How Is Your School District Performing?

A look at

Salem

Public Schools

2004–2006

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

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

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Salem Public Schools, Lawrence Callahan; the school department staff; and the town officials of Salem.

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INTRODUCTION

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

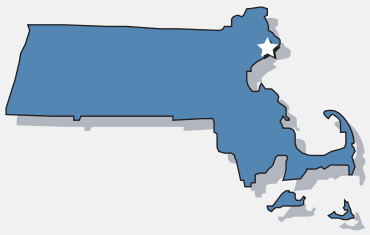
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools,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

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

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

Putting the Data in Perspective

Salem, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 40,407
Median family income: $55,635
Largest sources of employment: Education, health, and social services; and manufacturing
Local government: Mayor-Council

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 7 members
Number of schools: 9
Student-teacher ratio: 10.7 to 1
Per Pupil Expenditures: $11,419
Student enrollment:
- Total: 4,638
- White: 59.2 percent
- Hispanic: 31 percent
- African-American: 4.7 percent
- Asian-American: 2.8 percent
- Native American: 0.2 percent
- Limited English proficient: 7.8 percent
- Low income: 41.8 percent
- Special education: 21.1 percent

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

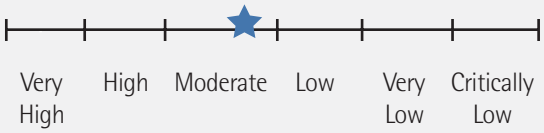
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

The Educational Management Audit Council accepted this report and its findings at their meeting of October 1, 2007

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	73	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	80	84
Math Proficiency Index	66	72

Performance Rating



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

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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

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

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

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

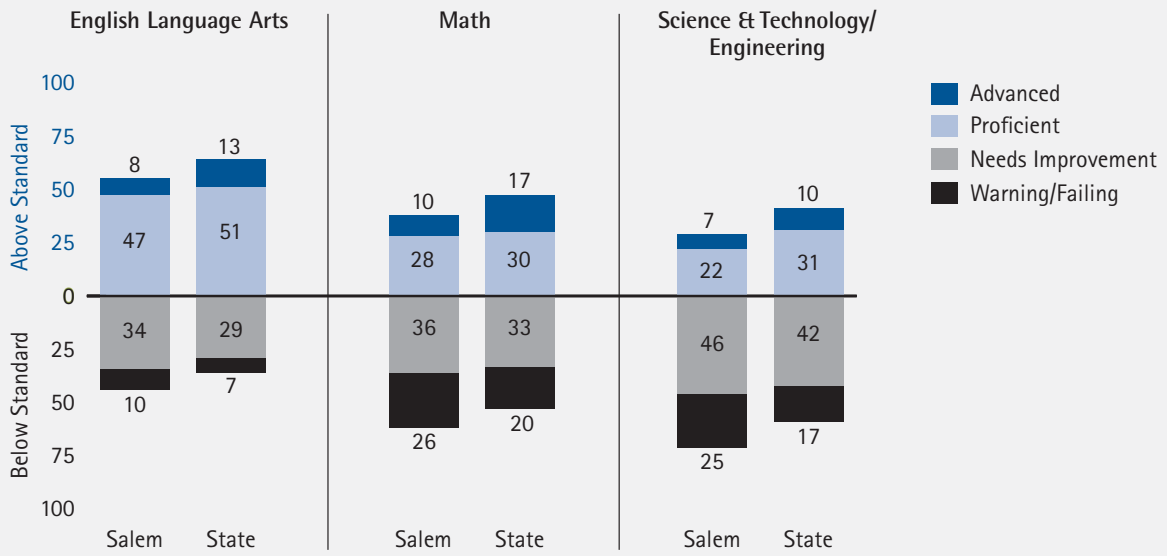
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

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

- Salem's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 73 proficiency index (PI) points, five PI points less than that statewide. Salem's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 27 PI points.
- In 2006, Salem's proficiency gap in ELA was 20 PI points, four PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of two and one-half PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Salem's proficiency gap in math was 34 PI points in 2006, six PI points wider than

SALEM SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than four PI points per year to achieve AYP. Salem's proficiency gap in STE was 36 PI points, seven PI points wider than that statewide.

