Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Westfield Public Schools

Level 3 District Review

Review of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of English Language Learners

October 2010

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Overview of Level 3 Reviews

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (DSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts district reviews under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws. This review is 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 2009-2010 school year were districts in Level 3 of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance[1] in each of the state's six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The eight 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 standards: Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management. 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. Team members previewed selected district documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a two-day site visit in the district and a two-day site visit to schools. The teams consist of independent consultants with expertise in each of the standards.

[1] In other words, as Level 3 was defined at the time of district selection, districts with schools in corrective action or restructuring.

Overview of LEP Reviews

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of reviews of school districts to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom an achievement gap exists. The reviews will focus, in turn, on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students, and students who are members of racial minorities. Spring 2010 reviews aim to identify district and school factors contributing to relatively high growth for limited English proficient (LEP) student performance in selected schools, to provide recommendations for improvement on district and school levels to maintain or accelerate the growth in student achievement, and to promote the dissemination of promising practices among Massachusetts public schools. This review complies with the requirements of Chapter 15, Section 55A, to conduct district audits in districts whose students achieve at high levels, relative to districts that educate similar student populations. The review is part of ESE's program to recognize schools as distinguished schools under section 1117(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows states to use Title I funds to reward schools that significantly closed the achievement gap. Districts and schools with exemplary practices identified through review may serve as models for, and provide support to, other districts and schools.

Selection of Districts

ESE identified 36 Title I schools in 14 districts where the performance of students with limited English proficiency (LEP students) exceeds expectations. All Massachusetts schools receiving Title I funds were eligible for identification, with the exception of reconfigured schools or schools that did not serve tested grades for the years under review. ESE staff analyzed MCAS data from 2008 and 2009 to identify schools that narrowed performance gaps between LEP students and all students statewide. The methodology compared the MCAS raw scores of LEP students enrolled in the schools with the predicted MCAS raw scores of LEP students statewide. The methodology also incorporated whether LEP students improved their performance from 2008 to 2009. "Gap closers" did not have to meet AYP performance or improvement targets, but did have to meet 2009 AYP targets for participation, attendance and high school graduation, as applicable. Districts with gap closers were invited to participate in a comprehensive district review to identify district and school practices associated with stronger performance for LEP students, as part of ESE's distinguished schools program (described above), "Impact of District Programs and Support on School Improvement: Identifying and Sharing Promising School and District Practices for Limited English Proficient Students."

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews explore five areas: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, and Student Support.** The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that most likely contribute to positive results, as well as those that may impede rapid improvement. Systems and practices that are likely to contribute to positive results were identified from the ESE's District Standards and Indicators and from a draft report of the English Language Learners Subcommittee of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Committee on the Proficiency Gap[2]. Reviews are evidence-based and data-driven. Four-to-eight team members preview selected documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a two-day site visit in the district and a two-day site visit to schools. To collect evidence across all areas, the team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the five areas listed above, as well as English language learner education.

[2] *Halting the Race to the Bottom: Urgent Interventions for the Improvement of the Education of English Language Learners in Massachusetts and Selected Districts*, December 2009

Westfield Public Schools

The site visit to the Westfield Public Schools was conducted from April 13-16, 2010. The site visit included visits to 9 of the district's 12 schools: Franklin Avenue Elementary School, Highland Elementary School, Munger Hill Elementary School, Paper Mill Elementary School, Southampton Road Elementary School, North Middle School, South Middle School, Westfield High School, and Westfield Vocational Technical High School. The visit to the South Middle School, which was identified as a "gap closer" for its limited English proficient students, as described above, was conducted as part of the English Language Learner (ELL) component of this review. 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.

District Profile[3]

Westfield is a small residential and industrial city located in the center of western Massachusetts at the foot of the Berkshire Mountains. Education, healthcare, and social services are the largest employers followed closely by light manufacturing. It is also home to Westfield State College. The College has a number of partnerships with the district, and provides opportunities for district educators.

The Westfield school district consists of 11 schools and an early childhood center for preschool children. There are 6 kindergarten through grade 5 elementary schools and 1 kindergarten through grade 3 elementary school; 2 grade 6 through 8 middle schools; and 2 grade 9 through 12 high schools. The October 2009 enrollment was 6,100 students. Enrollment has declined by approximately 100 students in each of the last five years. Currently, 92 percent of Westfield's school-age children attend the public schools. The district recently closed one elementary school and reconfigured another from a kindergarten through grade 5 to a kindergarten through grade 3 school; the subsequent redistricting increased the enrollment in the remaining schools. Five elementary schools, one middle school, and the vocational-technical high school are classified as Title I schools. At the time of the site visit the superintendent was in her third year of service, and the director of curriculum and instruction was in her second year.

The local appropriation to the Westfield Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2010 was $52,064,950. In addition to the appropriation to the district budget, school-related expenditures by the city were estimated at $18,015,403 for fiscal year 2010. In fiscal year 2009, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district ($51,110,717), expenditures by the town ($17,747,247), and expenditures from other sources such as grants ($15,587,864), was $84,445,828.

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

As in many Massachusetts communities, Westfield's diverse population represents the changing demographics of the state and region. In recent decades, immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean settled in the Pioneer Valley's larger urban communities of Amherst, Chicopee, Holyoke, Ludlow, and Springfield. Eventually, some moved to Westfield and other smaller neighboring communities. Immigrants from Eastern Europe (Russia and Ukraine) and Asia (China and Nepal) have also recently settled in Westfield and nearby communities. As a result, Westfield is diverse in its cultural and linguistic heritage.

Table 1 below shows the 2009-2010 percentage enrollment in the Westfield schools by race, ethnicity, and for selected populations. In 2009-2010, the district enrolled 682 students whose first language was not English, and 211 of these students were English language learners, meaning that they were unable to perform ordinary class work in English. The terms limited English proficient (LEP) and English language learner (ELL) are interchangeable. ELL will be used in this report for consistency, and because Westfield uses this term.

Table 1: 2009-2010 Westfield Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total 2009-10	Selected Populations	Percent of Total 2009-10
African-American	1.2	First Language not English	11.2
Asian	1.3	Limited English Proficient	3.5
Hispanic or Latino	10.7	Low-income	29.5
Native American	0.1	Special Education	19.0
White	85.9	Free and Reduced Price Lunch	29.6

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 2 below shows the first languages of Westfield's 211 ELL students by the number of speakers. Russian, Ukrainian, and Spanish are the most prevalent of the ten language groups represented.

Table 2: 2009-2010 First Languages of Westfield's ELL Students

Russian	Ukrainian	Spanish	Nepali	Other	Romanian	Chinese	Urdu	Tamil	Polish	Farsi
98	54	34	7	8	4	2	2	2	1	1

Source: ESE calculation from Student Information Management system (SIMS) data

As the district's demographics have changed over the past decade, Westfield has had to address growing diversity in student's academic, linguistic, and social needs. This has required planning and collaboration by the district's ELL department. These efforts and programs are described in greater detail in the ELL section of this report.

Student Performance[4]

The district has shown little improvement in the MCAS test results, and in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), especially for subgroups, during the three-year interval from 2006 through 2009. Table 3 below shows the 2009 AYP results for the district and its schools. Although the district made AYP in the aggregate in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, it did not make AYP for subgroups in either subject. Student performance in ELA and Mathematics varied by school. Three schools did not make AYP in the aggregate, and five schools did not make AYP for subgroups in ELA. In mathematics, six schools did not make AYP in the aggregate, and seven did not make AYP for subgroups. Because of this performance, the AYP status of the district was classified as Corrective Action for subgroups in both ELA and Mathematics. Six of the district's 11 schools are in Corrective Action (CA), Identified for Improvement (II), or Restructuring (RST) in ELA, and six are in Corrective Action (CA), Identified for Improvement (II), or Restructuring (RST) in Mathematics, largely attributable to low subgroup performance.

