Quincy Public Schools
REVIEW OF
DISTRICT SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES
ADDRESSING THE DIFFERENTIATED NEEDS
OF ALL STUDENTS

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This document was prepared on behalf of the
Center for School and District Accountability of the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Overview of the Reviews of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of All Students

Purpose:

The Center for School and District Accountability (SDA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of reviews of school districts to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom an achievement gap exists. The reviews will focus in turn on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students, and students who are members of racial minorities. The first set of districts reviewed, in May and June 2009, are Agawam, Chelsea, Lexington, Quincy, Taunton, and Westwood, districts where data pointed to responsive and flexible school systems that are effective in supporting all learners, particularly students with disabilities, or where there was an interest in making these systems more effective.

Key Questions:

Three overarching key questions guide the work of the review team.

- **How do district and school leaders assume, communicate, and share responsibility for the achievement of all learners, especially those with disabilities?**

- **How does the district create greater capacity to support all learners?**

- **What technical assistance and monitoring activities from ESE are most useful to districts?**

Methodology:

To focus the analysis, the reviews collect evidence in three critical domains: **(I) Leadership, (II) Curriculum Delivery, and (III) Human Resource Management and Professional Development.** The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that are most likely to be contributing to positive results, as well as those that may be impeding rapid improvement. Practices that are a part of these systems were identified from three sources: Educational Quality and Accountability indicators, Program Quality Assurance Comprehensive Program Review criteria, and the 10 "essential conditions" in 603 CMR 2.03(6)(e). The three domains, organized by system with component practices, are detailed in Appendix F of the review protocol. Four team members previewed selected district documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a four-day site visit in the district. The four-member teams consist of independent consultants with expertise in district and school leadership, governance, and financial management (to respond to domain I); curriculum, instruction, and assessment (to respond to domain II); human resource management and professional development (to respond to domain III); and special education (to collect evidence across all three domains; see italicized indicators under each domain in Appendix F of the review protocol).

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The review of the Quincy Public Schools was conducted from **June 8 - June 11, 2009**. The review included visits to the following district schools: Clifford H. Marshall Elementary School (K-4), Francis W. Parker Elementary School (K-5), Lincoln-Hancock Community School (PK-5), Squantum Elementary School (K-5), Merrymount Elementary School (K-5), Atlantic Middle School (6-8), Broad Meadows Middle School (6-8), Point Webster Middle School (5-8), North Quincy High School (9-12), and Quincy High School (9-12). Further information about the review and its schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

Quincy Public Schools

District Profile[1]

In 2008-2009 the Quincy Public Schools educated a total of 8,968 students in 18 schools: 13 elementary, 5 middle, and 2 high schools. District enrollment in 2008-2009 consisted of 5.6 percent African-American, 30.8 percent Asian, 4.6 percent Hispanic, 1.6 percent Multi-Race, 0.3 percent Native American, 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and 57 percent White students. (See Table 1 below.) Of this student population 38.6 percent were from low-income households, 28.3 percent were first language not English, 12 percent were limited English proficient, and 15.9 percent received special education services.

Noteworthy enrollment trends since 2006 are a 6 percent increase in students whose first language is not English, a 4.3 percent increase in low-income students, and a 3.2 percent increase in Asian students. While the percentage of students receiving special education services declined slightly (by 0.2 percent) over the same period, other increases, in the Asian student population and in the number of students whose first language is not English, present significant challenges for the district, as it must recruit qualified teachers to meet the increasingly diverse needs of its student body. Through a system of 75 efficient and effective teams the district maintains focus on the differentiated needs of all students, especially students with disabilities. This district focus is consistent from the classroom teacher-learner nexus to the superintendent's office in a two-way communication that informs budget development, resource deployment, and instructional strategies designed to improve the performance of all learners.

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[1] Student demographic data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Table 1: Quincy Public Schools' Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Populations (2008-2009)

RACE	% of DISTRICT	% of STATE
African American	5.6	8.2
Asian	30.8	5.1
Hispanic	4.6	14.3
Native American	0.3	0.3
White	57.0	69.9
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
Multi-Race	1.6	2.0
First Language not English	28.3	15.4
Limited English Proficient	12.0	5.9
Low-income	38.6	30.7
Special Education	15.9	17.1
Free Lunch	29.9	25.2
Reduced Lunch	8.7	5.5

Student Performance[2]

Three-year trend data reveals a Quincy Public Schools pattern of improvement in the aggregate on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The percentages of students scoring advanced or proficient (A/P) increased at all levels between 2006 and 2008. For example, at grade 10, students scoring A/P in ELA grew from 60 percent in 2006 to 70 percent in 2008, and the percentage of those scoring needs improvement or failure (NI/F) decreased from 40 percent in 2006 to 30 percent in 2008. In mathematics at grade 10, the percentage of students scoring A/P increased from 58 percent in 2006 to 70 percent in 2008, and the percentage scoring NI/F decreased from 41 percent in 2006 to 30 percent in 2008.

At the middle school level there is a similar positive three-year pattern. At grade 8 the percentage of students scoring A/P in ELA increased from 74 percent in 2006 to 78 percent in 2008 and the percentage scoring NI/F decreased from 27 percent in 2006 to 21 percent in 2008. Thirty-nine percent of grade 8 students scored A/P in mathematics in 2006 while 50 percent scored A/P in 2008; the percentage scoring NI/F declined as 60 percent of students scored NI/F in 2006 and 50

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[2] Data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

percent in 2008. Although mathematics remains a serious concern, the trend is one of steady improvement. The pattern for grade 6 students showed similar positive trend data.

Elementary school students also demonstrated improvements over the three test administrations from 2006 to 2008, although the rate was slower. At grade 4 in ELA the percentage of students achieving A/P increased from 45 percent in 2006 to 46 percent in 2008 and the percentage scoring NI/F decreased from 56 percent in 2006 to 54 percent in 2008. In mathematics the percentage of A/P scores at grade 4 increased from 34 percent in 2006 to 41 percent in 2008 and the percentage of NI/F scores decreased from 66 percent in 2006 to 58 percent in 2008.

Students with disabilities have improved their performance over the last three years. At the 10th grade in English language arts, the percentage of A/P scores for special education students increased from 20 percent in 2006 to 30 percent in 2008, while the percentage of NI/F scores decreased from 80 percent in 2006 to 70 percent in 2008. In mathematics 30 percent of grade 10 special education students scored A/P in 2006, increasing to 32 percent in 2008, and the proportion scoring NI/F decreased from 71 percent in 2006 to 68 percent in 2008.

The middle school grades saw similar trends: 29 percent of grade 8 special education students scored A/P in ELA in 2006, increasing to 42 percent in 2008, while the proportion scoring NI/F decreased from 70 percent in 2006 to 58 percent in 2008. In mathematics, 7 percent of grade 8 special education students scored A/P in 2006, increasing to 11 percent in 2008, and the proportion of NI/F scores decreased from 92 percent in 2006 to 89 percent in 2008.

At the elementary school level, 12 percent of ELA grade 4 special education students scored A/P in 2006, increasing to 13 percent in 2008, and the percentage scoring NI/F decreased from 88 percent in 2006 to 87 percent in 2008. In mathematics, 9 percent of grade 4 special education students scored A/P in 2006, while 10 percent scored A/P in 2008 and the proportion scoring NI/F decreased from 91 percent in 2006 to 90 percent in 2008.

Although students with disabilities demonstrated some growth in MCAS performance from grade 4 through grade 10, overall scores highlight an achievement gap between these students and their non-disabled peers in Quincy. The 2008 dropout rate for grades 9-12 for Quincy students with disabilities was 4.8 percent, higher than dropout rate of 3.1 percent for the general education students enrolled in the same grades. Similarly, the 2008 graduation rate for Quincy students with disabilities was 69.1 percent (compared to a state rate of 64.0 percent), while non-disabled peers graduated at an 87.3 percent rate (as compared to a state rate of 85.1 percent).

