Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Quabbin Regional School District
District Review

Review conducted April 2–5, 2012

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Table of Contents

Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Quabbin Regional School District

The site visit to the Quabbin Regional School District was conducted from April 2–5, 2012. The site visit included 34 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 63 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with one high school, eight middle school, and three elementary school teachers. The team also conducted visits to all the district's seven schools: Hardwick Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 6), Hubbardston Center School (kindergarten through grade 6), New Braintree Grade School (pre-kindergarten through grade 1), Oakham Center School (grades 2–6), Ruggles Lane Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 6), Quabbin Regional Middle School (grades 7–8), and Quabbin Regional High School (grades 9–12). Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

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

District Profile[2]

The Quabbin Regional School District serves students from Barre, Hardwick, Hubbardston, New Braintree, and Oakham. Each of the towns has its own elementary school but middle and high school students attend the one Regional Middle and High School located mid-district on a 109-acre campus in Barre.

School committee membership is determined by the size of each town's population. The 14 members include 5 members representing Barre; 3 members from Hardwick; 3 members from Hubbardston; 1 member from New Braintree, and 2 members representing Oakham. The superintendent serves as the parliamentarian. The Quabbin Regional School District is a school choice district.

Enrollment

The enrollment figures for the elementary schools in 2011 were: New Braintree Grade School, 167 students; Hardwick Elementary, 254; Hubbardston Center 397; Oakham Center, 204; and Ruggles Lane Elementary, 443 students. The Regional Middle School serves 500 students and the Regional High School has an enrollment of 895.

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

Student Demographics

Table 1a below shows the 2010–2011 Quabbin enrollment by race/ethnicity and selected populations, while Table 1b shows the same for 2011–2012.

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

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	**2,860**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	20	0.7
First Language not English	14	0.5	Asian	15	0.5
Limited English Proficient*	1	0.0	Hispanic/Latino	94	3.3
Special Education**	453	15.7	White	2,650	92.7
Low-income	608	21.3	Native American	6	0.2
Free Lunch	468	16.4	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	140	4.9	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	74	2.6
*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as "English language learners." **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data					

The total enrollment figure for the 2011-2012 school year is 2717. This is a slight decrease in enrollment (143 students) from the 2010–2011 school year. The majority of students are white, with 93 percent of the district's total enrollment. The Hispanic/Latino population makes up 3.2 percent of the district's enrollment. Students from low-income families make up 21.9 percent of total enrollment in 2011–2012, a small increase from 21.3 percent in 2010–2011. The district's special education population of 15.2 percent of total enrollment in 2011–2012 was little changed from the 15.7 percent of total enrollment in the 2010–2011 school year.

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

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	**2,717**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	14	0.5
First Language not English	14	0.5	Asian	15	0.6
Limited English Proficient*	2	0.1	Hispanic/Latino	87	3.2
Special Education**	418	15.2	White	2,527	93.0
Low-income	596	21.9	Native American	5	0.2
Free Lunch	476	17.5	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	120	4.4	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	68	2.5

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

District Leadership

Leadership in the district has not been consistent, as the present superintendent left the district in 2006 and during the interim four different superintendents provided leadership. Three of the superintendents were appointed on an interim basis and the fourth served for less than two years. In 2009, at the request of the school committee, the superintendent who had left in 2006 returned to the district. However, she returned only half time. She also served as a half-time superintendent in the North Middlesex School District. This arrangement was to end after the summer of 2012, when the superintendent was to retire but remain full time during the 2012–2013 school year, enjoying emeritus status and leading the district while a search for a new superintendent takes place.

In 2009 the district began to consider a change in grade structure at the Oakham Center Elementary School and New Braintree Grade School. After discussions with the principal the superintendent agreed that a change in grade structure would be better educationally. Agreements were reached in the 2010–2011 school year and Oakham Center became a grade 2–6 school and New Braintree Grade School became a pre-kindergarten through grade 1 school.

Currently, the high school is headed by an interim principal, as the principal left that position during March 2011, just a few weeks before the review team's visit to the district. An interim was leading the high school during a search for a replacement principal.

Significant changes at the central office have taken place over the years with over half of the staff being hired during the two years before the site visit, as will be described in the first Leadership and Governance finding below. The prevailing feeling in the district is that now that central office staff positions have been added the district is in a position to address some of the student achievement issues that require attention. All stakeholders hold the present superintendent in high esteem and credit her with establishing a district culture that promotes loyalty among the staff.

Financial Profile

Actual expenditures were below the local budget (estimated expenditures in the table below) by $1,974,801 (5.9 percent) in fiscal year 2010 and $2,379,210 (7.3 percent) in FY11. Actual expenditures from all sources of funding declined from $37,079,561 in fiscal year 2010 to $35,835,615 in fiscal year 2011. Estimated local budget expenditures for fiscal year 2012 of $30,145,887 are the lowest over the three-year period.

Chapter 70 aid decreased by $991,923 from $16,979,189 in fiscal year 2010 to $15,987,266 in fiscal year 2011, but in fiscal year 2011 the district received federal funds to supplement Chapter 70 aid of $1,059,273.[3] Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2011 exceeded required net school spending by 6.3 percent and 5.5 percent respectively.

Estimated figures for 2012 indicate that Chapter 70 aid increased by $85,827, and that estimated net school spending is expected to exceed required by $1,016,973 or 4.0 percent.

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[3] This was combined State Fiscal Stabilization Funds and Education Jobs grants.

Table 2: Quabbin Regional School District
Chapter 70 State Aid and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010–2012

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From school committee budget	33,244,342	31,269,541	32,678,100	30,298,890	30,145,887
From revolving funds and grants	---	5,810,020	---	5,536,725	---
Total expenditures	---	37,079,561	---	35,835,615	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	16,979,189	---	15,987,266	16,073,093
Required local contribution	---	9,043,482	---	9,241,791	9,371,400
Required net school spending**	---	26,022,671	---	25,229,057	25,444,493
Actual net school spending	---	27,662,240	---	26,619,183	26,461,466
Over/under required ($)	---	1,639,569	---	1,390,126	1,016,973
Over/under required (%)	---	6.3	---	5.5	4.0

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

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

Sources: FY11 District End-of-Year Report; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.

Data retrieved on September 18, 2012.

Findings

Leadership and Governance

At the time of the review there had been a long period of instability in the superintendent's position and recent turnover in many other central office positions and principalships. There had also been many changes in the administrative structure in the area of curriculum and instruction.

After the departure of the long-serving superintendent of schools in 2006, the district was led by four different superintendents—three on an interim basis, and another for a longer term, but for less than two years. In 2009, the previous superintendent, at the request of the school committee, agreed to return to the district on a half-time basis, equally sharing services under a unique intergovernmental agreement with the North Middlesex School District. The intergovernmental agreement was to conclude in the summer of 2012 with the retirement of this superintendent. North Middlesex would be acquiring a new superintendent. Although retired, the superintendent was to enjoy an emeritus status with the district and was to continue to lead the district during the 2012–2013 school year until the search for a new superintendent is completed and an orderly succession has been secured—to the satisfaction of the school committee. In addition to the changes in the superintendency, approximately one half of the other central office personnel, including the assistant superintendent, the director of student services, and the director of technology, were hired within the two years before the site visit.

At the school level, at the time of the site visit one of the principals was completing a third year of employment with the district, another principal was in her initial year of service to the district, and with the recent departure of the high school principal, one of the assistant principals had been appointed interim principal during the search for a replacement principal.

In the curriculum and instruction domain, a combination of changes in central office leadership and funding constraints led to the creation and then elimination of the position of director of curriculum and technology, as well as the elimination of high school department heads—and replacement by instructional specialists who were subsequently also eliminated. Finally, at the middle school, the curriculum liaison positions were also formally eliminated.

The review team found that instability in both administrative personnel and administrative structure meant that there was insufficient leadership, leading to a curriculum development process confined exclusively to the high school, as well as instructional practices that varied widely at each school. However, the review team was also able to discern a growing awareness among district administrators that unity in curriculum development, singularity of data analysis, and consistency of teacher evaluation for instructional effectiveness provide the ultimate foundation for assuring student success.

The district has developed the requisite planning documents, i.e., a Strategic Plan (SP), a District Improvement Plan (DIP), and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). However, the absence of specific timelines within the plans prevents there from being a sense of urgency within the district about achieving the goals or an understanding of which goals and activities have priority.

The Strategic Plan was a year old at the time of the site visit. The current superintendent convened about 60 stakeholders in the spring of 2011 to review the previous Strategic Plan that expired in 2010. The replacement Strategic Plan governs the vision for the district for a five-year period, from 2011 to 2016. It has the capability, therefore, of informing leadership decision-making during the transition period between superintendents, and also of setting the direction for the district during the initial years of the succeeding superintendent's tenure.

According to the superintendent, the current SP represents a 2011 renewal of the previous SP, which expired in 2010. Interviews with parents on school councils elicited a recognition that the SIPs should flow from the DIP, and representatives of the teachers' association felt that the three elements (SP/DIP/SIPs) influenced the discussion at the schools—particularly with regard to instruction.

One of the principals acknowledged that the school's SIP had recently been recrafted to align with the DIP, and another principal said that the school's SIP had been reworked to incorporate the SP and the DIP, and further, that work had been done with the teachers to use the SIP to influence individual teacher planning. Finally, a central office administrator, echoing an observation by the parents, expressed the belief that the DIP "flowed from the Strategic Plan."

The DIP details the strategic goals, objectives, and the party responsible for achievement. With rare exception, a general and very broad timeline of "School Years 2011–2014" is the timeline employed for achieving the goals and objectives.

When the review team was trying to determine the quality of curriculum standards in the district, it was reported that although there were goals, there were no timelines and that there were "a lot of balls in the air." Frequently, during several interviews with the review team, descriptors such as "work in progress," "long way to go," or "not there yet" were used to describe a variety of activities or conditions. Examples included the following:

- Building trust with academic coaches, teachers, and principals
- The use of data teams at the elementary schools
- Curriculum development in general
- Elementary instruction in math
- Vertical and horizontal consistency in curriculum

Additionally, the review team was struck by the recognition that, in some instances, although a process, program, or training existed within the district, it was not broadly required. The phrase "not mandated" was applied to:

- Scoring open responses

- Providing 90 minutes of math at the elementary level

- Taking a course about instructional practices that maximize student achievement

Frequently, the coin of the realm was "expectation"—rather than "mandate."

Various parties were cognizant, not only of the existence of the plans, but how they are intertwined. They recognized as well the potential role of the plans in influencing critical decisions. However, the review team concludes that the absence of calendar specificity in the plans, particularly in the DIP, prevents there being a sense of urgency or a shared understanding of the priority of goals and activities in the district.

The superintendent of schools has created a reservoir of good will, has nurtured harmonious working relationships among various constituent groups, and continues to recruit administrative personnel who are committed to a kindergarten through grade 12 collaborative effort to improve student achievement.

