



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report:

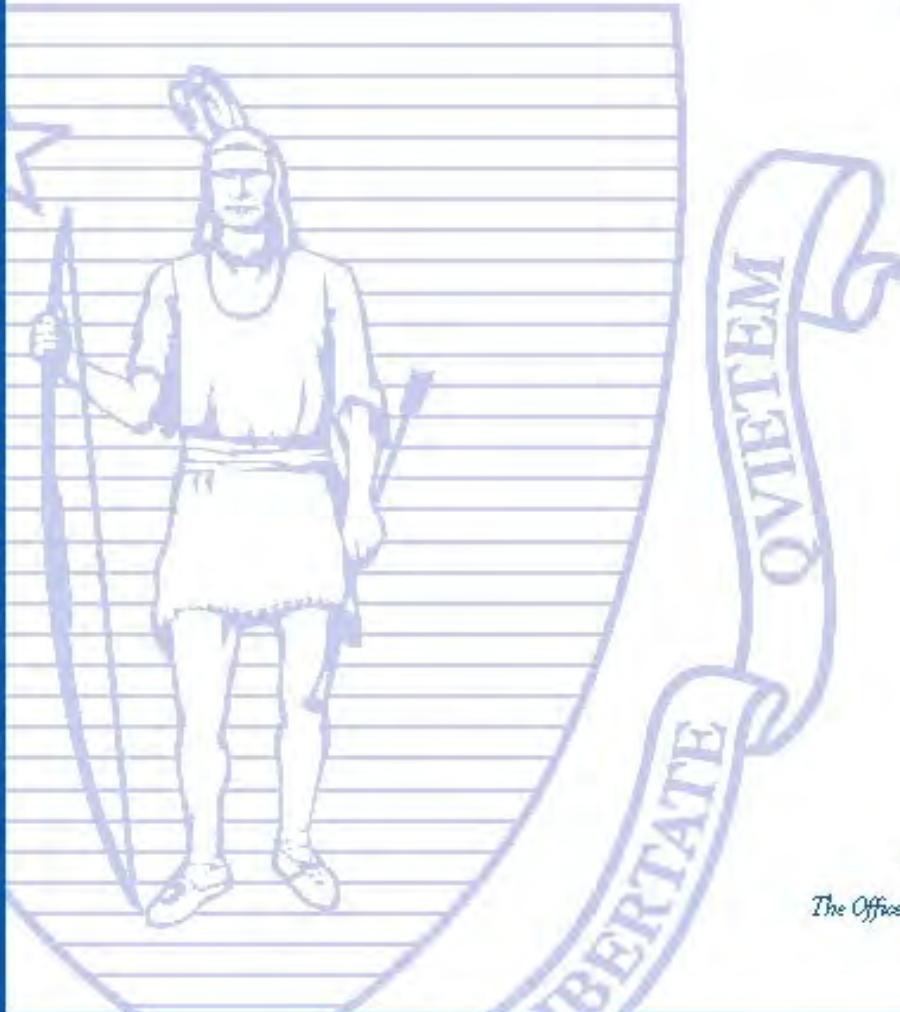
Southbridge
Public Schools



data driven

standards based

learner centered →



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

2005 - 2007

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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

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Executive Summary

The *Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report* describes the progress of the Southbridge Public Schools from October 2004, the time of a fact-finding review, to November 2007, the time of a follow-up review, both conducted by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA). The focus of the November 2007 examination was the district's implementation of its District Turnaround Plan (DTAP) to improve the Southbridge Public Schools.

The EQA first reviewed the operations of the Southbridge Public Schools in February 2003 and again in May 2004, which led the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) in July 2004 to recommend the district to the Board of Education (BOE) for a 'declaration of underperformance.' Following the BOE's declaration of underperformance in September 2004, the EQA conducted a fact-finding review in October 2004 to serve as a benchmark for the district's improvement and to inform improvement planning. The Department of Education (DOE) conducted an additional evaluation documented in its *Leadership Report*, to identify priorities for action, evaluate the district's capacity to implement the changes, and to determine technical assistance to provide the district.

Southbridge Public Schools used the findings from the Department of Education's *Leadership Report* to create its turnaround plan. The Board of Education approved Southbridge's turnaround plan in December 2005, and the DOE offered resources to the district. District leadership and the DOE decided that state assistance would be provided in the form of two district management experts who were former superintendents.

In November 2007, approximately two years after the beginning of implementation of Southbridge's District Turnaround Plan, a six-member EQA team conducted a four-day site visit following a review of student achievement data and documents provided by the district. The focus was to examine Southbridge's progress in implementing its turnaround plan.

The District Turnaround Plan

Southbridge's turnaround plan contains six initiatives designed to address the district's key areas in need of improvement as noted in the Department of Education's *Leadership Report*.

Initiative 1 regards Leadership, and contains action steps to hire, train, support, and refine the roles of key administrators in district leadership positions. Initiative 2 focuses on the development of a Standards-based Curriculum. Specifically, this initiative involves providing structures and professional development to empower teachers to develop and revise curricula, and to create a curriculum revision cycle. Initiative 3 regards Local Fiscal Support, which concerns strengthening the relationship and communication between the district and the town to promote town support for funding district improvements, especially in technology for the schools. Initiative 4 involves Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community; the superintendent identified ways in which she may engage parents and other town residents to support the Southbridge schools. Initiative 5 pertains to the development of District and School Vision, Mission, and Goals. This initiative contains action steps to develop, share, align, and encourage ownership in a vision, mission, and set of goals for the school system. Initiative 6 pertains to the implementation of Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement. In this initiative, the district focused on training staff members at all levels in data analysis resulting in documented plans for improving district, school, and classroom practices. All of these initiatives have been successfully completed or initiated with significant progress with the exception of Initiative 4, which is partially accomplished.

In the overall implementation of the six initiatives of Southbridge's turnaround plan, four themes emerged. The EQA team determined that Southbridge leadership has set clear priorities for developmentally appropriate and sustainable improvements; the district is aggressively building capacity at all levels to create newly established structures and practices; leadership has set the stage for ownership and cooperation in the implementation of the turnaround plan through its communication with the school committee, town, and staff, and by fully engaging the staff in improvement efforts; and, the district has been working to better engage the community and parents, although this area is still a work in progress. These four themes comprise the general findings generated from the EQA review process.

Findings

In the *Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report*, the EQA team developed four general findings (I-IV) and 18 corresponding findings directly related to the six turnaround plan initiatives. The general findings and findings are listed below. In the body of the report, each of the findings is

supported by evidence. For a complete list of the general findings and findings, see Appendix G: Organization of Findings and Appendix H: Order of Findings.

I. The leadership has set clear priorities for developmentally appropriate and sustainable improvements.

- The district's vision, mission, and goals have created both an alignment of and a clear direction for the Southbridge school system. (Initiative 5, Finding A)
- The district provided developmental levels of support each year to build principal and teacher capacity to analyze data, in order to precipitate planned actions at the school and classroom levels. (Initiative 6, Finding A)
- District goals and plans are continually refined through active and inclusive participation throughout the district. (Initiative 5, Finding C)
- The district has begun to build the structure for curricular improvements. (Initiative 2, Finding B)
- Although the district has not yet determined quantitative benchmarks to measure progress in meeting some goals, the superintendent intends to use quantitative formative benchmarks to measure growth in student achievement in the future. (Initiative 5, Finding D)

II. The district is aggressively building capacity at all levels to create newly established structures and practices.

- Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system. (Initiative 1, Finding A)
- The once-troubled special education program has been revamped. (Initiative 1, Finding C)
- The new curriculum development process is focused on strengthening standards-based instruction. (Initiative 2, Finding A)
- Professional development and planning support instructional improvements, although this is still an evident area of priority. (Initiative 2, Finding C)

- Professional development in Southbridge supports teacher implementation of the curriculum. (Initiative 2, Finding D)
- Teacher supervision and evaluation processes have not yet caught up with the new instructional expectations and administrator training. (Initiative 2, Finding E)
- The district established new measures to improve fiscal management, although improvements are still needed in this area. (Initiative 3, Finding B)

III. Leadership has set the stage for ownership and cooperation in the implementation of the turnaround plan through its communication with the school committee, town, and staff, and by fully engaging the staff in improvement efforts.

- The school committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement. (Initiative 1, Finding B)
- Improvement in town officials' level of support for the district was evident despite district-town relationships remaining an area of sensitivity. (Initiative 3, Finding C)
- The district had the financial resources needed to implement the turnaround plan. (Initiative 3, Finding A)
- The district has generated staff understanding and ownership in carrying out its initiatives. (Initiative 5, Finding B)

IV. The district has been working to better engage the community and parents, although this area is still a work in progress.

- The superintendent reestablished connections with parents and community organizations and attempted to engage these constituencies in the decision-making process. (Initiative 4, Finding A)
- Currently, the effectiveness of efforts to improve parent communication and parent involvement is unclear. (Initiative 4, Finding B)

District Overview

The town of Southbridge is located in Worcester County in south central Massachusetts, bordering Connecticut. The town maintains a semi-rural atmosphere, and its industry grew with the manufacture of optical products and related goods and services. Fiber-optics, among other industries, are important currently. The largest sources of employment within the community are manufacturing and educational, health, and social services. The town is governed by a Town Council/Town Manager.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Southbridge had a median family income of \$41,863 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of \$63,706, ranking it 338 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 17,214, with a population of 3,459 school-age children, or 20 percent of the total. Of the total households in Southbridge, 33 percent were households with children under 18 years of age. Thirteen percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), in 2006-2007 the Southbridge Public Schools had a total enrollment of 2,210. The demographic composition in the district was: 59.9 percent White, 36.8 percent Hispanic, 1.9 percent African-American, 1.1 percent Asian, and 0.2 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 6.3 percent limited English proficient (LEP), 62.1 percent low income, and 17.6 percent special education. Ninety-seven percent of school-age children in Southbridge attended public schools. The district does not participate in school choice. In 2006-2007, a total of 391 Southbridge students attended public schools outside the district, including 290 students who attended Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational Technical School District (Bay Path) and eight students who attended charter schools.

The district has five schools serving pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Eastford Road School serves pre-kindergarten through grade 1, Charlton Street School serves grades 2 and 3, West Street School serves grades 4 and 5, Wells Middle School serves grades 6 through 8, and Southbridge High School serves grades 9 through 12. The administrative team consists of a superintendent, a school business manager, a special education director, a Title I/preschool director, a technology director, a curriculum director, and an English language learner (ELL)

director. Each elementary school has a principal, and the middle school and the high school each have a principal and an assistant principal. The district has a seven-member school committee.

In FY 2007, Southbridge's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was \$12,630, compared to \$11,789 statewide, ranking it 85 out of the 302 of 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2005 to FY 2007, net school spending increased from \$21,819,777 to \$22,564,061; Chapter 70 aid increased from \$14,526,889 to \$14,851,612; the required local contribution increased from \$5,211,923 to \$5,866,161; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 2,530 to 2,300. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 67 to 66 percent over this period. From FY 2005 to FY 2006, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 65 to 59 percent.

The Review Process and History

In accordance with regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Education and Chapter 69 of the Massachusetts General Laws, a six-member team from the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) visited the Southbridge Public Schools during the week of November 13, 2007. The objective of the visit was to collect information and analyze the depth and scope of the district's progress in implementing its District Turnaround Plan (DTAP).

The EQA conducted the first examination of the operations of the Southbridge Public Schools in February 2003, with a primary focus on management practices in the five domains of Assessment and Evaluation, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Academic Support Services, Leadership and Governance, and Business and Financial Management. That review was followed up with another in May 2004 which provided performance ratings for indicators in each of the five domains. This second audit led to the decision of the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) in July 2004 to recommend that the Massachusetts Board of Education assign the district the status of 'underperforming' due to "serious deficiencies in the performance of the district for the period examined [2000-2003]." In September 2004, the Board of Education declared the district underperforming and directed the EMAC to conduct a fact-finding visit "to help guide the district's improvement planning." The EQA conducted this fact-finding visit in October 2004. In its December 2004 report of that examination, the EQA found significant deficiencies in each of the five domains. The report indicated that Southbridge Public Schools was not using data to engage in effective improvement efforts and that the "district and school leadership lacked the capacity to create or sustain improvement in student academic achievement."

The Department of Education followed up the EQA review with a leadership evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine how to address the district's deficiencies and to create recommendations for improvement. The DOE's *Leadership Report* found that the district's key deficiencies were its failures to "establish and focus on accomplishing priority objectives"; "implement essential accountability and evaluation systems"; "develop a system-wide K-12 curriculum"; manage and comply "with regulatory requirements in the Special Education program"; demonstrate "solid planning skills at all levels" based on a root cause analysis; connect the professional development program "to the needs and goals of the school

system”; improve student achievement; and address deficiencies at Southbridge High School which led to it being placed on probation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Further, the report noted that fiscal support for the district had been hampered by poor relationships and communication between the district and the town.

Due to the underperforming status, the Board of Education required the Southbridge Public Schools to create a District Turnaround Plan (DTAP). The superintendent developed the turnaround plan to address the priority areas described in the *Leadership Report*, with initiatives and/or action steps to improve the noted areas of weakness. The Board of Education approved Southbridge’s turnaround plan in December 2005.

To assist the district in implementing its turnaround plan, the Department of Education worked with Southbridge Public Schools to select a turnaround partner. The DOE offered resources to the district, including assistance with the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process and the assistance of the Education Development Center (EDC) as a turnaround partner. After initial planning efforts, leadership in the district and the DOE decided that state assistance would be provided in the form of two district management experts who were former superintendents. The DOE contracted with two expert consultants in district leadership, Matt George and Jean Thayer, to work with the Southbridge superintendent and the school committee.

The Department of Education monitored implementation through periodic reports from the DOE consultants and the Southbridge superintendent documenting the district’s implementation of the plan. In Southbridge, the district leadership team met regularly to discuss the progress of the plan’s implementation and the next steps to be taken as an integral part of the district’s operations. As a part of the turnaround plan, the district developed a vision statement, mission statement, and data-driven action plans for each school as guiding documents.

In November 2007, the EQA visited the Southbridge Public Schools to review the district’s implementation of its turnaround plan. The EQA review team was comprised of members with expertise in the domains of leadership and governance, curriculum, instruction, student assessment, program evaluation, professional development, human resource management, student academic support, and financial management. The team completed a two-day document review prior to its four-day site visit.

During the site visit, the team conducted 39 interviews (approximately 46 hours) with the superintendent, four district administrators, five principals, 14 teachers in focus groups, 12 teachers in individual interviews, five school committee members, four town officials, three teachers' association representatives, and 11 parents serving on school improvement councils. The team also reviewed district documents on site, including Southbridge's DTAP documents, policies, handbooks, curriculum documents, five principal personnel files, and 62 teacher personnel files. The team also observed 57 randomly selected classrooms in all five district schools. Classroom observations focused on English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science instruction in the tested grade levels.

Examination of the Implementation of the Turnaround Plan of the Southbridge Public Schools

Each initiative of the Southbridge District Turnaround Plan is described below, beginning with its status and a summary of the initiative's implementation. This is followed by the findings regarding the initiative made by the EQA team, with supporting evidence (bulleted statements); as noted above, the general finding (I-IV) that relates to each finding is indicated in parentheses. This is followed by the action steps associated with the initiative, their status, and evidence pertaining to their implementation. For reference, Appendix G: Organization of Findings provides a list of the findings organized by their relationship to the general findings, and Appendix H: Order of Findings provides a list of the findings in order of their appearance in this document (i.e., numerical order). Finally, Appendix I: Turnaround Plan Implementation Summary provides a list of the action steps associated with each initiative and their status.

Initiative 1: Leadership

Status: In progress and ongoing; action items completed, partially completed, or in progress

Summary

The Southbridge school district has made notable improvement in the establishment of an effective administrative team, consisting of educational leaders recruited from within and outside the district. This leadership team works with the superintendent to address the problem areas noted in the turnaround plan. The superintendent has taken care to monitor the district's progress in implementing each of the six initiatives: Leadership; Standards-based Curriculum; Local Fiscal Support; District Vision, Mission, and Goals; Parent and Community Involvement; and Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement. The superintendent has provided regular updates to the school committee concerning the progress on each initiative. In one of the initial steps involving the school committee, it participated in a series of meetings to define the roles and responsibilities of the committee members, as well as those of the superintendent and the administrative team. By clarifying roles and creating structures to support district functions, the district has improved the budget decision-making process and monitoring, although some financial reporting issues remain. To improve the special education department, the district

decided to utilize an external evaluation process and implement recommended changes to the inclusion programs in each building and the plan for out-of-district placements.

The EQA team arrived at three findings pertaining to this initiative: Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system; the school committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement; and the once-troubled special education program has been revamped. Each finding is supported by examples of district actions, practices, or other changed conditions to facilitate implementation of the initiative.

Findings:

A. Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system. (II)

- The Southbridge Public Schools has hired a new administrative team to lead the district out of its status as an underperforming school district, with the exception of one principal and the business manager.
- The administrative team includes staff members from within the district as well as new personnel from other districts, hired to bring about change.
- The superintendent has worked closely with the business manager to correct many of the noted areas of concern.
- The director of curriculum and instruction has worked with principals, curriculum specialists, department heads, and team leaders to align the curriculum across the district.

B. The school committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement. (III)

- The school committee has changed membership, and committee members have vowed to work in harmony and to advocate for the entire student body.
- The school committee participated with DOE-appointed partners and the superintendent in four formal meetings to review the roles and responsibilities of both the committee and the superintendent.

C. The once-troubled special education program has been revamped. (II)

- The special education department, using the services of a consultant, has completed a full review of the special education programs and service delivery.
- The special education department has been revamped to ensure proper services are afforded to special education students.
- The department has reduced the rate of out-of-district placements.
- The district established new autism and behavior programs.
- New practices involve greater inclusion.
- Formerly using an increasingly costly service model, the special education program reduced expenditures by approximately \$1 million over an 18-month period.

Evidence

Initiative 1 has eight action steps.

Action step 1: Employ highly qualified, experienced, administrators in key positions: high school principal, special education director, middle school principal, elementary principal, and director of curriculum.

Status: Completed

The superintendent appointed highly qualified, experienced administrators identified as capable of setting and implementing the district goals. The superintendent and members of the school committee described difficulties in attracting a substantial pool of qualified candidates for administrative positions because of the district's underperforming status. Therefore, filling some positions, particularly the director of curriculum and instruction, required additional time and advertising.

The superintendent has employed new administrators in each of the noted director and principal positions with one exception. The superintendent recruited the former principal of the Charlton Street School out of retirement.

The district posted all administrator positions internally as well as externally through advertisements in the local newspapers and *The Boston Globe*. The superintendent performed an

initial paper screening for licensure and experience, and she submitted the resumes of all candidates meeting both qualifications to a screening committee appointed by her. To screen candidates for principal of the high school, the superintendent solicited members of the local community as well as members of the educational community to serve on the screening committee. The screening committee reviewed the candidates and presented its final choices to the superintendent, who made the ultimate hiring decision. In accordance with statute, the school committee, working closely with the superintendent, appointed the director of special education.

The high school principal selected in 2005 had been an assistant principal in another district with prior knowledge of Southbridge High School's challenges. The superintendent selected the principal based on the identified qualifications and skills needed to address the high school's weaknesses, particularly those described in the report of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which had placed the school on probation. During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, the new principal made many changes, including establishing the freshman academy, creating a faculty senate, implementing data-driven decision-making, and emphasizing the importance of standards-based teaching. The principal resigned at the end of the 2006-2007 school year to assume a position in another district.

In 2007, the district once again advertised the high school principal position, and three finalists were identified. After a review of the candidates, the superintendent awarded the contract to Southbridge High School's assistant principal, who had served the district for decades as a teacher and music director. The superintendent stated the candidate possessed qualities needed currently for the high school principal position—being conscientious, loyal to Southbridge, and committed to the high school students. The superintendent also stated that the new principal was capable of increasing collegiality at the high school and leading the district's advocacy for the construction of a new middle-senior high school. Although the principal lacked a strong background in curriculum and instruction, the superintendent noted that he was taking course work to strengthen his skills in instructional leadership. Teachers in a focus group affirmed that the new principal has the support of the faculty in leading the high school.

The middle school experienced three changes in leadership since the arrival of the superintendent in 2005. In 2005, the middle school principal communicated the intention to retire in June 2006,

and mentored the assistant principal during 2005-2006 as a potential candidate for the position. The assistant principal was selected to fill the position during the 2006-2007 school year, but decided to move to another district. The current middle school principal served as an assistant principal in another district prior to his arrival.

The West Street School has a new principal with experience as an assistant principal in another district, and expertise in reading and in curriculum and instruction. The previous principal opted to leave at the end of the 2006-2007 school year after being denied a three-year contract.

The principal of the Eastford Road School was selected after the previous principal retired at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. The new principal has experience as an elementary principal in another district, and has expertise in special education, instruction, and reading.

The director of special education was hired during the 2005-2006 school year with experience as a director in another district.

The director of curriculum and instruction brought extensive experience and expertise. The district advertised for this position 10 times before the superintendent identified a candidate with the desired qualifications and the superintendent's confidence in leading the curriculum development work with a team of building principals and curriculum specialists.

Since 2005, Southbridge has had two principals at the high school, three principals at the middle school, two principals at the West Street School, and two principals at the Eastford Road School. Three of the district's five principals are new to the role and involved in a variety of training programs.

The superintendent indicated that the district has assembled a highly qualified team able to work with her to implement district and school goals.

Action step 2: Provide training for superintendent and school committee on roles and responsibilities.

Status: Completed

The school committee members and the superintendent have completed training programs on their roles and responsibilities and have been conducting their duties accordingly. The seven-

member school committee experienced three membership changes in 2005 shortly after the new superintendent was appointed. During the 2005-2006 school year, district's turnaround partner Education Development Center (EDC) provided four training sessions to the school committee and the superintendent regarding roles and responsibilities. School committee members interviewed stated that the sessions were open, collegial, and established a vehicle for communication and trust. The school committee members admitted that the body had not previously understood its roles but had declined many opportunities to participate in training programs provided by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). District leadership acknowledged that the district had suffered from prior school committee micro-management. School committee members stated that members previously focused on advocacy of narrow personal concerns rather than the welfare of the district.

School committee members stated that role clarification resulted in greater commitment to supporting the district goals, as members began to see their primary role as an advocate for students. Members expressed strong support of the superintendent and the administrative team, but admitted some frustration with the pace of improvement, particularly in student achievement. The committee indicated a desire for a timeline from the superintendent with defined, time-bound benchmarks for student achievement goals. The superintendent and the school committee have continued practices of regular and transparent communication.

Interviewees indicated that this action step increased the efficacy of the district leadership. School committee and teacher union representatives stated that the clarification of roles, responsibilities, and lines of communication have resulted in the reduction of teacher grievances across the district. Interviewees also noted that the public's confidence in and the credibility of the school committee increased during the review period, as a direct result of greater levels of professionalism and reduced conflict demonstrated in the televised meetings of the school committee.

Action step 3: Identify roles and responsibilities for administrative positions.

Status: Partially completed

The district updated or established new job descriptions for some, but not for all, of its advertised administrative positions. In a review of documents, the EQA team learned that the district

created new job descriptions in August 2005 for the following positions: director of curriculum and instruction, director of reading and language arts for grades K-6, director of mathematics for grades K-6, ELA/mathematics curriculum supervisors for grades 7-12, department heads for grades 9-12, math coaches for grades 4-8, and Reading First specialist. All of the descriptions included details about responsibilities, qualifications, specific duties, and reporting supervisor. The administrative team reviewed all job descriptions prior to school committee approval.

The superintendent acknowledged that new job descriptions have not been created for the director of special education and for building principals. The team found that newly selected administrators do not have official and clear job descriptions describing the parameters of their responsibilities.

Action step 4: Develop curriculum administrative team by filling the following positions: director of curriculum; curriculum supervisors, 7-12 (ELA and math); director of reading and language arts, K-6; director of mathematics, K-6; department heads; middle school team leaders.

Status: Completed

The superintendent has assembled a curriculum administrative team headed by an experienced director of curriculum and instruction. All of the stated positions have been filled by the school district under the scrutiny of the superintendent.

The district lacked a highly qualified candidate for the position of director of curriculum after placing 10 advertisements, and during the 2005-2006 school year the superintendent assumed that role. The district successfully hired a candidate with the experience and skills to fill the position in the 2006-2007 school year.

The superintendent has strengthened the curriculum development capacity by adding and by redefining pre-existing district positions. Currently, the positions of director of curriculum, director of reading and language arts K-6, director of mathematics K-6, and the ELA and math curriculum supervisors for grades 7-12 are full-time positions. Curriculum supervisors for grades 7-12 also teach one class period each day. At the high school level, curriculum supervisors also serve as department heads. The high school also has social studies, science, and foreign

languages department heads with teaching assignments. The middle school has teacher team leaders.

In order to create positions capable of effectively supporting curriculum development and delivery, the superintendent worked with the teachers' collective bargaining unit to reconfigure pre-existing positions within the teachers' contract. Negotiating with the union represented an important step because previous positions responsible for curricular and instructional improvements lacked the authority to perform their roles, lacked clarity concerning their responsibilities, and were marginalized because of the provisions of the teachers' contract, according to administrators. Reconfiguring the positions involved establishing new qualifications, requirements, and duties for new reading/ELA and mathematics coordinator positions. The district also negotiated with the teachers' union to redefine the positions of curriculum specialists, which were previously covered by the teacher contract. Currently, the positions within the teachers' bargaining unit are compensated with stipends, and include three high school department heads (for science, social studies, and foreign languages) and middle school team leaders.

With a bolstered curriculum leadership team, administrators have greater capacity to implement the Standards-based Curriculum initiative throughout the district. In order to propel movement and gain traction, the superintendent works closely with the new director of curriculum and instruction to coordinate curriculum development throughout the district. The director of curriculum works with curriculum specialists, department heads, team leaders, principals, and teachers to ensure horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment and to modify the curriculum using student achievement data. The superintendent created a district-wide curriculum council consisting of teachers from all grade levels and content areas to bring about open communication. Among the topics discussed at monthly meetings, which are scheduled and run by the director of curriculum, are early childhood programs, honors classes, and the revision of specific subject matter curricula.

Action step 5: Employ highly qualified, experienced curriculum administrative team (above positions).

Status: Completed

All of the members of the curriculum administrative team are appropriately certified and experienced in the areas under their purview. The curriculum administrative team consists of personnel hired from other districts and staff members appointed from within the district. This has resulted in a team with a complementary set of proficiencies, including knowledge of external practices and understanding of conditions unique to the district.

Action step 6: Provide leadership and support for the business manager.

Status: In progress

The superintendent has worked closely with and provided supervision and support for the business manager. The business manager and the superintendent meet daily to review the budget, open staff positions, and the status of budget items such as outside tuition for special education and utilities, transportation, and professional development costs. Business and financial management functions have generally been strengthened, but some areas are still in need of improvement.

EQA and DOE reports, as well as district leadership, revealed a history of issues regarding and changes to business and financial management practices throughout transitions in the Southbridge leadership. The initial report of the turnaround partners referred to historical issues between the district and town, including significantly different perceptions, distrust, and questions concerning school budget expenditures. Hired in August 2004, the business manager had served with the previous superintendent and the interim superintendent before the new superintendent arrived in 2005 to implement the turnaround plan. The fiscal year 2004 budget showed a deficit, but the budgets for fiscal years 2005, 2006, and 2007 showed a surplus at the end of the year. Interviewees attributed the 2005 surplus to the previous superintendent's conservative budgeting practices, the 2006 surplus to faculty resignations and retirements, and the 2007 surplus to savings in special education transportation and tuition costs when the current superintendent revamped the program.

Overall, Southbridge Public Schools' business and financial management has greatly improved. The district has restructured grants management with an accounting system that is updated monthly. The business manager has completed the first procurement course at the request of the superintendent and has completed his Massachusetts licensure requirements for business

manager. The initial report of the turnaround partners stated that the present business manager has gained skill and credibility with the town in managing the district's finances. The business manager works closely with the town treasurer and the town accountant.

Some issues in business and financial management remain. Interviewees and documents revealed some deficiencies in the areas of report timeliness, particularly the end of the year report, lack of clarification concerning procurement procedures, and insufficient formal communication between the district and the town manager, who serves as the chief procurement officer. Interviewees noted that the town manager, superintendent, and business manager meet together, although not formally and regularly.

Action step 7: Initiate a DOE audit of the FY04-FY05 school budget.

Status: Completed

The Department of Education suggested that the new superintendent initiate an audit for fiscal years 2004 and 2005. The superintendent contacted the DOE and worked with Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson. According to the superintendent and business manager, Mr. Jay Sullivan completed the audit and reported to the superintendent that he found no problems with the business manager's budget monitoring. The district did not receive a formal report, and the EQA team did not have access to the audit.

Action step 8: Review the programs and budget with the special educator director in order to identify a program that meets the needs of the students and is in compliance with state and federal guidelines.

Status: Ongoing

During the 2005-2006 school year, the district engaged in an external evaluation to review its special education service delivery prior to developing a specific plan to address previously identified weaknesses in the program. The June 2005 *Leadership Report* by the Department of Education had stated that the special education program was "grossly out of control" with a rapidly increasing out-of-district special education placement rate that far exceeded the state average. The percentage of the budget allocated to special education had increased from 17.8 in fiscal year 2002 to 28.4 percent in fiscal year 2005. The report attributed the increase to

“program mismanagement” and a lack of compliance with regulatory requirements. After reviewing the 2005-2006 external program evaluation, the special education director and the superintendent decided to restructure special education programs, services, transportation, and the staff.

The superintendent and the newly hired special education director met with the entire faculty in each school to solicit input on the strengths and weaknesses of each special education program. Their final recommendation to the school committee was to restructure the entire program, eliminate 10 positions, hire highly qualified staff members and paraprofessionals, and create new programs capable of recapturing students placed out of the district.