Findings

Leadership

District and school leadership have effective, standards-based systems in place that use analysis of student achievement data to affect educational programs and improve the achievement of all learners.

The Quincy Public Schools have an extensive array of teams, 75 in total as reported in Quincy's "Goals Set, Goals Met 2008-09" document. These teams are aligned across all levels and functions to maintain a districtwide focus on improving student achievement. The Quincy District Improvement Plan (DIP) was developed by the district over a five-year period because the superintendent was concerned about issues of content and input. He stated, "I wanted to make sure that it addressed the needs of all students and I wanted involvement by leaders at the school and district levels." All School Improvement Plans (SIPs), devised by principals and their leadership teams at each school, are aligned with the vision, mission, and goals of the DIP. Additionally, the superintendent requires that all program directors develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) that is aligned with both with the DIP and with SIPs throughout the district. For example, an examination of the special education Program Improvement Plan reveals standards and indicators from the DIP that specifically must be addressed by the special education department. This planning structure is designed to keep everyone focused on improving the performance of all learners.

The district's efficient and effective team structure is in place to support the implementation of the DIP and SIPs systemwide. Document review revealed a detailed and extensive systemwide schedule of team meetings, at the district and school levels, that is developed in advance for the entire school year. At the district level the superintendent's leadership team (SLT) and the principals' leadership team (PLT) meet regularly and work to ensure that the goals of the DIP and SIPs remain aligned and remain the focus of attention for any revisions warranted by an analysis of student performance data. Principals and their assessment teams annually amend SIPs to reflect needs based on an analysis of student performance data from the most recent MCAS test administration.

In interviews, principals indicated that the PLT provides an opportunity for them to express concerns about implementation of programs, instructional practices, and resource needs. When asked how they receive help from the district if unexpected needs arise during the school year and are now included in an amended SIP, a principal responded, "We know that we can go to the senior director, but we also know that we can go to each other for a sharing of resources while in our meetings." The senior director for curriculum and the business manager each indicated during interviews that they have reserve accounts for unanticipated needs, but the strength of the PLT is that it is a great vehicle for sharing problems and resources.

The Quincy district's team focus continues at the school level. Each school has an assessment team (AT), an integrated learning team (ILT) and a student support team (SST). The teams at the school level are designed to carry out the DIP and SIP to the classroom level. Members of each

school's administrative team analyze aggregated and disaggregated student performance data to plan amendments to the SIP and inform instructional strategies in classrooms. From interviews, however, review team members learned that some middle school principals were concerned about whether instructional changes were happening in the classroom based on analysis of student performance data..

The ILTs meet regularly during the course of the school year to analyze student behavior and academic performance, plan student groupings, and recommend placement changes. Review team members were able to view an end-of-year ILT meeting at an elementary school during which a teacher presented the progress of all the students in her English Language Learner (ELL) class, along with related issues.

The student support teams also meet regularly to address individual student academic and social-emotional needs. Classroom teachers present a student in a case study format. Together, student support team staff and the teacher work to identify the presenting problem, collect baseline data, and plan interventions calculated to bring about positive change. The team then sets a progress monitoring plan in place with regular meetings to check the student's response to interventions.

In this manner the Quincy Public Schools maintain a focus on student performance from the classroom to the district leadership. Their system of well-coordinated teams functions to keep staff dedicated to the tasks that support a DIP designed to improve the performance of all students. From the classroom level to the superintendent's office, the Quincy Public Schools demonstrate that there is a shared responsibility for the learning of all their students. The school district has developed a "culture of caring" and a structure to make the culture effective for all students.

All students benefit from the team system of accountability in the Quincy Public Schools as the result of the attention of all staff at team meetings being focused on students. The analysis of student performance data and the planning of instructional strategies are supported and monitored by school and district teams. Accountability and information flow from the classroom up and from the superintendent down in a two-way communication model that keeps improved student performance as the focus. Teams, with district and school leadership, function to keep important student performance data in the hands of the teacher in the classroom as well as those of the leadership of the district.

Assessment data on student achievement is used by principals to inform instructional leadership; this use of data is evolving as a districtwide practice for all classroom teachers.

In interviews, principals indicated that monitoring student assessment data is central to their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and the work of the site assessment teams. Copies of the SIPs showed "progress goals" specifically designed to increase MCAS scores and improve academic achievement across the curriculum for mainstream and high-risk populations, including special education students.

Principals shared a variety of monitoring practices that they employ, e.g., regular "walk throughs" or classroom visits, review of hard copy assessment reports and online Excel

spreadsheets from the district, frequent network connection via laptops to access classroom and student profile data through Test Wiz, informal feedback from parents, and formal teacher evaluations. Principals said that they follow up informally with individual teachers needing additional support. As one principal commented, "I can also suggest that a teacher who needs help see a teacher who is more veteran or effective in an area." Other principals interviewed offered similar comments.

The use of data is still an evolving practice. One elementary principal, for example, stated that teachers use MCAS and other data inconsistently to inform their instruction, noting that some teachers feel uncomfortable with this practice and might benefit from professional development on analyzing and using assessment data to improve academic achievement.

- 2007-2008 graduation rate data for students with IEPs in the district shows that the graduation rate of 69.1 percent (i.e., 96 graduates) for the 2008 special education cohort of 139 students was substantially lower than the 87.3 percent rate (i.e., 542 graduates) for the general education cohort of 621 students.

- 2007-2008 dropout rate data for the district reveals that 4.8 percent (i.e., 20) of the 416 special education students enrolled in grades 9-12 dropped out; this was a higher rate than the dropout rate of 3.1 percent (i.e., 78) for the 2500 general education students enrolled in the same grades.

The district regularly assesses its special education programs and services to determine their effectiveness and uses the data to create, modify, or discontinue programs and service delivery models.

According to the 2008 Quincy Public Schools End-of-Year Report, the district spent over $11,000,000 in tuition and transportation costs to educate 130 students in out-of-district placements. The superintendent, business manager, and special education director all indicated, in separate interviews, that this is a matter of great concern to the district. As a result of this concern the district's special education leadership commissioned an outside assessment of the services and resources the district provides to its students with language-based learning disabilities: the district had recently identified students with this category of special needs as an increasingly difficult population to educate in district programs. The outside consultant prepared an assessment that included an overview of the Quincy Public Schools' current language-based learning disability program; a report of the results of a preliminary parent survey; an overview of outside 766-approved programs for students with language-based disabilities; and cost analysis findings.

The district realized that it was not sufficiently addressing the needs of the population of students with language-based learning disabilities. The decision by the district's special education leadership to examine the effectiveness of its program was consistent with the special education department's mission—and legal requirements—to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. By examining the services provided to students by outside Chapter-766-approved specialty programs, surveying the opinions of parents, and analyzing current and

projected future costs, the district compiled the necessary data to make informed programmatic decisions.

Based in part on the outside consultant's assessment, the Quincy Public Schools planned to implement a Reading Academy Program in the district in the fall of 2009 using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Implementing this program is an attempt by the district to build greater capacity to educate students with language-based learning disabilities in the Quincy Public Schools. Although the district may not initially return many students from outside programs, a strong in-district program of services will increase the district's capacity to meet future student needs and the likelihood of parental acceptance of this program as an option for students with language-based learning disabilities.

The district has a history of creating successful in-district programs. Previously, the district special education leadership internally assessed the growing mental health needs of students at the high school level. According to the 2008 special education Program Improvement Plan, 37 in-district students were found to be in need of mental health services while 30 students were receiving services in out-of-district placements. Based on this internal analysis the district planned and implemented a new program, Positive Academic Social Support (PASS), designed with flexible scheduling, more individual instructional attention, and therapeutic services to support the students and maintain them in the Quincy Public Schools. Review team members were able to visit the program at North Quincy High School and briefly interview a staff member, who stated, "We are using the same curriculum but with a sometimes slower pace to accommodate the student needs; often the students come in either earlier or later due to anxiety issues." Although still in its early stages, this program represents a commitment by the district to assess the needs of students and to plan, develop, and implement programs to meet those needs.

