Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Waltham Public Schools
District Review

Review conducted February 13-16, 2012

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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Waltham Public Schools

The site visit to the Waltham Public Schools was conducted from February 13–February 16, 2012. The site visit included 39.5 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 117 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted one focus group with seven middle school teachers. Elementary and high school teachers followed their association's request, made in the context of what association representatives told the review team was an "impasse" in negotiations with the school committee for a new collective bargaining agreement, to arrive at meetings but not enter meeting rooms to meet with the review team.

The team also conducted visits to all the district's nine schools: Waltham Senior High School (grades 9–12), John W. McDevitt Middle School (grades 6–8), John F. Kennedy Middle School (grades 6–8), James Fitzgerald Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), Douglas MacArthur Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), Northeast Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), Thomas R. Plympton Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), William F. Stanley Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), and Henry Whittemore Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5). Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

District Profile[2]

Waltham is a metropolitan city nine miles from Boston, bordered by the towns of Weston, Newton, Lexington, Belmont, Watertown, and Lincoln. The city encompasses a total area of 13.6 square miles; the review team was informed that it has the second largest office market in the Greater Boston area after Boston. It has diverse housing, with dense, multifamily buildings in the southern section of the city and larger-lot, single-family homes in the northern section. Two universities, Brandeis and Bentley, are located within the city and their students provide volunteer services to the schools. The city has a mayor-council form of government and the mayor serves as chairman of the school committee. There are seven members of the school committee; they meet monthly except in June and July and all meetings are broadcast on local television.

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

The current superintendent has been in the position since July 2011. The district leadership team includes the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the business administrator. There has been significant turnover in leadership and personnel in the five years preceding the review: four individuals in the superintendent position and four in the director of special education position. Eight of nine principals are new to their positions since 2009. The organizational structure has remained relatively unchanged, with the exception of a one-year interim position, the assistant superintendent for administration, created in 2010–2011 during a time of transition between superintendents. Leadership is distributed among 13 directors nearly all of whom have kindergarten through grade 12 responsibilities in their content areas. At the time of the visit, the position of director of human resources had been vacant for at least three years.

Student enrollment reported in October 2011 was: district (4, 994), the high school (1,370), John F. Kennedy Middle School (554), John W. McDevitt Middle School (519), James Fitzgerald Elementary School (469), Douglas MacArthur Elementary School (330), Northeast Elementary School (474), Thomas R. Plympton (416), William F. Stanley Elementary School (491), and Henry Whittemore Elementary School (371). Student population in the district has remained stable since 2007 with a variance of only 40 students during that time: 2007 (4,836 students), 2008 (4,725 students), 2009 (4,751 students), 2010 (4,763 students), and 2011 (4,796 students).

Table 1a illustrates the Waltham 2010–2011 enrollments by race/ethnicity and selected populations, while Table 1b does the same for 2011–2012. Student demographics for the 2011–2012 school year are in line with those of the state, with some exceptions in sub-groups. For example, in 2012, students whose first language is not English make up 37.2 percent of the total enrollment, compared to 16.7 percent in the state. English language learners (ELLs) make up 12.1 percent of the student population, compared to 7.3 percent in the state, and Hispanic/Latino students make up 31.4 percent of enrollment, compared to 16.1 percent in the state. The proportion of white students is 50.2 percent, compared to 67 percent in the state, and the proportion of students receiving special education services in-district is 21.3 percent, compared to 17 percent in the state. At the time of the review, the Northeast, Whittemore, and Kennedy schools housed the kindergarten through grade 8 ELL programs for the district; however, the district was in the process of returning English language learners (ELLs) to their neighborhood schools at the rate of one grade each year. For example, ELLs in third grade returned to their neighborhood schools in 2011–2012.

Table 1a: Waltham Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010–2011

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State
Total enrollment	4,796	100.0	--	African-American/ Black	481	10.0	8.2
First Language not English	1,711	35.7	16.3	Asian	295	6.2	5.5
Limited English Proficient*	508	10.6	7.1	Hispanic/Latino	1,400	29.2	15.4
Special Education**	1,054	21.6	17.0	White	2,492	52.0	68.0
Low-income	1,647	34.3	34.2	Native American	8	0.2	0.2
Free Lunch	1,382	28.8	29.1	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	12	0.3	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	265	5.5	5.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	108	2.3	2.4

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

Table 1b: Waltham Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011–2012

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State
Total enrollment	4,994	100.0	--	African-American/ Black	477	9.6	8.3
First Language not English	1,856	37.2	16.7	Asian	313	6.3	5.7
Limited English Proficient*	603	12.1	7.3	Hispanic/Latino	1,566	31.4	16.1
Special Education**	1,080	21.3	17.0	White	2,505	50.2	67.0
Low-income	1,999	40.0	35.2	Native American	10	0.2	0.2
Free Lunch	1,678	33.6	30.4	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	8	0.2	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	321	6.4	4.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	115	2.3	2.5

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

Total per pupil expenditures have been higher than the state average, $18,960 in fiscal year 2010 (state $13,048), and actual net school spending has been well above required as shown in Table 2 below (40.4% above in 2010 and 50.4% in 2011.) Waltham's 2010 average teacher salary, according to ESE, was $69,421, compared to the state average at $68,781.

Table 2: Waltham Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010–2012

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From local appropriations for schools					
by school committee	62,882,828	61,800,038	62,882,828	61,189,980	64,691,296
by municipality	30,215,752	30,314,486	30,027,937	31,024,164	31,038,178
Total from local appropriations	93,098,580	92,114,524	92,910,765	92,214,144	95,729,474
From revolving funds and grants	---	6,738,903	---	7,755,220	---
Total expenditures	---	98,853,427	---	99,969,364	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	7,466,622	---	7,030,422	7,068,165
Required local contribution	---	50,761,236	---	48,460,847	48,664,297
Required net school spending**	---	58,227,858	---	55,491,269	55,732,462
Actual net school spending	---	81,749,759	---	83,466,444	87,237,628
Over/under required ($)	---	23,521,901	---	27,955,175	31,505,166
Over/under required (%)	---	40.4	---	50.4	56.5

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

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

Sources: FY10, FY11 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.

Overall, district MCAS scores since 2009 have been nearly flat (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C). Areas of particular concern include the achievement of the ELL subgroup, which lags substantially behind that of the state subgroup (see Tables C3 and C4 in Appendix C), chronic absence at the high school, especially among Hispanic/Latino students, and the dropout rate among ELLs (see second Student Support finding).

Findings

Leadership and Governance

The high turnover of central office and school-level administrators in Waltham in recent years has resulted in uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, insufficient communication, and unclear priorities, with each school operating independently rather than as part of a system.

Documentation provided to the review team presented a chronology of administrative turnover in both the central office and the schools. A document entitled the "History of Superintendents and Directors of Special Education for Five Years" listed four individuals who had served as superintendent in the five years before the review. Their times in the position were: (1) May 1998–August 2008, (2) August 2008–August 2010, (3) September 2010–June 2011, and (4) July 2011–present. Also, included in this document was a list of five individuals who had held the position of director of special education for the following time periods: (1) September 1999–September 2004, (2) September 2004–June 2007, (3) September 2007–June 2010, (4) July 2010–June 2011, and (5) October 2011–present (interim). School administrators confirmed with the review team that the district hired two new principals in 2009, one in 2010, and five in 2011. Thus, eight of the nine school principals are new to their positions since 2009.

According to interviewees, the leadership personnel changes in the five years before the review resulted in an insufficient coordination and organization within the school system. Comments made to the review team included, "nothing connects," "turnover has been traumatic," "no team here," "nine silos," and "very few left with a historical perspective." Other interviewees commented that there was a "break in continuity," a "lack of morale," and a "need to get to know people and build relationships over time."

The vision and goals for the district and the schools have changed with the appointment of each new superintendent. The current superintendent said that she had placed on hold the previously developed District Improvement Plan (DIP) until she has had an opportunity to assess the needs of the school system. She informed the review team that she presented to the school committee, at a regularly scheduled meeting, a status report on her Entry Plan. The preliminary findings in her Entry Plan were based on information that she had gathered from individual and group meetings with stakeholders and from classroom observations in each school in the district. The superintendent indicated that a major focus of her Entry Plan was to develop a vision for the school system and to work cooperatively with key stakeholders to prepare a new DIP that would include the school system's priorities and goals. One positive change that the current superintendent had already made was in the process used to prepare the proposed annual school budget. In previous years, principals were given a dollar amount from the central office around

which they built a budget, whereas the principals said that in 2011–2012 the superintendent requested that they prepare a budget based upon the needs in their school.

Interviewees noted inconsistencies in the area of performance accountability related to job descriptions. Directors with content responsibilities in kindergarten through grade 12 did not routinely visit the elementary schools. Some, but not all directors evaluated teachers. There was uncertainty about who was the instructional leader in each school. Expectations about communication channels were not explicit. Directors determined the professional development programs with limited input from principals. Teachers reported confusion about who held "claim" to their professional development time. Some interviewees stated that there were individuals in districtwide leadership positions who by the nature of their positions needed to meet and talk frequently, but who did not do so. One school principal mentioned receiving some technology carts for his school, even though he had not submitted a purchase order for them; they had come from a district administrator who had purchased them for the school from his budget.

An absence of priorities was referred to by many stakeholders. One significant example was that in the five years before the review, with the changes in leadership personnel, the district had embarked on 86 initiatives. This was confirmed by a "List of 80+ Initiatives" that the superintendent provided the review team and by interviews with several administrators. According to administrators, the initiatives came from different sources; some originated from the previous superintendent and former central office administrators or principals who were no longer in the district. Interviewees commented that there were "lots of initiatives as legacies, but no traction" and said, "You need professional development to support initiatives, but it never happens." Other initiatives came from other sources: directors, teachers, and support staff. Some examples included: an iPad pilot, educator evaluation, electronic health records, dropout prevention, Edline, Skillful Teacher, literacy teams, a new elementary report card, Writer's Workshop, and a Math & Mentoring program. Interviewees stated that initiatives were not centralized, not consistent in the schools at each level, and not brought to the attention of all the staff in the district. The superintendent told the review team that there was a need to evaluate the various initiatives, to identify and focus on those that had the greatest impact on improving student achievement, and to establish priorities for the entire district.

In this recent period of leadership turnover, interviewees characterized the schools as being nine separate entities operating independently—one interviewee referred to a collection of "fiefdoms," with everyone protecting their own territory as the result of so many changes and uncertainties. The recent instability in district and school leadership, with the abundance and scatter of "system priorities" and uneven communication and expectations, has affected the district's ability to develop highly effective systems, programs, and collaborative practices. Further, it has impeded the district's ability to take ownership of, and fully address, the achievement of all its students.

The current central office and school-level administrative structure is not operating effectively as the result of unclear lines of accountability, insufficient communication, collaboration, and coordination, and unfilled or interim positions.