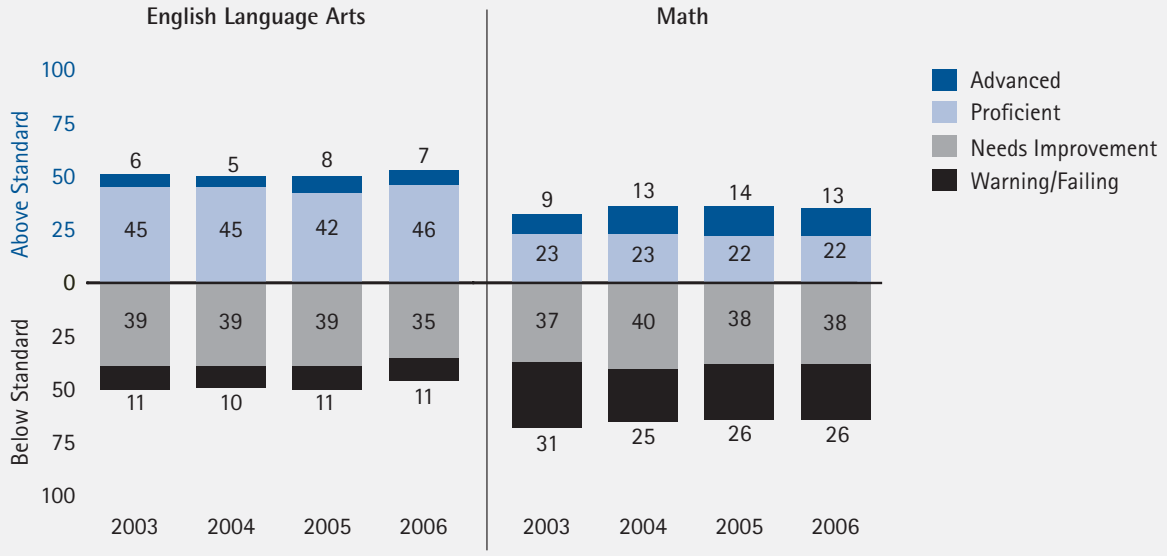
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Salem's MCAS performance showed slight improvement overall, in ELA, and in math, and was relatively flat in STE.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by four percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by four percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Salem narrowed from 32 PI points in 2003 to 29 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of nine percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Salem showed slight improvement, at an average of one-half PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of seven percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP. Math performance in Salem improved during this period at an average of one PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of more than 10 percent, also a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Salem showed little change in STE performance between 2004 and 2006. Although the percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE decreased by two percentage points over this period, Salem's STE

SALEM ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



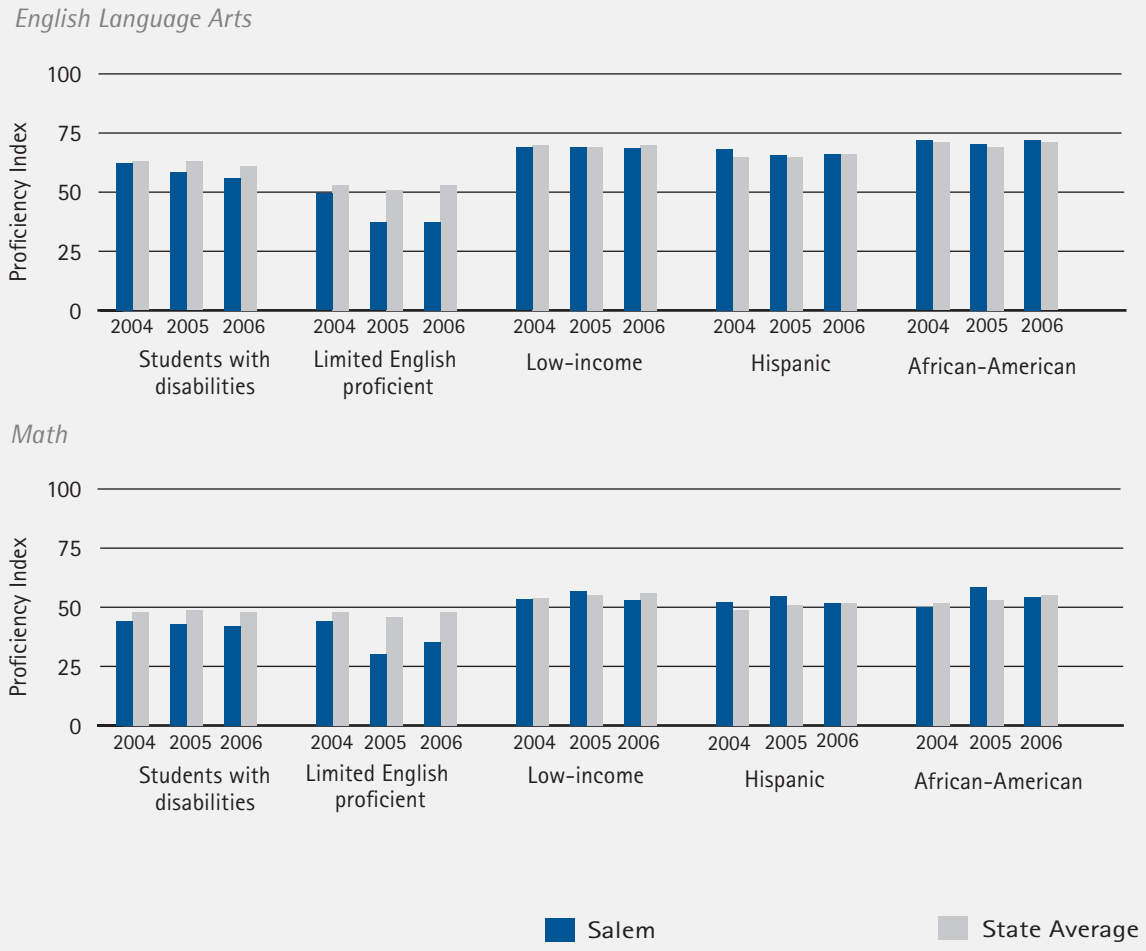
proficiency index improved by almost one PI point due to a decline in the percentage of students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing' category. This change in the STE proficiency index resulted in an improvement rate of two percent.