The special education department's leadership keeps its programs and services for students with disabilities current and effective by engaging in regular critical assessments. By examining best practices for the education of specific learners, the district targets programmatic and instructional interventions to improve student performance and close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. These regular assessments advance the mission of the department, "to provide all students with a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their unique needs and successfully maximize their potential in the least restrictive environment."

Retaining students in the district for their education also saves the school system the expense of costly tuitions and transportation and frees those funds for programmatic enhancements that improve student performance.

Curriculum Delivery

Significant progress has been made in aligning curriculum across the district, including ELA pacing guides and the creation of the QMath assessment system.

A focus of the Quincy Public Schools has been the alignment of academic benchmarks across the district in grades K-8. The most progress toward districtwide vertical and horizontal alignment

has been made in English language arts in grades K-5. According to district curriculum documents and interviews with teachers, principals, and district curriculum staff, all classroom and resource room teachers at the elementary level base their daily instruction on a districtwide pacing chart that dictates the sequence and intensity of unit coverage in the common reading/language arts program, *Trophies,* published by Harcourt Reading.

A review of district-supplied documents revealed that this phonics-based program is in use by all schools in the district in grades K-5 and in some 6th grade classes: *Trophies* was piloted in the three schools in the district receiving federal Reading First funding with such success that the program was adopted systemwide.

The district pacing guides for *Trophies* are extremely detailed and designed so that, according to the curriculum director, any child moving within the district could walk into his or her new classroom and be working on the same skills as the previous day. As they conduct their regular walk-throughs, principals and the curriculum team use these guides to ensure that every instructor is working on the same skills and stories at the same time.

The guides are divided into sections according to the thematic units in the *Trophies* program and further divided by the day. There are columns for grade-specific skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, or writing, with specific activities listed for each day. (For example, all kindergarteners' literacy blocks on the fifth day back from April vacation are to include medial phoneme isolation, blending /e/ and /d/, and writing about a make-believe bus.)

In mathematics, Quincy has made similar elementary-level gains, but by approaching it from another angle. According to principals, teachers, and documents supplied by the district, rather than making their grade 3-8 mathematics very detailed and establishing kindergarten-grade 2 pacing guides, Quincy uses common mathematics textbooks and curriculum materials and has implemented a home-grown series of mathematics assessments called QMath. These benchmarking tests are given simultaneously across the district at the end of 2nd grade (QMath 2), in the middle of 3rd grade (QMath 3), at the beginning and mid-year in 6th grade (QMath 5 and QMath 6), and mid-year in 8th grade (QMath 8). The data is used to check student progress against benchmarks and to adjust instruction.

While the pacing guides for grades K-5 and the QMath system for grades 2-8 are effective means for assuring that students have exposure to essential skills and standards in ELA and mathematics, according to teachers, principals, and curriculum and assessment team members, the district does not employ common curriculum documents that address objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments. Visits to classrooms across the district revealed just one school where learning objectives and the standards being addressed in the lesson were evident. It is notable in this connection that although the district has multiple curriculum teams, it has one director of curriculum K-12 with no subject coordinators to assist her.

The district does supply every ELA and mathematics teacher K-12 with a district-produced "Design for Learning" in each discipline. The "Designs for Learning," published in 2000, are

tables of listings of the Massachusetts standards, organized by strand and matched to learning objectives, all based on material published in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. They are an excellent reference for instructors creating lessons, course outlines, and syllabi, but they are not a common, written curriculum. Teachers in each subject and grade voluntarily share lesson plans among themselves through a dedicated page on the Quincy Public Schools website. Also, the Collins Writing Program is in use throughout the district.

Vertical teams (for grades 5 to 6 and grades 8 to 9, and for grades K-12 in foreign languages and engineering/technology) meet twice a year to determine which objectives and essential standards are to be addressed in each grade to ensure that students have the appropriate prerequisite background for success when they are promoted. These are an effective check for vertical alignment at the key transition years. Vertical teams base their work on district MCAS data.

Even in subjects without pacing guides, middle school principals interviewed all noted that great care is taken to ensure that teachers are all "on the same page" in their instruction. According to published documents, each teacher creates his or her own course outlines that describe the main objectives of the course and list materials used, which vary among classes and among schools. Teachers use and discuss the results of unit tests that are supplied with curriculum materials. According to administrators and teachers, middle school teachers meet weekly in grade-level and subject meetings to look at student work and to discuss instructional strategies.

In the two high schools, document review and interviews with teachers, principals, and department heads all indicated that there is no common, written curriculum (including objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments) for either or both of the two schools, in either mathematics or English, although there is a common format for laboratory reports. The English faculties' reported decisions to use instructional approaches based on individually-selected novels make the implementation of a common curriculum problematic, but certainly not insurmountably so.

The K-5 pacing guides in ELA are an excellent service to students, assuring that all students are instructed in the same phonics-based material, so that each student is fully prepared when promoted to the next grade. An added benefit of the ELA pacing charts is that students in substantially separate classrooms, as well as those who are pulled out for resource room services, keep up with their peers in general education classrooms. Often, resource room students join a general education classroom for direct instruction and then move back to the resource room for individualized instructional services. Likewise, the use of QMath assessments, in tandem with the "Design for Learning in Mathematics," helps instructors to know what should be covered in each grade and what benchmarks should be met for future success in mathematics. The lack of a complete, written curriculum at the secondary level may contribute to possible inequities within each school and between the two schools, North Quincy High School and Quincy High School.

The elementary schools employ data-based decision-making systems and processes for every student, regardless of IEP status, to determine appropriate placement and develop any needed instructional or intervention plan. Data is used less at the middle and high schools.

Quincy is exemplary in its effective use of assessments to gauge and support early literacy acquisition. The policy of the district, according to district and school leadership, teachers, special education staff, and district documents, is to use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess the acquisition of early literacy skills for all students from kindergarten through grade 3. They are designed to be short (one-minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy skills. Quincy also uses the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), a normative diagnostic reading assessment that determines what developmental skills students in grades 3 through 5 have mastered and where they need extra instruction or intervention. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is also used in the district. The results of these short assessments are then used to group and re-group the children for more intense phonics instruction, including Project Read, Orton-Gillingham, Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS), and Wilson Reading.

The instructional adjustments and early interventions that have resulted from examination of the data from the DIBELS and the GRADE assessments have, according to district and school-level special needs staff, cut down significantly on the number of special needs referrals and the number of children being placed on individualized education programs (IEPs) to address diagnosed learning disabilities. This data is also used as a basis for the elementary schools' Walk to Read (WTR) program. Using the leveled readers in the *Trophies* program and the DRA program, each student has thirty minutes per day of Walk to Read time, over and above regular whole-group reading instruction during the literacy block. Students are divided into WTR groups based on reading assessments and teacher input. WTR time provides intensive skill instruction at each group's instructional level, while teachers target instruction and strengthen each student's reading skills. During this time, some students may be pulled out for intense phonics or reading instruction, or for other needs that are delineated in an IEP.

The QMath system, described above, also generates data that is used for appropriate placement and for instructional and intervention plans. This data informs instruction and is used to ensure that all students are reaching appropriate benchmarks. Likewise, the vertical teams at the transition years of grades 5 to 6 and grades 8 to 9 use MCAS data to ensure that benchmarks are being met. At all grade promotions, not just those involving changes of school, teachers fill out a comprehensive student profile sheet for each student, which they not only pass on to the student's teacher in the next grade, but also discuss with that teacher at length. Each sheet contains assessment and behavioral data, as well as comments and recommendations for the student.