According to a document made available to the review team entitled "Waltham Public Schools Administrative Staff 2011–2012," the district has the following administrative staff positions:

- central administration (3): superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and school business administrator
- principals (9): one at each of the nine schools
- housemasters (4): four at the high school
- assistant principals (10): two at each of the two middle schools and one at each elementary school
- directors (13): special education, physical education/athletics, English 6–12/drama K–12, student support services, history & social sciences, career & technical education, reading/ELA K-5, science/health education, instructional tech/library media, nursing, mathematics, fine arts, ELL/world languages
- assistant directors (1.8 positions): special education and student support (.8 position)
- other administrators (7): facilities, fiscal coordinator, attendance, food services, summer school, evening school, and physician (part-time)

Stakeholders in nearly all meetings with the review team raised similar concerns about the current central office and school-level organizational structure. Interviewees mentioned as concerns:

- the absence of updated job descriptions
- nine principals operating their schools with little or no collaboration
- most kindergarten through grade 12 directors serving the secondary schools but not the elementary schools
- insufficient communication among some administrators resulting in inefficient management
- tension between principals and directors about implementation of curricula
- the need for accountability associated with the various positions
- the need for the addition of new administrative positions and consolidation or elimination of other positions

One frequently voiced concern was the unfilled administrative position for human resources at the district level. This vacancy was discussed by district and school leaders, directors, and

members of the teachers' association. At the time of the review, two secretaries with numerous other responsibilities were handling the duties in this area. Additional concerns about the management of human resources included: staff in the district who had not been evaluated over a number of years; the absence of a structured system for the recruitment, screening, and hiring of staff with and without professional status; and timely completion of forms for new hires and for former employees. According to stakeholders, the establishment of a position of director of human resources is critical to addressing these issues.

The coordination of all support services provided to students was another matter of concern to many interviewees. When the review team asked leaders about services provided to students and the types of programs available, the responses referred to several departments—student support services, special education, English as a second language, and Title I—along with guidance, adjustment, and mediation counselors. When the issue of accountability was raised, the lines of responsibility were neither clear nor uniform. For example, although the interim director of special education oversees the special education program for the district, the director does not evaluate the special education teachers; principals prepare the evaluations of special education teachers. Several interviewees raised a concern about the coordination of all support systems particularly when students become eligible for, or participate in, more than one program. One indirect impact of this diffusion of responsibility is that there does not appear to be a districtwide approach to classroom differentiation or inclusion strategies, as noted in classroom observations by the review team.

A third area of concern was the role of director across the district. There are 13 directors in the district, all of whom are supervised by the assistant superintendent. Interviewees reported that although directors have responsibilities for curriculum in kindergarten through grade 12, the directors spend most of their time at the secondary schools and only a few routinely visit the elementary schools. The math and ELA directors appear to have the most interaction with and oversight of the elementary programs, though the amount varies by school and grade levels. Principals indicated that there is an absence of district oversight of the kindergarten through grade 5 curriculum and that there is, therefore, inconsistency across the six elementary schools. In addition, some commented that principals do not believe that they have the authority to supervise curriculum because it is the responsibility of the directors; the directors, and not the principals, are responsible for more than half of the professional development programs at the schools on early release days. Interviewees told the team that opportunities for directors and principals to work together as a group are limited because the superintendent conducts separate meetings for each group.

A fourth concern involved the positions of network administrator/manager of the MIS department and director of instructional technology. Several administrators stated that there is inadequate communication between the individuals in these two positions resulting in ineffective implementation of both programs at the school level. Also, principals spoke about the increasing use of data by educators in the school system and the need for new technology, commenting that

both managers rarely participate in the development of each school's proposed annual school budget.

The administrative structure at the time of the visit had challenges including unfilled and interim positions, the absence of up-to-date job descriptions with resulting absence of clarity for staff, unclear lines of accountability, and insufficient communication among key personnel. Waltham was a district of individuals working independently rather than as a team. In the judgment of the review team, these challenges hinder the promotion of a culture of accountability, stakeholder confidence, collaboration, and joint responsibility for high achievement for all Waltham students.

Except for some school committee members themselves, the perception among interviewees was that school committee members involve themselves too much with matters that would best be handled by the superintendent and her administration.

Most of the individuals who expressed a view as to whether or not school committee members understood their role and responsibilities indicated that they did not. Of particular concern to many interviewees was a perceived tendency of some school committee members not to support the superintendent and staff sufficiently and not to use their role to support school leaders to raise levels of student achievement.

For example, interviewees said that school committee members "overstep their boundaries," are "not vested in the educational mission," "see themselves as town politicians," and are "not allowing people hired to do their jobs." Some commented that school committee members do not understand their roles, exert power and display arrogance, need to trust the superintendent to do what is necessary, and need to address the "disconnect" between the school committee and the administration and pay attention to reports from the district about student performance.

School committee members had different perceptions. One school committee member responded that they are "still trying to learn" their role and that it was "to support the superintendent in the policies they created" and to "assure the superintendent has the resources needed." Another indicated that the committee should put the right staff in place and support it, with "no micromanagement." This same member referred to the budget and district goals as part of the committee's role. A third member said that the school committee was "like the Board of Directors. We set the policy and make sure we're moving in that direction." On the other hand, another school committee member said that school committee members do not recognize their proper roles, adding that the school committee majority "tends to micromanage." Another member expressed concern that they "want to manage more than support."

School committee members said that they had received some training on the roles and responsibilities of a school committee member. Some members referred to a new members' orientation meeting that they attended in the past. One interviewee stated that school committee members were not receptive to these previous workshops with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).

Interviews with various stakeholders, including school committee members, showed an absence of shared understanding about the most appropriate and effective role of the school committee in their work to support the district—the role that allows committee, superintendent, and staff all to fulfill the various parts they have to play in improving education in the district. The absence of this common understanding of the school committee's appropriate role diminishes the capacity of the superintendent, other administrators, and the school committee itself to contribute to and build a culture of collaboration around the education mission.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district offers a broad curriculum; however, its core content curricula are not fully documented, well articulated at all grade levels, or consistently delivered across all schools. The current organization of curriculum leadership, with K-12 directors, is ineffective in ensuring consistently high-quality curricula for elementary- and middle-level students.

The team reviewed numerous curricular documents provided by the school and sample mathematics curriculum on the district's new Atlas online program. This review corroborated the assistant superintendent's review of the status of core content areas:

- kindergarten through grade 12 math is in the initial stages and "getting to" curriculum mapping guides;
- ELA in grades 6–12 is at a similar stage, with no documentation of kindergarten through grade 5 ELA curricula, spelling, or handwriting programs, and an incomplete balanced literacy program;
- science curriculum mapping is behind both ELA and math with some initial work done in grades 3–5;
- there are no scope and sequence documents in kindergarten through grade 12 except in history and social sciences.

Overall, sequencing and mapping are in their early stages with minimum documentation for teachers.

At the time of the onsite visit, the district was in its first year of using the Atlas curriculum mapping program to fully develop and document its mathematics curriculum in kindergarten through grade 12. The goal is to fully use the Atlas program for all curricular areas in the future. The review team examined several sample mathematics maps and found them to be comprehensive and to include unit overviews, essential questions or big ideas, references to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, assessments, student learning objectives, instructional notes to guide teachers, suggested resources, and timelines. However, samples did not include differentiation strategies for students receiving special education services or for English language learners.

The quality and thoroughness of other curricular documents varies among subjects and levels. For example, a curriculum document for grade 7 French lists unit numbers, themes/scope and sequence, functions, structure, and culture, while Latin Year 2 lists by quarter the content, the student learning goals, and the assessment/student work products. The grade 6 ELA curriculum map lists the "grade description," the units, the focus standards, "suggested student objectives," "suggested works," sample activities and assessments, and additional resources. A grade 4 history curriculum map has a format similar to that of other social science maps: it consists of a timeline, and subtopics, similar to the World History 1 map in grade 8 and the Advanced Placement U. S. History course in grade 11. While principals stated that curriculum documents and resources are provided to teachers by the directors, they acknowledged that some maps are unfinished, and one teacher noted that she worked on curriculum on her own during the summer because the district does not have a "strong curriculum prepared." The team found little or no documentation in the curriculum to address the needs of any but the typical learner in the classroom.

The district offers its broadest curricular program at the high school, with fully developed fine and performing arts programs and strong career/vocational/technical education programs. The district offers grade 9–12 programs in family and consumer science, automotive technology, collision technology, television broadcasting, carpentry and cabinetmaking, electrical technology, culinary arts, electronics, graphic communications, child care, cosmetology, metal fabrication, business education, and technology education. Enrollment in these courses totaled 454 at the time of the visit, approximately one third of the high school population. Two-hundred and ninety-six of these students were formally enrolled in a Chapter 74 program. Parents and teachers highly value these courses in providing all students with access to an outstanding technical/vocational program; parents also indicated that the comprehensive nature of the high school program enables students with special needs to receive academic and career training in a supportive environment within their home school. They also agreed that the fine and performing arts program offers many opportunities for all students for enrichment, skill development, and social interaction.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered in the traditional subject areas, and also in studio art, micro- and macroeconomics, statistics, psychology, and Spanish. In 2009–2010 high school students sat for 207 AP tests. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, 40 teachers were working on a grant-funded program to improve the rigor of coursework to better prepare more students for success in AP classes.

The district has an assistant superintendent for kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum and instruction with numerous responsibilities. In the position for a year and a half at the time of the review team's visit, the assistant superintendent inherited a curriculum leadership model in which directors function as content area specialists for kindergarten through grade 12, with the exception of a kindergarten through grade 5 literacy director. This central office position is seen as a pivotal one in the district by the directors of each content area who view the assistant

superintendent as someone who gives direction and focus to the curriculum, who supports the directors in their work, who helps to bring consistency across the district, and who serves as "a good role model."

The superintendent, assistant superintendent, directors, and school principals told the team that the directors are responsible for the development, implementation, and supervision of curriculum. There are K-12 directors in each of the following content areas: mathematics, history/social science, science/health, fine arts, and physical education. One ELA director is responsible for ELA in grades 6–12, and the K-12 reading director is also responsible for K-5 ELA curriculum. A director of world languages oversees programs in grades 7–12 as well as the kindergarten through grade 12 English language learner program. Directors in the non-core areas include: career/vocational education (grades 6–12) and student support. The assistant superintendent reported that he meets with all directors as a group each month.

According to directors, principals, and district leaders, K-12 articulation of curriculum was difficult to achieve. While the directors noted that they do have curricular responsibilities at the elementary level, school leaders, teachers, and the directors themselves told the review team that the directors can only provide minimal elementary curricular supervision. Interviewees did mention two examples of director involvement with elementary curricular articulation.

One example of elementary/middle school articulation was provided by the grade 6-12 ELA director and the K-12 reading director, who also serves as the K-5 ELA curriculum director; they described their collaboration on the grade 5 and 6 reading and writing programs. Neither was involved in other aspects of the kindergarten through grade 5 ELA program, however. Another example of articulation was described by the math director who was coordinating a K-5 math pilot, and was also overseeing the K-12 math curriculum mapping project.

However, the other curricular areas do not fare as well. When asked how science curriculum is supervised at the elementary level, the director said that while she meets periodically with the three science specialists who serve the elementary schools, she has little input at the kindergarten through grade 5 level. Similarly, the history/social science director stated that he had not met with teachers in grades 1–2 in two years and that the development of curriculum maps depended on which grades were scheduled for meeting in his subject area for the current year. A teacher noted that one director does not ever visit the elementary schools, and some principals mentioned two directors that they do not ever see in their schools. Two reasons for an absence of oversight were provided by some interviewees: an absence of understanding of elementary-level needs by secondary-level-trained directors and insufficient time for the directors to meet the needs of the elementary and middle grades while serving as department chairs at the high school. At the time of the visit all interviewees reported that although directors have no classroom teaching assignments at the high school they do serve as department chairs.