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

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Salem students. Of the 10 measurable subgroups in Salem in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 50 PI points in ELA (regular education students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, respectively) and 41 PI points in math (non low-income students, LEP students, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Salem in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, LEP students, Hispanic students, African-American students, low-income students (those participating in the free and reduced-cost lunch program), and male students. Roughly one-third of Hispanic, African-American, and low-income students, and more than two-fifths of male students, attained proficiency. Only 14 percent of students with disabilities and five percent of LEP students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, non low-income students, and female students. For each of these subgroups, more than half the students attained proficiency.

SALEM STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



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

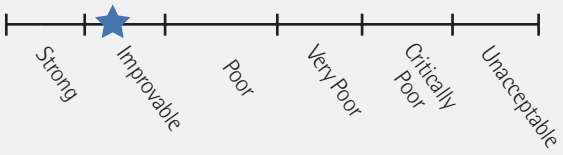
The performance gap in Salem between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 56 PI points in 2003 to 49 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 38 to 40 PI points over this period.

- In Salem, all student subgroups with the exception of students with disabilities had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, although the pattern of change varied among subgroups. The most improved subgroups in ELA were regular education students, LEP students, and Hispanic students.
- In math, all subgroups in Salem showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroups in math were non low-income students, White students, and regular education students.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

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



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

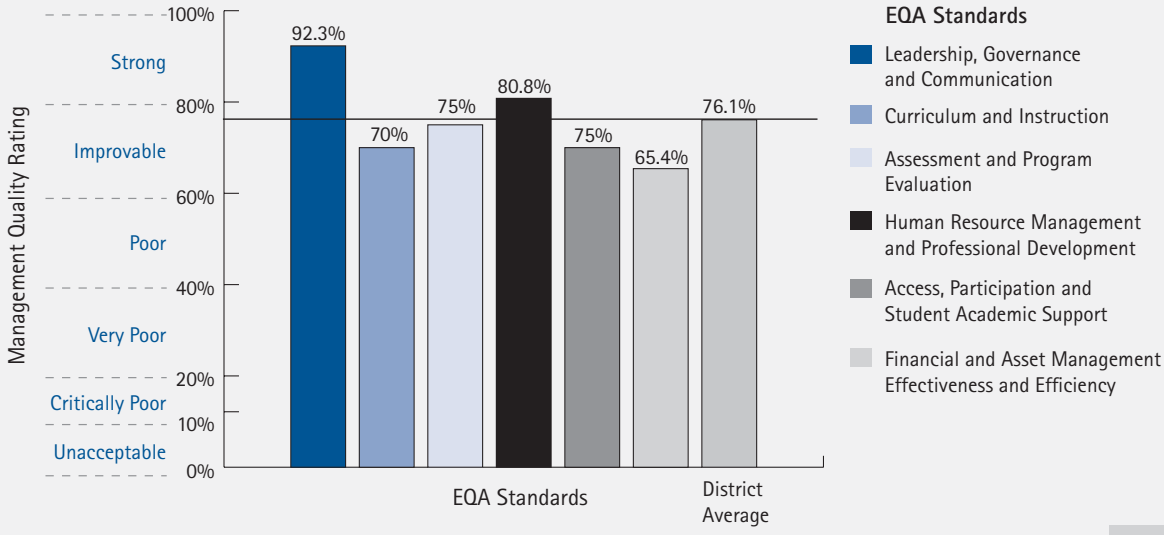
Overall District Management

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

In 2006, Salem received an overall MQI score of 'Improvable' (76.1 percent). The district performed best on the Leadership, Governance, and Communication standard, and worst on the Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. Over the review period, student performance improved overall, in math, and in ELA, but not in STE. Math performance improved for all subgroups, and ELA performance improved for all but one. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Salem, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

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

Leadership and Governance

The leadership of the Salem Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the seven-member school committee. During the review period, two different superintendents served the district. Both leaders developed strong working relationships with city officials and the school committee. A mission statement and strategic goals guided the district and informed development of individual School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The district welcomed newly elected school committee members through an orientation program that presented district successes and challenges and provided a context for decision-making concerning the education of the district's 4,600 students.

District leaders effectively governed the district from 2003 through 2006. A cooperative relationship existed between the school committee and district staff. The school committee regularly reviewed its policies and had a clear understanding about its role and that of the superintendent under the Education Reform Act. The superintendent annually presented educationally sound budgets that were carefully reviewed prior to their submission to the city council for adoption.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The school committee evaluated the superintendent annually, and included a goal related to the promotion of student achievement. The superintendent evaluated each principal annually, and the goals focused on promoting student achievement.
- Through partnerships with Salem State College, the Charles Read Foundation, and the Salem Education Foundation and federal and state grants, the district received support for science and literacy programs and professional development.

Areas for Improvement

- The district typically lacked data-driven decisions regarding program development, revision, and replacement, particularly with respect to its special education and English language learner (ELL) subgroup populations.
- A shortfall in FY 2006 required a budget reduction of $1.5 million, the elimination of more than 60 positions, and the termination or layoff of more than 30 staff members.