Southbridge Public Schools has implemented a more carefully planned service delivery model that provides special education students with greater access to the curriculum. The district revamped its inclusion model to provide more services within the classroom from content teachers and special education professionals, reducing the frequency of pull-out special education services. During the 2006-2007 school year, the district fully implemented the restructured special education program, including new autistic and behavioral programs in three of the five district schools. The district hired an additional team chair, several school psychologists, and an adjustment counselor to augment the special education department.

Staff members reviewed students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to ensure legal compliance and the delivery of necessary and appropriate services for each student. Southbridge has been working to develop a continuum of services for students throughout the district. The special education department initiated the Positive Academics and Social Skills (PASS) program in 2006-2007 for students with behavioral and emotional challenges in grades preK-8. The PASS program is structured, language based, and intended to provide a nurturing environment for different levels of social development, grouped by grades preK, K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. The district plans to expand PASS to the high school level in the 2009-2010 school year. To adjust the program to meet student needs, board-certified behavior analysts evaluate and create programs to help students with different behaviors and challenges to gain greater access to the curriculum. The district allows ongoing hiring of paraprofessionals to address emerging student needs.

Besides strengthening the program, revamping the special education service delivery model saved the district approximately \$1 million within the 18 months preceding the 2007 EQA review, according to district officials.

Initiative 2: Standards-based Curriculum

Status: In progress and ongoing; all action items completed or in progress.

Summary

Southbridge has made significant progress in the development of a standards-based curriculum. The district has built a K-12 infrastructure for curriculum development and modification consisting of directors, specialists, coordinators, and coaches; committed funds to underwrite curriculum activities; and created a phased cycle to ensure systematic review of each content area. Preliminary documents containing standards, expectations, and generic assessments have been produced in the core content areas at all grade levels by groups of teachers working under the direction of specialists. This will be followed by the development of implementation tools through a careful, deliberative process involving the teachers. Through this participatory process, the district is developing capacity, sustaining the work, enhancing the professionalism of teachers, and raising the expectations for student learning.

Findings:

A. The new curriculum development process is focused on strengthening standards-based instruction. (II)

- Southbridge Public Schools now has a staged process for the development of authentic curricula, beginning with a superstructure of standards, expectations, and generic assessments, and progressing to benchmarks, pacing guides, resources, and other implementation tools.
- The current superintendent introduced a guided participatory process for the development of the fundamental components of the curriculum in each content area at every grade level, and a format for documenting the learning outcomes.
- Under the direction of the superintendent and principals, teachers completed preliminary guides for grades preK-12 in ELA and mathematics during the 2005-2006 school year. Science guides were developed in 2006-2007, and history and social sciences guides were under development during the 2007-2008 school year.
- The curriculum guides established the goals for learning by discipline and grade level, but did not delineate the scope and sequence by unit or time of year, specify teaching

strategies and materials of instruction, and incorporate benchmarks and benchmark assessments.

B. The district has begun to build the structure for curricular improvements. (I)

- Southbridge now has an infrastructure and a cycle to sustain and anchor development and revision of curricula, with delineated roles at the school and district levels.
- District leaders deliberately had not given teachers curriculum guides with predetermined implementation tools because they wanted to build local expertise and capacity.
- Southbridge added a budget line item for curriculum development and renewal to sustain the work from year to year.
- The current superintendent built infrastructure for curriculum development by adding positions in areas of need, redefining positions to increase their effectiveness, and creating a phased six-year renewal cycle.
- The EQA team was unable to determine the permanency of the staffing structure since curriculum leadership positions were underwritten in significant part by external funding sources.

C. Professional development and planning support instructional improvements, although this is still an evident area of priority. (II)

- Teachers are empowered and trained to evolve the curriculum in professional learning communities with the direction and expertise of specialists.
- The superintendent planned and led a full-day session for all Southbridge teachers in November 2005 using the most recent MCAS test results to determine students' strengths and needs, and to identify the implications for curriculum and instruction. The focus of the day was on gap analysis to identify and address curricular weaknesses.
- In 2005-2006, the superintendent contracted with a vendor to provide in-service education on creating a standards-based classroom. The vendor provided six full-day sessions to a cohort of 25 teachers in 2005 and another cohort of 25 teachers in 2006.

- A Research for Better Teaching (RBT) course was offered to teachers to expand their repertoire of methods and techniques used to accommodate a wider range of differences in the classroom.
- The superintendent organized and compiled teacher-generated data by school in separate booklets, together with directions to the principals on next steps.
- At the school level, principals met with staff members to discuss the school results and recommendations. Teachers met in small groups to create improvement strategies in the deficient areas.
- The superintendent created planning teams in each school consisting of five teachers selected by the principal, and directed each team to develop an action plan to address weaknesses in student skill acquisition.
- The school action plans included improvement objectives by grade, content area, and group, together with improvement activities, starting and ending dates, persons responsible, resources needed, and progress measures.
- Observations of 57 randomly selected classrooms across the district by the EQA team revealed that the middle school was the weakest in the district regarding classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student activity and work, and classroom climate.
- In general, the district's teachers set the stage for learning by providing safety, structure, and order in the classroom.
- One theme that emerged from classroom observations across the district was the inconsistent use of instructional practices that encouraged rigor, higher order thinking, and student ownership of their learning.

D. Professional development in Southbridge supports teacher implementation of the curriculum. (II)

- Professional development in Southbridge was closely related to the accomplishment of district goals.

- The district provided trainings in adopted series and programs, creating a standards-based classroom, and Research for Better Teaching methodologies.
- Teachers received hands-on training in data analysis and began to write new curricula and related instructional strategies.
- Teachers earned stipends for curriculum development and completing approved projects in focus, or professional study, groups.

E. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes have not yet caught up with the new instructional expectations and administrator training. (II)

- At the time of the EQA review, the supervision of instruction in Southbridge was not embedded in a system.
- Principals are the instructional leaders in their schools, and all administrators were trained in evaluating classroom instruction with RBT vocabulary and methodologies.
- The collaboration of principals with curriculum specialists and department heads in providing supervision and evaluation of instruction is informal and not clearly defined.
- Most observations and evaluations lack specific recommendations for improving instruction.

Evidence

Initiative 2 has five action steps.

Action step 1: Develop a standards-based template to write curriculum in English/language arts and mathematics aligned with the Massachusetts frameworks.

Status: Implemented

The essential components of this action step are completed, and the implementation tools are in process.

According to the December 2004 EQA report, in the absence of district curriculum guides aligned with the state frameworks, individual teachers determined the taught curriculum in Southbridge. As a result, differences in teaching and learning existed from class to class within a

grade. This lack of alignment and uniformity accounted in part for the repeatedly low performance of Southbridge students on successive administrations of the MCAS tests.

Shortly after assuming the superintendency in 2005, the current superintendent introduced a guided participatory process for development of the fundamental components of the curriculum in each domain at every grade level, and a format for documenting the learning outcomes. The recording template consisted of standards from the state frameworks arranged in a hierarchy by domain and grade level, correlated with expectations and generic assessment strategies. The superintendent told the EQA team that it was necessary to begin with the standards in order to raise the level of student mastery in the district. In interviews with the EQA team, other administrators and teachers endorsed this approach. One administrator stated that setting the standards based on prior student performance results would have underestimated what students could achieve once the district had aligned curricula in the core content areas.

The superintendent worked with the principals to form grade-level committees of teachers to write the curriculum in each domain. Under the direction of the superintendent and principals, teachers completed preliminary guides for grades preK-12 in ELA and mathematics during the 2005-2006 school year, beginning with grades 7-12 ELA and mathematics in the fall of 2005, and continuing with grades preK-6 ELA and mathematics in the spring of 2006.

In 2006-2007, Southbridge engaged a full-time director to oversee curriculum development and revision. Using a similar process, science guides were developed in 2006-2007, and history and social sciences guides were under development during the 2007-2008 school year. District curriculum specialists told the EQA team that teachers used a backward design to generate incremental student learning expectations from the standards, and then developed related assessment strategies. They used the textbook series and supplementary materials adopted by the district, research on best practices, and other curriculum models as references in doing this work.

Principals and teachers told the EQA team that while curriculum guides clearly established the goals for learning by discipline and grade level, they did not delineate the scope and sequence by unit or time of year, specify teaching strategies and materials of instruction, and incorporate benchmarks and benchmark assessments. One teacher stated, “We have what to teach, but not when and how, and we’re just starting to assess how well students are learning.” The lack of

specific scope and sequence, teaching strategies, and instructional materials was part of the district's strategy to encourage teachers to take ownership of their work.

Since the textbook series and programs adopted by the district in ELA and mathematics were based on the state frameworks, teachers were using the manuals and unit tests to help them pace instruction and assess the accomplishment of the goals in the curriculum guides. For example, in grades K-3, teachers were using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) for progress monitoring. In 2007-2008, the mathematics coordinator was developing benchmark tests for grades 4-8 based on released MCAS questions, and the reading coordinator was developing pre- and post-tests based on the reading series for the same grades.

Curriculum specialists told the EQA team that district leaders deliberately had not given teachers curriculum guides with predetermined implementation tools because they wanted to build local expertise and capacity. They agreed that curriculum development in the district would not be sustained if experts did the work “for, rather than with and through, the teachers.” One stated that “when teachers had canned curriculum imposed on them before, it just didn’t take.” Another went on to say that Southbridge was “becoming a professional learning community,” and that the work teachers were doing together was “a slower process, but a process that needs to be valued.” This view was strongly affirmed by the other interviewees.

Action step 2: Lead professional day with entire staff to work on the curriculum for English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Status: Completed

The superintendent planned and led a full-day session for all Southbridge teachers in November 2005 using the most recent MCAS test results to determine students' strengths and needs, and to identify the implications for curriculum and instruction. The superintendent told the EQA examiners that the overall purpose was to create a sense of urgency or “crisis” about the level of student achievement in Southbridge and to generate a sense of agency and efficacy by having teachers identify root causes and corrective actions.

The superintendent began by providing teachers a comprehensive overview of the Southbridge 2005 MCAS test results, including a trend analysis. This was the first time that such a presentation had been made in the district. Next, teachers were divided into groups of five by grade level or discipline to identify questions answered incorrectly by 30 percent or more of the students, according to an item analysis. These questions distinguished between the learners, and provided evidence of the effectiveness of the taught curriculum in the relevant domains and strands. Two groups of teachers analyzed open-response questions and the long composition. These results were weak in Southbridge, and the teachers used the data to determine students' common difficulties with constructed responses, use of conventions, and topic development. Other teacher groups reviewed subgroup performance in the district by grade and domain to identify significant deviations from the aggregate performance.

The superintendent told the EQA team that the focus of the day was on gap analysis to identify and address curricular weaknesses, and added that the teachers received "hands-on training in data analysis and began to write new curriculum and related instructional strategies." As a culminating activity, the teachers entered learning expectations and strategies to improve student learning in curriculum templates. The session closed with each group reporting its activities and findings to the whole group. According to the superintendent and the longest serving administrators, this was the first time that Southbridge teachers had shared practices in a formal meeting.

Following the whole group session, the superintendent organized and compiled the teacher-generated data by school in separate booklets, together with directions to the principals on next steps. The superintendent met with each principal to discuss use of the data. At the school level, principals met with staff members to discuss the school results and recommendations, and each teacher was provided a booklet. Teachers subsequently met in small groups to create improvement strategies in the deficient areas.

To create more time for curriculum development and instructional improvement, the superintendent proposed the addition of two professional days and seven early release days to the school calendar and also reduced the number of school days from 184 to 181. This proposal was enacted in 2006-2007 with the cooperation of the school committee and teachers' association.

The superintendent created planning teams in each school consisting of five teachers selected by the principal for their knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The superintendent met with each school planning team in October 2006 to review an analysis of the 2006 MCAS test results, and directed each team to develop an action plan to address weaknesses in skill acquisition. The tabular worksheets for the action plan included templates for disaggregating results by subgroup, and identifying the most difficult items by domain and strand and the prerequisite knowledge and skills.

The action plans included improvement objectives by grade, content area, and group together with improvement activities, starting and ending dates, persons responsible, resources needed, and progress measures. The action plans were submitted to the superintendent and discussed in each school on the November 2006 professional day. Work on the action plans continued on the professional and early release days with the assistance of the newly appointed director of curriculum and the other curriculum specialists. This work continued at a deeper level in 2006-2007. One teacher commented, “We are peeling back the layers of an onion.”

Action step 3: Provide stipends for teachers in each grade to continue the curriculum work.

Status: Completed

During the period under review, the Southbridge School Committee added a budget line item for curriculum development and renewal to sustain the work from year to year in recognition of the significance of this activity. In 2005-2006, two groups totaling approximately 35 teachers developed preliminary curricula in ELA and mathematics. The district paid stipends to participating teachers for this work. According to the superintendent, the annual line item for curriculum development and renewal amounted to \$150,000.

In addition to their compensation for curriculum development and renewal, teachers earned stipends for completing approved projects in focus, or professional study, groups. These projects often related to curriculum. Under the terms of this initiative, teachers submitted proposals to their principals, then the superintendent, for approval. Stipends were paid upon the completion of an agreed-upon product, such as a benchmark assessment or unit of study.

Curriculum leadership in Southbridge was underwritten in significant part by external funding sources. While the local budget funded the grade 6-8 academic leaders, the grade 7-12 English and mathematics coordinators, and the high school department heads, the K-12 curriculum director was fully funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, the two reading coaches at grades preK-3 and the two math coaches at grades 4-8 were fully funded by grants, and the K-6 reading and mathematics coordinators were partially funded by grants.

Action step 4: Work with turnaround partner, EDC, and schedule professional development for staff on standards-based education.

Status: Completed

When the district did not reach agreement with EDC as its turnaround and professional development partner, the DOE authorized the superintendent to use the services of two advisors, both of whom were experienced superintendents. The former superintendents served as the district turnaround partners in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

In 2005-2006, the Southbridge superintendent contracted with another vendor to provide in-service education on creating a standards-based classroom. Six full-day sessions were offered to a cohort of 25 teachers from October through December 2005 and to another cohort of 25 teachers from January through March 2006. Concerned about the quality of instruction, especially at the middle and high school levels, the superintendent determined that instructional techniques and methods should receive a stronger emphasis.

During the 2005-2006 school year, all administrators were trained in evaluating classroom instruction with Research for Better Teaching (RBT) vocabulary and methodologies. In 2006-2007, all administrators received six further training sessions in RBT methods. The standards-based education sessions were discontinued in 2006-2007, and a six-session RBT course was offered to teachers with a goal to expand the repertoire of methods and techniques teachers might use to accommodate a wider range of differences in the classroom.

Curriculum leaders told the EQA team that professional development in Southbridge was closely related to the accomplishment of district goals. No formal survey of teachers' needs and preferences was conducted to inform the district-determined professional development program.

Southbridge provided training to help teachers meet students' needs as revealed by student assessment results and other performance indicators. One leader said, "We try to stick to areas needed by the district to meet student needs." For example, teacher training was provided on adopted series and programs including Reading First and balanced literacy, Harcourt Trophies in grades K-6, Everyday Math in grades K-6, Connected Math in grades 7 and 8, and Glencoe Math in grades 9-12.

As part of the self-determined professional development program, teachers were given release time to attend approved workshops or to make school visits. Teachers could also form professional study or focus groups on approved topics and were paid stipends, provided that they produced a product.

In interviews with the EQA examiners, administrators and teachers commented on the relevancy and quality of professional development. Most said that the district had not provided any professional development prior to the period under review, but was now offering many opportunities. This represented a major change. Most teachers and administrators stated that the sessions were meaningful and relevant to their roles.

In order to review the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom, the EQA examiners conducted 20- to 30-minute observations in 57 randomly selected classrooms across all schools in the district and recorded the presence or absence of 33 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching, grouped into five categories: classroom management; instructional practice; expectations; student activity, work, and behavior; and classroom climate for learning. In total, the EQA examiners observed 26 ELA classrooms, 22 math classrooms, four science classrooms, and five classrooms of other subjects. For summative information on the classroom observations, see Appendix F: Classroom Observations Summary.

The EQA team learned that instruction in the district supported safety, structure, and order and set the stage for learning. The team rated the district the highest on indicators of classroom management (77 percent throughout the district, with the elementary level the highest rated level, at 81 percent) and classroom climate (75 percent throughout the district, with the elementary and high school levels scoring approximately 83 percent.) The most frequently observed indicators, found in over 80 percent of the observed classrooms, were as follows: teachers modeled and

promoted respectful behavior and safety (noted in 93 percent of the observed classrooms); the interaction between students was respectful and productive (91 percent); the teacher provided clear and explicit directions (89 percent); the teacher created an inclusive environment (89 percent); the teacher checked for understanding and corrected misunderstandings (86 percent); classroom rules and routines were established in the service of learning (86 percent); the teacher communicated and enforced standards and expectations (84 percent); and students were actively engaged in learning (84 percent). In 81 to 82 percent of the observed classrooms, space was flexibly used to accommodate a range of learning activities, the teacher used positive reinforcement, teachers made learning goals clear, and students showed an understanding of the learning goals.

Instruction in the district was rated weakest on indicators demonstrating challenge, rigor, and varied instructional practices. The least frequently observed indicators were the following: students used available technology appropriately (found in 20 percent of the observed classrooms); the teacher used technology to deliver instruction (39 percent); high quality student work was displayed (45 percent); the teacher used a variety of instructional techniques (49 percent); students asked their own questions (53 percent); the teacher provided models and exemplars to exemplify high quality student work (54 percent); the teacher appealed to the interests or curiosity of students to motivate them (57 percent); the teacher incorporated ELA language development skills in content instruction (58 percent); student work reflected quality, complexity, and care (58 percent); and students made connections to prior learning (60 percent). In less than 60 percent of the observed classrooms did examiners observe classrooms that encouraged rigor, higher order thinking skills, and student ownership of their own learning.

Action step 5: Establish a six-year curriculum revision cycle with budgetary appropriations.

Status: Completed

In the 2004-2005 school year, prior to the turnaround plan, Southbridge Public Schools had little infrastructure and no cycle for curriculum development and revision. At the district level, there were no curriculum leadership positions, and the superintendent assumed that role. At the K-5 level, principals were nominally in charge of curriculum, but lacked time, resources, support,

and, in some cases, expertise. The middle school level had four ELA and four mathematics academic leaders with full-time teaching responsibilities. Administrators told the EQA team that the academic leaders coordinated grade-level team discussions that usually focused on students making unsatisfactory progress, and facilitated teacher acquisition of supplies and materials. The leaders did not have defined roles in curriculum development.

At grades 6-12, Southbridge had an ELA coach and a math coach, but administrators stated that these positions were marginalized because they were under the provisions of the teachers' contract, and the coaches lacked the authority to perform their roles. Administrators stated that the coaches had not led the development of curricula in their respective domains.

The current superintendent strengthened the infrastructure of the curriculum and instruction function by adding positions in areas of need, redefining positions to increase their effectiveness, and creating a phased six-year cycle for curriculum development and modification. The district underwrote curriculum-related personnel and activities with a combination of local, grant, and DOE funds. In 2006-2007, the district hired a new curriculum director to coordinate all district curriculum work. It also created a district-wide curriculum council, consisting of teachers representing all grade levels and content areas, to improve communication throughout the district about programs and services. The group met monthly to hear presentations on such topics as the early childhood program, young scholars and honors classes, and revision of the social studies and history curriculum.

The superintendent added the full-time positions of K-6 reading/English coordinator and K-6 math coordinator to assist the principals with curriculum development and to provide direct assistance to teachers. These positions were separate from the provisions of the teachers' contract, and spanned the multiple junctures between the elementary and middle school levels, facilitating continuity. The number of grade 6-8 academic leadership positions was reduced from eight to four, two for each team, and their job descriptions were revised to focus on curriculum and instruction.

At the grades 7-12 level, the ELA and math coach positions were abolished in favor of a reading/English coordinator and a math coordinator. These positions, spanning the middle and high school levels, were outside the provisions of the teachers' contract, although both

coordinators taught one high school class. The superintendent prevailed over a teachers' association challenge that alleged the coach and coordinator positions were essentially the same by demonstrating that the qualifications, requirements, and duties were significantly different.

The district had eliminated department head positions in 2002 for fiscal reasons. The superintendent restored the department heads in science, social studies, and foreign languages, altering the job descriptions to include a stronger emphasis on curriculum development and instructional improvement. In 2007-2008, full-time ELA coaches were added at the Eastford Road (grades preK-1) and Charlton Street (grades 2-3) schools through the Reading First grant, and full-time math coaches were added at the West Street (grades 4-5) and Wells Junior High (grades 6-8) schools through grant funding. Although administrators and teachers commented that the coaches helped teachers interpret assessment results, modeled instructional techniques, and provided resources, the superintendent told the EQA team that there was no plan to increase the use of coaches in the district.

District curriculum leaders told the EQA team that principals were the instructional leaders in their schools. The principals concurred, but stated that they relied on the leaders for assistance in supervising instruction. Both the principals and the curriculum leaders stated that their collaborative relationship in teacher supervision and evaluation was not clearly defined. In classroom observations, the team found that while the district set the stage for learning in the majority of the classrooms, with practices that supported student readiness to learn with clear standards and expectations, the district did not consistently implement varied instructional practices to engage students in challenging and rigorous activities to increase student achievement. See Appendix F: Classroom Observations Summary.

Initiative 3: Local Fiscal Support

Status: In progress and ongoing; action items completed or in progress

Summary

Interviews and a review of documents revealed that the Southbridge Public Schools gained considerable local fiscal support during the period under review. During this time, all school operating budgets submitted by the district to the town manager and town council received approval without reductions, with the exception of the FY 2007 budget which was reduced by approximately \$800,000. The FY 2008 budget was funded as presented to the town, with an increase of approximately \$340,000 (2.3 percent) over the previous year's budget. The town bonded \$1,250,000 to upgrade the district's technology. The town also supported the construction of a new middle/high school, submitted a statement of interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), and received a follow-up visit in the summer of 2007. At the time of the EQA review, the town was awaiting notification of the grant award in order to proceed. Southbridge school facilities are old and tired, but are safe, well lit, and well maintained to provide a positive educational environment.

Findings:

A. The district had the financial resources needed to implement the turnaround plan. (III)

- The town council supported the district budget without reductions for the last three years.
- The district acquired adequate resources through local and significant grant funding; this included full funding of the school district budget and approval of a \$1.25 million bond to support the district's technology plan.
- The town council supported the construction of a new middle/high school.

B. The district established new measures to improve fiscal management, although improvements are still needed in this area. (II)

- To prevent budget deficits, the school committee added a third meeting each month for it to review all budget expenditures.
- The school committee met monthly to review the school budget and quarterly to review federal and state grants.

- The reconciliation of school budget accounts with the town occurred monthly.
- Interviewees revealed that the district did not submit the required end of year report to the Department of Education in a timely manner. As of November 14, 2007, the FY 2007 end of year report required by the DOE in September remained in the school district office. Further, additional relevant reports provided to the DOE, such as the October 1 student enrollment report, were not shared routinely with the town but were made available upon request.
- During the review period, the district developed a capital plan but lacked a formal preventive maintenance plan. The district held responsibility for all school maintenance, and it employed three maintenance employees in addition to custodians, all of whom were directed by a supervisor.

C. Improvement in town officials' level of support for the district was evident despite district-town relationships remaining an area of sensitivity. (III)

- A history of mistrust between the superintendent and the town manager impeded communication and resolution of differences.
- The sensitive nature of the relationship between the superintendent and town manager did not interfere with the provision of financial resources to the district.
- Although per pupil expenditures in Southbridge exceeded the state averages, the town manager stated that the district needed additional financial resources due to the town's severe poverty and social problems and the district's underperforming status.
- A good working relationship existed between the school department and most town officials.

Evidence

Initiative 3 has five action steps.

Action step 1: Establish a working relationship with the town manager and town council members.

Status: In progress

One goal in the district's turnaround plan was the development of an improved relationship between the town and school administration. Interviews with the school committee and school administration revealed a "good" to an "excellent" working relationship with the town council, the town accountant, the town treasurer, the Department of Public Works, and town safety officials. The town manager and the superintendent rarely communicated during the period under review. During several interviews, examiners confirmed that a good working relationship existed between the district and most town officials; however, a history of mistrust existed between the superintendent and the town manager which impeded communication and resolution of differences, but did not interfere with provision of sufficient financial resources. The town manager explained that the town must monitor all district activities. Although the town manager legally can participate in collective bargaining sessions with school bargaining units, the town manager elected to attend the first negotiation meeting and then informed the school committee's subcommittee for negotiations that he would not be attending any additional meetings.

According to interviewees, the relationship between the town manager and the district could best be described as a "work in progress." Meetings between the superintendent and the town manager have occurred not on a regular basis but as needed. The preparation of the school district budget included parents, school councils, and school staff members and utilized student achievement data. However, the town stated that it was not provided with information concerning the budgetary impacts of the rising costs of health insurance and the addition of new employees on the assumption that the school district could fully anticipate these impacts.

Action step 2: Present updates to school committee regarding budgetary expenditures.

Status: Completed and ongoing

The business manager presented monthly budget updates to the school committee. The town manager served as the procurement officer for the town and signed all purchase orders for the school district, rather than delegating this responsibility to the school department. The town required that the district follow Chapter 30B purchasing requirements and that every purchase over \$5,000 include a goods and services contract. Most school purchases piggy-backed on the French River Collaborative competitive bidding process. The district used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to detail expenditures. The district lacked a purchasing manual to provide budgetary

guidelines for principals and program directors. A review of randomly selected FY 2007 bids revealed no discrepancies.

Interviewees indicated that the district processed payroll biweekly then transmitted payroll information to the town treasurer, who calculated the deductions and processed the checks. The school committee members signed the payroll warrant.

The EQA examiners reviewed the district's payroll ending June 2007, and the first payroll period in September 2007. The district's documents indicated the payroll warrants contained appropriate information, including employee names and identification numbers, payroll types, rates of pay, gross and net pay amounts, taxes, pensions, and dental, annuity, and other specified deductions.

During the turnaround plan implementation period, the district developed internal controls and specific business procedures in order to unify financial data. For example, all purchases required a purchase order, and prior to purchasing the business office checked account balances to confirm sufficient funds. The business manager used forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure that spending did not exceed budget limits.

Under the direction of the new superintendent, the school committee revised its policies to ensure communication regarding budget expenditures. The school committee revised section D (Fiscal Management) of the *School Committee Policy Manual*. Policy DBJ gave budget transfer authority to the school committee, and policy DI required district administrators to provide monthly reports to the committee on the district operating budget and quarterly reports on the financial status of federal and state grants. Policy DD authorized the superintendent to sign all grants, and policy DGA authorized the committee chair and the superintendent to sign all pertinent documents.

Interviews with the school committee and school administration revealed they supported the implementation of these policies. The committee met as a committee of the whole once a month to review the status of the operating budget and the financial health of the district. In addition, the committee reviewed the status of federal and state grants on a quarterly basis. A review of school committee minutes from June 25, 2007 showed that the committee authorized the district

administration to balance the budget for FY 2007 and allowed transfers of funds with copies of these transfers to the school committee. Interviewees indicated that the town and the district utilized an integrated accounting software program from KVS. The budget process began in October when the superintendent and business manager met with school administrators to review the budget process for the next fiscal year. The district provided training for new administrators and new support staff members when necessary.

A transparent budget process existed, involving all stakeholders. Administrators developed two budget scenarios. Level I reflected level services, and Level II reflected expenditures necessary to improve student achievement. Level II budgets referenced student achievement data. In building the budget, administrators identified the neediest schools and programs to provide with additional resources. For example, the district budgeted for math coaches at the West Street School and the Wells Middle School, for the Tufts reading program to improve grade 3 reading scores at the West Street School, and for annual professional development programs in standards-based education (attended by 25 teachers across the district). The school committee held the legally required public hearing and approved its fiscal budget in February. Subsequent to the hearing, the school committee adopted the practice of meeting with the education subcommittee of the town council two to three times before submitting its budget to the town manager by the March 31 deadline. The town approved a budget that allowed the district to restore two teaching positions, a technology director, and full library services in all five schools for the 2006-2007 school year.

Action step 3: Schedule meetings with town council to enlist support for school building projects.

Status: Completed and ongoing

The town council has continued to work with the district and has applied for funding to support building projects for a new middle/high school, in order to remedy long-standing concerns about facility conditions.

Prior to the turnaround plan, citizens had voiced concerns to the town council about the condition of school buildings. Building issues became a concern prior to the NEASC reports regarding

building conditions and its decision to place the high school on probation. Later, structural problems at the high school forced the district to close and relocate the school library.

Town officials responded to the initial concerns by establishing the school building committee. The chair was a school committee member, and a town council member also joined. A related committee was the subcommittee on education and human services, on which the town council member served as the vice chair.

Southbridge school district administrators met with town council members to enlist support for school building projects, and successfully gained the support of the town to construct a new middle/high school. The town filed a statement of interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), and in the summer of 2007 the agency visited Southbridge to assess the condition of all school buildings. The town awaits notification of funding approval.

Action step 4: Prepare a presentation for town council on the 2006-2007 school budget.

Status: Completed

During the turnaround plan implementation, the district successfully prepared a carefully considered operating budget for the next fiscal year and provided a thoughtful presentation to the town council. The EQA team reviewed the budget documents and determined that they were transparent and accurately reflected the Level I and Level II components identified as needs by the district. The use of student achievement data in budget development was evident at the school and district levels. The budget proposal contained mission and vision statements, a budget rationale for the community, a budget analysis, questions, and appendices representing each school's requested staffing increases and rationales for the requests.