School leaders and teachers reported that having an organizational structure with K-12 curriculum directors results in competition and uncoordinated professional development. For

example, while principals and teachers alike agreed that directors serve as "content area experts," a teacher noted that it was "discouraging to see directors fighting [with principals] over time with us" and that there seems to be a "turf war" between principals and directors when it comes time for curriculum professional development. One principal said that teachers felt that they "had too many bosses." Principals noted that of the six professional development time slots allotted to the schools, principals controlled one and the directors controlled the remaining five. One outcome of this uncoordinated approach to professional development is the considerable amount of time that teachers spend away from the classroom, as noted in the second Human Resources and Professional Development finding in this report.

While there is some vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum throughout the district it is weakest at the transition points at grades 5 and 6, somewhat weak across the two middle schools, and very weak across the six elementary schools. As noted above, only the three directors in math, ELA, and reading interacted in any formal way about the curriculum at the kindergarten through grade 5 levels, resulting in some articulation between the elementary and the middle school levels. One interviewee noted that although one middle school does not have a written science curriculum, the other middle school has one but does not make it available. In two of the six elementary schools, the Thomas R. Plympton and William F. Stanley, the principals decided to embed the science and social studies curriculum in the literacy program to provide more time for mathematics and ELA, while the other four schools maintained a traditional model with separate content instruction times. One director stated that at the elementary level, classroom teachers "determine how much time is spent in science." With the absence of a districtwide kindergarten through grade 5 elementary curriculum leader, alignment, sufficient instructional time, and fidelity to the curriculum at the elementary level are difficult to monitor, according to all stakeholders interviewed.

At the time of the site visit, the review team found that the district was in the process of documenting curriculum in the core subjects and had just begun using Atlas to fully document the math curriculum in kindergarten through grade 12. The team also found that while the district has provided adequate curriculum leadership and resources to meet the needs of students and teachers in grades 9–12, it has not matched this in grades 6 through 8 and especially in kindergarten through grade 5. As a result, implementation, fidelity, and supervision of curriculum are at best uneven across the lower grades and articulation among the levels is weak.

The district has a system of instructional leadership divided between directors and principals and has not conveyed to all teachers a clear vision of high-quality instructional practice. While teachers and students arrive prepared to learn, lessons do not have rigor, and instruction is not differentiated or supported by technology.

The team observed 55 classrooms throughout the district: 14 at the high school, 15 at the two middle schools, and 26 at the 6 elementary schools. The team observed 19 ELA classes, 23 mathematics classes, and 13 in other subject areas. Among the classrooms observed were two special education classes, two ELL classes, and two career/technical education classes.

The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. The tool contains 35 characteristics within 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of assessments. Review team members are asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

The team observed some areas of instructional practice that were of consistently high quality throughout the schools; these were generally related to classroom climate and school culture. For example, all students and teachers demonstrated positive and respectful relationships toward each other and students behaved according to rules and expectations in the classroom in nearly 100 percent of the observations in kindergarten through grade 12. Similarly, in observed classes across the district nearly all teachers were well-prepared and had the appropriate materials readily available for students. Students were welcoming and helpful to visitors; particularly notable was the high school where students assembled in hallways near the team's work area at the start of the school day.

Instructional techniques

In observed classes teachers used a blend of instructional designs and delivery; direct whole-group instruction was most prevalent at the elementary level. For example, 50 percent of the high school classrooms observed used a whole-group instructional model, while the other half added small-group learning or independent practice. Although whole-group instruction took place at a slightly higher rate in observed classes at the middle schools (60 percent), it took place most frequently at the elementary schools (69 percent of observed classrooms).

Use of class time and instructional pacing

Effective use of class time varied across the district. Students at the elementary level made smoother transitions between activities (in 88 percent of classes observed) than the older students (in 64 percent of classes observed at the high school and in 73 percent of observed classes at the middle schools). Lesson pacing that kept all students engaged was most prevalent at the middle schools (in 93 percent of observations) and noted less frequently at the elementary and high schools (in 88 percent and 79 percent of observed classes, respectively). The characteristic of teachers using wait time to allow for responses from all students was seen least often at the high school (in 64 percent of classes observed) as compared to 80 percent of the classes visited at the middle schools and 73 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary schools. The review team did observe some inappropriately used learning time in the district: two math teachers in different schools used instructional time to inventory math books, and a high school teacher sat working on papers while her students viewed a film for 20 minutes without any guidance or thought-provoking questioning by the teacher.

Learning objectives

Some directors and school principals noted that the team would see lesson objectives communicated to students. However, these were either observed or overheard in only 50 percent of the high school classes visited. The practice was more frequently in place at the middle schools (in 80 percent of observed classes) and the elementary schools (in 88 percent of visited classes). In the high school in 36 percent of observed classes student learning outcomes (rather than a list of student tasks) were identified in learning objectives. The proportion was higher in the middle schools (in 60 percent of observed classes) and elementary schools (in 77 percent of visited classrooms). For example, the objective in a grade 10 math lesson was posted as "Probability problems," while the objective in a grade 7 ELA class was posted as "Identify thesis statement, prepositional phrases, complex sentences." The objective in a grade 2 lesson was posted as "You will add two one digit numbers, regroup if you need to, and explain your work." In the high and middle schools, the characteristic of students receiving feedback that tells where they are in relation to the learning goals was observed in 36 percent and 40 percent of visited classes, respectively; at the elementary level, students received this feedback in 54 percent of the observed classes.

The review team found that the characteristic of setting high expectations for learning and conveying these to the students was more solidly in place in the elementary schools (in 88 percent of visited classrooms) than in the middle and high schools (in 53 percent and 50 percent of observed classes, respectively). This practice sometimes varied within schools: a middle school ELA teacher whose students did not have their homework expected them to report after school, while a math teacher in the same school noted that many of his students had come without their homework (or books) and proceeded to correct the homework without providing resources or giving additional consequences.

Higher-order thinking and rigor

Throughout the district the review team observed insufficient activation of higher-order thinking and of setting high enough expectations for rigorous thinking. For example, in the middle and elementary schools, in 40 percent and 50 percent of observed classes, respectively, students were examining, analyzing, or interpreting information. This characteristic was noted with more frequency in the high school where 71 percent of students in observed classrooms exhibited these behaviors.

In slightly over half, or 57 percent, of observed high school classrooms, students were asked to form predictions, develop arguments, or evaluate information. The rate was significantly lower in the classrooms visited in the middle schools (23 percent) and the elementary schools (35 percent). In observed classes, questions for students were primarily factual, with few classroom structures in place to encourage student discussion, analysis, or questioning.

In visited classes, students were seldom asked to evaluate their own thinking, progress, or approaches to problem-solving. This characteristic was observed with the least frequency at the high and middle schools where only 7 percent of students exhibited these behaviors; it was observed in 33 percent of elementary classes. In observed classes, students rarely generated questions for clarification or new information. The frequency of these behaviors was low at the elementary level (17 percent of classes observed), and middle school level (20 percent of classes observed), and lowest at the high school (7 percent of classes observed). Several interviewees at the secondary level acknowledged that this is a clear need and said that a grant-funded teacher-training program had been started to increase rigor at the middle and high school levels so that more students could participate successfully in AP classes.

Use of student assessments

Use of informal student assessments to inform instruction was observed in 36 percent of observed high school classes, 20 percent of the visited middle school classes, and 50 percent of the observed elementary classes. As noted earlier, students received feedback in relation to their learning goals most frequently at the elementary level (54 percent of classes observed), less often at the middle schools (40 percent of classes observed) and least often at the high school (36 percent of classes observed). Given the uneven presence of informal student assessments and of learning objectives in observed classrooms, the stated purpose of each lesson was not always clear to the team.

Differentiation

The review team found little evidence of differentiated instruction in any of the observed classrooms. While 38 percent of elementary teachers in visited classes used differentiated strategies, particularly in the implementation of guided reading, only 21 percent of high school teachers and only 7 percent of middle school teachers in observed classes did so. While the team was told that the district had focused professional development in this area several years ago, leaders noted that the practices are neither embedded nor reinforced districtwide. Some examples of differentiation observed beyond the elementary level included: a grade 7 math teacher provided reference sheets with formulas to assist students who needed them, calculators were readily available as students solved problems about the area of rectangles and parallelograms, and information and directions were provided visually as well as orally for some students. In one grade 9 environmental science class, students used pictures to help identify key elements of the carbon cycle; the pictures then helped them to “tell the story” about the experiment.

Use of technology

In observed classes, the use of technology to support learning was infrequent and hardware was outdated. Some classrooms visited had television screens mounted in the corners of the room; these were difficult for students and visitors to read. Although some interactive white boards and digital projectors were used in some visited classes, the white boards were most often used as projection screens. Some observed classes used document readers and overhead projectors. At

the high school level, technology was used by teachers in less than one third of classes. Teachers, principals, and directors all commented on the difficulties experienced in schools in getting the technology to operate, in having the appropriate software to support the programs, and in having the necessary training to use technology effectively. One concern about a new math program being purchased for the elementary level was the capacity of the elementary schools to support the software that accompanied the program.

Conclusion

An unclear districtwide vision of instructional excellence, coupled with instructional leadership divided between principals and directors, has contributed to instructional practice in the district that is inconsistent in quality, does not have rigor, and is not differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. As noted earlier and addressed further in this report, the district currently has over 80 initiatives related to curriculum, instruction, or student support, with little coherence among elementary schools and uneven articulation in kindergarten through grade 12.

Leadership and support for effective instruction was described by school leaders and by teachers as fragmented. While principals described themselves as instructional leaders they also follow the district practice of having curriculum leaders (directors) supervise content-specific methodology in their schools. Therefore, a single clear vision of what constitutes effective instruction does not guide leaders or teachers. When asked by the review team to name their own school's instructional initiatives, although principals cited some common themes (guided reading, Writer's Workshop, and a district program "Writing With Colors," for example), they also listed numerous others that were unique to particular schools: these included "changing teachers' beliefs, understanding cultural expectations, family literacy, Response to Intervention, teaching English language learners, working with homeless students and their families, developing common assessments, curriculum mapping, and developing science pathways." While all stakeholders reported that the district supported a teacher development program, as noted later in this report, they also stated that it had numerous topics and initiatives, and did not have a clear focus or strategic planning. While teachers in most schools had common planning time and enough professional development time to focus on developing best instructional practices, use of this time was under the direction of curriculum directors and the principals with little cohesion or communication between the two groups.

The absence of vision and clarity about teaching excellence coupled with split responsibilities for curriculum implementation leaves the district's teachers without clear guidance on how to teach effectively. As a result, despite the strong investment in professional development and the commitment of teachers and students, the quality of instruction across the district is uneven. Equally notable are the low frequency in observed classes of differentiation strategies, especially useful to meet the needs of two subgroups, English language learners and students with disabilities, and the limited evidence of rigorous practices throughout the district. All of these factors bear directly on student achievement and may have contributed to district MCAS scores since 2009 being nearly flat (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C).

