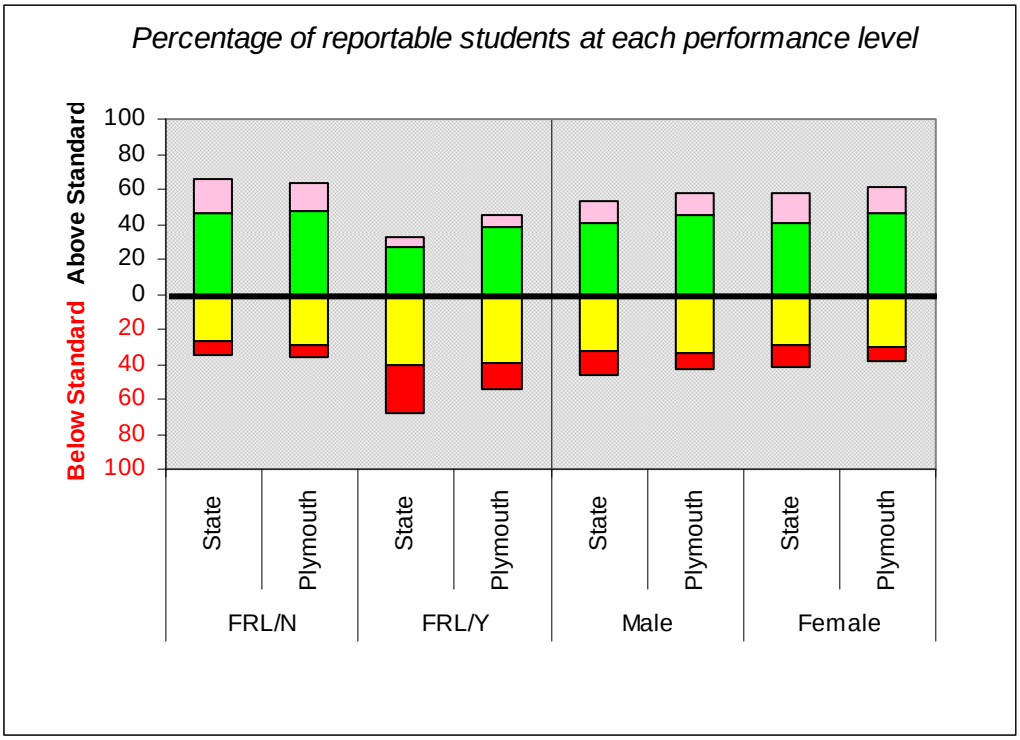


	White		African-American	
	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth
Advanced	17	14	4	3
Proficient	45	47	27	31
Needs Improvement	29	31	40	46
Warning/Failing	9	8	28	20
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	61	31	34
Average Proficiency Index (API)	82.9	82.8	63.2	67.6

In Plymouth in 2006, performance on the MCAS tests varied widely by race/ethnicity, as 61 percent of White students and 34 percent of African-American students attained overall proficiency.

Plymouth's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 17 PI points for White students and 32 PI points for African-American students. The average performance gap between White and African-American students was 15 PI points.

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

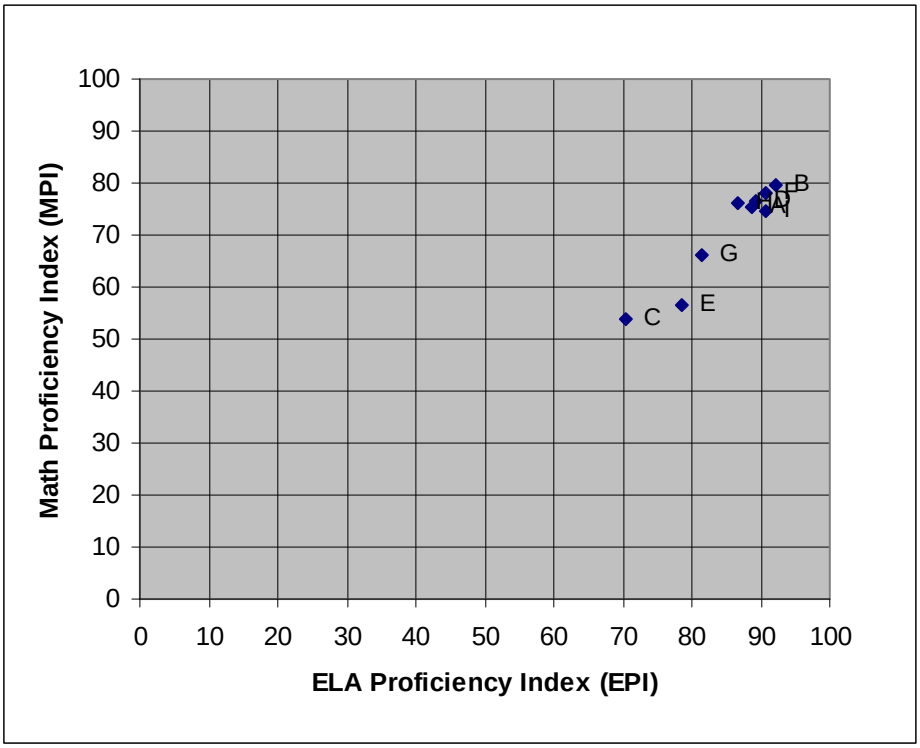


	FRL/N		FRL/Y		Male		Female	
	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth	State	Plymouth
Advanced	19	15	5	7	13	12	17	15
Proficient	46	48	27	38	40	46	41	46
Needs Improvement	27	29	40	39	32	33	29	30
Warning/Failing	8	7	27	16	15	9	13	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	63	32	45	53	58	58	61
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.5	84.3	63.5	73.8	77.1	81.4	79.6	82.7

In Plymouth in 2006, 45 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests, compared to 63 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The average proficiency gap was 26 PI points for low-income students and 16 PI points for non low-income students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was 10 PI points.

Performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was comparable for male and female students in Plymouth, with 61 percent of female students and 58 percent of male students attaining overall proficiency. The average proficiency gap was 19 PI points for male students and 17 PI points for female students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was two PI points.

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

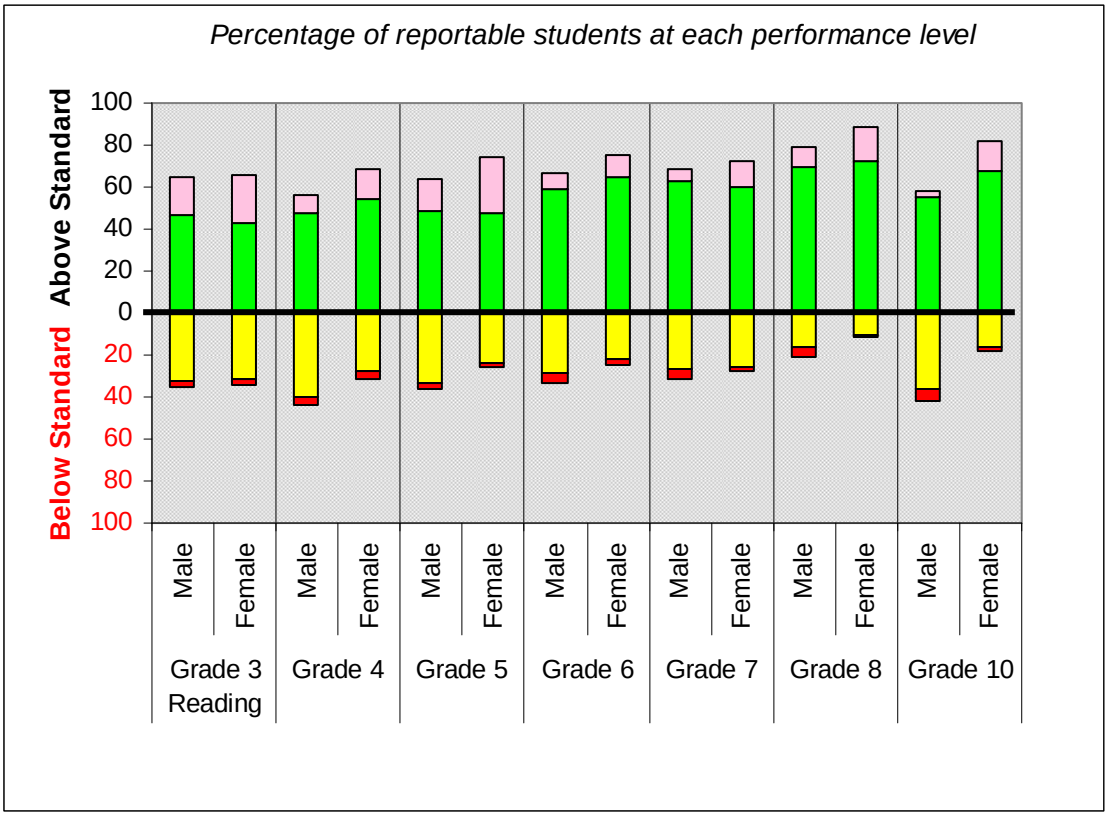


		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Plymouth	88.6	75.4	8,678
B	Regular Education	92.2	79.5	7,267
C	Disability	70.4	53.9	1,388
D	White	89.2	76.4	8,068
E	African-American	78.5	56.5	300
F	FRL/N	90.6	78.0	6,750
G	FRL/Y	81.5	66.1	1,927
H	Male	86.6	76.1	4,472
I	Female	90.7	74.6	4,205

Of the eight measurable subgroups in Plymouth in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 22 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 26 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

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

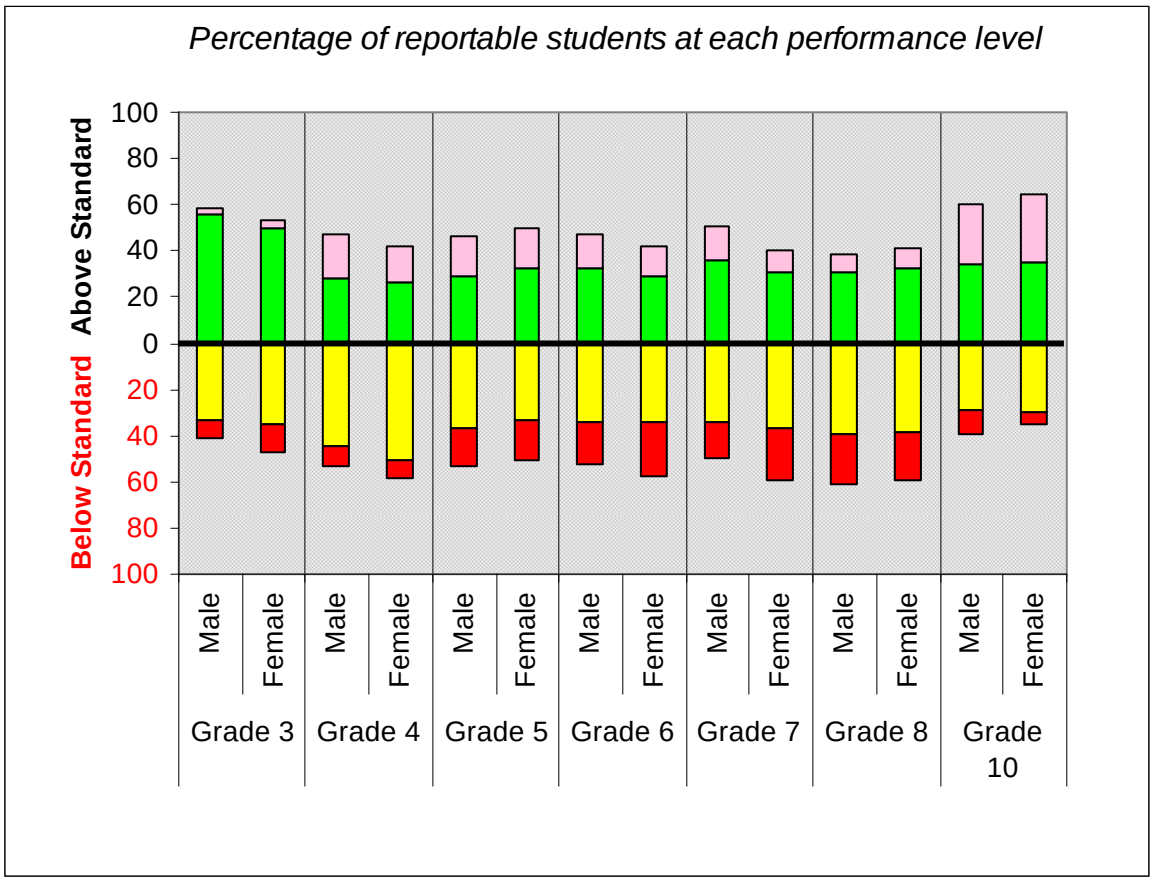
Figure/Table 13: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Advanced	18	23	8	14	14	27	7	11	5	12	9	16	3	14
Proficient	47	43	48	54	49	48	59	64	63	60	70	73	55	68
Needs Improvement	33	32	40	28	34	24	28	22	27	26	17	10	36	16
Warning/ Failing	2	3	4	4	3	2	5	3	5	2	5	2	5	2
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	66	56	68	63	75	66	75	68	72	79	89	58	82

In Plymouth in 2006, female students outperformed male students on all grade-level ELA tests.

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



	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	3	3	19	16	18	17	16	13	14	9	8	9	27	30
Proficient	56	50	28	26	29	33	32	29	36	31	31	32	34	35
Needs Improvement	33	35	45	51	37	33	34	34	34	37	40	38	29	30
Warning/ Failing	8	12	8	7	17	17	18	24	15	23	22	21	10	5
Percent Attaining Proficiency	59	53	47	42	47	50	48	42	50	40	39	41	61	65

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

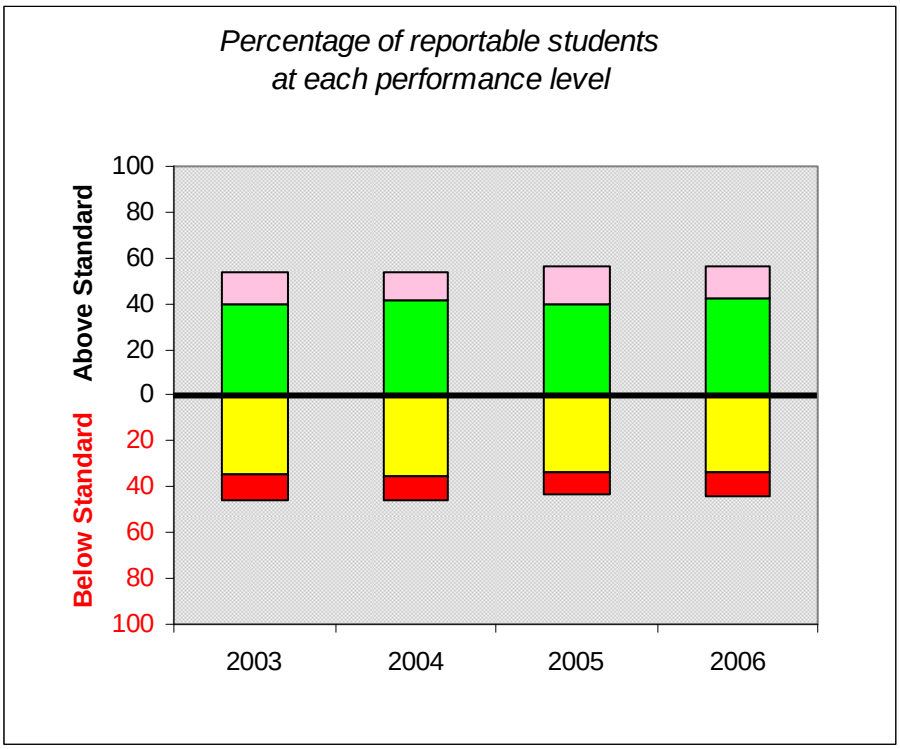
Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2003 and 2006, Plymouth'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 two percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Plymouth narrowed from 21 PI points in 2003 to 19 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of nine percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Plymouth remained flat at 88 PI points.
- Math performance in Plymouth showed improvement, at an average of more than one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Plymouth had a slight decline in STE performance. The percentage of students attaining proficiency decreased from 53 percent in 2003 to 50 percent in 2006, although the proficiency index remained the same at 78 PI points.

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



A.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	14	13	17	14
Proficient	40	41	40	43
Needs Improvement	34	35	34	34
Warning/Failing	12	11	10	10
Percent Attaining Proficiency	54	54	57	57
Average Proficiency Index (API)	78.5	78.8	80.6	80.5

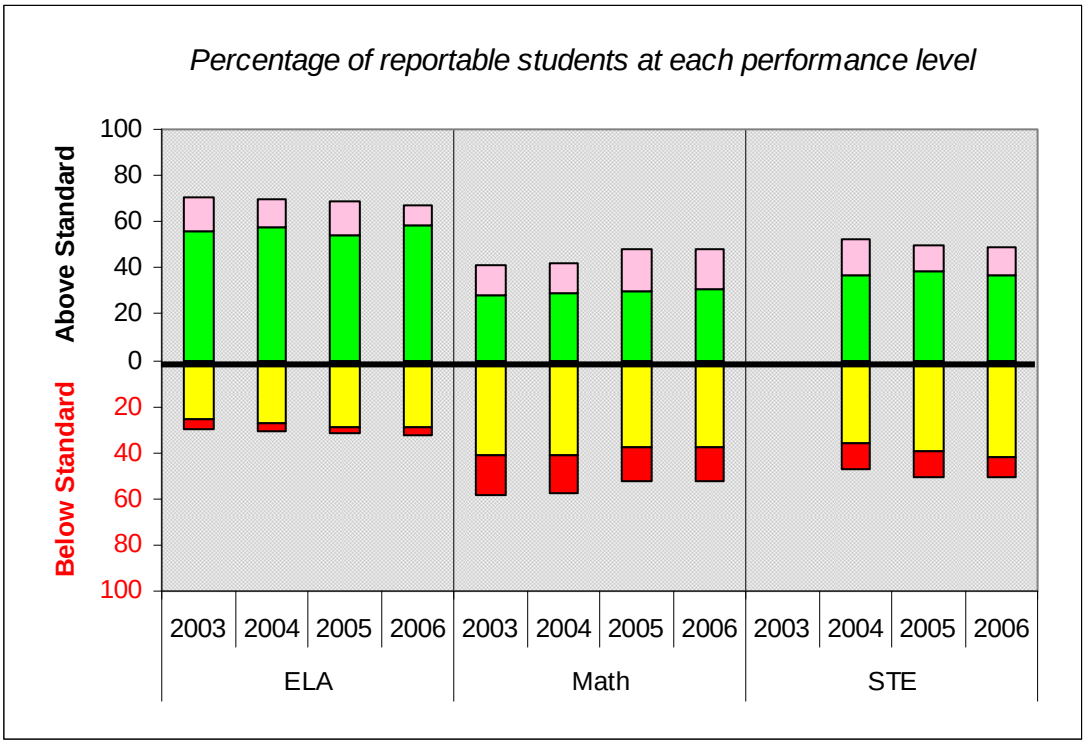
B. n-values

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	677	568	758	584
Proficient	1,921	1,867	1,844	1,839
Needs Improvement	1,664	1,583	1,551	1,461
Warning/Failing	572	492	440	421
Total	4,834	4,510	4,593	4,305

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

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests increased from 54 percent in 2003 to 57 percent in 2006. The percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased from 12 percent in 2003 to 10 percent in 2006. The average proficiency gap in Plymouth narrowed from 21 PI points in 2003 to 19 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of nine percent.

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



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

	ELA				Math				STE			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	15	12	14	9	14	13	18	17		16	11	13
Proficient	56	58	54	58	28	29	30	31		37	39	37
Needs Improvement	26	27	29	29	41	41	38	38		36	39	42
Warning/ Failing	4	3	3	4	18	17	15	14		12	11	9
Percent Attaining Proficiency	71	70	68	67	42	42	48	48		53	50	50
Proficiency Index (PI)	88.2	88.1	88.5	87.5	71.3	71.7	74.8	75.1		78.1	77.3	78.0

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining proficiency in ELA decreased from 71 percent in 2003 to 67 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in ELA was 12 PI points in 2003 and in 2006.

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining proficiency in math increased from 42 percent in 2003 to 48 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 29 PI points in 2003 to 25 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of 13 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Plymouth students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 53 percent in 2004 to 50 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in STE was 22 PI points in 2004 and in 2006.

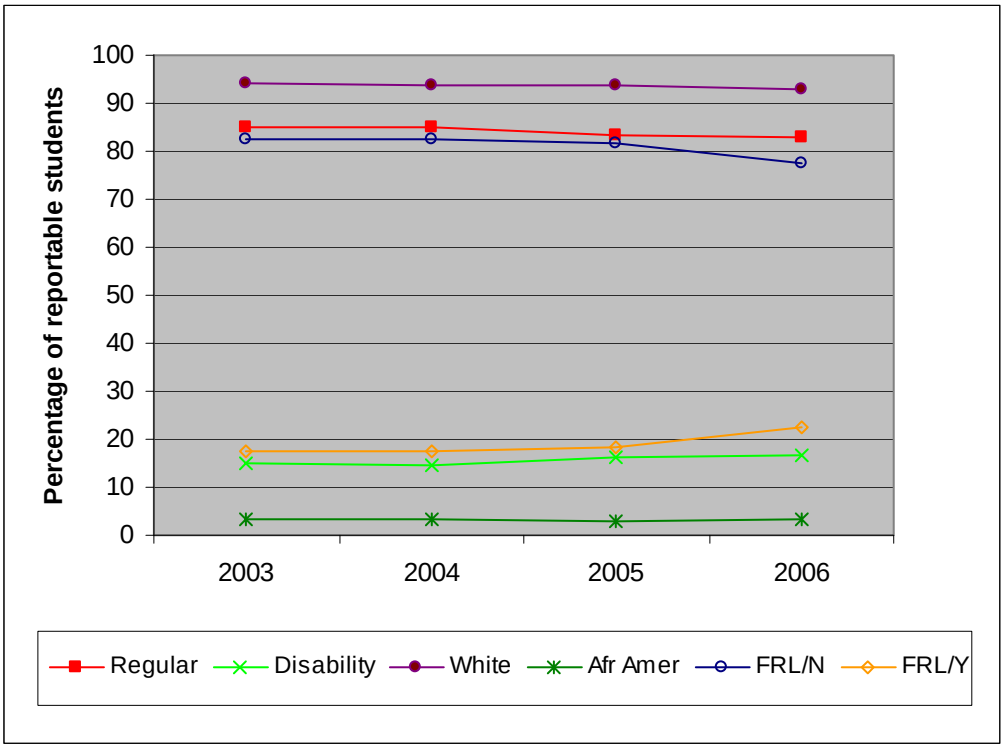
Equity of Improvement

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

Findings:

- In Plymouth, only African-American students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The performance of the other student subgroups remained relatively flat over this period.
- In math, all subgroups in Plymouth with the exception of African-American students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.
- The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA was 24 PI points in both 2003 and 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 29 to 27 PI points over this period.