Another example of the exemplary use of data in this district is the integrated learning team (ILT) system in the elementary schools. Three times per year, teams are assembled in every school, consisting of the principal and/or the assistant principal, the guidance counselor (who is

also, in each elementary school, the special education chair), the school literacy specialist, and the special educator(s) assigned to each grade. The team then meets with each classroom teacher for thirty minutes, during which time the teacher goes over the data collected on each classroom student, regardless of his or her special needs status. The whole team then discusses the progress of each student and determines in each case if and what sorts of interventions would be appropriate. At the end-of-the year ILT meeting (one of which the review team witnessed), each child's placement determination for the next year is also discussed. If a child's academic difficulties—as determined by ELA and QMath data—stem from behavioral or traumatic issues, the child will have been discussed at, or referred to, the school's weekly student support team (SST) meeting.

Interviews with middle school staff elicited the comments that while data is "everywhere" in the elementary schools, data "drops off the radar in middle schools," resulting in "significant gaps" that must be addressed with individual classroom assessments. There is a system of weekly collaborative grade-level meetings in the middle schools, when teachers gather to look at student work and to read students' responses to common open-response prompts, but they do not have much common data by which to judge student achievement. The only standardized tests in the high schools are the MCAS tests, but each school does use common mid-year and final exam questions in each of the core subjects.

The use of data in the elementary schools is beneficial to students in that it allows for rapid responses to learning deficits, which staff address with intense and rigorous interventions. The team structure within each school and across the district allows teachers to confer with others about assessment data and how best to use it to support students. The lack of data in the upper grades may preclude students from equal access to curriculum and attainment of academic benchmarks.

Students with learning differences or special instructional needs are identified by teachers and schools early in the academic process. Both early and ongoing interventions are intense, rigorous, and effective.

As evidenced by interviews with special education staff, teachers, and principals, as well as site visits, the district is dedicated in its focus on using data to identify and then appropriately support students with special needs. As noted above, students who are identified using the DIBELS tests as not reaching literacy benchmarks are given more intense phonics instruction, including Project Read, Orton-Gillingham, Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS), and Wilson Reading. Depending on the student's needs, these interventions are made either during classroom center time or through pull-outs.

There are substantially separate classes as well as inclusion classes available at every grade and in every school when data and the referral process indicate that the structure and support of an IEP would best fulfill a student's needs,. For some substantially separate or behavior services as well as in some cases of severe language-based learning disabilities, the student may attend a cluster program in a neighborhood school other than his or her own, but Quincy is focused on serving as many students in district as possible. To this end, the district hired a consultant to

examine the possibility of starting a Reading Academy Program for students with specific learning disabilities, as noted in the Leadership section of this report.

Quincy has inclusion opportunities for students with academic, behavioral, and emotional needs. During interviews, principals were enthusiastic about the district's inclusion model, although they expressed concern about the lack of resources available to replicate it in every class. One elementary principal noted that resources were insufficient to implement full inclusion for all three grade 5 classes in the school. According to the special education leadership, the insufficiency of resources available for hiring special education teachers necessitates that only some classes can be specifically identified as inclusion classes. The district's special education enrollment data for 2007-2008 showed 1335 students on IEPs with 51.0 percent enrolled in fully inclusive classrooms compared with the state rate of 55.7 percent. Moreover, the district rate was 21.2 percent for partial inclusion, 20.1 percent for substantially separate, and 7.7 percent for out-of-district compared with the state rates of 22.5 percent, 15.1 percent, and 6.7 percent respectively. There may be opportunities to integrate more special education students into regular education classes through additional goals and strategies.

In spite of this hindrance, review team members found that students with special needs were well integrated into their classes. When visiting an inclusion class, it was virtually impossible to determine which teacher in the classroom was the special needs teacher and which the general education teacher. Both teachers were fully engaged and interacting with all students through a variety of approaches that included whole-class instruction, technology, small-group activities using games, and individual student assistance. Likewise, the practiced observer could not determine which students were on IEPs and which were not.

The inclusion model in mathematics at the middle and high schools is unique and effective. According to documents, site visits, and interviews, students with IEPs in mathematics are scheduled for a system of wraparound classes called "re-teach." In a six-day schedule, all students have a math period each day (55 minutes in middle school; 45 minutes in high school). Students whose IEPs require extra support in mathematics have both a general education and a special education teacher in class, and their next scheduled period is for an elective or a foreign language. For three of the six days, the students do not attend that class, but instead go to "re-teach" where the special needs math teacher helps them with the information they have just learned in the inclusion math class. This is currently available only in mathematics and only for students with IEPs.

By being identified and addressed in the earliest grade possible, students' needs are often met early enough to attain literacy and/or numeracy before they develop a life-long learning disability. The use of data to regularly check progress allows many students to continue in the general education population without ever having been on a formal IEP. For those students who are on IEPs, every care is taken to ensure that they are keeping up with the general course of studies, through the use of ELA pacing guides in the classroom and inclusion whenever a student's needs make it possible. Having some classes and not others designated as inclusion

could be problematic in the upper grades, as some students on IEPs may be capable of more advanced work than is available in the standard inclusion classes.

The district's attempts to include more students in accelerated learning programs have not been accompanied by policies and procedures designed to support more students in benefiting from these programs. One effect has been that ELL and special education students are enrolled in accelerated programs only in isolated instances.

At least initially, the consideration of a student for placement in accelerated programs or classes follows a set pattern in the Quincy Public Schools. At interviews, district and school staff indicated that entrance at the end of elementary school to accelerated programs begins in the 4th grade. It involves a teacher recommendation, followed by student assessments in all of the core subjects using the Stanford 10. Those 4th grade students who score above a certain level are chosen to take the Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary Students (SAGES), a norm-referenced test for giftedness in language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. Principals and department chairs indicated that the SAGES test was added to the battery of assessments to help determine the difference between a gifted student who may not perform well in the classroom and a student who is very industrious and completes a large volume of schoolwork. The SAGES tests identify giftedness, not tenacity, and across all disciplines, not in individual subjects in which students have the aptitude to excel. Students who are advanced in only one or two subjects—for instance, math or writing—and not the others, are not accepted for advanced coursework. Those students who score high on all SAGES topics are invited to join the Academy, where they attend enrichment classes at Central Middle School one day a week throughout 5th grade.

For 6th grade, those same students are invited to attend middle school at Central, rather than their neighborhood school. At Central, in the Advanced Placement Center, they have the only access in the district to "advanced placement" grade 6-8 classes in language arts, reading, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Teachers interviewed as part of a focus group indicated that parents can request consideration in 4th grade for admittance to the program even if the student is not identified and recommended by a teacher. Parents may choose to have their child retested by SAGES in the 5th grade to give him or her a second opportunity to attend the Central Academy for middle school. When asked whether the district has a policy, practice, or procedure designed to increase the number or proportion of students from underrepresented subgroups, no one interviewed by the review team, including principals, indicated knowledge of any.

The district has a full complement of Advanced Placement (AP) courses available at both North Quincy High (NQHS) and Quincy High School (QHS). According to the high school department heads, there are prerequisite skills and classes for these college-level courses, so any student choosing to take Advanced Placement as a junior or senior must plan and prepare for this option beforehand.

Throughout middle school, the students in the Advanced Placement Center are prepared in all core subjects for enrollment in the advanced level and Advanced Placement courses in high school. Students who take the "standard" courses, including special needs students in inclusion classes, are at a disadvantage. Department chairs at North Quincy High School indicated that there has been an occasional student from an English language learner class or special education program enrolled in accelerated programs but that those were individual cases in isolated situations. About 75 percent of the students in AP classes in Quincy come from middle school programs other than the Advanced Placement Center. Even so, the proportion of high school students enrolled in one or more AP classes is low—about 13 percent.

To broaden the profile of the students enrolled in advanced courses, the principal and assistant principal at North Quincy High School sent letters to the parents of all students at the end of 2007-2008 encouraging students to consider enrolling in at least one course at a higher level than any ever taken by the student before, either honors or advanced. The principal stated that he wanted to "raise student expectations and challenge them to try higher level work" by this practice. Many students took advantage of this opportunity, and there was an increase in the number of students who enrolled in AP classes and took and passed the AP test.