The school committee and town completed a standard budget review process that facilitated communication. During the month of February, the school committee formally held its public meeting and formally approved the district's operating budget. The school committee met two or three times with the town council subcommittee on education and human services to explain budget requests. After the March 31 budget submission deadline, the superintendent, business manager, and school committee made a formal budget presentation to the town council. In fiscal

year 2007, presentations took place in the Rice Conference Room on May 1, 2006 and at Southbridge High School on May 23, 2006.

The approved school district budget allowed Southbridge to reinstate 10 teaching positions, hire a technology director, and offer full library services in all five schools for the 2006-2007 school year.

The preparation and clear presentation of the budget proposals represented a significant accomplishment because fiscal management had been a major concern in the town, especially since the school district experienced a \$2.3 million deficit in fiscal year 2004, resulting in the loss of 65 positions. This shortfall weakened the credibility of the district, created mistrust, and cast doubt on the district's fiscal projections. Not only did the recent preparation of the budget documents establish a solid basis for budget decisions, but the district finalized five out of six bargaining unit contracts in negotiations during the turnaround plan implementation period.

Action step 5: Prepare a proposal for funding computer hardware and software for town council.

Status: Completed, but needs improvement

One of the new superintendent's initial and immediate priorities was to upgrade school technology in order to improve instruction and student achievement. The district presented a technology plan to the town to upgrade computers in three schools. Remarkably, the town manager led the charge in seeking support for technology upgrades in all five schools. To achieve this goal, the town bonded \$1,250,000.

The attainment of funding and installation of modern technology was a notable achievement in the district. The district funds five professionals to maintain hardware and software and to provide instruction in computer labs. The district employs a director of technology, two hardware specialists, and two computer teachers. One computer teacher is in charge of the computer labs at the middle and high schools, and the second computer teacher provides services to all three elementary schools.

The district still lacks some components to integrate the use of technology in instruction to raise student achievement. The fiscal year 2007 district expenditure for instructional technology

totaled \$137,275. The district has only two computer teachers for five schools, and the team did not see evidence proficiency in using technology in instruction throughout the district. A tour of school facilities and classroom observations indicated limited use and integration of technology into instruction. In 57 classroom observations, examiners found some evidence of the use technology to deliver instruction in 21 classrooms (37 percent); this includes the use of overhead projectors, audio players, and calculators in addition to other forms of technology that are not necessarily computer based. In 11 classrooms (12 percent), students were observed using some form of technology.

Initiative 4: Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community

Status: Partially implemented; all action items not fully implemented

Summary

In the implementation of the turnaround plan between 2005 and 2007, the district worked to improve communication and outreach to parents and the community of Southbridge. The superintendent formed a district-wide school council to solicit input from parents and educators on the district's budget priorities, and a curriculum advisory council to keep parents informed about new curricula and programs considered for adoption by district staff members. The superintendent also met with parent groups and community organizations to rekindle their commitment to the school district. One group, the Citizens for Latino Educational Equity (CLEE), recently began working with the superintendent to increase the involvement of Hispanic parents in the schools.

The district used various forms of communication to encourage greater parent involvement. Schools sent family/student handbooks, newsletters, notices, and flyers to parents to keep them informed about school procedures and events. District staff members provided special education, early childhood, and English language learner information to parents of eligible students in both English and Spanish. Despite their efforts, district and school staff members reported dissatisfaction with overall low levels of parent involvement. Administrators and teachers mentioned some successful school-based strategies that increased parent participation. The team learned of no organized effort by the district to gather and analyze parent attendance data to share successful strategies to increase involvement. Parents expressed concern about poorly translated materials; staff members expressed concern that too much effort was needed to ensure the effective review of translated materials for accuracy and quality. The superintendent mentioned plans to address the need for higher quality Spanish translations in the near future.

Findings:

A. The superintendent reestablished connections with parents and community organizations and attempted to engage these constituencies in the decision-making process. (IV)

- The superintendent formed groups, which included educators and parents, to solicit input on the district's curriculum and budget priorities.
- During the period under review, the superintendent worked with the members of two parent organizations in Southbridge, the Partners for Progress and the Citizens for Latino Educational Equity, the latter to increase the involvement of Hispanic parents in the schools.
- The superintendent used public speaking, television, and personal visits to reach out to community organizations and community leaders in Southbridge.
- The district-wide school council, established in 2006-2007 and comprised of principals and parent members of school councils, met in the fall of each year to provide input on budget priorities for the following fiscal year for the schools and the district as a whole. One outcome was the restoration of full-time librarians at each of the schools.
- The superintendent established and convened the curriculum advisory council to inform parent representatives as district leaders and teachers shared newly written curricula and instructional materials they considered for adoption, such as in science last year.
- The district made a commitment to hire three part-time parent liaisons for the elementary schools and to provide translations for all school-home documents.

B. Currently, the effectiveness of efforts to improve parent communication and parent involvement is unclear. (IV)

- District and school staff members scheduled a number of activities in the schools but expressed a need to increase the involvement of all parents, including Hispanic parents, in their children's schools and education.

- The district and its schools used many forms of communication to keep parents informed about school news and their children's progress; however, staff members and parents said that the district needed to improve its communications in Spanish.
- Parents, staff members, and community organizations expressed concern that, although some Spanish communications from the district represented competent oral and written translations, other communications exhibited poor translations.
- School and district staff members considered the level of parent attendance to be good at some school events but disappointing at others.
- The district lacked a method for systematically tracking parent attendance at school activities and using these data to improve strategies for increasing parent involvement in the schools.
- As of the time of the EQA review, the superintendent had not yet established a Superintendent's Advisory Council for parent involvement, as planned.
- The EQA team did not learn of successful, deliberate efforts to reach out to a proportionate number of community groups connected to Hispanic parents.
- The district did not attempt to measure, such as through a community survey, the effects of the superintendent's efforts to reach out to the community on the public's perception of the school district.
- Work with the new Citizens for Latino Educational Equity (CLEE) organization was just beginning at the time of the review. The turnaround plan does not clearly integrate the new goals initiated by CLEE to maintain the integrity of the two-way relationship.
- The turnaround plan does not specifically address district actions to close the achievement gap, which CLEE identified as a priority. The EQA team saw limited use of some of the instructional practices related to increasing the achievement of students without English-language home experiences.

Evidence

Initiative 4 has six action steps.

Action step 1: Meet with new parent organization in town (Partners for Progress) to identify needs and concerns.

Status: In progress (initially completed and restarted)

Evidence

During the period under review, the superintendent worked with two new parent organizations in Southbridge, the Partners for Progress and the Citizens for Latino Educational Equity (CLEE).

Partners for Progress pre-dated the turnaround plan. When the superintendent was interviewing for the position in August 2005, members of the Partners for Progress introduced themselves to her. The mission of the Partners for Progress, the first group of its kind in Southbridge, was to support a Proposition 2 1/2 tax override for the Town of Southbridge. According to the superintendent, the failure of the override would result in the certain loss of 65 teachers across the district. After the school committee named the new superintendent, members of Partners for Progress hosted a reception for her in September in the high school cafeteria. In October, the superintendent met with three members of Partners for Progress to discuss how the organization could assist the schools. The superintendent visited with them again in November as they had agreed to join one of the district's three attendance study committees, one for the elementary level, one for the middle school level, and one for the high school level. The attendance committees held three meetings over the course of the 2005-2006 school year to identify ways to promote daily student attendance. The superintendent reported that the committees provided suggestions to improve attendance including daily telephone calls home concerning student absences, discussions with guidance staff members for students with chronic absences, and incentives for perfect attendance.

After the override failed, parent interest in Partners for Progress waned; however, the superintendent met with Partners for Progress for the last time in April 2006 to discuss air quality issues at the high school, a concern of one parent. The superintendent directed the maintenance department to conduct air quality testing at the high school, and it found no issues. During interviews, parents reported that some former members of Partners for Progress moved out of town after the Proposition 2 1/2 override failed.

The other new organization, the Citizens for Latino Educational Equity, formed in early 2007 and included parents of Southbridge students. According to parent interviewees, the primary concerns of CLEE members were poor student performance on the MCAS tests and SATs, the high school dropout rate, and student suspensions, especially among the Hispanic subgroup. The organization formed five subcommittees to focus on professional development, resource allocation, curriculum development, the achievement gap between Hispanic and white students, academic support programs, and parent involvement.

Because of a mutual desire to collaborate, the chair of CLEE met with the superintendent to discuss a partnership in August 2007. The chair invited the superintendent to the next CLEE meeting in early October. With parent involvement as the district's focus for its collaboration with CLEE, the superintendent attended the CLEE meeting to discuss possible links between the organization and the school district. The high school and the middle school principals also attended at the request of the superintendent. After the meeting, the superintendent invited CLEE members to make a presentation on their role in the community to the school committee during the third week of October. According to the chair of CLEE, they delivered a PowerPoint presentation that raised issues of race existing in Southbridge and called for sensitivity and cultural awareness training for Southbridge school district staff members. They hoped to secure an economic partnership with the school committee to provide tutoring assistance, including a location and support. According to the superintendent, the chair of CLEE spoke about a number of controversial issues at the school committee meeting, which caused an enormous backlash in the newspaper for several weeks. Shortly afterward, the CLEE chair met with the superintendent to establish the roles and interests they would explore as partners.

The superintendent and CLEE chair agreed to begin working together on parent involvement in the schools. At the early November CLEE meeting, the group discussed ways to increase Hispanic parent involvement. The PTA president, two school committee members, and the high school principal attended with the superintendent at her request. As an outcome of the meeting, several parents agreed to canvass homes in town to encourage more parents to attend meetings and get involved. The superintendent reported that the district made a commitment to hire three part-time parent liaisons to greet parents in the elementary schools and to provide translations for all documents sent home throughout the year. CLEE members reported that they also met with

individual principals in the fall of 2007 to inquire about academic support. At the time of the EQA visit, it was too early to determine if the partnership between Southbridge Public Schools and CLEE resulted in an increase in Hispanic parent involvement.

While increasing parent involvement is a turnaround plan goal, the current plan does not specifically identify other CLEE goals, such as addressing the achievement gap, to maintain the integrity of the two-way relationship. Proficiency gaps in Southbridge in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for Hispanic students (as well as for students with disabilities and low-income students). This was true in spite of the fact that Hispanic students were the only district subgroup whose performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007 did not decline. In math, the performance of the Hispanic subgroup improved between 2004 and 2007.

Although Southbridge's Hispanic and limited English proficient/formerly limited English proficient (LEP/FLEP) students underperformed their statewide counterparts on most MCAS tests in 2007, there were some exceptions. LEP/FLEP students outperformed the state average for their subgroup on the grade 3 MCAS reading test, and Hispanic students outperformed their statewide counterparts on the grade 10 MCAS ELA test. On the grade 3 MCAS math test, Hispanic students scored higher than the state average for their subgroup, and LEP/FLEP students scored higher than their statewide peers. On the grade 5 MCAS math test, Hispanic students slightly outperformed their statewide counterparts.

However, the EQA team saw limited use of some of the instructional practices related to increasing the achievement of students without rich English-language home experiences. In observations of 57 randomly selected classrooms across the district, examiners noted the use of a variety of instructional techniques to increase the level of learning in only 49 percent of the classrooms visited, and they observed the incorporation of ELA acquisition and ELA language development in subject area instruction in only 58 percent of the classrooms visited.

Action step 2: Attend local speaking engagements (Lions, Rotary, hospital, senior citizens).

Status: Ongoing

Evidence

The superintendent held meetings with a number of organizations and community leaders during the period under review with the intention of reaching out to the community, reversing the previous superintendent's failure to engage with groups in the town. The superintendent stated that forming good relationships with local organizations was necessary to rebuild pride in the schools, to bridge the divide between the community and its schools, and to develop town support for the school district, especially for a new middle/high school. Groups that the superintendent spoke to in 2005 and 2006 included the Southbridge Rotary Club and the Southbridge Lions Club.

During 2005 and 2006, the superintendent met with many town and community leaders, including PTA presidents, the town manager, the town librarian, the police chief, the pastor of the Elm Street Congregational Church, the principal of Trinity Catholic School, and a pastor of the local Catholic church. She also met with four town counselors, a YMCA director, the director of Community Connections, the chair of the Worcester Consortium about a grant opportunity, a staff member at Representative Wolf's office, Representative Carron, and Senator Moore. One issue the superintendent pursued concerned a \$150,000 violence prevention grant. She toured the local senior center and Wayside Family Services to view a children's program. She attended several events including a Trinity Catholic School PTO meeting, a Rotary luncheon and two meetings, a meeting of the Early Childhood Council, and a Town Hall Educational Forum with Representative Haddad and Geraldo Alicea. A Worcester radio station interviewed the superintendent and a Southbridge radio station conducted a discussion of the underperformance of the schools with the superintendent. The superintendent also ran a television show on the "state of the schools" for several months on local cable television.

The EQA team did not learn of any attempt by the district to measure, such as through a community survey, the effects of the superintendent's efforts to reach out to the community on the public's perception of the school district.

Action step 3: Establish superintendent's advisory council to dialogue with the community.

Status: Not implemented

Evidence

During the site visit, the superintendent indicated that the Superintendent's Advisory Council was not established. When asked about this group, she mentioned that she ran a television show on the "state of the schools" that aired on local cable for several weeks.

Action step 4: Establish a district-wide school council chaired by the superintendent to meet twice each year to discuss budget priorities.

Status: Partially implemented

Evidence

According to the superintendent, the district-wide school council met once each year to "provide input on the budget as it is being developed." EQA examiners learned during interviews that principals and parents served on the district-wide school council.

During the site visit, EQA examiners interviewed three parents on the district-wide school council, which was established during the 2006-2007 school year. Parents stated that the district held one district-wide school council meeting at the high school in December 2006 to discuss budget priorities for the following fiscal year. At this meeting, the members took a count of the positions eliminated at each of their schools after the tax override failed.

According to parents and the superintendent, the district-wide school council reached consensus on the three fiscal year 2008 budget priorities: the restoration of the full-time librarians at each of the schools; purchase of a new science program; and provision of funds for building maintenance. Parents reported that the district funded the fiscal year 2008 budget at Level I, which was a level services budget, and it included the budget priorities of the district-wide school council. They said that the district did not approve Level II budget improvements. Several parents shared that school council members at each of the schools were already discussing budget issues in their school council meetings in 2007-2008 as they did the previous year. These discussions were in preparation for representatives from each of the school councils to bring their budget priorities for fiscal year 2009 to this year's district-wide school council meeting.

Action step 5: Establish a curriculum advisory council to meet three times each year to discuss programs and curriculum.

Status: Implemented

Evidence

According to administrators, teachers, and parents interviewed by the EQA team, parents and teachers were members of the curriculum advisory council during the 2006-2007 school year, and the previous high school principal attended meetings of the council on occasion. The EQA team did not receive information about the number of times that the curriculum advisory council met in 2006-2007, but learned of various activities related to science curriculum development. Parents who served on the curriculum advisory council described their meetings as welcoming, organized, and focused on enhancing the science curriculum. One parent shared that he met with high school teachers in the science department more than 12 times and that he actually participated in writing the science curriculum; the parent also worked with math teachers. Interviewees discussed presentations made to the curriculum advisory council for its review. High school science teachers communicated with the advisory council the need for increased science instructional time, and demonstrated how microscopes met their standards. Teachers who made the presentations to the curriculum advisory council explained to the parents that they recently finished a complete revision of the K-12 science curriculum. These teachers also stated that the district piloted materials for several science programs at each level and sought parent input on the science programs for potential adoption.

Action step 6: Schedule building activities for all parents including Hispanic and bilingual families.

Status: Implemented

Evidence

Based on district documents and interviews with central office and school staff members, EQA examiners learned of the various ways in which the district staff involved all families, including Hispanic and bilingual families. According to School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and district staff members, schools sent communications home in English and Spanish. These included school newsletters, classroom newsletters, daily homework, Everyday Math Homelinks, parent/guardian

surveys, and regular academic team/parent communication notes. Some parents accessed school websites. The SIPs listed various events held at schools to increase parent involvement such as kindergarten orientation, open houses, family math and literacy nights, literacy breakfasts, a reading aloud program, Bedtime Stories, the preschool “Make-it, Take-it” night, Peacebuilder activities, celebrations, parent seminars, the Second Step program, the Total Transformation program, and the principals’ roundtable. Schools reached out to parents and the community through activities such as the Thanksgiving Food Drive, Supplies for Soldiers, Reach Out and Read days, and career days. Some schools recently began to use the Connect-ED system to send messages to students’ homes by telephone.

During interviews, district and school staff members described the strategies they used to increase parent involvement. Schools usually saw good parent attendance at open houses, family math and literacy nights, and school honors or holiday celebrations. Central office staff members shared that they had low parent attendance at special education Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, English language learner parent meetings, Title I PAC meetings, and most of the parent training sessions the district offered. Middle school teachers saw a big increase in parent attendance at open houses about two years ago when the school allowed students to come along with their parents, and district staff members mentioned that providing food increased participation.

During interviews with EQA examiners, parents described the ways that the district and its schools communicated with them. For general communications, such as notices concerning school events and student health issues, staff members sent the information home with the students. All schools sent a parent/guardian/student handbook and a student planner home with every student at the start of each school year. The district required parents to sign confirmations that they received the handbook. Several parents shared that they really liked the student planner.

When a student was absent and a parent did not notify the school, school staff members called the parents to confirm the absence. At the middle school, even when parents notified the school by phone, school staff members made calls home to verify the absence for safety reasons. Parents sent notes, emails, or made phone calls to their child’s teacher or to other school staff members about concerns. At the middle school, teachers had telephones in their classrooms that

could receive incoming calls. Teachers and school staff members stated they responded to these parent communications and initiated the same types of contact.

All schools conducted open house events at the start of the school year to welcome parents to the schools. At the 2007 open house events, teachers had parents sign up for evening parent conferences scheduled to take place shortly thereafter. Parents interviewed expressed disappointment that the district cancelled these parent conferences. The superintendent clarified that negotiation issues resulted in the re-scheduling of the conferences, and that notices were distributed directly to parents and made through the local media.

During the period under review, parents clarified that teachers made themselves available for conferences requested by parents. To inform parents about their child's progress, the district mailed report cards to families of students in grades 6-12 and sent report cards home with preK-5 students, requiring guardian signature. Teachers also sent midterm progress reports to families, and students kept assignment books for parent notification of schoolwork.

Some parents had concerns about the district's communications. One parent stated that student safety items appeared in the newspaper prior to notification from the child's school. Another parent complained that the district did not translate all documents going home and that the district sent some poorly translated documents home to Spanish-speaking parents. According to the parent, this was frustrating for many parents in a district with a 37 percent Hispanic population (24.7 percent of the total student body is classified as first language not English). A parent indicated that the high school improved substantially with new Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes, new staff members, and notable "commitment." One parent indicated that "positive progress" in the district needed more emphasis, suggesting that the district hire public relations staff to retain students.

During interviews, district and school staff members expressed disappointment with the lack of parent involvement in school activities and a desire to increase the number of parents who became involved. They shared a belief that increasing parent attendance at building activities would strengthen parent engagement in their children's education, build a stronger parent-teacher relationship, and improve student performance in the classroom.

Initiative 5: District and School Vision, Mission, and Goals

Status: Implemented; action items completed in whole or in part

Summary

The EQA team found that the district now has a set of goals and plans that provide direction for the district, the schools, the principals, and the superintendent. The school committee, administration, and teachers participated in the process of shaping the goals and plans through analyzing student achievement data and providing input. This has created greater school committee and staff ownership, a growing understanding by individuals of how to operate in their respective roles to serve the purposes of the district, and a greater alignment of district activities.

The school committee and superintendent indicated that at the time the turnaround plan was first introduced, the district lacked basic operational infrastructure such as a curriculum, aligned instructional programs, a functioning administrative team, a professional development program, and effective budget management processes. The district's first priority was to set targets for the establishment of systems for the functions of district and school management, curriculum, data analysis, human resources, and finances. The school committee and administration expressed that the district's progress in building systems and establishing new practices has far exceeded expectations.

The current set of district, school, and administrator goals is oriented toward task completion with set timelines. Few outcome goals are included. The superintendent indicated that prior to making systems operational, and with the district attempting a radically new approach to respond to the urgency of its turnaround plan, an emphasis on measurable, data-based outcome goals for student achievement and other indicators of success would be less meaningful than the current task completion goals. Some school committee members indicated that it is time for the district and superintendent to set quantitative outcome goals. The superintendent indicated that although establishing a more reliable student assessment system, strengthening and building the new district structures, and taking time to embed and refine district-wide practices precede the heavy reliance on measurable performance goals, the district is moving toward such goals.

Findings:

A. The district's vision, mission, and goals have created both an alignment of and a clear direction for the Southbridge school system. (I)

- The Southbridge Public Schools now has a clear vision, mission, set of goals, and plans for improvement that are correlated with each other and have created a direction for district activities.
- The district has new vision and mission statements that reflect the stated focus of the district and its schools, as confirmed by the school committee, administrators, and staff members.
- School Improvement Plans are correlated with district goals and data-driven action plans.

B. The district has generated staff understanding and ownership in carrying out its initiatives. (III)

- Interviewees stated that the superintendent's clarity regarding the district's goals and plans, supported by abundant data, has led to increased support.
- The vision and mission statements were drafted by the administrative team and reviewed by the school committee and teachers, who provided input.
- District processes actively involve staff members in using data to identify actionable areas for improvement.
- The school principals developed their own respective principal action plans and goals based on district goals, school-based action plans, and the National Institute of School Leadership training.

C. District goals and plans are continually refined through active and inclusive participation throughout the district. (I)

- The district's vision and mission statements are subject to annual review and revision.
- The district goals were identified by the superintendent, and the administrative team created and refined the action items to achieve each goal.

- Staff members review data and identify instructional strategies and program materials to address student weaknesses identified through the DIBELS (at the early elementary level), Stanford 10, and MCAS test data.

D. Although the district has not yet determined quantitative benchmarks to measure progress in meeting some goals, the superintendent intends to use quantitative formative benchmarks to measure growth in student achievement in the future. (I)

- Improvement plans do not contain measurable benchmarks to track progress toward the goals on an ongoing basis.
- Due to the lack of formative assessments with predictive validity, administrators were not certain why student performance in some areas, such as grade 3 reading, declined or remained flat.
- The superintendent described to the EQA team the district's growth in using formative data for measuring progress, in order to allow the district at all levels to identify and respond to quantitative indicators demonstrating midyear progress toward measurable student achievement goals.

Evidence

Initiative 5 has six action steps.

Action step 1: Schedule an administrative retreat to review district vision, mission, and goals.

Status: Completed and ongoing

The administrative retreat took place in September 2005, promptly after the superintendent officially began her tenure on August 15 and subsequently hired a new high school principal, special education director, middle school principal, and elementary principal.

Having noted that Southbridge Public Schools did not have an updated vision, mission, and set of goals that reflected student needs and tied into the work of the schools or their staffs, the superintendent made this initiative a priority. After the superintendent and the administrative team drafted new vision and mission statements in September 2005, the superintendent shared the drafts with the school committee and the staff for feedback. The district now has vision and

mission statements that are subject to annual review and revision. The EQA team confirmed through interviews with the school committee, staff, and administrators and through observations of the current plans and practices that the vision and mission statements are meaningful in that they reflect the work of the district and the high standards that it can work toward.

The district's vision statement is: "Southbridge Public Schools is a diverse community of learners in which all students meet or exceed the high academic expectations set forth by the Massachusetts Frameworks through a rigorous curriculum, targeted interventions, and continuous analysis of data. All stakeholders collaborate to ensure that each student will be given the opportunity to excel in academics and the arts, acquire technological expertise, participate in wellness programs, recognize cultural diversity, practice personal integrity, demonstrate responsible citizenship and become a lifelong learner."

Interviews and data from classroom observations confirmed that Southbridge has a growing, but not complete, awareness of the ways in which it needs to serve its "diverse community of learners." The district is particularly considering ways in which to strengthen English language learner and special education programs using disaggregated subgroup data. Yet, teachers interviewed by the EQA team revealed mixed levels of understanding of how to target interventions, and the 57 random classroom observations conducted by examiners indicated that strategies for serving diverse students are not embedded throughout the district. Classroom observations suggest that the district has not yet embedded practices in all classrooms for using additional staff members to support instruction (present in 55 percent of the classrooms observed), incorporating ELA acquisition and development into subject area instruction (present in 58 percent of the classrooms observed), using a variety of instructional techniques to increase the level of learning (present in 49 percent of the classrooms observed). Thirty-seven percent of the classrooms observed were not well provisioned with multiple resources that address different learning styles. Informally, the team did not observe many instances of tiered student work to create different levels of challenge for students. Classroom observation data also suggest that rigor was not embedded in instruction throughout the district. Examiners noted that the pace of instruction was matched to students' rates of learning and benchmark expectations in 63 percent of the classrooms observed, and students' work reflected complexity, quality, and care in 58 percent of the classrooms observed.

Positively, classroom observations suggest that the district has a foundation for instructing a diverse group of learners. The vast majority of classrooms were inclusive and instilled a sense of belonging (89 percent), positive reinforcement was used (82 percent), student interaction was respectful and productive (91 percent), and the teacher modeled and promoted respectful behavior (93 percent). Seventy-seven percent of observed teachers expressed confidence in students' ability to perform challenging work. Further, teachers and students generally demonstrated cooperation to meet articulated expectations. Students in 79 percent of the observed classrooms took responsibility for their own work with or without teacher direction, and 77 percent of the classrooms demonstrated implementation of instructional strategies that reflected district and/or school priorities.

Observations by the team and interviews with the school committee, staff members, and administrators revealed that the school system has been using data, as articulated in its vision statement, especially to strengthen and build upon its curriculum. Staff members have been reviewing data and working to identify instructional strategies and use instructional program materials to address student weaknesses mostly identified through MCAS and Stanford 10 test data, and through DIBELS data at the early elementary level.

Even under scrutiny to improve its MCAS scores, the district has worked to uphold the broader vision that "All stakeholders collaborate to ensure that each student will be given the opportunity to excel in academics and the arts, acquire technological expertise, participate in wellness programs, recognize cultural diversity, practice personal integrity, demonstrate responsible citizenship and become a lifelong learner." The district has retained arts and sports programs even in lean financial times. The music program at the middle and high schools is highly valued in the town, according to stakeholders interviewed by the team. Technology has been prioritized through a \$1.2 million purchase of computers that have been installed in classrooms throughout the schools.

The EQA team did not receive information on how the district measures "responsible citizenship" and becoming a "lifelong learner," although examiners noted progress in several areas that the district has identified for improvement. These areas include a higher attendance rate (92.8 percent in 2006), a lower suspension rate (9.5 percent out-of-school suspensions in

2006), a lower dropout rate (8.3 percent for all students and 22.1 percent for special education students in 2006), and a higher four-year graduation rate (64.3 percent for all students and 24.1 percent for special education students in 2006). The district's dropout and four-year graduation rates, though improved, continue to lag the state averages.

The district's mission statement is: "Southbridge Public Schools is a professional learning community committed to meeting the diverse needs of all students to reach proficient and advanced standing in their learning. We will engage in a focused and continual process for improvement by analyzing data and the methods we employ to improve our practices of teaching and learning. We will work to foster and sustain a collaborative effort from all stakeholders in our schools and community to support our students to face the challenges in achieving high standards. We will prepare all students to meet the demands of an ever-changing, global society." Teachers and administrators confirmed that the staff is engaged in the work of "professional learning communities" to analyze data and reflect on methods to improve instruction. The mission reflects a high standard, aiming for all students to reach proficiency. Like the vision statement, the mission statement reflects high standards that the district is working toward but has not yet attained.

Besides the refinement of the district vision and mission statements, another priority of the new superintendent was to identify district goals. She created these goals herself for review by the administrative team and the school committee, stating that the goals were set because they addressed the needs identified in the *Leadership Report* and the prior reviews of the district that led to the declaration of underperformance.

Southbridge Public Schools does not have a document entitled a District Improvement Plan. The district has five goals that relate to: 1) student performance; 2) personnel; 3) educational programs; 4) learning environment; and 5) parent, family, and community involvement. At the initial administrative retreat, the administrative team assigned action steps to each goal for the period of 2005 to 2007. In 2007, the administrative team reviewed the document and updated the action steps for the period of 2008 to 2010. The general goals remained the same, although Goal 3 was expanded to include "educational programs and initiatives," and the definitions, action steps, and responsible persons were updated. Some actions items were made into continuance

items. For example, Goal 2, Action Item 2 was changed from “approve a new curriculum leadership infrastructure to address the recommendations identified in the Department of Education’s *Leadership Report* and the High School NEASC report” to “continue to support the curriculum leadership infrastructure....” Goal 1, Action Item 8 was changed from “Increase the quality of teaching in mathematics by implementing the Everyday Mathematics program in grades PreK-6. Redesign instructional time allocated for mathematics at each grade level to increase instructional time in mathematics to between 70-90 minutes each day” was changed to “...60-70 minutes each day.”

Action step 2: Work with school committee, administration, staff, and parents to write clear and measurable goals for the district.

Status: Partially completed

The team determined that the establishment of clear and measurable goals for the district was a work in progress, although the initial work tasks related to this action step were successfully completed early in the turnaround plan implementation period. The turnaround plan submitted on November 29, 2005 stated that this action step was completed in November 2005. The team verified that the district had established clear completion goals, although success was not measurable for all goals. The superintendent said during an interview with the team that the district “is just getting into benchmarks” like those set forth in the action plans. “Benchmarks were not used until this year.”

Like the vision and mission statements, the superintendent shared with the school committee the five district goals and the action steps drafted by the administrative team for its review and feedback. The superintendent stated that she also shared the goals with staff members in all schools in group discussions prior to the November 2005 presentation to the school committee and the school committee’s adoption of the two-year goals. The December 29, 2006 Department of Education *Status Report*, on page 1, confirms that “under the leadership of the Superintendent and School Committee, the District’s vision, mission and goals were written and communicated to the staff and the public soon after the superintendent took office.”