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



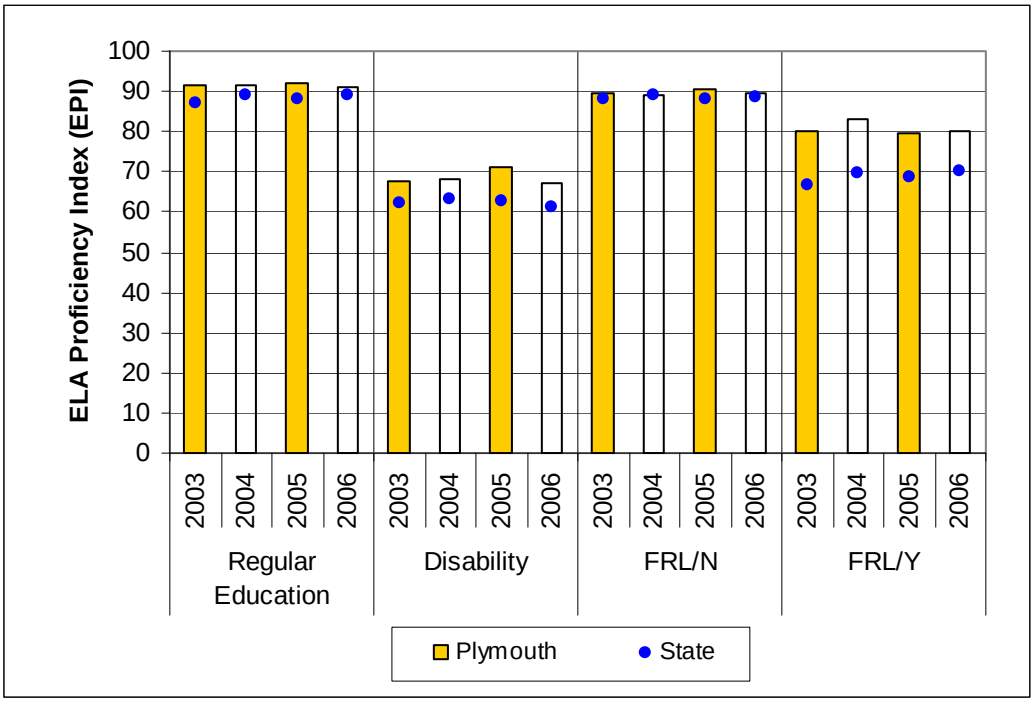
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2003	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**
Plymouth	3,417	3,980	3,822	4,371	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	2,903	3,381	3,178	3,632	85.0	84.9	83.2	83.1
Disability	508	577	623	728	14.9	14.5	16.3	16.7
White	3,211	3,727	3,577	4,062	94.0	93.6	93.6	92.9
Afr Amer	117	130	117	154	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.5
FRL/N	2,819	3,283	3,120	3,393	82.5	82.5	81.6	77.6
FRL/Y	598	697	702	978	17.5	17.5	18.4	22.4

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

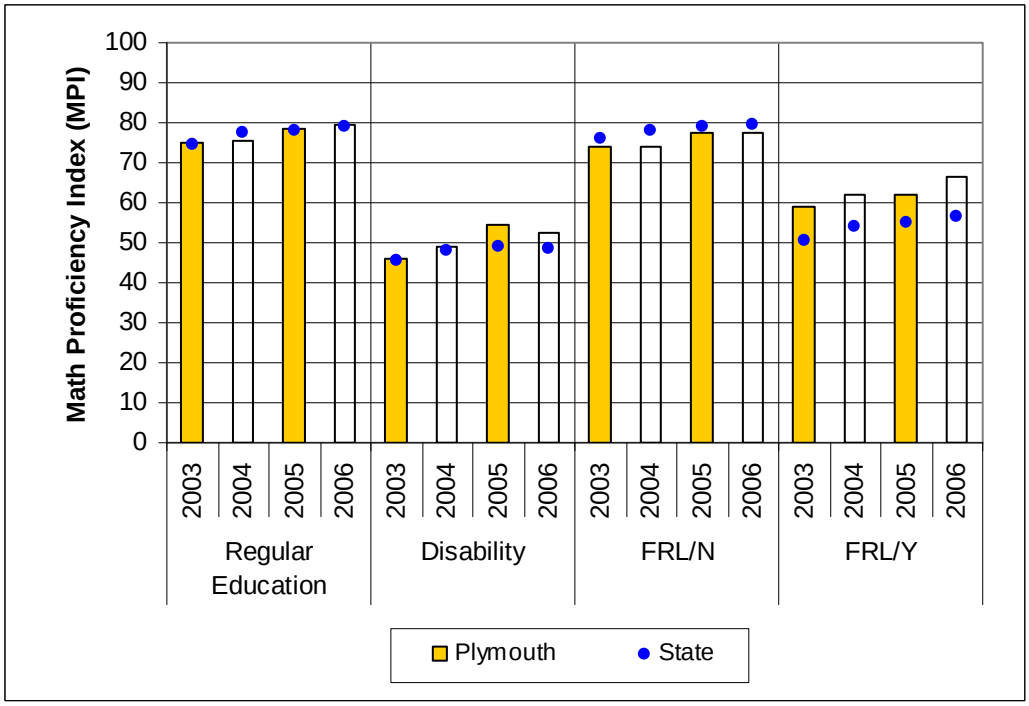
In Plymouth between 2003 and 2006, the proportion of students with disabilities increased by nearly two percentage points, the proportion of non-White students increased by one percentage point, and the proportion of low-income (FRL/Y) students increased by nearly five percentage points.

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

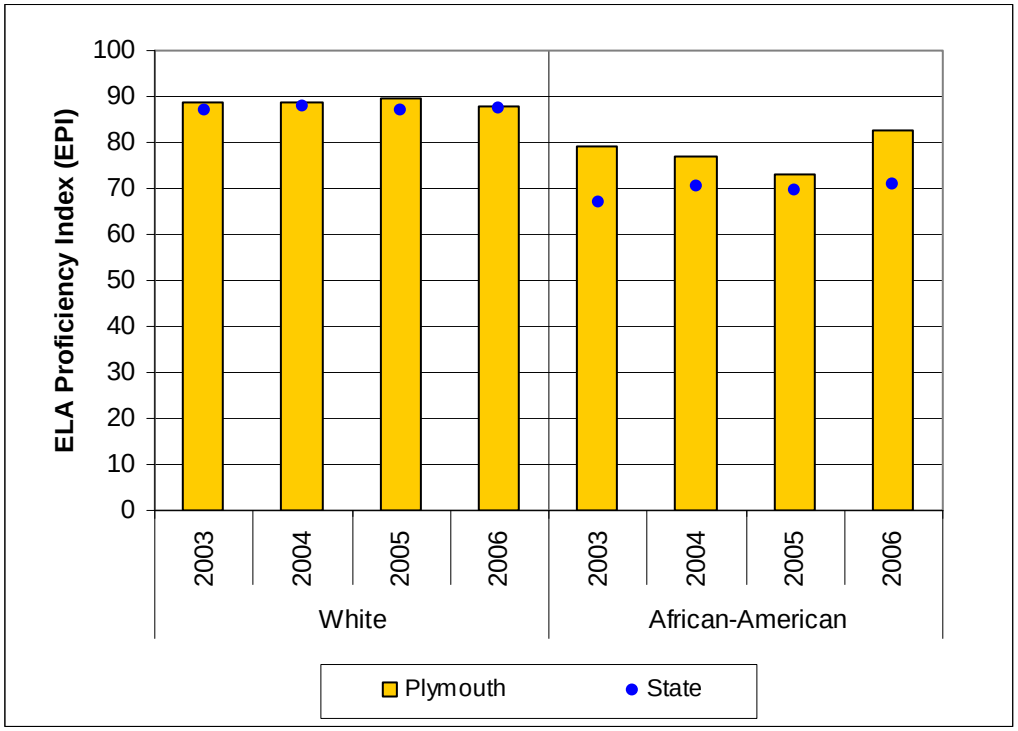
A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



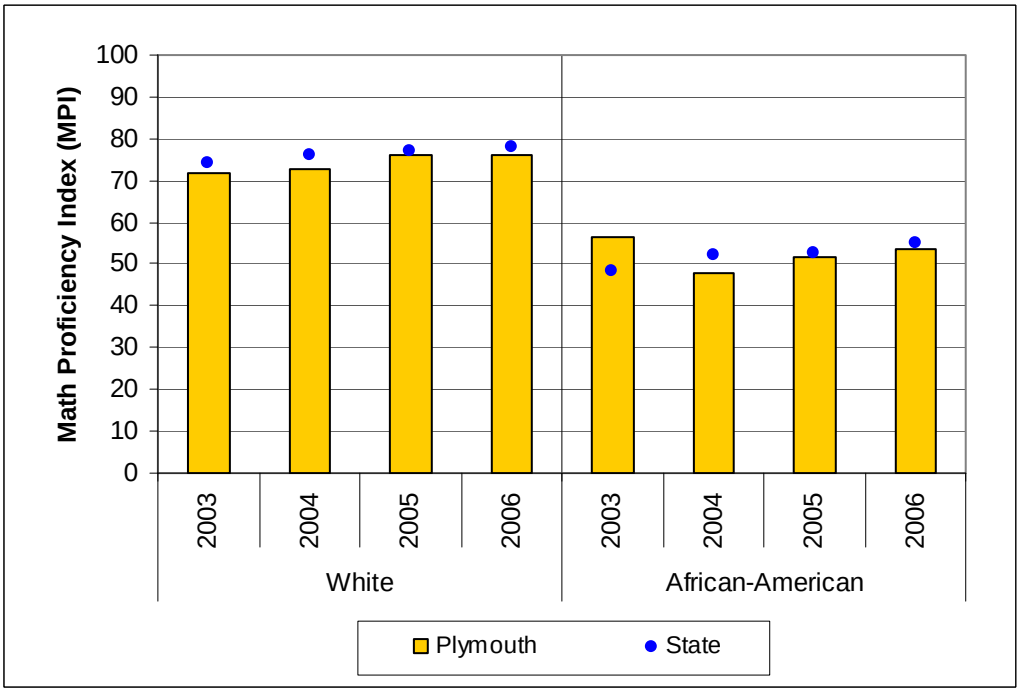
B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



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



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

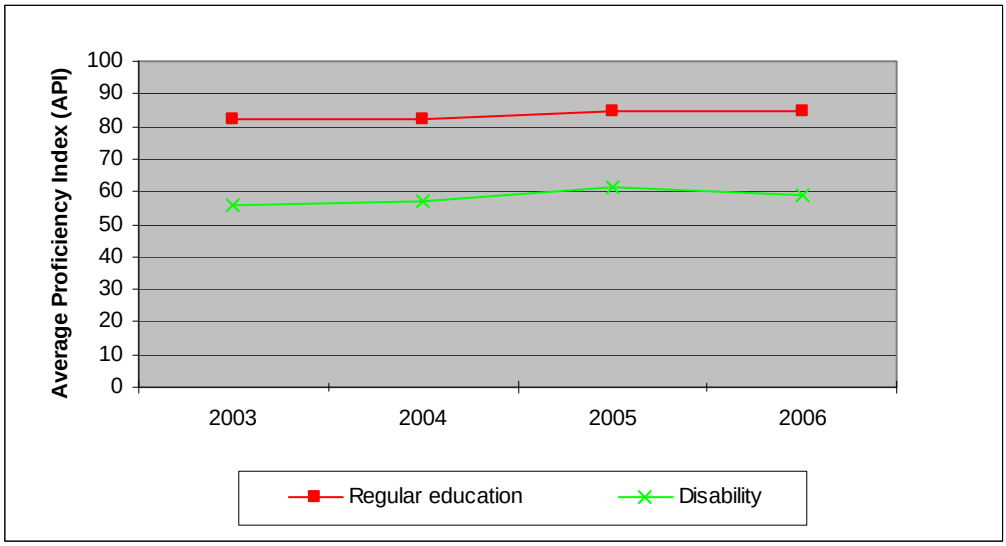


State				Plymouth			
Subgroup	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**	**Subgroup**	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**
Regular Education	2003	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2003	91.6	75.2
	2004	89.2	77.4		2004	91.4	75.7
	2005	88.3	78.2		2005	92.2	78.7
	2006	89.0	78.9		2006	91.2	79.4
Disability	2003	62.1	45.3	Disability	2003	67.7	46.1
	2004	63.3	47.9		2004	68.4	49.1
	2005	62.9	49.0		2005	71.0	54.3
	2006	61.2	48.4		2006	67.1	52.7
FRL/N	2003	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2003	89.8	74.0
	2004	88.9	78.1		2004	89.2	73.8
	2005	88.3	79.0		2005	90.4	77.4
	2006	88.6	79.7		2006	89.5	77.6
FRL/Y	2003	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2003	80.3	58.8
	2004	69.7	53.9		2004	83.3	62.0
	2005	68.8	55.0		2005	79.7	62.2
	2006	70.0	56.3		2006	80.0	66.5
White	2003	86.9	74.4	White	2003	88.5	72.0
	2004	87.7	76.2		2004	88.6	72.8
	2005	87.1	77.2		2005	89.4	75.9
	2006	87.4	77.8		2006	87.7	76.3
African-American	2003	67.1	48.4	African-American	2003	79.3	56.3
	2004	70.5	52.3		2004	77.0	47.7
	2005	69.4	52.8		2005	72.9	51.5
	2006	70.9	55.2		2006	82.6	53.5

In Plymouth, only African-American students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The performance of the other student subgroups remained relatively flat over this period. In math, all subgroups in Plymouth, with the exception of African-American students, showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income (FRL/Y) students and students with disabilities.

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA remained at 24 PI points in 2003 and in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 29 to 27 PI points over this period.

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

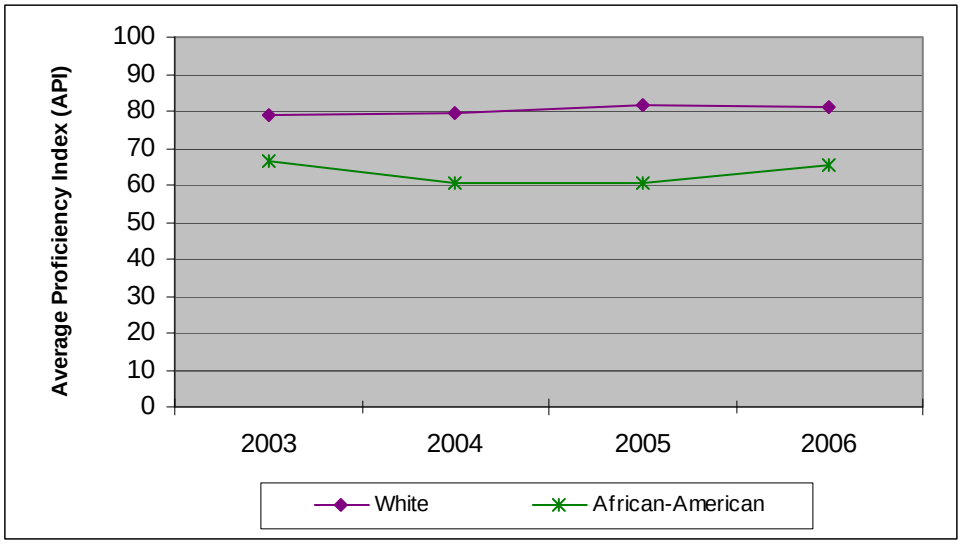


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Regular education	2003	82.1	91.6	75.2	77	46
	2004	82.5	91.4	75.7	76	47
	2005	84.4	92.2	78.7	76	53
	2006	84.6	91.2	79.4	74	53
Disability	2003	55.7	67.7	46.1	30	12
	2004	57.1	68.4	49.1	29	15
	2005	61.7	71.0	54.3	31	18
	2006	58.8	67.1	52.7	30	20

Both regular education students and students with disabilities in Plymouth had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006 due to improved math performance. The average proficiency gap for Plymouth's regular education students narrowed from 18 to 15 PI points; for students with disabilities, it narrowed from 44 to 41 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 14 percent for regular education students and seven percent for students with disabilities.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was relatively flat.

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

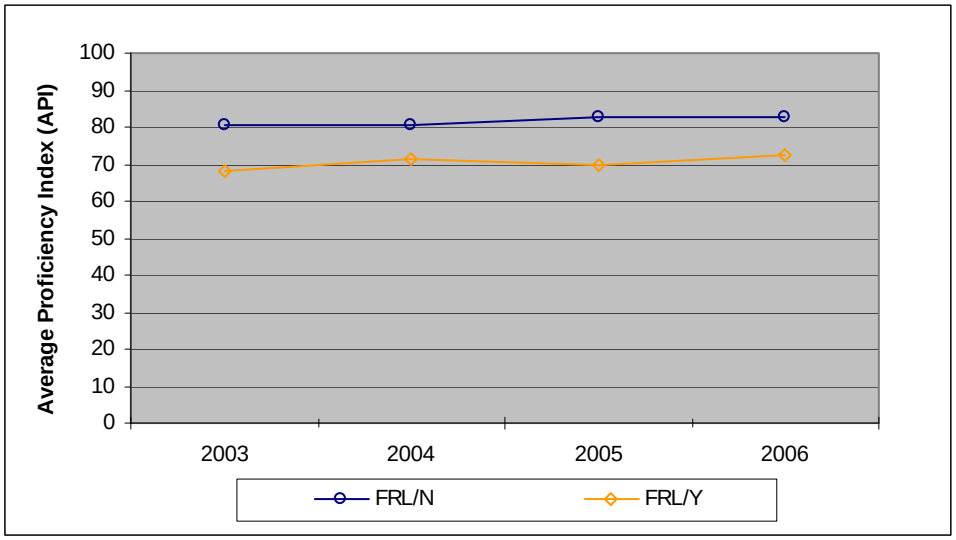


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
White	2003	79.0	88.5	72.0	71	42
	2004	79.6	88.6	72.8	70	43
	2005	81.6	89.4	75.9	70	49
	2006	81.3	87.7	76.3	68	49
African-American	2003	66.3	79.3	56.3	53	19
	2004	60.7	77.0	47.7	48	21
	2005	60.5	72.9	51.5	34	13
	2006	65.3	82.6	53.5	56	17

In Plymouth, White students had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006, while the performance of African-American students declined during this period. The average proficiency gap for White students narrowed from 21 to 19 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 11 percent. The average proficiency gap for African-American students widened from 34 to 35 PI points.

Between 2003 and 2006, the average performance gap between White and African-American students widened by three PI points.

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

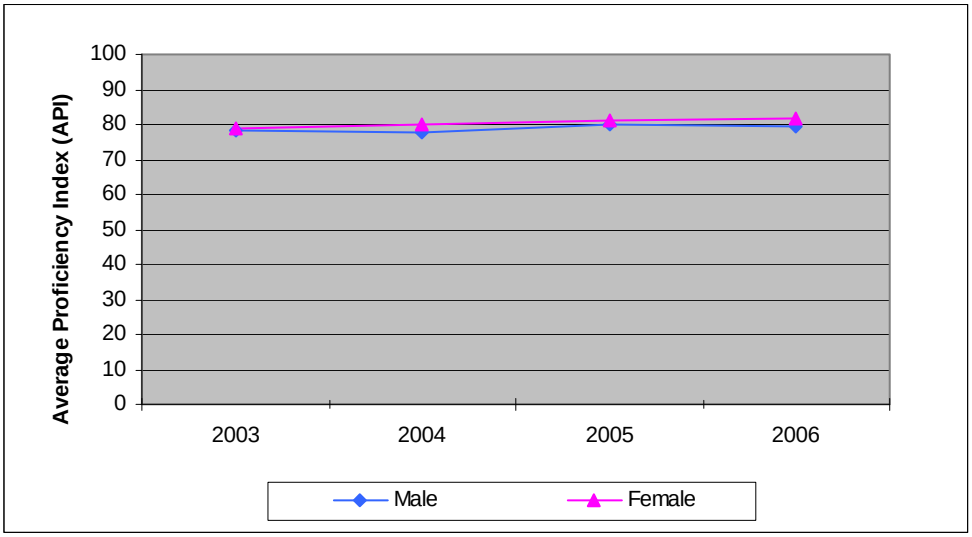


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
FRL/N	2003	80.7	89.8	74.0	74	45
	2004	80.4	89.2	73.8	72	45
	2005	82.9	90.4	77.4	73	52
	2006	82.8	89.5	77.6	72	51
FRL/Y	2003	67.9	80.3	58.8	54	22
	2004	71.2	83.3	62.0	59	29
	2005	69.7	79.7	62.2	49	28
	2006	72.3	80.0	66.5	52	34

Both the low-income (FRL/Y) and non low-income (FRL/N) subgroups in Plymouth had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for low-income students narrowed from 32 to 28 PI points, and for non low-income students it narrowed from 19 to 17 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of 14 percent for low-income students and 11 percent for non low-income students.

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

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



		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Male	2003	78.1	85.9	72.3	65	44
	2004	77.7	85.6	71.7	63	43
	2005	80.1	86.3	75.5	63	50
	2006	79.2	84.6	75.2	61	48
Female	2003	79.0	90.6	70.4	77	39
	2004	79.9	90.8	71.7	77	42
	2005	81.2	91.0	74.0	75	46
	2006	81.8	90.4	75.1	74	47

Both male and female students in Plymouth had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2003 and 2006. The average proficiency gap for male students narrowed from 22 to 21 PI points, and for female students it narrowed from 21 to 18 PI points. These gains resulted in improvement rates of five percent for male students and 13 percent for female students.