In the judgment of the review team the superintendent of schools has been the most influential factor in the success of the district. The review team found that a host of groups had unqualified praise for the superintendent and believed that she was responsible for creating a bond of loyalty between the district and its employees. Illustrative in this regard is the low annual turnover rate for teachers of between 6 percent and 10 percent from 2009 to 2011—compared to the state rate of 11 to 12 percent during the same period.

Members of the school committee praised the superintendent's loyalty to the district, her collaborative efforts, and her skills in dealing with representatives of the five towns. Indeed, when review team members met with representatives of two towns who opposed the adoption of the current budget, and were adamant in their continued opposition, they, nevertheless, lauded the advocacy skills of the superintendent and also expressed appreciation for the comprehensive nature of the budget information as well as its transparency.

Representatives of the teachers' association, in two separate meetings, affirmed their support of the superintendent—despite an approximate six-month delay in negotiating a successor agreement to the expired teachers' collective bargaining agreement. Recognition by the association of the difficulty in passing the budget replaced any rancor or animosity that might have arisen because of the delay. Indicative of the collaboration between the teachers' association and the administration was the scheduling of an afternoon workshop on April 6, 2012. The workshop, conducted by the Massachusetts Teachers' Association, and attended by teachers and administrators, concerned a review of the requirements of the new evaluation system for teachers under The Race to the Top funding award.

Since returning to the district in 2009, the superintendent has replaced some administrators at the central office and the school levels. The superintendent has hired principals, an assistant superintendent with an increasing focus on instruction, a director of technology, and a director of student services. At the time of the review, the superintendent was actively searching for a high school principal through advertising and by making personal phone calls both within and outside the state.

Once the high school principal vacancy is filled, the superintendent will have created a tightly focused administrative team with a strong capability of devoting time and energy to solving problems within the district—particularly about curriculum development and instructional practice. The existence of this vital component, the district's educational leadership, will serve as a firm foundation for selecting a successor to the current superintendent in 2012–2013, and will likely contribute to continued success and continued improvement for all who work in, and are served by, the Quabbin Regional School District.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district does not have curriculum guides for English language arts (ELA) or math at the elementary and middle school levels, and those at the high school are incomplete. No timelines for the development or completion of the guides exist. The district does not have a systematic process for developing and evaluating curricula.

A district administrator and the schools' principals acknowledged that completed, aligned curricula for the schools in the Quabbin Regional School District do not exist. The administrator said the focus has been on increasing the teachers' instructional skills rather than on the development of curriculum. According to the administrator, there was insufficient understanding of standards-based instruction on the part of the teachers. Furthermore, the development of curriculum was "put on hold" because of the high school's commitment to the self-study related to the recent NEASC accreditation visit. Additionally, it was decided that curriculum development should take place after the publication of the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

The district's elementary schools have no written curriculum for ELA or mathematics. Rather than establishing a common curriculum in these disciplines, the district opted to seek common texts (mathematics) or programs (phonics). In the summer of 2008 the district purchased a reading series. According to staff the purchase of the *Reading Street* series was completed without teacher input and as a result implementation was met with resistance. During the fall of 2011 a supplemental kindergarten through grade 3 phonics program (Lively Letters) was purchased and implemented. During the 2011–2012 school year some elementary teachers piloted (and the district has adopted) Go Math, a kindergarten through grade 6 mathematics program. The district's elementary schools currently use four different mathematics texts.

Curriculum at the district's secondary schools does not exist or is incomplete. At the middle school "power standards" developed approximately five years before the site visit exist for mathematics (incomplete), English language arts, science, social studies (incomplete), and Spanish. These documents are limited to a summary of the standard and a brief justification for its inclusion as a power standard. Two years before the site visit the high school adopted an Understanding by Design template to assist in the organization and development of course curricula. High school staff explained to review team members that the first stage of a three-stage process had been completed for many courses. A review of the documents revealed that stage one of the process resulted in the development of course goals, *students will know and be able to do* statements, and essential questions for each course. Stages two and three (performance assessments and instructional strategies, respectively) were to be completed in the future, according to faculty members and the interim principal. Those same faculty members acknowledged that a timeline for the completion of stages two and three did not currently exist. When asked how stages two and three would be completed, high school staff said that there were many initiatives (capstone, rubric development, International Baccalaureate) and that "staff is spread thin."

Currently, the Quabbin Regional School District has no districtwide plan or timeline indicating when curricula will be developed or completed. There is no systematic process for developing and evaluating curricula. The district does not have a curriculum steering committee and standing curriculum subcommittees organized by discipline and grade span. The decision to select textbooks and programs before the development of curricula is consistent with the district's recent history of a text serving as a discipline's curriculum.

The absence of standards-aligned curriculum in kindergarten through grade 12 has many undesirable consequences. It hinders a review and revision process necessary to identify gaps and redundancies in the grade-to-grade vertical sequence of what students should know and be able to do**.** Similarly it makes it difficult to achieve the desired horizontal consistency of curriculum across the elementary schools and within grade-level courses at the middle school and the high school**.** The absence of curriculum also limits the construction of aligned assessments for formative and summative purposes. Further, classroom teachers do not have the opportunity to contribute to the development of district and school curriculum documents. A consequence not to be overlooked is the absence of the upsurge in content knowledge and instructional expertise realized by teachers during the curriculum development process.

The district does not have the leadership and resources necessary for the development, review, and revision of curriculum.

During recent years the full time equivalents (FTEs) of those positions coordinating and leading initiatives to improve curriculum have been diminished and in some cases the positions have been eliminated. For example, at the high school the position of department head was changed to chief instructional leader for the 2010–2011 school year. The instructional leader positions were eliminated in the 2011–2012 budget. The middle school's curriculum liaisons were eliminated in 2010. In both schools, when teachers were asked who was responsible for the school's

curriculum work, they identified the principal and assistant principal; however, a district administrator said that Quabbin's principals were not performing as instructional leaders. The elimination of the middle school's curriculum liaisons and the high school's chief instructional leaders leaves the schools with no one having primary responsibility for discipline-specific leadership in the matters of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Positions related to curriculum and instructional improvement have been added recently. In 2010 a literacy coach and a mathematics coach were hired to support instruction in those disciplines in kindergarten through grade 8, although the majority of the coaches' focus is the elementary level, according to a district administrator. The district added a full-time assistant superintendent for curriculum beginning in the 2010–2011 school year. However, this assistant superintendent assumes the duties of superintendent in the half-time superintendent's absence.

Goal number one of Quabbin's District Improvement Plan calls for the "review and revision of PreK-12 curriculum." The Strategic Plan's first goal is "to teach what matters most." Thus the district appears to recognize the link between the development, review, and revision of curriculum and improved student achievement. But the review team did not find any evidence of the district conducting curriculum review and revision work or of efforts to determine "what matters most." Curriculum development, review, and revision and the related development of assessments and instructional strategies require time and expertise. School districts organized to produce effective curricula require structures such as a districtwide curriculum planning council, individual curriculum task forces, and curriculum writers. Without a sufficient curriculum leadership and the structures necessary to produce effective curricula, it will be difficult for the district to engage in and accomplish this critical work.

While a positive, respectful classroom climate and effective teacher preparation are evident in Quabbin, informal use of assessment is insufficient and students at the middle school and high school levels do not have enough opportunities to participate in differentiated instruction and tiered learning activities.

The review team observed instruction in 62 of the district's classrooms: 37 at the elementary level, 12 at the middle school level, and 13 at the high school. The classes included 25 ELA, 9 mathematics, and 3 other classes at the elementary level; 5 ELA, 5 mathematics, and 2 other at the middle school level; and 4 ELA, 6 mathematics, and 3 other at the high school. The observations ranged from 20 to 30 minutes in length. Team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning to record their observations. The tool contains 35 characteristics grouped within 2 broad areas (organization of the classroom and instructional design and delivery) and 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of student assessments. Review team members are asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

The highest consistent percentages at all levels were in the category of classroom climate. Several characteristics in this category are worthy of further analysis.

- In 98 percent of the observed classes (elementary, middle, and high school), reviewers noted solid evidence of positive and respectful relationships between students and teachers. In one classroom a grade 8 teacher was heard to say "I smell something burning. I think it's your ideas. That's great!"

- In 97 percent of the observed classes there was solid evidence of students behaving according to rules and expectations. In one classroom a teacher asked the students to "show me that you're ready."

- In only 58 percent of the observed classes was there evidence of teachers conveying high expectations for learning to students. In one classroom a grade six teacher told her students "This algebra is pretty tough stuff."

In the overall area of classroom organization and instructional design and delivery, there were mixed results.

Among the positive results:

- In 100 percent of the observed classes at all levels, there was solid evidence that the content of the lesson appeared appropriate for the grade and level.

- In 100 percent of the observed classes at all levels, there was solid evidence that the teachers were prepared and learning materials readily available.

- In 94 percent of the observed classes there was solid evidence that lessons were paced in a manner allowing all students to be engaged in the learning.

- In 89 percent of the observed classes, there was solid evidence that the teacher communicated the academic content with clarity and accuracy.

- In 85 percent of the middle school's observed classes, there was solid evidence that the teacher communicated the learning objective to students. This characteristic was observed in 73 percent of the visited elementary classes and in 75 percent of the visited high school classes.

- In 83 percent of the high school's observed classes, there was solid evidence that students examined, analyzed, or interpreted information. In a grade 10 geometry class the students responded to the teacher's question, "What would I need to know to determine if triangles were congruent?" In a high school creative writing class the students, examining an 11-inch by 14-inch poster, were asked to write about "What is happening from the perspective of one of the people depicted in the poster?" This characteristic was observed in 68 percent of the observed elementary classes and in 77 percent of the observed middle school classes. In a grade 4 classroom students were going to the computer lab to enter their data and draw conclusions to determine which mineral is which.

Results of concern included:

- In only 45 percent of classrooms observed was there solid evidence of students reflecting on their own thinking.

- In only 39 percent of the observed classes was there solid evidence of students working together without direct instruction in small groups or pairs.

- In only 32 percent of classrooms observed was there solid evidence of students generating questions about the goals of the lesson. In a grade 12 classroom students were observed asking their classmate-presenters questions as the lesson proceeded.

- In only 50 percent of classrooms observed was there solid evidence of students forming predictions, developing arguments, or evaluating information. In a grade 9 English class studying Shakespeare, students were asked "What is going to happen next?", "What are the clues?", and "How do you know?" In a grade three classroom, students observed a photo of Japanese students and were asked "What does their dress indicate about their culture?" In another classroom students were told that they "needed to give evidence when they evaluate…we can't just assume."

- In only 24 percent of classrooms observed was there solid evidence of teachers using an instructional technique <u>other than</u> direct, whole-group instruction; this characteristic was evident in only 8 percent in the observed classrooms at the high school.