But according to department chairs, this challenge had mixed success. One stated, "It was an absolute disaster because the students were not prepared for the high level math." All other department chairs but one said it was a bad idea, requiring a lot of extra help and support for the students who were stretching. Department chairs also indicated that once students were in higher-level classes, a return to lower-level classes was sometimes impossible because of a lack of space, and students often failed or did poorly as a result. The most significant problem described by the teachers was that teachers in standard courses have lower expectations, and so students in those courses are given much more support than those in honors or advanced classes, including having notes handed out to them or being given notes where they just fill in blanks during lecture or lab. Therefore, the average student is unprepared for the intensity of work required in higher-level classes.

The attempt to increase the number of students in advanced classes, although well intended, also did not take into account that for some higher level classes preparation must be in place from classes taken at the elementary and middle school levels. Again, when department chairs were asked if there was a district or school policy designed to increase the number of underrepresented student subgroups in accelerated classes, they expressed no awareness.

It appears that, lacking a policy or approved practices and procedures to increase the proportion of underrepresented students in these classes, the district relies on individual teachers, guidance counselors, and administrative staff to act as institutional agents on behalf of some students. This practice does not address the underrepresentation of subgroups in a systemic manner and does not provide open access for students and families who may be unfamiliar with school department processes.

The existing achievement gap is reinforced by the lack of a district policy with approved practices and procedures designed to interest underrepresented students and their families in

enrolling in accelerated classes and inform them about the process for doing so. ESE statistics indicate that in 2008-2009 15.9 percent of students were special education students; in addition, 12.0 percent were limited English proficient.

Advanced Placement classes are at the level of first-year college courses; therefore, any student who is prepared for AP is prepared for college or other postsecondary plans. It follows, then, that when a district wishes to prepare every graduate for college or other postsecondary plans, it will prepare all students to have the option to take Advanced Placement classes in 11th or 12th grade. But students who do not excel in all subjects are not given the opportunity to prepare for AP courses by access to accelerated programming in middle school. And from the description by North Quincy High School teachers of the problems students had going from standard courses to honors or AP courses, there is not a continuum of expectations that would allow students in standard courses to make the transition to honors and AP classes. Additionally, there is not a continuum of support as they move from standard to advanced classes.

Human resources and professional development

Attempts by the district to create a diverse and effective teaching staff are supported by systems that monitor and coordinate the progress made by professional staff toward attaining appropriate licenses in the areas of general and special education.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education statistics for 2008-2009 for the district showed changes in the student population that could present a cultural and language-based challenge for professional staff in their efforts to deliver the curriculum and to provide students with an effective learning environment. Specifically, the population of Asian students increased by 3.2 percent from 2006 to represent 30.8 percent of the district's enrollment in 2008-2009; according to the director of human resources, many Asian students are immigrants from China and Vietnam. In addition, the combined percentages of first language not English (FLNE) and limited English proficient (LEP) students increased by 6.5 percentage points, to 40.3 percent in 2008-2009. According to staffing data for the district for 2007-2008, 31.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) of the staff was Asian; this represented 2.7 percent of the district's 1,156.4 total FTE.

District leaders, including the director of human resources, and principals and staff spoke of their awareness of the need to increase the diversity of the teaching staff so that it will be able to address the cultural and language-based needs of the district's students. They indicated the need to continually seek ways to attract diverse, effective teachers. The district has practices in place to attract appropriate applicants for teaching positions. These practices include newspaper advertisements in the *Patriot Ledger* and *Boston Globe.* Also, the district communicates by email or fax with the Asian-American Association in Quincy. In both initiatives, the response has been mixed.

There is a pathway for hiring professional staff. Both formal and informal practices are integrated in the pathway. The director of human resources is responsible for pre-screening applicants. Principals, directors, and department heads play key roles in the hiring process.

The director of human resources provided evidence of the difficulty of retaining qualified teachers who have the diversity needed to address specific student issues. The case focused on the difficulty a qualified subject matter teacher (with a language-based barrier) was having in passing the communications segment of the Massachusetts Test for Educator License (MTEL). In this situation, the director of human resources requested a waiver extension. In addition, a plan has been set up for the teacher to receive in-district assistance to attain a preliminary license.

School and District Profiles data for 2008-2009 on the ESE website (in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Report Card) indicated that 94.6 percent of Quincy teachers were licensed in their teaching assignment, compared to 96.5 percent of teachers statewide. Also, 95.4 percent of the core academic classes were taught by teachers who had attained highly qualified (HQ) status, compared to 96.5 percent of these classes statewide. The district provided evidence that there is a focus on establishing an effective teaching force that would equal and surpass the state's averages. In the 2008-2009 District Improvement Plan, Standard 4, Human Resource Management and Professional Development, included an indicator that addressed the issue of appropriate licensure for all professional staff. The DIP documented specific benchmarks, sources of evidence, and teams (business and personnel) responsible for gathering information about licensure issues.

The district's "Goals Set, Goals Met 2008-2009" report gave the status of the 2008-2009 goals for the indicator. Two of the six listed goals were met. The first goal was for information concerning personnel and human resources issues to be shared among all supervisors at all levels. The second goal was for all principals and supervisors to become familiar with both the ESE licensure regulations and federal regulations concerning Highly Qualified (HQ) status. The remaining four goals for the indicator were given ongoing status. There was a detailed and sequential plan for the district to achieve the 2008-2009 DIP goal of having 100 percent HQ teachers. The plan included 1) direct communication between the director of human resources and each non-HQ staff member, 2) course work toward passing the MTEL, 3) mentoring, and 4) timelines for periodic checks for the completion of responsibilities for reaching HQ status.

In addition to evidence from the DIP and the "Goals Set, Goals Met" report on the status of DIP goals, interviews with staff showed that the district is addressing the issue of establishing an effective and qualified teacher force. During the 2008-2009 school year, the director of human resources visited and talked directly with all 98 teachers who needed to obtain appropriate licenses. The director was assisted by the early childhood director in this initiative. As a consequence, at the time of the review there were 28 teachers who did not have appropriate licenses. Fifteen of the 28 teachers were not making progress. Thirteen of the 28 teachers were considered critical staff: 8 of the 13 were special education teachers and 5 of the 13 were in the sciences. Based on the critical needs of the district, the director of human resources planned to request waiver extensions from ESE and indicated that teachers who were not deemed critical staff and who did not complete their waiver conditions were notified of non-renewal in April 2009.

The growing trend of incoming students with diverse profiles (cultural, academic, linguistic, and socio-economic) and the need to provide these students with an appropriate professional staff present a challenge for the district. The district's focus on providing differentiated instructional strategies to deliver the curriculum so as to meet the needs of the diverse learners in its schools is directly linked to the profile of its professional staff. Teachers need to plan appropriate lessons, implement effective instructional strategies in lessons, establish classroom routines to manage the students in the classroom, and develop a positive rapport with students. The district has identified the need to continue hiring teachers who can communicate with students and implement instructional strategies that address student diversity. For example, the academic leadership in the district noted the difficulty of determining whether a student needs an IEP or the source of a student's academic problem(s) is language-based.

The district's process for planning, implementing, and assessing its professional development plans results in flexible plans that are adapted to address the needs of its professional staff and the diverse needs of its student population.

Interviews with the director of professional development and key members of the professional development team (PDT) indicated that the aim of professional development in the district is the implementation of instructional strategies based on the diverse needs of its students. The overview of the 2008-2009 Professional Development Plan (PDP) stated, "The effectiveness of our efforts in professional development will be reflected in the instructional practices of each classroom and in improved student achievement." This statement was supported by ESE's 2008 Coordinated Program Review report, which indicated that both general and special education staff were given opportunities for training in special education requirements, diverse learning styles, and methods of collaboration with colleagues. In addition, the report found that the district considered the needs of all staff in developing training opportunities for both professional and paraprofessional staff. Interviews with principals revealed that the goals and objectives of the 2008-2009 PDP were aligned with the District Improvement Plan and embedded in their School Improvement Plans.