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

Participation

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Finding:

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

n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2006

Subgroup	Performance Level	ELA	Math	STE
Plymouth	ALL LEVELS	**4,343**	**4,335**	**1,271**
	Advanced	561	611	160
	Proficient	2,485	1,496	464
	Needs Improvement	1,152	1,585	529
	Warning/Failing	145	643	118
Regular Education	Advanced	547	591	151
	Proficient	2,259	1,375	426
	Needs Improvement	781	1,302	415
	Warning/Failing	48	364	63
Disability	Advanced	14	20	9
	Proficient	225	119	38
	Needs Improvement	364	278	114
	Warning/Failing	93	275	53
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	0	0	0
	Proficient	1	2	0
	Needs Improvement	7	5	0
	Warning/Failing	4	4	2
White	Advanced	544	593	154
	Proficient	2,336	1,424	450
	Needs Improvement	1,032	1,459	472
	Warning/Failing	124	556	88
Hispanic	Advanced	3	5	2
	Proficient	47	18	4
	Needs Improvement	29	39	22
	Warning/Failing	10	26	10
African-American	Advanced	5	4	0
	Proficient	66	27	9
	Needs Improvement	69	70	19
	Warning/Failing	11	48	19
Asian	Advanced	8	7	4
	Proficient	25	22	1
	Needs Improvement	15	12	10
	Warning/Failing	0	7	1
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	502	541	144
	Proficient	2,005	1,234	380
	Needs Improvement	794	1,188	393
	Warning/Failing	76	410	74
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	59	70	16
	Proficient	479	262	84
	Needs Improvement	358	397	136
	Warning/Failing	69	233	44
Male	Advanced	209	327	89
	Proficient	1,256	784	246
	Needs Improvement	679	808	263
	Warning/Failing	94	315	64
Female	Advanced	352	284	71
	Proficient	1,228	712	218
	Needs Improvement	473	777	266
	Warning/Failing	51	328	54

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2003-2006

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2003	642	0	0
	2004	683	0	0
	2005	624	0	0
	2006	624	622	0
Grade 4	2003	734	735	0
	2004	636	634	0
	2005	677	674	0
	2006	615	614	0
Grade 5	2003	0	0	0
	2004	0	0	693
	2005	0	0	583
	2006	615	615	614
Grade 6	2003	0	688	0
	2004	0	667	0
	2005	0	664	0
	2006	578	577	0
Grade 7	2003	671	0	0
	2004	691	0	0
	2005	658	0	0
	2006	663	664	0
Grade 8	2003	0	703	0
	2004	0	658	658
	2005	0	688	688
	2006	655	657	657
Grade 10	2003	649	654	0
	2004	612	612	0
	2005	617	615	0
	2006	593	586	0
All Grades	2003	2,696	2,780	0
	2004	2,622	2,571	1,351
	2005	2,576	2,641	1,271
	2006	4,343	4,335	1,271

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

Standard Findings and Summaries

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

I. Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The district had a strategic plan that served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP) in place for the entire period under review as well as a School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each building that aligned with the DIP.
- The district established action plans through the Performance Improvement Mapping process in both ELA and mathematics specifically directed toward improved MCAS scores for all students.
- The makeup of the seven-member school committee changed considerably during the period under review, and all new members participated in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) training program and on occasion participated in local and state meetings. The superintendent closely mentored newly elected members before they participated in their first meeting.

- The district used various data from the MCAS tests to aid in the development of programs and curriculum in order to best serve the needs of the entire student population. A district data team and school-based data teams worked together to provide classroom teachers with needed information that would address areas of strength and weakness.
- Members of the school committee and the superintendent worked closely with town officials to ensure the needs of both the district and other town agencies were met when final budgets were presented at the annual town meeting.
- The district annually reviewed the crisis/safety plan developed by the superintendent, the fire chief, and the chief of police.

Summary

During the latter part of the period under review, the superintendent and the school committee made a concerted effort to enhance the communication between the district and all other town agencies that focused on district improvement. The superintendent met weekly with the town manager and other department heads to engage in conversations regarding the needs of the entire community.

The school committee members met with the finance committee and selectmen on a regular basis, again opening up the lines of communication in their role as student advocates. The result of this ongoing collaboration produced a better understanding of the needs of both the district and the town as a whole, and the town recently voted to allow the school district to pursue a total of $199 million to upgrade the facilities of both high schools.

The seven-member school committee changed membership on four occasions during the period under review. Micromanagement was not deemed a problem. The committee did not have a formal mentoring program, but the superintendent met with all new members prior to their first meeting to share all pertinent information and the contents of the policy manual. Veteran members also offered their support to new members via meetings, telephone conversations, and e-mail. The school committee had subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and communications, and it assigned a member to serve as liaison to each school. The local cable channel televised all meetings, affording community members the opportunity to share school information. Members of the press in attendance also reported the information in the two local

newspapers. The school committee policy manual was not updated on a regular basis and included many policies with revision dates in the 1990s.

The district began strategic planning in 2002 with the adoption of a three-year plan that included three basic goals along with objectives, timelines, financial implications, and expected outcomes in the areas of ELA, mathematics, and safe and secure schools. A steering committee developed the present plan covering the years 2006-2008 that contained the same three goals. In addition to the strategic plan, the district produced a District Improvement Plan (DIP) that mirrored the strategic plan and contained both mission and vision statements that were in evidence in the buildings as well as in many documents. Plans for ELA and mathematics created during the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process supplemented the new DIP and addressed the needs of both the district and individual schools in need of improvement. The DIP appeared on the district's website and was made available in the form of a brochure.

The SIP for each school contained the same goals as the DIP did and addressed the needs specific to the school. The principals and school councils presented their respective SIPs to the school committee and also reported on the progress of attaining the goals included in their prior SIPs. Regular attendance occurred at school council meetings, and parents and other community members were interested in serving on the school councils, mostly at the elementary level.

The district regularly reviewed assessment data, and members of the teaching staff had one full day and eight half days of professional development to work on areas such as curriculum, assessment, review of data, and differentiated instruction. The district, in accordance with the teachers' contract, provided, in addition to the professional development time, three after-school meeting dates per month to further work in areas deemed necessary by the teaching staff.

The district shared the analyzed MCAS data and district performance packets on a regular basis with the school committee and the community at large. The information contained within each packet included test results, item analysis trends, comparisons, and summary sheets outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each school. Principals met with staff regularly to use analyzed data to improve instruction, and schools made changes to programs based on the data.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a strategic plan that served as its District Improvement Plan (DIP) for all of the years under review that included vision and mission statements which were tied together. Prior to the period under review, the district used a strategic plan developed by the previous administrative council with limited input from staff and the community. The new plan, developed in 2003 in accordance with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, included input from a 96-member steering committee, including administrators, school committee members, staff members, students, parents, town officials, and community members at large. The initiative came about as part of a Department of Education (DOE) grant and followed a prescribed format that included goals, objectives, persons responsible, timelines, financial implications, and expected outcomes. Interviewees stated that the school committee embraced the TQM-inspired Malcolm Baldrige National Quality award model for developing its ideas. The district included these ideas when the strategic plan became formal and the school committee adopted it. The district also included them in its reviews of the plan, which occurred on a regular basis at administrative and faculty meetings, and the plan's contents became the backbone of the district. The three major goals contained within the plan included improvement in student achievement in ELA, improvement in student achievement in mathematics, and improvement in school safety and climate. The EQA review of administrative council meeting agendas, faculty meeting agendas, and school committee minutes verified that discussions and reviews occurred on an ongoing basis at the meetings.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the district revisited the strategic plan, and brought a new DIP covering the years 2006-2008 before the school committee for formal adoption. The revised plan also contained three goals: improving student achievement and academic performance by measuring the proficiency of all students in ELA, mathematics, and science on the MCAS tests;

providing a climate that is both safe and conducive to learning for all students; and improving communication and collaboration with all stakeholders. Each goal contained specific activities, timelines, measuring devices, and funding sources. While not as in depth as the previous strategic plan, the new DIP had two additional plans regarding the performance of students in ELA and mathematics that were in full alignment with the Performance Improvement Mapping process in place in the district at the time of the review. Interviewees stated the goals and activities in both PIM plans addressed the needs of both the district and individual schools in need of improvement.

The district posted its mission statement, its vision, and its goals in each building as well as in the office of the superintendent. In addition, it produced a brochure outlining the DIP and made it readily available by posting it on the website.

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

Rating: Excellent

Evidence

The seven-member school committee had a mixture of both veteran and newly elected members. The chairperson had one year of service with the committee and the time of service of other members ranged from 10 months to 21 years. All members of the committee had been involved in the mandatory MASC training and occasionally participated in local conferences. Members of the committee also attended the state conference on a regular basis. Interviewees stated that the committee had an annual retreat in August, during which time it established goals for the upcoming year and used the opportunity to address many issues surrounding the needs of the district. All members stated they understood their role as a member and that micromanagement did not hinder the operation of the district. Interviewees also said they let the professionals do their job and they offered support by advocating for students. The committee had active subcommittees in the areas of policy revision and communications and a group that met with other town officials on a regular basis. Some interviewees stated that because of the size of the

district, each member of the committee became a liaison to one of the schools and participated in the activities associated with the school, thus providing support from the committee level.

The district did not have a formal mentoring program for newly elected committee members. Interviewees said that new members met with the superintendent prior to their first meeting, and they received a copy of the policy manual, a great deal of supporting information relative to the district, and an update of current issues facing it. School committee members and administrators added that communication between the committee and the superintendent was ongoing via e-mails, memos, face-to-face meetings, and telephone conversations. Interviewees mentioned to the EQA team that the superintendent had regular conversations with each member of the committee prior to every school committee meeting, and that he emphasized the importance of open communication to ensure there would be no surprises brought before them. An excellent relationship existed between the superintendent and the school committee.

The school committee policy manual provided to the EQA team showed that revisions of established policies and adoptions of new policies had taken place during the period under review, while some policies with dates of 1986 were still in effect. In many instances, the committee solicited input from members of the educational community to assist in the establishment and review of policy. One example the committee gave related to the establishment of the wellness policy, which came under the guidance of the lead nurse in the district. Interviewees stated that while members of the policy subcommittee were determined in their quest to update the manual, in some instances the committee became bogged down in the process. Interviewees indicated that the subcommittee had been studying the issues surrounding the establishment of a "memorials" policy that had been in the discussion stage for two years. Members stated the subcommittee had recently established a policy renewal timetable for its ongoing policy updates.

School committee members emphasized the importance they placed on the gathering and use of data as they made decisions for the district's budget and programs.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The document review yielded information related to both the gathering and use of data, and interviewees consistently mentioned the district already had procedures and practices in place for the gathering, selection, and use of data. The district had a district data team made up of some curriculum coordinators, some teachers, and some principals who met on a regular basis, as well as school data teams made up of teachers in each school. During the period under review, the district conducted a great deal of MCAS data analysis on a regular basis and shared the results of the analyses with the school committee and the community. The superintendent, the assistant superintendent for administration and instruction, the curriculum coordinators, and the members of the district data team reviewed the MCAS test results as soon as the information arrived, and promptly sent all pertinent information to each building principal. Many administrators and some teachers had formal training in TestWiz, and the information gleaned through this program was distributed to all staff members. Interviewees in teacher focus groups said they understood the analyses and were able to use the information to make curriculum changes and to adjust their teaching strategies. Teachers received the information during regularly scheduled faculty meetings as soon as possible, and analyzed the results by grade level and by department at the secondary level. Interviewees in teacher focus groups stated that their ability to review the data as soon as they arrived in the district made it possible to adjust teaching strategies and make curriculum adjustments in those areas of noted strength and weakness. Examples given to the EQA team included changes to the sequence in geometry as well as changes in the ELA program to address a noted weakness in the area of poetry.

The district provided the EQA team with past copies of district performance packets that the school committee received in October or November of each year. The report gave an in-depth analysis of performance level results from the most recent test and included annual comparisons, item analysis trends, disaggregated information, AYP data, and a summary sheet outlining defined areas of both strength and concern for each school. Documented areas in need of improvement in 2005 for one school included open-response questions and the long composition at grades 3 and 4; for example, data showed that correct answers to open-response questions on the mathematics tests at these grades in the school were below the district level. School committee members stated they spent a great deal of time reviewing and discussing the data and how they as a committee could provide resources during the planning of the budget to improve

scores across the district. The school committee received the district performance packet during the establishment of the annual budget and, as a result, the committee had the time to make adjustments deemed necessary. Members also stated that if immediate resources were needed they would support the administration in finding the necessary funding to make appropriate budget transfers.

The district used data that prompted the change in the middle school from a seven-period to a six-period day. This resulted in an increase in the time students were instructed in core subject areas. The district also made the determination to have all students in grades 7 and 8 who scored below the 'Proficient' level to participate in additional course work in ELA and mathematics. All grade 7 students, unless they were in the ARL program, took the Strategic Reading and Math Problem Solving courses. Grade 8 students who scored 'Proficient' or above, although they were not necessarily in the ARL program, took Spanish rather than the Reading for High School course offered to grade 8 students. After the district analyzed the data from students who participated in the extra academic classes versus those who did not participate, they found that the scores of the students who received the additional ELA and math support had increased at a much higher rate than the scores of the students who did not participate.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The review of documents showed the existence of SIPs for all schools for each year of the review period, with all plans updated on an annual basis. Each SIP contained the same three goals as the DIP and addressed the particular needs of the school with regard to student achievement and a safe and secure school. Each of these plans included objectives and strategies for each of the goals as well as the additional goals/objectives deemed necessary by the school council. Specific objectives and timelines that directly related to the level of achievement on the MCAS tests appeared in all plans. Interviewees said that prior to the period under review, SIPs were not in alignment with the strategic plan, and each school council determined the needs that were most important to that particular school.

Interviewees stated that all schools posted upcoming meetings of school councils and that councils met on a monthly basis with set agendas. Principals said that attendance at these meetings was regular and there was much interest on the part of parents and community members to serve on each council at the elementary level, although interest waned at the high school level. The review of faculty meeting agendas provided evidence that discussion with all members of the staff occurred regarding the goals and objectives in each SIP. The review of district and school meeting agendas provided evidence that administrators regularly discussed the goals in the DIP and SIPs.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviewees in the administrative and budget sessions said that the superintendent and the business manager worked together and sought much information from other administrators, principals, and teachers during the budget's development. Budget allocations took into account the differing needs of each school, and administrators said they were involved during the entire process and knew how much money they would have to run their respective building/program. The superintendent provided principals information regarding approximately how much additional funding was available before the school committee reviewed the budget request of the district. Special education always received the amount of money deemed necessary. In most cases, the amount of money allocated for needed additional staff, textbooks, and supplies and materials met the needs of the classroom teacher and the district as a whole. Each principal had to provide justification for the need of additional personnel and any other particular needs of his/her building. Teachers in focus groups stated they had sufficient supplies and materials and funds for special requests, even as the end of the year approached. In addition, parent teacher organization (PTO) groups in each school raised money to supplement the resources of both the building and the classroom teachers. The finance committee supported the request of the district to introduce the Reading First series at the elementary schools as additional funding was approved by the town meeting after the passing of the original school budget. Interviewees

pointed out that that the mathematics textbook at the elementary and middle school levels did not align with the state frameworks, and the district's request to include a math specialist at the elementary level did not appear in the budget.

The professional development program review showed that there had been a reduction of two professional development days per year. This related to the negotiated contract when the district had to cut $5.9 million in FY 2004. The present professional development program called for eight half-day sessions throughout the year during which staff members had the opportunity to work on identified areas of need. Interviewees mentioned that during the past two years the district had promoted a number of programs dealing with differentiated instruction and reviewing the assessment program in place at each school. Members of the staff were also able to engage in course work at the post-secondary level with reimbursement, and funding was available to offset the cost of workshops that staff members wished to attend.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated that during the entire period under review, the budget was established using a bottom-up approach. At the beginning of the school year, principals met with staff members to solicit their needs for the coming year. Each principal developed three budgets, including one that addressed all needs of the building/staff, a level services budget, and a level funded budget. The office of the superintendent compiled all of the information, and each principal/administrator met with the school committee in open, televised working sessions to advocate for his/her needs. School committee members reviewed each budget by line item, and had conversations relative to the needs described by the administrator and the data used to support each request. Since there was no budget subcommittee, the entire committee was involved in the preparation of the budget. The superintendent received financial guidelines from the finance committee and determined the probable amount of money that would be available to the district. Final budget determinations were made, and all administrators met with the

superintendent and business manager and made all needed changes. The school committee approved the budget in January or February, and the superintendent and the business manager presented it to the selectmen and finance committee. The final approval came in the spring at the town meeting.

The school committee was involved in the budget process in its entirety, and advocated for students in meetings with town officials and with each school council and parents organization. The school committee liaison assigned to each school provided another layer of advocacy as he/she met with parents to encourage support of the school budget. School committee members said that during the 2006-2007 town meeting, community members voted additional funding for new K-8 science books and for two resource officers at the secondary schools.

Even though it was an educationally sound system, the review of budget information showed that the expenditure per student and the foundation budget were both below state averages, and four years ago the school budget suffered a loss of approximately $5.6 million. Interviewees attributed the loss of much revenue to the elimination of a power plant.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Evidence from interviews and the review of school committee agendas showed that the leadership reported to the school committee on the attainment of the goals in the DIP and SIPs on an annual basis. The superintendent reviewed all SIPs prior to presentation to the school committee. All principals and members of the school councils presented their SIPs for the upcoming year to the school committee in late spring, when discussion of the rationale behind each goal and objective took place. The committee also discussed the attainment or non-attainment of goals in the previous SIP. While no longer a mandate, the school committee formally voted on all SIPs on an annual basis. Also at this time, the committee reviewed the strategic plan/DIP to determine if objectives set the previous year were met. School committee members stated the goals contained within the DIP and SIPs dictated the direction of the district,

particularly regarding student achievement, safe and secure schools, and, more recently, communication.

School committee meetings were televised allowing members of the community to not only become aware of the direction of the district but also provide feedback to the superintendent and members of the school committee. Two local newspapers also reported on the results of each meeting, thus providing an additional avenue for parents and members of the community to understand the goals both of the district and each school. Brochures outlining the DIP, including the mission, vision, and goals of the district, were readily available. Both the DIP and SIPs appeared on the website, which also included a great deal of information about the entire district.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated that the analysis of the MCAS data occurred on a regular basis for the entire period under review and that the process came under the purview of the central office administrative team, the principals, and the curriculum coordinators. Staff members also became involved in the use of both aggregated and disaggregated data. They had three after-school meetings per month when they discussed and reviewed the data gathered by the district and school data teams. While the district disaggregated data for some subgroups such as special education students, male and female students, students in the free or reduced-cost lunch program, and students in the vocational program, the limited number of students in many other subgroups was cited as the reason deeper analysis did not occur. The special education department was now examining how classroom instruction was changing and was looking at the delivery of mathematics instruction. Interviewees also stated that both high schools were assessing how student achievement data were used.

Interviewees stated that principals met with staff members on a regular basis and developed strategies to improve instruction in each building and at each grade level. Staff members stated they met by grade level at each school and met with teachers from other grades to review data

from the present and past years. Interviewees also added that due to the distance between schools, the district was not able to have all elementary teachers meet by grade level. The high school and middle school staff members were able to meet by grade level on a regular basis, and the curriculum coordinators facilitated all of these meetings. While the curriculum coordinators were assigned to grades K-12, it was stated that they spent most of their time at the secondary level.

As the result of the MCAS data analysis, the district reported that it made adjustments in the time spent on mathematics at the elementary level by increasing the original time allotment of 45 minutes to a recommended 60 minutes. The number of periods at the middle school was reduced from seven to six, and additional time in mathematics and ELA was added at grades 7 and 8. The review of data prompted the district to revamp the schedule of vocational high school students from one week of academic work and one week of vocational work to a balanced week of both academic and vocational studies. Teachers at Plymouth South High School stated that the inclusion of these students in regular education classes had increased the achievement of the vocational population.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees stated the importance of the goals in the DIP and SIPs surrounding student achievement in the areas of ELA and mathematics continually directed personnel to seek better methods of assessing student achievement. The review of both faculty meeting and administrative meeting agendas supported this. The central office administrative team, curriculum coordinators, directors, and principals consistently monitored student achievement as well as classroom data on a regular basis. The review of documents yielded copies of the MCAS test results that showed progress as well as information regarding various subgroup populations. The district shared all of these reports with the school committee and the community at large. School committee members stated that the reports initiated much discussion, and they stated the

committee considered the recommendations of administrators regarding needed changes in curriculum, and, if necessary, advocated for additional resources.

The ongoing monitoring of student achievement allowed the district the opportunity to modify and/or implement programs and services as deemed necessary by the administration. During the period under review, the district introduced the practice of classroom review of released MCAS test questions; increased the amount of time spent on open-response questions; changed the sequencing of material in some courses, such as geometry, to ensure students had been introduced to potential test content; and focused on the assessment of all students and programs. The district offered professional development programs to all staff regarding the use of data and differentiated instruction. In addition to district professional development initiatives, each building held three after-school meeting blocks to address the needs of its student body.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The review of 41 administrative files found biannual, rather than annual, signed evaluations for all of the years under review. All of the reviewed evaluations contained statements that were informative, descriptive, promoted growth, but were not timely as mandated by statute. All members of the administrative team, with the exception of one assistant principal who had a waiver, held proper certification in their assigned areas, and all certifications were up to date. Interviewees all said they set annual goals directly related to the strategic plan/DIP and SIPs. Prior to 2006-2007, all raises were predetermined, but during 2006-2007 this practice changed and administrators now received a cost-of-living raise and an additional amount of money relative to their ability to meet all of their goals.

The on-site review of the administrative personnel file of the current superintendent in place for the years under review revealed evaluations for each year. The superintendent established an annual set of goals in conjunction with the school committee goals and the goals contained within the strategic plan/DIP, and reported the ongoing status of these goals to the committee

during regularly scheduled meetings. All school committee members evaluated the superintendent in accordance with the committee's policy that called for an annual evaluation during the spring of each year. All school committee members individually evaluated the superintendent and the chairperson gave a composite to the superintendent, usually during a meeting in March or April. The committee's agreed-upon evaluation tool evaluated the superintendent in the following areas: ability to work with the committee, community relationships, government/oversight agency relationships, educational leadership, staff and personnel management, business and finance, facilities planning and management, and personal qualities. In addition to the evaluation tool, the school committee evaluated the superintendent on his ability to meet the goals he had established at the beginning of the year. The superintendent presented the committee with a written review of the accomplishments pertaining to each goal, and these accomplishments were taken into consideration as each evaluator determined whether the superintendent had met expectations in each of the above eight areas. The final evaluation also provided individual commendations and recommendations. The EQA team's review of the evaluations indicated that they contained statements that were informative, promoted growth, and addressed areas of need. The review of the three-year contract of the superintendent showed predetermined salaries for each of the years, and interviewees stated there was no direct correlation between salary adjustments and improved student achievement.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The central office administrators met on a weekly basis to discuss all issues facing the district. In addition, the principals, directors, and curriculum coordinators met every other week with the superintendent. Agendas were in place for all of the meetings, and interviewees stated that all members had input and the opportunity to discuss district, building, and program needs. Sample agenda items included the strategic plan/DIP, the budget, student data, and other administrative issues that needed addressing. Interviews revealed that close communication, in spite of the size of the district, existed between all administrators. In addition, the high school principals met and

communicated on a regular basis, as did the middle school principals; on occasion, all four principals met to discuss common issues. Interviewees stated that the number of elementary schools, and the distance between them, hindered regularly scheduled meetings, but elementary principals could and did use e-mail and the telephone to communicate with each other. Interviewees stated some principals worked very closely with other principals, but the lack of elementary assistant principals made it difficult to meet during the school day. Interviewees stated that the lack of regularly scheduled meetings did not inhibit their ability to communicate with their colleagues and that telephone conversations were ongoing.

Administrative interviewees said the superintendent delegated the leadership of each school and program to the assigned administrator. Interviewees stated that principals, members of the staff, and, in some instances, parents worked cooperatively when new staff had to be hired. Committees reviewed the credentials of all applicants and submitted candidates to the principal for final review and consideration. All final candidates met with the assistant superintendent for human resources who was ultimately responsible for the hiring of all staff. Interviewees stated that in some cases the principal solely made the final decision without staff input; this usually occurred during the summer when a late resignation was made and time was of the essence. Interviewees also stated that principals shared information and applications with each other when vacancies occurred. The office of the superintendent received all applications and shared them with the principal/administrator when a vacancy occurred within the district.

While the three-year contracts issued to principals and other administrators did not have specific language related to student achievement or the use of data as part of the hiring or re-hiring process, the attainment of the mutually agreed-upon goals connected to the strategic plan/DIP and SIPs, and each of these documents made reference to student achievement.