- In only 32 percent of observed elementary classes was there solid evidence of students engaged in structures that advance their thinking, i.e., think-pair-share, turn and talk.

- In only 27 percent of observed elementary classes was there solid evidence of students participating in different or tiered activities based on academic readiness. An observer noted in one classroom that a student group was using computers, another group was working on worksheets, and another group was working with direct teacher instruction—all related to the same goal. In another class, with teacher guidance students were selecting leveled reading materials.

- In only 38 percent of observed elementary classes was there solid evidence of at least one informal assessment (e.g., thumb tool, ticket to leave) used to check for understanding or mastery. In one elementary classroom before students could transition to snack time, they had to post on the Smart Board one word that stemmed from their study of Latin root words. In another classroom students were asked "How many agree with the statement…?" In another classroom students were asked "to put one thumb up if you think she's right." In a grade 4 classroom students held up erasable cards to respond to the teacher's question.

- In only 8 percent of the high school's observed classes and 23 percent of the middle school's observed classes was there solid evidence of at least one informal assessment (e.g., thumb tool, ticket to leave) used to check for understanding or mastery.

- In the observed middle school and high school classes there was no evidence (zero percent) of students participating in different or tiered activities based on academic readiness.

- In the observed high school classes there was no evidence (zero percent) of students inquiring, exploring, or solving problems together in small groups or pairs; this characteristic was evident in only 15 percent of the middle school's observed classes.

- In only 8 percent of the high school's observed classes and 15 percent of the middle school's observed classes was there solid evidence of students engaged in structures that advance their thinking, i.e., think-pair-share, turn and talk.

In summary, review team members found solid evidence of Quabbin's classrooms being safe, well-mannered learning environments. Typically, students behave according to rules and expectations. Teachers and students act respectfully towards one another. Teachers are prepared and students respond to routines and expectations. In about three out of four classrooms the lesson's learning objectives are communicated to the students. Team members' observations indicate that the pace of lessons in almost all classrooms (94 percent) allows for all students to be engaged.

Although a positive climate exists and the conditions for learning have been created, observation data strongly suggests that in many district classrooms there is an insufficiency of key instructional strategies in the Quabbin teachers' pedagogical repertoire. Mastery of these strategies is important for the achievement of Goal 3a of Quabbin's District Improvement Plan, to "effectively implement the three-tier instructional model."

Assessment

The absence of sufficient common formative and summative assessments at each grade level hinders the improvement of curriculum and instruction and student performance.

Student assessment is taking place at each level in the district, but these assessments are not implemented consistently. Interviews with district principals indicated that the absence of consistent implementation has resulted, in some instances, in using assessments from textbooks that either are not aligned to the state frameworks, or do not accurately measure student achievement within the district.

It was reported to the team that at the elementary level, there are no common assessments. However, decisions have been made to purchase a reading series that offers more depth and consistency in assessment. The expectation is that there will be common assessment protocols in place in the near future. A kindergarten through grade 6 literacy assessment calendar was sent out in the fall of 2011 with the expectation that it will be followed. According to information provided by the district, at the present time there are common assessments in ELA including tests embedded in the *Reading Street* series, adopted districtwide in 2008. It was reported to the team that after a slow start because of poor implementation with insufficient planning, professional

development helped both administrative staff and teachers use the assessment data generated from this series to modify and improve instruction and assessment. Interviewees indicated and a review of documents confirmed that AIMSweb and Fountas and Pinnell, instituted in the fall of 2011 for progress monitoring, added depth to the literacy data and helped staff and the literacy team determine needs at the elementary level.

Principals gave as an example of a common formative assessment used at the Hardwick Elementary School, the day's "do now" activity, based on a concept perceived to be unclear to students the previous day. According to district and school personnel, a review of MCAS reading comprehension scores in grades 3–6 and composition scores in grade 4 was also used in individual schools to inform instruction and assessment. Administrators told the team that professional development has helped improve the ability of administrators and teachers to extract data from the state assessments, and so has improved their ability to use with this information to make changes. Interviews with administrators indicated that there are few common assessments in math at the elementary level because of the fact that four different math series are used. This year *Go Math* has been piloted and recently adopted as the district's elementary series in kindergarten through grade 6. It was planned that in September 2012, all elementary schools in the district would be using this math series. Galileo and Fluency and Automaticity through Systematic Teaching and Technology (Fastt) Math are used for progress monitoring. Interviewees said that common open-response prompts, instituted in 2010, are administered, scored, and analyzed districtwide. There are no common assessments in science at this level.

Interviewees said and a review of documents confirmed that there are few common assessments administered at the middle school level. ELA common assessments include the MCAS test in grades 7–8 and open-response prompts in both ELA and math. In math, Galileo is administered three times a year and Fastt Math is used for progress monitoring. In science the MCAS test is administered. Few common assessments are administered in the core subjects.

At the high school level, examples of common assessments include the MCAS tests in ELA, math, and science; AP tests; and the SAT. The high school staff is working with Understanding by Design; according to district and high school personnel they have completed stage 1 of the process, which includes goals, understandings, and essential questions. Central office and school administrators said that work on common assessments in most subject areas is yet to be completed. At the present time, there are common courses at the high school, but not common assessments for these courses.

Common formative and summative student assessment data is necessary to recognize and monitor student achievement in the district. Each elementary school in the district is a separate entity; as long as assessments are different in schools across the district, initiatives to recognize deficiencies and formulate solutions are hindered by the absence of comprehensive data. At the middle and high school levels the same problem exists; although initiatives are in the works to rectify it, progress is hindered by the absence of common formative and summative assessments.

Although student achievement data is collected, analyzed, and used throughout the district to varying degrees, there are few district policies and procedures regulating these functions; the district does not have a comprehensive system for data collection, analysis, and use.

Collection of Data

Interviews with administrators and a review of documents revealed that the collection of data by data teams is an expectation in the district. Principals said that there are no data teams at the middle or high school level; school administration provides this function. Of the five elementary schools, Oakham and Hardwick instituted data teams in 2011–2012, and there is a K-6 districtwide literacy team. Interviewees reiterated that data collection at the other elementary schools is the responsibility of the school principals. The literacy team collects data districtwide from the *Reading Street* series; the Aptitude Inventory Measurement Service (AIMS), a benchmark and progress monitoring system based on direct, frequent and continuous student assessment; and the MCAS tests. According to district and school administrators, the Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks are also used at this level. According to district administration, this program was instituted in September 2011. Three to four teachers from each elementary school meet monthly for kindergarten training. Grades three to six were to be trained in spring 2012. Teachers were to assess six students in 2011–2012 in their respective schools and the expectation was that the program would be fully implemented in September 2012.

Interviewees reported to the team that at the time of the review *Go Math* was being piloted in all elementary schools and had recently been adopted for the 2012–2013 school year. Interviewees said and a review of documents confirmed that four different math series are in use at the elementary level. They also said that data collection is school-based for math, and that math assessment data is not comparable among the schools. Data collected showed that the different math series were not working to improve student achievement at the elementary level; the *Go Math* program is expected to help improve math scores. A review of documents showed that Galileo, a fully integrated, standards-based, instructional improvement system, is used in math for kindergarten through grade 8.

Data collection at the middle and high school takes place at the department level. Examples of data collected at the middle school include MCAS tests, Galileo, Fastt Math, and subject area tests, few of which are common. At the high school, examples include MCAS tests, Advanced Placement (AP), SAT, and departmental unit, midyear, and final exams. Interviews with the superintendent confirmed that open-response prompts are common and professional development has ensured that they are scored consistently throughout the district.

Analysis of Data

Attendees at teacher focus groups said and district administrators confirmed that analysis of student achievement data takes place at the school level, usually at grade-level or monthly faculty meetings, depending on the expertise or training of the administrative staff. Interviews

with the leadership team indicate that working with data is still at the "neophyte" stage and that it is difficult getting teachers to believe in the validity of data. School principals and district administrators told the team that during the 2011–2012 school year there has been more of a focus on generating and using disaggregated data to inform instruction at all levels in the district. The literacy coach meets with teachers to review and analyze data. In 2010 professional development for principals and coaches introduced the district to the Educational Data Warehouse technology. Teachers and other district personnel will be trained at a later date. According to school principals and coaches, disaggregation of data is also starting to take place at the school level.

At the elementary level, interviewees confirmed that AIMSweb data showed that students were still struggling with phonics and decoding. In November 2011 all kindergarten staff including special education teachers were trained in Lively Letters. Additional training is scheduled for the remaining grade levels. Interviewees said that the scoring and analysis of open-response prompts four times a year have resulted in improved student achievement on the MCAS ELA test.

At the middle school level, teachers and administrators said that they analyze MCAS and open-response scores in math and ELA at department meetings to identify weaknesses in curriculum and instruction. A weakness was perceived in an MCAS open-response prompt on step-by-step instructions. This resulted in the reteaching of this skill. The proposal and adoption of a co-teaching model in special education for grades 7 and 8 were the result of disaggregation of assessment data.

At the high school level, administrators said that the administrative guidance staff analyze student achievement data and meet with teachers to discuss assessment results and corrections to weaknesses indicated by the data. According to teachers, changes in course structure and content have resulted from this analysis in math, ELA, and science.

Other Data-Influenced Changes in Instruction

Interviews with school administrators confirmed that student achievement data is used to make changes at the school level, under the direction of the administrative staff. The principals are responsible for changes based on data analysis. Interviewees said that there is nothing formalized at the district level on the use of assessment data. The literacy and math coaches assist the school administrative staff in generating data reports.

At the elementary level, coaches and administrators acknowledged that the implementation of Galileo and Fountas and Pinnell has not only helped teachers become more familiar with data, but has also resulted in data-influenced changes in instruction. Through Galileo it was determined that there was a weakness in number sense and computation. Fastt Math was introduced in the fall 2011 to address these skills. Interviews with school administrators indicated that math tests from the Addison-Wesley math series were not in sync with the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. This discrepancy and the realization that a districtwide math series would be beneficial for the district, resulted in the piloting districtwide of "*Go Math.*" The series has recently been adopted by the district for the 2012–2013 school year.

Principals also said that at the Ruggles Lane School, low scores were attributed to an absence of time on learning. Under the direction of a new principal, the schedule was adjusted to increase math and ELA class time contributing to improved student achievement in both subjects (see Tables 3 and 4). Staff changes at the Ruggles Lane School included pairing weak teachers with strong partners to improve instruction. At Hubbardston Elementary, the principal instituted a "data wall" to show literacy improvement with progress monitoring in kindergarten through grade 6. The district provided the review team with a one-page document showing bar graphs representing the number of students below bench mark on the AIMSweb assessment in September and March. The spring assessment was to be administered in May 2012 and graphed at that time. District data showed that in grade six the number of student below benchmark went from 31 in September to 17 in March. In grade one, the number of students below benchmark went from 31 in September to zero in March. School administrators said that the expectation was that additional students would reach benchmark.