Planning and Communication

The district leadership team, comprised of central administrators and principals, collaborated effectively to develop SIPs that identified student academic weaknesses as indicated by the MCAS exams. The assistant superintendent stated that the plans focused on the improvement of writing skills across the district, and beginning in 2006-2007 a consistent implementation of the elementary Everyday Math program. Plans as well as student achievement results were routinely communicated to school committee members, parents, and the general public by means of locally televised school committee meetings, newsletters, and a comprehensive district website.

Building-based efforts to raise student achievement yielded very modest results. Special education students and English language learner (ELL) students posed the greatest challenge to the district since those students scored significantly lower than their peers statewide. With the appointment of a new assistant superintendent in April 2006 after a year-long vacancy, the district has recommitted itself to regaining momentum in the areas of instructional improvement, curriculum development, promotion of student achievement, and data-driven decision-making.

The district adopted a strategic plan that guided the initiatives of the district from 2001 to 2006, and the district was contemplating a successor plan. During that time the district embarked on a comprehensive building renovation/replacement project. Renovations to Salem High School will be completed in another year. The district maintained clean buildings despite inadequate custodial resources. A financial deficit in FY 2006 caused the elimination of more than 60 positions and the layoff of approximately 30 staff members (about half the positions eliminated had been vacant). The reduction of math leadership positions as a result of the deficit reduced the district's leadership capacity in this critical academic area.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Salem Public Schools faced some challenges in the areas of effective curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

The district had aligned its curricula with the state frameworks, but curriculum at the elementary level lacked the expected components that would have made it user-friendly for teachers. The district curricula had a degree of horizontal alignment in elementary ELA, the middle school core content areas, and high school science courses. In other areas, the curricula lacked the specificity, particularly with regard to assessments, which brings alignment.

During the review period, the middle and high school principals were the curriculum leaders who oversaw the continuing development of curriculum in their respective schools. At the middle school and in the science department at the high school, administrators and teachers had data to evaluate the use, consistency, and effectiveness of delivery of the curriculum. In elementary schools, principals and literacy coordinators gathered student achievement data in ELA from the administration of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). Similar activities in elementary math and high school English and math were not reported to EQA examiners.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- Districtwide classroom observations revealed positive instances of classroom management in 89 percent of classrooms observed and of climate in 84 percent.

Areas for Improvement

- The district used little assessment information beyond MCAS test results to monitor student achievement and teacher effectiveness.
- The elementary ELA and math curricula lacked a number of expected curriculum components.
- The district focused on the achievement of students in the aggregate rather than that of subgroup populations.
- The elementary schools did not have a math specialist for each building, a districtwide elementary math coordinator, or recognized formative assessments to track individual and classroom student achievement.
- Budget cuts at the end of 2005-2006 resulted in the elimination of the math and social studies department chair positions.

Effective Instruction

The district and the schools promoted several programs for the improvement of writing and began to provide teachers training in instruction appropriate for English language learners. The district implemented First Steps, the Six Traits of Writing, Harcourt Trophies, and Looking at Student Work (LASW) at the elementary level, the Collins Writing Program at the middle school, and Writing Across the Curriculum at the high school.

In addition, during the period under review, the district increased the amount of instructional time for elementary math and ELA and for high school courses. At the elementary level, each school established a longer literacy block ranging from 90 to 120 minutes per day. Time allocated to math instruction was set at not less than 60 minutes. In 2005-2006, the high school shifted from five 48-minute periods for a total of 240 minutes per day of instruction to four 80-minute periods for 320 minutes per day. Extended instructional blocks were already in place at the middle school. The district also provided appropriate instructional technology, promoted its use through professional development, and funded technology integration specialists to support teachers.

For the most part, the district confined its examination of MCAS test results to scores in the aggregate and to item analysis rather than broaden its scope to include analysis of subgroup achievement. However, administrators and coaches did sometimes examine student achievement by classroom and discuss the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies. The district formally provided teachers with strategies for addressing the needs of ELL students during the final year of the period under review. While the district included special education students in regular education classrooms, interviewees reported little professional development in supporting these students.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

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

Student Assessment

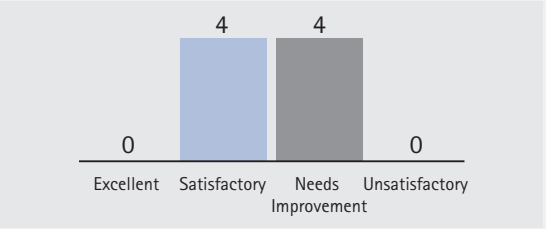
Students were extensively assessed within the Salem Public Schools. Particularly in the elementary grades, the MCAS tests, which were analyzed both for aggregate information and trends, were a part of an information gathering system. Principals explained that they used data to conduct trend analyses to evaluate individual student and school progress from year to year, or to evaluate the effect of the length of stay in the Salem Public Schools on overall academic growth. They had also used data in the assignment of staff and in monitoring grant funded initiatives. Low districtwide achievement on the 2005 MCAS tests led to implementation of First Steps and Five Traits in Writing at the elementary school, the Collins Writing Program at the middle school, and Writing Across the Curriculum at the high school.