Assessment

The schools in the district collect a large amount of student assessment data, and many schools are using the data to improve student learning.

Directors, principals, and central office personnel indicated that all schools use assessment data to structure programs to better meet the needs of students. At all levels common formative and summative assessments are well established in some areas and a "work in progress" in others. Each of the nine schools has different practices in place for the collection, analysis, and use of student assessment data within their schools. However, there are some districtwide practices for the collection and use of data.

At the elementary level, common assessments include: MCAS, DIBELS, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2), running records, Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O), long composition, and common formative and benchmark assessments in math and ELA. At the two middle schools, common assessments include: MCAS, common midyear exams in math, ELA, history and science, common formative assessments, Laying the Foundations assessments, long compositions, and pre-AP exams. At the high school, common assessments include: common formative, midyear, and final exams in math, English, science, and history; Laying the Foundation assessments; and PSAT, AP, and SAT exams. Interviewees stated that English language learners and students receiving special education services use these same common assessments with modifications in some classes at each level.

Elementary Level

At Whittemore Elementary, through using Mastery Manager, staff learned that nonsense word fluency on the DIBELS was very low across the first grade. The data team used the information to form small groups and through progress monitoring initiated a turnaround in scores. At Stanley Elementary, at grade-level meetings teachers bring samples of student writing, score work using exemplars, and discuss outcomes. At MacArthur Elementary, teachers receive assessment data results at grade level and school meetings. Teachers at Northeast Elementary started a kindergarten through grade 1 intervention block in 2011–2012 based on their data analysis. Students are placed in groups of 4–12 and meet for thirty minutes each day for remedial work, practice, or enrichment in math and ELA. Each staff member, including administrators, works with a group. Northeast Elementary is also piloting "I Ready" in grades 3–5. This online computer program can be accessed at home and tracks student achievement at multiple points during the school year.

Across the district in grades 2–5 math formative assessments take place three times a year. Tests are scanned into Mastery Manager and teachers receive information that indicates whether a student is above, below, or well below benchmarks. Elementary teachers who have been trained can also access the data analysis. Other schools in the district are using another computer

program, Successmaker, to address skill deficits. Documentation provided to the team shows that in December 2011, the two Level 3 schools, Whittemore and Northeast, developed a document entitled "Additional Interventions to Support Student Learning." This document includes a plan to increase progress monitoring and review assessment data and student work to improve student achievement at each grade level.

Middle School Level

At the middle school level, common assessments are used in the core subjects and some are scored using Mastery Manager. According to data team members, getting the results to teachers and changing instructional practices is "a work in progress"; however, interviewees provided several examples of instructional changes made as a result of the analysis of data.

There is an after-school program that targets students with low scores using Study Island. In grade 7 an outside consultant scored 25 compositions and sent feedback to teachers. Teachers analyzed results at grade-level meetings. In science, according to interviewees, data analysis at the middle schools is new. Teachers were given MCAS item results and they identified strengths and weaknesses, looking at curriculum maps to make changes. One example of such a change is that genetics and heredity have been shifted from grade 8 to grade 7. At the Kennedy Middle School, based on assessment data in math and ELA, the schedule was changed from seven periods five days a week to six periods over six days. In response to low MCAS scores, an MCAS support class was instituted in 2011–2012. At the McDevitt Middle School, when Mastery Manager data indicated that a goal had not been met, grade 8 teachers incorporated practice of the goal into "Do Now" activities. At grade 7 scores in the long composition MCAS exam were low. The decision was made to begin working on the long composition in November rather than in January to afford students more practice time.

High School Level

At the high school level, data results were used to determine that Advanced Placement (AP) courses did not have rigor, and it was reported that student enrollment in these classes was not sufficiently diverse. To produce more scores of 3 or higher, middle school and high school classes needed to increase rigor in core subject areas. A pre-AP initiative has been introduced at the middle school level to address this goal. All core subjects have common formative and summative exams, some of which were written in 2011–2012. Directors reported that results from these exams are used to adjust curriculum and instructional practices. Based on MCAS assessment data, weekend MCAS support programs are available before retests. The guidance department looks at assessment data for former English language learners (FELLs) to determine which students would benefit from taking MCAS or SAT prep classes.

Writing assessment tool

The district has developed a unique writing assessment tool currently in use from grades 6–12; it was introduced at grade 5 in December of 2011. Documents provided to the team show that the

Color Criteria System, introduced in the high school in 2004, middle schools in 2005, and grades 4–5 in 2011, codes the grading criteria for MCAS ELA open-response questions and long composition using colors to teach students how to improve their writing and make revisions. This system provides students with a blueprint for organizing their writing and improving their achievement on the long composition and open-response questions on the MCAS exam. The review team observed several ELA writing lessons and saw evidence in classrooms that this assessment practice is widespread in grades 412.

Teachers at all levels are not yet fully trained in the analysis of data and its application to daily instruction to improve learning for all students. In addition, the use of informal, on-the-spot formative assessment to help teachers target or revise instruction is underdeveloped; the review team observed this in only 38 percent of all classes visited.[3] For school and district leaders, assessment data is not as informative as it otherwise would be given the inconsistencies in curriculum and curriculum implementation at the lower levels noted in the curriculum finding above. Nevertheless, interviewees stated that user-friendly assessment data is provided to administrators, directors, and teachers and that it is being used in a variety of ways to improve student learning.

Data teams are in place in each school, though they are not all fully functional and the use of data varies across the district. Because there is no district data coordinator or data team to provide oversight and coordination, the district is limited in its ability to analyze districtwide trends and patterns in student achievement.

Waltham has data teams in each of its nine schools; however, there is not a district data team in place and no one person in the central office is designated as the district data coordinator. The school data teams are autonomous and differ in composition, function, and effectiveness. They do not have written protocols and procedures upon which to base decisions for improved student achievement in their schools. There is little district oversight of the teams as well as little communication or collaboration between school data teams at the elementary and middle school levels. The use of data to make decisions affecting programs or students varies across the district.

Interviews with district administrators, directors, literacy coaches, and school principals indicated that the composition of each school data team is determined by the school leader and may include the principal, assistant principal, literacy and math coaches, data coaches, and teachers. Guidance personnel, the school nurse, and special education personnel may also be included depending on the needs of the school. The data teams were instituted in schools across the district within the three years before the site visit. District and school administrators have received training from Research for Better Teaching (RBT), and in Mastery Manager and Education Data Warehouse. Mastery Manager, introduced in 2010–2011 by the assistant superintendent, has played an important role in beginning to systematize the compilation of data;

[3] 50 percent of the elementary classes, 20 percent of the middle school classes, and 36 percent of the high school classes visited

it provides teachers with real-time, actionable student performance information. Although literacy and math coaches have also participated in the RBT and Mastery Manager training, classroom teachers have not yet all been trained; they rely on the school administration or coaches to disseminate data in a timely manner. Mastery Manager was introduced in the district in the spring of 2011 and is gradually being implemented throughout the school system to compile and disaggregate data to better identify weaknesses in student achievement.

All school-based teams reported that although they are looking at data, inconsistencies in how data is used are evident across the district. Data teams do not have uniform written protocols to collect, analyze, disseminate, or use data. They function within the parameters of school needs. The frequency of team meetings varies from once a week, to biweekly, to monthly, to several times a year. Documents provided to the team indicated that the Northeast Elementary School is the only school in the district that has kept notes on data team meetings, disseminated them to staff, and posted them on the shared drive. In other schools data is discussed and distributed at grade level or whole-staff school meetings, rather than at data team meetings.

According to school administrators, directors, and literacy and math coaches, the effectiveness of the teams varies from school to school as described below.

Elementary Schools' Data Teams

At the elementary level, some teams are working well and others are inactive. Where teams are inactive the principals access the data, complete item analyses, and disseminate data at grade-level or school meetings. At MacArthur Elementary, staff looked at the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) at the kindergarten level, and noticed that there were three to four students in each class needing support; they reconfigured groups to meet these needs. At Northeast Elementary, the data team is reviewing three-year trends in ELA MCAS results to identify questions that are problematic for students and to develop strategies to address them. As mentioned in the previous finding, Northeast has piloted an "intervention block" for kindergarten and grade 1; it runs thirty minutes a day for math and ELA. Using data from DIBELS and Kathy Richardson Assessments, the data team places students in groups of four to twelve to receive remedial work, practice, or enrichment. Changes in grouping take place as needed. At the Stanley and Plympton elementary schools, math and literacy blocks were lengthened based on analysis of math and ELA assessments by the data team. As noted earlier, not all teachers at the elementary level have access to Mastery Manager data or have been trained to analyze and use it.

Middle Schools' Data Teams

Both middle schools have data teams. However, not all teachers at this level have access to Mastery Manager data or have been trained to analyze and use it. At Kennedy Middle School, the data team met during the first marking period, compiled assessment results, and reviewed and emailed MCAS results to the staff. At McDevitt Middle School, the team is structured around content. For example, science specialists at McDevitt looked at science MCAS results at both the

middle and high school levels, reviewed AP scores at the high school, and determined that there was an absence of rigor that needed to be addressed by curriculum revision at both middle schools.

High School Data Team

At the high school level the data team had not yet met at the time of the review team visit in February 2012. Dissemination and analysis of assessment data, including MCAS, AP, and common, formative, and summative assessments in each of the core subjects, take place at monthly department meetings chaired by the kindergarten through grade 12 directors. At the time of the review team's visit, the purpose and role of the high school data team had not been firmly established. As at the elementary and middle school levels, not all teachers at this level have access to Mastery Manager data or have been trained to analyze and use it. Although attendees at grade-level and departmental meetings at the middle and high school levels share responsibility for data analysis and dissemination of data to school staff, according to interviewees, this analysis is not always made available to the school data teams.

Interviews with directors and principals throughout the district indicated that each school data team is autonomous. Each team meets on its own schedule and functions independently; the effectiveness of the teams varies depending on the collection, analysis, and use of data within the school. There is little communication among the data teams and the district does not have a data coordinator to oversee the teams. As a result, the district is limited in its ability to analyze trends and patterns in student achievement across the district. Further, the independence and isolation of the data teams hinders the district's ability to identify and replicate successful practices validated by improved assessment results, to strategically allocate human and financial resources, and to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services based on analysis of data.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district has had difficulty in hiring and retaining professional staff in a range of key leadership positions; the position of director of human resources had been vacant for much of the three years leading up to the review team visit.

The Waltham district has a high administrative turnover. The district has had three superintendents since the 2008-2009 school year. ESE data indicates that the principal turnover rate in Waltham was 20 percent for 2009, 11 percent for 2010, and 56 percent for 2011. The statewide principal turnover rate fluctuated between 17 percent and 19 percent during the same period. One school saw four principals and three assistant principals in four years. The special education department has also seen much turnover over several years. Currently, an interim director who is a retired special education director is filling the position. In a related department that oversees general student support, Title I, and programs for homeless students, the position of director of student support services is currently held by the now retired past interim superintendent (during 2010–2011). Teachers, administrators, and parents all indicated that the

turnover has resulted in uncoordinated leadership, disconnected initiatives, and frustration among teachers and other stakeholders.