The PDT is a key component of the district professional development process. The team includes a chairperson (senior director of curriculum) and an assistant (early childhood coordinator). Its members include a cross-section of the district's administrators, directors, teachers, and department heads. The team's role is to create, implement, and assess the goals and objectives of the district's system-level professional development.

A cyclical three-step process is used to create the professional development program. It consists of planning, implementing, and assessing. The PDT uses criteria from project management to write all of its goals; they must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (SMART). It uses a template to establish and organize professional development initiatives. The DIP includes standards, indicators, and benchmarks to assess these initiatives.

An interview with the chairperson of the PDT indicated that a collaborative model is used in the planning process to allow all professional staff (learners, leaders, facilitators, and the 75 teams) to contribute. This model provides an opportunity for districtwide and schoolwide participation

of staff in all phases of professional development planning. Teacher surveys are analyzed annually to assist the professional development team in planning future offerings.

There is evidence in the content of the PDP that a variety of assessments, research, staff surveys, and student achievement data were used to establish its 13 objectives. The plan addressed the priority needs stemming from the district's diverse profile. For example, one of the plan's goals was to train at least 100 staff members in English language learner (ELL) "category trainings" required by ESE: interviews with teaching staff revealed a need to provide ongoing ELL training based on the growing population of ELL students.

The district provides adequate time to plan and conduct professional development activities. It includes system and principal release days every Tuesday and 10 hours of contractual professional development. In addition, there are scheduled grade-level and department meetings, as well as scheduled meetings for the district's many operational teams. The amount of informal common planning time varies among the district's schools. Teacher assignments, school schedules, and resources have an impact on the ability to provide staff with more collaborative interactions. Interviews with teachers indicated the need to have more time to implement their training and to prioritize the various district initiatives.

The district's systems for aligning professional development and collaboration among professional and support staff are designed to have a positive impact on student progress and achievement. This continuous focus on what happens in the classroom is critical. The application of appropriate strategies for differentiating instruction to meet the diverse learning styles of the district's diverse student population is a continuing theme. Collaborative efforts using the team model assist in the assessment of the effectiveness of instruction and the delivery of the curriculum to students with special needs.

The district has effective systems and structures in place for supervision and evaluation and for the analysis of data. These systems and structures allow it to use student performance data and other information to guide school and district improvement planning, to improve instruction and the delivery of the curriculum, and also to plan professional development; they are designed to support all learners and to make the responsibility for student achievement a collaborative effort.

The 2008-2009 Professional Development Plan (PDP) had one objective that specifically targeted the needs of administrators in the areas of leadership and guiding others toward a systematic approach to educational reform. The superintendent delegates the leadership of the schools to principals and program directors, in a hierarchy that provides a seamless route for information to pass from and to the superintendent. The assistant superintendent of school operations and assessment, senior director of curriculum and Title I, and director of student support services report directly to the superintendent and are essential personnel in the superintendent's monitoring and evaluation of principals and program directors. Interviews with principals and the director of curriculum revealed that a key element of supervision and evaluation practices is the team structure. Each of the 75 educational and operational teams under the supervision of the superintendent and the superintendent's leadership team (SLT)

focuses on a specific function (e.g. professional development) and establishes a maximum of three goals. The goals reflect those of the District Improvement Plan and support the School Improvement Plans. Annually, in the "Goals Set, Goals Met" report, the superintendent's leadership team presents the status of each of the goals set by each team. As an example, the principals' leadership team (PLT) reported that "ongoing" was the rating given for its goal of creating a walk-through protocol, one that was used consistently during the 2008-2009 school year.

The district has systems in place to analyze data and use it to make decisions aimed at increasing students' achievement in core academics. The district's organizational chart for 2008-2009 reveals a hierarchy that focuses on student achievement. In this organizational set-up, the assistant superintendent and the district's assessment specialist are key personnel in the system. Interviews with principals and program directors indicated that they have access to student achievement data and that there has been some training in data collection and analysis (e.g., TestWiz). The 2008-2009 PDP included a standard and indicator that focused on data analysis skills for staff.

Both principals and program directors noted the assessment specialist as a key source of data for the professional staff when making data-driven decisions. The assessment specialist is the chairperson of the site assessment teams in the district. The role of each of these teams is to disaggregate and analyze its school's MCAS scores and other data. The scores and other data are used to develop the district improvement plan (DIP) and the school improvement plans (SIPs). The information from the assessment teams is also used to develop goals and action steps for professional development planning. The "Goals Set, Goals Met 2008-2009" report indicated that the goals of the site assessment teams were given a status of "completed or met." One goal was to present MCAS analysis to the district's schools three times per year. The other goal was for members of the team to acquire additional skill in manipulating data using TestWiz. In general, data and other information are used by school administrators to address the quality of instruction and the effectiveness of the delivery of the curriculum, and to determine priorities in making decisions about distributing resources.

An interview with two principals revealed how they evaluate staff and handle the distribution of resources. At one of the high schools, the principal evaluates the assistant principal, deans, and department heads. The department heads evaluate teachers, using a walk-through protocol to conduct observations. A more detailed evaluation form is used for teachers with professional status. Teachers discuss personal goals with department heads. In general, evaluations do not directly link a teacher's assessment with individual student data. According to remarks made by the principal, evaluations are both descriptive and prescriptive. Also, data is used to make decisions that concern core academics or grade-level adjustments. At one of the elementary schools, the principal used student achievement data in the decision to make one of the three 5th grade classes a co-taught inclusion class (with two certified teachers). In general, student achievement data is used to help make decisions that affect instruction, curriculum, and resources.

The District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans provide evidence that both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks are used to evaluate staff. Supervisors use student achievement data to guide teachers and suggest specific training for them to consider for their professional growth.

The team system provides linkage among the district's human resources, supervision, and professional development functions. During interviews with the directors in these areas, they spoke of common interests and the practices in place (e.g., scheduled team meetings) that allow them to collaborate. The 2008-2009 DIP included a variety of teams (e.g., personnel, professional development, and teacher/mentor) that link the areas of human resources, supervision, and professional development. As an example, the teams responsible for meeting a benchmark for mentoring included the business and personnel team, superintendent's management team, and teacher mentor team.

Because of the funding difficulties that exist at the present time and are projected into the near future, the district leadership and professional staff indicated the need to find ways to bring in outside critical consultative help. An interview with the director of curriculum revealed that a $10,000 membership fee paid to an outside agency for professional development resources for the district will not be renewed. As a consequence, teachers interviewed voiced their concern about the professional development offerings in the near future.

The district has the systems in place to use data and other information for continued growth of its professional staff and to allow staff to share in developing the district's capacity to provide educational and support opportunities to improve student achievement. The benefit for students of effective supervision and evaluation is built into the human resource and professional development systems established in the district. The systems are designed to support all learners and to make the responsibility for student achievement a collaborative effort. An interview with both general and special education students at Quincy High School provided insight about the quality of their education during their years at the school. All students graded their experiences at the high school with an "A". The challenge of the academic programs, the support services, and the quality of the teachers were the subjects of some of the positive comments made by the students. Students benefit from an array of classroom environments and instructional strategies that provide them with auditory, visual, and kinesthetic stimuli. One student stated, "I like Talking Notes. That's how I learn best."

Recommendations

Leadership

1. The district should continue its use of teams to implement the DIP and SIPs.

    - The district's efficient and effective team structure is in place to support the implementation of the DIP and SIPs systemwide. Document review revealed a detailed and extensive systemwide schedule of team meetings, at the district and school levels, that is developed in advance for the entire school year.

    - At the district level the superintendent's leadership team (SLT) and the principals' leadership team (PLT) meet regularly and work to ensure that the goals of the DIP and SIPs remain aligned and remain the focus of attention for any revisions warranted by an analysis of student performance data.