Elementary level assessment tools included the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), all of which were used for assessing students' performance in English language arts. Fewer options were available in mathematics or science. In math at the elementary levels, as well as in all subjects at the middle and high school levels, the district relied heavily on MCAS tests results as well as individual class or course assessments made at the building level. The district actively required all students to participate in all required assessments.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- All students within the district participated in all forms of assessment administered. The district made efforts to ensure that all students were tested on schedule.
- The district utilized numerous sources of data, especially at the elementary level, in making decisions regarding school leadership and curriculum changes.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not make special efforts to communicate the results of student assessments to parents, although staff repeatedly expressed that parents were welcome to request a meeting.
- While assessment of students was widespread and systemic throughout the district, assessment of programs was not.
- A review of the 2006 adequate yearly progress (AYP) data revealed that the district met its ELA and math targets for all subgroups.

Program Evaluation

Across the district, individual examples existed of data being used to evaluate programs, but the efforts were not deeply ingrained and frequent. Analysis at all levels of MCAS aggregate data and trends was common, allowing teachers and principals to make changes in curricula, but the practice was individualized and lacked districtwide support and direction. The district had policies in place requiring program evaluation, but there was little evidence that programs were analyzed using disaggregated data, despite the fact that in 2006 only five percent of limited English proficient students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests compared to 58 percent of regular education students.

Other than those required by law and related to Title I or district finances, the district did not engage in any internal or external program audits. However, it was a member of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and had undergone school-wide evaluations at both the high school and one elementary school. In neither case did the audits focus on program effectiveness, and the results were not used specifically to improve programs or instruction.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

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

Hiring Practices and Certification

Maintaining a fully staffed human resources office even during a period of fiscal austerity allowed the district to continue implementing efficient and equitable hiring practices, and assisted in the effective monitoring of professional licensing. The district used both free and commercial advertising and participated in job fairs to attract a wide range of applicants for open positions. Interviews were conducted, and principals made the final decision with respect to hiring the best candidate. Administrators reported that there was no pressure applied from the district office to avoid the most qualified candidate at the expense of one who could be hired at a lower salary.

Following reference and criminal record checks, the district checked licensure. If a potential hire was licensed, the offer letter was issued immediately. If the candidate was not licensed, an application for licensure would be generated immediately in the candidate's presence, and a letter requesting a waiver of certification would be dispatched to the Department of Education before the candidate left the office. In the event of open or newly created positions, all qualified internal candidates were guaranteed interviews, in order to help retain valuable district employees. Representatives of the teachers' association reported that the district had experienced substantial personnel changes over the previous years, with 30 percent of the faculty having held their positions for fewer than three years, 50 percent for fewer than five years, and 70 percent for fewer than 10 years.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The district provided incentives and professional support such as tuition reimbursement and promotional opportunities to retain effective teaching staff.
- Of 45 randomly selected teacher personnel files, 43 revealed evidence of licensure or waiver. Staff members were licensed when hired, or arrangements for licensure or waivers from licensure were made before an offer letter was given to candidates.

Areas for Improvement

- Administrators did not supervise teachers consistently. Of the 39 evaluations reviewed, most were informative, but few were instructive or geared toward professional growth.
- Of 21 administrators' personnel folders, only 12 contained evaluations. All 12 were informative, but few were instructive, and compensation was not linked to student achievement.

Professional Development

The professional development plan for the district was building based and supervised actively by the district office. Principals were allowed to plan professional development activities that would best train their faculties in accordance with the SIPs. The district shared the professional development time by planning and sponsoring districtwide initiatives that would lead to the successful implementation of the District Improvement Plan (DIP). Topics included Everyday Math and Looking at Student Work. Over the review period, the district budgeted $800,000 for professional development activities, of which $570,000 represented teacher salaries charged to professional development for the full-staff professional development days.

The teachers' association contract called for tuition reimbursement for a three-credit course at Salem State College upon prior approval of the superintendent and upon successful course completion. During the 2005-2006 school year, this allotment amounted to $420 per teacher and totaled $40,000. In addition, the district participated in an initiative with surrounding communities called the Tri-district Initiative for Leadership in Education (TILE), which assembled a cohort group intended to encourage the pursuit of advanced degrees by faculty and administrators.

All new teachers were provided both a two-day orientation before the beginning of the school year and a year-long mentoring program designed to support and nurture the teacher. Administrators were also provided with mentors whose experience matched their new assignments. The mentoring program could be extended for an additional year if found to be beneficial to the candidate.