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

Table 3: 2009 District and School AYP

District/School	ELA					Math				
	Status 09	CPI 09	CPI Chg 08-09	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 09	CPI 09	CPI Chg 08-09	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
Westfield	CA Sub	85.7	1.2	Yes	No	CA Sub	74.1	0.6	Yes	No
Abner Gibbs	II1 sub	83.3	4.7	Yes	Yes	None	82.5	4.5	Yes	Yes
Franklin Avenue	None	81.7	(4.0)	No	No	None	66.7	(12.2)	No	No
Highland	CA A, Sub	75.0	(1.6)	No	No	CA A, Sub	74.2	(0.5)	No	No
Juniper Park	None	89.7	5.1	Yes	Yes	None	83.8	1.8	Yes	Yes
Munger Hill	II1 Sub	84.3	0.8	Yes	Yes	II1 Sub	80.8	1.4	Yes	Yes
Paper Mill	None	85.1	3.2	Yes	Yes	II2 Sub	74.5	(1.1)	No	No
Southampton Road	None	88.1	2.6	Yes	Yes	None	84.8	3.5	Yes	Yes
North Middle	II2 Sub	87.7	0.5	Yes	No	RST2	68.2	0.1	No	No
South Middle	RST1 Sub	85.2	1.1	Yes	No	RST2	68.4	0.5	No	No
Westfield High	II2 Sub	95.7	3.7	Yes	Yes	II2 Sub	89.6	4.7	Yes	No
Westfield Vocational Technical High	None	79.2	(4.1)	No	No	None	75.6	(2.1)	No	No

Note: A or Agg = Aggregate; CA = Corrective Action; CPI = Composite Performance Index; II1 = Identified for Improvement year 1; II2 = Identified for Improvement year 2; RST1 = Restructuring year 1; RST2 = Restructuring year 2; S or Sub = Subgroup

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) are used to compare the changes from year to year in a student's MCAS test scores to changes in the MCAS test scores of other students statewide with similar score histories.[5] The most appropriate measure to report progress for a group is the

[5] MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: State Report, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, October 2009, p. 2.

median SGP, or the middle score for a group when the individual student growth percentiles are arranged from highest to lowest. The proficiency percentile is the percentage of students scoring Proficient or above on the MCAS tests. Table 4 below shows the 2009 median SGPs and proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics for all Westfield students and by subgroup.

According to the table, the median SGPs for district ELL and FLEP (Formerly Limited English Proficient) students exceeded the median SGPs for Westfield students in the aggregate, and for all other subgroups in ELA. For example, with a median SGP of 64.5 Westfield ELL students grew more rapidly between 2008 and 2009 than 64.5 percent of their academic peers across the state with similar MCAS score histories in ELA. The median SGP of ELL students in ELA exceeded the median SGP of 45.0 in ELA for all Westfield students by 19.5 SGPs. This means that despite their lower proficiency rates, Westfield ELL and FLEP students made more rapid progress in ELA between 2008 and 2009 in comparison to their statewide peers with similar score histories than all Westfield students compared to their statewide peers.

Fewer than half of all Westfield students who took the MCAS test in mathematics scored either Advanced or Proficient. Few district subgroups demonstrated high median SGPs or high levels of proficiency in mathematics, with the exception of 73 percent of Asian students reaching proficiency. ELL students' rate of growth between 2008 and 2009 exceeded that of all students and all other subgroups with a median SGP of 48.5 in mathematics, but the improvement was modest given the urgency of their low proficiency rate of 38.0 percent. FLEP students, along with African-American and low-income student subgroups, showed relatively low rates of growth in mathematics between 2008 and 2009 compared to their statewide peers with similar score histories, with median SGPs of 34.0, 36.5 and 39.0 respectively.

Table 4: 2009 Westfield Median SGPs and Proficiency Rates in ELA and Mathematics

Westfield and Subgroup	ELA		Math	
	Median Student Growth Percentile	% Proficient	Median Student Growth Percentile	% Proficient
All Students	45.0	65.0	45.0	48.0
Asian	39.0	78.0	48.0	73.0
African American/Black	39.0	58.0	36.5	28.0
Hispanic/Latino	41.0	40.0	41.0	26.0
White	46.0	69.0	46.0	50.0
ELL	64.5	31.0	48.5	38.0
FLEP	62.0	57.0	34.0	42.0
Special Education	40.0	23.0	43.0	10.0
Title I	45.0	58.0	47.0	40.0
Non-Title I	45.0	69.0	44.0	53.0
Low Income	44.0	49.0	39.0	32.0
Non Low Income	45.0	74.0	48.0	55.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 5 below shows the 2009 proficiency rates for LEP and FLEP students in South Middle School, Westfield, and the state. The proficiency rates for South Middle School's LEP and FLEP students exceeded the statewide rates on each test given in each of the school's three grades except for ELA in grade 8 and Mathematics in grade 6.

Westfield's LEP students also outperformed their statewide peers in proficiency at almost every grade level on the MCAS ELA, Mathematics, and Science and Technology tests. (Please note that at the three grades included in South Middle School, grades 6, 7, and 8, most or almost all of the Westfield LEP/FLEP students tested were students at South Middle School. The proficiency rates for Westfield's LEP and FLEP students exceeded the statewide rates in ELA in every grade subject to testing, except for grade 3 and grade 8, and in Mathematics in every grade subject to testing except for grade 3 and grade 10. The proficiency rates for Westfield's LEP and FLEP students exceeded the statewide rates in Science and Technology in every grade subject to testing, except grade 10.

Table 5: 2009 South Middle School, Westfield, and State Proficiency Rates for LEP/FLEP Students

Grade	ELA			Mathematics			Science/Technology		
	South Middle	Westfield	State	South Middle	Westfield	State	South Middle	Westfield	State
3	---	19(32)	29	--	31(32)	36	---	*	*
4	---	45(20)	25	---	45(20)	26	---	*	*
5	---	52(27)	29	---	67(27)	29	---	52(27)	18
6	35(20)	44(23)	33	30(20)	31(23)	30	*	*	*
7	31(16)	41(22)	30	38(16)	30(23)	20	*	*	*
8	31(16)	29(17)	36	40(15)	38(16)	18	20(15)	19(16)	7
10	---	41(17)	31	---	34(18)	38	---	13(15)	18

Numbers of LEP/FLEP students (n) taking the test given in parentheses for South Middle School and Westfield.
*Test not given for this grade.
--- School does not include this grade.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

This report has two components. Given the lack of significant improvement in student performance results for the district as a whole, and the limited growth of most of its subgroups as measured by the MCAS tests, the Level 3 component addresses the district's practices and systems for educating all students. A clearer understanding of the district's strengths and weaknesses can inform planning and priority-setting. Given the higher achievement of Westfield's and South Middle School's ELL and FLEP students as compared to their statewide peers, the ELL component addresses the district's promising practices for ELL students through a review of the South Middle School's ELL programs, culture, and processes.

Level 3 Findings

Leadership and Governance

The District Improvement Plan provides a centralized format for the development of School Improvement Plans without linking the district and schools to a unified direction.

In a statement on its website, the City of Westfield takes pride in its schools for providing children educational opportunities for a productive future. The district has a decentralized approach to management, and parent-teacher groups and school councils offer input at each school. In interviews with the review team, school committee members characterized the autonomy of its principals as a district strength. Parents expressed general satisfaction with opportunities to participate in the schools, communication between school and home, school safety, and facilities improvement in a difficult economy. Parents told the review team that they do not measure school improvement based solely on student achievement on standardized tests. School websites provide links to student achievement data. Each school prepares a School Improvement Plan in compliance with district guidelines. Except for the high school's, these plans are not posted on the school websites.