The process of establishing the goals represented a turning point for the district. The DOE *Leadership Report* dated June 10, 2005, which predated the turnaround plan, had identified the

past problem that “stakeholders have not been involved in any real or significant way in planning discussions that may have occurred.” Evidence indicated that the district wrote clear goals that were reviewed, vetted, and approved by staff members and the school committee and shared with parents. Parents, staff members, and school committee members interviewed by the EQA team felt that the process was sufficiently inclusive and participatory, expressed shared ownership of the general goals, and agreed that they represented priority areas for the Southbridge Public Schools.

When asked how the goals met the standard of “clear and measurable,” the superintendent replied that the goals could be measured by the completion of the component action items. When asked if there were district-wide performance goals for student achievement results and other indicators of academic success and participation that were measured from year to year with identified benchmark indicators of progress toward the goal, and that were (or could be) reported to staff members to show midyear and year to year progress, the superintendent and administrators confirmed the statement of one administrator that “we are not there yet.”

While continuing to build the infrastructure, the current superintendent has indicated that moving closer toward more measurable goals is a priority. In the root cause analysis in the turnaround plan, the superintendent noted, “The district lacks clear and meaningful goals incorporating identification of gaps in student performance with meaningful strategies and plans for improvement.” In the implementation of the turnaround plan, professional development, school improvement planning, budget allocation, and school- and classroom-based action plans have incorporated the use of data.

Although particular schools and grade levels have some indicators for improvement, such as a SIP goal to increase proficiency by five percent or suspension data that would show a decreasing number of physical assaults in the middle school, a district-wide practice for setting outcome goals for student performance or quantitative goals related to staff performance was not evident at the time of the EQA visit; however, the superintendent provided documentation indicating its existence after the team had departed. Principals indicated that it would be very valuable to have regular assessment data they could receive and review monthly that would measure progress toward proficiency in math and ELA by school, grade level, and classroom.

The superintendent told the EQA team that the district did not currently have a set of reliable formative student assessments with predictive validity. The superintendent introduced the Stanford 10 assessments at grades 2-9 when she arrived, because of Pearson Assessment research indicating a 0.7 predictive validity with the MCAS tests, but the annual assessments are not formative. The superintendent expressed that the DIBELS, the GRADE, and unit assessments provided the information principals needed to reliably track student progress toward proficiency. She stated that her goal is to introduce more reliable and more predictive formative assessments in the future. She is considering investigating the use of Galileo assessments and introducing a process to create assessments for each grade level that are well aligned to the district curriculum as well as to state standards. The latter could be a two-year process, she stated, based on her previous experiences.

Lacking formative assessments with predictive validity, administrators indicated that they were not certain why performance on the MCAS tests in some areas declined or remained flat during the period under review, such as in grade 3 reading. On the other hand, some staff members reported that they were encouraged by improved performance on some question types, identified by item analyses that staff members had focused on in the previous school year.

One factor that may have contributed to the district's ability to use clear and measurable formative benchmarks for student performance to chart the midyear progress of individual students, classrooms, grade levels, subgroups, and schools is the district's investment in professional development, particularly in the area of data analysis. The *Leadership Report* had stated, on page 2, that "the inability or failure to develop and successfully implement a comprehensive district improvement plan which would improve classroom instruction, using student and teacher performance assessments to identify specific areas in need of improvement, and provide professional training to achieve specific goals is another example of deficient leadership and inadequate governance." The *Leadership Report* recommended, on page 3, that the DOE should "assist the district in establishing a comprehensive system for professional development directly connected to areas of need."

The superintendent declined the DOE's professional development offer with the assistance of the Education Development Center (EDC) so that the district could instead focus on the district goal

related to personnel, which states, “Update and review the District Professional Development Plan and the District’s Improvement Plan to ensure that: 9a) all professional training supports the district’s three-year goals, (b) within each school the teacher’s professional development plan reflects the district goals and recertification requirements, (c) teachers’ PDP will be reviewed by their principal, director, or department head.”

The District Professional Development Plan included an emphasis on professional development in data analysis. Moreover, the superintendent made data analysis a priority even on the first district-wide professional development day, in which she led all staff members in a process to read, reflect on, and complete worksheets to assist in the analysis of MCAS data reports produced from TestWiz that she provided to teachers. This exercise, which included teacher identification of strategies and resources to address areas of weakness by school, content area, grade level, and subgroup, led to the compilation of MCAS data analysis reports based on 2005 data. In the 2005-2006 school year, the administrative and school-based leadership teams completed the data analysis work that contributed to each school’s data-driven action plan. The district had three full days and seven early release days of professional development dedicated to data analysis.

Action step 3: Share goals with all community and school staff.

Status: Completed and ongoing

Not only did the district share its goals with the community and staff, interviewees indicated that stakeholders felt confident that the superintendent’s practices of communicating the goals to the town and staff will continue.

The original turnaround plan dated November 29, 2005 noted that this action step was ongoing. Following the superintendent’s November 2005 presentation of the district goals to the school committee, and the school committee’s adoption of the two-year goals, the superintendent distributed the goals to all schools and staff members. On an ongoing basis, the superintendent shares district goals and related plans to community stakeholders, including the town council and town meetings, and to parents involved in committees such as the district-wide school council that meets annually to provide input into the budget.

School committee members stated that the transparency of the district's goals and plans, supported by abundant data, has led to increased community support. According to the December 29, 2006 DOE *Status Report*, "improved communication and credibility with parents and community resulted in the Town Council approving a \$1 million bond issue for school technology."

Action step 4: Principals will develop goals for their own evaluation based on the district goals.

Status: Completed

Each of the school principals developed their own respective principal action plans and goals, and the superintendent provided an evaluation of these administrators based on the accomplishment of the stated goals. When asked the basis for the goals, the principals stated that the goals were based on the district goals, their action plans, and the leadership training provided by the National Institute of School Leadership (NISL). A review of the evaluations showed that all principals had student achievement goals for ELA and math as well as other self-identified goals related to professional growth or school improvement. The evaluations also had a section summarizing overall administrative responsibilities.

Evaluations contained general improvement goals in ELA and math, although no specific references to benchmarks were noted, and compensation was not tied to student achievement data. Rather, student achievement improvement goals for principals described the activities they would engage in as instructional leaders in their buildings, such as supervising staff members, providing leadership in staff discussions, increasing time on learning, helping staff members analyze data, and providing programs for parents and students. All five principal evaluations reviewed included all the components of education reform, complete with comments that were instructive and conducive to growth.

Rather than merely addressing administrator evaluations, the *Leadership Report* recommended, on page 11, that the DOE "should provide technical assistance in the development of an effective performance evaluation program for all personnel in the District. This should include the development of new instruments to assess the performance of those being evaluated and professional development for the evaluators." The *Leadership Report* noted, on page 8, that

“with the exception of the Middle School, their regular monitoring of staff members was not fully reflected in the teacher evaluation program currently in use within the district,” and that none of the 60 elementary or 34 high school evaluations showed teachers in need of improvement or contained references to poor student achievement.

In the 45 personnel files reviewed by the EQA team, all teachers were found to be certified, 43 evaluations were timely, and 42 were informative. However, only 12 evaluations were considered instructive and only five were considered conducive to growth. The superintendent indicated that the evaluation instrument used was not sufficient to provide effective supervision and evaluation. According to the June 22, 2007 DOE *Status Report*, the Southbridge Education Association (SEA) contract was settled, like all other contracts, in June 2007. Teachers agreed to a three-year contract with a 1.25 percent increase for the 2006-2007 school year, a 2.0 percent increase the subsequent year, and a 3.0 percent increase the third year. In the most recent version of the district goals (2008-2010) provided to the team, Action Item 7 of Goal 2 is “continue negotiations to adopt a process for teacher evaluation and develop an implementation plan to distribute a multiple-year process and finalize documents to support the process by the spring of 2008.” The superintendent stated that a new evaluation document was forthcoming.

The evaluations of the directors included all the components of education reform, complete with comments that were considered instructive and conducive to growth. By contrast, teacher evaluations were not considered as effective.

Action step 5: New School Improvement Plans were written to reflect district goals.

Status: Completed

The EQA team’s review of the current School Improvement Plans (SIPs) revealed a correlation with district goals, and the original turnaround plan dated November 29, 2005 noted that SIPs were written to reflect district goals by December 2005. All SIPs included ELA and math performance goals. Other goals in the SIPs varied among the schools. Some included climate goals, goals for parent involvement, attendance goals, and goals for school programs or activities. In addition to goals, the SIPs included activities, persons responsible, resources, and timelines. The new SIPs represent a vast improvement from the SIPs described in the *Leadership Report*, which noted that at the time of the review in 2005, “most [interviewees] acknowledged

that both the District and School Improvement Plans were quite general, ‘rich in philosophy but lacking substance.’ In fact, the plans for the elementary schools are not only general, they are identical and not reflective of a carefully crafted plan to accomplish system goals within a specific building.”

Principals differed as to whether they relied on the SIPs or their data-driven action plans as the guiding document for improving student achievement in their respective buildings. In the West Street School and the Wells Middle School, which are in restructuring status, the SIPs were considered the guiding document because of the schools’ emphasis on whole-school change. In the Charlton Street School, the data-driven action plan was identified as the guiding document because of the school’s emphasis on improving grade 3 MCAS test scores in math and reading. All principals agreed that the two documents supported each other and did not conflict.

The superintendent decided to use some of the DOE’s Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) data analysis tools in the process of developing the SIPs and data-driven action plans. The *Leadership Report* had recommended that the DOE should “assist the system in the elements of Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) so that comprehensive student performance improvement plans can be developed and implemented at all levels.” Rather than use the entire PIM process, the superintendent carefully selected elements of the PIM process that aligned with the other district activities. In doing so, the superintendent initiated an efficient and developmental process to support staff members in learning to use data to carry out district initiatives.

Action step 6: Superintendent’s goals will be based on the district goals.

Status: Completed

Like the principals, the superintendent created goals for her own evaluation that were based on district goals. The school committee evaluated the superintendent on that basis, in accordance with the *Leadership Report* recommendation, on page 9, that district “accountability should include necessary monitoring and regular evaluations of the Superintendent and regular evaluation of the Superintendent by the School Committee as well as planned and consistent reporting about improvement efforts.” The December 29, 2006 DOE *Status Report* noted, on page 1, that “a timely and positive evaluation of the Superintendent’s performance was

completed in July, 2006,” and the EQA reviewed a similarly positive evaluation completed on September 11, 2007.

The team found that the superintendent’s evaluation was timely, informative, and conducive to growth, and that all school committee members participated in the evaluation process. School committee members shared that the discussions about the superintendent’s goals were ongoing, and that some members wanted more measurable goals, particularly goals based on student achievement data.

Initiative 6: Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement

Status: Implemented; action items completed

Summary

The superintendent introduced data-driven procedures to build staff capacity to analyze and use student achievement data to improve the district's curriculum and instructional delivery systems. The superintendent used both "top-down" and "grass roots" strategies to move forward. An example of the former was the development of a package of resources, based upon student achievement data, that was a centerpiece of professional development work. An example of the latter was the introduction of MCAS test data during a teacher professional development day for teachers to use to identify gaps in student achievement. Both examples served their purpose of convincing faculty and staff members to accept ownership of the district's student achievement gaps on the MCAS tests. Furthermore, professional development represented the beginning of a series of activities, introduced by the district's leadership, to raise MCAS test scores.

Finding:

A. The district provided developmental levels of support each year to build principal and teacher capacity to analyze data, in order to precipitate planned actions at the school and classroom levels. (I)

- Creating an initial sense of urgency and a commitment to changing district practices, the superintendent introduced to staff members simple data-driven procedures for identifying instructional strengths and weaknesses during a professional development day shortly after her arrival in 2005.
- To facilitate data-driven school improvement initiatives, in the fall of 2006 the superintendent developed a set of resources and tools for analyzing school achievement data.
- The superintendent used two professional days to immerse staff members in both the identification of and the resolution of student achievement gaps on the MCAS tests.
- Central office staff members prepared data analysis packets for use by school planning teams.

- Between December 2005 and June 2006, principals used a common template to write action plans based upon their analyses of MCAS test results.
- Teacher action plans for each school were written in the fall of 2006.
- The superintendent introduced data-driven procedures to build the capacity of staff members to analyze and use student achievement data to improve the district's curriculum and instructional delivery systems as an integral component of change initiatives.

Evidence

Initiative 6 has six action steps.

Action step 1: Schedule a full professional day for entire staff to review MCAS results.

Status: Completed

The superintendent scheduled a full day for the entire staff to review MCAS test results shortly after the introduction of the turnaround plan. Prior to her arrival, only one professional development day had been scheduled for the 2005-2006 school year. The new superintendent used this day (November 2, 2005) to focus faculty and staff attention on the results of the spring 2005 MCAS tests. Her agenda for the day was intended “to create a crisis for the teachers.”

Interviewees said that the faculty and staff spent the entire day analyzing student performance data and identifying gaps in student achievement on the 2005 MCAS tests under the superintendent's direction. According to documents reviewed and the superintendent's comments, the team had defined work tasks. Teachers flagged MCAS test items missed by more than 30 percent of the students. The flagged test questions were compiled and analyzed to ascertain the error patterns and the grade levels most culpable. Groups of teachers discussed reasons for the students' MCAS test errors. Each group prepared a report and submitted it to the superintendent. The reports focused upon changes called for in classroom instruction, professional development, and classroom resources. The superintendent then used these reports to prepare a document that detailed necessary subsequent work.

The superintendent envisioned these activities as the supports and the safety net needed to confront the crisis in student achievement. Evidence indicated that the professional development

day created a sense of urgency and a commitment to changing district practices, and introduced analyses of student achievement data as a standard procedure for improving school practices, becoming the springboard for a series of activities intended to raise MCAS test scores.

Action step 2: Prepare packets for the analysis of MCAS test data.

Status: Completed

The district created MCAS test data analysis packets at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, year two of the turnaround plan. School planning teams met in each of the district's schools for a day-long meeting in September 2006. The superintendent asked building principals to assemble teams consisting of five of the strongest members of each building's staff. The superintendent stated that she "wanted the school planning teams rather than all of the staff members to pull together all of the gaps in every content area in every school" using the MCAS test results.

The central office provided each team with disaggregated MCAS test results for it to review. After review, each team established student learning objectives based upon the skills and knowledge students needed to acquire, identified possible causes of students' lack of skills and knowledge, and developed a school action plan. The director of curriculum and the superintendent assembled a packet of resources to facilitate the school planning teams' work. The packet consisted of worksheets with the following titles: Disaggregating MCAS Data for Spring, 2006; Analyses of MCAS Questions for Spring, 2006; Identifying Skills and Knowledge Students Lack, Spring, 2006; Identifying the Lowest Performing Student Groups; Writing Student Learning Objectives; Identifying Measurable Improvement Objectives; Possible Causes of Students' Lack of Skills and Knowledge; What Skills and Knowledge Do Students Need To Acquire; and Action Plans Sheet. According to administrators interviewed, the packet was used by the school planning teams "to peel back layers of the onion."

The superintendent met with each building's school planning team in October 2006 to review the progress being made. By the end of the month each team submitted a first draft of its completed plan to the superintendent for her review. These drafts became the subject matter of a professional day held in November 2006. The revised action plans that came out of the professional day became part of a district-wide report prepared by the superintendent.

Action step 3: Present an overview of the analysis to staff on November 2, 2005.

Status: Completed

The superintendent opted not to use a traditional method to present an overview of the 2005 and 2006 MCAS test results to the Southbridge faculty and staff during scheduled fall professional days.

At the November 2, 2005 professional development day, she presented the students' MCAS test results and asked the participants to analyze the data in order to identify gaps in student achievement, with her intent being "to create a crisis for the teachers." By the end of the day, groups of teachers completed reports based upon their analyses of the MCAS test results that called for changes in classroom instruction, professional development, and classroom resources.

At the November 3, 2006 professional development day, administrators and teachers remained in their own buildings and worked with MCAS data analysis reports and analytic tools provided by school planning teams. Each school-based group adopted a Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) template to develop a first draft of an action plan, according to interviews with the superintendent, the curriculum director, principals, and teachers. Once completed, each action plan was submitted to the superintendent.

The approach taken by the superintendent during these two professional days was intended to immerse faculty and staff members in both the identification of and the resolution of student achievement gaps on the MCAS tests. The impact of these two professional days were summarized in two turnaround plan progress reports submitted by the superintendent in January and September 2007.

Action step 4: Write a report based on findings for the district.

Status: Completed

One of the outcomes of the November 2, 2005 professional development day was a set of reports, prepared by groups of teachers and administrators in attendance, that were submitted to the superintendent. The reports described changes called for in classroom instruction, professional development, and classroom resources. The superintendent used these reports along with feedback provided by "an interim superintendent, school committee members, the business

manager, the administration, parents, the town manager, town council members, staff members, and students to gain an understanding of the issues in Southbridge Public Schools.”

The district’s turnaround plan was submitted by the superintendent on November 29, 2005. The turnaround plan identified six areas as the central problems contributing to the Southbridge schools’ underperformance, identified and discussed root causes of the central problems, and described how the district would be expected to improve. For each of the six areas, actions to be taken were listed along with a time frame and a progress measure for each action. The turnaround plan facilitated the introduction of standards-based curricula, data-driven action plans, and professional development for faculty and staff members at Southbridge Public Schools.

This plan was followed up by two progress reports, written by the superintendent, to inform the district. The first report (dated January 3, 2007) summarized actions being taken to facilitate student progress and growth. It also detailed “the many challenges that still lie before us.” The second report (dated September 27, 2007) was an update of the January document. It set forth “significant changes” made during the past two years and described the district’s remaining challenges. The two progress reports detailed changes in leadership, curriculum and instruction, data-driven decision making, and relationships with the town.

Action step 5: Teachers will write action plans based on their analysis.

Status: Completed

Teachers wrote school-based action plans based upon their analyses of MCAS and other test data, with support and preparation provided by the superintendent. During 2006-2007, the superintendent provided resources to conduct three professional days and seven early release days, a significant increase over the previous school year. She also earmarked \$150,000 to cover the cost of teacher focus groups that conducted school improvement work after school and on Saturdays throughout the school year.

The initial work of the school planning teams set the agenda for an all staff professional development day held in November 2006. Administrators and teachers stayed in their own buildings and conducted the work. MCAS data analysis reports provided to each school-based

group served as the foundation for the day's task. Each school-based group adopted a Performance Improvement Mapping template to develop a first draft of an action plan, according to the superintendent, the curriculum director, principals, and teachers. The template accounted for MCAS test-based goals and specific improvement objectives, evidence of implementation activities (such as criteria used, frequency of progress reviews, responsible persons, and initiation dates), and evidence of outcomes (such as benchmarks and assessments used, responsible persons, and outcome report due dates). Once completed, each action plan was submitted to the superintendent.

Teachers in individual interviews and teacher focus groups indicated that the development of action plans informed their teaching. Teachers noted that the MCAS test-based action plans contributed to classroom applications of standards-based instruction. Teachers also asserted that action plan development helped them become accustomed to using disaggregated MCAS test data as an instructional planning resource. Even though most teachers were not trained to perform TestWiz data analyses, they were able to make use of the disaggregated MCAS test data provided to them. Three of these teachers also commented upon the time and effort required to meet expectations set forth in the action plans, describing the process as “overwhelming,” the data as showing “so much to improve,” and their feeling “stressed.”

The superintendent said during an interview that the district “is just getting into benchmarks” such as those set forth in the action plans. “Benchmarks were not used until this year.”

Action step 6: Principals will write action plans based on the analysis.

Status: Completed

Principals wrote action plans based upon the five district goals. The superintendent described the context that framed the preparation of the principals' action plans, beginning with the public presentation of five goals to support the district's revised vision and mission. This presentation was followed by a collaborative effort among principals, teachers, and school councils to develop School Improvement Plans, based upon the five goals, to address gaps in student achievement.

All of the building principals relied upon a common template to write their action plans. The template consisted of four sections: improvement areas focused upon; improvement goals; weekly actions to ensure implementation; and actions taken by instructional leaders. During interviews, the principals revealed different approaches to the action plan assignment. One principal used the teacher action plan for the building as a point of departure to write the principal's action plan. A second principal drew upon a previously written School Improvement Plan and the teacher action plans to formulate a building plan. A third principal relied upon the support of a teacher committee to prepare an action plan. Finally, two principals met with varied school standing committees prior to writing their action plans. All writing occurred between December 2005 and June 2006. The EQA team reviewed teacher action plans and principal action plans provided by the district. The plans were quite compatible and supported the district goals.

Conclusion

The EQA team found that the leadership of Southbridge Public Schools has made significant progress in addressing the key deficiencies noted in the *Leadership Report* submitted by George Blaisdell and Matt George on June 10, 2005. The district's new superintendent, Dr. Dale Hanley, accepted the challenge of leading a district reportedly lacking vision and practices to use data in decision-making, and she initiated steps to prepare the district to meet the mandates of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. The district addressed stated priorities, beginning with the need to strengthen its leadership capacity. The district recruited new leadership, who together addressed the need to "establish and focus on accomplishing priority objectives" as intended in Initiative 5: District Vision, Mission, and Goals, and who continued to implement the entire turnaround plan through their respective roles.

As the *Leadership Report* had noted, a particular area of priority was curriculum alignment: "the actual curriculum taught to [Southbridge] students [was] not articulated vertically or horizontally, coordinated in its application or assessed in any accountable way.... The Department of Education should require the immediate development of a systematic curriculum, accountable and aligned with the state's academic frameworks." The superintendent took direct responsibility for addressing the need to "develop a system-wide K-12 curriculum" and created mechanisms for updating and revising it with the implementation of Initiative 2: Standards-based Curriculum. Related to the curriculum initiative was the need to "implement essential accountability and evaluation systems," and the district addressed this priority area in the turnaround plan in Initiative 6: Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement, and through the addition of a goal-based evaluation process for the superintendent and principals.

Initiative 3: Local Fiscal Support addressed the need to improve relationships and communication between the district and the town to ensure adequate financial support. While past tensions may have continued to impact this area, the district and town were able to work together to support the implementation of the turnaround plan, including the approval of a \$1.25 million technology plan.

Major district program and school weaknesses were addressed in the turnaround plan implementation. The district was successful in connecting the professional development program

“to the needs and goals of the school system” to address the prior deficiencies in this area identified in the *Leadership Report*. Professional development was directly connected with the implementation of Initiative 2: Standards-based Curriculum and Initiative 6: Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement. Southbridge revamped its special education program to be more efficient and to comply “with regulatory requirements in the Special Education program” as recommended in the *Leadership Report*, and implemented through action steps in Initiative 1: Leadership. Through the overall turnaround process, the district addressed the deficiencies at Southbridge High School, which was removed from probation by NEASC and received commendations for its improvement.

The district successfully used its turnaround plan, simple in format, to identify and work on actions that will lead to a sustainable and healthy school district. Initiatives 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 all demonstrate “solid planning skills at all levels” that the *Leadership Report* identified as previously lacking in the district. The team found ample evidence that all of the initiatives had gained traction except for Initiative 4: Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community, which was still a work in progress.

The district leadership recognizes that while the turnaround plan was needed to move the district toward standards-based education, the system has more work to do. The success of the plan will be evident in the district’s student achievement results. The change process is evident, but significant gains in student test scores are not yet evident. In general, Southbridge Public Schools still performs below the state average both for the aggregate student population and for subgroups.

The district’s adequate yearly progress (AYP) report shows that in 2007 overall district performance declined in both ELA and math. ELA performance was rated as ‘Moderate’ and math performance was rated as ‘Very Low’ as defined by the DOE (see Appendix B). Although the district’s 2007 MCAS test performance in ELA was stronger than its performance in the other tested content areas at every grade level except grade 3, approximately three-fifths of Southbridge students did not attain proficiency on the 2007 MCAS ELA tests. Less than one-third of Southbridge students attained proficiency in math. All student subgroups and the

aggregate student population underperformed the state in math at grades 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10 in 2007.

Closing Southbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 would require an average improvement in performance of nearly four proficiency index (PI) points annually to achieve AYP, and closing Southbridge's math proficiency gap would require an average improvement of six PI points per year (see Appendix A). The district made AYP in 2006 and 2007; the math improvement rating was 'No Status,' and the ELA improvement rating was 'Corrective Action' for subgroups in 2007. Students in grades 3-8 both in the aggregate and in subgroups did not make AYP in math or ELA in 2006 and 2007. Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA and math performance declined, widening the proficiency gaps.

The superintendent noted that improvement in student achievement takes time, and the EQA team found evidence that the district has been working to create the building blocks for improved future achievement. Although the district has plenty of work left to do, the team found that the leadership of the Southbridge Public Schools has been aggressively building the district's superstructure to create a system capable of meeting the mandates of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. The focus has been on aligning goals, developing leadership to create and refine systems, using data at all levels, refining the curriculum, and supporting changes with adequate funding. The turnaround process is being conducted in carefully conceived stages that consider the district's capacity, level of development, stakeholder engagement and ownership, and future sustainability. Many of the action items have been completed, but the district's turnaround is still a work in progress. Southbridge has set mostly undefined quantitative performance benchmarks for the next few years, and the leadership recognizes that the district is still developing and refining its structures. The success of Southbridge Public Schools depends on whether its next steps build on the established foundation and proceed in an aligned and aggressive course of action at a more advanced developmental level.

Appendix A: Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The EQA's analysis of student achievement data focuses on the MCAS test results for 2004-2007, with primary attention paid to the 2007 MCAS tests. This analysis is framed by the following five essential questions:

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

In order to respond accurately to these questions, the EQA subjected the most current state and district MCAS test results to a series of analyses to determine whether there were differences between the mean results of district students and those of students statewide or among student subgroups within the district. Descriptive analyses of the 2007 MCAS test results revealed differences between the achievement of students in Southbridge and the average scores of students in Massachusetts.

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

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

The basis for gap analysis is the *proficiency index*, which is a measure of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, or meeting the state standard. The unit of measure is proficiency index (PI) points, and a score of 100 indicates that all students in the aggregate or in a subgroup are proficient. It can be calculated for overall achievement as well as achievement in an individual subject. Please see Appendix B for more detailed information about the proficiency index

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

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

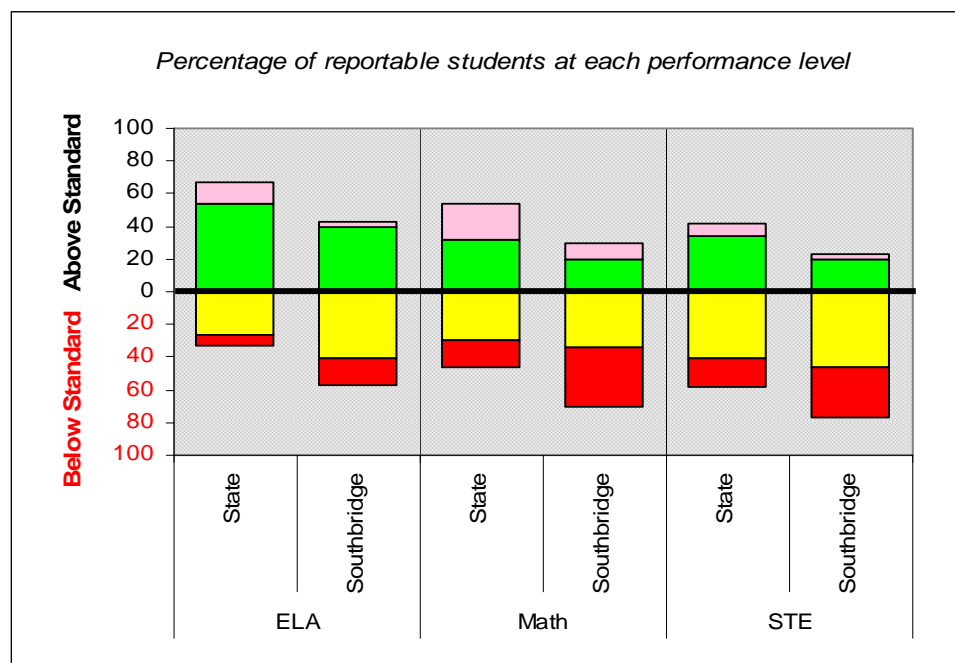
Achievement

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

Findings:

- On average, more than two-fifths of the students in Southbridge Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, less than one-third of Southbridge students attained proficiency in math, and less than one-quarter attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-four percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination.
- Southbridge's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 73 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of 27 PI points, 13 points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of nearly four PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- In 2007, Southbridge's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 58 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 42 PI points, 18 points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of six PI points per year to achieve AYP.
- Southbridge's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 58 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 42 PI points, 14 points wider than that statewide.