Evaluation

While the district fulfilled its contractual obligation to observe and evaluate teachers, principals agreed that they wished they had more time to directly supervise their staffs. No classroom monitoring occurred, but principals reviewed plan books and student test results. The system used for evaluations resulted in annual observations for non-professional status teachers, but as few as one classroom observation every five years for professional-status teachers. In general, evaluations reviewed by the EQA examiners were complete, but had few recommendations for improvement or comments on the effectiveness of pedagogical techniques, either on the classroom observation reports or the summative evaluations themselves.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

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

Services

The Salem Public Schools provided an array of special education services for its children, including early childhood education and services for children with learning, emotional, behavioral, and physical needs. The district placed these children in the most inclusive setting possible. The district, home to a sizeable English language learner population, ran sheltered immersion programs and pullout instruction through the middle school level with a separate program at the high school. It also began to provide training for its regular education teachers. Each elementary school provided 90 to 120 minutes of instruction daily in ELA and 60 minutes in math. Literacy instruction took various forms: Reading Recovery, Title I, and guided reading. Although some schools received grant funding for more services, each school provided services within its available resources and appropriate to its population. The differences in grant funding affected the variety and type of MCAS remediation that each school provided. These included in-school courses for at-risk populations at the high school, general remediation in reading and writing for all grade 6, 7, and 9 students, and after-school programs in either literacy or math at some elementary schools and at the high school. One elementary school without a grant had no supplementary services, and another had a special homework night each week.

Although guided reading groups at the elementary school were scheduled so that special education and ELL students could receive services from knowledgeable professional staff, the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) did not provide sufficient direction to regular education teachers serving these students in inclusionary settings, providing neither specific recommendations nor lists of available Salem services for children. Instructional practices needed for special populations were not strongly in evidence in the classroom observations.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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

Areas of Strength

- The district provided time and materials and trained staff for literacy instruction in all the elementary schools.

Areas for Improvement

- Despite the district's efforts, 20 percent of grade 4 students failed the MCAS ELA test.
- The district did not address low achievement of student subgroups, in particular special education students, English language learners, and low-income students.
- Daily attendance rates at the middle and high schools were below expected levels, and chronic absenteeism rates were high. The district did not inquire into the loss of one-third of the grades 9-12 student population.
- Districtwide disciplinary practices were ineffective at Salem High School, as approximately one-fourth of all grade 9-10 students were suspended out of school during the course of the year. Budget reductions resulted in the elimination of in-school suspension services.

Attendance

The district effectively tracked and monitored teacher attendance. The schools posted information bulletins urging attendance in all student handbooks. Student attendance, tracked by IPASS software, was at acceptable levels except at the high school where attendance averaged slightly below 90 percent. Chronic absenteeism rates ranged from 13 to 17 percent at the middle school, while the high school figures ranged between 32 and 40 percent. Staff throughout the district spoke about the effect of the transient population on record keeping and instruction. The problem was more pronounced at the high school, which had high retention and suspension rates.

Discipline, Retention, and Dropout Services

The district had an extensive and detailed disciplinary code that appeared in all student handbooks. The district provided the services of two conflict resolution counselors, Child Study Teams in every building, and a resource officer to assist the schools with disciplinary and attendance issues. Elementary principals reported handling discipline on a case-by-case basis, involving parents when necessary. The middle school benefited from an in-school suspension program and two instructional programs, one on-site and the other off-site, for providing specialized care to students with behavioral and emotional issues.

The high school instituted a Freshman House and Freshman Seminar in order to ease the transition to high school. It also provided an alternative after-school program, child care for teenage mothers, the Hawthorne Program, vocational courses, and other resources to assist students. However, the district did not initiate its own summer school until the end of the review period. Since the high school lost its in-school suspension program several years prior to the review period due to budget cuts, repeated disciplinary referrals resulted in out-of-school suspension for a quarter of the student body in grades 9-11 during the last two years of the review period. The budget for FY 2008 calls for the resumption of the in-school suspension program at the high school. In addition, retention rates reported to the Department of Education exceeded the state average in each year of the period under review. Additional data provided by the high school revealed a high retention rate and a large number of students who, either due to transfers or dropping out, disappeared from the student rolls. The high school did not provide clear data on whether students' failure to re-enroll was due to their having transferred or dropped out. The dropout rate exceeded the state average every year, and the high school reported that 12 percent of the class of 2006 had dropped out.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

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

Budget Process

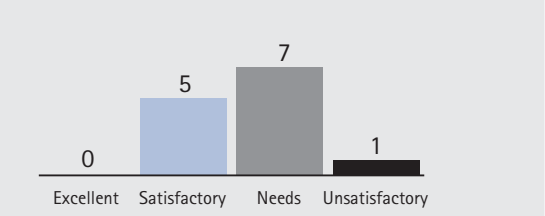
The budget process was defined in the policies of the school committee and was implemented by the superintendent. Early in the budget process, the superintendent and mayor met to set the parameters for the development of the school department budget. Upon receipt of instructions from the superintendent as to the allowable budget increase, the principals and districtwide administrators prepared their budgets with input from their staffs. Each budget item, with the exception of salaries and districtwide activities accounts, was based on a per pupil cost allocation.

The budget development process included the goals of the superintendent and those of the SIPs and DIP. The superintendent and school committee had been committed to preserving small class sizes and considered this to be the most important aspect of the budget process. The superintendent held meetings with the individual principals and administrators to review their budgets. The budget document did not include information on state and federal funds, revolving accounts, or other financial resources. The budget recommended by the superintendent was submitted to the school committee. Several public school committee meetings were held, followed by a mandated public hearing. Upon adoption by the school committee, the budget was sent to the mayor and city council for review and final appropriation.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The city and school system had policies and procedures in place that ensured that state procurement laws had been followed.
- Almost all of the elementary schools have been renovated as a result of a $100 million commitment by the city, and a $47.5 million renovation project for Salem High School was underway.