The director of human resources position had remained vacant throughout most of the three years before the review team visit. In response to this, central and business office staff have carried out many human resources functions in addition to their other responsibilities. Currently, no designated staff person is responsible for recruiting, hiring, or retaining professional staff. In addition, typical human resources responsibilities—such as staff recruitment, responding to licensure concerns, labor relations including collective bargaining, employee safety, staff accountability, compensation strategies and structure, benefits, organizational development, policy recommendations, employee relations, team building, communication, and employee orientation and training—are delegated to several people.

The review team was told that basic human resources functions are not being completed in a timely way. No formal system of exit interviews exists to determine the reasons for departure. Directors and teachers' association representatives said that the district has minimal staff to address seniority and employee data issues, and to assure that accurate health, absenteeism, bereavement, and professional development records are maintained. Review team members also were told about concerns about ineffective communication between the central and business offices when there was a resignation or new hire. Interviewees reported that the business office has learned of a resignation or new hire from reading school committee minutes, sometimes two weeks after the employee had joined or left the district. Consequently, at times benefits forms and other necessary paperwork are not completed in a timely manner.

Another function not currently being carried out is the maintenance of up-to-date job descriptions. For example, in discussions with directors, it was noted that job descriptions for the directors have not been updated in many years and that some are not available. Each of the directors is a ten-month employee, covered by a collective bargaining agreement. They are compensated for additional services that are not included in their contracts. Without clear job descriptions and expectations, there is little consistency among the directors about how they conduct their jobs.

The district's policies and practices for identifying, recruiting, and retaining professional staff were a concern to many interviewees. With a minimal budget and with no director of human resources in place, programs to train non-instructional staff depend on school leaders and teachers. Further, information about reasons for staff departures is anecdotal; data is not tracked districtwide, preventing the district from planning strategically to stem turnover and to improve retention rates.

Without central office level direction or supervision, human resources management in the district has become fragmented and ineffective, affecting the district's ability to identify, attract, and retain effective personnel. As a result the positions and functions filled by key personnel, such as principals, the director of special education, and other central office administrators, not to

mention the human resources director position itself, are vacant or have been turning over at a significant rate, a hindrance to continuous improvement in student achievement.

The district has a professional development program with over 80 initiatives; it does not have clear focus or priorities, has limited teacher input, is not connected to the performance evaluation system, and allows teachers to be absent for considerable amounts of classroom instructional time.

A review of documents provided by the district and information from interviews showed that the school system does not have a coordinated, districtwide approach to the creation of an annual professional development plan that aligns professional development opportunities with the core goals of the district and its schools.

At the time of the team visit, the district had no formal strategic professional development plan, although one district leader provided the team with an undated document entitled "A System-wide District Improvement Plan" that appeared to guide professional development. It states: "The priorities below apply to all teachers of all content areas in the Waltham Public Schools … To improve student learning and achievement … to increase the overall rigor in all programs K-12 … To provide high quality instruction by ensuring that best practices in standards-based and differentiated instruction are being used in all classrooms … and to monitor student performance and program implementation at the district, school and classroom levels." The team found limited evidence to suggest that the district uses student achievement data, program evaluations, or information about staff needs from personnel evaluations to plan professional development.

The district reported to ESE in 2010 a total of $193 per pupil spent on professional development, slightly under the state rate of $226 per pupil.[4] Waltham's professional development budget includes $70,000 for tuition reimbursement. Title II grant monies and the district's budget also support consultants, opportunities for attendance at conferences and workshops, training, and teacher-led study groups.

Interviews and district documents identified over 80 professional development initiatives created over the past several years. Several interviewees referred to the "topic of the moment" as being the determining factor for professional development. Others indicated that Waltham has numerous professional development initiatives "to support legacies," that there is "no traction" and that training is often at a beginner's level. Interviewees told the team that professional development has been unfocused and superficial, initiatives have been scattered, and there has been no accountability for sharing or using professional development information to improve instructional practice.

Waltham's professional development for 2011–2012 included a multipage list of activities scheduled throughout the year. Among the topics offered were: Writing with Colors (grades 6–

[4] In 2011 the per-pupil expenditures on professional development were $207 for the district and $238 across the state.

12), ELL category training, RBT Skillful Teacher, Promoting Accessibility in Elementary Mathematics, Project-based Learning, iPad Uses in the Classroom, Video Editing workshop, Technology and Literacy and the new MA Frameworks, Master Lessons, Curriculum Mapping, AP Web Training, Mastery Manager Training, Nuts and Bolts of Special Education Compliance, Questioning Techniques for ELL Classrooms, and Classroom Management.

Responsibility for professional development is shared by directors and school leaders. For the one full day and five Professional Development Release Time (PDRT) half days each year, the directors are responsible for identifying the majority of activities. Principals may spend the morning of the full day on school-specific professional development. In addition, they have two of the PDRT afternoons. According to teachers' association representatives, there is no teacher input into professional development planning. As noted earlier, the review team was told that teachers feel pulled in different directions by the uncoordinated curriculum training.

Priorities for staff development do not appear to be linked in any way to teacher evaluations and their improvement of instructional practice. In a review of 46 randomly selected teacher evaluations, only 4 (for teachers who were categorized as "needs improvement") identified areas for improvement with specific recommendations for professional development. Many evaluations consisted of a list of the teacher's professional development activities during the period under review. More than 90 percent of the evaluations reviewed indicated that teachers were exceeding expectations in all six standards for effective teaching.

Many interviewees were concerned about a long-standing practice of providing professional development during the school day, causing teachers to miss an unusually high number of instructional hours. During the 2010–2011 school year, a total of 898.5 teacher days were devoted to professional development during the school day. These were in addition to the one full day and five half days of professional development throughout the district when students were not in school. There is no limit on the number of professional development days that a teacher or administrator can request and use during any particular year. Directors told review team members that participation in school-day professional development offerings has contributed to an absence of continuity in instruction for students. Further, this practice may explain the comparatively high average of 15 days of absence per year per teacher, although this number includes all reasons for absences such as sick days, and long-term medical leaves, as well as professional development days. However, some directors and principals noted that school-day professional development is one of the few ways to ensure that all staff receive the same information. During the review team visit, several visits needed to be carefully scheduled so as to be able to observe classes where classroom teachers rather than substitutes were teaching.

Professional development for other district staff, like the teachers' professional development program, does not have a districtwide vision and focus. Support staff and specialists have minimal professional development. Teachers provide professional development to paraprofessionals.

The district provides mentors for new teachers. Two full days of orientation are held before the opening of school. A total of 70 hours of mentoring takes place during the teachers' first year, followed by 50 hours during the second year. According to interviewees, teachers have found the mentoring program to be very effective. New administrators have basically the same program, in which they are mentored by a colleague.

While the district provides an extensive professional development program, it is not focused, does not have clear priorities, has limited teacher input, and is not connected to the performance evaluation system. This valuable resource is less effective than it could be in improving student performance, and because there is no limit on the number of teacher absences for professional development, the amount of instructional time students have with the class's regular teacher is reduced, impeding the acceleration of student achievement.

Student Support

The Waltham school district has programs at all levels to provide students with supports for identified physical, social, emotional, and academic needs. District-level leadership of two departments providing support services is in transition.

The school district has a broad range of student support services for its students. The district has a specific department entitled "Student Support Services," one of four that focus on students' health, social, emotional, and academic needs. Other departments that provide services are the department of special education, the department of English language learners, and the nursing department.

Each department is led by its own director; however, leadership of two of these departments is in transition. The position of director of student support services is currently held by a retired administrator who served as both the assistant superintendent of administration (an interim position between superintendents) and director of student support services in 2010–2011. She has been hired by the district as a consultant to continue directing student support services. The position of director of special education is currently filled by an interim director and has seen significant turnover in the five years before the site visit. Members of the school committee identified filling the position of director of special education as a top priority.

The department of student support services offers services to students in four major ways: guidance in grades 6–12, three Title I programs, at the Plympton, Whittemore and Stanley elementary schools, various summer programs, and a variety of resources supported by grants such as the McKinney-Vento Grant, the Community Development Block Grant, and the Academic Support State Grant. Support services from the nursing department are interwoven throughout the district.

The department of English language learners monitors all English language learners (ELLs) as well as those who have been classified as former English language learners (FELLs). This

department also supervises the administration of the MEPA and MELA-O assessments and monitors the performance of ELLs.

Descriptions of services from these departments are organized by level below and illustrate the district's ability to provide a safety net for students who require physical, social, emotional, and academic support.

Elementary School Level

At the elementary level, there are school-year before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs. These programs offer students academic support in both literacy and math. Summer programs also include enrichment activities such as art and drama. Approximately 300 students from kindergarten to grade 5 participate in summer programs. Students who participate receive breakfast as part of Title I services. The kindergarten through grade 5 summer program is funded by Title I monies, and the district financially supports the grade 3–5 summer program. During the regular school day the district's Title I monies are also used to support struggling students within the mainstream with small group assistance in math and supports from reading specialists in literacy**.** The ELL program also provides a summer literacy program for approximately 100 students.

A Title I newsletter is distributed to parents four times a year from the department of student support services. It contains information about upcoming support programs, has a health section from the nurse, and provides several pages of math- and reading- related supplemental activities for parents to work with their children at home. These newsletters are translated into Spanish and distributed to all students at each Title I school.

Middle School Level

The district also has a summer program at the middle school level in which approximately 40 students from the 2 middle schools participate. Participants receive academic instruction in literacy and math, participate in fitness and art enrichment activities, and receive breakfast. To support students at greater risk of struggling with the transition from middle- to high-school, the district has a transition program for rising grade 9 students. This summer program is grant funded. Participants are offered academic support in literacy and math and project-based approaches are used. The program is designed to help middle school students better understand the high-school experience and the resources available to them upon their entry into high school. High-school staff, mediation counselors, and others are invited to discuss their programs with students. The transition program targets approximately 45 students often identified through principal input, input from school counselors, and parent interest.

At the middle-school level in grades 6–8, clusters of teachers meet once per six-day cycle to discuss individual students. ESL instructors in the department of English language learners (ELL) participate in these meetings**.** The middle schools have four guidance counselors with assigned grade levels and caseloads.

Extended day services, funded in the past by a 21st century grant, were used to provide additional student support services for extended day at the middle-school level for students in academic need. The Carol White PEP Grant supports the district in continuing this work now that the grant has expired.

High School Level

At the high school level, there are 6.7 FTE guidance counselors, one of whom is bilingual in English/Spanish. Guidance counselors remain with their assigned students throughout the students' years at the high school. Guidance counselors help inform students' career choices and post-high-school decisions and ensure that each student fulfills the necessary requirements for graduation.