According to a complete review of them, there is a standard format for School Improvement Plans consisting of introductory information, demographic and academic data, a description of student support services, program priorities, and an analysis of the results of the MCAS tests. The depth of this analysis, however, varies by school. There are also significant differences in the comprehensiveness of the action plans in the School Improvement Plans. Although action plan goals are aligned with the District Improvement Plan, there are significant differences in the comprehensiveness of the goals and in how much emphasis is placed on district priorities. The action plans contain all fundamental components except identification of the person(s) responsible and accountable for carrying out the designated activities. Timelines for attaining the goals are not included. Principals stated that the improvement plan has been considered a "wish list" during the recent tight budget period.

A leadership team consisting of twenty-nine district and school administrative, instructional, and support personnel prepared the 2008 through 2011 District Improvement Plan. This document, dated May 29, 2008, followed the current superintendent's arrival on July 1, 2007. The plan has 20 goals, including two broadly related to improving student academic achievement and meeting AYP in ELA and mathematics. Two additional goals call for the development of a districtwide assessment system to track student learning, and the evaluation of programs and services. The fundamental components missing from the district plan include the identification of the person or persons responsible and accountable for carrying out designated activities, and a timeline for attaining the goals. Funding or other resources needed to achieve goals are also not identified. The superintendent told the review team that school level budgeting and decision-making are within the authority of the principals consistent with the district's management model. The

superintendent expressed the need to revise the plan because it lacks specificity about how to achieve the goals.

The District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans have an aligned format that gives the appearance of centralized planning. However, the generality[6] of the goals coupled with the lack of identification of person(s) responsible, timeline, and funding produces uncertainty about what needs to be done. This uncertainty and the general lack of a districtwide commitment to a clear and focused direction weaken the linkage between the documents and efforts to ensure goal attainment and accountability. During an interview, the superintendent described an effort to determine the impact of district priorities. In 2008-2009, the district administrative team visited several schools and classrooms, without taking notes because of restrictions in the union contract. Team members, including the superintendent, met with principals to share their observations orally.

In the judgment of the review team, the district will not make consistent and continuing improvement in student achievement without the establishment of a unified direction and shared priorities by district and school leadership. The District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans are not as effective as they should be as guides for improvement because a clear message has not been sent to schools about which goals are the priority goals to address student needs and because funding, resources, and timelines have not been designated. The district has not completely fulfilled its responsibility and executed its authority to develop consensus on a direction for the district and hold principals accountable for implementation of improvement plans that advance the district in that direction.

Decentralized authority within the school district limits centralized structures and systems to support schools and provide direction for improving student achievement.

According to a review of the district's organizational chart dated 2009, those performing essential centralized functions report directly to the superintendent. These functions include finance, human resources, student support services, computer services, and school administration. The individuals responsible for these functions told the review team that they are given the responsibility and authority to carry out their duties without excessive oversight. District administrators have direct reporting lines to the superintendent, and the financial and human resources administrators also report to the school committee to provide budget-related information and legal counsel. The administrator of computer services, assisted by the educational technology facilitator located in the student support services function, reports to both the mayor and the superintendent. The superintendent could not identify any individual as the district's data leader. Central office administrators meet weekly with the superintendent on

[6] For instance, the first goal in the DIP is "To improve the academic achievement of all students." The two objectives listed under this goal are "Increase the use of building-based and district-wide data in making instructional decisions at each school" and "Develop academic opportunities based on the needs and abilities of all students."

Monday mornings for a round-table update, followed by reports from the subordinate administrators of facilities, computer support, and student support.

Recent job postings were consistent with the structure represented in the organizational chart except the posting for the director of curriculum and instruction, who reports to the administrator of student support services according to the chart. According to the job posting, the director of curriculum and instruction is responsible for directing, coordinating, and supervising the preparation, dissemination, implementation and evaluation of all instructional and special programs under the direct supervision of the superintendent. According to the current director of curriculum and instruction, the director reports to the administrator of student support services with input from the superintendent on any districtwide decisions.

School principals report directly to the superintendent, but since the present superintendent has been in the position are expected to go to district administrators first when centralized functions have an impact on the issues or decisions. According to interviewees, this process was initially difficult to implement, but is now gaining acceptance. In interviews with the review team, principals and teachers stated that the district did provide daily operational support in budgeting, purchasing, payroll, re-licensure, teacher evaluation, scheduling, reduction-in-force, maintenance, student support programs, and technology.

The superintendent's 2009-2010 principal and central office administrators meeting schedule dated August 2009 lists a two-hour monthly meeting for all administrators. Participants told the review team that discussions deal primarily with building operations, finances, and current issues and concerns. There is little discussion of teaching and learning. In addition, in a review of a sample of principals' evaluations for 2008-2009 the review team found no direct references to District or School Improvement Plans, or a unified approach to improving student learning. School committee members and district and school leaders describe the superintendent in several ways: She is open to expressing her opinions to school committee members and empowers subordinates to express what is on their minds. She cultivates meaningful and trusting professional relationships, and has a strong belief in the central role played by principals and teachers in improving student learning. It requires a lot of substantiation to change the superintendent's mind. Financial accountability and accuracy have been her focus as the result of practices before her arrival that led to a deficit and because of the poor economy.

In the judgment of the review team, the well-established school-based authority of the principals has resulted in a great deal of school autonomy in teaching and learning. This has created reluctance to use centralized structures and systems to bring about a more focused and united direction for improving student achievement. There are too few discussions between the district and school levels on prioritized issues of teaching and learning. The ambition of the Westfield Public Schools to be recognized as "a child-centered learning community focused on student achievement" has not yet been realized. Decentralized functions and systems create fragmentation and inconsistency in the district as it seeks solutions to stagnant student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district is developing a new supplementary curriculum document to expand and strengthen the curriculum and make it more complete and useful.

Through a review of curriculum guides produced by the office of curriculum and instruction, other documents, classroom observations, and interviews with leaders and teachers, the review team determined that the documented Westfield curriculum for each subject area is aligned to the state frameworks and includes some important components. Each guide contains mission and philosophy statements, goals, a scope and sequence, and the grade level expectations for student mastery of the objectives. Most also include suggested classroom strategies and activities. The curriculum documents examined by the review team are well-scaffolded to facilitate the introduction of more complex and extended coverage of topics and concepts appropriate to students' learning levels. The appendices contain rubrics, a glossary, scoring guides, summer reading lists, suggested books, and a matrix showing alignment to state standards by grade level.

The secondary curriculum guides describe the learning expectations for each course by topic. All of the guides reviewed contain high expectations for what students should know and be able to do, and provide for thorough topic coverage. All of the curriculum documents are easily accessible to teachers and other members of the school community and are posted on the district's website.

In 2009-2010 under the leadership of the kindergarten through grade 12 director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the social studies curriculum team strengthened its curriculum by adding new and needed components in a supplementary document that will be piloted by the district. The district is shifting focus to a grade-level and course-specific curriculum with pacing guides, links to the district's assessment bank (a work in progress), and designated instructional resources such as core program texts, key readings, and other instructional materials. The new curriculum format, however, does not yet contain strategies and resources to support students with diverse learning needs such as ELL students by aligning the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO) to the Massachusetts frameworks. It also lacks extensions for struggling students, including students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and gifted and talented students. The new format also does not identify appropriate program interventions, assistive technology, media, or educational software.

Without fully elaborated curriculum guides, instructional practices may vary across schools and courses. In recognition of this, the district initiated the social studies pilot. A new, more complete and aligned curriculum can help district and school leaders to monitor instruction and instructional priorities. It can also help leaders and teachers make more data-driven decisions to improve curriculum and instruction through the use of common assessments of student progress.

In the judgment of the review team, the district is headed in the right direction, although slowly, in developing a more complete and consistent curriculum for all subjects that will support leaders and teachers in improving student achievement and meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

With a district culture supporting a high degree of autonomy at the school level and limited direction from district leadership, there is inconsistency and unevenness in curriculum implementation and monitoring and in the programs and interventions used, especially in reading/language arts at the elementary level.