The entire administrative staff of 51 had an annual retreat in late summer to review the strategic plan/DIP and the SIPs, and to discuss the issues that would be facing the district during the upcoming school year.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the last two years under review, the superintendent and the school committee made a concerted effort to open up the lines of communication between the school district and all other town departments. Included in both the school committee goals and those of the superintendent during the period under review was a community outreach goal that encouraged the convergence of all departments to meet the needs of the entire community. Interviewees stated that prior to the period under review, very little cooperation occurred among the various departments and that the school committee and the selectmen did not always work together and at some times proved adversarial. The superintendent met on a weekly basis with the town manger, the fire chief, the police chief, and the head of the department of public works to discuss issues affecting the entire community. In addition, members of the school committee met with members of the finance committee and the selectmen on a regular basis. Interviewees cited this initiative as part of the reason the community voted to allocate $199 million toward the building and/or renovation of the two high schools. All interviewees acknowledged that overcrowding and the age of many of the facilities had to be addressed.

All interviewees consistently stated that the town was vested in the educational system, and one of the examples given was that after the school budget had been voted on at the town meeting, the finance committee asked for and received additional funding for the district for new science materials. Another example given was that the town approved the hiring of two new staff members and did not increase the funding requested by the fire and police departments.

The school district worked with eight various unions, and all contracts were renegotiated during the same period of time. The contracts reviewed by the EQA team were in place for 2003-2006, and interviewees stated that the raises afforded each of these parties were similar to those of all town employees. District administrators told the EQA that the new teachers' contract for 2006-2009 had been accepted, and all benefits would be retroactive. Interviewees confirmed that the

latest round of negotiations was difficult, and that teachers had protested the lack of a new contract at various sites and at various meetings. The school committee and the teachers' union both used the services of an attorney/Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) representative during negotiation sessions.

Members of the union and the superintendent stated that open communication existed via telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, regularly scheduled meetings, and e-mails, and that only one grievance had reached the school committee during the past eight years. All interviewees confirmed that issues were addressed professionally and immediately, and solutions were attained. Interviewees stated that the teachers' union also covered the teachers in Carver even though the Plymouth-Carver Regional School District was disbanded a number of years ago.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the entire period under review, the district had a comprehensive staff crisis manual in place for all schools and the central administration office. The superintendent of schools, the director of health, and the fire and police chiefs established the original plan and the school committee adopted it. The plan was reviewed and/or updated on an annual basis by the district crisis team, all administrators, and the fire and police departments. Subsequently it was presented in the form of an easy to use flip chart. The general manual contained pertinent information regarding lockdowns, evacuation training, floor plans, and the like, and provided various scenarios with precise procedures. Members of the EQA team noted that during classroom visits the flip charts were in place in the same location in each classroom, and in other areas such as the main office, library, gymnasium, and cafeteria. The charts provided a synthesized form of the overall crisis response manual to aid a needed response by a member of the staff. New members to a building, including new teachers and paraprofessionals, received training and classroom knowledge of where needed information and materials were located and how to use the flip charts provided by the district. The crisis plan included the following

potential incidents: bomb threat, hostage situation, fire/explosion, choking student, suicide attempt, intruder in building, field trip protocols, missing student, and universal precautions for school settings. Also, the plan included necessary phone numbers and a building map.

Annual fire, bus evacuation, and lockdown drills were conducted and these were noted in memos sent to the office of the superintendent. Visits to each school by members of the EQA team evidenced various methods of school security in place, including visitors wearing badges, the signing in of visitors, and a limited use of cameras. In some cases, doors leading into the schools were not locked, thus allowing easy access.

In addition to the staff crisis manual, a manual entitled Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan existed which included the guidelines and procedures that needed to be followed in the case of a problem at Pilgrim Station, the nuclear power plant in Plymouth. The town also provided each school with the Radiological Emergency Response Plan, again in response to the proximity of the power plant. Both plans were visible in all schools and buildings and came under the purview of town officials.

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

II. Curriculum and Instruction

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

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The district developed extensive curriculum documents that aligned to the state frameworks, contained required components structured in a consistent user-friendly format, and were available in hard copy, on CD, and online. Internet resources were included in these documents.
- The district generated much comprehensive data and used them to inform modifications to the curriculum, but, other than the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data at grades K-3, the district did not use the data to monitor teacher effectiveness nor to drive instruction on a consistent basis.
- Classroom observations by the EQA examiners yielded evidence of teacher instructional practices that reflected high expectations for students' work and mastery in only 48 percent of classrooms at the high school level.
- Study halls at the high school level reduced time on learning from the required 990 hours to 864 hours.
- Time for mathematics instruction at the elementary level was not consistently allocated across the district, ranging from 60 to 75 minutes at different buildings.

- The district maintained and used a myriad of technology. The infrastructure was able to handle large volumes of traffic on the network and was used at 95 percent of capacity by staff.
- The district did not have a formal writing program or a consistent model implemented across buildings and grades, especially at the elementary level.

Summary

The district had a process and practices in place for developing, reviewing, and revising the curriculum. This included analysis of the MCAS data at the district and building levels when they were first received from the Department of Education (DOE). The district trained all administrators in TestWiz, and they could access the MCAS test data through the DOE security portal as soon as they were available. In addition to a data team at the central office, each building had a data team that analyzed the school's data and then, along with the principal, shared the data at staff meetings for further analysis and interpretation. While other staff members were not trained in TestWiz, they were familiar with using the reports to identify trends and strengths and weaknesses to be addressed. A group then developed an action plan to make any curriculum modifications needed for the balance of the year. The district supported curriculum committees each summer that worked on revisions that became addenda to the curriculum until a major revision was undertaken. In 2005-2006, the district developed a formal curriculum review cycle to create consistency in the process. The cycle included steps for reviewing and revising the current curriculum, adopting new textbooks, providing professional development, and evaluating new programs.

Through the examination of the MCAS test scores and through the PIM process required by its AYP status for subgroups, the district identified mathematics as a districtwide issue needing attention in 2004-2005. The district developed an improvement plan for math in 2005-2006 and completed a major revision of the mathematics curriculum in the summer of 2006. The mathematics textbook used at grades K-5 was a 2000 edition that was not in alignment with the state curriculum frameworks. The textbook was not scheduled to be replaced until at least 2008-2009.

The district aligned its curricula to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks using a format that contained measurable objectives, resources, instructional strategies, and timelines or pacing charts. The district provided curriculum documents to staff in several forms: hard copy, online through the district website, and on CD. Teachers were able to connect to the Internet resources included in the curriculum documents from the website or CD.

The district provided multiple levels of professional development to develop and improve effective instruction. These included two years of professional development on differentiated instruction and a four-year effort on standards-based instruction and assessment strategies. In response to student need, as indicated by student achievement data, the district brought in a mathematics consultant to work with instructors on teaching techniques, adopted the Six Traits of Writing program, and focused attention on improved methods for teaching special education students, namely in reading and mathematics.

The EQA examiners saw a variety of instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction used in 37 percent of classrooms observed during the site visit. Recently, the district trained all high school staff in brain-based teaching, followed by training for middle school teachers in 2006-2007, with training for elementary teachers planned for 2007-2008. As part of that initiative, the district offered a summer course in brain-based learning that a large percentage of teachers attended.

The district organizational structure for curriculum consisted of subject-area coordinators for grades K-12, a curriculum council, and a curriculum coordinating council that ultimately approved all curricula. The K-12 coordinators worked most closely with the secondary level, while elementary principals monitored curriculum at their level. Administrators monitored teachers' instruction with walk-throughs and formal evaluations. The district did not have a formal protocol or consistent practice for walk-throughs. The district had a lesson plan template on its website that teachers were "strongly encouraged" but not mandated to use. Collection, review, and monitoring of plan books and lesson plans varied across buildings.

Assessments were used to monitor student mastery of subjects but not the effectiveness of teachers' instruction. Data were used to inform and drive instruction through the modification of programs and courses.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of documents by examiners and interviews with administrators and staff showed that the district implemented curricula at all grade levels in tested core content areas that clearly addressed the components of the state curriculum frameworks. The documents contained objectives, resources, instructional strategies, pacing and mapping guides, timelines, and measurable outcomes. The curriculum contained some assessments. The district was in the planning and development process for assessments. The curriculum documents were available in hard copy, online, or on a CD version available in 2007.

According to administrators, the district completed a major revision of the mathematics curriculum during 2005-2006. During 2006-2007, the district began to investigate programs for piloting and adoption in 2007-2008. The district's core mathematics program for grades 1-5 used a Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley 2000 edition. The middle school used a Glencoe text beginning at grade 6. Interviewees indicated that since the texts did not align well with the Massachusetts framework for mathematics, teachers developed supplemental materials. Key pieces were missing in authentic concept problem-solving. This led to the implementation of a new half-year problem-solving and application course at grades 7 and 8 at the middle school. The revised curriculum also had problem-solving woven throughout it.

Interviewees said that a revision of the science curriculum was completed during the period under review, and a new science program was implemented at the K-6 level that contained extensive standardized lesson plans to help teachers stay on level. Because of a Reading First grant in two elementary schools, the district reviewed data and adopted the Houghton Mifflin core reading program for kindergarten through grade 3 for districtwide implementation in the

2005-2006 school year. Grades 5 and 6 used an older edition, 2002, of the Houghton Mifflin program, and grade 6 also used a variety of novels and the McDougal-Littell anthology.

Administrators reported and a review of documents showed that the curricula included many Internet resources. The district purchased licenses and memberships for these resources that included computer simulations, an elementary animated package, and use of the National Science Digital Library. English language arts (ELA) used Read, Write, and Think, which was publicly accessible and linked to the Houghton Mifflin reading program.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

A review of documents and interviews indicated that the district's curriculum documents were aligned vertically and horizontally in all tested areas. The alignment of delivery of curricula in the classroom was not consistent across all buildings and levels.

Administrators and interviewees indicated that grade-level meetings at individual elementary buildings addressed the horizontal alignment of curricula. However, grade-level meetings across the district were infrequent although clusters of elementary schools might meet during in-service time. Most in-service time was devoted to MCAS data analysis and curriculum review by building or mandated professional development provided by the district. Distance between buildings in the district was an issue when planning for half-day in-service as schools may be many miles apart. The distance also created a barrier to cross-district grade-level meetings to address issues such as mathematics. The mathematics textbook was seven years old and not fully aligned to the Massachusetts framework. As individual buildings or those close to each other worked to supplement the texts, they lacked consistency in implementation. Interviewees indicated that curriculum discussions among levels happened informally when individual teachers made connections to the next or previous level. At the middle and high school levels, departmental meetings addressed the issue of horizontal and vertical alignment of curricula for their respective disciplines.

While the district's organizational structure had discipline-specific coordinators who were responsible for grades K-12, there was no structure to support and monitor curriculum delivery at each level. The district had two math specialists in place at the beginning of the period under review. It lost one to budget cuts and eliminated the second to create a central office position. At the elementary level, the principal was the curriculum leader who oversaw the vertical and horizontal alignment within the building. The secondary level had lead teachers in non-stipended positions who provided support but not supervision. Curriculum work including revision was mostly building based during the school year. A broader representation across levels K-12 occurred during the summer when curriculum teams were brought together to revise and create addenda to the curricula.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Administrators and staff reported that at the elementary level the principal was the curriculum leader who oversaw the use, alignment, consistency, and effectiveness of delivery of the district's curricula that focused on improvement for all its students. At the secondary level, the principal along with the K-12 subject-area coordinators oversaw the curricula.

Interviewees reported that at all levels the process of examining and revising curriculum and instruction began when the district received the MCAS test data. The district data team analyzed the results and forwarded the analyses to building principals, who reviewed them with their data teams and faculties. Principals had already done some work with the data as soon as they were available through TestWiz. The data team presented the analysis at faculty meetings, and the staff reviewed strengths, weaknesses, and trends. They then focused on modifications to the curriculum based on the data. This resulted in a plan that focused on some things they could do immediately, i.e., teachers learned from the math analysis that they needed to use a common math vocabulary; they developed the vocabulary in summer workshops, and principals and coordinators subsequently monitored instruction for common math vocabulary.

Interviewees indicated that there was a common lesson plan template that the district "strongly encouraged" teachers to use; however, it was not required. There was not a district protocol for supervision and monitoring regarding plan books and lesson plans. Administrators' reports of depth and frequency of checking lesson plans varied, although all expected to see the standard, student involvement in activities, assessment/checking for understanding, and a reflection piece.

At the elementary level, administrators reported their role as laying the groundwork for discussion, making sure teachers were using the word walls, and making sure students were exposed to the components of the curriculum.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviewees reported that each school provided active leadership and support for effective instructional strategies, techniques, and methods grounded in research and focused on improved achievement for all students. The district developed and implemented a strategic plan for 2001-2005 followed by a DIP for 2006-2008, with each school having a SIP tied to the DIP. However, the district did not focus on implementation of consistent strategies across the district to improve achievement for all students.

According to administrators, two elementary schools received Reading First grants during the period under review and began using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess K-2 students' reading levels. This practice spread to all elementary schools for the 2006-2007 school year after teachers in grades K-3 received training in the DIBELS. The district also implemented the Three Tier reading model to support identified struggling readers.

Interviewees indicated the district did not have a formal writing program. While the new core reading program contained writing components, it was not a writing program. While one building had adopted the John Collins Writing Program, there was no consistency across the elementary level. Interviewees pointed to grade-level expectations for writing, but there was not

a formalized model. Principals said that student writing folders were maintained in order to examine student work. At grade 10, students prepared a response to a long composition and teachers discussed the results during departmental meetings. This was a reflection of staff and administrator concern for student performance in the open-response portions of the MCAS tests, where there had been much analysis. As a result, the district implemented the Six Traits of Writing at grade 6 during 2005-2006, expanded it to grades 7 and 8, and planned to implement it at the elementary level in the future. According to the superintendent, the district is "… in the process of developing a unified writing program."

Administrators reported that the district had been part of Brown University's The Education Alliance for three years. This required providing samples of homework and assessments in the four core academic areas. "The district exceeded expectations in the quality of activities." Separate from the Brown University partnership, but in conjunction with it, through the Breaking Ranks partnership the district has been implementing brain-based learning over the past two years. High school staff received training in 2005-2006, middle school staff received training in 2006-2007, and elementary staff would receive training in 2007-2008. Many teachers took advantage of a week-long three-credit course. There were three phases to The Education Alliance brain-based work: brain-friendly instruction, management, and assessment with teachers "dipsticking" and checking for understanding.

Administrators said that the district provided further support to teachers by bringing in a mathematics professional who worked with the staff on mathematics strategies, especially in the use of manipulatives. In addition, the district provided opportunities for teachers to take The Skillful Teacher course, as well as opportunities for involvement in partnerships with Bridgewater State College and University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth. In response to flat MCAS test scores and schools identified as in need of improvement for subgroups in mathematics, administrators indicated the need for special education staff to have greater content understanding as well as better grouping strategies and improved use of time. One response was the introduction of Larson Learning (similar to Study Island) at the middle school level to provide more individualized instruction that engages students.

The district offered professional development in differentiated instruction during half-day in-services.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of the documents by examiners and interviews showed that the district had established a documented process for the regular and timely review and revision of curricula that was based on valid research, the analysis of the MCAS test results, and focused on improved achievement for all subgroups. During the early part of the period under review, the process was not standardized. In 2004-2005, the district developed a five-year cycle for curriculum review. The curriculum for each discipline was reviewed, revised, and piloted, with textbooks adopted, professional development provided, and finally the program evaluated. The curriculum revision cycle helped to focus efforts and address resource needs.

The district used two committees to review and approve curricula prior to school committee review and approval. These committees met regularly to revise the district curricula and generate new curricula. Data teams analyzed MCAS and PIM data at the building level. The data team shared the results with the faculty through departmental, grade-level, and faculty meetings. After determining trends, strengths, and weaknesses, staff developed action plans to modify the curricula for the balance of the year. Further revision occurred during the summer. In 2005-2006, the district brought together teachers, principals, administrators, and staff who met every Thursday for two and one-half months to develop a district improvement plan for mathematics. Administrators said that during the summer of 2005-2006, district science teachers worked with Bridgewater State College and 21 other districts to develop a common biology curriculum for the biology-focused MCAS test for students in grade 9.

A district review of subgroup analysis in mathematics showed a need for examining specific strategies for teaching mathematics to special education students. The district also identified the need for greater content knowledge in mathematics for special education teachers.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Through interviews and examination of documents, examiners found that the district analyzed student achievement data and allocated instructional time in the tested core content areas that focused on improved rates of proficiency for all students. However, a review of time on learning indicated that the district did not meet the time on learning requirement at the high school. The high school placed students in directed study classes that had no set curriculum or grading. This reduced the time on learning at the high school to 864 hours, below the 990 required hours. The middle and elementary schools had 990 hours of instructional time.

At the elementary level, principals reported a two-hour block of time for literacy and between 60 and 75 minutes for mathematics, depending on the building. The addition of the Three Tier model to support identified struggling readers provided less disruption to special needs students' reading instruction. The model provided for an additional 30 minutes of reading daily with progress monitoring using the DIBELS.

Administrators said that at the middle school, the examination of data resulted in a change from a seven-period day to a six-period day. This provided increased time in core subjects for students. Additionally, one middle school used management strategies to reduce inefficient time, engage students more, and result in more learning. They looked to cluster time in a period so that the lesson consisted of three different activities to reach all learners and hold their attention. There was less disseminating of information and more work leading to proficiency. Teachers spoke with a common language due to professional development, and this led to common strategies to help writing.

Administrators reported that the high school developed the Freshman Academy because of work with The Education Alliance at Brown University. The academy model provided for teams at the grade 9 level in both high schools, and teams at the grade 10 level in one high school, similar to the middle school model. The other high school had a vocational component that offered a

small schools structure. These academies provided smaller learning environments in a more personalized setting.

Administrators said that finding time to support special needs students was always a concern. At the middle school, supplemental reading and special education content support in mathematics were provided. Students were pulled from special subjects, with grade 6 receiving Strategic Reading, grade 7 receiving Reading in Content Areas, and grade 8 receiving Reading for High School. All were half-year courses. At the high school, the science department developed a two-year biology program at grades 9 and 10 for identified students.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of documents by the EQA examiners and interviews with administrators and staff showed that appropriate educational technology was available and used as an integral part of the instructional process.

According to administrators, the district supported a large volume of network traffic. The district installed a network five to six years ago that was well used. The district added a T3 bandwidth, and since the opening of school in 2006 there had been 95 percent use of the technology. Administrators said that the middle school faculty was the most proficient in the use of technology. There was an emphasis on technology integration at the new middle school, and then at the second middle school. This was followed by renovation of two elementary schools with multiple technology resources. Every classroom had seven hardware drops for between 3,700 and 4,000 computers in the district. Each building had a technology professional development (TPD) person to provide training and support. In addition, an instructional technology specialist at each level was a liaison between the central office and the schools.

Interviewees reported that staff had the ability to sign up for courses online and receive professional development points (PDPs) online. Out of 250 elementary teachers, 100 signed up for earth science, life science, and physical science courses offered online. The high school

offered Virtual High School (VHS) and had three teachers teaching in the program. If the district purchased more seats than it had students for, it sold the seats to other schools to help fund the program. The program was used for classes that were not offered, and for recovery course credit for seniors needing to graduate.

Interviewees reported that each elementary school had a computer lab and classrooms had two computer stations for student use. Each computer had 15 to 20 software titles installed. The middle schools had a computerized art course, rolling laptop carts, SmartBoards, and graphing calculators in math. In addition, one middle school had a planetarium and a television station. There were weather stations in every school. Science support included Harcourt online textbook support, BrainPOP, digital microscopes, and probeware. There was a trained laboratory paraprofessional present for each lab. During classroom observations, the EQA examiners observed students appropriately using available technology in 33 percent of the classrooms districtwide, in 41 percent of elementary classrooms, 36 percent of middle school classrooms, and 13 percent of high school classrooms. Examiners did not visit vocational classrooms.

Other technology available included Study Island, Larsen Learning, websites developed and used by teachers, a Freshman Academy website, LCD projectors, and wireless keypads.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviews with administrators showed that school leaders actively monitored teachers' instruction through walk-throughs in addition to the formal evaluation process. There was no established protocol or consistent feedback mechanism for the visits. While administrators addressed expectations for lesson plan content and classroom sights and sounds, they did not articulate practices that reflected high expectations for students' work and mastery. Administrators indicated that if they were in a classroom observing for a length of time, a written response was given, but if something negative was observed, it required a face-to-face meeting. Administrators provided a note in a teacher's mailbox for a positive item. Elementary principals reported trying to walk through every classroom each day. Middle school administrators tried to

get to every classroom at least once every week or two weeks. Coordinators visited elementary schools occasionally in the morning and collaborated on walk-throughs with the principals at the secondary level. EQA visits to classrooms showed that indicators of high expectations were observed in 81 percent of elementary classrooms, 84 percent of middle school classrooms, and 48 percent of high school classrooms.

Indicators for high expectations included good routines and habits of students, challenging academic tasks in classrooms, high quality work displayed, and teacher expectations of high quality work.

All administrators were trained in Observing and Analyzing Teaching, a Research for Better Teaching (RBT) course. Principals reported that when they evaluated teaching they made note of what they saw and commented on the use of manipulatives and higher level questioning, the presence of an agenda on the board, closure at the end of the lesson, and student engagement.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviews with administrators indicated that the district used summative data, standardized tests such as the MCAS tests, the DIBELS, textbook or program assessments, and teacher-generated tests to monitor student mastery of subjects but not the effectiveness of teachers' instruction. Data were used to inform and drive instruction through modification and revision of programs and courses.

Administrators reported using walk-throughs and the formal evaluation tools to monitor teacher effectiveness. Of 47 personnel files reviewed by examiners, most were informative in nature, with some being instructive and a few promoting professional growth. The documents did not link student achievement to evaluation. Some principals collected student work samples and/or reviewed portfolios.

At the high school, coordinators were involved in monitoring teachers' classrooms and holding regular conversations with teachers, but they depended on lead teachers for much communication with staff.

Administrators stated some schools were piloting the Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) during 2006-2007 with implementation districtwide planned for 2007-2008. The tests could be scanned in-house with a maximum two-week turnaround for data to be returned to teachers. According to interviewees, this tool would support more effective monitoring of teaching and learning.

While there was not widespread use of data to determine the effectiveness of teachers' instruction, some teachers, including ones on professional status, were on growth plans.

According to interviewees, professional development was offered at the beginning of new program implementation, i.e. the Houghton Mifflin reading program and the Harcourt science program at the elementary level. Other professional development surrounded initiatives such as the Freshman Academy and brain-based teaching and learning.