School adjustment counselors, one for each grade level at the high school, also provide services mandated by Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and other services and are supervised under the department of special education. Various staff members can bring concerned students to the attention of the adjustment counselors. For example, the nurse might refer a student to a guidance or adjustment counselor for anxiety-related concerns. Mediation counselors are available to help settle disputes, disagreements, and conflicts between staff and students, students and students, etc. Finally, a part-time counselor serves as a liaison between businesses and the school. This outside funded position helps coordinate relationships between students and mentors in the field**.** To better support English language learners (ELLs) at the high-school level, a literacy course has been started for at-risk ELLs**.**

Districtwide

To better identify students in need of support, there is a Child Study Team (CST) in every school; here students' needs are discussed and interventions are identified and put in place. The school principal or assistant principal, nurse, or attendance officers may participate in these meetings as needed. Students can be identified as "at risk and in need of intervention" by grade-level leaders, poor MCAS scores, poor attendance, low grades or through requests made by a teacher, another staff member, a doctor, or the adjustment counselor.

The district is attentive to the needs of its growing homeless population. There has been an increase in the district's homeless population (85 students as of January 23, 2012), because families are being housed in hotels located within the district. In 2011-2012 the district received $20,000 from McKinney-Vento to provide these students with before- and after-school services, counseling, summer help, and transportation services for parents attending school meetings. The district has also tapped into a grant called Project Marigold that provides enrichment activities for homeless and abused students. Schools that have large homeless populations have also conducted their own food and clothing drives to assist homeless families in need**.** The district has a nurse at each school, and three at the high-school level, who extend the efforts of the district in supporting homeless students. School nurses work to ensure that students' health records are current and that all students have health insurance.

The district provides health-related services in addition to the roles of the school nurses mentioned above. The district has received from Mass Child monies that are used as copayments for children to receive glasses and other health-related necessities. According to the district's December Data Report completed by the director of nurses, who also completes the district's annual Health Services Program Data Report, in December 2012, nurses within the school health centers had 5,655 encounters with students, 1,083 communications with parents, 550 communications with school staff, and 55 communications with outside agencies.

The district offers numerous other programs to students; these include, though are not limited to, the following:

- A special education summer program.
- The summer literacy program for ELLs, 100 enrolled.
- The Math Clinic, two days a week. Students can drop in twice a week for extra math help after school. According to district staff, two to eight students a day visit the clinic on the days in which it is open.
- The Saturday MCAS assistance program.
- Six week ELL course for parents, three times a year, at one elementary school.
- A parent information center housed at Whittemore Elementary School, one of the Level 3 schools.
- Project Interface, which links students and families to mental health services.
- School safety officers at the middle and high schools.
- Tutoring services provided by students at Bentley and Brandeis universities.
- Space made available for the Waltham Family School, a small preschool for 45 mothers who speak limited English and who have three- and four- year-old children. The program helps the mothers learn English, obtain a job, engage in hands-on activities with their children, and learn about the importance of being actively involved in their children's school experience.

The district strives to ensure that its services are communicated to parents via translated materials**.** In 2011–2012 it hired a full-time, bilingual staff member to join the district's parents' center as a translator. All the services mentioned in this report are provided to students within the district at no cost**.**

The review team found that the school district has many initiatives in place that support students' social, emotional, academic, and health-related needs. These efforts are further supported by school-level leaders and others who strive to provide wrap-around services to ensure that all students come to school prepared to learn.

Too many students at the high school are chronically absent and the dropout rate for English Language Learners is high. District resources for addressing student attendance and for communicating with families who are not proficient in English are limited.

Of the 4,994 students in Waltham in 2011-2012, 31.4 percent were Hispanic/Latino and 12.1 percent English language learners (ELLs). Of the total number of ELLs enrolled in the district, 71 percent were Hispanic/Latino. The director of ELLs reported that at the time of the review team visit, there were 614 ELLs.

The district's percentage of chronically absent students for 2010-2011 was high: 32.1 percent in grade 10 (compared to 18.0 percent among grade 10 students statewide), 21.9 percent in grade 11 (compared to 19.4 percent statewide), and 32.1 percent in grade 12 (compared to 20.8 percent statewide).[5] While the proportion of chronically absent students at the high school was 25.4 percent in 2011, Hispanic students at the high school had a higher proportion of chronic absenteeism at 39.5 percent.

The district's overall graduation rate for 2011 was 78.4 percent, as compared to the state rate of 83.4 percent. The four-year graduation rate for Waltham Hispanic/Latino students for 2011 was 64.1 percent, one of the lowest graduation rates for any district subgroup[6], though higher than the 2011 four-year graduation rate for Hispanic/Latino students statewide (61.9 percent). On the other hand, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students in the 2011 cohort who dropped out over the four years was 22.3 percent, as compared to 18.3 percent of Hispanic/Latino students in the statewide cohort.

The four-year graduation rate for Waltham ELL students for 2011 was 54.2 percent, the lowest graduation rate for a district subgroup. This rate was slightly lower than the 2011 four-year graduation rate for ELLs statewide, which was 56.2 percent. The proportion of ELL students who dropped out over the four years was 33.9 percent, compared to the state four-year dropout rate for ELLs for 2011 of 19.0 percent.

District resources for addressing student attendance matters are limited and do not involve efficient, systematic methods. Adjustment counselors, house masters and evaluation team leaders explained that they meet with students identified as at risk of dropping out and explore ways to make accommodations where needed. There is a dropout prevention program at the high school level that identifies ways in which students can recover credit by receiving credit for time they spent working outside of school. If students are identified as having poor attendance then the attendance officer is involved**.** However, there was only one attendance officer for a district of

[5] On the other hand, the 2011chronic absence rate for district students in grade 9 (14.5 percent) was lower than the statewide rate (19.6 percent).

[6] The 2011 four-year graduation rates for Asian students (64.3 percent) and students with disabilities (64.5 percent) were very similar to the rate for Hispanic/Latino students.

approximately 4,994 students in 2011-2012. In addition to addressing attendance matters, this staff member is also responsible for addressing safety matters sometimes linked to the courts**.** While the district has placed some supports in place to address attendance concerns, overall these supports are scarce**.**

While the district has an abundance of student support services for its students, communication to families with limited English proficiency is limited. The district has only recently hired a full-time, bilingual staff member for the parent center in spite of an ongoing need for the last several years. While there is a translator who translates various districtwide documents, a bilingual guidance counselor and some bilingual paraprofessionals, some of whom speak Spanish, there are not enough translation supports available to support staff when they communicate about available services and strategies for improving student performance at the various levels**.**

Without an efficient, systematic method for addressing student attendance issues and sufficient translation services to communicate with families with limited English proficiency, it will be difficult to improve the high chronic absence rates at the high school and the high dropout rate for English language learners.

Financial and Asset Management

The city supports its public schools at generous funding levels. However, the review team questioned the effectiveness of the allocation of funds to meet student needs and raise student performance. The review team noted that the district has above-average administrative and operations expenditures and below-average expenditures on technology.

Although total per pupil expenditures in 2011 were $19,741 compared to the state figure of $13,361, the district does not appear to provide the effective instruction and extra support for at-risk students which could be available in such an asset-rich district. At–risk subgroups have recently increased in number—for instance homeless students and low income students, who now constitute approximately 40 percent of enrollment. A significant population of English language learners has arrived in the last decade; since 2004, the percentage of ELLs has increased every year but one, to the 2012 percentage of 12.1 percent.

Some of the district's subgroups are in need of better support to improve their performance. For instance, the district's ELL subgroup lags substantially behind the state subgroup in achievement (see Tables C3 and C4 in Appendix C), and the low-income subgroup's four-year graduation rate for 2011 was 73.8 as compared to 78.4 for all students—though higher than the statewide graduation rate in 2011 for low-income students of 69.8 percent. As described in the Student Support section above, chronic absence at the high school, especially among Hispanic/Latino students, and the dropout rate among ELLs are of significant concern. And overall, district MCAS scores since 2009 have been nearly flat (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C).

Above Average Administrative and Operations Expenditure

Per pupil expenditure in 2011 in several non-instructional spending categories was exceptionally high, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Waltham and State Expenditures per Pupil: 2010-2011

Expenditure category	Waltham	State
District administration	$773.93	$446.62
Curriculum directors and department heads	$288.53	$190.76
School leadership	$600.37	$480.76
Operations and maintenance	$1,620.99	$1,066.86
Insurance, retirement programs and other	$5,332.20	$2,296.44

Source: Per-pupil expenditures calculated by ESE from district-submitted FY11 End of Year report

Administrative costs per pupil are 73 percent higher than the statewide costs per pupil. Approximately forty-seven administrators serve the district: three core central office administrators, nine principals, 14 housemasters and assistant principals, more than 13 directors, and others. In spite of this level of staffing, several key administrative positions, human resources, special education, and student services, are vacant or in transition, so that critical areas of administration do not have strong supervision.

The business and finance office is fully staffed and handles a wide range of functions including payroll, purchasing, financial oversight and reporting, substitute calling, and budget preparation. Expenditures from the district's own budget in fiscal year 2011 for the school business office were reported as $592,374. The city, however, reported an additional $1,832,256 in business and finance costs in the End of Year financial report, as part of net school spending - expenditures directly in support of education. (In an apparent error in fiscal year 2010, over a million dollars of city services was reported on the school committee expenditure line, and nothing on the business services line.)

Waltham has replaced or renovated all but one of its school buildings in the last decade, suggesting little or no major maintenance should be required. However, operations and maintenance spending was 52 percent higher than the state average.

Benefits for the majority of school personnel are negotiated in collective bargaining agreements. The share of health insurance cost paid by the district ranges between 87.5 percent and 89 percent for active employees, depending on plan selection, and is over 90 percent for many retirees. Active and retired employee benefits cost 132 percent more than the state average. According to unpublished fiscal year 2010 ESE data, a typical employer cost share for health insurance premiums among Massachusetts districts is about 75 percent.

Average Teacher Salaries, Proportionally More Teachers

Teacher salaries from all funding sources are about average with the state. The average salary has actually dropped, according to most recent data, which may be a reflection of average age and experience level of teachers (e.g. replacing retiring teachers). However, the student to teacher ratio in Waltham in fiscal year 2010 was 11.2 to 1, compared to the state at 13.7 to 1. A hidden factor affecting the value of teacher expenditures, however, is that staff attendance records show that teacher absences from classes are comparatively high at an average of 15 days per year per teacher, including all reasons for absences such as sick days, long term medical leaves, and professional development days.

Below Average Technology Expenditures

Both administrative and educational technology appears to be under-funded, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparison of Waltham and State Per-Pupil Expenditures on Technology: 2010-2011

Expenditure category	Waltham	State
District-wide information management and technology	$22.53	$74.77
Building technology	$0	$38.22
Classroom instructional technology	$10.22	$54.08
Instructional software	$5.00	$11.55

Source: Per-pupil expenditures calculated by ESE from district-submitted FY11 End of Year report

Insufficient usable technology in the classroom was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees including MIS personnel, teachers, and principals. There are 2,500-2,700 computers in the district, most of which are 4 to 6 years old. Many have too little memory to accommodate video streaming, for example. The network and hardware are maintained by a districtwide staff of six. The IT department is attempting to make wireless service available in all schools, but to date only certain areas are wireless-enabled and whole-classroom groups could not use wireless computers if they had them. Another key technology issue is that software systems are not integrated. In the business office alone, multiple software systems are used to manage the district's finances with crosswalks to align data in different systems. MUNIS is used for payroll and personnel, and has an entirely separate coding system from purchasing, accounts payable, and the general ledger. Those functions are maintained on Softwrite software, selected by the city about three years ago. Collecting financial, staffing, and asset information for analysis and reporting is made unnecessarily complex and takes more time.