According to a review of the improvement plans, district and school goals are highly aligned. The broad priority to improve student achievement is clear to all stakeholders. Each principal has discretion to determine how to accomplish both the agreed-upon district priorities, and school-specific teaching and learning goals. The district's professional culture has evolved to grant school leaders almost full autonomy. Many interviewees stated that under the Education Reform Act of 1993, principals are given full authority and responsibility to improve student achievement in their schools. Westfield has a decentralized system of leadership with most expectations for practice defined at the school level. There are few explicit expectations for school leaders, and they have limited accountability to the central office.

Initiatives for improving, implementing, and monitoring the curriculum originate at both the district and school levels. Evidence from interviews indicates that there is little communication between levels. At the district level, the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is working with a kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum team in each academic area to review and revise the curriculum. The teams are composed of the appropriate grade 6 through 12 supervisor[7], teachers, a principal and/or assistant principal, and other specialists, such as Title I supervisors or coaches. Special educators and ELL teachers rarely serve on the curriculum teams.

Curriculum teams meet at least three times each year and work from a schedule to review curriculum issues, discuss and share student data and progress, and address other curriculum needs. This work partially fulfills the requirement in school committee policy AFE (also IM) for a periodic evaluation of the instructional programs. No short-term or long-term strategic plan for curriculum or instruction was described in interviews or found in documents.

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[7] The district has grade 6 through 12 supervisors for reading/language arts, mathematics, science, educational technology, unified life, athletics/physical education, Title I, and ELL. There are no longer supervisors for social studies and foreign languages, since these positions were left unfilled when the former supervisors left the district. Interviewees told the review team that the mathematics supervisor will not be replaced upon her retirement at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. This is a concern given the district's low MCAS test results in mathematics, and the lack of significant improvement in students' mathematics achievement. (Note: According to the superintendent in a communication after the review, the mathematics supervisor position has not been eliminated, but is being reformed as a department head position, a reform that she said was being made with all supervisor positions where the supervisor was retiring.)

All of the supervisors now teach part-time, making it difficult for them to supervise teachers, work with middle school teachers, and provide requested support at the elementary schools.

The director and other interviewees stated that both curriculum and instruction are standards-based, but there was no shared view in interviews of what that meant, and no written description. A review of documents, however, showed that some schools have had professional development sessions for teachers on designing standards-based lessons. The director also articulated short-term goals, including addressing the immediate need to increase student achievement in mathematics, piloting a new curriculum format by adding components to the social studies curriculum, and creating data teams in each school.

The priorities and activities of the curriculum teams are not well-known at the school and classroom levels. Interviewees were aware of the teams, but told the review team that communication was limited. They added that the director rarely came to the schools to explain or help set curricular or instructional priorities.

At the elementary level, the principals' leadership of curriculum, instruction, and assessment varies. Principals work with teachers to select core programs, materials, interventions, and instructional approaches. Most track student progress on school-based assessments and all are aware of and discuss MCAS test results with staff. Interviewees told the review team that teachers are accountable for curriculum "coverage." Teachers are expected to submit checklists providing evidence of coverage to principals who turn them over to the director of curriculum and instruction. This was the only common mechanism to guide and monitor curriculum across the elementary schools. However, in interviews, principals did not have a common understanding of district instructional priorities. When asked, one principal referred to a "uniform curriculum with expectations for mastery and objectives that come from state standards," but added that there were "no discussions across schools about what constituted effective practice." Other principals described "a clash of philosophies." One stated "we are embroiled in the reading wars here in Westfield." As a result, a number of curriculum materials and the instructional approaches used to deliver curriculum show broader than usual variation across schools. They align more with a particular principal's or school's philosophy than a common district philosophy.

While six of seven elementary schools use the Houghton-Mifflin core literacy program for kindergarten through grade 3, and the Scott-Foresman core literacy program for grade 4 and grade 5, there are multiple instructional approaches or models in the schools. These include tiered intervention strategies, the Lesley University literacy collaborative model, and Response to Intervention (RTI) with a developing protocol for "push-in/pull-out" support. Some schools rely on a basal series, while others have a balanced literacy program using trade books from leveled libraries. One school uses the Scott-Foresman literacy program uniformly in kindergarten through grade 5, and the Bay State Reading Initiative (BSRI) as the instructional model. Another uses a variety of instructional approaches for literacy instruction.

There are many literacy interventions, and the number and use varies across schools. According to the superintendent, the district puts no restrictions on which grants schools pursue. Several interviewees told the review team that the decision to purchase and use an intervention was often

governed by the terms of a grant, rather than the literacy needs of the students and the areas to strengthen in the core program.

For mathematics, three elementary schools use *Investigations in Number, Space and Data* (Addison Wesley), while four schools use another Addison Wesley mathematics program. Each program comes with its own instructional materials, resources, and activities. Some schools and teachers also develop their own teaching materials and assessments to supplement common assessments. In mathematics, however, benchmark assessments tend to be common across the schools.

Principals monitor curriculum and instruction through faculty meetings and supervisory activities such as walkthroughs and performance evaluations. Under the district's four-year evaluation cycle, professional status teachers might not be formally observed and evaluated for two or three years. Only one principal interviewed conducts formal walkthroughs with a protocol including clear, scaffolded expectations for instruction. This principal offers informal feedback to individual teachers and often addresses evidence from walkthroughs at faculty meetings. Other principals conduct walkthroughs to gain a general idea of what is occurring in classrooms but give teachers little individual feedback. Some provide general and informal feedback to teachers in passing. Some principals do not conduct walkthroughs. Again, a lack of clear district expectations, along with varied procedures at the school level, results in inconsistency in supervisory practices and effectiveness.

Interviewees told the review team that there is no clear direction or set of priorities from the district's leadership to maximize the benefits of the coaching model. Though they sometimes have support from the grant or program provider, for the most part the district leaves the schools without direction, often resulting in partially met or unmet needs. Schools might have a full-time coach for mathematics and/or literacy, or share part-time coaches with other schools. Four schools have a Title I literacy coach one-quarter-time each week. Title I coaches are generous with their time and attempt to share their expertise with non-Title I schools when possible, but these arrangements are inconsistent and undependable. Principals told the review team that each school does the best it can with the time, staff, and funds allocated. Little planning or direction comes from the district's leadership to maximize the benefit of coaches at Title I schools and across the district.

The lack of district vision and priorities results in direction-setting at the school level. Principals feel totally empowered to set the direction for their schools and faculties. With so many school-specific practices and so much autonomous decision-making, district leaders cannot rely upon shared values and energies in efforts to improve student achievement. As a result, there is little common vocabulary or design to address weaknesses and to build on each others' strengths. The district may be described as a system of schools, rather than a school system.

In the judgment of the review team, measures to monitor and improve curriculum and instruction in Westfield have been compromised by the autonomy of the principals; limited opportunities for teachers to meet with each other (see the following finding) and for teachers and principals to

meet with district leaders to exchange views about vision, priorities, and expectations; irregular and infrequent communication among district leaders, principals, and staff; inconsistent supervisory and evaluation practices; and wide variations among the schools in core programs, materials, resources, staffing, interventions, and assessments. The review team believes that these conditions have contributed significantly to the lack of meaningful improvement in student achievement in Westfield as measured by MCAS tests.

There is a lack of regularly scheduled time for teachers to meet with each other and district leaders to discuss curriculum and instruction, and to use data to guide their work.

Lack of regularly scheduled meeting times for teachers to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment also contributes to the unevenness and inconsistencies in instructional practice (see the following finding). In interviews, most teachers stated that they are reduced to discussing instruction over lunch, and in the hallways. Elementary principals told the review team that they meet irregularly with subject and grade-level teachers. Coaches in Title I schools stated that they observe, coach, and meet with teachers, but the nature and frequency of these interactions varies from school to school. According to interviewees, most meetings to discuss instruction or examine data take place as time permits, or as part of monthly faculty meetings among other topics competing for time on the agenda.