In interviews, the EQA examiners asked principals what they would see in classrooms. Although the district provided two years of professional development in differentiated instruction, principals did not cite this as something that would be observed. Administrators expected examiners to find student-centered rather than teacher-centered classrooms at all levels with cooperative teams and hands-on activities.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed 63 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 26 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching. The attributes were grouped into five categories: classroom management,

instructional practice, expectations, student activity and behavior, and climate. The EQA examiners checked the attributes that they observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. Observations were conducted at the district's 16 schools as follows: 34 at the elementary schools, 14 at the middle schools, and 15 at the high schools. In total, the EQA examiners observed 40 ELA classrooms, 20 math classrooms, and three science classrooms.

Classroom management refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 92 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 97 percent at the elementary level, 100 percent at the middle school level, and 75 percent at the high school level.

Instructional practice was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher's questions transcend direct recall and include open-ended questions that require the use of higher order thinking skills. Students should be encouraged to go beyond their initial responses, to analyze, to synthesize, to compare and contrast, and to explain their own thinking. Class time should be focused on student learning. Students who have finished their work should be provided with other appropriate tasks; students who are off task should be redirected to their task. The work should engage all students; it should be age-appropriate, and attuned to many learning modalities, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The pace of the class should be appropriate, challenging, and engaging for all students. Instruction should be differentiated so that all learners are challenged. The lesson should be clearly aligned with the state curriculum frameworks and either posted on the board or cited in the teacher's planner. The lesson's objectives should be clear and explicitly articulated. The teacher should use standards-based instruction to set objectives, to plan activities, to assess the effect of the lesson, and to measure progress for all learners. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 81 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 88 percent at the elementary level, 82 percent at the middle school level, and 63 percent at the high school level.

Expectations refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. Evidence of high expectations could include recent examples of high quality student work posted in the

classroom. In addition, high quality work should be evident through rubrics that may sometimes be generated by students. Tasks should be challenging for all students, and all students should have access to the same curriculum, although the instruction and strategies may be adapted to the needs of students. The teacher should clearly maintain and communicate high expectations for student work during class time. All students should be expected to be on task and engaged in the lesson. High expectations for students were evident in 74 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 81 percent at the elementary level, 84 percent at the middle school level, and 48 percent at the high school level.

Positive student activity and behavior are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They must show a clear understanding of the objective of the lesson and interact with the teacher and each other in accomplishing the tasks. They should be attentive and responsive. While the environment may be busy and constructive, it must also be controlled and orderly. There should be few distractions, and the learning process must be evident. Indicators of positive student activity and behavior were evident in 78 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 86 percent at the elementary level, 82 percent at the middle school level, and 59 percent at the high school level.

Finally, the concept of *climate* is considered evident when the classroom is welcoming, and the teacher is an active listener and treats all students with respect. Students should listen attentively to and be respectful of all other students. Many resources and means beyond the textbook should be available for learning; these may include technology, manipulatives, cassettes, visuals, overhead projectors, and a classroom library. Positive indicators of climate were evident in 84 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 91 percent at the elementary school level, 86 percent at the middle school level, and 67 percent at the high school level.

Summary of Classroom Observations

	Number of Classrooms						Computers		
	ELA	Math	Science	Total	Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Elementary	27	6	1	34	18.6	0.6	132	119	5.3
Middle	5	8	1	14	18.7	0.4	62	53	4.9
High	8	6	1	15	20.4	0.0	27	18	17.0
Total	40	20	3	63	19.1	0.4	221	190	6.3

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity & Behavior	Climate
Elementary					
Total checks	132	268	109	169	93
Maximum possible	136	303	135	196	102
Avg. percent of checks	97	88	81	86	91
Middle					
Total checks	56	103	47	69	36
Maximum possible	56	126	56	84	42
Avg. percent of checks	100	82	84	82	86
High					
Total checks	44	85	29	53	30
Maximum possible	59	135	60	90	45
Avg. percent of checks	75	63	48	59	67
Total					
Total checks	232	456	185	290	159
Maximum possible	251	564	251	370	189
Avg. percent of checks	92	81	74	78	84

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

III. Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The district generated comprehensive data relating to student assessment, and they were used to inform curricular changes but their effectiveness in impacting instruction was not consistent.
- A districtwide assessment team was in place and each school had a volunteer assessment team that analyzed the MCAS data and disseminated them to all staff.
- All teachers in grades K-3 were trained in the implementation of the DIBELS.
- Middle and high schools administered end-of-year common exams, but the use of formative assessments was lacking in the district. The district planned to use the GRADE and GMADE in 2007-2008.
- The district produced a comprehensive assessment report that included MCAS data for all schools as well as SAT and AP data for the high schools.
- The district did not have formal program evaluation procedures in place and relied on the MCAS data to judge the effectiveness of its programs.

Summary

The district designed its assessment program to include the director of student support services as well as district and school assessment teams. The teams analyzed data and disseminated them to teachers and staff at building as well as team meetings. The teams were responsible for analyzing each respective school's data, presenting them to teachers, and working with teachers to identify student weaknesses and strengths. The data were disaggregated by subgroup, namely the special education subgroup. In addition, the teams provided the data analyses to the district's data director, who then produced a comprehensive report including all the MCAS test data and information related to Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT results.

The district trained all principals in TestWiz, and while teachers had not received such training, they said in interviews that they felt comfortable using data. However, interviewees told the EQA team that while there was a great deal of available data, not all teachers were using the data to impact their instruction. Teachers did extensively use data in reviewing and revising the curriculum on an ongoing, as well as an annual, basis.

While there was a lack of formative assessments in the district, district leaders planned to fully implement the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) in the coming year. At the time of the review, teachers used the DIBELS for diagnostic purposes at grades K-3, and they used the Stanford 9 for diagnostic purposes at grade 7 and also at grade 8 for students enrolled in the Reading for High School course, as well as to determine placement in grade 9 reading lab courses. The district used other assessments including Addison Wesley end-of-chapter tests, Houghton Mifflin themed tests, and common exams at the high school. Schools varied in their use of these assessments.

Student participation on the MCAS tests was near 100 percent for both regular and special education students. Schools had different motivating activities to encourage students to attend the MCAS testing sessions.

In addition to the extensive testing report, the district reported the MCAS test results to parents and to the community through televised school committee meetings. The town's annual report also contained a section devoted to the school district and its accomplishments.

The district engaged in few voluntary external and internal audits, with the exception of a voluntary audit that was administered to students in grades 7-12 regarding their perceptions about the use of alcohol and drugs. The district invited The Education Alliance at Brown University to conduct a "Climate Review" of the North High School, which resulted in the creation of a Smaller Learning Community at that high school. This program spread to include grade 9 at both high schools and grade 10 at one high school.

Although the district did have a five-year cyclical curriculum plan in place, it had no formal evaluation procedures and rather depended upon the MCAS test results to judge the effectiveness of its programs. The MCAS data revealed districtwide student weaknesses in math and a significant gap between the performance of special education and regular education students. As a result, the district instituted new courses, adopted new instructional techniques, and reviewed the delivery of its special education program. The data also led the district to change the number of class periods at the middle school level to allow for increased instructional time in the core areas, and to move teachers to areas of need in special education and in middle school math.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

While the district had no policy that referred to assessment, it had many practices in place regarding the collection and analysis of student assessment data. During the 2002-2003 school year, the district had a data director who was located in the central office. During the 2004-2005 school year, the district redesigned the assessment program and brought on a director who expanded the district's use of data. Now, the district has a district assessment team as well as building assessment teams. When the MCAS data arrived in the district, the district assessment team analyzed them, and then disseminated them to the building assessment teams, which, along with the principal, examined them. They then "pull[ed] out weaknesses and strengths" and set up action plans so teachers could focus on specific areas. Data were shared with classroom teachers at staff meetings as well as at team meetings. In focus groups, teachers said that they

not only received the scores for their present students but those for previous students. This enabled them to examine data for "gaps" in the curriculum.

School building teams also disaggregated data by subgroup, namely special education. The subgroup data were shared with regular education teachers as well as special education staff. All principals received training in TestWiz, and while teachers had not, a district administrator said that they "understand the reports." School assessment teams were also responsible for producing a report on the school's MCAS data, and submitting it to the district data director. This information was then included in the district's testing report. The report gave a comprehensive look at testing in the district and not only included the MCAS data but also included a list of each building's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the report contained information regarding AP and SAT scores. Each of the district's SIPs contained the MCAS data and the school's goals for the 2005-2006 school year, including measurable goals related to improvement in ELA and math on the MCAS tests. Teachers in focus groups all agreed that they had received the data and shared them, and that they were familiar with their use. Administrators agreed that there was an abundance of data, but said "not all staff were on board with regard to its use."

District administrators, principals, and teachers all agreed that, because of the analysis of the MCAS data, they were able to determine that math achievement was a problem in the district. Teachers in focus groups said that students had difficulty reading math problems on the MCAS tests, adding that the math textbook used at the elementary level was seven years old and did not align well with the state framework. At the middle school, administrators said that it was "evident that students were failing in the use of math knowledge, and that as a result of the analysis of the MCAS data, students need to know how to attack a multi-faceted math problem." The MCAS data also showed that district schools needed to improve students' ability to respond to the MCAS open-response questions.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Participation on the 2006 MCAS tests was 99.1 percent for all students in ELA and 99.0 percent in math. Participation for the special education students was 99.6 percent in ELA and 99.2 percent in math. In interviews, district and school staff cited a number of motivating activities to encourage student participation. The district sent letters home to parents advising them of the MCAS testing times. In addition, the district's automated telephone service was used to remind parents of the testing times. School clerks were extra vigilant regarding student attendance on the testing days and made phone calls to determine reasons for any student absences. Breakfast was served at some schools.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district prepared an extensive testing report that included the MCAS and AYP data. The report also included a section devoted to each school's strengths and weaknesses as measured by the MCAS tests. The testing report was distributed to each district school, district coordinators, and the school committee. An administrator said that the central office made available throughout the district 110 copies of this extensive annual report regarding student achievement. In addition, the town's annual report contained a section devoted to the school district. The superintendent included the MCAS data from each school in this report, and the annual report was available at the town hall. In addition, the district distributed copies of NCLB reports to each parent, and these reports were also on the district's website.

In a parent focus group, parents said they received sufficient feedback regarding their children's progress. The feedback consisted of the MCAS test results as well as other student progress information. This information was provided through the reporting system available at each level as well as parent conferences at the elementary level. Parents did say that while there was much information available from the elementary school, they felt they had to "sometimes initiate" requests for information from the middle schools.

The district provided MCAS presentations annually to the school committee, and also televised them. Assessment data were also available on the district's website.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district provided the EQA team with an assessment model overview for the elementary level for 2006-2007. It provided district information regarding assessments administered in the elementary schools. These included the DIBELS, which was now administered to all students in grades K-3; initially, the DIBELS was only administered at two schools that were Reading First schools. But the district was so enthusiastic regarding the results that it instituted the assessment for all students in grades K-3 and gave all teachers training in administering it.

The district was piloting the GRADE and GMADE at some of its elementary schools at the time of the review, and planned for full implementation at all K-5 schools in 2007-2008. The GMADE was used by Title I teachers, and one of its advantages was that teachers could easily access diagnostic and growth value information quickly. However, the only math assessment tools available in other elementary schools were the Addison Wesley end-of-chapter tests and the MCAS released questions taken from the earlier math tests. As noted earlier, since the Addison Wesley math text was not aligned with the state curriculum framework, its assessment value was limited. Teachers at grades 4 and 5 used the Houghton Mifflin themed tests as an assessment tool. However, not all elementary teachers used these theme tests, citing in focus groups the expense involved in their use. According to the superintendent, the district was "in the process of developing a unified writing program." One elementary school was piloting components of the John Collins Writing Program; in another school a writing program was developed for grade 4 that had been extended down to grade 3. In focus groups, elementary teachers said "each school has its own process for looking at writing."

Teachers administered the Stanford 9 for diagnostic purposes to all grade 7 students and to grade 8 students enrolled in the Reading for High School course, as well as to determine placement in

grade 9 reading lab courses. Final assessments, which were common exams, were also given at the end of the year at the middle schools. According to interviewees, these assessments were used to "see what and if students learned." Some midyear assessments were also given at the middle school.

The high school administered common final exams in all content areas at both the middle and end of the school year. High school teachers also developed a common rubric that could be used for all content subjects. In addition, they administered the PSAT and SAT.

Interviewees at all levels said that the district "strongly encourages" all teachers to maintain plan books, and that each lesson must contain objectives as well as assessments. They told the EQA team that the methods used to monitor plan books varied from school to school, with some principals "calling for the plan books" at regular intervals and others looking at them during walk-throughs.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A review of the assessment data produced by the district revealed that the MCAS tests were the major assessment tool used to identify the effectiveness of instructional and support programs in the district. Deficiencies in the math program and difficulties in writing answers to open-response questions were identified though the MCAS results. Also because of the MCAS data, the Plymouth South Middle School implemented a Math Applications course in grade 7 during the 2004-2005 school year, and was to be implemented in grade 8 during the 2006-2007 school year. The 2005 MCAS math scores of the students improved. The program was expanded to the Plymouth Community Intermediate School in the 2005-2006 school year. At the end of that year, scores rose at the Intermediate School and went down at South Middle School. Administrators could not explain the reason but suggested that it might be because students were able to "opt out."

Interviewees agreed that a big discrepancy existed between the MCAS achievement of the regular education students and special education students. The EQA team learned that the special education department was examining how programs were delivered at the middle schools. A survey of teachers showed that there was a concern that students were pulled out of the very content classes in which they needed support. As an example, a special education student was pulled from a math class to receive math resources and was missing regular math. At the time of the review, special education students were pulled out from special subject classes. The special education department was holding meetings to discuss the inclusion model and "what's effective." Teachers, referring to the MCAS scores, were now asking, "How do you teach math to special education students?"

The district also used the PIM process to identify strengths and weaknesses in its schools. The special education department also used the PIM process to identify weaknesses in the delivery of services.

The district used the data generated from the DIBELS assessment, and the Reading First coordinator used data from both the DIBELS and the MCAS tests to produce a reading folder for each student. This information helped to put flexible reading groups together. As mentioned earlier, the data from the DIBELS at two schools provided the impetus for the district to institute the DIBELS assessment in all K-3 grades.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district engaged in few internal or external audits that were not mandated by the state or federal government as a result of grants. Recent external audits included a Coordinated Program Review (CPR) in March 2006 in which the district was commended for its consistent implementation of strategies to support regular education teachers with strategies to help special education students in their classes. The Title I program received positive comments regarding

the use of an assessment system that employed multiple assessments in the content areas of math and ELA to determine the needs of students.

A New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) audit took place at the high schools that resulted in both schools being identified in need of improved facilities. The NEASC also recommended that both high schools develop a common rubric for all content area subjects. Both high schools developed a common rubric.

The district engaged in one voluntary external audit regarding student perceptions on the use of alcohol and drugs. The Communities that Care survey was administered to students in grades 7-12 and shared with the staff. The survey, in its second year, was a computer-based survey.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Interviewees said that two special education teachers were reassigned to the Small Learning Communities at the North High School. The high school hoped to add another special education teacher to the program. In an interview, the superintendent said that the ELA and math programs needed to be changed at grades 7 and 8, and that the district cut 17 teachers but reallocated teachers to the middle school for half-day programs. The district moved two new special education staff to the South High School to provide MCAS remediation for students. At the middle school, two half-year programs devoted to math problem-solving and applications required staff allocations at the middle school. Elementary teachers said that a math specialist had been cut and that they wished that the position could be reinstated. District administrators said that there had been two math specialists and that the district had cut one leaving only one specialist for all the elementary schools. The position was ineffective and, as a result, the district eliminated it.

The Plymouth Community Intermediate School changed its schedule from a seven-period schedule to a six-period schedule, thus increasing the time from 47 to 56 minutes. This change

allowed for an increase of 45 minutes per subject area per week. While the school dropped no classes, it impacted the enrichment program. The district did not mandate any instructional time for math and reading at the elementary level but recommended two hours for literacy and 60 minutes for math, but each school implemented its own recommended times. Some schools required 60 minutes of math; others required 75 minutes. Students who received reading services through the Three Tier model, Soar to Success, received extra time in reading. There was an extended day program at the South Middle School that provided tutoring in math and ELA for 93 students. Students received tutoring in small groups. Extended day programs were also available at all elementary schools, the Community Intermediate School, and the Algonquin Heights housing project.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The EQA team's review of the documents did not reveal a school committee policy regarding the evaluation of programs in the district's schools. In interviews, district and school staff said that there was no formal approach to the evaluation of programs. Interviewees did refer to the cyclical curriculum review in place, but acknowledged that this review relied on the use of the MCAS data to judge the effectiveness of programs. Further, interviewees stressed that because the district has curriculum coordinators in place, they were "constantly evaluating" programs and making necessary changes.

The district engaged The Education Alliance at Brown University in the spring of 2004 to conduct a "Climate Review" of the North High School, as school officials had detected a "climate of disrespect," and they wanted an outside evaluation to identify and address ways to improve the school experience for all students and staff. As a result of the evaluation, the Plymouth Public Schools investigated a smaller schools model at the high school. A high school team applied for a federal grant and received funding to implement a Smaller Learning Community at the North High School. Interviewees said that the process of writing the grant

was “enlightening” as they were able to review data on attendance and dropouts. The Smaller Communities model for grade 9 was implemented in the 2005-2006 school year.

The high school also looked at students who were struggling and referred them back to an alternative model that was actually in place five or six years ago for 15 to 20 students. While plans were in place for an alternative school, there was a delay in its implementation because the district could not find an appropriate director.

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

IV. Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

Standard Rating: Needs Improvement

Findings:

- The Plymouth Public Schools had an effective process for the recruitment, selection, and retention of professional staff.
- The district had a comprehensive induction program, which included training and compensation for mentors and a 20-hour Beginning Teacher Institute for protégés that included a stipend. The district provided substitute teachers for observation sessions for mentors and protégés.
- The three-tiered professional development plan consisted of mandatory in-service offerings, offerings based on building needs, and offerings based on individual teacher needs.
- The district supported changes in programmatic offerings through professional development designed to provide teachers with the necessary skills to teach new and modified programs.
- The professional development program included a tuition reimbursement program for teachers and opportunities for staff to attend out-of-district conferences and seminars.
- The evaluation process for teachers reflected the Principles of Effective Teaching, although the instrument was a modification of the one used by the district in 1987.

Summary

The Plymouth Public Schools used a comprehensive process for the identification, recruitment, and selection of professional staff. The district posted new positions with print media outlets at the state and local levels. In addition, the district participated in eight job fairs including two that the Affirmative Action Recruitment Consortium of Eastern Massachusetts administered. Principals at the elementary level and principals and curriculum coordinators at the secondary level did the screening and interviewing of candidates and put together a comprehensive binder that included letters of reference, Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) forms, and a checklist for interviews. The principal would then submit a final candidate to the assistant superintendent for human resources, who would review the personnel binder, interview the candidate, and make the final determination. Interviewees maintained that the district sought out the best candidate regardless of finances. The district announced administrative positions using the same media outlets and job fairs. The superintendent would screen all applicants for an administrative position and form a system-wide screening committee, which would interview the superintendent's semi-finalists. The screening committee in turn would make five or six recommendations to the superintendent, who would make the final selection.

The assistant superintendent for administration and instruction chaired the district professional development program. The district professional development team, consisting of administrators and teachers, and the curriculum coordinating council, consisting of administrators, collaborated on choosing professional development offerings. Improved student achievement was the top priority for professional development. Initially, teachers would complete a needs assessment and forward it to the professional development team to consider potential offerings. The districtwide data team and the curriculum coordinators also made recommendations in their respective areas for professional development. The district professional development team would make the final determination of courses to be offered.

The district delivered mandated professional development programs during the district's eight half-day and one full-day release days. Best Practices in Assessment and Instructional Strategies represented the theme of the mandated professional development during the period under review. A second layer of professional development offerings focused on building needs in the area of content and consisted of more than 40 in-service offerings that resulted in PDPs or college credit

for teachers. The third layer of professional development offerings dealt with individual teacher needs and could be satisfied by matriculating in the in-service programs or by taking a course or attending a conference outside the district. The district reimbursed teachers up to $1,000 per year for tuition for courses. The district also reimbursed teachers for fees and travel expenses related to out-of-district conferences. Administrators had a $1,000 line item in their budget for personal professional development, which included dues and fees for professional organizations and conferences.

The district's evaluation procedure for all administrators was not in compliance with Massachusetts General Laws because assistant principals were not evaluated due to stalled negotiations. The instrument used for the administrator evaluations complied with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. The district's evaluation procedure for teachers complied with 603 CMR 35.00. The instrument used for teacher evaluations complied with the Principles of Effecting Teaching. The instrument written in 1997, when the Principles of Effective Teaching became a state mandate, closely resembled the instrument the district used in 1987. The district used an effective induction program as part of its supervision and evaluation process. In addition, administrators used individual professional development plans and walk-throughs as part of the overall evaluation process.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The Plymouth school district had a comprehensive process for the identification, recruitment, and selection of professional staff. Initially, the district posted all positions for new teaching staff internally per the collective bargaining agreement. The district then posted new positions in the local press including *The Boston Globe*, *Cape Cod Times*, *Patriot Ledger*, and New Bedford's *The Standard-Times*. The district attended eight job fairs per year that included two fairs conducted by the Affirmative Action Recruitment Consortium of Eastern Massachusetts, as

well job fairs at Bridgewater State College, Stonehill College, and Simmons College. At these fairs, the district provided applicants with a comprehensive portfolio describing the Plymouth community in terms of demographics, attractions, and the benefits of teaching in Plymouth.

Applicants had the option of applying online by visiting the Plymouth Public Schools' website or they could apply in writing. Once the district received applications, a thorough screening process took place. At the elementary level, the principals screened all potential candidates. In some instances, the principals enlisted the help of the teaching staff, although this was not a formal part of the process. Once candidates were identified for an interview, the assistant superintendent for human resources created a hiring binder. The binder contained all the documents necessary for hiring, including letters of reference, CORI forms, and college transcripts. The principal had the responsibility of completing the recruitment binder. When the principal chose a final candidate, the binder went to the assistant superintendent for human resources who interviewed the candidate and made a final decision.

At the secondary level, the principal, assistant principals, and academic coordinators participated in the initial screening and interviewing, with teachers sometimes asked to participate.

Once a candidate was selected, the assistant superintendent for human resources made the final decision. Principals said in interviews that the assistant superintendent was supportive and normally approved the nominated candidate. Administrators also said that the district placed no financial restrictions on the hiring process. EQA examiners further substantiated this claim during a random sampling of personnel files.

The Plymouth Public Schools policy manual (Section 5-Item 9) outlined the selection process for the positions of assistant superintendent, principal, curriculum coordinator, and director/ supervisor. The district contacted the same media outlets as it did for new teachers. In addition, the district placed ads in *Education Week* and the American Association of School Administrators' *AASA Bulletin*. The superintendent did the initial paper screening. The district assembled an eight-member screening committee consisting of two teachers, appointed by the president of the teachers' union; two citizens, appointed by the school committee chairman; one school administrator, appointed by the president of the Administrators Association; one

principal, appointed by the superintendent; one student, appointed by the superintendent; and one school committee member, appointed by the school committee chairman. The convened committee interviewed candidates and made recommendations (usually no more than six) to the superintendent. The superintendent then made the final decision.