Figure/Table 1: MCAS Test Performance by Subject, 2007



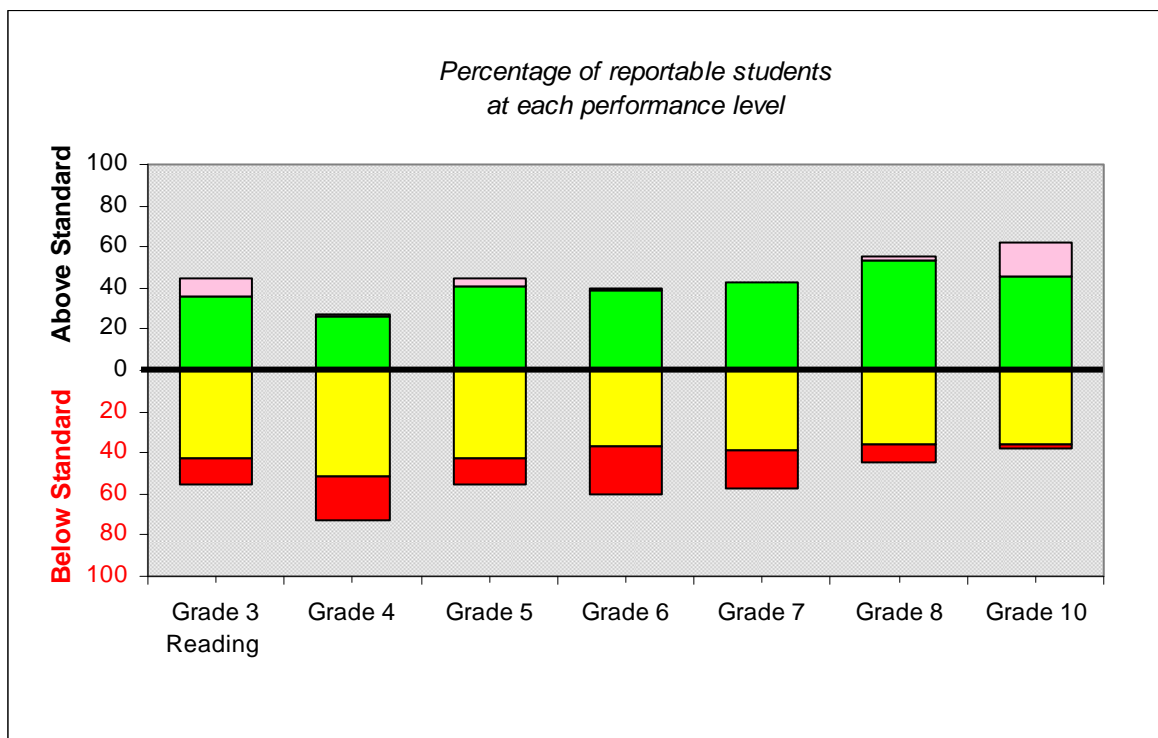
		ELA		Math		STE	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	13	3	22	9	9	3
	Proficient	53	40	32	20	34	20
	Needs Improvement	27	41	30	34	41	46
	Warning/Failing	7	15	17	36	17	32
	Percent Attaining Proficiency	66	43	54	29	43	23
	Proficiency Index (PI)	85.7	73.1	76.1	58.1	72.1	57.6

In 2007, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was lower in Southbridge than statewide. In Southbridge, 43 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 66 percent statewide; 29 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 54 percent statewide; and 23 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 43 percent statewide.

The 2007 proficiency index for Southbridge students in ELA was 73 PI points, compared to 86 PI points statewide; in math, it was 58 PI points, compared to 76 points statewide; and in STE, it was 58 PI points, compared to 72 points statewide.

The ELA proficiency gap for Southbridge students in 2007 was 27 PI points, compared to 14 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of nearly four PI points annually to make AYP. Southbridge's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 42 PI points, compared to 24 PI points statewide, and would require an average improvement of six PI points per year to make AYP. Southbridge's STE proficiency gap was 42 PI points, compared to 28 PI points statewide.

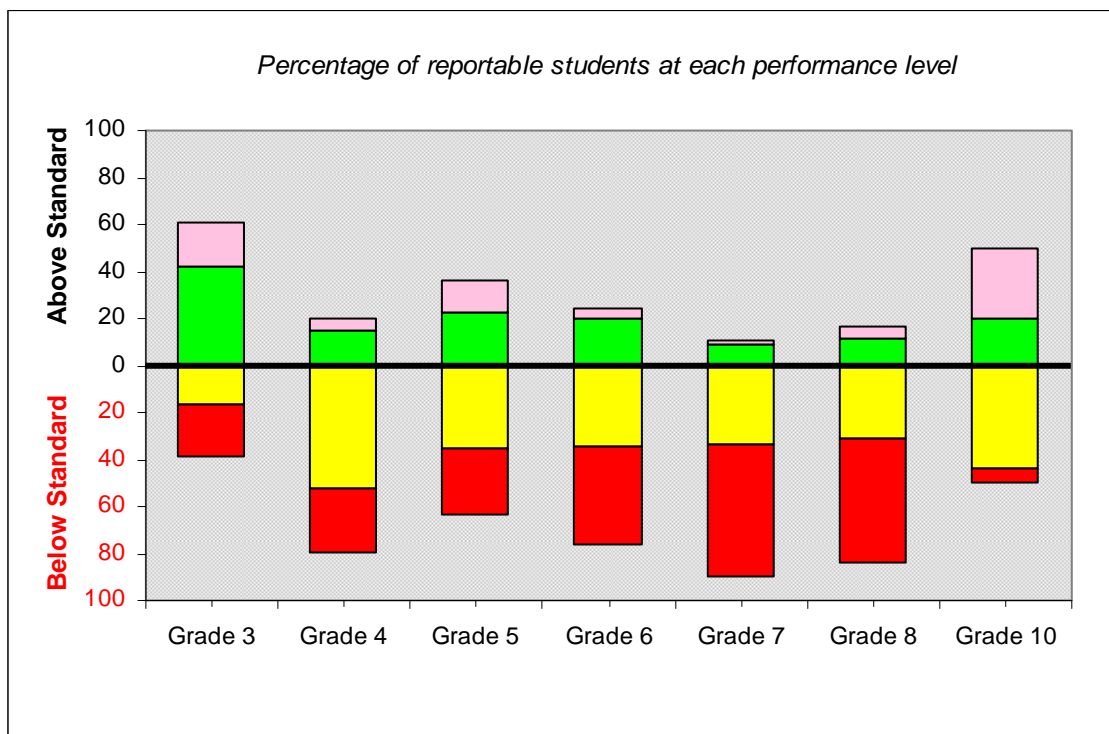
Figure/Table 2: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Grade, 2007



		Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
	Advanced	8	1	3	1	1	2	17
	Proficient	36	26	41	39	42	53	45
	Needs Improvement	43	52	43	37	39	36	36
	Warning/Failing	13	21	13	23	18	9	2
	Percent Attaining Proficiency	44	27	44	40	43	55	62

The percentage of Southbridge students attaining proficiency in ELA in 2007 varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 27 percent at grade 4 to a high of 62 percent at grade 10.

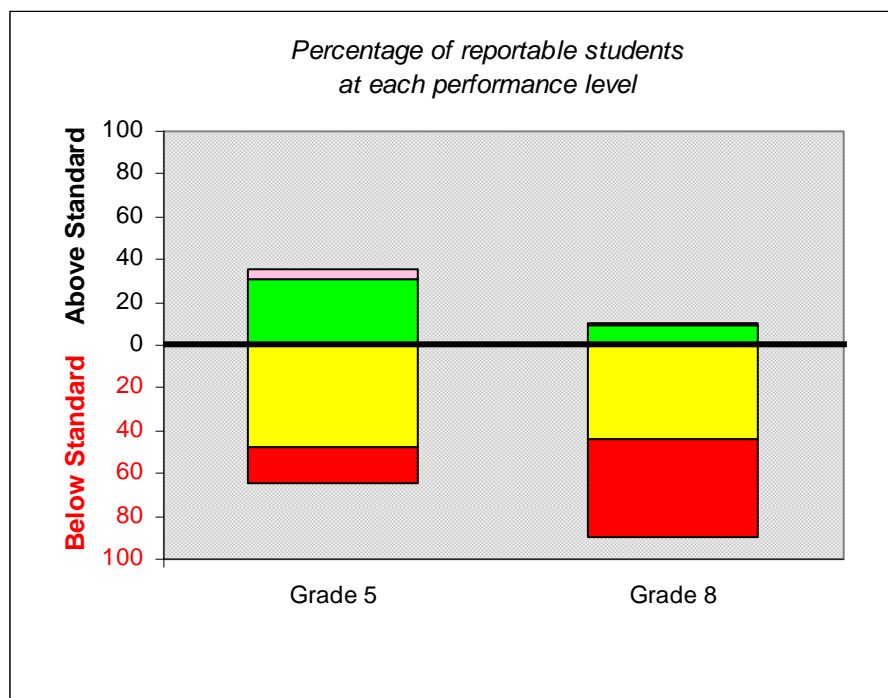
Figure/Table 3: MCAS Math Test Performance by Grade, 2007



		Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
	Advanced	19	5	14	4	2	5	30
	Proficient	42	15	22	20	9	11	20
	Needs Improvement	16	52	35	34	34	31	44
	Warning/Failing	22	27	29	42	56	53	6
	Percent Attaining Proficiency	61	20	36	24	11	16	50

The percentage of Southbridge students attaining proficiency in math in 2007 also varied by grade level, ranging from a low of 11 percent at grade 7 to a high of 61 percent at grade 3.

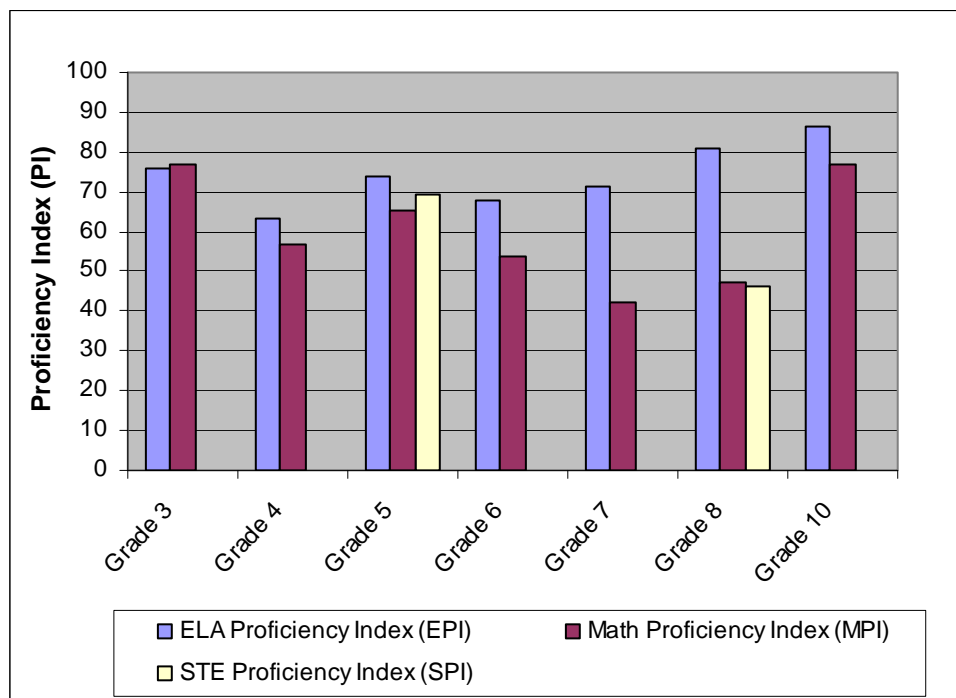
Figure/Table 4: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Grade, 2007



		Grade 5	Grade 8
	Advanced	5	1
	Proficient	31	9
	Needs Improvement	48	44
	Warning/Failing	16	46
	Percent Attaining Proficiency	36	10

In Southbridge in 2007, 36 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 10 percent of grade 8 students did so.

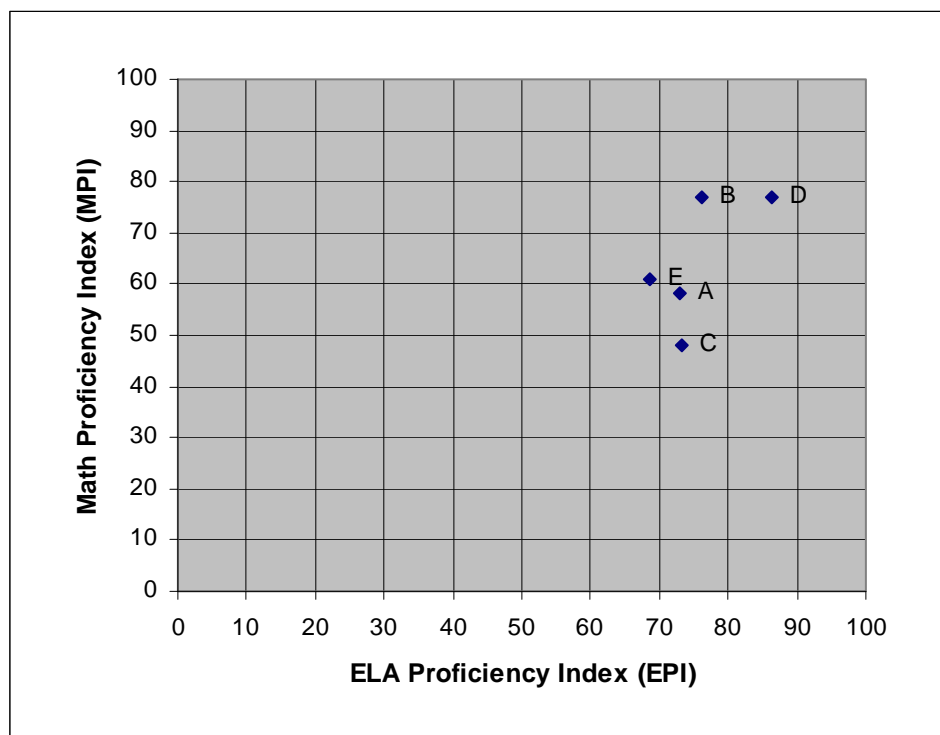
Figure/Table 5: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Grade and Subject, 2007



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	76.1	63.5	74.0	67.9	71.6	80.8	86.4
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	76.9	56.8	65.1	53.7	42.4	47.3	77.0
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			69.5			46.1	

At every grade level, the performance of Southbridge students on the 2007 MCAS tests was strongest in ELA. Southbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of 14 PI points at grade 10 to a high of 37 PI points at grade 4. Southbridge's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 23 PI points at grades 3 and 10 to a high of 58 PI points at grade 7. Southbridge's STE proficiency gap was 30 PI points at grade 5 and 54 PI points at grade 8.

Figure/Table 6: MCAS ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) vs. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by School, 2007



		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Southbridge district average	73.1	58.1	2,313
B	Charlton Street School	76.1	76.9	363
C	Wells Middle School	73.3	47.9	1,108
D	Southbridge High School	86.4	77.0	130
E	West Street School	68.6	60.8	712

Among Southbridge's schools, the ELA proficiency gap in 2007 ranged from a low of 14 PI points at Southbridge High to a high of 31 PI points at West Street. Southbridge's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 23 PI points at Charlton Street and Southbridge High to a high of 52 PI points at Wells Middle.

Equity of Achievement

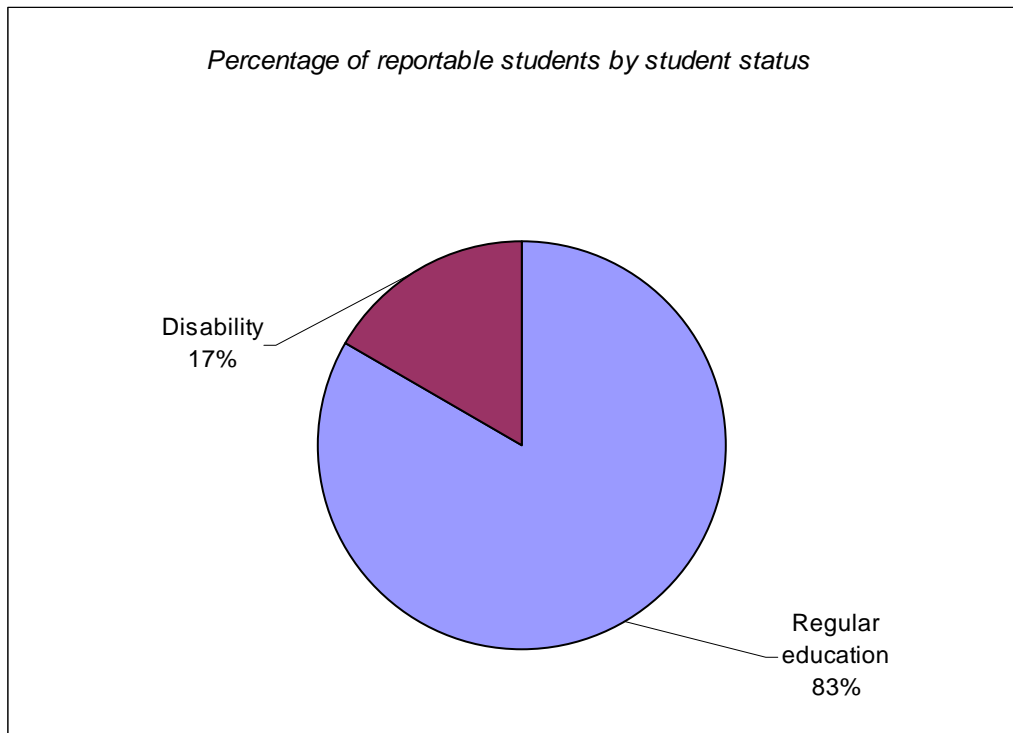
Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

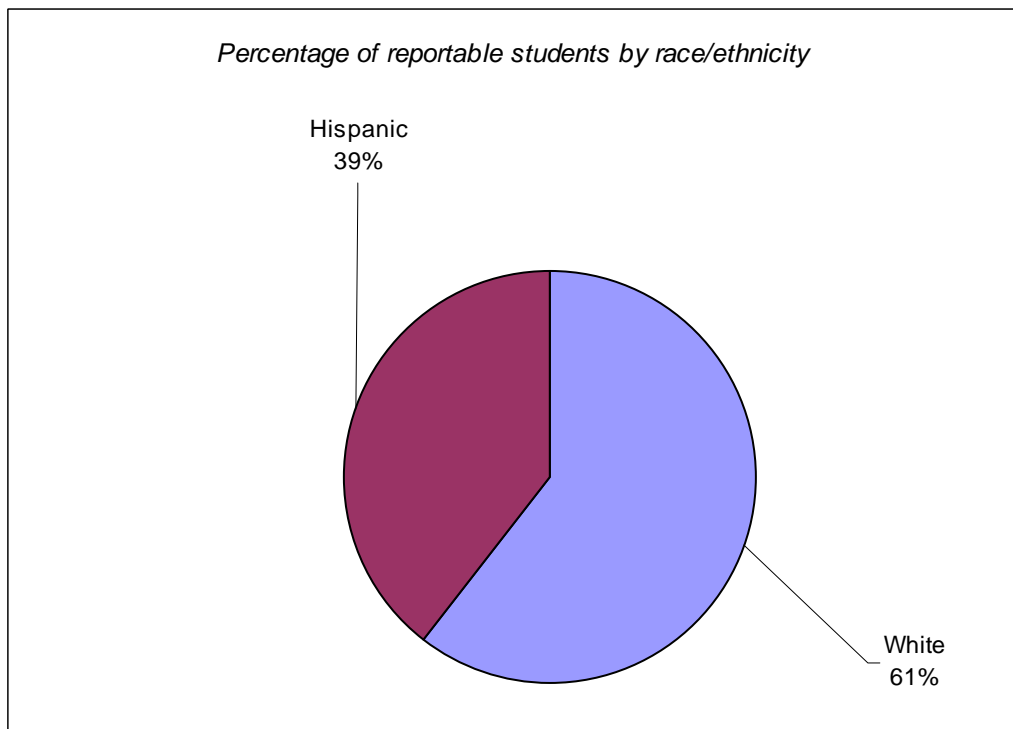
- MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Southbridge students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Southbridge, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 34 PI points in ELA and 37 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).
- The proficiency gaps in Southbridge in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students.

Figures 7 A-C/Table 7: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2007

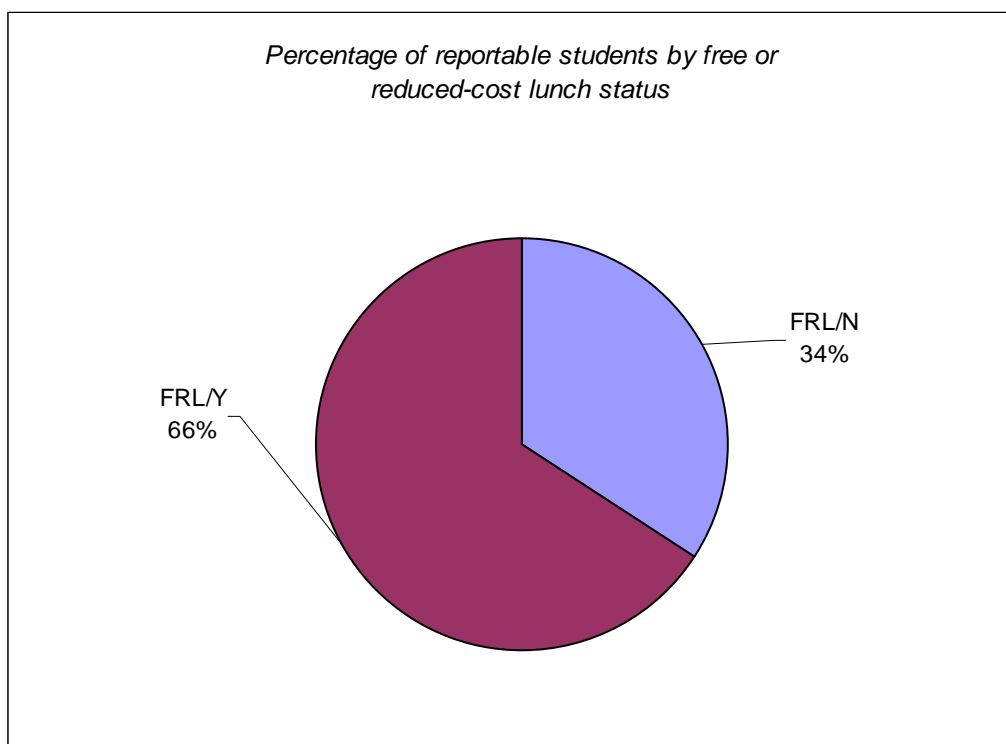
A.



B.



C.

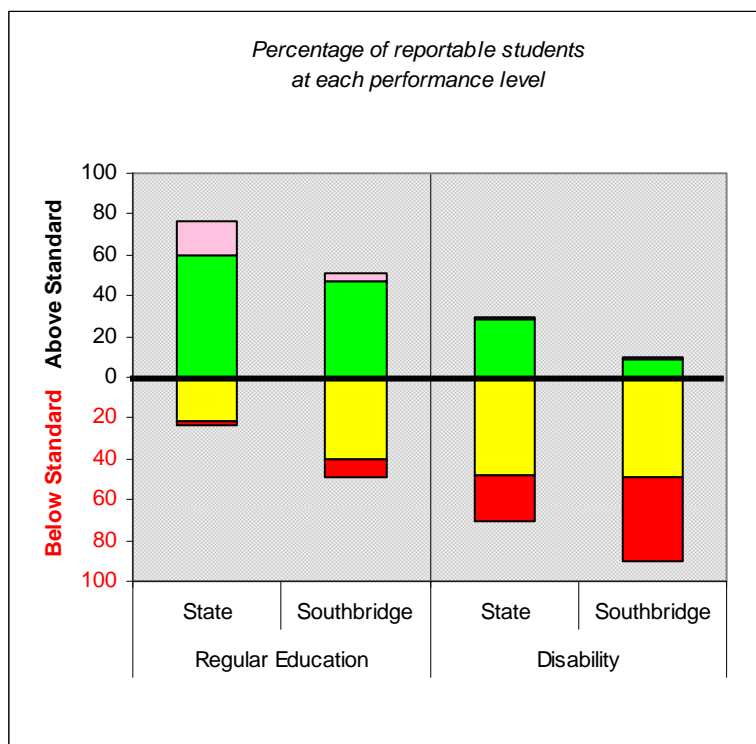


	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	948
	Disability	190
Race/ethnicity	White	681
	Hispanic	442
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	398
	FRL/Y	764

Note: Data include students in tested grades levels only.

In Southbridge in 2007, 17 percent of the students tested were students with disabilities. Thirty-nine of the students tested were Hispanic. Sixty-six percent of the tested students participated in the free or reduced-cost lunch program.

Figure/Table 8: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007

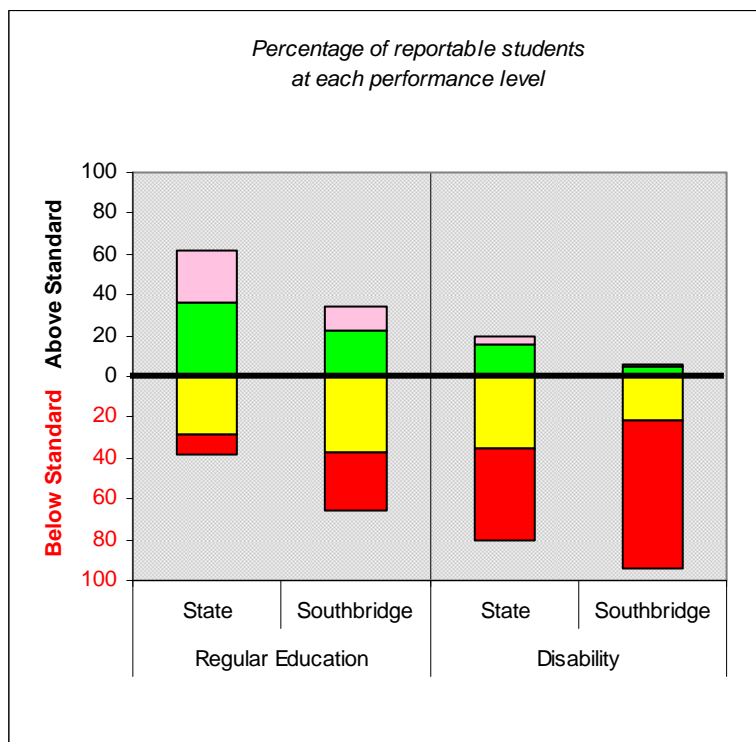


		Regular Education		Disability	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	16	4	2	1
	Proficient	60	47	28	9
	Needs Improvement	21	40	48	49
	Warning/Failing	2	10	22	41
Percent Attaining Proficiency		76	51	30	10
Proficiency Index (EPI)		91.3	78.5	64.8	47.8

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in ELA of regular education students was five times greater than that of students with disabilities. Fifty-one percent of regular education students and 10 percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in ELA on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Southbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 was 21 PI points for regular education students, compared to nine PI points statewide; and 52 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 35 PI points statewide. The performance gap in ELA between Southbridge's regular education students and students with disabilities was 31 PI points.

Figure/Table 9: MCAS Math Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007

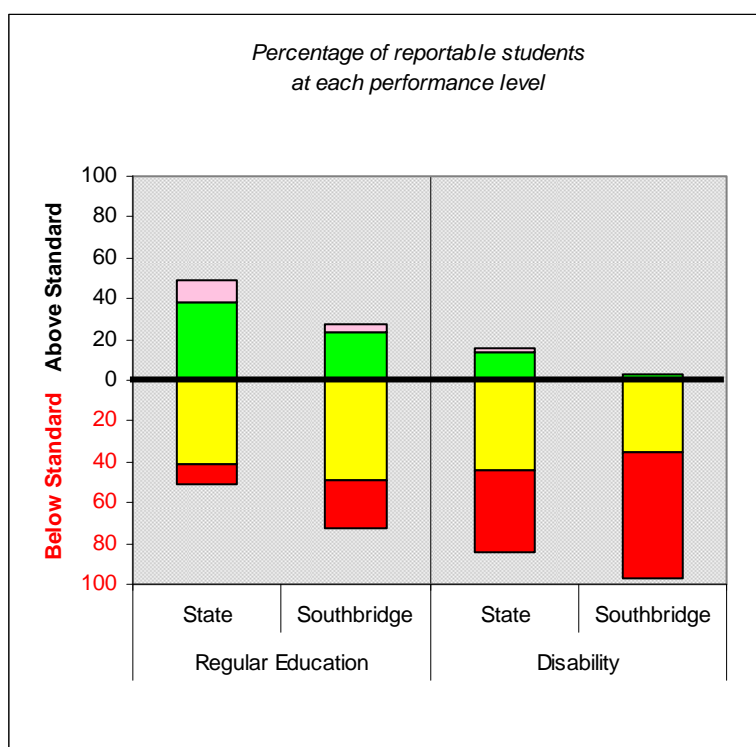


		Regular Education		Disability	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	26	11	4	1
	Proficient	36	23	16	5
	Needs Improvement	28	37	36	22
	Warning/Failing	10	29	44	73
Percent Attaining Proficiency		62	34	20	6
Proficiency Index (MPI)		82.2	63.2	51.0	33.0

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in math of regular education students was nearly six times greater than that of students with disabilities. Thirty-four percent of regular education students and six percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests in 2007.

Southbridge's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 37 PI points for regular education students, compared to 18 PI points statewide; and 67 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 49 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between Southbridge's regular education students and students with disabilities was 30 PI points.