There is a lack of common planning time across the district for grade level and subject area teachers. New teachers take advantage of their mentors' experience and expertise to guide them in curriculum and instruction, but have little time to interact with other colleagues. One exception is at the middle schools, where cross-subject teaching teams meet regularly to discuss student groups and even individual students' progress. At the high school, teachers meet monthly by department in addition to monthly faculty meetings to address curricular and instructional topics. A number of high school teachers also told the review team that they find time at lunch or in passing for informal discussions of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with colleagues who teach the same course. All of the teachers interviewed agreed that they do not have enough time during the school day to plan and work collaboratively to improve practice.

Teachers have little time to meet and collaborate with colleagues. Without time to work together, and without coherent district-organized priorities communicated to and shared at the schools, there is a lack of a common base to define and promote effective teaching and improve student achievement.

Observations of classroom instruction demonstrated strength in lesson organization and management skills and weakness in instructional design and delivery, especially in practices that promote differentiation, higher order thinking, and the application of knowledge.

The review team conducted 20 to 25 minute observations in 71 classrooms. These observations included 41 lessons at the elementary level, 17 lessons at the middle school level, and 13 lessons at the high school level. In interviews and focus groups, it was clear that the district was not unified in its vision and understanding of the qualities and expectations for excellent instruction

in Westfield. Classroom observation data reinforces this notion. While classroom organizational and management skills were strong, practices and questioning leading students to higher order thinking were not solidly embedded in lessons. In addition, there was little evidence that teachers consistently adjusted their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Observers noted that in 61 of 71 classrooms, classroom climate was characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. Class time was maximized for learning in 20 of 41 elementary lessons, 7 of 17 middle school lessons, and 8 of 13 high school lessons.

When asked to define Westfield's expectations for teaching, teachers and other interviewees said that it was "standards-based," meaning that objectives must be posted and addressed in class. While curriculum documents clearly outline what students should know and be able to do, goals or objectives were firmly evident through posting or oral recitation in only 10 of 41 elementary classrooms, 5 of 17 middle school classrooms, and 7 of 13 high school classrooms.

Teachers firmly linked academic concepts to students' prior knowledge and/or experience in 29 of 71 observed classrooms. A grade 6 mathematics/geometry lesson provides a good example of linking instruction to prior knowledge. The learning objective for this lesson was to construct several polygons using construction paper. The students muffled cheers as the teacher explained the specifics of the project, which would be done after the vacation break, by linking it to previous classroom activities. Students were also aware of the project from other students who had previously completed it. The students and the teacher conducted a lively discussion regarding the specifics and educational value of constructing polygons, and defined and used new words such as "parallel" and "perpendicular." The excitement of constructing real three-dimensional geometric objects significantly motivated the students.

The district and some schools have promoted differentiation to meet students' learning needs. Instruction was linked to students' developmental levels and levels of English language proficiency in 20 of 41 elementary lessons, 11 of 17 middle school lessons, and 6 of 13 high school lessons. Content was appropriate to developmental levels and English language proficiency in 24 of 41 elementary classrooms, 10 of 17 middle school classrooms, and 6 of 13 high school classrooms. With its team teaching structure, the middle school demonstrated finer tuning of lessons to students' needs and abilities.

In previous years, professional development was offered to help teachers learn to differentiate lessons, but in interviews teachers told the review team that they were still in the early stages of understanding how to do this. Typically, multi-modal lessons in observed classrooms involved the whole class rotating through the same learning center activities, with rare differentiation based on students' individual needs. A range of instructional techniques was observed in 32 percent of all observed classrooms. More specifically, a range of techniques was evident in 9 of 41 classrooms at the elementary schools, 11 of 17 at the middle schools, and three of 13 at the high schools. In a typical lesson in several elementary classrooms, students either worked at learning centers on specific reading/language arts activities including writing, listening, and completing worksheets, or read with the teacher. Although the students were actively engaged,

and the work was appropriate to their grade level, there was no differentiation of instruction to accommodate students' learning style preferences, strengths, and needs. All of the students were cycling through the same activities at the same rate. The work was mostly at the literal level and unchallenging, such as retelling. When asked, most students were able to explain what they were doing, but few could explain why they were doing the activity.

Observers noted that teachers paced lessons to ensure that all students were engaged in 20 of 41 elementary lessons, 11 of 17 middle school lessons, and 9 of 13 high school lessons for a total of 40 of the 71 observed lessons. Rigor and depth of content throughout the presentation of the lesson was firmly in place in 30 of 71 classrooms. Observers found a good example of rigor in a grade 6 geometry class where the teacher and students discussed real-life objects as examples of geometric shapes. Mathematics vocabulary was emphasized. An example of lack of rigor came from a grade 5 classroom where students were watching a movie as an alternative way of understanding the plot of a novel. The teacher provided neither outlines nor graphic organizers for student note taking, and there were no posted discussion questions, or any other structures to scaffold the content. It was unclear whether a pre-movie discussion had taken place.

A grade 3 geometry class provided a good example of a lesson requiring students to articulate their thinking and reasoning, with the teacher asking questions that required students to analyze, synthesize, then apply new knowledge. In this class, most students worked with the teacher, while two students worked independently. The teacher conducted a lecture-demonstration on plane geometric shapes, checking periodically on the two students working independently. The teacher asked the students to explain and relate the activity to previously taught lessons. She asked questions such as, "What other polygons have we studied so far?" and "How is this like or unlike a triangle? Do they have anything in common?" This teacher varied knowledge and recall questions with questions requiring analysis, interpretation, and application.

Observers concluded that Westfield teachers need professional development to help students use higher order thinking skills. The review team found solid evidence that teachers posed questions requiring students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in only 16 of 71 observed lessons. This included 7 of 41 elementary classrooms, 6 of 17 middle school classrooms, and 3 of 13 high school classrooms. In 37 observed lessons there was partial evidence of this practice. Requiring students to articulate their thinking and reasoning occurred in only 18 of 71 lessons. This included 9 of 41 at the elementary level, 7 of 17 at the middle school, and 2 of 13 lessons at the high school level. Thirty of 71 lessons demonstrated partial evidence of this quality. Teachers offered opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content in only 19 of 71 observed lessons: 13 of 41 at the elementary schools, 6 of 17 at the middle schools, and none in the high schools.

Finally, the review team observed teachers solidly using on-the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding and inform instruction in 31 of 71 classrooms, including 15 of 41 at the elementary schools, 10 of 17 at the middle schools, and 6 of 13 at the high schools. Although interviewees informed the review team that students use an electronic clicker system in some

classrooms to demonstrate their understanding, the review team did not see this formative assessment technique in actual use.

Although many elementary classrooms were filled with posters and student work, the review team did not observe the use of technology as a tool for teaching in district classrooms. Across the district, some teachers used overhead projectors, but there was little use of more advanced technology such as Smartboards and computers, except for web-based intervention programs such as Study Island.

In interviews, teachers and leaders could not clearly explain the expectations for good teaching in Westfield. When asked about the instructional standards in the district that new teachers should know, teachers conveyed, often passionately, their personal views, including empathic understanding and meeting students' needs. Interviewees stated that while data-driven instruction was important at the district level, it was different at the school level. One principal stated that there was no certainty about instructional standards, and another added that the district hadn't discussed or defined them.

In the judgment of the review team, the lack of a clear, coherent, consistent idea of what constitutes excellent instruction in Westfield has resulted in many definitions. Good instruction can be collectively defined, modeled, and monitored. It is derived from an ongoing and deep conversation that occurs in a culture of continuous improvement. Discussions to define excellence in teaching can be a reflective and transformative process, and are needed to realize the goal of improving student achievement.

Assessment

The Westfield Public Schools use a wide array of disparate assessments that do not sufficiently inform instruction.