At the middle school level, focus group attendees said that math teachers meet informally with administrators to focus on Galileo and MCAS assessment data. As a result, student assessment data was used to justify increasing math vocabulary in all classes and in assigning students to the grade 8, Algebra 1 class. Teachers in the focus group also said that in science, data analysis revealed that increased time needed to be spent on density in the physical science class and less spent on areas of strength. In ELA, data results showed that more instructional time needed to be spent on poetry. Other subject areas also embedded subject-specific poetry in their instruction. In response to data analysis and weak scores in math and ELA, teachers said that a numeracy and literacy class was added in grades 7–8 in addition to the regular math and ELA classes. These classes meet either for 30 minutes a day or for 60 minutes every other day.

At the high school level, administrators realized that data analysis indicated that more time was needed for Algebra 1. This class was expanded to a full year with the understanding that if things were not going well, and students were still struggling, the class could start over in January and go from January to January. Administrators said that teachers carefully evaluated MCAS test results, determined what was missing from teaching, and instituted changes in curriculum and instruction. Interviewees said that in science a change in scope in sequence was instituted based on data analysis showing that Newton's Law of Motion was really about forces and balance, and not enough time was being spent on it. School and district administrators said that questions about dialect in *The Hobbit* were problematic to students, and English teachers decided to revisit the topic in a work by Jack London.

The absence of districtwide policies on the collection, analysis, and use of student achievement data hinders the district from compiling and analyzing data effectively and making decisions about curriculum and instruction in the district that are informed by comprehensive data. Student achievement in the district cannot improve quickly or efficiently without systems and practices in place for districtwide collection, analysis, and use of student assessment data.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Administrators and teachers have developed a common language for evaluations and negotiated a walkthrough process, but evaluations of most administrators and some teachers were not conducted in a timely manner, and teacher evaluations did not include comments aimed at improving instruction or recommendations for professional development.

The review team examined 13 administrator files, as well as a random selection of 35 teacher files. Twenty percent of the teacher files reviewed were those of teachers without professional status. Although about three-quarters of the teacher evaluations were timely, some of those that were not timely dated back as far as 1996. The form used for teacher evaluations was aligned with the Principles of Effective Teaching.[4]

Eighty percent of the reviewed files were informative, meaning that they cited such instructional details as methodology, pedagogy, Principles of Effective Teaching or instruction of subject-based knowledge. However, only 14 percent were instructive, meaning that they included comments intended to improve instruction. Similarly, 14 percent provided recommendations for professional development. Only one evaluation included both instructive comments and recommendations for professional development. One hundred percent of the staff whose evaluations were reviewed were certified.

Three of the administrative files included evaluations within the two years before the site visit. Each evaluation was signed, informative, and aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership.[5] There were no evaluations included in the files of the remaining administrators to be evaluated by the superintendent. The superintendent corroborated this finding by indicating that evaluations by the superintendent were perceived as though, "If I'm evaluating you, you're gone." The district provided an evaluation for one administrator who had not been rehired within the past year. All administrators were fully certified according to district documents.

In interviews the assistant superintendent, principals, and teachers agreed that the teacher evaluation system was weak. Further, evaluators did not have training and there was little accountability for completion of evaluations. Some teachers and administrators viewed the two-year cycle as including an "on year" and an "off year." There was little specific feedback beyond summarizing what was observed.

All district administrators, as well as approximately 25 teachers, have been trained by a consultant in standards-based teaching and differentiated instruction. Interviewees noted that as a result of the training and use of the books that the consultant has developed and published,

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[4]   The Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect through the 2010-2011 year; on June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators.

[5] See previous footnote.

everyone in the district now has a common language and common comprehension of the district's evaluation process. Teachers and administrators enrolled in a graduate-level course through Fitchburg State University for a portion of the training. According to the course description, it covered components of effective classroom management: maximizing understanding and retention for varied learning styles, mastery-based learning, assessing student work, questioning skills for regular and special education students, differentiated instruction, lesson study and classroom research, working effectively with parents, and using theory and practice to tap into the personal interests of students.

The course also included a plan for calibration observations. Participants prepared a lesson plan and held a preconference with the consultant. The preconference was followed by a full-period observation. Following the observation, the consultant and principal met for nearly two hours to discuss and analyze the lesson's effectiveness.

The district has placed an emphasis on walkthroughs as a method of instructional improvement. Representatives of the teachers' association said that evaluation was a large component of the recent contractual negotiations. A defined process of walkthroughs and observations was negotiated because "members wanted clarification on how they were being judged." Members of the review team examined walkthrough and observation documents that were included in the selected evaluations. Walkthrough documentation was inconsistent. While several documents included instructive comments, most did not. Principals noted that walkthroughs were conducted many times when the forms were not completed. There has also been some "pushback" from staff, who have found the present walkthroughs "unsettling."

The consultant's training for administrators and teachers and the contractual emphasis on walkthroughs indicates that the district has made substantial progress in arriving at a common understanding of effective instruction and finding ways to improve instruction based on that understanding. However, teacher evaluations especially did not consistently include comments intended to improve the teacher's instruction or recommendations for professional development. At the time of the review, the district had not realized the full potential of its supervision and evaluation instrument for improving professional practice and student achievement.

The district has a full-time human resources director who has implemented effective and efficient information systems and procedures to guide recordkeeping and recruitment.

The human resources director has been employed in the district since 2007. She has implemented a staff accountability software program to maintain accuracy of staff records. The records include certification information—areas, level, and valid dates. A review of 35 teachers' files and all administrators' files indicated that 100 percent of the staff whose files were reviewed were fully certified. Personnel files were well organized and secure.

Recruitment through the human resources department includes a combination of internal and external components. The department begins all recruitment internally, by posting open positions for two weeks. Externally, the department places advertisements in the *Worcester Telegram*, as well as in New Hampshire and Connecticut newspapers. *The Boston Globe* is used, but only

occasionally, as a result of the excessive cost. Openings are posted on the district's website, through the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), and through the principals' associations. A diverse pool of applicants is obtained by placing openings in SchoolSpring. The human resources director noted that between 60 and 200 applications for district positions have been received from throughout the United States and the world.

The human resources director provides many services to the school district. The department's responsibilities include all paperwork associated with evaluations and observations; retirements, resignations, and new hires; management of insurance programs; assisting with negotiations with all six unions; supervision of Title IX (sexual harassment); management of staff requesting services under the Family Leave and Medical Act (FMLA); and overseeing the staff payroll. She meets with new staff to review the district "basics," including harassment and no smoking policies, as well as background on No Child Left Behind. Teachers' association representatives praised the human resources director for her preparation and distribution of a packet of information for all new hires.

Organized recruitment, methodical and secure personnel files, and responsiveness to employees are all hallmarks of this office, which has created effectiveness and efficiency within the Quabbin Regional School District.

The district has recently written a comprehensive professional development plan and provides embedded training as well as training outside the district.

The central office developed a District Strategic Plan (SP) in 2011. Approximately 60 people participated in a brainstorming session as a part of the process. Parts of the SP speak to professional development; the District Improvement Plan (DIP) (2011–2016) was built from the SP and includes several suggested areas of professional development.

The Professional Development Plan

The assistant superintendent then developed a comprehensive Professional Development (PD) Plan. Some administrators and the literacy and mathematics coaches provided input, but a PD committee composed of the various constituents of the district was not developed. The Plan includes five goals and nine priorities. The nine priorities are:

1. To provide training to educators in the use of various forms of data to inform decision making regarding curriculum and instruction

2. To use data to effectively monitor student progress and to develop appropriate intervention plans for students

3. To review, revise, and develop curriculum and instructional practices to align with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks

4. To provide teachers with methods to involve students in applying information and ideas by synthesizing, generalizing, explaining, hypothesizing, reasoning soundly, and writing intelligent responses to open-ended questions

5. To provide professional development programs that address the needs of administrators as they develop and incorporate effective practices of leadership

6. To continually expand teachers' repertoire of effective strategies in order to maximize their ability to meet the needs of all learners

7. To expand integration of technology to advance teaching and learning across the curriculum

8. To increase educator's knowledge and implementation of standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment

9. To provide support services and programs for beginning teachers

Progress in Addressing Professional Development Priorities

A comparison of activity agendas and other sources of information and the district's priorities as identified in the PD Plan indicates that each of the priorities has been addressed in varying degrees as indicated below:

- (Priority 1)   Time has been identified for data meetings on October 31, 2011 and January 23, 2012. Galileo training has also been offered.

- (Priority 2)   Teachers at the high school worked on developing rubrics on September 23, 2011, while elementary teachers worked on matching books to readers in pre-kindergarten through grade 6 on March 9, 2012. The district has purchased the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) to provide data on reading comprehension achievement. Consultants are providing training in the spring 2012 in kindergarten through grade 6. Some teachers in grades 7–8 have been involved, as well.

- (Priority 3)   Curriculum review and revision for physical education, music, art, and media technology took place during two out of five PD days. Middle school staff participated in unspecified curriculum work during two workshop days. The high school staff worked on preparing for the International Baccalaureate program and NEASC follow-up in the areas of curriculum and instruction, in addition to other areas.

- (Priority 4)   Three workshop sessions in kindergarten through grade 6 were devoted to open-response questions in literacy and mathematics.

- (Priority 5)   The assistant superintendent convenes weekly meetings with administrators. Topics include professional development on evaluation and assessment and discussions about data. The district has provided training to administrators and coaches in the use of the Education Data Warehouse. Administrators attend and participate with teachers in full- and half-day professional development. One administrator is completing National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training. All

administrators completed a summer District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) course in tiered instruction in literacy.

- (Priority 6) Paraprofessionals participated in a "Managing Student Behavior" workshop on October 31, 2011. Teachers for Teachers conducted a series of workshops on literacy strategies. At the middle school, teachers participated in two sessions of "Reading in the Content Areas and Developing Strategies." The District has provided training in curriculum areas, such as Lively Letters, FASTT Math, and Go Math. In addition, ongoing training in the incorporation of Reader's Workshop in all kindergarten through grade 6 classrooms is taking place.

- (Priority 7) The integration of technology into the instructional program was accomplished through sessions on Fastt Math and Assistive Technology. The math workshops were for teachers in kindergarten through grade 8, while the assistive technology workshop was held for guidance, nurses, paraprofessionals, and special education staff.

- (Priority 8) Teachers in mathematics in grades 4–6 participated in standards-based instruction to meet student needs on March 9, 2012. High school teachers discussed learning expectations on September 23, 2011.

- (Priority 9) The district provides a mentor to new administrators. A mentor is also assigned to new teachers, teachers who are new to the district, and teachers in need of improvement. Mentors include experienced teachers, experienced administrators, and retirees. The district does not have a high turnover, so the mentoring program is not comprehensive, according to interviews and the 2011 New England Association of Schools and Colleges report. Consultants have provided professional development to administrators in the development of improvements plans for underperforming teachers.