Figure/Table 10: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Student Status Subgroup, 2007

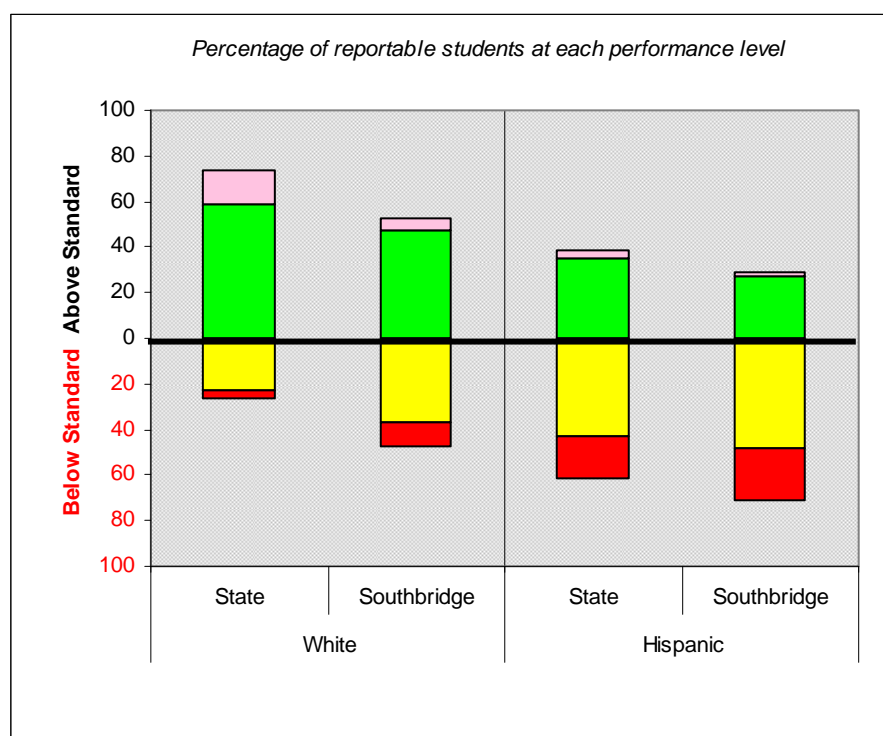


		Regular Education		Disability	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	10	4	2	0
	Proficient	39	24	14	3
	Needs Improvement	41	49	44	35
	Warning/Failing	10	23	40	62
Percent Attaining Proficiency		49	28	16	3
Proficiency Index (SPI)		77.5	63.0	51.8	37.1

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in science and technology/engineering of regular education students was more than nine times greater than that of students with disabilities. Twenty-eight percent of regular education students and three percent of students with disabilities attained proficiency in STE on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Southbridge's STE proficiency gap in 2007 was 37 PI points for regular education students, compared to 22 PI points statewide; and 63 PI points for students with disabilities, compared to 48 PI points statewide. The performance gap in STE between Southbridge's regular education students and students with disabilities was 26 PI points.

Figure/Table 11: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

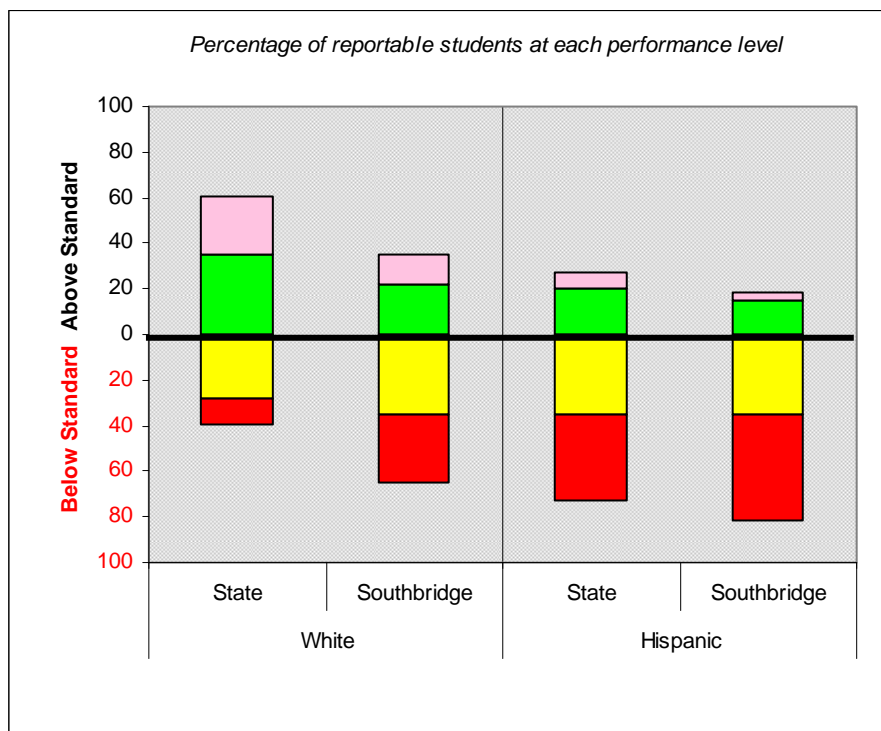


		White		Hispanic	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	16	5	3	1
	Proficient	58	48	35	28
	Needs Improvement	22	37	43	48
	Warning/Failing	4	11	19	23
Percent Attaining Proficiency		74	53	38	29
Proficiency Index (EPI)		89.8	77.9	69.8	65.1

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in ELA of White students was nearly twice as great as that of Hispanic students. Fifty-three percent of White students and 29 percent of Hispanic students attained proficiency in ELA on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Southbridge's ELA proficiency gap in 2007 was 22 PI points for White students, compared to 10 PI points statewide, and 35 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 30 PI points statewide. The performance gap in ELA between Southbridge's White and Hispanic students was 13 PI points.

Figure/Table 12: MCAS Math Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

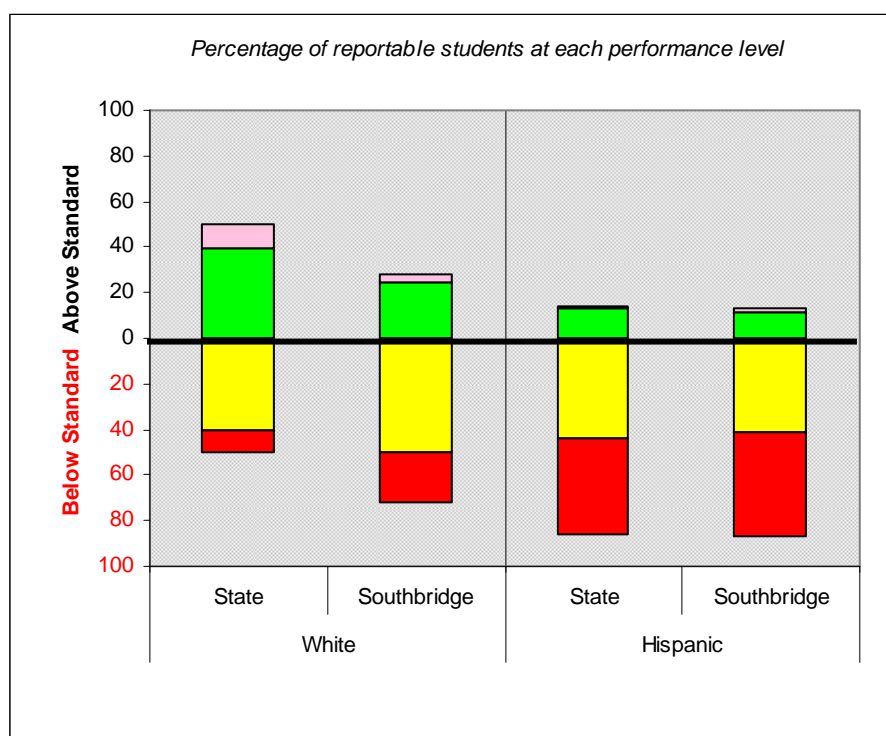


		White		Hispanic	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	25	13	7	3
	Proficient	35	22	20	15
	Needs Improvement	28	35	35	35
	Warning/Failing	11	30	37	47
Percent Attaining Proficiency		60	35	27	18
Proficiency Index (MPI)		80.9	63.0	56.9	49.6

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in math of White students was approximately twice as great as that of Hispanic students. Thirty-five percent of White students and 18 percent of Hispanic students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests in 2007.

Southbridge's math proficiency gap in 2007 was 37 PI points for White students, compared to 19 PI points statewide, and 50 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 43 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between Southbridge's White and Hispanic students was 13 PI points.

Figure/Table 13: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity Subgroup, 2007

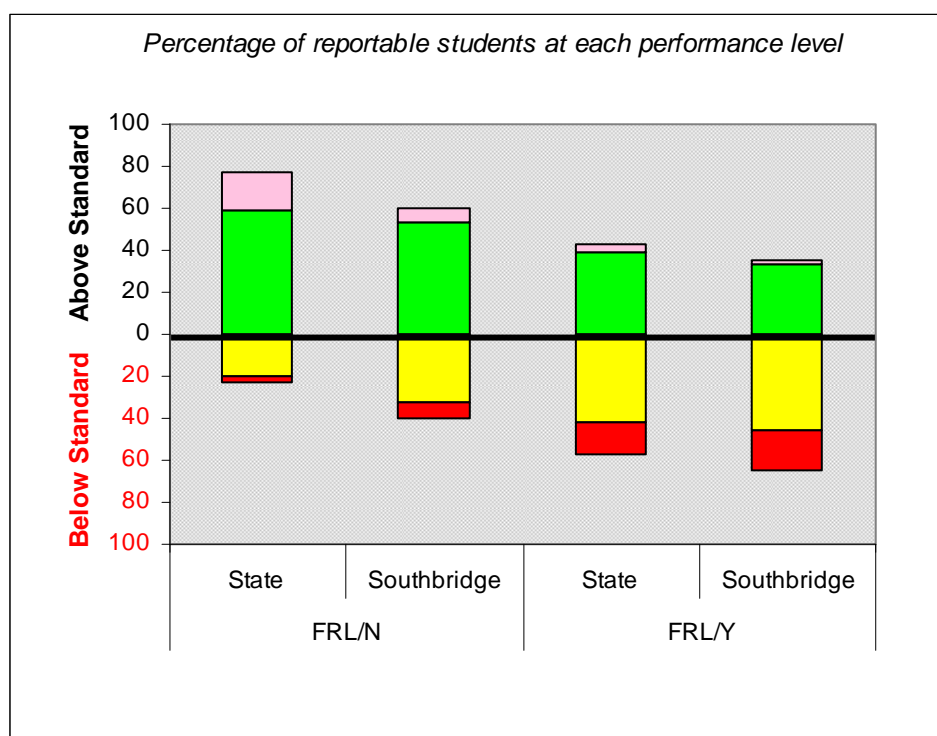


		White		Hispanic	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	10	4	2	2
	Proficient	39	24	13	11
	Needs Improvement	40	50	44	41
	Warning/Failing	10	22	41	46
Percent Attaining Proficiency		49	28	15	13
Proficiency Index (SPI)		78.0	64.0	50.6	47.1

In Southbridge in 2007, the proficiency rate in STE of White students was more than twice as great as that of Hispanic students. Twenty-eight percent of White students and 13 percent of Hispanic students attained proficiency in STE on the 2007 MCAS tests.

Southbridge's STE proficiency gap in 2007 was 36 PI points for White students, compared to 22 PI points statewide, and 53 PI points for Hispanic students, compared to 49 PI points statewide. The performance gap in STE between Southbridge's White and Hispanic students was 17 PI points.

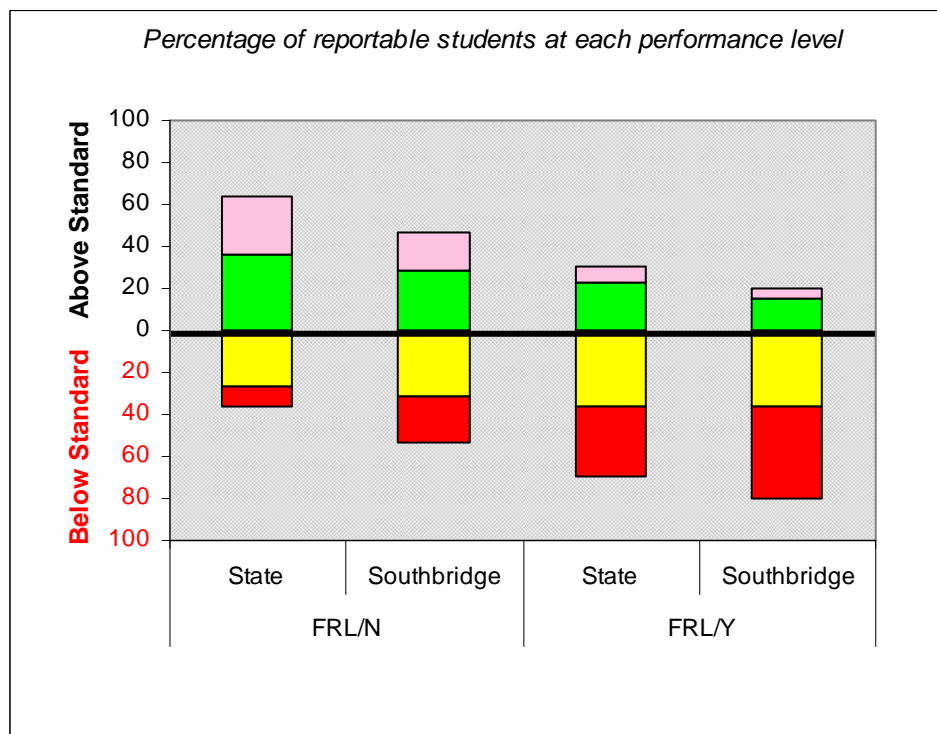
Figure/Table 14: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	17	6	4	2
	Proficient	59	53	39	33
	Needs Improvement	20	32	42	46
	Warning/Failing	3	8	15	19
Percent Attaining Proficiency		76	59	43	35
Proficiency Index (EPI)		91.0	82.1	73.4	68.4

In Southbridge in 2007, 35 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in ELA on the MCAS tests, compared to 59 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The ELA proficiency gap was 32 PI points for low-income students, compared to 27 PI points statewide, and 18 PI points for non low-income students, compared to nine PI points statewide. Southbridge's performance gap in ELA between the two subgroups was 14 PI points.

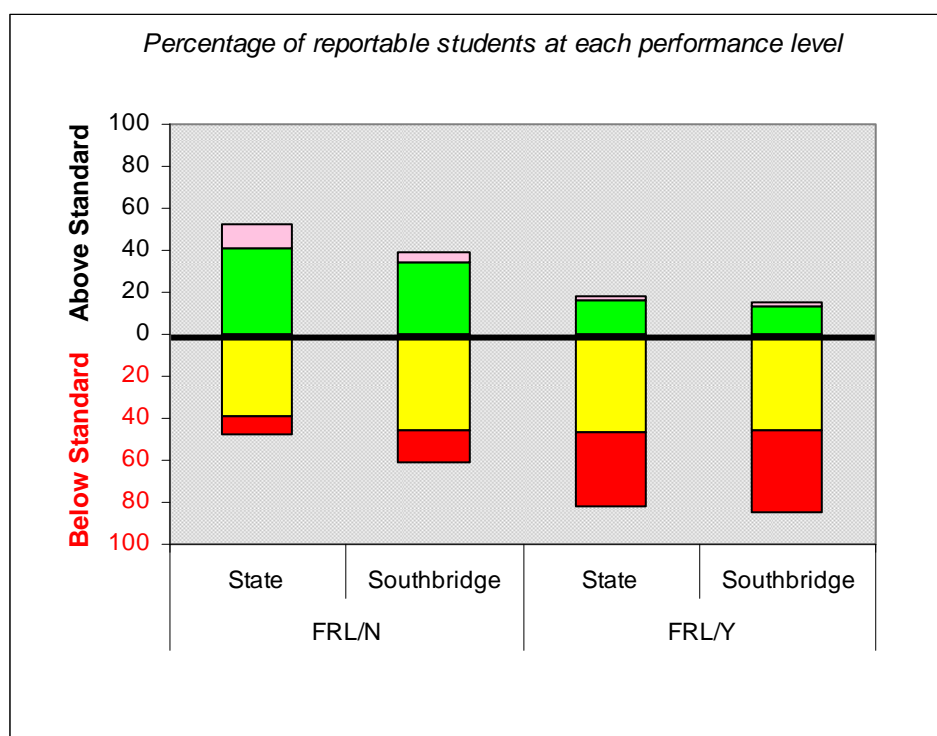
Figure/Table 15: MCAS Math Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	27	17	8	5
	Proficient	36	29	23	15
	Needs Improvement	27	31	37	36
	Warning/Failing	10	22	33	44
Percent Attaining Proficiency		63	46	31	20
Proficiency Index (MPI)		82.7	70.3	60.3	51.7

In Southbridge in 2007, 20 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in math on the MCAS tests, compared to 46 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in math was 48 PI points for low-income students, compared to 40 PI points statewide, and 30 PI points for non low-income students, compared to 17 PI points statewide. The performance gap in math between the two subgroups in Southbridge was 18 PI points.

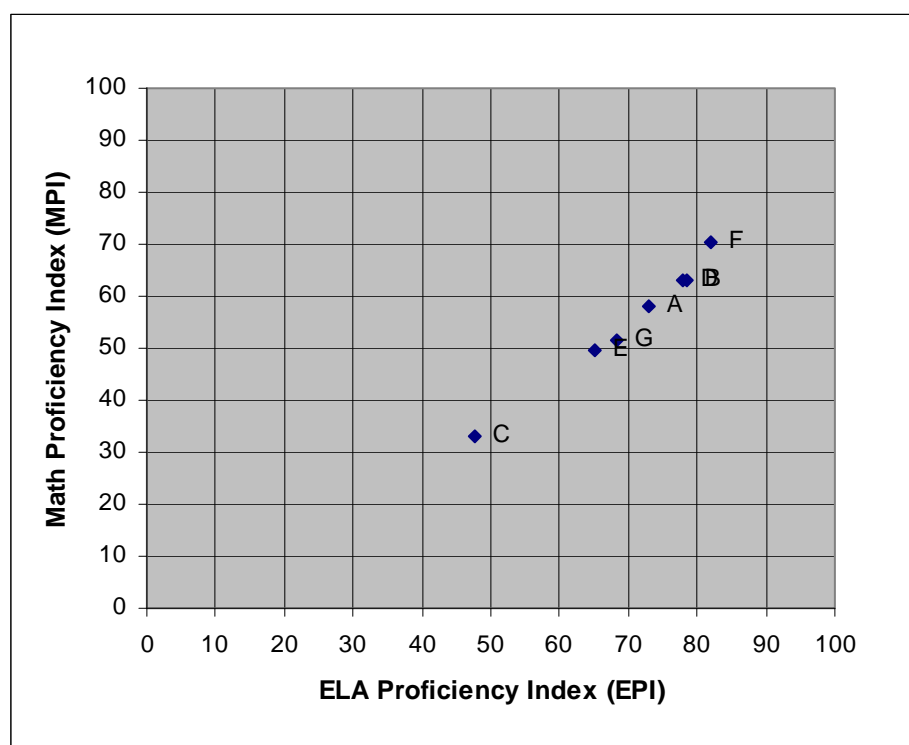
Figure/Table 16: MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2007



		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
		State	Southbridge	State	Southbridge
	Advanced	11	5	2	2
	Proficient	41	34	17	13
	Needs Improvement	39	46	47	46
	Warning/Failing	9	15	34	39
Percent Attaining Proficiency		52	39	19	15
Proficiency Index (SPI)		79.4	70.3	55.2	51.7

In Southbridge in 2007, 15 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained proficiency in STE on the MCAS tests, compared to 39 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap in STE was 48 PI points for low-income students, compared to 45 PI points statewide, and 30 PI points for non low-income students, compared to 21 PI points statewide. Southbridge's performance gap in STE between the two subgroups was 18 PI points.

Figure/Table 17: MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index by Subgroup, 2007



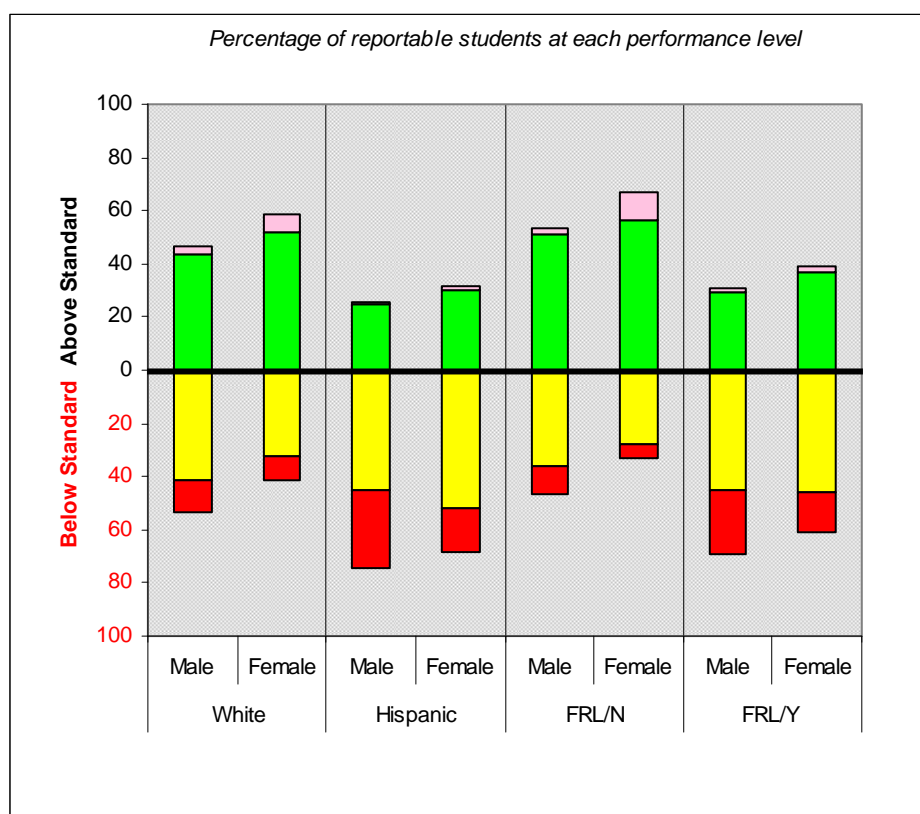
		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Southbridge	73.1	58.1	2,313
B	Regular Education	78.5	63.2	1,894
C	Disability	47.8	33.0	370
D	White	77.9	63.0	1,360
E	Hispanic	65.1	49.6	876
F	FRL/N	82.1	70.3	789
G	FRL/Y	68.4	51.7	1,524

The gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in Southbridge in 2007 was 34 PI points in ELA and 37 PI points in math (non low-income students, students with disabilities, respectively).

Regular education students, White students, and non low-income students in Southbridge performed above the district average in both ELA and math in 2007, while students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and low-income students performed below the district average in both subjects.

Each subgroup in Southbridge had stronger performance in ELA than in math on the 2007 MCAS tests. The gap between performance in ELA and math among subgroups in Southbridge ranged from 12 to 17 PI points.

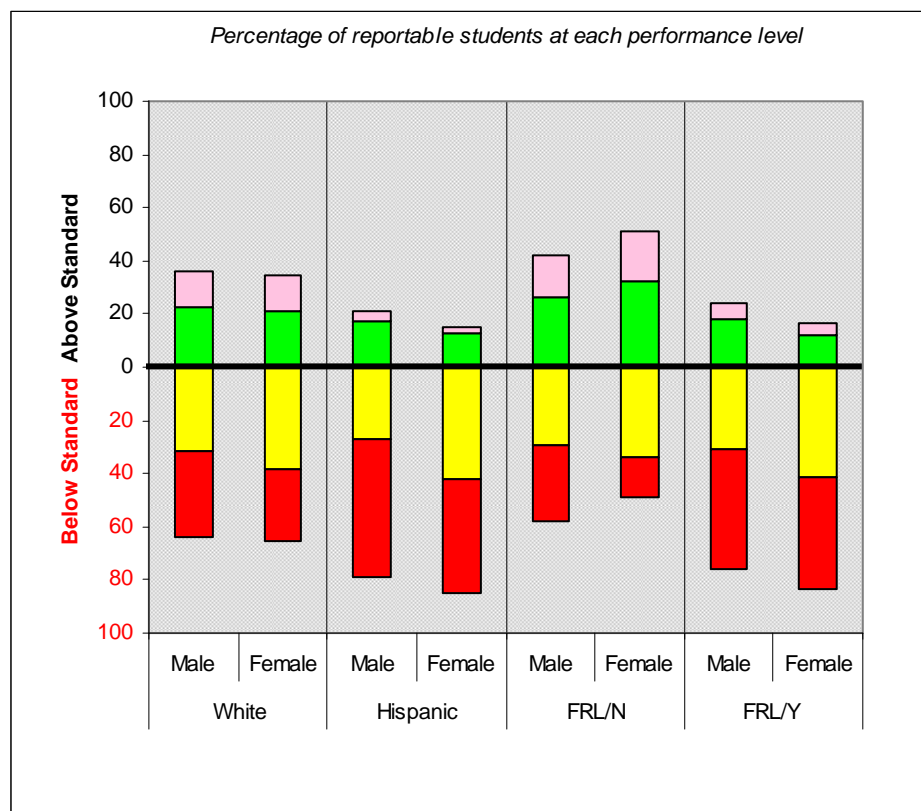
Figure/Table 18: MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007



		White		Hispanic		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Advanced	2	7	1	1	2	11	2	2
	Proficient	44	52	25	30	51	56	30	37
	Needs Improvement	41	32	45	52	36	28	45	46
	Warning/ Failing	12	9	29	17	11	5	23	15
Percent Attaining Proficiency		46	59	26	31	53	67	32	39
Proficiency Index (EPI)		75.3	81.0	61.0	69.0	78.9	86.0	64.9	71.9
Number of Tests		364	318	216	222	216	177	383	382

On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, Southbridge's female students outperformed male students in all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups. The performance gap in ELA between female and male students was narrowest for White students (six PI points) and widest for Hispanic students (eight PI points).

Figure/Table 19: MCAS Math Test Performance by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status by Gender, 2007



		White		Hispanic		FRL/N		FRL/Y	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Advanced	14	13	3	2	16	19	6	4
	Proficient	23	21	18	13	26	32	18	12
	Needs Improvement	32	38	27	42	29	34	31	41
	Warning/ Failing	32	28	52	43	29	15	45	43
Percent Attaining Proficiency		37	34	21	15	42	51	24	16
Proficiency Index (MPI)		62.3	63.8	48.7	50.5	65.8	75.7	52.5	50.9
Number of Tests		360	318	216	222	217	179	379	380

On the 2007 MCAS tests in math, Southbridge's female students outperformed male students in the White, Hispanic, and non low-income subgroups, and male students outperformed female students in the low-income subgroup. The performance gap in math between female and male students was narrowest for White students and low-income students (one and one-half PI point) and widest for non-low income students (10 PI points).

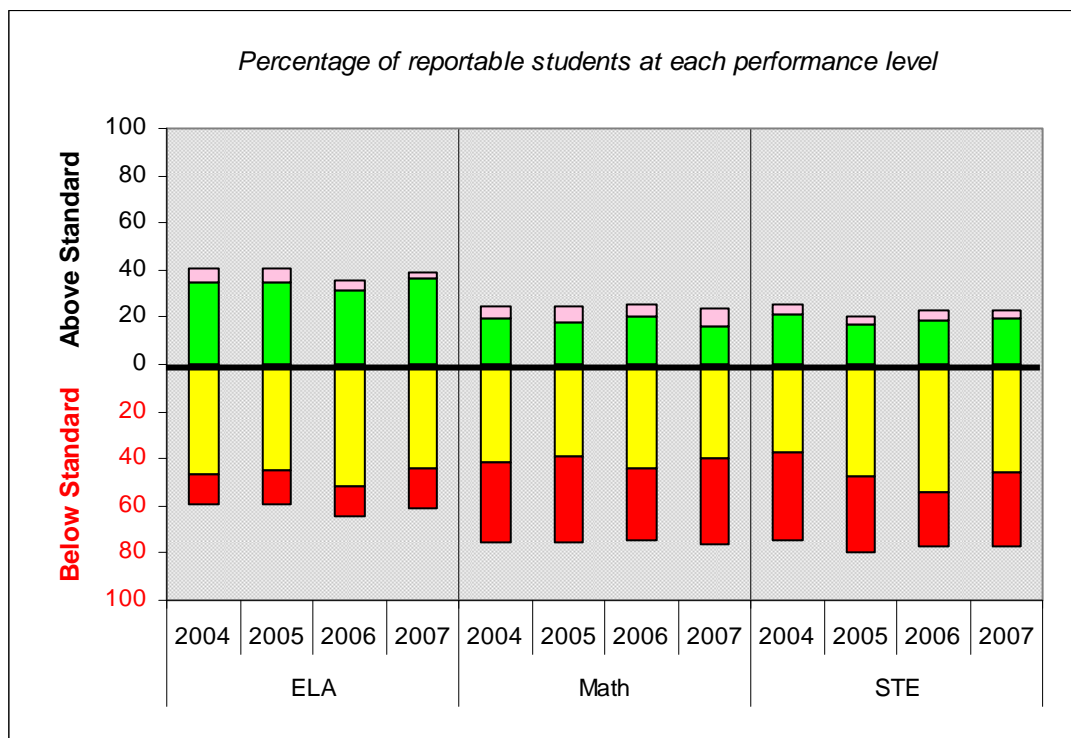
Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2004 and 2007, Southbridge's MCAS performance showed a slight decline in English language arts and in math and little change in science and technology/engineering.
- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Southbridge declined at an average of approximately one PI point annually. This resulted in a widening of the proficiency gap of 12 percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA decreased from 41 percent in 2004 to 39 percent in 2007.
- Math performance in Southbridge also showed a slight decline over this period, at an average of less than one PI point annually. This resulted in a widening of the proficiency gap of five percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math fell from 24 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Southbridge had a slight improvement in STE performance of less than one PI point over the three-year period, resulting in a narrowing of the proficiency gap by less than three percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 26 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2007.

Figure/Table 20: MCAS Test Performance by Subject, 2004-2007



		ELA				Math				STE			
		2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
	Advanced	6	6	4	3	5	7	6	7	5	3	4	3
	Proficient	35	34	31	36	19	18	20	16	21	17	19	20
	Needs Improvement	46	45	51	44	42	39	44	40	37	48	54	46
	Warning/ Failing	13	15	13	17	34	36	30	37	37	32	23	32
	Percent Attaining Proficiency	41	40	35	39	24	25	26	23	26	20	23	23
	Proficiency Index (PI)	73.5	72.9	71.2	70.4	57.2	56.3	59.7	55.2	56.9	57.1	61.1	57.6

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2007 ELA and math data may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 1.

The percentage of Southbridge students attaining proficiency in ELA decreased from 41 percent in 2004 to 39 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in ELA widened by 12 percent from 27 to 30 PI points over this period.

The percentage of Southbridge students attaining proficiency in math decreased from 24 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in math widened by five percent from 43 to 45 PI points over this period.