The district uses a number of instruments to assess student learning. Interviewees told the review team that principals and teachers at all levels routinely use assessment results to measure progress. The seven elementary schools administer a total of 10 norm-referenced assessments in addition to sets of locally developed benchmarks for mathematics and programmatic benchmarks for guided reading and writing. Among these assessments only the TEMA (Test of Early Math Ability), DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) are commonly used. TEMA is used across the district in kindergarten; DIBELS in kindergarten through grade 3; and GRADE in grades 1 through 5. The same formative assessments may be used differently in schools across the district. For example, while in most instances teachers said that they use DIBELS three times a year as a formative assessment to compose and disband reading groups, some described it as a summative assessment, and others reported using it for both formative and summative purposes.

Documents and interviews with school staff showed that there is little consistency in the use of other assessments across district schools. Guided reading benchmarks and writing benchmark

samples are used in four elementary schools. Even among the schools using benchmark assessments, there is variability in the grade levels at which they are administered. The Schlagal Developmental Spelling Test and the Slosson Oral Reading Test are administered at one school; DIBELS assessment is extended through grade 5 in three schools. Although there is some overlap, most of these assessment programs are individual school-based initiatives. According to documents and interviews with school staff, there is also variability in the assessments used in Title I schools. Principals' responsibility and authority to determine the assessments used in their schools extend to provisions for the Title I program.

During their site visit the team found no consistent assessment in reading after grade 5 in the district. The South Middle School uses the GRADE through grade 8. The North Middle School had no assessment in reading and language arts. At the time of the site visit the review team heard from an administrator of plans to begin administering the GRADE at the North Middle School in 2010-2011; however, the plans seemed to be dependent upon the availability of funding.

Without consistency, the district is unable to accurately assess student progress in reading and language arts. The data collected through a variety of assessments is incomplete, and there are differences in the types of data available to teachers and leaders. Interviews with administrators and district documents revealed that except for results of the MCAS tests, student achievement data is not aggregated for the entire district or disaggregated by school or subgroup. The data is highly fragmented and insufficient to inform instruction.

Although Westfield's performance in mathematics lags behind its performance in ELA, the review team learned from district documents and interviews with administrators that the district has and administers far fewer assessments in mathematics than in ELA. At the elementary level the only mathematics assessment used consistently across the district is the TEMA. The GMADE (Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation), while widely used, is not universal, and it is administered at various grade levels at different schools. According to interviews with school leaders, the two middle schools developed local benchmarks in mathematics independently of each other. The benchmarks for both schools were developed by teachers based upon the state frameworks and the curriculum objectives. There is no reliability data for either set of benchmarks. There is also no collaboration between the two schools in using them. Teachers meet in their own buildings to discuss student performance, but there is neither the inclination, nor time set aside for teachers from the two schools to meet. Although the staff in each school monitors student progress against the benchmarks several times a year, the data is inconsistent. Teachers at North Middle School have multiple forms of the benchmarks, while teachers at South Middle School have one finite set. This disparity invalidates a comparison of the results for the two schools and makes it impossible to assess student performance across the district. There is little assessment of proficiency in mathematics in the district, and the team saw and heard no evidence that data is used to inform instruction.

According to interviews with school and district administrators, assessment at the high school consists of departmental mid-year and final examinations. The results are analyzed routinely

within departments. In many cases, this analysis has resulted in adding a course with less challenge and lower expectations for struggling students. Assessment at the vocational high school is a blend of traditional and authentic assessments.

Many of the assessments currently in use were introduced recently and are at the foundational stage. Although there are two goals in the District Improvement Plan that address assessment, review of documents showed that there is no district level policy or protocol on the types and purposes of assessment. According to district and school leaders, many principals have not determined and communicated the uses of data, and most teachers' understanding of data is at an introductory level. Teachers vary in their ability to use the data to improve instruction in order to increase student achievement. Although teachers analyze student achievement data, there is little emphasis on the instructional implications. Interviewees told the review team that there are plans for each school to have a data team, but principals and teachers knew little about this when asked in interviews. According to interviews as well as documents, there is currently no professional development strand to equip teachers with a high level of expertise in using data consistently to improve student achievement.

Classroom instruction is characterized by teachers' frequent checking for understanding. Seventy-nine percent of classroom visits showed partial or solid evidence of teachers checking for understanding. There are rubrics in the curriculum, but use of them is inconsistent across the district. Other assessments are mainly traditional. There is little authentic assessment. The trend toward traditional classroom assessment is pronounced at the middle and high schools.

Administrators and teachers expressed frustration that despite the use of multiple assessments of student learning in the district, they have been unable to increase student achievement significantly. In the judgment of the review team, the current assessment program in Westfield is too inconsistent and incomplete to be used effectively to inform instruction. Because the district lacks protocols and policies on assessment, principals work in isolation to implement assessment strategies in their schools to identify and meet students' needs. Focused at the school level, these initiatives are fragmented, lack a cohesive and common philosophical and pedagogical approach, and have only limited value in improving student achievement

Human Resources and Professional Development

The current teacher evaluation system has a four-year instead of the required two-year cycle for professional status teachers; also, evaluations are not fulfilling their function of monitoring and improving teachers' and administrators' practice.

Of all the management tools available that cross organizational lines and school boundaries, the Unit A teacher evaluation system is the most obvious to use to identify effective teaching across the district. In reality, however, an examination of the official records by the review team revealed a disjointed four-year evaluation system nearly devoid of deep conversation about effective teaching and its impact on learning. This occurs despite school and district efforts to

benchmark and identify the impact of instruction on learning. In addition, as currently configured, the Unit A four-year evaluation cycle is not in compliance with 603 CMR 35.06(1) for professional status teachers.

The Westfield Unit A contract describes the process for evaluating all teachers, both with and without professional status, aligns with state requirements for annual evaluation of teachers without professional status, and references the district's Principles and Descriptors of Effective Teaching. The district's evaluation process for professional status teachers, however, is not compliant with state regulations—or school committee policies (see AFC, AFE (also IM), and GCN)—because it uses a four-year rather than a two-year cycle.

The four-year cycle provides one set of observations and an evaluation by a supervisor during the first year, and no formal required observation for the next three years. During each of the three remaining years, the professional status teacher selects a professional development activity from a list of possible activities. The list of activities changes annually. Once the teacher has selected an activity, the teacher's supervisor must approve it by endorsing the form. For years two and three, the teacher must describe, and the supervisor must substantiate how the selected activity will have an impact on student learning. For year four, there is no form required.

As part of its examination of human resource functions, the review team read 10 percent (or 57) of all teacher evaluation files, selected according to a table of random numbers. Of these, 30 percent contained written data, usually a classroom observation, but often a summary of the teacher's contributions to the school and the teacher's students. None contained any suggestions for improved practice or recommendations for professional development that might improve student learning. All contained some reference to the titles of the seven components in the Unit A procedure, but none contained any rating of teaching. An analysis of these year one evaluations suggests that the process does not differentiate in terms of teachers' relative instructional skills and abilities. Year two and year three evaluation data contained descriptions of various professional development activities unrelated to the Unit A procedure. Although the required forms had a section to elicit from the teacher how the selected professional development activity would have an impact on student achievement, the entries were not written as observable or measurable outcomes, and were often stated as "helping me become a better teacher." No data about student learning outcomes were found in any of the evaluation documents. The year four evaluation procedure required no written forms, providing little basis for ensuring teacher growth and accountability.

At the time of the site visit, only 80 percent of required teacher evaluations from the 2008-2009 school year had been received by the human resource office, narrowing the district's perspective on how well teachers are performing throughout the district. No comprehensive central office review of completed evaluation forms was conducted according to district records, and no evaluations were returned to the evaluators for clarification of content. None of the evaluations reviewed contained references to a previous evaluation.