One example of technology and information management issues in the district was the conflicting figures reported on the percentage of low-income students. The original SIMS report for fiscal year 2012 showed 34 percent low income students but reduced and free lunch numbers indicated that the figure should be 48 percent (in October) or 44 percent (in January.) The figure was amended to 40 percent in a February report to ESE. This confusion calls into question district methods of data management.

Data management for personnel may also be questioned. Without an HR director, hiring and induction procedures are split between two assistants to the superintendent, the payroll office, and building-based administration. According to interviewees, payroll department staff sometimes receive information about new hires and transfers from school committee minutes, and sometimes do not receive leave-of-absence information in a timely way. Data entry regarding staff membership and function was done by yet another administrative entity.

In summary, a combination of high spending levels in certain areas, insufficient resources in MIS, absence of certain key leadership functions, and a confusing mixture of software and reporting expertise, among other issues, hampers the school district's efforts to provide best-possible, data-informed educational services to a changing population of students.

Recommendations

Leadership

The superintendent should engage in two priority actions to improve student achievement across the district:

- **continue her work to provide a clear vision of the district's educational priorities for all stakeholders; and**
- **evaluate the central office and school-level organizational structure and revamp it as necessary to meet the needs of the district.**

At the time of the review, the new superintendent had recently shared with the school committee a status report on her Entry Plan, which she was developing based on meetings with stakeholders and classroom observations in each school. She indicated that a major focus of her Entry Plan was to develop a vision for the school system and to work cooperatively with key stakeholders to prepare a new DIP that would include the school system's priorities and goals.

The superintendent should follow through on this intention, establishing a reasonable number of priorities focused primarily on improving student achievement. These priorities should then lead to the development of a new District Improvement Plan (DIP) with SMART goals (specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and timely) that will provide clear direction and action steps for moving the district to its next level. All goals in the new School Improvement Plans (SIPs) should then be aligned with the goals in the DIP. The superintendent should hold central office and school administrators accountable for progress, or absence thereof, toward attainment of the goals in the SIPs and the DIP.

The current organizational structure as described by stakeholders is ineffective and requires re-evaluation.

- Many interviewees cited the need in the district for a central office administrator for human resources because many critical functions of this position are spread among several staff members and not always effectively accomplished.
- A second area of need is the organization of student support services. Currently, although a variety of services are available to students, their organization is fragmented,with several directors and assistant directors overseeing different services, without clear lines of responsibility or coordination of the district's approach in such areas as inclusion and differentiation of instruction. The superintendent should consider reorganizing the current segmented organizational structure and establishing a position in the central office such as an administrator of student support services. This administrator would be responsible for coordinating and overseeing all student support services such as special education, English language learners, Title I, school nurses, students at risk of dropping out, and homeless students.
- A third area is the assignments and responsibilities of many of the directors. According to interviewees, directors have kindergarten through grade 12 responsibilities, yet, in reality,

most of them primarily focus their content work at the high school, with the elementary schools receiving the least curriculum direction and support. This has meant that implementation, fidelity, and supervision of curriculum are at best uneven across the lower grades and articulation among the levels is weak.

- A fourth area whose structure and functions should be examined includes the positions of network administrator/manager of the MIS department and director of instructional technology. Information provided to the review team indicated that communication between these two departments is inadequate. Furthermore, administrators mentioned that as the principals prepare their proposed annual school budgets neither the network administrator/manager of the MIS department nor the director of instructional technology meets with the individual principals to discuss matters pertaining to data and technology. Communication, collaboration, and cooperation are essential to meet the technological needs of district systems, and teacher and student needs.

In general, the evaluation of administrative organization in the district should address the high administrative costs described in the Financial and Asset Management finding (see in particular Table 3).Though several key administrative positions are unfilled or in transition, the district has about 47 administrators.

Also, interviewees mentioned as concerns that the nine principals operate their school with little or no collaboration and that there is insufficient communication among some administrators, resulting in inefficient management. Directors noted that their job descriptions had not been updated in many years and that some were unavailable; some principals said that principals do not think that they have authority over the curriculum, given the responsibilities of the directors. In connection with the evaluation and whatever reorganization follows, clear job descriptions, areas of accountability, and lines of authority should be established and structures for better communication among both school and central office administrators created.

By these two critical actions, deciding on a narrow set of priorities for the district and improving the structure and functioning of its administration, the superintendent will guide the district in targeting its many resources and the work of all stakeholders toward continuous improvement in achievement for all students.

In order to come to a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, the superintendent and all members of the school committee should participate in the new District Governance Support Project, a partnership of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents.

Some school committee members described the role of the school committee as supporting the superintendent in such areas as budget and goal-setting, saying that there should be “no micromanagement.” Others told the review team that most school committee members do not recognize their proper roles in that they tend to micromanage or “want to manage more than

support." Interviewees other than the school committee members themselves agreed with this second view. Many interviewees expressed concern about a perceived tendency of some school committee members not to trust and support the superintendent and her staff and not to work with school leaders to support higher levels of student achievement. They described a "disconnect" between the school committee and the administration and said that committee members "minimize reports from the district about student performance."

Disagreement within the district and within the school committee itself about whether members of the school committee are fulfilling their proper role and responsibilities distracts all stakeholders from their proper duties and diminishes the capacity of the superintendent, school leaders, and the school committee to contribute to and build a culture of collaboration around the education mission.

The review team recommends that the superintendent and all school committee members participate in the District Governance Support Project (DGSP) co-sponsored by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. The DGSP is "designed to focus on continuous improvement and build greater understanding of both the distinct roles and responsibilities of the school committee and district superintendent as well as promote new strategies for teamwork and collaboration to enhance student achievement."[7]

It is noted that the superintendent is currently participating in another new leadership program, the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP), which ESE is co-partnering with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. With the superintendent and school committee members participating in DGSP, and with the superintendent participating in NSIP, a common understanding of their respective roles will be furthered, leading to a better relationship between the committee and the administration and a more effective partnership. A common understanding of roles and responsibilities will also allow the school committee to carry theirs out more effectively, with enhanced communication, more public confidence, and a more strategic commitment of the city's resources toward improving instructional quality and raising student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should continue its documentation of curriculum in the core content areas and establish clear instructional priorities supported by targeted professional development.

Although the district has adopted a robust curriculum-mapping program (Atlas) and has started the process in mathematics, the district's current curriculum documentation and articulation is inconsistent and incomplete. Without full curricular documentation available to all teachers, the district is unable to guarantee consistently high-quality curriculum for all learners across its nine

[7] See DGSP brochure.

schools, particularly at the elementary level. Also, the district does not have a focused, clear vision of instructional excellence with targeted professional development to strategically improve teachers' skills. Instructional leadership is divided between principals and directors so that teachers receive uncoordinated messages about what should be taking place during their lessons.

All these conditions have led to instruction in the district that is inconsistent in quality and in the content of the curriculum it delivers, does not have sufficient rigor or differentiation, and does not meet the needs of all learners. By fully developing its curriculum and arriving at clear, commonly understood instructional priorities backed by the training needed to put them into practice, the district be using its resources strategically to improve instruction districtwide, building teacher capacity to improve student achievement.

Assessment

The district should consider creating a district-level coordinator or team that would be responsible for establishing consistent expectations for all school-based data teams, creating districtwide data systems, and analyzing data trends across the district.

At the present time, each of the nine school-based data teams functions as an independent entity, answering only to school administration. There are no common protocols or expectations about the composition of the school teams, frequency of meetings, or the compilation and dissemination of agendas, meeting notes, and outcomes for each meeting. There is little to no communication among data teams for different schools and levels. Mastery Manager, introduced in 2010–2011 by the assistant superintendent, has played an important role in beginning to systematize the compilation of data, but the use of Mastery Manager is in its early stages.

A district-level coordinator or data team would ensure that data is regularly analyzed by the school data teams and disseminated to appropriate staff members. The collection, recording, analysis, and use of data could be systematized. Most important, this coordinator or team would be responsible for identifying patterns and trends across the district, monitoring the kindergarten through grade 12 progress of students in at-risk subgroups, working with other district leaders to link data-based findings with the district's professional development plan (see next recommendation), and helping to guide the district in overall program improvement. Having a district-level data coordinator or team would enhance the district's ability to identify and replicate successful practices, strategically allocate its resources, and continue, modify, or discontinue programs and services based on their effectiveness.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should develop, coordinate, and closely monitor a comprehensive kindergarten through grade 12 professional development program targeted to improving student achievement and based on staff needs.

There is currently no districtwide system in place for making data-driven decisions about the professional development needs of the district. No professional development plan exists. Rather, directors and principals, sometimes independently from one another, determine professional development for the year. Teachers are not represented in the process, and teachers' evaluations are not used in it. The result is professional development driven by individual directors and schools, not related to teachers' needs, and not strategically related to student achievement.

The district should seek teacher input, examine its student achievement data, evaluate its programs, and use professional development recommendations in teachers' and administrators' evaluations to determine and prioritize areas of greatest need, with the priorities in its DIP as a guide (see first Leadership and Governance recommendation above). Once the needs have been determined, the district should create a strategic, documented, professional development plan. The plan should include goals and objectives, timelines, individuals responsible for accomplishing the goals and objectives, and opportunities for evaluation of professional development by participants. The district should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its professional development offerings by analyzing evaluations by participants, by gathering feedback from supervisors as they follow up on the professional development, and by linking student performance data to professional development.

The district should review its long-standing practice of providing professional development during the school day, considering its impact on instruction. While this approach may result in widespread staff participation, it cannot help but affect the continuity and quality of instruction for students. During the 2010–2011 school year, a total of 898.5 teacher days were devoted to professional development during the school day. These were in addition to the one full day and five half days of professional development throughout the district during which students were released from classes.

By carefully creating a coordinated professional development plan based on district priorities and needs, and by minimizing the amount of class time teachers miss, the district will be able to use the valuable resources of teacher time and district funds in ways that will result in more consistently high-quality instruction and higher student achievement.

Student Support

The district should monitor the effectiveness and quality of programs offering supports to students. Efforts should be better coordinated across departments so as to make the most of resources.

The district has many initiatives to support students' physical, social, emotional, and academic needs. However, as described under the first Leadership and Governance recommendation above, these are under the direction of several administrators, and the review team found the supports to be compartmentalized rather than coordinated. Several interviewees raised a concern about the coordination of support systems, particularly when students become eligible for, or participate in, more than one program. And the current organizational structure makes it difficult for the district to systematically monitor the success and effectiveness of its programs and to determine where there may be gaps or overlaps in staffing or in programs.

Coordinating and systematizing student support programs and services would aid in proper and prompt identification of students in need of support, and proper distribution of resources. The district could better determine how many students are in need of the services being offered and how many of these students are actually accessing those supports. This would help the district in determining whether it needs to take more action to link students to needed resources, as well as in determining where to add or reduce staffing. In some areas appropriate supports are limited, particularly as the student demographics have changed. For example, although there is one bilingual counselor at the high school, translation support to help teachers communicate with the families of the increasing number of ELLs is needed at all levels. And with one attendance officer who has other responsibilities as well, the district should consider whether it has deployed adequate resources to address attendance problems and whether it needs to develop a more systematic approach to them.