2. All professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district data on certification of its professional staff revealed that during 2005-2006 the district placed 16 teachers on waivers, while the remaining staff had appropriate licensure. Twelve of the 16 teachers on waivers received their licensure while the remaining four were granted a second waiver. Administrators said the four granted a second waiver taught in the area of special education, a field that provided challenges for adequate staffing.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the district employed 632 teachers of whom 609 held professional licenses. The remaining 22 teachers held waivers, and by the time of the EQA visit nine of the 22 teachers were licensed. Administrators said that all teachers in the tested content areas had licensure; however, the EQA examiners discovered that two science teachers and one ELA teacher still had waiver status. Interviewees also indicated that some teachers taught one section out of their area of licensure. This occurred primarily in the area of science where a biology teacher might be teaching one section of earth science. The DOE does not consider this teaching out of one's field.

According to data provided by the district, Plymouth employed 51 administrators of whom only one had a waiver while the remaining 50 had proper licensure. The district also employed 177 paraprofessionals of whom the district considered 124 'highly qualified.' When the EQA examiners asked why 53 paraprofessionals did not meet the federal definition of highly qualified, administrators cited the difficulty in getting qualified paraprofessionals, but further stated they attempted to improve the situation with in-service trainings.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to interviewees, teachers hired on professional waivers had the same support as teachers new to the district through the induction program. The district provided teachers on waivers with a mentor, who was usually the principal of the building. In addition, curriculum coordinators provided pedagogical as well as content support throughout the year. Interviewees also reported that the assistant superintendent for human resources closely monitored uncertified teachers' progress toward licensure. Teachers on waivers also had access to the districtwide professional development program. The district provided administrators on waivers with a mentor. During the period under review, the district hired a former ELA coordinator to mentor new administrators as well as those on waivers.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The Plymouth school district had an extensive mentoring program that met the requirements of the mandated DOE induction program. An assistant superintendent, whose job description included the administration of this program, provided leadership.

Teachers interested in becoming mentors applied to their building principal. Principals said that they looked for content and pedagogical competence, a spirit of collegiality, and individuals who would provide positive feedback to protégés. Mentors must have attained professional status and have had five years of teaching experience along with three years of teaching experience in Plymouth. Once selected, mentors attended a 30-hour workshop conducted by three national board certified teachers. The workshop consisted of three modules: Adult Learning, Observation Techniques, and Protégé Support. The district provided mentors with a stipend of $400 per year.

They also provided additional compensation for attending the mentoring orientation program in August and four additional meetings during the year for additional mentor training.

Protégés participated in the August orientation program, which dealt with human resources and district- and building-based issues. The district provided protégés with a comprehensive portfolio that included contracts, medical benefits, and professional development activities. In addition, the district required all protégés to participate in the Beginning Teacher Institute, which consisted of 20 hours of course work during the year. The first eight hours consisted of a full-day workshop before schools opened, with 12 additional hours offered throughout the year. According to interviewees, the Beginning Teacher Institute focused on classroom management, assessment, the state frameworks, best practices in planning lessons and making modifications, and high expectations for students. The district compensated protégés $300 for attending this institute.

The district required mentors and protégés to keep a weekly log of their sessions. Substitute teachers hired by the district enabled mentors to observe their protégés. Protégés were also provided with substitute teachers so they could observe their mentor or engage in peer observations. The principal and district curriculum coordinators further supported protégés who had full access to the professional development program for additional enrichment and training.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district embarked on a four-year in-service training program directly connected to the development of data analysis skills and the use of data during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years. The program focused on Connecting Standards to Instructional Practice. The 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 in-service programs focused on Best Practices in Assessment and Instruction. The implementation of these programs was a collaborative effort between the districtwide professional development team and the districtwide data analysis team.

Each school in the district developed a plan based on the PIM process promoted by the DOE. Best Practices in Assessment and Instructional Strategies part I (2005-2006) and part II (2006-2007) occurred during mandatory release days. The district had one full-day and eight half-day release days.

A sampling of offerings taken from the professional development in-service program illustrated the thoroughness of offerings in assessment. At the elementary level, the district provided all teachers in grades K-3 training in the administration and analysis of the DIBELS. At the middle school level, the district offered teachers a four-session Best Practices in Assessment and Instructional Strategies course. At the high school level, a focus on brain-based instruction led to a course in brain-based assessment strategies. Comprehensive data analysis also occurred throughout the district at faculty and departmental meetings and at voluntary after-school in-service trainings.

The district trained most principals at the elementary level in the use of TestWiz. The principals, along with their school-based data teams, prepared an overview of the MCAS scores for the district and their buildings. According to interviewees, the principals used their three faculty meetings per month for instruction and assessment issues and presented the MCAS results to the staff. The staff actively engaged in the process of making modifications to instruction based on these results. This process was corroborated in an interview with elementary teachers, and most felt that data analysis and modification of curriculum worked well in ELA due to program revisions over the past three years and resource help. However, they said that progress in math did not match that of ELA due to outdated materials and the lack of trained coaches to help.

At the middle school level, the data team disaggregated data and made a presentation to the staff. The staff made modifications to instruction and assessment at monthly departmental meetings chaired by the respective curriculum coordinator. In addition, the staff used faculty meetings and team time to work on curriculum modifications. At the high schools, the principals, data teams, and coordinators, along with the individual departments, used the results of the MCAS tests to make necessary adjustments.

At the elementary, middle, and high schools, changes were effective immediately. The district also provided summer opportunities to fine tune the curriculum in a more comprehensive way for the following academic year.

The desegregation of data led to system-wide changes. At the elementary level, the DIBELS and a Reading First grant at several elementary schools resulted in a spike in the ELA scores. At the middle schools, a change in scheduling and focus on the tested content areas was made with the intent of improved performance on the MCAS tests. At the high schools, teaming in grades 9 and 10 aided the transition from middle school to high school, and enabled staff to focus on individual and system-wide weaknesses in assessment. Systemic pedagogical changes also took place because of disaggregated data analysis with the focus on differentiated instruction and brain-based education.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The Plymouth Public Schools had an extensive professional development program that encouraged professional growth. Mandatory in-service programs dealing with assessment and pedagogical issues complemented the more than 40 offerings teachers could take within the district on a voluntary basis. A tuition reimbursement program enabled teachers to take courses at colleges such as Lesley University, Bridgewater State College, Stonehill College, and Endicott College. Documentation also revealed a master's program in history offered by Westfield State College for half the tuition that a student would normally pay. Interviewees indicated that these courses often took place onsite during after-school hours and on Saturdays. PDPs or college credits were offered. Summer opportunities for course work and professional development were numerous and, in most instances, free of charge.

In addition to professional development opportunities, the district provided professional growth through the induction program for new teachers, committee membership opportunities, common planning time, in-service programs presented by members of the staff, and a variety of stipended

positions such as coaches, club advisors, and mentors. According to interviewees, the district encouraged promotional opportunities within the district. The superintendent and principal of Plymouth North High School previously held other positions within the district before being promoted to their current positions. The district sent one staff member per year to the Commonwealth Leadership Academy at a cost of $1,600, and provided that staff member an opportunity to do a yearlong internship within the district.

District administrators also told the EQA examiners that the district made efforts to recognize and retain effective personnel. During 2005-2006, 70 teachers left the district, an 11 percent turnover rate. Upon closer examination, the EQA examiners discovered that 35 of those teachers retired from the district, leaving an actual turnover rate of five percent. Reasons given for teachers leaving revolved around economics, with the cost of gas being a primary reason. Other reasons included staff moving out of the state or new career opportunities in other fields, especially among science and math teachers. Administrators indicated in interviews that longevity pay for those who stayed in the district for more than 10 years also resulted in the retention of effective teachers. In addition, the district also paid 80 percent of the teachers' medical premiums and had a competitive pay scale with neighboring districts.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to documentation reviewed by the EQA examiners and responses by interviewees, the district professional development program focused on three distinct areas. Area I related to mandatory in-service activities that administrators felt all teaching staff needed. The second category targeted specific building or departmental needs, as specified by building principals or K-12 coordinators. The third area consisted of programs that satisfied the individual needs of teachers. Interviewees indicated that student assessment had the greatest impact in all three areas.

The assistant superintendent for administration and instruction headed the professional development program. Two system-wide committees acted as screening agents for the professional development activities. The districtwide professional development committee looked at teacher surveys, assessment data, and departmental needs in determining the scope and sequence of the following year's program. The process started in the spring when teachers completed surveys, and the districtwide data committee identified areas of strength and weakness. The curriculum coordinating council, consisting of the assistant superintendent, administrators, guidance counselors, and coordinators, met every other Thursday and provided input to the professional development committee. The curriculum committee, for example, learned of the need for brain-based education and recommended it to the professional development committee. It also recommended that the district embrace a writing process for grades K-12 across the curriculum. The collaboration of the curriculum coordinating council and the professional development committee resulted in a final draft of offerings, sent to the school committee for final approval.

According to the superintendent, the professional development plan aligned with the DIP and the SIPs. In the SIPs, the district required principals to cite one goal for ELA and one goal for math in order to improve performance on the MCAS tests. A review of the 2005-2006 professional development plan revealed the district focused on best assessment strategies at the required eight half-day and one full-day teacher sessions.

The curriculum coordinators added the content-based layer to the professional development program. They provided in-service training in the areas of curriculum and instruction at departmental meetings at the secondary level. At the elementary level, they served as an additional resource in the content area, and occasionally presented at faculty or grade-level meetings. Interviewees also stated that the coordinators offered in-service activities for elementary teachers on a voluntary basis, and used the incentive of PDPs to attract participants. The science and social studies coordinators had numerous offerings in their areas. Curriculum coordinators also offered opportunities for teachers to attend local, state, and national conferences, and provided participants with substitute coverage and reimbursement for dues, fees, and mileage. Individual staff members could also apply to take college courses and attend out-of-district conferences.

A random review of personnel files revealed that teachers in the district took advantage of the professional development offerings. Over one-third of the teaching staff had enrolled in the Research for Better Teaching (RBT) offering, a research-based program in instruction. Personnel files also revealed teacher participation in voluntary in-service and out-of-district conferences and college courses. The files also revealed teacher involvement in professional development activities as a means to satisfy a goal(s) in their individual professional development plans.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district, during the period under review, supported changes in programmatic offerings through professional development designed to provide teachers with the necessary skills to teach these new and modified programs. At the elementary level, the awarding of a Reading First grant triggered significant professional development training and support. At the middle school level, the structural change from seven classes to six classes per day was accompanied by advantageous shifts in the number of teachers in the tested content areas. At the high school, the team-based Freshman Academy format necessitated the training of staff in this format. The district sent teachers assigned to teach AP courses to AP conferences throughout the year, and enrolled them in weeklong AP seminars for new teachers in the summer.

In a random sampling of individual professional development plans, the EQA examiners found specific references that indicated district support and resources for new and emerging programs.

According to interviewees, the district monitored the implementation of new programs through formalized observations, walk-throughs, and departmental meetings conducted by principals and curriculum coordinators. The district also used the MCAS, the DIBELS, high school final exam, AP, and other data to monitor the delivery of new programs.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the period under review, the district's administrator evaluation process did not comply with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 38, which stated that administrators required annual evaluations.

The EQA examiners reviewed 41 administrator personnel files using a rating sheet that focused on the timeliness of the evaluation, whether it was instructive and informative, whether it promoted growth and overall effectiveness, whether it was signed, and whether the administrator had proper licensure.

Timeliness referred to whether a yearly evaluation was completed. The district evaluated seven out of 41 administrators, or 17 percent, on an annual basis. Analysis revealed that all evaluations were signed and informative. The EQA examiners concluded that three of the 41 evaluations, or seven percent, were instructive or gave administrators concrete ideas to improve their craft. Seventeen evaluations examined, or 41 percent, promoted growth and overall effectiveness, and 40 administrators, or 98 percent, held certification while two percent had waivers.

According to interviewees, the school committee evaluated the superintendent on an annual basis. The superintendent's responsibilities included evaluating the curriculum coordinators and his central office staff. The assistant superintendent for administration and instruction evaluated the district's principals who, in turn, evaluated assistant principals and housemasters.

Interviewees also said that starting in 2006-2007 the superintendent required administrators to add three goals to their individual goals in the areas of student achievement on the MCAS tests, teacher attendance, and data accuracy and timeliness. Administrators received an automatic cost-of-living raise, but additional performance pay was based on the attainment of the added

goals. Curriculum coordinators and assistant principals belonged to a bargaining unit, Unit B, and their contract resulted in collective bargaining between the Plymouth/Carver Teachers Association and the school committee.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

During the period under review, the district's evaluation process for non-professional status and professional status teachers complied with 603 CMR 35.00, which specified that non-professional status teachers shall be evaluated annually and professional status teachers shall be evaluated biannually. The instrument complied with the Principles of Effective Teaching, but the EQA examiners discovered that it was an adaptation of an instrument that dated back to 1987.

Principals, coordinators, and assistant principals carried out the evaluation process. At the elementary level, the principal was the primary evaluator and did all evaluations unless he or she had an assistant principal working in the building. Directors evaluated specialists, such as music and physical education instructors. At the secondary school level, principals, curriculum coordinators, housemasters, and assistant principals collaborated in the evaluation process. The district evaluated teachers without professional status three times during year one and two times during years two and three, while the district evaluated professional status teachers biannually. The district used a 32-part checklist form divided into two main categories, The Instruction, which consisted of planning, organizing, instructing, and directing; and The Teacher, which included leadership, classroom environment, assessment, and professional qualities.

A random sample of 10 non-professional status and 36 professional status teacher evaluations revealed the following. Forty of the 46 evaluations were done in a timely manner (86 percent). The evaluations were signed in 100 percent of instances. All 46 evaluations contained components of education reform. Forty reflected informative criteria (86 percent), while 22

contained elements of instructiveness (48 percent). The EQA examiners found that 25 of 46 evaluations promoted growth and overall effectiveness (54 percent). Examiners observed that all teachers sampled either had certification or had been granted a waiver by the DOE.

According to interviewees, student performance represented criteria in a teacher's evaluation, although it seldom appeared in writing. Patterns of poor scores factored into the evaluation but interviewees felt that demographics, a challenging class, and other variables would also be a factor in poor scores. According to interviewees, the district provided resources for struggling teachers, including mentoring, peer observation, professional development, and referral to the Employee Assistance Program. The district placed chronically underperforming teachers in a growth plan overseen by the principal, and, when appropriate, the curriculum coordinators. If a teacher did not respond to a growth plan, a dismissal process would ensue. Interviewees claimed that non-renewals of professional status teachers did not occur during the period under review.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to interviewees, the district held administrators accountable for improving student achievement during the period under review. Administrators revealed, and a review of personnel files supported, that administrators had to include a goal related to the improvement of the MCAS ELA and math scores. Principals constructed this plan from the data and the PIM process. These goals became a part of the SIP, which also reflected performance goals contained in the DIP. At the conclusion of each academic year, administrators said that they would meet with the superintendent to review their individual goals. If they did not achieve these goals, they would not receive performance pay for the following year.

Principals indicated that they used data as one criteria in assigning staff. When asked if a teacher would be reassigned due to his or her students' underperformance on assessments, administrators remarked that normally a stronger teacher would be used with a class or section of students who

potentially might underperform. Occasionally, an underperforming teacher might be reassigned to another grade level or school in the district, but this was not the norm.

Administrators indicated that they had been required to take an RBT course entitled Observing and Analyzing Teaching. This course was particularly useful in doing walk-throughs and helped them to know what to look for and how to communicate these findings to their staffs. Administrators also indicated in interviews that the district allotted three faculty meetings per month, and that the themes of these meetings usually centered around student achievement. The EQA examiners found that supervisors provided guidelines for growth in 47 percent of the evaluations in personnel files the examiners read.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

During the period under review, the district linked and supported employment, supervision, and professional development with appropriate levels of funding. The district divided the budget for human resources into the human resources department and the curriculum/professional development program. The district allocated $368,035 to the professional development program during the 2006-2007 academic year. The district had a comprehensive process for the hiring of administrative and teaching staff. During several interviews with administrators, the examiners learned that the district sought the best candidate and that the hiring process was not linked to cost effectiveness. Interviews also indicated that the induction program and professional development opportunities further provided incentive for staff retention. During the period under review, the district experienced a five percent turnover rate, not including teachers who had retired. Interviewees remarked that generous health and longevity benefits served as strong incentives for teacher retention. In an interview with principals, the EQA team learned that they had a line item in their personal budgets for dues and fees related to professional development and professional organizations. The principals said that the district also provided funds for them to attend national conferences with all expenses covered by the district. Interviewees also

maintained that the central administration seldom, if ever, turned down a request for personal professional development opportunities.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The Plymouth Public Schools had an extensive training and implementation program for the school district's crisis plan. The town has a nuclear power plant, which further necessitated the existence of a crisis plan. The two-fold crisis plan covered crises that might occur at the nuclear power plant and crises that might occur in the schools.

Each school has a crisis response team consisting of full-time staff members. The Emergency Management Agency for the town of Plymouth and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) team collaborated with the school district in planning a response to a nuclear accident. Each school had a Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan developed by members of the crisis team that contained detailed instructions complete with maps on evacuation plans. The crisis team divided the town into five zones and each zone evacuated to Bridgewater State College, Taunton High School, or Braintree in the event of a nuclear accident.

The second crisis response program focused on incidents in the schools such as a bomb threat, sexual assault, intruder in the building, and fire. The district provided teachers with training annually for both nuclear and school-based crises. When asked if the district provided training for substitute teachers and volunteers, interviewees stated that a volunteer would work directly under a staff member who would provide him or her with instructions. Interviewees stated that a full-time staff member, such as a reading specialist or physical education teacher, would be assigned to a substitute's class during a crisis. The EQA examiners also observed a Staff Manual Crisis Booklet in each classroom they visited that clearly spelled out processes for dealing with potential crises.

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

V. Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- The district provided instructional time and materials to promote literacy in the elementary schools, but used few formative and summative benchmark assessments.
- The district instituted attendance goals and gave no course credit for excessive student absences.
- The principals had a goal to reduce teacher absences by one percent per year.
- The district had comprehensive programs in place to include the transient, special education, vocational, and free or reduced-cost lunch subgroups more fully in all aspects of school life, including advanced/accelerated programs, but their participation was limited.
- The district had few mechanisms in place to help students make effective transitions between buildings.
- The district instituted teaming at the middle schools and, in conjunction with Brown University, instituted teaming at grade 9 and one high school's grade 10 in order to personalize education and reduce discipline referrals, suspensions, dropouts, and retentions.

- The district had many mechanisms in place to disaggregate the MCAS test scores and identify strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. However, it did not ensure, in all cases, that at-risk subgroups consistently received education in the regular classroom setting.

Summary

The district provided an array of services for its special education and at-risk students, including early childhood education, the parent center, literacy toolkits, summer reading camp, and tutorials for at-risk students. The district was working toward placing these children in the least restrictive environment, but many were still pulled out of the regular classroom for services. Literacy instruction took various forms such as Reading First, the Three Tier model that included Soar to Success, Project Read, Title I services, and Lexia. Tutoring programs were offered at various times of the day and in the summer, and there was an after-school tutorial program at a local housing project staffed by students, adult volunteers, and certified teachers. The district offered a Chapter 74 vocational education program. Students enrolled in this program participated in the regular academic program on a daily basis. The district provided in-district life skills, autism, and support programs so that students with more intensive needs could remain with their peers. In addition, remedial math and reading classes were provided at the middle schools, and reading and math labs at the high schools.

Several AP and honors courses were offered at the high school. The middle school had an Advanced Readiness Learners (ARL) program that offered Spanish and robotics to students scoring in the 'Proficient' and 'Advanced' categories on the MCAS tests.

The differences in grant funding affected the variety and type of remediation that each school provided. One school, designated a complete Title I school, had a large assortment of materials and staffing. The district provided funding to open math and reading labs and offer the remediation courses at the middle and high schools.

The district attempted to teach students in an inclusionary, co-taught model, but this was not done on a consistent basis. All the schools had pre-referral teams to draw up accommodations for students to participate in the least restrictive environment. The middle school was piloting a model of mental heath accommodations so that students could remain in their classes. Some students at the high school with more serious social/emotional problems remained in their classes

with a teacher to monitor them, while others attended a substantially separate program until they earned their way out of it. All students, including those in vocational education, were encouraged to take high-level courses.

The schools included information urging good attendance in all student handbooks. Student attendance, tracked by Rediker software, exceeded 90 percent for all levels and all subgroups. The district had a policy for the loss of credit with excessive absences at the high school, and an administrator worked closely with the transient population to assure attendance and full participation. The district effectively tracked and monitored staff attendance. Principals had improvement of staff attendance as one of their goals.

The district worked with Brown University and instituted academies at grade 9 in both high schools and at grade 10 in one high school to better personalize instruction, monitor student behavior, and prevent retentions and dropouts. Each academy had its own housemaster and counselor, as the middle school teams did, and teams of teachers met regularly with them to discuss student progress. The high school had one small, substantially separate program for behaviorally challenged students and was planning an afternoon/evening school for older students at risk for discipline problems and/or dropping out.

To assist students to become successful, the high schools had summer school for those who qualified and online and in-school credit recovery courses. They also had a Failure is Not an Option program for freshmen failing one or more courses, and work-study programs for older students.

Indicators

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district used teacher observations, report card grades, and test results to identify at-risk students and provided a number of supports; however, it did not ensure that the subgroups received adequate care within the regular curriculum in all cases. Interviews and document reviews revealed that the district had a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) listing all activities that could help students, and each building had its own curriculum accommodation plan (CAP) specific to the services it offered. The CAPs were used in pre-referral meetings at which strategies for student success were provided. Interviewees said that extensive training for staff was provided on this process. Counselors conducted these meetings and drew up and signed a formal plan that monitored the student's progress. They sent the plan to parents and disseminated it to the appropriate teachers. At the elementary level the plan followed the student through to the middle school and counselors met with the elementary teachers to discuss student progress. At South Elementary School, a dramatic decrease in the number of special education referrals occurred (from 16 to 11 percent during the period under review), and staff attributed this decrease to the CAP process.

According to interviews and a review of documents staff identified at-risk students during kindergarten screening, or earlier in the case of special education students. The CAP pre-referral process took effect for these at-risk students. Supplemental support was provided immediately if required, and the level of support was based upon student need.

Teachers received training in Project Read and Lexia software in order to improve literacy. A Soar to Success computer program was available for grade 3-4 students. The district also had an extended day program for math and reading, and in the summer Camp Read-A-Lot was open to teacher-recommended students entering grades 2 and 3. In 2006-2007 students at the elementary level had access to Study Island on their home computers. A Great Brain math program and Lego robotics were provided for advanced students.

Five to eight of the elementary schools were designated as Title I schools, and the Hedge School was a complete Title I school; the other schools were eligible for targeted assistance. Support services were provided in the regular classrooms whenever possible, but there was some pullout remediation, according to interviews and observations. Title I had provided money for the after-

school programs for quite some time. A home/school liaison identified pre-schoolers in need of service. Title I funds were used to provide parents with literacy toolkits to help with literacy activities at home and a parent center, which lent resources, at Hedge. Each school had a reading teacher and Title I schools had Title I support teachers. Special education funds provided basic life skills and autism programs.