    - The Quincy district's team focus continues at the school level. Each school has an assessment team (AT), an integrated learning team (ILT) and a student support team (SST). The teams at the school level are designed to carry out the DIP and SIP to the classroom level.

    - The ILTs meet regularly during the course of the school year to analyze student behavior and academic performance, plan student groupings and recommend placement changes. The SSTs also meet regularly to address individual student academic and social-emotional needs.

    - The district's system of well-coordinated teams functions to keep staff dedicated to the tasks that support a DIP designed to improve the performance of all students. From the classroom level to the superintendent's office, the Quincy Public Schools demonstrate that there is a shared responsibility for the learning of all their students.

2. a. The district's leaders and principals (with the assistance of its assessment specialist and assessment teams) should consider extending the use of data-based instructional decision-making to all program areas and classrooms by adapting effective models currently used, such as the model of early literacy focus, or adopting research-based models.

    b. To strengthen the capacity of the assessment specialist to support principals and teachers in making instructional decisions based on data, the district leadership should consider the feasibility of identifying, training, and designating additional staff for this purpose.

    - Interviews with principals and program directors revealed that they have access to student achievement data and they indicated that there has been some training in data collection and analysis (e.g., TestWiz). In general, student achievement data is used to help make decisions that impact on instruction, curriculum, and resources.

    - Both principals and program directors noted the assessment specialist as a key source of data for the professional staff when making data-driven decisions.

- While the review team found that the use of data in the elementary schools is beneficial to students, allowing for rapid responses to learning deficits, it found a comparative lack of data in the upper grades that may preclude students from equal access to curriculum and attainment of academic benchmarks.

- One elementary principal stated that some teachers feel uncomfortable with using data to inform their instruction and might benefit from professional development on analyzing and using assessment data to improve academic achievement.

- Some middle school principals were concerned about whether instructional changes were happening in the classroom based on analysis of student performance data.

- A review of special education data suggested that there might be areas for district and school leaders to target, using such data, to improve student achievement within the special education subgroup.

- By increasing the use of data-based instructional decision-making, the district would see the success that has resulted from several examples of its use in the elementary schools replicated in other areas.

3. The district should consider devising a consistent strategy to monitor the fidelity of data-driven classroom instructional interventions.

- Principals shared a variety of monitoring practices that they employ, e.g., regular "walk-throughs" or classroom visits, review of hard copy assessment reports and online Excel spreadsheets from the district, frequent network connection via laptops to access classroom and student profile data through Test Wiz, informal feedback from parents, and formal teacher evaluations.

- Principals and their assessment teams annually amend SIPs to reflect needs based on an analysis of student performance data from the most recent MCAS test administration.

- One elementary principal stated that teachers use MCAS and other data inconsistently to inform their instruction, noting that some teachers feel uncomfortable with this practice and might benefit from professional development on analyzing and using assessment data to improve academic achievement.

4. The district should consider examining the existing nomination and selection process for the middle school accelerated program to identify potential barriers to access for underrepresented students and their families. It should also consider developing a districtwide policy for student enrollment in accelerated programs that would provide for outreach to students and families from underrepresented subgroups and a clear pathway for them. A partnership with the Quincy Parent Advisory Committee and community organizations may assist in this process.

- At interviews, district and school staff indicated that entrance to accelerated programs at the end of elementary school involves a teacher recommendation, followed by student

assessments using the Stanford 10 and, for those students who score above a certain level, the Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary Students (SAGES) test.

- When asked whether the district has a policy, practice, or procedure designed to increase the number or proportion of students from underrepresented subgroups, no one interviewed by the review team, including principals, indicated knowledge of any.

- Encouraging students at North Quincy High School in 2008 to consider enrolling in at least one course at a higher level than ever taken by the student before had mixed success, in part because for some higher level classes the preparation must be in place from classes taken at the elementary and middle school levels.

- There are currently no procedures that promote participation by students who are members of underrepresented subgroups in higher-level classes; as a result, the performance gap between them and other students is reinforced.

5. The district should continue to monitor the progress of students in the Positive Academic Social Support (PASS) program and the implementation of the new Reading Academy to ensure improved student performance as an outcome of these programs.

- Based on an internal analysis of the growing mental health needs of high school students, the district planned and implemented the new PASS program, designed with flexible scheduling, more individual instructional attention, and therapeutic services to support students with mental health needs and maintain them in the Quincy Public Schools.

- The new Reading Academy is an attempt by the district to build greater capacity to educate students with language-based learning disabilities in the Quincy Public Schools.

- A strong in-district program of services will increase the district's capacity to meet future student needs and the likelihood of parental acceptance of the Reading Academy as an option for students with language-based learning disabilities.

- Although it is important to maintain students in or return students to the Quincy Public Schools to ensure their access to the least restrictive environment, it is also important for the special education leadership to continue to engage in regular critical assessments of its programs and services, including its new ones, to ensure quality learning for the students.

Curriculum Delivery

1. The district should consider reallocating resources and reassigning staff to create distributed responsibility for math, ELA, science, and social studies curriculum coordination, so that the district can move quickly to create, support, and continually adjust written curriculum (including objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments) for all grades and subjects in all schools.

- The Quincy Public School District, while it uses curriculum teams, employs just one director of curriculum for the district K-12, with no subject coordinators.

- The district does not employ common curriculum documents that address objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments. Visits to classrooms across the district revealed just one school where learning objectives and the standards being addressed in the lesson were evident.

- There is no common, written curriculum (including objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, and measurable outcomes or assessments) for either or both of the two high schools, in either mathematics or English.

- The lack of a complete, written curriculum at the secondary level may contribute to possible inequities within each school and between the two high schools, North Quincy High School and Quincy High School.

- Having complete, written curriculum for all grades and subjects in all schools would improve the consistency of curriculum and instruction throughout the district.

2. The district should further strengthen its curriculum by expanding the ELA pacing guides through grade 8, making the existing mathematics pacing guides for grades 3-8 more detailed, and creating analogous pacing guides in mathematics for grades K-2.

- The K-5 pacing guides in ELA are an excellent service to students, assuring that all students are instructed in the same phonics-based material, so that each student is fully prepared when promoted to the next grade.

- An added benefit of the ELA pacing charts is that students in substantially separate classrooms, as well as those who are pulled out for resource room services, keep up with their peers in general education classrooms.

- Expanding the use of similar pacing guides to other grades and to mathematics would improve consistency across the district in instruction and thus in student learning.

3. a. The district should continue to use the DIBELS, GRADE, and DRA assessments for elementary students, and consider expanding their use through 6th grade where the materials are available.

b. The district should consider employing assessment systems that would provide standardized data to gauge mathematics achievement for all elementary students that could then, like the literacy assessments, inform the ILT process.

c. The district should also follow through with stated plans to increase the scope of the QMath system, so that all students, K-8, are tested using this districtwide benchmarking assessment.

- The instructional adjustments and early interventions that have resulted from examination of the data from the DIBELS and the GRADE assessments have, according to district and school-level special needs staff, cut down significantly on the number of special needs referrals and the number of children being placed on IEPs to address diagnosed learning disabilities.

- The use of data in the elementary schools is beneficial to students in that it allows for rapid responses to learning deficits, which staff address with intense and rigorous interventions.

- The use of the DIBELS, GRADE, and DRA assessments, which has been so effective at the grades where they are currently used, would, if expanded, provide improvements in learning for other students as well; the use of formative and summative assessments in mathematics would expand these improvements in learning to mathematics, as well.

4. Likewise, at the high school level, the Quincy Public Schools should consider formalizing the standards measured on the common mid-year and final assessments, so that standardized objectives are assessed, resulting in data that can be analyzed and used to inform instruction in a more comprehensive manner than studying common questions or analyzing just 10th grade MCAS data.

- The only standardized tests in the high schools are the MCAS tests, but each school does use common mid-year and final exam questions in each of the core subjects.

- The lack of data in the upper grades may preclude students from equal access to curriculum and attainment of academic benchmarks.