Focus of Professional Development in 2011–2012

Other district documents identify five major focus areas for professional development in 2011–2012:

1. Implementing the NEASC recommendations at the high school

2. Standards-based instructional practices and literacy across the content areas at the middle school

3. Improved literacy and mathematics instruction at the elementary level

4. Incorporating improved standards-based instructional practices in pre-kindergarten through grade 12

5. Using teacher evaluation as a resource to drive instructional improvement and student achievement

Some staff members commented that they would prefer to have more time for grade-level discussions.

In interviews, review team members were told that the district's past practice on its professional development days generally consisted of "one shot" programs. The district calendar provides three full days and three half days of professional development annually. Agendas are developed at the central office and distributed to all staff. In interviews, some staff indicated that their input had been sought on professional development; in other interviews, staff reported the opposite.

The Quabbin Regional School District staff, including teachers, support staff, paraprofessionals, and administrators, have multiple opportunities for professional development. The district provides in-district seminars, workshops, and training, as well as on-site graduate-level courses through area universities and colleges such as Fitchburg State University and Worcester State University. Some 30 members of the staff have a master's degree from Clark University for courses that were offered in the district. Opportunities exist for out-of-district conferences and workshops. Depending upon the particular workshop or conference, there are identified procedures for approval that range from the school principal to the school committee level. Again, depending upon the content of the workshop or conference and applicability to the teacher's or administrator's responsibilities, the individual may be required to pay the registration fees. Coaching is provided in the areas of English language arts and mathematics in kindergarten through grade 6. The coaches model lessons for teachers, provide strategies to help teachers use their instructional materials better, and assist staff in aligning existing curriculum materials to the standards. A variety of collaborative study groups exist, including faculty and grade-level meetings and summer study groups. The newly negotiated collective bargaining agreement with teachers includes one-hour professional development sessions twice a month. Common planning time has been scheduled at some schools.

Interviewees reported that the district has begun to determine professional development needs by using AIMS data, holding discussions with teachers, obtaining input from the literacy team, and tabulating results of staff surveys at the conclusion of professional development activities. However, at the present time, no professional development committee exists within the district, nor does the present plan include timelines or structures to evaluate progress in accomplishing the district's professional development priorities and goals.

The district has moved from "one-shot" professional development offerings to the recognition that professional development can also be embedded in common planning time, informal classroom visitations, multisession programming with follow-up, coaching, and faculty meetings. Adopting this methodology, along with creating a professional development committee and including timelines and evaluation components to the present plan, has the potential to broaden the expertise of all staff and positively impact curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Student Support

The district has established a variety of student supports at all levels to improve student achievement, and is working to make them more effective.

Elementary Schools

To improve student achievement the district has implemented a Response To Intervention (RTI) model at four of the elementary schools in the district using the Title I Staff to provide the tiered instruction. The seven part-time tutors are all elementary certified teachers and focus on different levels at each school. They work with students in grades 1–3 at the Ruggles Lane Elementary School, students in grades 2–4 at the Oakham Elementary School, students in kindergarten through grade 1 at the New Braintree Elementary School, and students in kindergarten through grade 3 at the Hardwick School. According to interviewees the Title I program serves approximately 100 to 130 students. In interviews principals said that schedules had been modified to provide tiered interventions for identified students but that some intervention models were more comprehensive than others. An administrator told the visiting team that while the district was working on RTI support was not yet adequate. According to interviewees Title I staff have opportunities to meet with classroom teachers to discuss intervention plans for students as well as to discuss student progress. Just before the site visit two elementary schools finished a ten-week, after-school program that included instruction in both ELA and math for identified Title I students who were most economically disadvantaged. However, participation was limited as no transportation was provided. One elementary school was able to offer a summer program for Title I students; 71 students attended.

Interviewees said that at one school Title I staff is available before school. Students may come into the computer room immediately after getting off the bus and receive help for 20 minutes before school begins. National Honor Society students from the high school also provide tutoring at one elementary school.

Each elementary school has a Student Support Team (SST) that meets weekly and includes special education staff, regular education staff, and guidance. According to interviewees and documents these teams "meet to identify which aspects of the students' educational environment must be changed in order to ensure learning in general education." At the same time, one of the action steps in the District Improvement Plan (for Goal 3A) is to "strengthen the SST process and use of DCAP across the district." Interviewees said that the SST process includes the use of many different forms that cause confusion but that the hope was to have standardized forms in place during the 2012–2013 school year. Further, a district administrator said that the DCAP was being revised and that a final version would be in place in the fall of 2012.

Instruction for students with disabilities at the elementary levels takes place with some pullout, but a majority of instruction is offered through inclusion. A review of the data shows that

students in special education had low proficiency rates in 2011.[6] The low scores were acknowledged by a district administrator, who went on to say that discussions were taking place about the scores and that work needed to be done on improving content knowledge and pedagogy for special education teachers and paraprofessionals. This same administrator said that every school has varying staff assistance and that the goal is to "even it out" to improve special education services for students and ultimately student achievement. At this time each elementary school has a guidance counselor, which was not the case until 2009. Before that time the schools shared guidance counselors. Each elementary school also has a full-time nurse.

One elementary school has developed a gifted program for students in grades 2–6 in response to a goal in the District Improvement Plan (Goal 1 C) about the development of a gifted educational program in kindergarten through grade 6. The gifted program, new during the 2011–2012 school year, uses the Renzuli model to serve its 14 students, who are pulled out of their regular classroom for 45 minutes twice a week. The school's assistant principal provides the instruction for students, who complete a Profiles Sheet and then are divided into smaller groups where they work on projects that interest to them. Interviewees told the review team that the program had just started at the time of the site visit, so results could not yet be discussed.

Middle School

Interviewees said that the middle school faces a challenge because elementary students come to the middle school from four different elementary schools. Each of these elementary schools now uses Reading Street for ELA, but they continue to use different math programs. In 2008 the middle school instituted a Literacy Support class and in 2009, a Numeracy Class . MCAS results as well recommendations of grade 6 teachers are used to determine which students will be assigned to these classes. Students not only receive instruction in the regular math and ELA classes but also receive 30 minutes of extra help each day or 60 minutes every other day. Students can receive support in both ELA and math; however, those who receive this supplementary instruction cannot attend classes in special subjects and may miss an art, physical education or a Spanish class. According to an interviewee, students—some of whom are in special education—generally continue to receive the extra support for the full academic year but sometimes test out. Pre- and post-testing are used to determine success, and in many cases students advance in proficiency.

In a middle school focus group teachers said it is not uncommon for teachers to meet with students during teachers' lunch time to offer help. Students at the middle and high schools also can receive assistance every other Wednesday after school for one and one half hours. Teachers are required to remain at school during that time period to provide academic assistance for students. The time is also used for students to meet in enrichment clubs and in student government activities. A late bus is provided for students so that transportation is not an issue.

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[6] In both ELA and math in 2011the proficiency rates of students in special education in grades 3–6 lagged behind those of their peers statewide by gaps ranging from 2 to 9 percentage points, except in grade 6 in math, in which the proficiency rate equaled the state rate of 19 percent.

High School

The district provides a summer program for incoming grade 9 students who require remediation as a result of performance on MCAS. The program is described as a Summer Skills workshop and is also open to grade 9 students who wish to attend.

Students at the high school receive remediation in a program that is funded by a $50,000 grant and provides intensive support to a group of 40 students identified as needing extra help and at risk of dropping out. They are grouped with other students who do not necessarily need extra support. The program provides opportunities for teachers to meet as group twice a week to discuss students' progress students. Students who participate in the program are not aware that they have been selected for this special support, but their parents have been made aware of the extra help that is being provided to their children.

The high school also has a credit recovery program through NovaNet. This recovery program has been in place since 2007 and has as one of its components the use of a graduation coach, who not only works with students who are enrolled but also contacts students who are in out-of-district placement. At the time of the site visit two students who were in out-of-district placements were returning to work on recovering credit. The school has eleven licenses for the program and it is offered without charge to students.

A review of the data shows that the high school has had low attendance in its AP classes. But staff have been working to improve participation in these classes, and from 2010 to 2011 the percentage of students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course increased from 9 percent in Quabbin, compared to 17 percent in the state, to 19 percent, compared to 22 percent in the state. Interviewees said that participation in AP courses is a priority at the high school and that they are now offering more courses than in the past. To encourage more students to participate, the high school has also dropped pre-registering.

In the words of one administrator, they are "opening doors as much as possible." The district is also working to introduce the International Baccalaureate to the high school, and participation in AP courses becomes an informal prerequisite to this endeavor.

Conclusion

The district has established a commendable variety of supports at each level. In accordance with the DIP the district was working on its curriculum accommodation plan and on its elementary Student Support Team process. Administrators recognized that the support provided by the RTI model was inconsistent and not yet adequate, and that work needed to be done to improve special education and the achievement of student with disabilities.

The absence of a district attendance policy and an overly flexible attendance policy at the high school may be contributing to rates of chronic absence in many grades that are higher than state rates.

As shown by Table 3 below, Quabbin students in 8 of the 12 grades[7] had rates of chronic absence in 2010–2011 that were higher than state rates for those grades.

**Table 3: Percentage of Students Chronically Absent
in Quabbin and the State by Grade
2010–2011**

Grade	District	State
K	6.4	13.6
01	10.6	9.4
02	8.7	7.7
03	8.8	6.6
04	5.8	6.5
05	10.7	6.8
06	6.1	8.6
07	7.3	10.6
08	12.6	12.1
09	20.7	19.6
10	21.2	18.0
11	21.2	19.4
12	14.7	20.8
Source: ESE data		

The Quabbin Regional School District does not have a district attendance policy. Principals said that they each devise their own policies about the number of days that a student may be absent before a letter goes home. One principal set eight days as the cut-off while another set another time period. And principals write their own attendance letters. Although the district does have an automatic call system that alerts each parent when a child is not in school, according to interviewees there is not time for nurses to make follow-up calls to determine reasons for

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[7] Every grade except grades 4, 6, 7, and 12 (and kindergarten).

absences. District principals told the review team that there is no attendance officer, but that sometimes, when asked, the police will go to the home of a student who has excessive absences.

An administrator cited many reasons for the high rates of chronic absence at the high school, including unemployment and students with difficult family situations. But the same administrator, when discussing the lengthy portion of the high school student handbook devoted to student attendance, indicated that the handbook's policy was too relaxed. The review team was told that students could be absent for 20 to 30 days and still pass. Although the section in the handbook devoted to attendance includes references to an attendance committee, interviewees said that this committee meets infrequently.

The absence of a districtwide attendance policy has led to the establishment of a variety of practices to improve student attendance. While these practices by individual groups aim to get students to attend school, in 2011 rates of chronic absence were high at many grades in the district. And the high school, with a relaxed attendance policy and an attendance committee that meets infrequently, has missed the opportunity to use this policy and this committee to improve attendance. Students who are chronically absent are missing a significant number of school days, and the impact of chronic absence on student achievement is well known: diminished academic engagement and reduced opportunity and achievement.