At the middle school level, special education services included a districtwide life skills language development program. Students in grades 5 and 6 were eligible to receive remedial math and reading, and a math problem-solving and applications course was available at grades 7 and 8. Students who had scored in the 'Proficient' or 'Advanced' categories on both the ELA and math MCAS tests were not eligible to attend these programs; these students took Spanish instead and were part of the ARL program. Students not reaching proficiency also took a half-year course in math and/or ELA. Schools sponsored an after-school math club at a subsidized housing complex that was voluntarily staffed by teachers. Teams of students in pods shared the same teachers, housemaster, counselor, and two special educators.

At the high school level, services were provided during the school day and interviewees said that there were extensive special education services available. The two high schools implemented the Freshman Academy model, and a grade 10 academy at Plymouth North High School was in place. The Plymouth South High School housed the district's Chapter 74 approved vocational/technology program, and the Plymouth North High School had an English language learner (ELL) and life skills program. Both high schools had reading and math labs that provided tutoring by students after school and during lunch times. SAT programs were provided in the evening, and both high schools offered after-school math programs. The Town of Plymouth had a business/education collaborative as well as an RSVP program of retired volunteers who tutored students.

Special education was based on the inclusive, co-taught model. In some cases, the support came from a paraprofessional instead of a teacher. According to interviews and observations, there were some pullout programs and a small (eight students) behavioral program at the high school.

In 2006-2007 the middle school piloted a mental health program, and the district provided an extended day program for 125 students between the ages of five and 22 with intensive special

needs. The elementary level had an autism program, and life skills programs were provided at all levels. At age 22, students moved to Project Grow where they participated in supportive employment and continued with their academics. Plymouth North High School was in the process of restructuring its special education program because that population was increasing.

Interviewees said that the district had been the recipient of various grants and programs. During 2003, the district received an extensive review by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts. West Elementary School received a targeted assistance grant that provided assistance in the early identification of at-risk students that reduced special education referrals. Title I funds were reduced from year to year, and the math family and early school support grant funding had been discontinued. The district did receive a community grant of $100,000 to help reduce substance abuse. The collaboration with Brown University supported the academy concept at the high schools and not only helped train high school staff in brain-based teaching but also provided the services of a consultant twice per month to assist the schools.

As a result of culture and climate reviews at Plymouth Community Intermediate School and at the two high schools, a faculty senate and houses were instituted at the high schools.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district had many programs in place during the period under review that used data to identify students in need. According to interviewees, the MCAS data first went to the central office where a team analyzed the data and the MCAS coordinator for the district then delivered the data to the appropriate schools. Teachers looked at the data at staff, departmental, and grade-level meetings. Each building's data team produced a school testing report on the subgroups and put it on a template. The data disaggregated by subgroup also allowed teachers to view the results of their students from prior years. The teachers analyzed the data regarding subgroup performance, and identified patterns of strength and weakness. This pointed to instructional implications,

according to interviewees. For example, the ELA coordinator had all grade 10 students write an answer to the same open-response question and then the teachers at a departmental meeting scored students' answers as they did at summer MCAS academies. In this way, students became more comfortable taking the exam, left fewer questions blank, and learned response strategies, such as using quotes from the literature they were citing.

In interviews, school staff members said they used MCAS practice questions. At the Hedge Elementary School, the principal provided weekly feedback on the students' responses to open-response questions. Families at this neighborhood school could come in twice per month and take out educational games from a lending library, the parent center, provided by Title I funds.

In interviews, the director of the vocational program said a special education teacher came in to help students with math, and while 24 percent of his students were identified as special education students, they were fully immersed in academic courses at the high school.

The special education director met with the department heads at the high school level and looked at the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to make revisions and review accommodations based upon the test data.

At the elementary level, the schools provided additional time on learning in the form of MCAS support before and after school. Although attendance was voluntary, a high percentage of those students invited attended the program. Students in need of remediation had an Individual Student Success Plan (ISSP). School personnel staffed a program formerly at a housing project and now at Federal Furnace Elementary with transportation provided. Grades 3-5 had access to Study Island on their home computers.

At the middle school level, students who failed the MCAS tests also had ISSPs. Parents of students who scored in the 'Warning/Failing' or 'Needs Improvement' category received a letter regarding the availability of after-school tutoring at the schools and at the housing project. Before-school help and Junior Achievement at the Intermediate School after school made the tutoring more attractive. These students took a math problem-solving course and Strategic Reading (grade 6), Reading in Content Areas (grade 7), or Reading for High School (grade 8) labs. Grade 7 students who scored in the 'Advanced' category on both the ELA and math

MCAS tests took ARL classes, while grade 8 students who scored 'Proficient' or higher on both tests took Spanish. Students in middle school and high school had access to the Larsen computer program at school and at home.

At the high school some students had ISSPs, and MCAS remediation courses were available but there were not any MCAS preparation classes. There were MCAS tutors, freshman reading and math labs, and Failure is Not an Option, in which students received tutoring from older peers. According to documents provided to the EQA examiners, in August lists were created of grade 10 students who failed the MCAS tests and seniors who had not passed the MCAS tests. In-school tutoring during study halls was available for juniors and seniors. Students' schedules were changed so that they were able to participate in tutoring in preparation for the November retest. In January, letters were sent home to students failing the retest, which indicated their assignment into school-day tutoring classes. Also, letters went home to parents of sophomores who did not pass in grade 8 and these students had to attend remediation classes. In the spring, letters went home again with growth sheets (or progress reports). Parents were informed about Project SAIL, a summer remediation program for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the 2006 MCAS test data analyzed by the Merrimack Education Center (MEC), 66 percent of Plymouth grade 3 students attained proficiency in ELA, including 65 percent of males and 66 percent of females, while 62 percent of grade 4 students, including 56 percent of males and 68 percent of females, achieved proficiency. These translated to a proficiency index (PI) of 87.8 for grade 3 and 85.7 for grade 4.

There was a Head Start program in town and the district had the Mount Pleasant Preschool Program, according to documents reviewed. Special education students and others who required extra services were identified by kindergarten screenings and child-find methods advertised in local media outlets. The district took part in the Reading First initiative, originally only at one

school but throughout the district during the period under review. The district monitored the results and was pleased. All elementary schools had a reading teacher assigned. Five schools in the district were designated as Title I schools, and one school, Hedge Elementary, a neighborhood school, was designated a complete Title I school, eligible for many literacy services where every child received support. The Title I schools had special Title I staff and extra funding. The district also had hired an exclusive Title I director to help improve literacy. Students eligible for services were identified using federal Title I criteria. According to an interview with a principal, half-day kindergarten was free and there used to be a full-day program for a fee. During the period under review, the district only had a half-day program, unless special services were required by a specific IEP.

The DIBELS was given at grades K-3 in the elementary schools three times per year, according to interviewees. Supplemental support services were given immediately when a need was discovered, they said. The level of support was based on data. There was intensive support for at-risk students. Teachers had all been trained in Project Read. Observations and interviews revealed students were using the Lexia software system to improve reading. There was a comprehension program known as Soar to Success at grades 1-4. There was an extended day program in reading and Camp Read-A-Lot in the summer for students entering grades 2 and 3. The district used the Houghton Mifflin series for reading at the elementary level. There was no standard length of time for literacy instruction across the district at the elementary level.

The EQA examiners saw a Toolkit for Literacy sent home to parents with activities to help them improve their child's literacy skills. There was a Parent Home program seen in brochures. Interviewees stated that this was a center at Hedge where parents could drop by and learn ways to help them read to their student and where there were books and games for the children. The Title I director attempted to get people to staff it who could speak some Spanish or Portuguese as needed.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to interviews, the schools made student assignments at the elementary level based upon where they lived. The administrators told EQA examiners that if a student and their parents requested a transfer to another school that they could do so, provided that there was room and that parents provided the transportation. The staff told EQA examiners that kindergarten students required screening. Children identified early for special services were started in the preschool program as soon as possible. Teachers at the elementary level spoke often to one another regarding students to assist in transitioning them between grades and to alert one another about special concerns. Teachers and other service providers sent home frequent written reports for students on IEPs. Some elementary schools sent out weekly "Tuesday" sheets to keep parents abreast of what was going on in class. In interviews, district and school staff did not discuss transition activities from elementary to middle school.

According to parents, the transition to the two middle schools was a big change. They did not feel as welcomed or as informed but some parents said that parents had to seek out the information desired at this level. There was not as much written communication, although the middle and high schools had an automated, web-based phone dialing system (PACE) to alert parents about report cards, lockdowns, and other situations. The parents felt that part of the problem was that the middle schools were so much larger than the elementary schools and that they did not know all the teachers, students, and other parents as they had in the elementary schools. Other parents felt that the teachers at the middle schools had "more to do" and did not have time to send home Tuesday sheets, and that they wanted students to take on more responsibility.

The middle schools were on house plans where groups of students met with a team of teachers in pods and each house had its own housemaster and counselor. The staff members interviewed felt that they could thus know their students better and there would be better access to proactive discipline and counseling services. The teachers used their common planning time to discuss students. They acted as a pre-referral team and often called in students and their parents to see how to improve the student's grades and/or behavior. They would draw up a plan for modifications. If this was not successful, then the student might require testing and a 504 plan or IEP might be drawn up.

The high schools had counselors go to the middle schools to learn about incoming freshmen for smoother transitioning, but there were no transition activities, according to interviews. Plymouth North High School had established a grade 9 academy that carried the teaming philosophy into the high school level. They had established a grade 10 academy in 2006-2007 even though the school lost out on a large number of teacher duties. Plymouth South High School had a grade 9 academy and its Chapter 74 vocational program became a second team. The high school teachers felt that they got to know their students better in this way and the students could be monitored by a group of caring adults, making their transition and school success better. The staff also indicated it used its common planning time as a pre-referral meeting time to monitor and remedy student performance.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district retained few students through grade 8. Documents revealed that the three-year (2003-2005) rate of retention for Plymouth elementary schools ranged from 0.4 to 3.9 percent. There were no formal policies regarding retention at the elementary level. The matter was handled on a case-by-case basis. If it was determined that the child was not mature enough to move on, most retentions occurred in kindergarten and grade 1, according to interviews. Principals interviewed said that they would meet midyear with parents of students at risk of being retained. Often the parents would agree to retain the students. Many of these students would be referred for special education testing. At the middle school level, there were references to retention and promotion in the handbooks. The counselors met with any student who failed or received a 'D' in a core course. At midyear, principals said that they contacted students and their parents if there was a danger of retention. It was almost like a team meeting. The students were offered summer school but it was not mandatory, according to principal interviews. According to interviews, little retention occurred at the middle schools, as the three-year average was 0.5 percent at both schools for 2003-2005, and the issue was usually lack of maturity.

The high schools clearly articulated their promotion policy in the handbooks. Plymouth North High School had a three-year retention rate of 7.2 percent and Plymouth South High School had a rate of 4.5 percent for 2003-2005. Grade 9 had the highest retention levels across the district. Movement between grade levels was based on a credit system. Students had the ability to take classes they failed with a score of 50 or better in summer school or during the year and catch up to their class. There was an online Credit Recovery program, which was limited to 16 students, during the school day or in summer school. Students were not limited to attending summer school in Plymouth but could attend in other communities. If a student wanted to graduate early, there was an early college program where students attended college classes and got dual credit at the high school and college levels. The district had no limit to the courses that could be taken, but the student had to pay for them and provide their own transportation.

The district's software program allowed it to analyze data on retentions, discipline, and in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Data from the district showed that the rate of in-school suspensions was lower compared to the state rate (2.8 percent for the district in 2006 compared to 3.4 percent for the state) but that the rate of out-of-school suspensions was higher that the state rate (6.6 percent for the district in 2006 and 5.8 percent for the state). More in-house suspensions occurred at the middle school level and more out-of-school suspensions occurred at the high school level, according to documents presented to examiners.

Teachers in interviews pointed to the lack of administrators for a time during the period under review. The teachers also stated that there was a core of students causing discipline problems and that they wanted a larger alternative program to start. Administrators said that they were looking for a director for the afternoon to evening program. As a result of discipline issues, the district had attempted to be proactive. It provided Second Step training, and the special education director had been called in often to address behavioral concerns. Teachers had also been trained on functional behavioral assessments and to draw up plans to modify student behavior. There was formal non-violence prevention training where all administrators said that they and 18 to 20 teachers were trained to de-escalate problems and to only use physical restraint as a last resort.

Interviews with staff pointed out a change in the demographics of the town. Staff felt that only the polar opposite ends of the socioeconomic scale were left in town as the affordable housing was being reduced. There was also more foster care and a group home had opened up. Some children in these situations displayed more acting out behavior, according to staff, and so the schools were working on more positive and less punitive strategies. There were peer mediators, and the probation officer assigned to the district had an office to hold on-site meetings and keep watch over his charges. The middle schools and, now, the high schools had created schools-within-a-school so that relationships could be built. Plymouth North High School had grade 9 and 10 academies while Plymouth South High School had a grade 9 academy and a vocational/technology program. Students in the latter program attended an exploratory program in grade 9 and went to their shops for three periods in grade 10 and for four periods in grades 11 and 12. The middle school teams were not brought up from the middle schools but new teams were created that were matched and diverse.

At the elementary level, interviewees said that they rarely suspended a student except in the case where a student brought blades to school. The schools provided extra supervision at recess. At the middle school, interviewees said that there had been outside consultation with a behavioral psychologist about student discipline. Most often these children were identified as special education students. During 2006-2007, at the middle school level there was Project Care, which drew up behavioral intervention plans for students with mental health issues who may or may not be special education students. They were not placed in a separate program and attended classes as usual with modifications. Also at the middle school level, interviewees stated that there were preventive programs such as the anti-bullying program known as Steps to Respect. There was a good ratio of counselors to students, and students stayed with their counselors throughout middle school. They tried to work with students to decide how they could be more successful next time. Cyberbullying had been a big issue at this grade level, according to staff and parents, but the schools had taken an active role and things seemed to be better. The high school level had a small, eight-student, substantially separate alternative program where the teacher received professional development to teach all subjects to the students. He also consulted on and monitored another six students in regular classes. Students who were successful in this program could matriculate to regular classes. The program, interviewees stated, was based on levels and students earned appropriate rewards. The high school teachers interviewed wanted a larger

alternative program since they felt there was a growing number of students with discipline problems.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the district report and DOE data, the dropout rate for the district was 3.5 percent in 2003 and 4.3 percent in 2004. These compared to the state rates of 3.3 and 3.7 percent, respectively, in 2003 and in 2004. The district had only submitted reports for the school years of 2003 and 2004. The rate was on the rise, according to the limited data, but interviewees stated that failing the MCAS tests did not seem to be a factor in the dropout rate as most of the dropouts had successfully passed the MCAS exams. Interviewees felt that family issues and dislike of school were the deciding factors. Also, they stated a substantial transient population affected the rate.

Documents reviewed by the EQA examiners as well as interviews showed many policies, procedures, and practices were in place to prevent or minimize dropping out. Students who considered dropping out of school would meet with counselors and parents and would explore options. Even if they did eventually drop out, the counselors and guidance director stated that they tried to keep in contact with the students to learn whether they had attained their General Educational Development (GED) certificate, went to work or a training program, or enrolled in the military. There were also two home-school people to contact the families. One student had come back after attaining a certificate of attainment, took the MCAS tests, and got a diploma during the period under review, according to interviewees. The district had a Reconnecting Youth program for dropout prevention. This program had at-risk students meet with selected teachers the first two periods of the day. Both high schools had established grade 9 academies with their own housemasters, counselors, and special education teachers to personalize education and to help ensure success because staff saw that students who failed at grade 9 had a greater chance of dropping out of school. Plymouth North High School had instituted a grade 10 academy also.

Plymouth South High School had a Chapter 74 vocational program offering certification in many trades, including cosmetology, carpentry, welding, computers, plumbing, electricity, marine technology, culinary arts, and health care. An open house was held annually for students to see demonstrations and talk to students from the various shops. The vocational students took their academics with the other students, and teachers and administrators said that they did not know the difference between students. They took an exploratory program of all the shops in the freshman year and then a varying number of periods in their field depending upon grade level. In their senior year, students could possibly go out to a job site for an internship. While the vocational program was competitive to get into, the possibility of attending it appealed to some students and acted as an inducement to stay in school. The assistant superintendent for administration and curriculum said that a few years ago the valedictorian of the class had been a vocational education student. Both high schools had partnerships with the Boys & Girls Clubs and were able to send students out to internship jobs the last period of the day. A My Turn program, according to documents and interviews, had started in 2006-2007 and was run by a career counselor who brought people in to discuss various careers with students.

Students who had lost credit for attendance reasons or for failing a course with a minimum grade of a 50 were allowed to go to summer school in the district through the Credit Recovery Program. They could take credits through Virtual High School (VHS) as part of this program. Certain classes were designated as Credit Recovery classes. There was a pilot program in the period under review known as Failure is Not an Option that was part of the Freshman Academies. This targeted freshman students who failed one or more core subject area courses in their fall semester. The goal of the program was to reduce failures and to help students realize that they still had a chance to pass the course for the year. Students were presented with strategies to improve their grades and told how high they had to score in the second semester in order to pass. Finally, upper-class students volunteered to tutor these students both after school and at lunchtime.

The district was in the planning stages for an alternative high school for older students that would meet from 2:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., according to handbooks and interviews. The district had to find a director for it. Students with behavioral issues had a small, substantially separate program. The district was constantly assessing programs offered out-of-district for students,

according to interviews, and many students had been brought back to the district, which could offer programs better and at a cost savings. There was a Life Skills program offered at South Middle School and South High School to help train students requiring these skills. Some students who had school phobias were home tutored and brought back to school for longer and longer periods as they felt comfortable.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the director of pupil services who was in charge of monitoring the homeless and transient populations, the district provided students with services according to the McKinney-Vento Act. There was an increase in this population as a result of a safe house for battered women in Kingston, more children in shelters and foster homes, and children living for a time in the state park in tents. The director budgeted $8,000 to $10,000 for their transportation. Informational sessions were held for all teachers dealing with the identification of the homeless. The district made sure that students had access to free or reduced-cost lunch; special education, Title I, and ELL services; gifted and talented programs; and vocational education. The director and the staff encouraged students to participate in extracurricular activities. According to the director, he also tried to follow up on what happened to the students when they left the district, although this was often difficult to do.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to the DOE data, the attendance rate for the district was 94.7 percent in 2003, 94.3 percent in 2004, 94.5 percent in 2005, and 94.6 percent in 2006 (compared to a state average of 94.2 percent in 2004, 94.4 percent in 2005, and 93.8 percent in 2006). For the school year ending in 2006, males had an attendance rate of 94.7 percent while females had a rate of 94.5 percent. The district did not have many minority students, but the average attendance rate for the

school year ending in 2006, according to documents reviewed, was 92.9 percent for African Americans, 95.7 percent for Asians, 91.9 percent for Hispanics, 91.9 percent for multi-race non-Hispanics, 92.2 percent for Native Americans, and 91.9 percent for Native Hawaiians. Except for Asian students, these rates were lower than they were for white students – 94.7 percent. According to DOE data, chronic absenteeism was 20.8 percent in grade 9, 18.8 percent in grade 10, 18.8 percent in grade 11, and 20.4 percent in grade 12.

All school handbooks contained language describing the importance of good school attendance and the requirement of a physician's note in the case of extended absence. The responsibility of attendance at the high schools belonged to any administrator. All attendance reports were sent to the students' guidance counselors and their classroom teachers. A district attendance officer handled the cases of chronically absent students, who became involved in monthly meetings with guidance counselors, made home visits, and could file a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition with the courts, if necessary.

The district had Rediker software that tracked student attendance, and administrators, adjustment counselors, and the attendance officer could access it. At the high schools, guidance counselors met at least three times per year with all students and noted their attendance. Students received 12- and 18-day form letters for unexcused absences. There was an automated phone system at the high schools that called homes for every student tardy and absent. Teachers took attendance by computer every period at the high schools. At the high schools, younger students with severe attendance issues who could not drop out or go to evening programs worked with a teacher during the first two periods of every day in the Connecting Program to give them a chance of succeeding. For older students, the district had planned an alternative school that would meet from early afternoon until evening.

When students at the high schools accumulated nine unexcused absences in a semester, they lost credit for the course and would have to appeal to get credit back. There were regular appeals meetings and the principal could restore or deny credit for the course. Students were able to make up the course another year or in summer school, but only if they had attained a 50 average or higher. Administrators probed medical excuses and tried to provide many opportunities for students to succeed. Some students were placed on a 504 plan, of which there were 182 in the

district, and the school psychologist in each building headed the team providing these plans. Students who were school phobic were provided with home tutors and brought back to school for longer and longer periods of time to acclimate. Staff interviews and student handbooks stated that students could lose driving privileges due to poor attendance.

The middle school took period attendance with paper and pencil while the elementary took it on computers. The schools had a breakfast program to help with attendance since some students needed it. Over the last two years of the review period, the nurses conducted an extensive study of class attendance versus visits to the nurse. The nurses had done presentations for teachers about aids such as bandages that teachers could use in their rooms to avoid having students miss class time going to the nurse. There was no formal attendance policy at the middle or elementary school levels. However, some schools gave out perfect attendance awards each term, according to interviews with parents and staff. At the elementary schools and middle schools, either the nurse or a receptionist called home if parents had not called in their child's absence for the day. Principals had goals of improving attendance.

To ensure attendance at the MCAS testing, the staff interviewed said that the district sent home letters encouraging parents to make sure that their student was in attendance. There were meetings with sophomores and the students were given breakfast at the high school. Administrators used school-wide announcements, and the automated call system phoned homes regarding MCAS participation. For students who were frequently absent, counselors made personal phone calls, and for students being retested the guidance counselors met with them and they sent a letter and made a phone call to the parents. The student handbook had the dates of the tests and retests. The administrators interviewed said that they stressed the importance of good attendance for staff during testing and would not allow field trips.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

According to principals and the director of student support services, monthly printouts of staff attendance helped track whether teachers were running out of sick time and allowed them to address issues if needed. According to data submitted to the EQA by the district, teachers at the preschool and elementary levels in the district were absent an average of 12.2 days including professional development days and an average of 10 days excluding professional development days. Teachers at the two middle schools were absent an average of 16 days including professional development days and an average of 15.2 days excluding professional development days. Teachers at the two high schools were absent an average of 12.4 days including professional development days and an average of 10.9 days excluding professional development days.