5. The district should consider backward mapping AP courses in the district to 6th grade and creating curriculum and professional development opportunities so that all students are prepared for these college-level classes by their senior year in high school.

- According to the high school department heads, there are prerequisite skills and classes for AP courses, so any student choosing to take Advanced Placement as a junior or senior must plan for this option beforehand.

- Students who have been invited to join the Advanced Placement Center at Central Middle School based on their scores on the Stanford 10 and on all subjects on the Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary Students (SAGES), a norm-referenced test for giftedness in language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science, have the only access in the district to "advanced placement" grade 6-8 classes in those subjects: language arts, reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. Throughout middle school, these students are prepared in all core subjects for enrollment in the advanced level and Advanced Placement courses in high school.

- The SAGES tests identify giftedness, not tenacity, and across all disciplines, not in individual subjects in which students have the aptitude to excel.

Human resources and professional development

1. The district should continue to explore ways to reach out to the community and beyond to establish an active file of potential applicants who match the cultural, socio-economic, linguistic, and academic backgrounds of its student population. The district could, for example, initiate a cooperative effort to work with similar districts and state agencies to compile a database of professional staff to use in creating a diverse and effective teaching force.

- According to staffing data for the district for 2007-2008, 31.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) of the staff, or 2.7 percent of the district's 1,156.4 total FTE, was Asian, as opposed to 30.8 percent of the district's 2008-2009 student population.

- The need to increase teaching staff diversity was reiterated by district and school leaders.

- The district's focus on providing differentiated instructional strategies to deliver the curriculum so as to meet the needs of the diverse learners in its schools is directly linked to the profile of its professional staff.

2. The district should continue its focus on diverse learners by prioritizing provision of a more consistent pattern of staff trainings and professional development offerings in the area of differentiated instruction. It should also continue to prioritize specific training to develop effective instructional strategies for the growing population of ELL students.

- Interviews with the director of professional development and key members of the professional development team indicated that the aim of professional development in the district is the implementation of instructional strategies based on the diverse needs of its students.

- The application of appropriate strategies for differentiating instruction to meet the diverse learning styles of the district's diverse student population is a continuing theme.

- The 2008-2009 Professional Development Plan addressed the priority needs stemming from the district's diverse profile. One of its goals was to train at least 100 staff members in English language learner (ELL) "category trainings" required by ESE: interviews with teaching staff revealed a need to provide ongoing ELL training based on the growing population of ELL students.

3. The district should continue to use quantitative assessments (e.g., MCAS) qualitative assessments (e.g., teacher surveys), and input from all stakeholders to assist the professional development team in developing plans for upcoming professional development. Student achievement data should be disaggregated at the individual student level, not only to allow teachers to focus more on the effectiveness of their repertoire of instructional strategies, but also to guide planning for professional development activities.

- After the assessment teams disaggregate and analyze their schools' MCAS scores and other data, this information is used to develop goals and action steps for professional development planning.

- Teacher surveys are analyzed annually to assist the professional development team in planning future offerings.

- There was evidence in the content of the 2008-2009 Professional Development Plan that a variety of assessments, research, staff surveys, and student achievement data were used to establish its 13 objectives.

- The professional development team's members include a cross-section of the district's administrators, directors, teachers, and department heads; it uses a collaborative model in the planning process to allow all professional staff to contribute in all phases of professional development planning.

- The disaggregation of student achievement data at the individual student level would give teachers more refined data to use to decide on instructional strategies and would give the professional development team more information to use in planning professional development.

4. The district should regularly assess the effectiveness of the team model, a key component in evaluating staff that provides them with the opportunities to grow professionally and to collaborate to improve the district's capacity to support all learners. The model should be continuously revised as the needs of the district and its schools change.

- A key element of supervision and evaluation practices is the team structure. Each of the district's teams focuses on a specific function and establishes a maximum of three goals that reflect the District Improvement Plan and support the School Improvement Plans. Annually, in the "Goals Set, Goals Met" report, the superintendent's leadership team presents the status of each of the goals set by each team.

- The team system provides linkage among the district's human resources, supervision, and professional development functions.

- The district has the systems in place to use data and other information for continued growth of its professional staff and to allow staff to share in developing the district's capacity to provide educational and support opportunities to improve student achievement.

- Regular assessment would allow the district to optimize these systems.

Appendix A: Differentiated Needs Review Team Members

The review of the Quincy Public Schools was conducted from June 8 - June 11, 2009, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Lawrence J. Finnerty, Leadership and Site Coordinator

Alison L. Fraser, Curriculum Delivery

Joe Nigro, Human Resources and Professional Development

Marlene Godfrey, Special Education

Appendix B: Differentiated Needs Review Activities and Schedule

Differentiated Needs Review Activities

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

o The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Quincy Public Schools' central office administration:

Superintendent of Schools; Director of Business; Senior Director, Curriculum and Instruction; Senior Director, Student Support Services; Director of Human Resources; Director of Title I/ELL; Director of Special Education; Coordinator of McKinney-Vento; Assessment Specialist; Early Childhood Coordinator; Team Administrators; Professional Development Director; Curriculum Team.

o The review team visited the following schools in the Quincy Public Schools: Clifford H. Marshall Elementary School (K-4), Francis W. Parker Elementary School (K-5), Lincoln-Hancock Community School (PK-5), Squantum Elementary School (K-5)), Merrymount Elementary School (K-5), Atlantic Middle School (6-8), Broad Meadows Middle School (6-8), Point Webster Middle School (5-8), North Quincy High School (9-12), and Quincy High School (9-12).

o During school visits, the review team conducted 18 interviews with school principals, teachers, department chairs, students, and parents.

o The review team conducted 25 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 10 schools visited.

o The review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department

     o District profile data

     o Latest Coordinated Program Review Report

     o Staff contracts

     o Reports on licensure and highly qualified status

     o Long-term enrollment trends

     o End-of-year financial report for the district for 2008

     o List of the district's federal and state grants

     o Municipal profile

o The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels

     o Organization chart

     o District Improvement Plan

     o School Improvement Plans

- o   School Committee Policy Manual
- o   ELA Design for Learning
- o   Mathematics Design for Learning
- o   ELA Pacing Chart K – 5
- o   Course outlines, Middle School
- o   Course outlines, High School
- o   High School Program of Studies
- o   Calendar of Formative and Summative Assessments
- o   Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
- o   Descriptions of Student Support Programs
- o   Program Evaluations
- o   Student and Family Handbooks
- o   Faculty Handbook
- o   Professional Development Program/Schedule/Courses
- o   Teacher Planning Time/Meeting Schedules
- o   Teacher Evaluation Tool
- o   Classroom Observation Tools/Learning Walk Tools
- o   Job Descriptions (for central office/school administrators and instructional staff)
- o   Principal Evaluations
- o   Description of Pre-Referral Process
- o   School Schedules
- o   Bain Associates Special Education Program Assessment

Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the differentiated needs review of the Quincy Public Schools, conducted from June 8 - June 11, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
June 8 Introductory meeting with superintendent, district leaders; interviews with district staff and chairpersons. Interview with superintendent. Interviews with student assessment and program evaluation leaders. School visit: Lincoln-Hancock Elementary, interview with principals, classroom observations School visit: Merrymount Elementary, iInterview with principal, classroom observations	**June 9** Interviews with: Title I, McKinney Vento, ELL, Student Services. Interview with professional development director. Interview with human resources director Interview with curriculum team and principals	**June 9** School visit: Broad Meadows Middle School Interview with principal, classroom observations, teacher team meetings Interview with special education director	**June 10** High school visits: North Quincy High, Quincy High. Principal interviews, classroom observations interviews with department heads, student focus groups. School visits: Parker Elementary, Atlantic Middle School, parent group, teacher group Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; follow-up interviews; team meeting.	**June 11** School visits: Marshall and Squantum Elementary Schools, interviews with principals. classroom observations. Team meeting Final meeting with district leaders