Areas for Improvement

- The superintendent stated that the school system's high special education tuition costs, and the reduction of Chapter 70 funds rendered the district's financial resources inadequate to ensure quality educational programs and facilities.
- The city and the school department did not have a formal written agreement regarding indirect costs for services provided by the city.
- The school system did not employ staff with MCPPO credentials or a certified school business official.
- The district's budget did not include information from all fund sources, and was not based on student performance data.

Financial Support

The City of Salem had two financial crises that affected the instructional delivery system in the Salem schools, one in FY 2004 with the reduction of Chapter 70 funding, and another in FY 2006 with a reduction of $500,000 by the mayor followed by the school department having to absorb a $1,100,000 special education tuition budget deficit. This resulted in substantial reduction in staff and services. According to the superintendent, this was accomplished with minimal impact on the school system's educational goals. The instructional costs in FY 2006 increased by 4.01 percent over those in FY 2005.

The school system exceeded net school spending (NSS) requirements for the period under review. According to the mayor, 50 percent of the city budget had been allocated to the school system. City audit reports stated that "the city had experienced financial challenges." The city and the school department had experienced rising health care costs for employees/retirees, energy costs, and pension costs.

Facilities and Safety

Several years prior to the review, the city and the school department embarked on a $100 million building project to renovate all of the elementary schools. This effort was completed in FY 2005. The final phase of the building project consisted of the $47.5 million renovation of the Salem High School. As a result of the rebuilding of the infrastructure of the Salem schools, the schools will have state-of-the-art facilities that will help provide an excellent education. In interviews, the administration stated that the Collins Middle School, the Saltonstall School, and the Horace Mann Lab School (under the jurisdiction of Salem State College) required substantial repairs and improvements.

Visits revealed that the schools were well maintained and conducive to student learning and achievement. The FY 2006 midyear reductions in the school department operating budget had a negative impact on the building service department and on the schools and the learning environment; the impact was a 28 percent reduction (10 full-time positions) in the custodial department, which affected all the schools. The school department did not have a formal written preventative maintenance program for its schools.

The schools had adequate security systems. While all school buildings were safe and secure, and fire drills were scheduled and carried out as required by law, the district did not practice other procedures in its crisis management plan in all buildings on a regular or consistent basis.

CONCLUSION

During the review period, the Salem Public Schools was considered a 'Moderate' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in ELA and 'Low' in math on the MCAS tests. Less than half of Salem's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Improvable,' with its highest score on the Leadership and Governance standard and its lowest on the Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency standard.

The Salem Public Schools hosts a growing population of increasingly diverse students. The number of economically disadvantaged students is rising, as is the number of special education students. At the same time, the student population on the whole is declining, as the district faces increasing competition for students from private and parochial schools in the area. Thirty percent of the teaching staff have served the district for fewer than three years, and 50 percent have been in the district for fewer than 10 years. The administrative staff fits the same profile, with only five members of the 13-member leadership team having served as administrators during the 2003-2004 school year, when the EQA examiners previously reviewed the district.

The city faces financial constraints that are common to many communities. Salem experienced a fiscal crisis during 2005-2006, when the district had to cut $1.5 million halfway through the fiscal year. The budget for the following year was level funded, but included the funds that had been cut from the previous year. The reduction resulted in the loss of more than 30 staff members and 60 positions (approximately half had been vacant) from among the teaching and support staff. The financial crisis had an adverse effect on instructional delivery, support services, and maintenance of facilities, including elimination of math and social studies department chair positions, in-school suspension services, and 10 custodial positions.

The Salem Public Schools' districtwide management model gave schools the liberty to provide programs, support, and assessments, but building-based efforts yielded mediocre results. More districtwide coordination and oversight was needed. Elementary schools used a variety of assessment tools in ELA, but not in math. Despite these efforts, 20 percent of grade 4 students performed at the 'Warning/Failing' level on the 2006 MCAS ELA test. EQA examiners noted curriculum deficiencies in level of specificity and alignment, and at the elementary level both ELA and math curricula lacked expected information. Salem also lacked a districtwide elementary math coordinator and elementary school math specialists. The high school did not gather, analyze, and use student data effectively, except in science.

The district's efforts to improve MCAS performance included increasing instructional time for elementary math and ELA and for high school courses. It also implemented First Steps and Five Traits in Writing at the elementary level, the Collins Wiritng Program at the middle level, and Writing Across the Curriculum at the high school. The district lacked data-driven approaches to improving academic performance among special education students and English language learners, who scored lower on MCAS tests than the state average for these subgroups. However, the district provided teachers with strategies for addressing the needs of ELLs in the final year of review, met its AYP targets for all subgroups, and appointed a new assistant superintendent to improve academic support for these students.