The review team examined all administrator evaluations for the 2008-2009 school year. These evaluations revealed close working relationships among the superintendent, central office leaders and principals. Each evaluation contained goals and included documentation from three required meetings yearly. The evaluations focused on district operations and school-specific goals and contained a written assessment of overall performance. The evaluations were informative, but not instructive as to how to improve performance. The Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership (from 603 CMR 35.00) were not included in any of the evaluations examined by the review team.

The review of a sample of principals' evaluations for 2008-2009 the review team found no direct references to District or School Improvement Plans, or a unified approach to improving student learning. However, the evaluation documentation substantiated meaningful discussions of professional and personal goals, which are discussed and set in September/October, reviewed in January/March, and assessed in a summative evaluation in May/June. The preponderance of ratings on the six Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership (603 CMR 35.00) were "commendable," or "meets professional standards." No principals received "recommended for professional growth" or "unsatisfactory" on any measure. The process is informative, but lacks an instructive or developmental aspect. Few evaluations referred to student performance. Assistant principals were evaluated by their principals with no ratings.

The review team found that reports, summaries, and schedules prepared and controlled by the human resource staff were comprehensive and detailed. A new schedule to track evaluation dates, a document that identifies missing evaluations, and a position-control schedule were in use. In addition, despite a large reduction-in-force in 2008-2009, no grievances were filed.

In the judgment of the review team, the district's four-year evaluation process for experienced teachers does not yield important information about the effectiveness of instruction in improving student learning. Not only is it too long a cycle: the evaluations reviewed did not contain any rating of teaching, suggestions for improving practice, or recommendations for professional development, and they did not refer to data on student learning outcomes. Thus they are not being used to monitor the effect of instruction on student learning and improve the way teachers plan and deliver instruction, and are not contributing to the district's ability to support organizational learning and individual teacher growth.

In addition, evaluations for central office administrators and principals were informative, but did not contain suggestions for improving administrative practice or recommendations for professional development and were not aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. This means that evaluations are not being used to enhance administrators' competencies, to assist and support them, or to hold them accountable for student achievement.

The district's professional development program is fragmented, with conflicting priorities vying for limited funds, and is mostly not aligned with district priorities or schools' instructional efforts.

As stated in the Leadership and Governance findings earlier in this report, the district has competing organizational structures. Some functions are centralized, while others are distributed to the schools. When decisions are made about the use of the district's professional development funds, which are limited, there are conflicts because the district, schools, and teachers' union all have their own priorities as to how they should be spent and all have a voice in the decision.

There is a $300,000 line item for professional development in the school budget, allocated by a professional development committee that meets 12 times each year to review and approve requests. There are comprehensive records on file about the work of this committee. The committee established criteria for reviewing requests for funds based on perceived needs and the Unit A contract. According to the 2008-2009 Staff Development Handbook, improving student academic achievement is the first priority. A substantial number of workshops are offered at various sites during the school year and summer.

Additional teacher training needs have arisen because of the recent school closings and redistricting. For example, some schools needed to orient teachers transferring from closed schools to their grade level or departmental teams and instructional programs. Supervisors rely on professional development funds for these training needs, but these requests from across the district compete with each other and with the requests from teachers seeking professional development for re-certification, a priority of the teachers' union. In interviews, the team heard from union leaders that the $300,000 in professional development funds should be prioritized for re-certification needs. There are other sources of professional development including grants from federal programs, such as Title I, but these funds are not available to all district schools.

The district's professional development committee maintains a list of approved and not-approved requests for funds. Before this committee was formed, all of the funds were encumbered by late September, leaving none to support emerging training needs. Now the funds are controlled centrally according to priorities established by the professional development committee, but the crosscurrents of district, school, and individual teacher needs create conflict.

Many principals stated that new training needs often emerge during the school year, and after student achievement benchmarks are set. However, their requests for additional professional development compete with individual teachers' requests for professional development for re-certification or advancement on the salary scale. In interviews, the review team heard repeated complaints that the district was supporting advancement on the salary scale through its professional development funds at the cost of depriving school faculties and principals of essential professional development. While supporting individual teachers' growth and development is appropriate, according to interviewees there is an imbalance in the allocation of funds.

No documents examined by the review team measured the effects of professional development on student learning, although the Unit A evaluation handbook requires this assessment in years two and three of the professional status teacher evaluation cycle. One file contained an excellent example of how professional development funds can lead to improved student achievement. A teacher requested training on a new technology related to his teaching assignment, and his written reflection on the effects of the training was enthusiastic.

An examination by the review team of the professional development activities in district records showed no workshops on assessment techniques and models or tests and measurement theory, although in interviews with the review team, principals described these as priorities. Interviewees told the review team that professional development workshops are evaluated by the participants on content and appropriateness. There is no system to help teachers translate professional development learning into classroom practice. A review of approved professional development activities showed that they included presentations by consultants and partial tuition reimbursements for graduate level courses. In one instance a consultant was paid over $6,000 to provide training on standards-based instruction for the faculty of one elementary school. Several principals stated that the district's efforts to categorize professional development were documented, but professional development had little relevance to the needs of classroom teachers.

In addition to the professional development previously described, there are at least two days for trainings related to district and school level priorities. In addition, the human resources staff has training on legal and reporting issues.

Other professional development opportunities are available to teachers through a consortium with Westfield State College, including the Teachers on Assignment and Student Teachers programs. While these are popular and well-integrated programs, interviewees were unclear about how they contribute to student achievement, although individual teachers celebrated the extra hands and assistance from having visiting teachers or student teachers in the classroom.

The district director of curriculum and instruction has the responsibility for overseeing professional development, and according to interviews with administrators, oversight is achieved through a combination of supervisors as well as through school-based or Title I programs such as the Literacy Collaborative at the Abner Gibbs School and the Bay State Reading Initiative at the Highland School.

The district's professional development effort, as well as being a subject of conflict, is mostly not aligned with district priorities or schools' instructional efforts. Professional development can serve as one part of an integrated system intended to surface and develop effective teaching models. But in Westfield, professional development is not sufficiently integrated with monitoring and modification of teaching practice and with student learning. In the judgment of the review team, the lack of integration reduces opportunities to improve practice and accelerate student achievement. It also reduces opportunities to catalogue examples of successful teaching

for use in mentoring and in building an exemplary teaching community across schools and academic disciplines.

Student Support

The district is creative and proactive in securing grant funds for student support services.

There are many programs available for student support within the Westfield Public Schools. Examination of the list of grants and awards received by the district revealed that it actively, vigorously and successfully pursues grants from state and federal sources and uses them to fund programs to assist students in need.

Interviews with administrators and teachers, as well as curriculum documents from all of the schools indicated that students at five Title I elementary schools have access to Fast Math, Reading Recovery, Reading First and Quick Read. There are active Response to Intervention three-tier intervention models at Franklin Avenue, Abner Gibbs, and Highland elementary schools. Three-tier intervention models are just beginning at Paper Mill and Southampton Road elementary schools. South Middle School benefits from remedial mathematics services. Franklin Avenue offers mathematics instruction before school, and South Middle, Paper Mill, and Highland have extended day programs. In the summer of 2009, using Title I funds, extended-year programs were offered for Title I elementary and middle school students, as well as a freshman transition program for 45 students at Westfield Vocational-Technical High School. Programs for special education students and ELL students and a program funded by the MCAS grant were also provided during that summer.

Despite the extensive range of programs at some schools, many programs have been lost due to changes in the funding stream. According to administrators, when Transitional Bilingual Education became Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) in 2002 because of a change in the law, pressure increased to move students through an instructional program using SEI teaching strategies. Reading Recovery services were reduced at all levels, both in staff support and number of students served. Four Reading First schools that each had a coach now share one coach among them. There are no transitional alternative programs at the high school level. One administrator stated, "[A] lot of things are grant-funded, and those are getting to be less common."