The director of student support services said that the district had a software package called "Subs on Line" that broke down staff absences by school and could track patterns of Monday and Friday absences per teacher. The principals stated that their goals had to include improving teacher attendance by one percent per year. The EQA examiners observed that teacher evaluation and personnel files revealed documentation to teachers who had exceeded acceptable absences. In one instance, a teacher with many absences was required to present notes from a physician every time he or she was absent. The assistant superintendent for human resources handled serious cases of absenteeism and could recommend the confidential Employee Assistance Program that the district provided. The district was affiliated with Jordan Hospital and could send staff for medical help. The district had not formally measured the relationship between teacher absenteeism and achievement. In focus groups, parents stated that they did not feel that teacher absence as a whole was a problem – just for certain teachers and in certain years. One elementary school sent notes home if a teacher was absent either for a day or for an extended time while others only sent home notes if teachers would be out for an extended period of time. The middle schools had each hired two permanent substitutes to help with continuity of coverage.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The high school programs of study contained language encouraging students to attempt to take honors and AP courses. Interviews revealed that guidance counselors and staff would also encourage students to take upper-level courses. Classes were open to any student and parents had the right to override any recommendations. Review of the AP course enrollments and interviews showed a small representation of the free or reduced-cost lunch subgroup. Few of the ethnic/racial or special education subgroups were represented, according to interviewees, because those subgroups represented such a small segment of the population. As a result, the district did not disaggregate AP and SAT scores by subgroup, except informally and in the case of the free or reduced-cost lunch category. According to an interview with the superintendent, "lots of vocational students" were in AP classes although documentation did not verify this. The staff interviewed were pleased that a vocational student had been a class valedictorian and some vocational students were attending college. The high schools participated in Virtual High School that was open to all. It allowed students to take advanced courses that could not be offered at the schools due to low enrollments. The students could go after school or take up to three periods each day in the courses. There was a coordinator for the program and three teachers from the district taught in the program.

In the middle schools, there was a gifted and talented program called ARL, and a program for students to take Spanish instead of extra math and ELA classes.

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

VI. Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

Standard Rating: Satisfactory

Findings:

- Interviews with school and town administrators and officials evidenced that a culture of cooperation existed in the community and all parties shared the goal of providing students with a quality education in improved facilities.
- The district's budget development process informed and included all stakeholders, and the final document provided clear and comprehensive information regarding the district's financial position and budget needs.
- During the period under review, the district had its Chapter 70 aid reduced one year by almost $4 million and level funded the next year, and the community experienced declining revenues due to the deregulation of the power plant.
- On September 6, 2006, Plymouth citizens voted a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools and resolve severe space needs and to upgrade educational facilities and programs at these schools.
- The district instituted an energy conservation program that during FY 2006 resulted in a reduction in utility costs of $744,000.

- After a NEASC report stated that North High School needed to address its routine cleaning and maintenance needs, the district developed a formal facilities services audit program and contracted with a vendor to improve its procedures in addressing maintenance work order requests.

Summary

The district had a formal budget process with numerous benchmarks that encompassed a yearlong process, beginning in April of the current budget year with administrators discussing priorities and guidelines, and concluding the following April with a completed budget presentation at the annual town meeting. Examiners learned in interviews that the process was open and participatory with many stakeholders including the school committee members, central office administrators, school administrators, teachers, parent councils, and municipal boards and administrators having the opportunity to provide input and guidance.

The district developed three levels of budgets for consideration by the school committee and ultimately the town meeting. The first budget was a level service budget, which was the same services and staffing provided in the current budget year adjusted for the subsequent year's cost. The second budget was a program restoration or enhancement budget in which programs that had been reduced in previous budget years were reinstated or new programs were added. The third budget was the one the school committee approved.

The resultant budget document provided clear and accurate information and tables that could be understood by all levels of interest. It was comprehensive in that it contained all funding and expenditure categories by cost centers used in the district.

During the period under review, the district and municipality had experienced reductions in revenues such as having their Chapter 70 aid reduced one year by $4 million and level funded the next year, and the community experienced reductions in revenues due to the deregulation of the power plant. However, there was evidence that the community provided financial support to the school district when the need was apparent. On September 6, 2006, the citizens voted for a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools. The district was experiencing serious overcrowding in its two high schools. Interviewees stated that South High School was built for 1,200 students and now housed 1,600 students; North High School was built for 800

students and now had 1,000 students. Another example was that one year the school committee did not include needed replacement textbooks in its final budget presented at the town meeting. The town finance committee recognized the need and recommended at a town meeting that the school committee budget request be increased to include these textbooks.

Although the expenditure per regular education student was below the state average during the period under review, interviews with some staff members indicated that there were adequate supplies, materials, and technology. However, in other interviews staff members commented that Reading First textbooks were not available and requisite materials were not adequate in schools.

The district, as stated above, had begun to address the problem of overcrowded, aging, and inappropriate facilities in its two high schools by the vote for a $199 million override. The Massachusetts School Building Authority inspected all schools in the commonwealth in 2006, and in Plymouth found that two elementary schools, the Cold Spring School and the Nathaniel Morton School, were in moderate condition with some building systems that may need attention. The other buildings, with the exception of the high schools, were rated as in generally good condition with a few building systems that may need attention.

The NEASC report observed that routine cleaning and maintenance at the high schools was an area of concern, and school administrators developed a plan to reassign custodial labor in conjunction with the implementation of a vendor-furnished, computerized work order system to address the problem. The district also developed a formal facilities service audit program.

Indicators

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

Rating: Excellent

Evidence

The district's budget was developed through an open, participatory process. Examiners reviewed a detailed, published timeline that indicated the budget process began in April of the current

budget year and was completed in April of the following year at the annual town meeting. The timeline indicated that the process began with central office and district administrators discussing priorities and budget guidelines. In June, the school committee initially became involved in the process by holding discussions related to priorities that should be incorporated in the subsequent budget. During the summer, budget request forms were distributed to cost center administrators. Cost centers consisted of each school building plus other service operations such as pupil personnel services, technology, central administration, and maintenance. There were 31 cost centers in the district.

In late September, the budget preparation continued with principals reviewing present and future staffing needs, enrollment, and new programs while central office staff calculated negotiated increases in salary costs and other fixed expenses, such as energy and transportation.

Examiners were furnished with evidence that principals, teachers, and school councils were involved in the budget process. At the high school level, a faculty senate was initiated in the fall of 2005. It was reported in the NEASC document of October 2006 that "Curriculum, budget, and overall school leadership are reviewed by this group on a regular basis." The job description of a high school or middle school principal stated that the principal "prepares and submits budgetary requests and manages expenditures of funds of the school." The elementary principal job description stated "administers the school budget." Information from a Cold Spring School document affirmed that "our budget process was explained to our school council. Members had an opportunity to ask questions and make recommendations. Each spring we review the budget at a faculty meeting and request staff input." Interviews with principals produced comments such as "we are considered site-based managers."

During the period under review, the district prepared three distinct budgets: a level service budget, a program restoration or enhancement budget, and finally a school committee-approved budget. Also during each budget development period, district administrators met with town finance representatives to discuss prospective available funding.

In mid-November, the initial budgets were summarized and budget sessions were held with central office personnel and cost center administrators. Capital budget requests were also prepared during this time period. In early December, preliminary budgets were made available

to the entire school committee. The school committee did not have a subcommittee to review the budget process.

The school committee held approximately three formal budget sessions during January. These sessions included interviews with school principals and other cost center administrators. When the school committee completed its review of the budget, it then made presentations to the town finance committee and the board of selectmen and held a legally required public hearing. In April, the budget was presented at the annual town meeting.

The budget document was clear, comprehensive, complete, current, and understandable. The document contained an introductory letter of explanation prepared by the superintendent that included student performance data, enrollment, and staffing information. The budget book contained the requested budget as well as budget history by cost center and object codes. It included historical information on grants and revolving accounts and sources of funding. It also contained information on enrollment projections and current and historical data regarding district and school staffing by specific assignments. Further, it contained information that could be used for data and historical analysis such as a five-year longitudinal summary of personnel staffing and teacher salary and insurance premium cost comparisons for 30 selected school districts.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The budget was developed and resources were allocated based on the ongoing analysis of student assessment data to a limited degree. A review of the elementary and secondary SIPs indicated that funding for improvement strategies and activities such as resources to address the identification of at-risk students at the secondary schools required the identification of the funding source within the district to address this matter.

In interviews with district administrators, it was stated that the staff continually reviewed data to make decisions related to funding. An example cited was that upon a review of student literacy

scores on a standardized test, North High School recognized the need to implement a reading lab model for grade 9 students. This need was incorporated into the budget. Another example stated in interviews was the adoption of the Houghton Mifflin reading program as well as expenditures to support early literacy efforts under the Reading First initiative. Other programs cited in administrative interviews were the Pearson science program and the funding of a life skills program. However, evidence of the analysis of student assessment data and the allocation of budget resources to support improved achievement for all student populations was not revealed when reviewing the budget development documentation.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The superintendent's letter of transmittal within the FY 2005 budget stated, "We are seeing warning signs of a deterioration of the community's belief that we can sustain a quality educational program under the present circumstances. In spite of this, we have maintained the quality of the education we provide to Plymouth." The superintendent's letter of transmittal within the FY 2007 budget stated, "The funding level for the Plymouth Public Schools has been below the State average for seven consecutive years and nine of the last ten years. The FY 05 Plymouth expenditure, the last year data is available, is $684 per student below the state average." The FY 2007 budget also displayed that from FY 2001 through FY 2006 the district had a decrease in instructional personnel of 46 FTEs, a decrease in administrators of 13 FTEs, and a decrease in support and service personnel of 172 FTEs. Student enrollment in the district, for kindergarten through grade 12, had decreased by 646 students from FY 2002 through FY 2006.

The combination of Chapter 70 aid and local revenues exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirements of the education reform formula for the period under review. For FY 2004 the NSS

exceeded requirements by $7,194,143 or 11.5 percent. For FY 2005 the NSS exceeded requirements by $7,166,277 or 11.1 percent. For FY 2006 the NSS exceeded requirements by $9,375,875 or 13.9 percent. The district had exceeded NSS from at least FY 1997 to FY 2006.

The Chapter 70 aid as a percent of NSS for the period under review averaged approximately 22 percent. From FY 2003 to FY 2004, Chapter 70 aid to the district was reduced by 19.6 percent or $3,976,414. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, Chapter 70 aid to the district was level funded at $16,321,643, and from FY 2005 to FY 2006, Chapter 70 aid increased by $427,800.

The examiners found evidence that during the period under review the district's budget and supplemental funding were adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and to provide for adequate operational resources, and that the community annually provided sufficient financial resources to ensure educationally sound programs and facilities of quality. On September 6, 2006, the citizens voted a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools which were recognized as being overcrowded.

District administrators stated in writing when addressing this indicator that, "The administration believes that we are capable of running an efficient and effective educational program for Plymouth Public Schools under the approved budget."

Examiners were told in interviews with school administrators that, in general, supplies and materials were adequate and that the budget had not been frozen during an operational period during the period under review or previous years. School personnel during interviews stated that they felt funding for professional development was adequate and principals were not denied access to conferences. Some staff interviewed stated that money for special supplies and materials not included in the budget was often available from parent organization funds.

The district had appropriate and adequate instructional technology. The district had a T3 bandwidth installed in 2006. Classrooms had adequate drops for between 3,700 and 4,000 computers in the district. Each building had a technology professional development person to provide training and support.

Another example of the community providing sufficient resources was that one year during the period under review the school administration and school committee, in order to stay within their

budget, did not include funds to replace outdated science textbooks, although teachers and administrators advocated for them during the budget process. The town finance committee supported this need and recommended that additional funds in excess of the voted budget be awarded to the school district to purchase these elementary textbooks.

A review of the financial status of the town obtained on the Department of Revenue website showed that in FY 2005 the stabilization fund had available funds of $9,343,414, and the certified free cash as of July 1, 2005 was $6,716,509. The average single-family tax bill was $3,799 for FY 2006.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district, as part of its budget development, implemented an evaluation-based review process to determine the cost effectiveness of some of its programs. Interviewees stated that the process of developing the budget was a formal procedure that involved many district and town personnel. At one level the superintendent reviewed district needs with the town manager and other town financial officials. At the school building level, the budget was developed with input from a number of different groups. Principals met with staff, community members, and school council members. This was a collaborative process that evaluated all options and initiatives with the available funds.

The district implemented a number of other programs that were developed to realize cost effectiveness. An energy conservation program was instituted by a firm called Energy One which reviewed expenditures and guaranteed to save the district money. The district did not have to pay the company if it did not reduce the district's energy budget. A district document reviewed by examiners stated that in FY 2006 the amount of $704,825 was saved through energy conservation and that energy consumption for the year dropped by over 22 percent. The district had also implemented a program purchased from a firm called School Dude which allowed the

tracking and completion of work orders and maintenance requests to be completed in a more efficient manner.

Administrators stated that they constantly reviewed the out-of-district placement of students and evaluated whether establishing programs for specific special needs within the district would be more effective. The district also evaluated its special education transportation contract methods and planned to restructure the bid documents.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district and community had appropriate written agreements and memoranda related to 603 CMR 10.0. Examiners reviewed the document and observed that it was properly signed. The allocation method for services was a percentage estimate of actual time spent by municipal employees. Operation, maintenance, and other fixed charges such as insurance were 100 percent of the actual expenses incurred by the school district and its personnel.

School administrators stated in interviews that they kept careful tallies on personnel taking insurance and periodically reviewed the Schedule 19 assessments.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The combination of Chapter 70 aid and local revenues exceeded the NSS requirements of the education reform formula for the period under review. For FY 2004 the NSS exceeded requirements by $7,194,143 or 11.5 percent. For FY 2005 the NSS exceeded requirements by $7,166,277 or 11.1 percent. For FY 2006 the NSS exceeded requirements by $9,375,875 or 13.9 percent. The district had exceeded NSS from at least FY 1997 to FY 2006.

The Chapter 70 aid as a percent of NSS for the period under review averaged approximately 22 percent. From FY 2003 to FY 2004, Chapter 70 aid to the district was reduced by 19.6 percent or $3,976,414. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, Chapter 70 aid to the district was level funded at $16,321,643. From FY 2005 to FY 2006, Chapter 70 aid increased by $427,800.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Regular, timely, accurate, and complete financial reports were made to the school committee, appropriate administrators, staff, and the public. Although school committee policy had no requirements relative to the submittal of reports, the practice was that the committee received a budget status report at every meeting. Reports prepared for the committee consisted of a summary of the budget appropriation by cost center, all transfers, encumbrances, and expenditures to date. These reports were discussed at meetings, which were televised to the public.

Financial reports were prepared and distributed monthly to all principals, directors, coordinators, and grant managers. Other financial reports were generated as needed. School finance administrators stated that they reconciled their budget status with the town accountant every month. Interviews with town officials verified this statement.

Examiners reviewed a sample of federal and state required reports and determined that they were accurate and filed on time.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district used efficient accounting technology; however, the technology did not meet all the requirements that the district desired to be more efficient and it was in the process of upgrading its software program. Financial reports had to be transferred by hard copy between cost centers and central administration. The district also prepared its purchase order requests on hard copy at each school rather then preparing them on a computer at a cost center and forwarding them electronically to the central office. The town accounting office and the school central office could transfer data electronically, and they both were on the same financial software program and in the process of updating to the same new financial software. Interviews with town finance officials confirmed that the school district's budget status was reconciled on a monthly basis.

The district used forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure spending was within budget limits. Central office reviewed expenditure reports prepared by cost center administrators, and formal transfer procedures were in place for reallocation and over expenditure of cost center budgets. Any request to alter a salary account had to be approved by the human resources department and central administration. The district forecast its salary budget through a program developed on an Excel spreadsheet. Examiners reviewed this spreadsheet application and observed that it was detailed and contained the elements and data to make accurate projections.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a system in place to pursue, acquire, monitor, and coordinate grants. In FY 2004 the district expended $8,016,347 in federal and state grants and $3,172,798 in revolving accounts. In FY 2005 the district expended $5,333,383 in federal and state grants and $3,182,733 in revolving accounts. In FY 2006 the district was awarded $6,757,067 in federal and state grants and expended $3,244,688 in revolving accounts. The major grants received by the district were for Title I, SPED 94-142, and Reading First.

Grants were monitored in the same manner as the general budget. Each grant had its own account structure and an individual responsible to monitor its progress and expenditures. The assistant superintendent finalized the signature approval process and monitored the financial reports of all grants.

The district had not been very successful in obtaining competitive grants. In interviews, administrators stated that they reviewed applications and did not meet the demographic or financial guidelines of most grant requirements. The district did not obtain much funding in private grants although interviewees stated that parent groups were often financially supportive of specific teacher needs.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a system in place to ensure that state procurement laws were followed. The school business manager and the facilities director had MCPPO credentials. The district was a member of a purchasing collaborative for school supplies and materials. The district also used the state procurement process. Non-bonded renovation and construction projects were bid by the director of facilities and overseen by the business manager. Bonded renovation and construction projects were bid by the town's procurement officer. Town officials confirmed this information in interviews. According to interviewees, all administrators were periodically trained in procurement laws and provided with written guidelines and updates. Interviewees reviewed a district form titled Request for Quotations that formalized that process and required records to be maintained for all purchases between $5,000 and $24,999 in accordance with Chapter 30B requirements.

Examiners reviewed independent audit reports, single audit reports, and End of Year compliance reports and determined that there were no remarkable findings. In interviews, town finance officials stated that the present independent auditing firm had been in place with the town and school district for approximately four years and the town was going to solicit independent auditing services through the bid process next year.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district had a formal preventative maintenance program to maximize and prolong the use of the district's facility assets. The district employed a licensed plumber, two licensed electricians, two heating and ventilation technicians, and a carpenter, as well as unlicensed routine maintenance personnel. The facilities services office also used the computerized work order system School Dude to track repair and maintenance requests.

The NEASC report observed that routine cleaning and maintenance at the high schools were areas of concern, and school administrators developed a plan to reassign custodial labor in conjunction with the implementation of the computerized work order system to address the problem. Examiners, when visiting the high schools, noted that areas appeared to be in need of updating, and a number of locations appeared to be congested with supplies and materials that examiners attributed to the space needs at the high schools.

Examiners reviewed the existing conditions report of all school buildings in the district completed by the Massachusetts School Building Authority in 2006. They found that three schools, two elementary schools and the North High School, were in "moderate condition with some building systems that may need attention."

The North High School had 14 modular classrooms and the Indian Brook Elementary School had six modular classrooms. These classrooms had been used by the district for a number of years and appeared to be reaching the end of their useful life.

The Coordinated Program Review (CPR) of August 2006 prepared for the district stated that at two elementary schools and the Plymouth South High School "the special education services are clustered. This practice results in separation and stigmatization for special education eligible students."

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The district had a long-term capital plan that clearly and accurately reflected the future capital development and improvement needs of the district's high schools. On September 6, 2006, the citizens voted a $199 million building project to upgrade both high schools. The district was experiencing serious overcrowding in its two high schools. In an interview, an administrator stated that South High School was built for 1,200 students and housed 1,600 students. North High School was built for 800 students and had 1,000 students. North High School also had 16 modular classrooms.

The community had subsequently submitted its statement of interest in the project to the Massachusetts School Building Authority, which was evaluating a number of options for housing the student population.

Interviewees reported that there had been a capital improvement program in place since the 1980s to fund repairs and improvements to the town's buildings, including the schools. For school capital outlay projects, the process began at the building level where principals submitted project requests to the director of facilities. These requests were then submitted to central administration and then the school committee for review and approval. Approved requests were

then forwarded to the town-wide capital outlay expenditures committee and eventually placed in priority order with all town and school requests. The town manager recommended projects to be funded in a fiscal year to the selectmen and finance committee and then at the annual town meeting. Town officials, when interviewed, verified the existence of a town-wide capital improvement committee.

A capital improvement plan to spend $199 million at the two high schools was necessary considering the overcrowding and physical conditions at these schools. Examiners reviewed the five-year capital plan of the school district as to the timeframes and available funding to make needed improvements to the district's other schools, such as the replacement of modular classrooms at one elementary school. The district's five-year capital plan, with the exception of HVAC work, did not appear to contain funds to address major building system replacements.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

The schools had systems to ensure student safety. It was reported that all schools had intrusion alarms. Most schools had security receptionists. Some personnel were secretaries located in the main offices who had an additional duty as a security receptionist, but the larger schools had personnel dedicated to security. In most schools sign-in procedures were in place and visitor badges were required to be worn. In some schools the main door was locked and a buzzer and phone system was installed. Exterior cameras were reported to be in use in some school buildings. In at least two buildings visited by the examiners, they encountered unlocked side or rear doors and entered the schools without being challenged.

Appendix A: Proficiency Index (PI)

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

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B: Chapter 70 Trends, FY1997 – FY2006

	Foundation Enrollment	Pct Chg	Foundation Budget	Pct Chg	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid	Pct Chg	Required Net School Spending (NSS)	Pct Chg	Actual Net School Spending	Pct Chg	Dollars Over/Under Requirement	Percent Over/ Under
FY97	8,399	2.5	50,217,570	4.4	35,123,160	12,643,583	21.3	47,766,743	5.6	50,288,922	5.6	2,522,179	5.3
FY98	8,503	1.2	52,366,851	4.3	36,105,306	14,682,650	16.1	50,787,956	6.3	54,411,019	8.2	3,623,063	7.1
FY99	8,553	0.6	54,582,802	4.2	37,693,793	16,673,932	13.6	54,367,725	7.0	55,863,291	2.7	1,495,566	2.8
FY00	8,630	0.9	54,956,552	0.7	39,292,006	17,798,618	6.7	57,090,624	5.0	61,192,502	9.5	4,101,878	7.2
FY01	8,828	2.3	57,954,659	5.5	41,475,393	19,343,518	8.7	60,818,911	6.5	63,950,497	4.5	3,131,586	5.1
FY02	8,826	0.0	60,765,457	4.8	42,804,861	20,298,057	4.9	63,102,918	3.8	66,591,851	4.1	3,488,933	5.5
FY03	8,991	1.9	62,727,404	3.2	44,936,876	20,298,057	0.0	65,234,933	3.4	68,996,936	3.6	3,762,003	5.8
FY04	8,789	-2.2	62,620,990	-0.2	46,299,347	16,321,643	-19.6	62,620,990	-4.0	69,815,133	1.2	7,194,143	11.5
FY05	8,635	-1.8	63,724,652	1.8	48,304,109	16,321,643	0.0	64,625,752	3.2	71,792,029	2.8	7,166,277	11.1
FY06	8,556	-0.9	65,808,603	3.3	50,709,654	16,749,443	2.6	67,459,097	4.4	76,834,972	7.0	9,375,875	13.9

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	
FY97	5,979	1,505	5,987	25.2	95.1	100.1	25.1
FY98	6,159	1,727	6,399	28.0	97.0	103.9	27.0
FY99	6,382	1,949	6,531	30.5	99.6	102.3	29.8
FY00	6,368	2,062	7,091	32.4	103.9	111.3	29.1
FY01	6,565	2,191	7,244	33.4	104.9	110.3	30.2
FY02	6,885	2,300	7,545	33.4	103.8	109.6	30.5
FY03	6,977	2,258	7,674	32.4	104.0	110.0	29.4
FY04	7,125	1,857	7,943	26.1	100.0	111.5	23.4
FY05	7,380	1,890	8,314	25.6	101.4	112.7	22.7
FY06	7,692	1,958	8,980	25.5	102.5	116.8	21.8

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