The percentage of Southbridge students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 26 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2007. The proficiency gap in STE narrowed by less than three percent over this period, from 43 to 42 PI points.

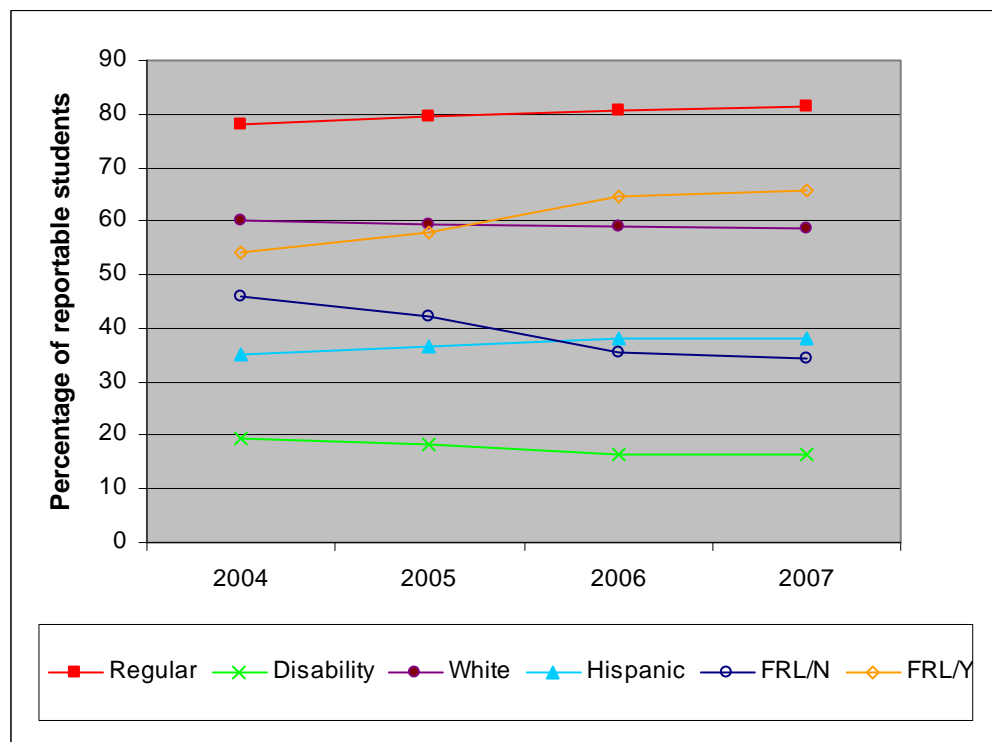
Equity of Improvement

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

Findings:

- In Southbridge, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 28 PI points in 2004 to 41 PI points in 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 27 to 38 PI points over this period.
- All student subgroups with the exception of Hispanic students had a decline in performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The subgroup with the greatest decline in ELA was students with disabilities.
- In math, the performance of the Hispanic, non low-income and low-income student subgroups in Southbridge improved between 2004 and 2007. The subgroup with the greatest improvement in math was Hispanic students.

Figure/Table 21: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2004-2007



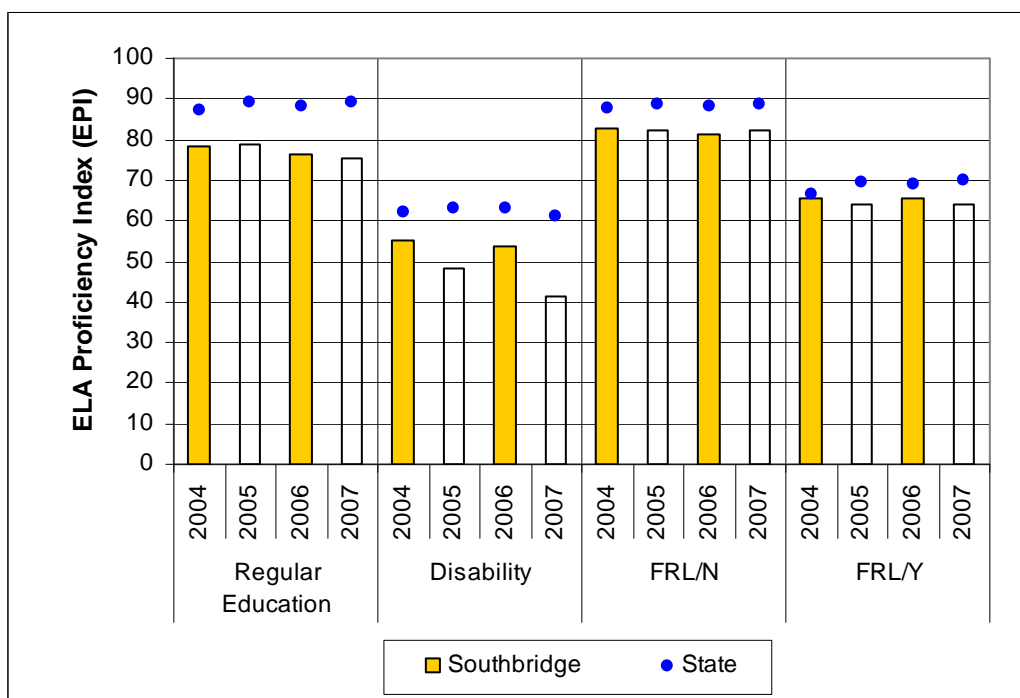
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Southbridge	1,158	1,126	1,201	1,162	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	902	895	967	948	77.9	79.5	80.5	81.6
Disability	224	205	199	190	19.3	18.2	16.6	16.4
White	695	670	709	681	60.0	59.5	59.0	58.6
Hispanic	406	411	457	442	35.1	36.5	38.1	38.0
FRL/N	533	475	427	398	46.0	42.2	35.6	34.3
FRL/Y	625	651	774	764	54.0	57.8	64.4	65.7

Note: The 2007 percentages of students reported here may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 7; the percentages shown here are based on the total number of students in the district, whereas the percentages shown in Figure 7 are based on the number of students in reportable subgroups. Data include students in tested grades only.

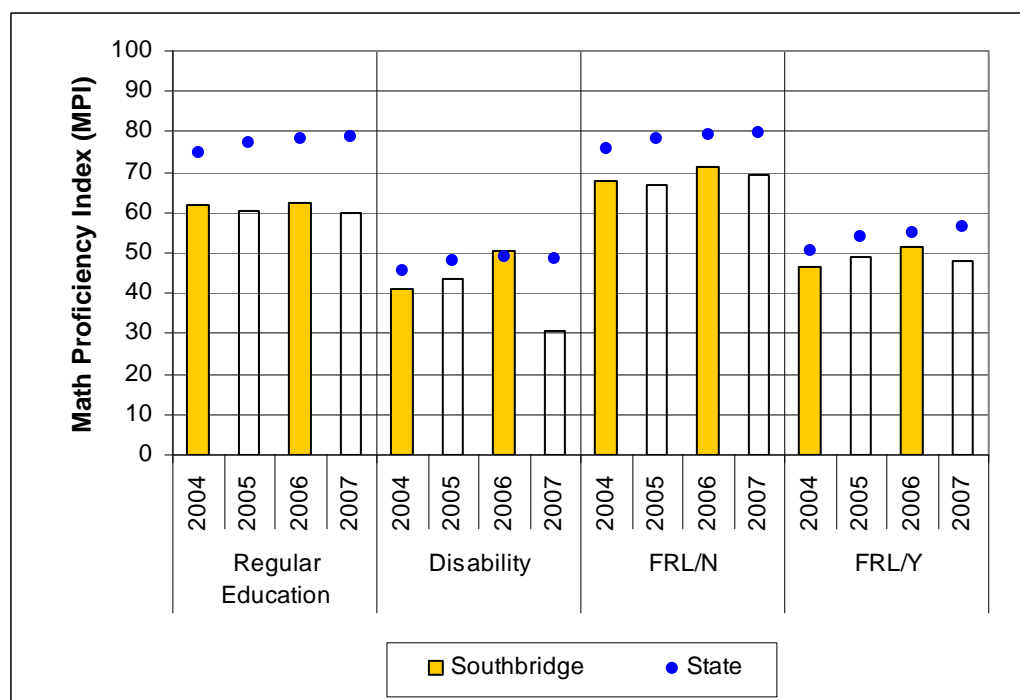
Between 2004 and 2007 in Southbridge, the proportion of low-income students increased by 12 percentage points. The proportion of students with disabilities decreased by three percentage points. The proportion of White students decreased by one and one-half percentage points and that of Hispanic students increased by three percentage points.

Figures 22 A-D/Table 22: MCAS Proficiency Indices by Subgroup, 2004-2007

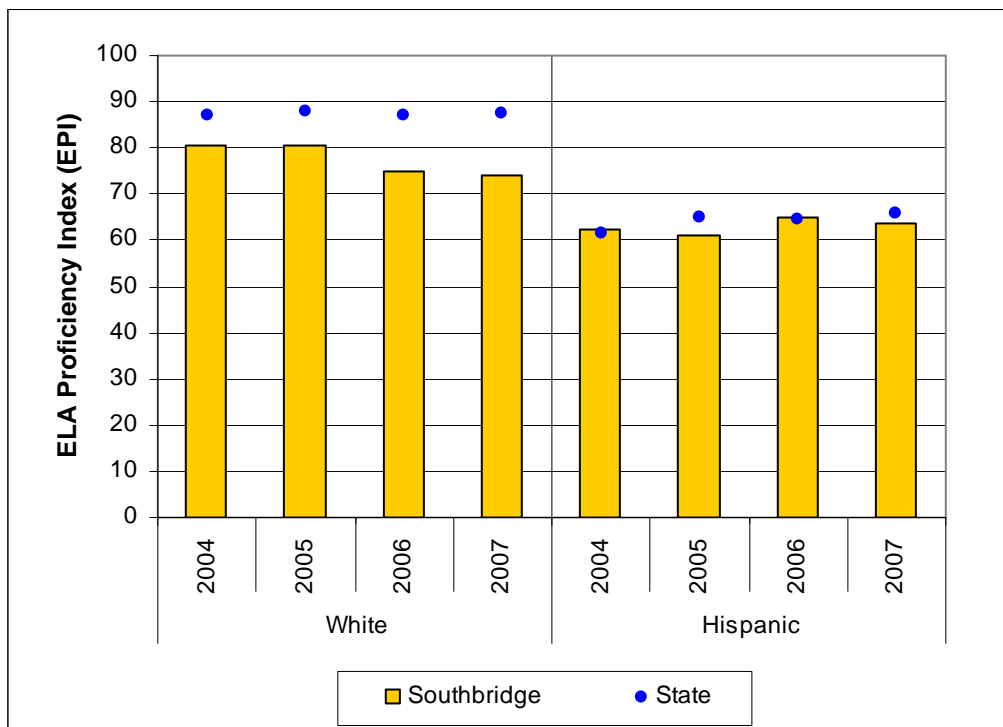
A. ELA Proficiency Index (EPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



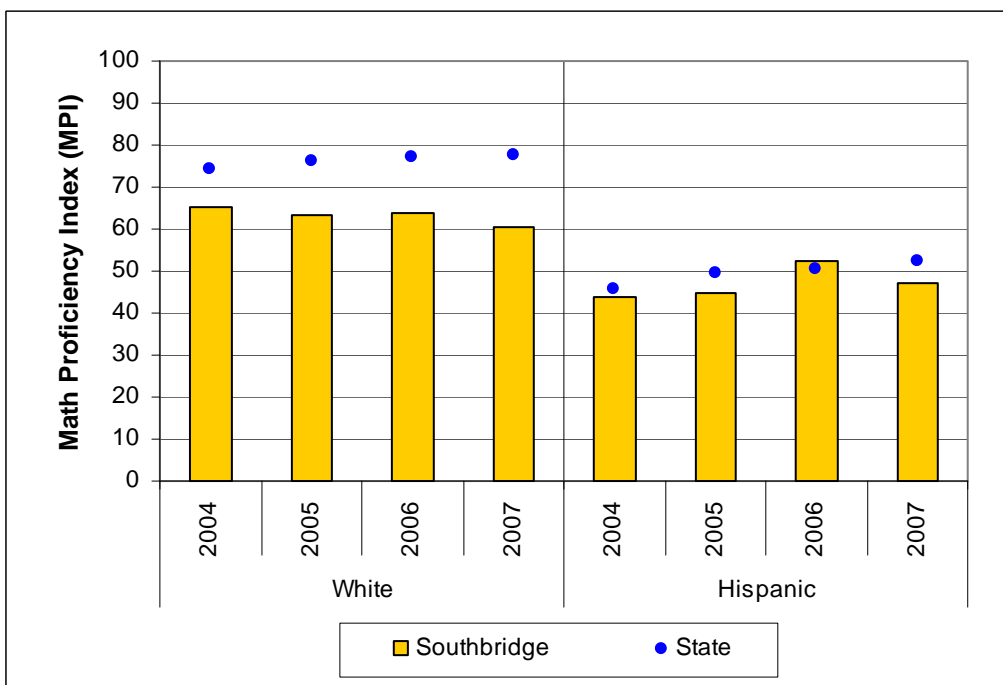
B. Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Student Status and Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch Subgroups



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



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

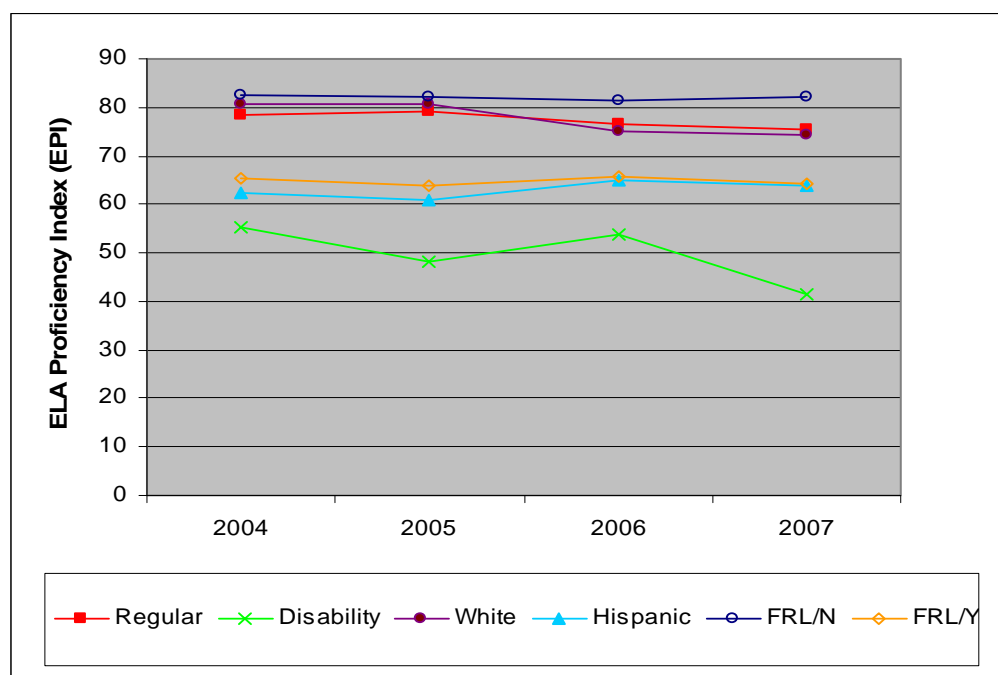


State				Southbridge			
Subgroup	Year	EPI	MPI	Subgroup	Year	EPI	MPI
Regular Education	2004	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2004	78.4	61.8
	2005	89.2	77.4		2005	79.0	60.4
	2006	88.3	78.2		2006	76.6	62.4
	2007	89.0	78.9		2007	75.3	60.1
Disability	2004	62.1	45.3	Disability	2004	55.2	41.0
	2005	63.3	47.9		2005	48.3	43.5
	2006	62.9	49.0		2006	53.7	50.5
	2007	61.2	48.4		2007	41.5	30.8
FRL/N	2004	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2004	82.7	67.8
	2005	88.9	78.1		2005	82.1	66.7
	2006	88.3	79.0		2006	81.3	71.4
	2007	88.6	79.7		2007	82.2	69.1
FRL/Y	2004	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2004	65.3	46.4
	2005	69.7	53.9		2005	63.9	49.0
	2006	68.8	55.0		2006	65.6	51.7
	2007	70.0	56.3		2007	64.2	48.0
White	2004	86.9	74.4	White	2004	80.6	65.4
	2005	87.7	76.2		2005	80.5	63.5
	2006	87.1	77.2		2006	74.9	63.9
	2007	87.4	77.8		2007	74.2	60.5
Hispanic	2004	61.4	45.7	Hispanic	2004	62.4	43.8
	2005	64.8	49.3		2005	60.9	44.7
	2006	64.6	50.6		2006	64.8	52.3
	2007	65.8	52.2		2007	63.7	47.1

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, and 15.

In Southbridge, all student subgroups had more of a decline or less improvement in ELA than in math between 2004 and 2007. Over this period, the performance of regular education students declined by three PI points in ELA and by two PI points in math. The performance of students with disabilities declined by 14 PI points in ELA and by 10 points in math. The performance of non low-income students declined by one-half PI point in ELA and improved by one PI point in math, and the performance of low-income students declined by one PI point in ELA and improved by one and one-half points in math. The performance of White students declined by six and one-half PI points in ELA and by five points in math. The performance of Hispanic students improved by one PI point in ELA and by three points in math.

Figure/Table 23: MCAS English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007



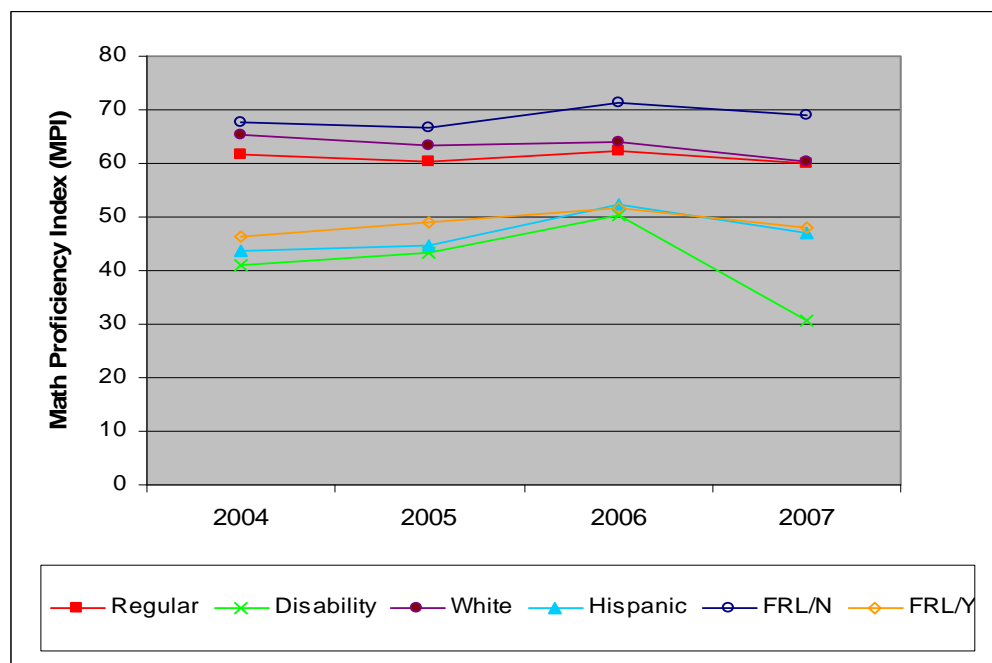
	ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)				Percent Attaining Proficiency			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Southbridge	73.5	72.9	71.2	70.4	41	40	35	39
Regular	78.4	79.0	76.6	75.3	47	47	44	45
Disability	55.2	48.3	53.7	41.5	15	11	9	5
White	80.6	80.5	74.9	74.2	53	53	42	45
Hispanic	62.4	60.9	64.8	63.7	20	22	24	28
FRL/N	82.7	82.1	81.3	82.2	58	55	54	59
FRL/Y	65.3	63.9	65.6	64.2	25	27	25	29

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 8, 11, and 14.

All student subgroups in Southbridge with the exception of Hispanic students had a decline in performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The ELA proficiency gap for Southbridge's regular education students widened by 14 percent from 22 to 25 PI points over this period, and for students with disabilities it widened by 31 percent from 45 to 59 PI points. The proficiency gap in ELA for White students widened by 33 percent from 19 to 26 PI points, and for Hispanic students it narrowed from 38 to 36 PI points, an improvement rate of nearly four percent. The ELA proficiency gap for non low-income students widened by three percent from 17 to 18 PI points, and for low-income students it also widened by three percent from 35 to 36 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in ELA between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by 11 PI points. The ELA performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by eight PI points. The performance gap in ELA between non low-income and low-income students widened by one-half PI point over this period.

Figure/Table 24: MCAS Math Proficiency Index (MPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007



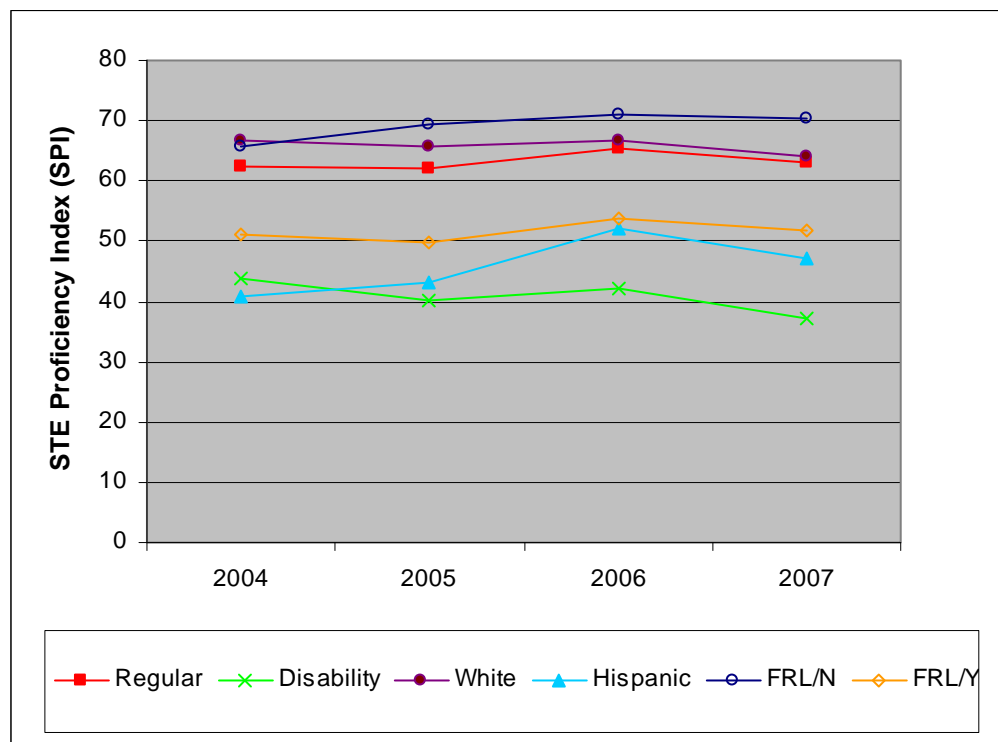
	Math Proficiency Index (MPI)				Percent Attaining Proficiency			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Southbridge	57.2	56.3	59.7	55.2	24	24	26	23
Regular	61.8	60.4	62.4	60.1	29	29	29	28
Disability	41.0	43.5	50.5	30.8	9	12	14	2
White	65.4	63.5	63.9	60.5	34	33	31	30
Hispanic	43.8	44.7	52.3	47.1	8	11	15	12
FRL/N	67.8	66.7	71.4	69.1	38	37	42	42
FRL/Y	46.4	49.0	51.7	48.0	10	15	14	14

Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, 2007 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Tables 9, 12, and 15.

In math, the performance of the Hispanic, non low-income, and low-income student subgroups in Southbridge improved between 2004 and 2007. The math proficiency gap for Southbridge's regular education students widened by five percent from 38 to 40 PI points over this period, and for students with disabilities it widened by 17 percent from 59 to 69 PI points. The proficiency gap in math for White students widened by 14 percent from 35 to 40 PI points, and for Hispanic students it narrowed from 56 to 53 PI points, an improvement rate of six percent. The math proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed by four percent from 32 to 31 PI points, and for low-income students it narrowed by three percent from 54 to 52 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in math between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by nine PI points. The math performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by seven PI points. The performance gap in math between non low-income and low-income students narrowed by less than one-half PI point over this period.

Figure/Table 25: MCAS STE Proficiency Index (SPI) by Subgroup, 2004-2007



	STE Proficiency Index (SPI)				Percent Attaining Proficiency			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Southbridge	56.9	57.1	61.1	57.6	25	20	23	23
Regular	62.5	62.1	65.5	63.0	29	25	28	28
Disability	43.7	40.1	42.0	37.1	15	4	4	3
White	66.8	65.6	66.7	64.0	35	30	29	28
Hispanic	40.9	43.3	52.2	47.1	11	5	13	13
FRL/N	65.6	69.3	71.0	70.3	37	37	34	39
FRL/Y	51.0	49.7	53.9	51.7	17	10	16	15

In science and technology/engineering, the only student subgroups in Southbridge whose performance did not improve between 2004 and 2007 were students with disabilities and White students. The STE proficiency gap for Southbridge's regular education students narrowed from 38 to 37 PI points over this period, an improvement rate of one percent, and for students with disabilities it widened by 12 percent from 56 to 63 PI points. The proficiency gap in STE for White students widened by eight percent from 33 to 36 PI points; and for Hispanic students it narrowed from 59 to 53 PI points, an improvement rate of over 10 percent. The STE proficiency gap for non low-income students narrowed by 14 percent from 34 to 30 PI points, and for low-income students it narrowed by one percent from 49 to 48 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2007, the performance gap in STE between regular education students and students with disabilities widened by seven PI points. The STE performance gap between White and Hispanic students narrowed by nine PI points. The performance gap in STE between non low-income and low-income students widened by four PI points over this period.

Participation

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Finding:

- On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Southbridge participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2007

Subgroup	Performance Level	ELA	Math	STE
Southbridge	ALL LEVELS	1,158	1,155	352
	Advanced	39	107	10
	Proficient	463	230	70
	Needs Improvement	477	397	161
	Warning/Failing	179	421	111
Regular Education	Advanced	37	106	10
	Proficient	442	216	67
	Needs Improvement	377	352	138
	Warning/Failing	92	272	65
Disability	Advanced	1	1	0
	Proficient	17	9	2
	Needs Improvement	92	40	21
	Warning/Failing	76	134	37
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	1	0	0
	Proficient	4	5	1
	Needs Improvement	8	5	2
	Warning/Failing	11	15	9
White	Advanced	31	91	8
	Proficient	325	149	51
	Needs Improvement	252	236	106
	Warning/Failing	74	202	46
Hispanic	Advanced	5	12	2
	Proficient	121	67	15
	Needs Improvement	212	152	54
	Warning/Failing	100	207	60
African-American	Advanced	0	0	0
	Proficient	9	3	2
	Needs Improvement	5	7	1
	Warning/Failing	4	8	3
Asian	Advanced	2	3	0
	Proficient	8	9	1
	Needs Improvement	6	2	0
	Warning/Failing	0	3	2
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	24	69	6
	Proficient	210	115	38
	Needs Improvement	127	124	51
	Warning/Failing	32	88	17
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	15	38	4
	Proficient	253	115	32
	Needs Improvement	350	273	110
	Warning/Failing	147	333	94
Male	Advanced	11	58	6
	Proficient	223	125	35
	Needs Improvement	252	180	77
	Warning/Failing	113	233	46
Female	Advanced	28	49	4
	Proficient	240	105	35
	Needs Improvement	225	217	84
	Warning/Failing	66	188	65

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2004-2007

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2004	201	0	0
	2005	196	0	0
	2006	192	190	0
	2007	180	183	0
Grade 4	2004	199	198	0
	2005	196	195	0
	2006	185	186	0
	2007	183	183	0
Grade 5	2004	0	0	221
	2005	0	0	199
	2006	182	185	185
	2007	175	171	173
Grade 6	2004	0	201	0
	2005	0	217	0
	2006	184	184	0
	2007	189	190	0
Grade 7	2004	207	0	0
	2005	188	0	0
	2006	197	200	0
	2007	184	185	0
Grade 8	2004	0	198	197
	2005	0	199	199
	2006	167	168	168
	2007	181	179	179
Grade 10	2004	130	130	0
	2005	130	129	0
	2006	86	88	0
	2007	66	64	0
All Grades	2004	737	727	418
	2005	710	740	398
	2006	1,193	1,201	353
	2007	1,158	1,155	352

Notes

Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years. The following grades are included in the trend data for 2004-2007 reported in Figure/Tables 20-25 and in the table of n-values by grade and year:

English language arts (ELA): 3, 4, 7, 10

Math: 4, 6, 8, 10

Science and technology/engineering (STE): 5, 8

The highest performance level for grade 3 reading in 2006 and 2007 was Advanced/Above Proficient; this level did not exist in prior years, when the highest level was Proficient.

Subgroup inclusion is based on the number of students and the number of schools in the district. To be included as reportable, a subgroup must have at least 10 times the number of schools in the district. Subgroup inclusion for all years of the trend data is based on the 2007 data.

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

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

Appendix B: Proficiency Index (PI)

The proficiency index is a metric used to measure and compare all schools and school districts regarding their performance on the MCAS tests. The proficiency index is a measure of the level of achievement a district, school, grade, or subgroup has made in relation to the 'Proficient' achievement level on the MCAS tests. The EQA computes three indices: the English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI), the Math Proficiency Index (MPI), and the Science and Technology/Engineering Index (SPI).