Financial and Asset Management

The district's annual budget format is well presented, with the current budget and financial trends. The budget document however, does not make effective use of student data to provide rationales for the district's requests for staff and program enhancements.

The fiscal year 2012 annual budget includes excellent information for anyone seeking a profile of the district, including all of the following: descriptions of each school; the district's mission, vision and goal statements; student enrollment data; member town assessment apportionment; choice program enrollments by school; staffing information and trends; charts of each school's MCAS data; and thorough financial information explaining current and past revenue and expenditure data with historical trends. It concludes with the statute and regulations regarding regional school districts. The budget was so comprehensive that a selectman commented, "We can't argue any longer that transparency is an issue."

Fiscal year 2012 staffing charts in the budget detail actual and projected full time equivalents (FTEs) in all instructional and support areas for three consecutive years. In addition to projected revenue shortfalls, the fiscal year 2013 Budget Task Force document of January 25, 2012, outlines "Needs vs. Affordability" and decisions that are "researched based and data driven." The document notes in Goal 6 that the district will "identify, collect and analyze data" in using "clear metrics for better results."

MCAS data is quite complete in the budget, but the data stands alone without some articulation of its significance for how the budget may be affected, particularly by staffing and program recommendations. And formative assessment data is not cited to support budget requests.

Evidence cited above in the assessment section suggests that the use of assessment data is increasingly having an impact on instruction in the classroom, as well as driving program changes, but that the district's assessment system and data analysis skills and supervision are still in development. One result is that it is apparently difficult for school administrators to match student data with proposed corrective actions and their costs, although it was noted in a finance interview that a "certain amount of work has been done with relation to data."

In an interview, finance staff indicated that the citizens of member towns in votes at Town Meetings did not show a clear understanding of the link between student performance and the budget. There is a disconnect between towns and parents, with a large budget gap and the necessity of finding items to cut. When cuts are discussed, administration tries to keep cuts away from instructional resources; for instance, principals recommended cutting instructional coaches, but the central office rejected this.

Economic and funding conditions in fiscal year 2013 will continue to be tight, and as a selectman said, "Finance committees focus on affordability but not on content." However, the use of student achievement data as a basis for recommending staffing and program changes in the budget remains a goal, as noted in the fiscal year 2013 Budget Task Force document, "Needs vs. Affordability." Quabbin appears to be in the process of improving its student data management systems, but has not yet achieved the use of specific student achievement data to communicate needs.

Capital planning for the district is not effective enough, as the member towns' identification of and planning for capital needs of the elementary schools is not well-integrated into the district's capital planning process.

The district has an established a process to collect and age building maintenance priorities on its Capital Plan for the middle/high school building. The district administration annually presents a formal listing of capital needs for this building and lists replacements or upgrades of more than $5,000 at the K–6 elementary schools based in member towns. In some cases emergency replacements or repairs at elementary schools above the $5,000 threshold have been managed by the regional district, which has then been reimbursed by the town.

As in all regional districts, capital spending is assessed to member towns separate from net school spending. The Quabbin Regional School District has a stabilization fund established for capital item funding.

The district deals with the finance committees of the member towns to assemble a list of critical needs from them and provide the log of capital planning issues for the middle/high school mentioned above. Focus meetings are held to inform finance committee members about capital issues.

At issue is the fact that the elementary school buildings are still owned by the towns, and the district administration would like better coordination and support for maintenance and repairs of these buildings. In some cases, towns have not financially supported building needs; for instance it was noted that Barre has tried several debt exclusions, which all failed. Hubbardston prides itself on never having had a debt exclusion. One town handled a renovation project by paying for it from savings. When asked about the general feeling of towns on incurring capital debt, interviewees noted that towns question their ability to pay off debt, though the issue comes up on an annual basis.

As far as the team could determine, Quabbin's member towns do not have established capital planning committees to review capital needs for their buildings including the schools, but have their Finance Committees cover this function as well. However, capital planning is distinct from the operating expenditures that are the responsibility of finance committees, and benefits from deliberation by citizens knowledgeable in debt and debt funding as well as facility maintenance and renovations, who can then make capital planning and debt recommendations to Finance Committees and town governing bodies.

Without capital planning committees to discuss capital issues exclusively, the district's critical major school repair or replacement issues may get less priority or become confused with general operating issues. From a strict accounting protocol, capital issues are clearly meant to be distinct from operating issues.

Recommendations

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

Leadership and Governance

To increase the utility of the Strategic Plan and the District Improvement Plan the district should incorporate in the plans specific, prompt timelines for achieving goals and objectives. It should also mandate implementation of critical initiatives in the district.

Multiple interviewees showed an understanding that the Strategic Plan, District Improvement Plan (DIP), and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) should be aligned and should influence the work in schools and classrooms. The usual timeline in the DIP, however, was "School Years 2011-2014." The review team was told that there were goals but no timelines for curriculum work; in several areas, interviewees used terms like "long way to go" or "not there yet" in talking about various activities. Completing some activities—for instance scoring open responses, providing 90 minutes of math at the elementary level, or taking a particular course on instructional practices—was described as "not mandated." The absence of specific timelines within the plans, particularly the DIP, prevents there being a sense of urgency or a shared understanding of the priority of goals and activities.

The district should revise the Strategic Plan and the DIP to include specific, prompt timelines, and make sure that responsibilities for activities are clear. It should require the schools to do the same with the SIPs. It should also make important initiatives in the district mandatory. By doing so, the district will establish a sense of urgency in working toward shared goals, and will give clearer direction for accomplishing that work, so that it is better coordinated.

The district's Strategic Plan and its District Improvement Plan should inform the school committee's superintendent search and selection, and later its evaluation of the new superintendent.

The current Strategic Plan governs the vision for the district for a five-year period, from 2011 to 2016. It has the capability, therefore, of informing leadership decision-making during the transition period between superintendents, and also, with the changes recommended above, of setting the direction for the district during the initial years of the succeeding superintendent's tenure, for instance by informing the school committee's evaluation of the superintendent.

Essential to the superintendent selection process is a determination of how candidates would work to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan—how their work would fit into the description of "Strategic Plan Implementation" at the end of the Plan. The response to the question contained in this section of the Plan, namely, "What is success?" should be a vital determinant in the selection process.

There is a broad recognition within the district that the District Improvement Plan flows from the Strategic Plan. In examining the DIP as a potential tool to inform the superintendent search, the review team recommends that the evaluative components in each plan, both of personnel and programs, be emphasized.

The strategic goals and objectives in the DIP can be valuable tools in assessing the skills and knowledge of each candidate in the following areas in the DIP:

- Revision of the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum with an initial emphasis on ELA and math (Goal 1. A, first strategy/action step)

- Revision of the personnel evaluation system for teachers and administrators to improve instruction and enhance student achievement (Goal 4. A, multiple strategies/action steps)

- Formation of data teams at each school to use data as an integral component of decision making for instructional improvement (Goal 4. C, first and second strategies/action steps)

Certainly, all the goals in the DIP are important and are integral to the success of implementing the Strategic Plan. The review team believes, however, that by emphasizing curriculum development along with personnel evaluation and program evaluation through data analysis as the framework for selecting the next superintendent, the district will have aligned its vision with the talents and foresight of the person it chooses. Surely, that would be a recipe for continued educational success for the Quabbin Regional School District.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Quabbin Regional School District should formulate a long-term plan that schedules the planning, production, piloting, implementation, review, and revision of curriculum for each discipline. Curriculum guides should include objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, and assessments.

Central office and school-based administrators acknowledged that Quabbin's schools did not have completed, aligned curricula. The district's elementary schools have no written curriculum for English language arts or mathematics. Curriculum at the district's secondary schools does not exist in some areas and is incomplete in others. At the middle school there are "power standards," which were developed approximately five years before the site visit for mathematics (incomplete), English language arts, science, social studies (incomplete), and Spanish. Two years before the site visit the high school adopted an Understanding by Design template to assist in the organization and development of course curricula. Stage one of a three-stage process has resulted in course goals, *students will know and be able to do* statements, and essential questions for each course. Stages two and three (performance assessments and instructional strategies, respectively) were to be completed in the future according to faculty members and the interim principal. At the time of the review there was no timeline for the completion of stages two and three. According to a district administrator, development of curricula was "put on hold" because of the high school's

commitment to activities related to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' (NEASC) required self-study.

A district administrator said that the district's focus had been on increasing the teachers' instructional skills rather than on the development of curricula. The district administrator said that it was decided that curriculum development should take place after the publication of the Common Core Standards, though Goal 1A of the District Improvement Plan calls for the "review and revision of the PK-12 curriculum."

Rather than establishing common curricula at the elementary level, the district opted to purchase and use common texts or programs. In the summer of 2008 the district purchased a K-6 reading series (*Reading Street*). During the fall of 2011 a supplemental K-3 phonics program (*Lively Letters*) was implemented. During the 2011–2012 school year elementary teachers piloted (and the district adopted) a K-6 mathematics program (*Go Math*). Typically a curriculum is written before texts or programs are chosen in order to identify those that best support the approved curriculum.

The district should formulate a long-term plan for the planning, production, piloting, implementation, review, and revision of curriculum for each subject. Having complete, aligned curricula will allow the district to align assessments and instructional strategies; it will also enable it to provide common learning experiences and eliminate gaps and redundancies for all the district's students regardless of which school they attend.

The Quabbin Regional School District's instructional corps should increase its use of key pedagogical strategies so as to improve achievement for all its students. Teachers should place less emphasis on whole-group instruction and make greater use of informal assessments for the purpose of differentiating learning opportunities.

Team members found solid evidence of Quabbin's classrooms being safe and well-mannered learning environments. Typically, students behaved according to rules and expectations. Teachers and students acted respectfully toward one another. Teachers were prepared and students responded to routines and expectations. However, review team members found no evidence (0 percent) of tiered instruction being used in the 12 middle school or 13 high school classrooms that they observed. Team members found evidence of tiered instruction taking place in only 27 percent of the 37 elementary level classrooms observed. In only 8 percent of observed high school classes, 23 percent of observed middle school classes, and 38 percent of observed elementary classes was there solid evidence of at least one informal assessment used to check for understanding or mastery. In only 24 percent of observed classrooms was there solid evidence of teachers' using an instructional technique other than direct, whole-group instruction; this characteristic was evident in only 8 percent of the observed high school classrooms.

Quabbin's District Improvement Plan, authored in 2011, includes goals (3A and 6A) to "effectively implement the three-tier instructional model" and "strengthen current and develop new formative and summative student assessment practices throughout the school district." The review team found little evidence that these practices had been implemented in the district's

classrooms. Teachers should rely less on whole-group instruction and consider organizing students in small groups to engage in activities that advance student thinking and problem-solving. School Improvement Plans and the district's professional development offerings should provide Quabbin's instructional corps with the knowledge and practice, in areas such as tiered instruction, formative assessments, and instructional techniques other than whole-group instruction. This will enhance teaching and enrich learning for students of all abilities.