By coordinating and systematizing its supports for students, possibly under one district-level director or coordinator, the district will be able to target these valuable resources more effectively. It will be better able to monitor the quality of its programs, and to ensure that students in need are quickly identified and provided needed supports.

Finance and Asset Management

The administration should assess the areas where expenditures are exceptionally high or low, and adjust deployment of financial and personnel resources to provide the greatest benefit in the areas of instructional services and instructional technology for students. In conjunction with this evaluation, expenditures attributed to the support of education by the city should be closely reviewed.

ESE data shows that expenditures in several areas are exceptionally high: district administration, instructional and school level leadership, facility operations and maintenance, and health insurance benefits for employees and retirees. Expenditures are low for administrative, financial, and instructional technologies, and information management is not well coordinated.

Unlike many school districts, the problems are not lack of resources, but rather distribution of resources. Funding for education is high, student to staff ratios are low, and a comprehensive range of programs is in place, including a dynamic vocational program and various special education programs. However, a quarter of high school students are chronically absent and too many of them drop out.[8] Student achievement scores in Waltham have remained nearly flat overall since 2009, and ELLs perform substantially below their state counterparts. The district has made a substantial investment in its schools and should be able to improve student achievement. A cost-benefit analysis of each budget category where expenditures are exceptionally high or low could help to start the process of strategic deployment of resources. Consideration of the deployment of teachers and administrators would be an essential addition to this analysis.

The superintendent should review the agreement with the city regarding expenditures attributed to the support of education. Expenditures from the district's own budget in fiscal year 2011 for the school business office were reported as $592,374; the city reported an additional $1,832,256 in business and finance costs in the End of Year financial report, as part of net school spending - expenditures directly in support of education. Even without these, the city would be generously supporting its district, but the expenditures may also indicate a level of confusion and even duplication in efforts.

Closely examining how funding is allocated to ensure that instruction and instructional technology get the greatest benefit from the city's resources—and reorganizing the administrative structure to be more efficient and effective—will help Waltham marshal the generous funding provided for education of its students in the way that will most improve student learning and student performance.

[8] The 2011 four-year dropout rate was 13.2 percent for Waltham as compared to 7.2 percent statewide.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Waltham Public Schools was conducted from February 13–February 16, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

John Kulevich, Leadership and Governance

Christine Brandt, Curriculum and Instruction, review team coordinator

Jo Napolitano, Assessment

Coral Grout, Human Resources and Professional Development

Alenor Williams, Student Support

Gail Zeman, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Waltham financial personnel: city auditor.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Waltham School Committee: chairman and six members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Waltham Educators Association: president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary.
    - The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Waltham Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, interim director of special education, school business administrator, fiscal coordinator, director of facilities, payroll staff, administrative assistants responsible for human resources, and technology directors.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Waltham Public Schools: Waltham High School (grades 9–12), Kennedy Middle School (grades 6–8), McDevitt Middle School (grades 6–8), and the following elementary schools: Fitzgerald (kindergarten through grade 5), McArthur (kindergarten through grade 5), Northeast (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), Plympton (kindergarten through grade 5), Stanley (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), and Whittemore (kindergarten through grade 5).
    - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals and some support staff. The team interviewed seven middle school teachers; though high school and elementary teachers were invited to attend focus groups, they teachers from these levels followed their association's request, made in the context of what association representatives told the review team was an "impasse" in negotiations with the school committee for a new collective bargaining agreement, to arrive at meetings but not enter meeting rooms to meet with the review team.
    - The review team conducted 55 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 9 schools visited.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
    - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
    - Data on the district's staffing and finances.

- Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).
- District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks for students/families and faculty, school schedules, and the district's end-of-the-year financial reports.
- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Waltham Public Schools, conducted from February 13–February 16, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
February 13 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association; school visit and classroom observations at the high school.	February 14 Interviews with district staff and principals; visits to the Kennedy and McDevitt middle schools, classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents.	February 15 Interviews with town or city personnel; school visits- Plympton, Kennedy, McDevitt, Northeast, interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews.	February 16 School visits- Whittemore, MacArthur, Stanley, Fitzgerald, interviews with high school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

Table C1: Waltham Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)[9]
2009–2011 English Language Arts

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Proficient	*Median SGP*
All Grades—District	67	*59*	66	*53*	69	*57*
All Grades—State	67	*50*	68	*50*	69	*50*
Grade 3—District	50	*NA**	56	*NA**	60	*NA**
Grade 3—State	57	*NA**	63	*NA**	61	*NA**
Grade 4—District	50	*54*	48	*49.5*	47	*50*
Grade 4—State	53	*50*	54	*50*	53	*51*
Grade 5—District	59	*54*	56	*49*	63	*56*
Grade 5—State	63	*50*	63	*50*	67	*50*
Grade 6—District	69	*66*	76	*61*	68	*59.5*
Grade 6—State	66	*50*	69	*50*	68	*50*
Grade 7—District	77	*65*	73	*49*	76	*54*
Grade 7—State	70	*50*	72	*50*	73	*50*
Grade 8—District	79	*60.5*	76	*55*	84	*72*
Grade 8—State	78	*50*	78	*50*	79	*50*
Grade 10—District	84	*55*	83	*53.5*	88	*55*
Grade 10—State	81	*50*	78	*50*	84	*50*

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

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

Table C2: Waltham Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009–2011 Mathematics

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	*Median SGP*
All Grades—District	51	*52*	53	*51*	53	*52*
All Grades—State	55	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 3—District	55	*NA**	59	*NA**	64	*NA**
Grade 3—State	60	*NA**	65	*NA**	66	*NA**
Grade 4—District	38	*49*	41	*51*	40	*50*
Grade 4—State	48	*50*	48	*49*	47	*50*
Grade 5—District	49	*50*	43	*46*	51	*48*
Grade 5—State	54	*50*	55	*50*	59	*50*
Grade 6—District	54	*61.5*	55	*58.5*	49	*51*
Grade 6—State	57	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 7—District	46	*54*	45	*48.5*	42	*45.5*
Grade 7—State	49	*50*	53	*50*	51	*50*
Grade 8—District	45	*52.5*	53	*53.5*	48	*60*
Grade 8—State	48	*50*	51	*51*	52	*50*
Grade 10—District	69	*48.5*	74	*53.5*	78	*54*
Grade 10—State	75	*50*	75	*50*	77	*50*

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

Table C3: Waltham Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts

	Waltham Public Schools			State	
	Number of Students Included	CPI	*Median SGP*	CPI	*Median SGP*
All Students	*2,417*	86.9	*57*	87.2	*50*
African-American/Black	*223*	83.6	*59.5*	77.4	*47*
Asian	*137*	92.2	*65*	90.2	*59*
Hispanic/Latino	*737*	78.9	*57*	74.2	*46*
White	*1,242*	91.3	*56*	90.9	*51*
ELL	*137*	49.8	*56*	59.4	*48*
FELL	*126*	79.6	*70*	81.7	*54*
Special Education	*574*	72.4	*46*	68.3	*42*
Low-Income	*934*	79.1	*55*	77.1	46

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C4: Waltham Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics

	Waltham Public Schools			State	
	Number of Students Included	CPI	*Median SGP*	CPI	*Median SGP*
All Students	*2,424*	77.7	*52*	79.9	*50*
African-American/Black	*223*	67.2	*54.5*	65	*47*
Asian	*142*	86.3	*57*	89.5	*64*
Hispanic/Latino	*734*	67.7	*50*	64.4	*46*
White	*1,246*	84.4	*52*	84.3	*50*
ELL	*136*	49.3	*50.5*	56.3	*52*
FELL	*126*	70.8	*59*	75.1	*53*
Special Education	*580*	58.5	*45*	57.7	*43*
Low-Income	*932*	67.8	*50*	67.3	*46*

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The high turnover of central office and school-level administrators in Waltham in recent years has resulted in uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, insufficient communication, and unclear priorities, with each school operating independently rather than as part of a system.
2. The current central office and school-level administrative structure is not operating effectively as the result of unclear lines of accountability, insufficient communication, collaboration, and coordination, and unfilled or interim positions.
3. Except for some school committee members themselves, the perception among interviewees was that school committee members involve themselves too much with matters that would best be handled by the superintendent and her administration.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. The district offers a broad curriculum; however, its core content curricula are not fully documented, well articulated at all grade levels, or consistently delivered across all schools. The current organization of curriculum leadership, with K-12 directors, is ineffective in ensuring consistently high-quality curricula for elementary- and middle-level students.
5. The district has a system of instructional leadership divided between directors and principals and has not conveyed to all teachers a clear vision of high-quality instructional practice. While teachers and students arrive prepared to learn, lessons do not have rigor, and instruction is not differentiated or supported by technology.

Assessment

6. The schools in the district collect a large amount of student assessment data, and many schools are using the data to improve student learning.

7. Data teams are in place in each school, though they are not all fully functional and the use of data varies across the district. Because there is no district data coordinator or data team to provide oversight and coordination, the district is limited in its ability to analyze districtwide trends and patterns in student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. The district has had difficulty in hiring and retaining professional staff in a range of key leadership positions; the position of director of human resources had been vacant for much of the three years leading up to the review team visit.

9. The district has a professional development program with over 80 initiatives; it does not have clear focus or priorities, has limited teacher input, is not connected to the performance evaluation system, and allows teachers to be absent for considerable amounts of classroom instructional time.

Student Support

10. The Waltham school district has programs at all levels to provide students with supports for identified physical, social, emotional, and academic needs. District-level leadership of two departments providing support services is in transition.

11. Too many students at the high school are chronically absent and the dropout rate for English Language Learners is high. District resources for addressing student attendance and for communicating with families who are not proficient in English are limited.

Financial and Asset Management

12. The city supports its public schools at generous funding levels. However, the review team questioned the effectiveness of the allocation of funds to meet student needs and raise student performance. The review team noted that the district has above-average administrative and operations expenditures and below-average expenditures on technology.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The superintendent should engage in two priority actions to improve student achievement across the district:
   - continue her work to provide a clear vision of the district's educational priorities for all stakeholders; and
   - evaluate the central office and school-level organizational structure and revamp it as necessary to meet the needs of the district.
2. In order to come to a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, the superintendent and all members of the school committee should participate in the new District Governance Support Project, a partnership of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. The district should continue its documentation of curriculum in the core content areas and establish clear instructional priorities supported by targeted professional development.

Assessment

4. The district should consider creating a district-level coordinator or team that would be responsible for establishing consistent expectations for all school-based data teams, creating districtwide data systems, and analyzing data trends across the district.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. The district should develop, coordinate, and closely monitor a comprehensive kindergarten through grade 12 professional development program targeted to improving student achievement and based on staff needs.

Student Support

6. The district should monitor the effectiveness and quality of programs offering supports to students. Efforts should be better coordinated across departments so as to make the most of resources.

Financial and Asset Management

7. The administration should assess the areas where expenditures are exceptionally high or low, and adjust deployment of financial and personnel resources to provide the greatest benefit in the areas of instructional services and instructional technology for students. In conjunction with this evaluation, expenditures attributed to the support of education by the city should be closely reviewed.