Salem Public Schools faced challenges in the area of student support services, including attendance, discipline, retention, and dropout prevention. Attendance rates and chronic absenteeism at the middle and high schools compared poorly to the state average. The out-of-school suspension rate was high, a problem which the district plans to address by reinstituting in-school suspension services in 2008. Retention rates exceeded the state average, and 12 percent of the class of 2006 dropped out. The district provided after-school and other programs, child care services for teenage mothers, and, toward the end of the review period, a summer school for at-risk students.

Most of the facilities were in good repair due to the expenditure of $100 million in construction and renovations. The Collins Middle School and the Saltonstall and Horace Mann elementary schools were still in need of repair at the time of the EQA's most recent district review. All district schools were secure and had visitor procedures in place; however, the crisis management plan was not consistently followed.

The district made extensive efforts to develop community partnerships with higher education institutions, foundations, and museums. The Charles Read Foundation, Salem State College, the Museum of Science, and the Peabody Essex Museum have worked with the school district to provide science and literacy enrichment and professional development programs designed to benefit both students and teachers. The Tri-district Initiative for Leadership in Education encouraged district staff to pursue advanced degrees. Overall, the City of Salem is and should be proud of its school district and supportive of its continuing efforts to implement and modify programs to improve student achievement.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

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

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

Data-Driven Assessment

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

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

Standards-Based Examination

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

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

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis

ADA: Average Daily Attendance

ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment

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

ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress

CAP: Corrective Action Plan

CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures

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

CMP: Connected Math Program

CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information

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

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

CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test

CSR: Comprehensive School Reform

DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIP: District Improvement Plan

DOE: Department of Education

DPDP: District Professional Development Plan

DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment

ELA: English Language Arts

ELL: English Language Learners

EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index

ESL: English as a Second Language

FLNE: First Language Not English

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

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

FTE: Full-Time Equivalent

FY: Fiscal Year

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

GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board

GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

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

IEP: Individualized Education Program

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

IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan

IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan

ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan

LASW: Looking at Student Work

LEP: Limited English Proficient

MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials

MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

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

MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official

MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral

MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment

MPI: Math Proficiency Index

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

MUNIS: Municipal Information System

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NRT: Norm-Referenced Test

NSBA: National School Boards Association

NSS: Net School Spending

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

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

PIM: Performance Improvement Management

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

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

QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory

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

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

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

SIMS: Student Information Management System

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPED: Special Education

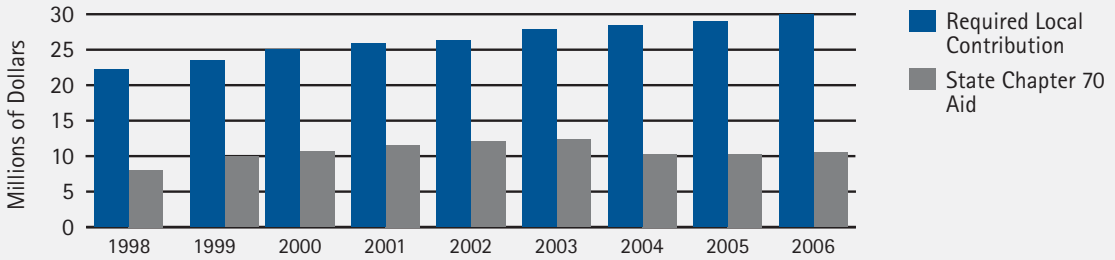
STE: Science and Technology/Engineering

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

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

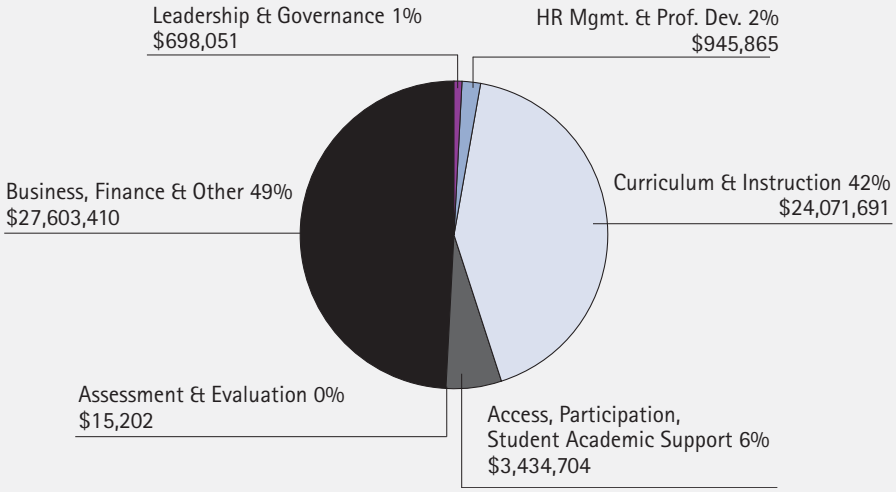
A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program — the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Salem's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. The district exceeded the state net school spending (NSS) requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, NSS increased from $44,420,716 to $46,139,372; Chapter 70 aid increased from $10,290,730 to $10,536,330; the required local contribution increased from $28,359,639 to $29,992,288; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 5,101 to 4,912. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual NSS decreased from 23.2 to 22.8 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total Schedule 1 NSS decreased from 58.2 to 57.8 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

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



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