Assessment

To guide its efforts to improve student achievement, the district should develop and implement a comprehensive system of K-12 common formative and summative assessments, based on its new curriculum.

Quabbin has a need for common formative and summative assessments at all levels, in all schools, districtwide. At the elementary level coaches and school staff have implemented a K-6 ELA assessment procedure that is embedded in the *Reading Street* series. AIMSweb and Fountas and Pinnell are used for progress monitoring in ELA, and the district has a firm foundation upon which to develop and implement an assessment system at this level. The *Go Math* series was to be implemented at all elementary schools in September 2012; the formative and summative assessments in this series will provide reliable data in mathematics for the district. In science, there are no common formative and summative assessments. An elementary curriculum must be developed before assessment measures can be written and articulated.

At the middle school level, few common assessments are administered in grades 7–8. Each grade and subject assesses students based on textbook-driven curriculum. At the high school level, other than the MCAS, AP, and SAT tests, teachers devise and administer their own assessments. At the time of the review the high school was in the early stages of formulating a curriculum based on Understanding by Design. The district recognizes the need for district-level and school-based data teams. The school data teams at the middle and high school levels could oversee the development of common assessments in the core subject areas.

An all-inclusive K-12 curriculum should be the first priority, the cornerstone, and has to be developed before administrators and teachers can accurately measure student growth. A complete K-12 curriculum will help administrators and teachers build an assessment matrix to measure achievement, modify instruction, and revise the curriculum documents as needed, thus completing the circle.

The district should develop policies and procedures for the collection, analysis, and use of assessment data K-12 and make them accessible to all stakeholders, while providing training for district staff in accessing, analyzing, and using data.

Although the district does not have a formal assessment process, each school in the district has established a variety of informal procedures for the collection, analysis, and use of student assessment data, more extensive in some schools than in others. At the time of the site visit

school administrators and coaches compiled and analyzed student assessment data from assessments such as AIMSweb, Lively Letters, MCAS tests, FASTT Math and Galileo, to name a few.

These school-based functions would be more effective and the information generated would have more impact in the district if they were coordinated on a district level. As mentioned, the district recognizes the need for a centralized data team as well as school-based teams to coordinate efforts. If data teams became a mandate rather than an expectation, they could help centralize, expand, and write down the practices already established within the schools. To date, however, although two schools in the district have data teams, they do not have formal policies and procedures.

Although principals and district administrators said that during the 2011-2012 school year there was more focus on generating and using disaggregated data to inform instruction at all levels, interviews with district leadership indicated that working with data was still at the "neophyte" stage.

Under the direction of the assistant superintendent, the district should develop assessment policies and procedures, making them available, along with K-12 assessment calendars, to all stakeholders in the district. They should be updated, expanded, maintained and periodically revised by the district's data teams. Having a comprehensive system for data collection, analysis, and use will help the district to use data purposely to improve curriculum, instruction, programs, and services. The district should also provide staff with the necessary training in accessing and analyzing data to take them to the next level in using data from the district's assessments to improve instruction.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district can build on its previous efforts to improve supervision and evaluation as it revises its system to be consistent with the new state educator evaluation system, negotiates agreement on its new system, and begins implementing it during the 2012-2013 school year.

At the time of the review the district had invested a considerable amount of time, financial resources, and effort to develop a supervision and evaluation process. This included contracting with a consultant, negotiating a walkthrough component to the teachers' collective bargaining agreement, and providing professional development to administrators and teachers to create a common language and foundation for evaluation. However, 86 percent of the teacher evaluations reviewed by the team did not contain specific recommendations that would lead to professional growth, and only three (23 percent) of the administrators to be evaluated by the superintendent had been. Teachers and administrators agreed that the teacher evaluation system was weak, and the superintendent told the review team that administrators regarded evaluation by her as indicating that they were at risk of losing their jobs.

In June 2011 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted new educator evaluation regulations to replace the previous ones. As a participant in the Race to the Top grant program, Quabbin is required to begin implementing a new evaluation system consistent with the new state evaluation system in the 2012-2013 school year. The investments the district has made in developing its supervision and evaluation system will be valuable as it revises its current system to be consistent with the state system, negotiates agreement on the revision, trains staff in the new system, and implements it.

The new educator evaluation model provides opportunities for school districts to develop and implement

- Professional development for evaluators;

- Training to develop meaningful professional practice and student learning goals;

- Systems to ensure

    o that evaluators have the time and support to carry out the new system with fidelity and

    o that district and school goals are aligned with administrator goals

- Professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the goal-setting and evaluation process.

In taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the new model, Quabbin will address the areas the review team identified for improvement in the educator evaluation system in use in the district at the time of the team's visit, including the timeliness of evaluations and the contribution they make to professional growth.

The district should continue the changes to professional development begun in 2011 by creating a districtwide professional development committee composed of representatives from all levels to revisit its Professional Development (PD) plan. The PD Plan should be data driven and driven by the priorities in the District Improvement Plan (DIP), professional development recommendations contained in teacher and administrator evaluations, and staff evaluations of professional development.

According to interviews, the majority of professional development in the district before 2011 consisted of "one shot" programs and initiatives. With the change in leadership and the addition of the assistant superintendent's position, professional development has become more focused. The assistant superintendent followed up on the professional-development-related portions of the Strategic Plan and District Improvement Plan written in 2011 by developing a professional development plan. In its 2011 professional development plan, the district began to provide embedded as well as out-of-district training to address identified goals and priorities. However, though some administrators and the literacy and math coaches provided input, it did not have wide staff input within the district. Some staff indicated that their input had been sought, others the opposite.

The district should create a professional development committee with representation from all levels; the committee should use input from teachers and analysis of student achievement data to determine and prioritize areas of greatest need, keeping in mind district goals and priorities. Professional development for teachers should then address those needs. Based upon the identified needs, and recognizing that improved classroom instruction is a key component in improved student achievement, the district should focus its professional development further. The professional development plan should include timelines and structures to evaluate progress in meeting teacher needs and accomplishing district priorities and goals.

Professional development initiatives should be continued, revised, or dropped based on whether and how well they advance the district toward its identified goals and priorities, with consideration of teacher needs identified in educator evaluations and teacher feedback on initiatives. By aligning, prioritizing, systemizing, documenting, tracking, and evaluating the district's professional development, Quabbin will have a means to align teaching with the district's changing learning needs. Along with the transition already made from "one-shot" trainings to more embedded professional development, this process will take the school district a long way toward increasing that learning.

Student Support

The district should continue the efforts it has begun to examine its support systems to determine whether they are effective in increasing student achievement.

The district has many supports in place at all levels.

To improve student achievement, at the time of the review four of the elementary schools had implemented the Response to Intervention (RTI) model using Title I staff to provide the tiered instruction. The seven part-time tutors, who are all certified elementary teachers, were focusing on different levels at different schools. However, the review team was told that some of the RTI models were more comprehensive than others. Further, a district administrator told the team that while the district was working on RTI, support was not yet adequate. In view of this the district should continue to develop the support provided through RTI, examining the RTI models in all its schools to determine their effectiveness and identify ways to improve each of them.

Students with disabilities generally receive instruction in inclusion classrooms, with some students pulled out. An administrator said that the low scores of students with disabilities were under discussion, as was improving the content knowledge and pedagogy skills of special education staff. In addition, the review team was told that there was varying staff support at different schools for student with disabilities and that the goal was to even it out to improve services. The district should continue in these efforts, making sure 1) that special education staff have a high level of content knowledge and high-quality pedagogy skills so that students with disabilities are receiving high-quality instruction, and 2) that all schools are adequately staffed.

Continuing examination by the district of the supports that are provided is essential to determine whether schools are implementing student support models appropriately and whether they are meeting the various needs of students.

The district should develop and implement an attendance policy to provide staff, students, and parents with guidelines that define expectations about attendance and provide consequences for excessive absence. It should also develop procedures to monitor absence and take steps address the reasons for excessive absence.

In 2010-2011 Quabbin students had higher rates of chronic absence than students statewide in 8 of the 12 grades, including 3 of the 4 grades at the high school level (see Table 3 above).. At the time of the review the district did not have an attendance policy, and principals devised their own policies, resulting in differing amounts of acceptable absence and different responses to attendance problems. The review team was told that the high school's attendance policy was too relaxed: that students could be absent for 20 to 30 days and still pass. The high school's attendance committee met infrequently.

The district does have an automatic call system that alerts parents if students are not in school, but the review team was told that there was no time for nurses to follow up with a call to determine reasons for absence.

Since one of the main building blocks for student success is school attendance, the district should develop a policy that will provide consistent guidelines for all schools and levels and define expectations for students and families. It should also 1) establish effective monitoring procedures to identify excessive student absence, 2) determine the issues that lead to some students missing a more than a tenth of school days each year, and 3) address those issues. In carrying out these recommendations, the district might consider making use of a reactivated high school attendance committee. By reducing the amount of instructional time lost, the district will be benefiting students both academically and socially.

Financial and Asset Management

The district should continue its initiative to use student achievement data in making budget proposals. A summary of student data in the annual budget, clearly connected to recommended staff or program changes and their costs, would promote credibility and support advocacy for the district budget at member towns.

MCAS data is quite complete in the budget, but the data stands alone without some articulation of its significance for how the budget may be affected, particularly by staffing and program recommendations. And formative assessment data is not cited to support budget requests.

Evidence cited above in the assessment section suggests that the use of assessment data is increasingly having an impact on instruction in the classroom, as well as driving program changes, but that the district's assessment system and data analysis skills and supervision are still in development. One result is that it is apparently difficult for school administrators to match

student data with proposed corrective actions and their costs, although it was noted in a finance interview that a "certain amount of work has been done with relation to data."

Clear communication by disclosing the reasoning the district administration used in arriving at "needs" decisions, with supporting student data, may provide a stronger justification to taxpayers of the value of their appropriations to the district. Some further training of school administrators as well as others in data analysis would provide the skills to make these kinds of data-supported requests (see second Assessment recommendation above). Data collection and data analysis is being built and strengthened already in the district; the administration should extend this work by making efforts annually during budget presentations to include a rationale for staff and program cost issues directly related to instructional data.

To better coordinate and support capital planning and expenditures, the district should consider asking its member towns to jointly form a capital planning committee with representation from each town and the regional district.

From interviews, it appears that the school committee and district administration have the responsibility of maintaining K-6 schools in member towns, although they are owned by the towns. Tensions with the district over funding have been lessened by the district's more complete budget presentation with supporting information and financial details. The district administration may wish to encourage coordinated capital planning for the town-owned K-6 buildings.