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

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

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

Example: The Anywhere High School had the following results on the 2007 MCAS tests in a given content area:

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

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

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

The EPI is calculated using the ELA results for all students taking the ELA exam. The MPI is calculated using the math results for all students taking the math exam. The SPI is calculated using the STE results for all students taking the STE exam.

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

Appendix C: Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1998 – FY 2007

	Foundation Enrollment	Pct Chg	Foundation Budget	Pct Chg	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid	Pct Chg	Required Net School Spending (NSS)	Pct Chg	Actual Net School Spending	Pct Chg	Dollars Over/Under Requirement	Percent Over/Under
FY98	2,504	-2.1	16,203,479	1.6	4,198,681	11,621,344	6.1	15,820,025	7.0	16,300,829	9.8	480,804	3.0
FY99	2,455	-2.0	16,324,718	0.7	4,460,908	11,863,229	2.1	16,324,137	3.2	16,411,110	0.7	86,973	0.5
FY00	2,473	0.7	16,434,496	0.7	4,543,825	12,234,179	3.1	16,778,004	2.8	17,070,468	4.0	292,464	1.7
FY01	2,459	-0.6	16,790,410	2.2	4,684,600	12,664,504	3.5	17,349,104	3.4	18,474,456	8.2	1,125,352	6.5
FY02	2,507	2.0	17,916,634	6.7	5,018,767	14,564,180	15.0	19,582,947	12.9	18,860,949	2.1	-721,998	-3.7
FY03	2,612	4.2	19,152,269	6.9	5,740,765	14,564,180	0.0	20,304,945	3.7	19,734,078	4.6	-570,867	-2.8
FY04	2,552	-2.3	19,389,738	1.2	5,558,930	14,401,675	-1.1	19,960,605	-1.7	22,633,775	14.7	2,673,170	13.4
FY05	2,530	-0.9	19,738,812	1.8	5,211,923	14,526,889	0.9	19,738,812	-1.1	21,819,777	-3.6	2,080,965	10.5
FY06	2,488	-1.7	20,428,362	3.5	5,691,750	14,736,612	1.4	20,428,362	3.5	22,176,350	1.6	1,747,988	8.6
FY07	2,300	-7.6	20,103,131	-1.6	5,866,161	14,851,612	0.8	20,717,773	1.4	22,564,061	1.7	1,846,288	8.9

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	
FY98	6,471	4,641	6,510	71.7	97.6	100.6	71.3
FY99	6,650	4,832	6,685	72.7	100.0	100.5	72.3
FY00	6,646	4,947	6,903	74.4	102.1	103.9	71.7
FY01	6,828	5,150	7,513	75.4	103.3	110.0	68.6
FY02	7,147	5,809	7,523	81.3	109.3	105.3	77.2
FY03	7,332	5,576	7,555	76.0	106.0	103.0	73.8
FY04	7,598	5,643	8,869	74.3	102.9	116.7	63.6
FY05	7,802	5,742	8,624	73.6	100.0	110.5	66.6
FY06	8,211	5,923	8,913	72.1	100.0	108.6	66.5
FY07	8,740	6,457	9,810		103.1	112.2	65.8

Foundation enrollment is reported in October of the prior fiscal year (e.g., FY07 enrollment = Oct 1, 2005 headcount).

Foundation budget is the state's estimate of the minimum amount needed in each district to provide an adequate educational program.

Required Net School Spending is the annual minimum that must be spent on schools, including carryovers from prior years.

Net School Spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures and transportation.

Appendix D: Crisis and Security Indicators

All districts reviewed by the EQA are evaluated on the crisis and security indicators approved by the EMAC in light of the recent spate of school violence and the need to ensure student safety. The ratings on these indicators and the relevant evidence found by the EQA examiners did not influence the evaluation of the District Turnaround Plan, but are provided for informational purposes only.

Crisis and Security Indicator 1: The superintendent created and disseminated a comprehensive safety plan in collaboration with the community, and plans were reviewed annually with the police and fire departments prior to each school year. School and district safety plans were aligned.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district has a *Southbridge Public Schools School Crisis Handbook* that the previous administration had established in conjunction with town safety officials. The easily identified document is divided into 27 detailed response categories and serves as the crisis handbook for each of the five schools. The current administrative team has reviewed the handbook, and does so on an annual basis, with local hospitals, the chief of police, and the fire chief. As a result of one of their previous meetings, the middle school office was moved downstairs to add more security. Each building has a crisis team and regular meetings are held on a district-wide basis. The easy to use flip chart contains pertinent information regarding lockdown procedures, floor plans, and various scenarios to be followed by school personnel. Issues regarding accidents, bomb threat, missing child, kidnapping, natural disaster, fire, medical emergency, and a host of other possible problems are covered.

Crisis and Security Indicator 2: The district provided all staff with ongoing training in dealing with crises and emergencies; provided safety procedures for substitutes, student-teachers, and volunteers responsible for students; and provided opportunities to practice emergency procedures with all students.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Southbridge developed written crisis and emergency protocols and presented them in a spiral-bound handbook provided to staff members. Administrators and teachers told the EQA team that building principals reviewed the procedures annually at their initial faculty meetings. The EQA examiners noted agenda items addressing emergency procedures in a review of a sample of staff meeting agendas. Staff members new to a building, including new teachers and paraprofessionals, receive training and information regarding where necessary information and materials are located and how to use the flip charts provided by the district. The manual is in the possession of all staff members and placed in the top drawer of teachers' desks. The manual is easy to use and contains up to date telephone numbers and information.

Professional development regarding the school crisis handbook occurs annually. Administrators stated, and teachers confirmed, that the district regularly conducted building and bus evacuation drills, fire drills, and lockdown drills, and these were noted in memos sent to and from the office of the superintendent. The police and fire departments sometimes observed the drills and offered suggestions and corrective feedback. The dates of these drills were recorded in the school offices.

Principals told the EQA team that they provided copies of the emergency and crisis handbook to regular substitutes and volunteers. They also stated that they personally explained and clarified the procedures. Teachers told the examiners that substitutes had carried out emergency procedures in their absence, and they were unaware of any problems resulting from lack of information or misunderstanding of and/or noncompliance with procedures.

Crisis and Security Indicator 3: The schools were secure and had systems in place to ensure student safety.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

A tour of the school buildings revealed that the exterior doors in each school could not open from the outside. Access to each school could only be granted through a locked front door, which could be unlocked from a remote location. Upon entering, visitors sign in and out and receive either a visitor's identification badge or label. The middle and high schools each have a camera

by the front door, and the high school also has cameras in the corridors. Staff members did not wear identification during the EQA visit. Interviewees stated that the small size of each school resulted in an atmosphere in which all staff members knew each other. Every adult having contact with students received a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.

A review of the EQA Facilities Inventory (attachment E) provided by the district indicated that school construction dates ranged from 1816 to 1936. Over the years renovations took place in each school. The most recent renovations occurred in 1993 at the West Street School, the Charlton Street School, and the Eastford Road School. Each school, despite being worn due to age and use, was well lit, clean, well maintained, and promoted a positive learning environment.

School resource officers assigned by the police department and paid jointly by the school and police departments were in place at the middle and high schools.

Appendix E: Support Indicators

All districts reviewed by the EQA are evaluated on the support indicators recently approved by the EMAC. The ratings on these indicators and the relevant evidence found by the EQA examiners did not influence the evaluation of the District Turnaround Plan, but are provided for informational purposes only.

Support Indicator 1: The district formed partnerships with community human service agencies and benefactors, such as corporate and civic sponsors, to provide at-risk students and families access to health, social, recreational, and supplemental educational services.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district has community partnerships with several local community organizations that provide support for at-risk students and their families. The superintendent endeavored to increase the number of local groups supporting the district by reaching out to them. Major state and community service agencies having ongoing relationships with the district include the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and the Southbridge Early Childhood Council (SECC), which coordinates with Head Start and Catholic Charities. The district has co-sponsored a family literacy breakfast with the SECC for the last few years. The district and the SECC also co-sponsor an annual preschool fair in April, with additional support from Southbridge Community Connections (SCC) and the YMCA. These two events usually have high parent attendance. Harrington Hospital and the SCC offer language classes and other day and evening classes for parents, but these generally have low attendance rates even though the sponsors provide daycare and babysitting.

The district in conjunction with the police department implemented a violence prevention program, using a \$150,000 grant, that offers after-school and summer programs for 150 middle school students. This program has both tutoring and athletic components. Another program for low-income freshmen and sophomores is intended to encourage college enrollment for students whose parents did not attend college. The district was in the process of implementing the Upward Bound program after receiving a \$1 million grant from You, Inc., a community outreach

partner. Central office staff members reported a lack of after-school programs at the middle and high schools. They also expressed a need for home tutoring.

Support Indicator 2: The district created inclusive classrooms or programs for student populations, through an integrated services model, minimizing separation from the mainstream.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Southbridge enrolled special education students in full inclusion programs, but significantly underserved them. According to DOE statistics for 2005-2006, Southbridge reported a higher rate of special education students enrolled in full inclusion programs (62.8 percent) than the state average (49.1 percent); however, the graduation rate for Southbridge special education students (24.1 percent) was much lower than the state average (61.1 percent), and the dropout rate for Southbridge special education students was much higher than the state average (22.1 versus 5.1 percent). According to the 2007 MCAS test results, Southbridge special education students performed below the state average in almost every subject at each tested grade level.

Contrary to its apparent philosophy of inclusion, Southbridge relied heavily on external placements. According to DOE data for 2005-2006, Southbridge enrolled 13.8 percent of its special education students in out-of-district special education programs, nearly twice the state average of 6.7 percent.

When questioned about these data by the EQA team, administrators stated that prior to the period under review, students with significant disabilities, especially those with behavioral or cognitive limitations, were usually placed in collaborative and private placements, while most of the remaining students under special educational management were enrolled in inclusion programs with ineffective support. One administrator said, “If you didn’t fit you were out; and if you were in, you were dumped in a classroom without much help.”

One administrator characterized the special education program as “grossly inefficient with poor results.” Another said that the program was “mismanaged and chaotic.” A central office administrator stated that the then out-of-district coordinator lacked training and experience in special education, but was making decisions about programs and services for students. A DOE

Coordinated Program Review (CPR) cited numerous non-compliance issues. Immediately prior to the period under review, the contract of the then special education director was not renewed.

Upon entering the district in 2005, the current superintendent hired a new special education director. The superintendent then contracted with an external consultant for an evaluation of district's special education programs and services and used the resulting recommendations to begin to "reconstruct the program." Southbridge created local programs for low incident populations, including students on the autism spectrum and students with social-emotional problems. These programs resulted in significant savings in transportation and tuition costs, while serving students in the least restrictive environment.

The district also augmented support for students in inclusion programs by redefining job descriptions and giving para-educators and co-teachers more active instructional roles. The director and principals monitor classrooms more often to ensure that mandated modifications were made. Both teachers and administrators told the EQA team that they welcomed the recent changes in the management and direction of the district's special education program.

Support Indicator 3: The district immediately assessed the skills and needs of entering and mobile students when records were not available or accessible, and made educationally appropriate and effective placements.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Southbridge immediately enrolls and assesses the strengths and needs of entering students when records are not available. Administrators stated that entering early elementary students are assessed with the DIBELS, GRADE, and Stanford 10 to determine their literacy and numeracy skills. Class and group placements are based on the initial results. Administrators also stated that daily performance is the most reliable indicator of developed skills, and placements and services are often modified during the first weeks of attendance.

At the middle and high school levels, entering students are administered the Stanford 10 to guide placement decisions. Beginning in 2007-2008, some recently developed local unit and

benchmark tests and writing samples are being used to help determine mastery levels in combination with the Stanford 10 results, but this is not yet a consistent practice.

Support Indicator 4: The district provided programs and services to alleviate the adverse effects of poverty (including delayed language development, lack of readiness skills, low self-esteem and aspirations, high mobility, and family instability) on students' social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

Southbridge does not formally analyze the needs of low-income students in order to create a network of programs and services. Although not specially designed for low-income students, the district offers a number of appropriate programs. According to DOE data for 2006-2007, low-income students constituted 62 percent of the student population in Southbridge. Administrators told the EQA examiners that while the district analyzed the performance of the special education, Hispanic, and limited English proficient subgroups, there had been no analysis of the low-income population. One administrator explained, "Maybe the group is too large for us to see it as a subgroup. Most of our kids are poor."

Southbridge began a full-day kindergarten program in 2006-2007 and a full-day preschool program in 2007-2008. These programs emphasize language acquisition and readiness skills, and the development of a learning disposition. In 2007-2008, the district was applying for a grant to provide extended day programs at the later elementary and middle school levels to provide academic remediation, field trips to broaden students' experiential backgrounds, and structured recreation opportunities.

In 2006-2007, Southbridge received a three-year, \$1 million Upward Bound grant to provide tutorial instruction and counseling services to increase the skills and aspirations of students whose parents had not attended college. The district also maintains formal relationships and protocols with state and community human services agencies serving children and families, including the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Health, and Community Connections, a private agency serving impoverished youth.

Support Indicator 5: The district directly involved parents and community organizations in the education of their children through their regular communication and outreach, and facilitated their participation by such means as holding meetings and events at convenient times and locations and providing translators, transportation, and child care.

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

After a review of district documents and interviews with administrators and teachers, EQA examiners discovered how district and school staff members plan events to involve parents in the schools. The district has made attempts to increase parent involvement; however, district staff members seldom facilitated the participation of parents who needed free transportation and/or child care in order to attend some school events. According to the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), schools hold events to increase parent involvement, such as the kindergarten orientation, open houses, family math nights, literacy nights/breakfasts, preschool “Make-it, Take-it” night, Peacebuilder activities, patriotic, holiday, or honors celebrations, parent university or seminars, the Second Step program, the Total Transformation program for parent education, and principal’s roundtable discussions. Schools reach out to the community and parents with activities including a Thanksgiving food drive, Supplies for Soldiers, ROAR (Reach Out and Read) days with community volunteer readers, and volunteers presenting at career days.

During interviews, district and school staff members shared the strategies they use to increase parent involvement, and stated that the schools usually have good parent attendance at open houses, family math and literacy nights, and school honors or holiday celebrations. Central office staff members stated that they have low parent attendance at special education Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, ELL parent meetings, Title I PAC meetings, and most of the parent training sessions the district offers. They shared no strategies that worked to increase parent involvement except for providing food. Middle school teachers saw a big increase in parent attendance at open houses about two years ago when the school allowed students to come along with their parents. That was the only strategy teachers shared for effectively increasing parent involvement. Central office staff members reported that they had insufficient funds to provide free transportation for parents to attend school events or parent training, and the district seldom provided child care to increase parent involvement. District staff members did not show the EQA

team documentation of the systematic gathering and analysis of data on parent involvement activities.

According to the SIPs and district staff members, the schools send communications home such as school newsletters in English and Spanish, classroom newsletters, regular homework, Everyday Math Homelinks, parent/guardian surveys, and regular academic team/parent communication. Parents also access school websites for information. During interviews with EQA examiners, parents described the ways that the district and its schools communicate with them. For general communications such as notices of school events or letters informing parents about health issues, school staff members send the notices home with the students. All schools send a parent/guardian/student handbook and a student planner home with every student at the start of each school year. The district requires parents to sign that they received the handbook. Several parents shared that they really like the student planner.

When students are absent and parents do not notify the school, school staff members call parents to confirm the absence. Parents send notes or emails or make phone calls to their child's teacher or to other school staff members about concerns. At the middle school, teachers have telephones in their classrooms that can receive incoming parent calls. Teachers and school staff members respond to these parent communications and initiate the same types of contact.

All schools conduct "Open House" events at the start of the school year to welcome parents to the school. At Open House events in 2007, teachers had parents sign up for evening parent conferences scheduled to take place within a short period of time. Parents interviewed expressed disappointment that the district cancelled these parent conferences. One parent was upset saying that her child's teacher did not notify her of the cancellation. For the period under review, parents of students at all grade levels clarified that they were able to schedule parent conferences when they needed to talk to their child's teacher.

To inform parents about their children's progress, the district mails report cards home to parents of students in grades 6-12, and it sends report cards home with students in grades preK-5 that require parent signature. Teachers also send midterm progress reports, and students keep assignment books for daily or weekly parent notification of schoolwork.

Some parents had concerns about the district's communications. One parent shared concerns that she read about student safety items in the newspaper before she heard about them from her child's school. She felt that she was not receiving all the information that parents should know or it came too late. Another parent complained that the district did not translate all documents going home and that the district sent some poorly translated documents to Spanish-speaking parents. According to the parent, this was a frustrating situation for many parents in a district with almost 50 percent of the student population Hispanic. A last parent suggested that the district hire a public relations person to improve the community's perception of the district, keep students in the district, and let the public know about the "positive progress" being made in the district.

District staff members stated that Spanish is the only high incident language in the district and that proficient Spanish translators are not available full time at each of the schools. District staff members translated student/parent/guardian handbooks, special education paperwork, ELL documents, and other district-wide documents into Spanish, but there were not enough proficient Spanish translators in the district to translate all the other documents that schools send home. During the period under review, the district did not have a system or structure for translating all school documents. The superintendent said that the district planned to hire three Spanish-speaking parent liaisons to work in parent centers at each of the elementary schools. The parent liaisons would produce quality oral and written translations in Spanish to provide effective communication with Hispanic parents.

Appendix F: Classroom Observations Summary

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 57 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 33 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching, grouped into five categories: classroom management; instructional practice; expectations; student activity, work, and behavior; and classroom climate for learning. Examiners recorded the attributes observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. Observations were conducted at the district's five schools as follows: 22 at the elementary level, 19 at the middle school level, and 16 at the high school level. In total, the EQA examiners observed 26 ELA classrooms, 22 math classrooms, four science classrooms, and five classrooms of other subjects. In calculating the presence of observed practices, where appropriate, the practices that would not be applicable were noted and were removed from the total to obtain a proper basis for determining the percentage.

Classroom management refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Classroom rules and routines are established and internalized, and students take responsibility for their work with or without teacher direction. The teacher models and promotes respectful behavior and maintains safety in the classroom. Instructional time is maximized due to smooth transitions between activities. Other adults working in the classroom have an active instructional role. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 77 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 81 percent at the elementary level, 62 percent at the middle school level, and 92 percent at the high school level.

Instructional practice was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher implements instructional strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities. The teacher makes learning goals clear to students, and students understand their relevance. The teacher increases the level of learning by using a variety of instructional techniques. Instructional time is allocated and used effectively, and the pace of instruction is appropriate to students' varied rates of learning. The teacher elicits student contributions and uses a variety of questioning techniques that encourage elaboration, thought, and broad involvement. The teacher checks for student understanding and corrects misunderstandings, and provides clear and explicit directions that are understood by students. English language acquisition and language development are embedded in all subject areas. The

teacher uses available technology appropriately to deliver instruction. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 69 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 68 percent at the elementary level, 55 percent at the middle school level, and 88 percent at the high school level.

Expectations refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. The teacher communicates and enforces expectations and guidelines for student work and behavior, and the teacher encourages students and expresses confidence in their ability to do challenging work. Instructional time focuses on having students produce high quality work, and the teacher provides models and rubrics to exemplify such work. High quality student work is shown to be valued through activities such as celebration, citation, exhibition, and publication. Positive indicators of expectations for students were evident in 66 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 64 percent at the elementary level, 54 percent at the middle school level, and 84 percent at the high school level.

Positive student activity, work, and behavior are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They show an understanding of the lesson's objective, and they demonstrate ownership of learning by asking their own questions. Students are able to recall information from prior learning and make connections to new learning. They make appropriate use of technology in the classroom. The interaction between students is respectful, and they are purposefully and productively engaged in learning. Student work reflects quality, complexity, and care. Positive indicators of student activity, work, and behavior were evident in 64 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 63 percent at the elementary level, 50 percent at the middle school level, and 84 percent at the high school level.

Finally, indicators of positive classroom climate for learning are considered evident when the teacher creates an inclusive environment where all students are accepted and where the space is used to accommodate a range of learning activities. The teacher uses positive reinforcement to enhance students' self-esteem and self-confidence, and appeals to students' interests or curiosity to motivate them. The classroom is well provisioned and includes multiple resources that address different learning styles. Positive indicators of classroom climate for learning were evident in 75

percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 82 percent at the elementary school level, 61 percent at the middle school level, and 83 percent at the high school level.

	Number of Classrooms				Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Computers		
	ELA	Math	Science/ Other	Total			Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Elementary	11	9	2	22	17.2	0.7	113	98	3.9
Middle	8	6	5	19	16.9	0.3	91	87	3.7
High	7	7	2	16	12.3	0.4	29	16	12.3
Total	26	22	9	57	15.7	0.5	233	201	4.5

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity, Work & Behavior	Classroom Climate
Elementary					
Total observations	83	165	69	96	89
Maximum possible	103	241	108	153	109
Avg. percent of observations	81	68	64	63	82
Middle					
Total observations	56	113	51	65	58
Maximum possible	90	207	95	131	95
Avg. percent of observations	62	55	54	50	61
High					
Total observations	67	154	67	94	66
Maximum possible	73	176	80	112	80
Avg. percent of observations	92	88	84	84	83
Total					
Total observations	206	432	187	255	213
Maximum possible	266	624	283	396	284
Avg. percent of observations	77	69	66	64	75

Appendix G: Organization of Findings

I. The leadership has set clear priorities for developmentally appropriate and sustainable improvements.

- The district's vision, mission and goals have created both an alignment of and a clear direction for the Southbridge school system. (Initiative 5, Finding A)
- The district provided developmental levels of support each year to build principal and teacher capacity to analyze data, in order to precipitate planned actions at the school and classroom levels. (Initiative 6, Finding A)
- District goals and plans are continually refined through active and inclusive participation throughout the district. (Initiative 5, Finding C)
- The district has begun to build the structure for curricular improvements. (Initiative 2, Finding B)
- Although the district has not yet determined quantitative benchmarks to measure progress in meeting some goals, the superintendent intends to use quantitative formative benchmarks to measure growth in student achievement in the future. (Initiative 5, Finding D)

II. The district is aggressively building capacity at all levels to create newly established structures and practices.

- Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system. (Initiative 1, Finding A)
- The once-troubled special education program has been revamped. (Initiative 1, Finding C)
- The new curriculum development process is focused on strengthening standard-based instruction. (Initiative 2, Finding A)
- Professional development and planning support instructional improvements, although this is still an evident area of priority. (Initiative 2, Finding C)
- Professional development in Southbridge supports teacher implementation of the curriculum. (Initiative 2, Finding D)

- Teacher supervision and evaluation processes have not yet caught up with the new instructional expectations and administrator training. (Initiative 2, Finding E)
- The district established new measures to improve fiscal management, although improvements are still needed in this area. (Initiative 3, Finding B)

III. Leadership has set the stage for ownership and cooperation in the implementation of the turnaround plan through its communication with the school committee, town, and staff, and by fully engaging the staff in improvement efforts.

- The school committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement. (Initiative 1, Finding B)
- Improvement in town officials' level of support for the district was evident despite district-town relationships remaining an area of sensitivity. (Initiative 3, Finding C)
- The district had the financial resources needed to implement the turnaround plan. (Initiative 3, Finding A)
- The district has generated staff understanding and ownership in carrying out its initiatives. (Initiative 5, Finding B)

IV. The district has been working to better engage the community and parents, although this area is still a work in progress.

- The superintendent reestablished connections with parents and community organizations and attempted to engage these constituencies in the decision-making process. (Initiative 4, Finding A)
- Currently, the effectiveness of efforts to improve parent communication and parent involvement is unclear. (Initiative 4, Finding B)

Appendix H: Order of Findings

General Findings:

- I. The leadership has set clear priorities for developmentally appropriate and sustainable improvements.**
- II. The district is aggressively building capacity at all levels to create newly established structures and practices.**
- III. Leadership has set the stage for ownership and cooperation in the implementation of the turnaround plan through its communication with the school committee, town, and staff, and by fully engaging the staff in improvement efforts.**
- IV. The district has been working to better engage the community and parents, although this area is still a work in progress.**

Initiative 1: Leadership

Findings:

- A. Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system. (II)
- B. The school committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement. (III)
- C. The once-troubled special education program has been revamped. (II)

Initiative 2: Standards-based Curriculum

Findings:

- A. The new curriculum development process is focused on strengthening standard-based instruction. (II)
- B. The district has begun to build the structure for curricular improvements. (I)
- C. Professional development and planning support instructional improvements, although this is still an evident area of priority. (II)
- D. Professional development in Southbridge supports teacher implementation of the curriculum. (II)

- E. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes have not yet caught up with the new instructional expectations and administrator training. (II)

Initiative 3: Local Fiscal Support

Findings:

- A. The district had the financial resources needed to implement the turnaround plan. (III)
- B. The district established new measures to improve fiscal management, although improvements are still needed in this area. (II)
- C. Improvement in town officials' level of support for the district was evident despite district-town relationships remaining an area of sensitivity. (III)

Initiative 4: Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community

Findings:

- A. The superintendent reestablished connections with parents and community organizations and attempted to engage these constituencies in the decision-making process. (IV)
- B. Currently, the effectiveness of efforts to improve parent communication and parent involvement is unclear. (IV)

Initiative 5: District and School Vision, Mission, and Goals

Findings:

- A. The district's vision, mission and goals have created both an alignment of and a clear direction for the Southbridge school system. (I)
- B. The district has generated staff understanding and ownership in carrying out its initiatives. (III)
- C. District goals and plans are continually refined through active and inclusive participation throughout the district. (I)
- D. Although the district has not yet determined quantitative benchmarks to measure progress in meeting some goals, the superintendent intends to use quantitative formative benchmarks to measure growth in student achievement in the future. (I)

Initiative 6: Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement

Finding:

- A. The district provided developmental levels of support each year to build principal and teacher capacity to analyze data, in order to precipitate planned actions at the school and classroom levels. (I)

Appendix I: Turnaround Plan Implementation Summary

Initiative 1: Leadership

Status: In progress and ongoing; action items completed, partially completed, or in progress

Action step 1: Employ highly qualified, experienced, administrators in key positions: high school principal, special education director, middle school principal, elementary principal, director of curriculum.

Status: Completed

Action step 2: Provide training for superintendent and school committee on roles and responsibilities.

Status: Completed

Action step 3: Identify roles and responsibilities for administrative positions.

Status: Partially completed

Action step 4: Develop curriculum administrative team by filling the following positions: director of curriculum; curriculum supervisors, 7-12 (ELA and math); director of reading and language arts, K-6; director of mathematics, K-6; department heads; middle school team leaders.

Status: Completed

Action step 5: Employ highly qualified, experienced curriculum administrative team (above positions).

Status: Completed

Action step 6: Provide leadership and support for the business manager.

Status: In progress

Action step 7: Initiate a DOE audit of the FY04-FY05 school budget.

Status: Completed

Action step 8: Review the programs and budget with the special educator director in order to identify a program that meets the needs of the students and is in compliance with state and federal guidelines.

Status: Ongoing

Initiative 2: Standards-based Curriculum

Status: In progress and ongoing; action items completed or in progress

Action step 1: Develop a standards-based template to write curriculum in English/language arts and mathematics aligned with the Massachusetts frameworks.

Status: Implemented

Action step 2: Lead professional day with entire staff to work on the curriculum for English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Status: Completed

Action step 3: Provide stipends for teachers in each grade to continue the curriculum work.

Status: Completed

Action step 4: Work with turnaround partner, EDC, and schedule professional development for staff on standards-based education.

Status: Completed

Action step 5: Established a six-year curriculum revision cycle with budgetary appropriations.

Status: Completed

Initiative 3: Local Fiscal Support

Status: In progress and ongoing; action items completed or in progress

Action step 1: Establish a working relationship with the town manager and town council members.

Status: In progress

Action step 2: Present updates to school committee regarding budgetary expenditures.

Status: Completed and ongoing

Action step 3: Schedule meetings with town council to enlist support for school building projects.

Status: Completed and ongoing

Action step 4: Prepare a presentation for town council on the 2006-2007 school budget.

Status: Completed

Action step 5: Prepare a proposal for funding computer hardware and software for town council.

Status: Completed, but needs improvement

Initiative 4: Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community

Status: Partially implemented; all action items not fully implemented

Action step 1: Meet with new parent organization in town (Partners for Progress) to identify needs and concerns.

Status: In progress (initially completed and restarted)

Action step 2: Attend local speaking engagements (Lions, Rotary, hospital, senior citizens).

Status: Ongoing

Action step 3: Establish superintendent's advisory council to dialogue with the community.

Status: Not implemented

Action step 4: Establish a district-wide school council chaired by the superintendent to meet twice each year to discuss budget priorities.

Status: Partially implemented

Action step 5: Establish a curriculum advisory council to meet three times each year to discuss programs and curriculum.

Status: Implemented

Action step 6: Schedule building activities for all parents including Hispanic and bilingual families.

Status: Implemented

Initiative 5: District and School Vision, Mission, and Goals

Status: Implemented; action items completed in whole or in part

Action step 1: Schedule an administrative retreat to review district vision, mission, and goals.

Status: Completed and ongoing

Action step 2: Work with school committee, administration, staff, and parents to write clear and measurable goals for the district.

Status: Partially completed

Action step 3: Share goals with all community and school staff.

Status: Completed and ongoing

Action step 4: Principals will develop goals for their own evaluation based on the district goals.

Status: Completed

Action step 5: New School Improvement Plans were written to reflect district goals.

Status: Completed

Action step 6: Superintendent's goals will be based on the district goals.

Status: Completed

Initiative 6: Data-driven Action Plans for Improvement

Status: Implemented; action items completed

Action step 1: Schedule a full professional day for entire staff to review MCAS results.

Status: Completed

Action step 2: Prepare packets for the analysis of MCAS test data.

Status: Completed

Action step 3: Present an overview of the analysis to staff on November 2, 2005.

Status: Completed

Action step 4: Write a report based on findings for the district.

Status: Completed

Action step 5: Teachers will write action plans based on their analysis.

Status: Completed