The school committee has a facilities subcommittee, which typically reviews capital improvements and routine maintenance for district-owned buildings. By forming a capital planning committee with representatives from the member towns and the facilities subcommittee, the district could institute better planning and management of capital needs, including the issues of debt structure for the several entities involved.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Quabbin Regional School District was conducted from April 2–5, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Owen Conway: Leadership and Governance

Dr. Peter McGinn: Curriculum and Instruction

Ms. Jo Napolitano: Assessment

Dr. Coral Grout: Human Resources and Professional Development

Ms. Dolores Fitzgerald: Student Support and review team coordinator

Mr. Richard Scortino: Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Quabbin Regional School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following: Oakham finance committee member, New Braintree select board member, and Oakham finance committee member.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Quabbin Regional School District School Committee: two members representing Hubbardston, one member representing Barre, and one member (school committee chairperson) representing Hardwick.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Quabbin Regional Teachers Association: president, vice president, and two teacher representatives.

- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Quabbin Regional District central office administration: superintendent of schools; assistant superintendent; director of administrative services; interim director of student services; director of technology; human resources director.

- The review team visited the following schools in the Quabbin Regional School District: Hardwick Elementary School, Hubbardston Center School, New Braintree Grade School, Oakham Center School, Ruggles Lane Elementary School, Quabbin Regional Middle School, and Quabbin Regional High School.

  o The review team conducted 62 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the seven schools visited.

- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:

  o Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.

  o Data on the district's staffing and finances.

  o Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

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

o All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Quabbin Regional School District, conducted from April 2–5, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
April 2, 2012	April 3, 2012	April 4, 2012	April 5, 2012
Orientation with district leaders and principals	Professional Development and Curriculum and Instruction Interviews	Student Support Interview	School Visits to: Ruggles Elementary
Leadership Interview	Leadership Interview with Principals	Professional Development Interview	High School
Curriculum and Instruction Interview	Finance and Student Support Interviews	Curriculum and Instruction Interview with Principals	Middle School
Assessment Interview	Finance Interview with Town Officials	Assessment Interview	Oakham Elementary
HR Interview	Teacher Focus Groups: Elementary, Middle, and High Schools	Leadership Interview with Finance	New Braintree Grade
Finance Interview		Interview with Assistant Superintendent	Interviews with School Leaders
Student Support Interview	School Council Parent and Teachers' Association Interviews	School Committee Interview	Superintendent Briefing
Teachers' Association Interview	High School and Middle School Classroom Visits	Classroom Visits at the Middle School, Hubbardston Elementary, and Hardwick Elementary	Emerging Themes Meeting with District Leaders and Principals
Review of Documents	Interview with School Principals	Interview with School Principals	
Review of Personnel Files	Review of Personnel Files		

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

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

Grade	2009 Percent Proficient	2009 Median SGP	2010 Percent Proficient	2010 Median SGP	2011 Percent Proficient	2011 Median SGP
All Grades—District	**66**	*50*	**70**	*56.5*	**72**	*56*
All Grades—State	67	*50*	68	*50*	69	*50*
Grade 3—District	**55**	***NA****	**67**	***NA****	**60**	***NA****
Grade 3—State	57	*NA**	63	*NA**	61	*NA**
Grade 4—District	**37**	*37.5*	**41**	*37*	**48**	*48.5*
Grade 4—State	53	*50*	54	*50*	53	*51*
Grade 5—District	**58**	*45*	**56**	*50*	**62**	*52*
Grade 5—State	63	*50*	63	*50*	67	*50*
Grade 6—District	**62**	*33*	**66**	*51*	**67**	*54*
Grade 6—State	66	*50*	69	*50*	68	*50*
Grade 7—District	**74**	*58*	**85**	*75*	**80**	*62.5*
Grade 7—State	70	*50*	72	*50*	73	*50*
Grade 8—District	**83**	*67*	**87**	*60*	**90**	*61*
Grade 8—State	78	*50*	78	*50*	79	*50*
Grade 10—District	**85**	*53*	**86**	*61*	**94**	*56*
Grade 10—State	81	*50*	78	*50*	84	*50*

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

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

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

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*
All Grades—District	54	*51*	59	*57*	58	*55*
All Grades—State	55	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 3—District	51	*NA**	65	*NA**	54	*NA**
Grade 3—State	60	*NA**	65	*NA**	66	*NA**
Grade 4—District	46	*57*	50	*63*	56	*65*
Grade 4—State	48	*50*	48	*49*	47	*50*
Grade 5—District	43	*37*	50	*47.5*	57	*51*
Grade 5—State	54	*50*	55	*50*	59	*50*
Grade 6—District	54	*55*	54	*56.5*	58	*53*
Grade 6—State	57	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 7—District	53	*63*	58	*68.5*	46	*52*
Grade 7—State	49	*50*	53	*50*	51	*50*
Grade 8—District	45	*43*	51	*48*	58	*64*
Grade 8—State	48	*50*	51	*51*	52	*50*
Grade 10—District	84	*58*	86	*57*	83	*47*
Grade 10—State	75	*50*	75	*50*	77	*50*

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

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

	Quabbin Regional School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	**CPI**	*Median SGP*	**CPI**	*Median SGP*
All Students	*1,555*	**89**	*56*	**87.2**	*50*
African-American/Black	*9*	---	---	77.4	47
Asian	*8*	---	---	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	*48*	86.5	61	74.2	46
White	*1,440*	88.9	56	90.9	51
ELL	---	---	---	59.4	48
FELL	---	---	---	81.7	54
Special Education	*238*	65.7	47.5	68.3	42
Low-Income	*359*	84.7	54	77.1	46

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

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

	Quabbin Regional School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	CPI	*Median SGP*	CPI	*Median SGP*
All Students	*1,553*	**81.1**	*55*	**79.9**	*50*
African-American/Black	*9*	---	---	65	47
Asian	*8*	---	---	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	*48*	73.4	53	64.4	46
White	*1,438*	81.4	56	84.3	50
ELL	---	---	---	56.3	52
FELL	---	---	---	75.1	53
Special Education	*237*	57.2	51	57.7	43
Low-Income	*360*	74.3	50	67.3	46

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. At the time of the review there had been a long period of instability in the superintendent's position and recent turnover in many other central office positions and principalships. There had also been many changes in the administrative structure in the area of curriculum and instruction.

2. The district has developed the requisite planning documents, i.e., a Strategic Plan (SP), a District Improvement Plan (DIP), and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). However, the absence of specific timelines within the plans prevents there from being a sense of urgency within the district about achieving the goals or an understanding of which goals and activities have priority.

3. The superintendent of schools has created a reservoir of good will, has nurtured harmonious working relationships among various constituent groups, and continues to recruit administrative personnel who are committed to a kindergarten through grade 12 collaborative effort to improve student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. The district does not have curriculum guides for English language arts (ELA) or math at the elementary and middle school levels, and those at the high school are incomplete. No timelines for the development or completion of the guides exist. The district does not have a systematic process for developing and evaluating curricula.

5. The district does not have the leadership and resources necessary for the development, review, and revision of curriculum.

6. While a positive, respectful classroom climate and effective teacher preparation are evident in Quabbin, informal use of assessment is insufficient and students at the middle school and high school levels do not have enough opportunities to participate in differentiated instruction and tiered learning activities.

Assessment

7. The absence of sufficient common formative and summative assessments at each grade level hinders the improvement of curriculum and instruction and student performance.

8. Although student achievement data is collected, analyzed, and used throughout

the district to varying degrees, there are few district policies and procedures regulating these functions; the district does not have a comprehensive system for data collection, analysis, and use.

Human Resources and Professional Development

9. Administrators and teachers have developed a common language for evaluations and negotiated a walkthrough process, but evaluations of most administrators and some teachers were not conducted in a timely manner, and teacher evaluations did not include comments aimed at improving instruction or recommendations for professional development.

10. The district has a full-time human resources director who has implemented effective and efficient information systems and procedures to guide recordkeeping and recruitment.

11. The district has recently written a comprehensive professional development plan and provides embedded training as well as training outside the district.

Student Support

12. The district has established a variety of student supports at all levels to improve student achievement, and is working to make them more effective.

13. The absence of a district attendance policy and an overly flexible attendance policy at the high school may be contributing to rates of chronic absence in many grades that are higher than state rates.

Financial and Asset Management

14. The district's annual budget format is well presented, with the current budget and financial trends. The budget document however, does not make effective use of student data to provide rationales for the district's requests for staff and program enhancements.

15. Capital planning for the district is not effective enough, as the member towns' identification of and planning for capital needs of the elementary schools is not well-integrated into the district's capital planning process.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. To increase the utility of the Strategic Plan and the District Improvement Plan the district should incorporate in the plans specific, prompt timelines for achieving goals and objectives. It should also mandate implementation of critical initiatives in the district.

2. The district's Strategic Plan and its District Improvement Plan should inform the school committee's superintendent search and selection, and later its evaluation of the new superintendent.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. The Quabbin Regional School District should formulate a long-term plan that schedules the planning, production, piloting, implementation, review, and revision of curriculum for each discipline. Curriculum guides should include objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, and assessments.

4. The Quabbin Regional School District's instructional corps should increase its use of key pedagogical strategies so as to improve achievement for all its students. Teachers should place less emphasis on whole-group instruction and make greater use of informal assessments for the purpose of differentiating learning opportunities.

Assessment

5. To guide its efforts to improve student achievement, the district should develop and implement a comprehensive system of K-12 common formative and summative assessments, based on its new curriculum.

6. The district should develop policies and procedures for the collection, analysis, and use of assessment data K-12 and make them accessible to all stakeholders, while providing training for district staff in accessing, analyzing, and using data.

Human Resources and Professional Development

7. The district can build on its previous efforts to improve supervision and evaluation as it revises its system to be consistent with the new state educator evaluation system, negotiates agreement on its new system, and begins implementing it during the 2012-2013 school year.

8. The district should continue the changes to professional development begun in 2011 by creating a districtwide professional development committee composed of representatives from all levels to revisit its Professional Development (PD) plan. The PD Plan should be data driven and driven by the priorities in the District

Improvement Plan (DIP), professional development recommendations contained in teacher and administrator evaluations, and staff evaluations of professional development.

Student Support

9. The district should continue the efforts it has begun to examine its support systems to determine whether they are effective in increasing student achievement.

10. The district should develop and implement an attendance policy to provide staff, students, and parents with guidelines that define expectations about attendance and provide consequences for excessive absence. It should also develop procedures to monitor absence and take steps address the reasons for excessive absence.

Financial and Asset Management

11. The district should continue its initiative to use student achievement data in making budget proposals. A summary of student data in the annual budget, clearly connected to recommended staff or program changes and their costs, would promote credibility and support advocacy for the district budget at member towns.

12. To better coordinate and support capital planning and expenditures, the district should consider asking its member towns to jointly form a capital planning committee with representation from each town and the regional district.