Administrators also reported that in addition to the grant-funded support programs, there is an active parent volunteer program. Although the program is not exactly the same at all schools, it provides services such as parent reading tutors, mathematics support, homework clubs, and fund raising for all schools. There is also a program providing small grants in the $200 range to support individual teachers' classroom initiatives. The Renaissance Program at Westfield High School provides incentives and rewards to students for improved attendance, attaining honor roll status, or other socially responsible behaviors. These incentives are funded by contributions from public-spirited community members, and by school-supported sources.

An impressive range of student support programs provides assistance to students in need without depleting the diminishing district resources. According to job descriptions provided by the district as well as interviews with district finance personnel a grant coordinator in the district office serves as an identified monitor and reporter for the programs, promotes timely application for grants, and coordinates access to requests for proposals. In many schools, teachers volunteer as well, providing before school, lunchtime, and after-school tutoring and support for individual students.

Grant-funded support programs allow many students to maintain and improve their academic skills, and are critical to improved achievement for many students. As district financial resources diminish, the creativity in securing funding for such programs cannot be undervalued.

The district offers few support programs that are districtwide and available to all students; the nature and availability of support programs are often determined by the grants that fund them.

The Westfield Public Schools have Title I services at seven district schools and one private school site. The Abner Gibbs, Franklin Avenue, and Highland elementary schools, the South Middle School, and Westfield Vocational-Technical High School offer schoolwide Title I programs, with services available to all students. The district is amenable to enrolling students from other schools who are in need of support as space becomes available. This occurs regardless of whether the student is in the target population for the grant program. The Paper Mill and Southampton Road elementary schools and the non-public Saint Mary's elementary school receive Title I funding for non-schoolwide programs. In these schools, student services are available to many students. According to the ESE website, "Eligible participants in Targeted Assistance schools are those identified as failing, or most at-risk of failing to meet the State's challenging achievement standards on the basis of multiple, educationally related objective criteria established by the district and supplemented by the school. When resources are insufficient to serve all eligible students, they are rank-ordered and served on the basis of 'most in need.'"

As reported by administrators and teachers who provide student support across the district, locally funded support programs available to all students are less common. All schools have the services of a school nurse. All levels have access to school adjustment counselors, and there are guidance counselors in all secondary schools. Counselors are responsible for monitoring of students on individual student success plans (ISSPs). The Westfield Public Schools have maintained counseling services in the face of increasing budget pressure.

Despite these efforts, interviews with administrators and review of student handbooks from all of the schools revealed that the district does not have a districtwide approach to promoting improved student attendance. Although Westfield matched the statewide attendance rate in 2008-2009, there is a substantial rate of chronic absenteeism, especially in grades 10 through 12. Chronic absenteeism is defined by ESE as absence, excused or unexcused, for more than 10 percent of a student's days in membership, or, for a 180-day school year, for more than 18 days.

While chronic absenteeism was at 13.5 percent for the district in 2009, it reached 23.5 percent in grade 10, 28.0 percent in grade 11 and 25.6 percent in grade 12. This means that after freshman year, approximately one in four high school students was chronically absent. In both high school student handbooks, the district describes a loss of credit policy that is fairly consistent. The Westfield High School student handbook states that "Students who have undocumented absences in excess of 10 percent of membership days may be subject to denial of course credit or promotion." Administrators reported that at least at Westfield High School, a change in the way student attendance is monitored may lead to improved student attendance during the 2010 -2011 school year.

In both high schools, according both to the student handbooks and interviews with administrators, individual cases of excessive student absenteeism are referred to the student assistance team for individual action, if appropriate, and credit may be denied for undocumented class absences in excess of the 10 percent limit. In either case, however, students may exceed the limit in the ESE definition of chronic absenteeism without incurring district action.

According both to district and school administrators in interviews, all of the schools have a student assistance team to address the needs of at-risk students. The teams usually consist of the principal, assistant principal, adjustment counselor, guidance counselor, and teachers. Team composition varies by school, and according to the nature and purpose of the meeting. Student assistance teams use resources described in the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), and may refer students for an evaluation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or the special education law. The three-tiered intervention system is available at some, but not all schools. At Title I schools this system serves as a response to intervention (RTI), as required by federal law. According to administrators, the Title I schools implement the RTI initiative more effectively than the non-Title I schools because of the increased availability of resources to use at tiers 2 and 3, and the additional support rendered by coaches. Generally, tier 1 is the standard curriculum, tier 2 usually consists of interventions such as Reading Recovery, and tier 3 may involve specially designed instruction through special education or other school-specific services.

The opportunity to match an individual student's instructional needs to an appropriate intervention is limited in the district unless the intervention is supported by external funding and available in the school that student attends. There are few locally funded student support programs available to all students in all schools, as reported by administrators and teachers in different interviews. When grants underwriting support programs end, the program often ends as the result of lack of alternative or local support. The MCAS after-school tutoring at the high school ended because of the loss of grant funds to pay staff to provide the semester-long courses in mathematics and ELA, and also because of cutbacks in district teaching staff. These courses were replaced by a seven-week after-school support activity in mathematics, science, and ELA funded by an Academic Support grant from ESE. Other MCAS support is provided through teacher and student volunteers after school, as time permits.

The district has a wide range of student support programs but lacks a unified evaluation process to determine the types and levels of interventions needed to improve student achievement or to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular intervention strategy or activity. The nature and availability of support programs are often determined by the grants that fund them, with the result that support programs are not always targeted to the needs of the population.

Lack of a focused and planned comprehensive program of student support results in inconsistent provision of levels and types of assistance to students in need. Such inconsistency in turn may lead to inconsistent improvement in student achievement across the district.

Financial and Asset Management

The review team investigated the district's financial and asset management without the benefit of interviews with the district's chief financial officer, who was unavailable at the time of the site visit. The team interviewed other district staff with financial management responsibilities including the superintendent, the assistant for business and transportation, and several town officials. The team also examined financial records and data to arrive at the following findings and the associated recommendations included later in the report.

Insufficient local, state, and federal funds have decreased the quality of educational opportunities and services for students over the past several years.

According to interviews with the superintendent and school committee members, soon after her appointment in 2007, it became clear that there was a budget deficit in excess of $950,000.00 for fiscal year 2008. This was followed by a $500,000.00 surplus after fiscal year 2009, her first budget year as superintendent. The surplus resulted from aggressive budget management after a culture of spending before she became superintendent. Consultants were hired to assist in the preparation of the fiscal year 2009 budget. The superintendent revised the budget process by implementing a budget manual that not only includes financial data, but also school profiles, demographics, school choice data, student performance, facility data, special education, staffing, grants, maintenance, capital expenses and non-personnel budget expenses, and information from all funding sources. The new procedure encourages collaboration and transparency. It also encourages input from various stakeholders, although the superintendent makes the final recommendations to the school committee.

The superintendent described the budget process to the review team. The process commences with the school committee's approval of a budget calendar. Each principal completes a school-based budget, and then meets with the superintendent and district leaders. Each school sets goals with objectives to improve student achievement. These goals align to the School Improvement Plan for each school. The superintendent and the district leadership team then develop the final budget for submission to the school committee. As a result of budget constraints, principals were only allowed a level-service budget for fiscal year 2009. According to the superintendent, there is no formal evaluation of programs for cost effectiveness during the budget process. The

superintendent presents a state-of-the-schools report at a public budget hearing in addition to the proposed budget. The principals are made aware of the superintendent's budget recommendation for each school at the school committee presentation. The recommended budget is then sent to the finance subcommittee for further review. The mayor, who is chairman of school committee, recommends the appropriation for the school system. The chief financial officer (CFO) makes monthly line item financial reports to the school committee to assure that spending is within limits. The per-pupil-cost for fiscal year 2009 was $12,530 compared to a state average of $13,055; it was in the same range as cities and towns with similar demographics.

The mayor of Westfield is responsible for the total city budget and allocates funds for the school system based on state and federal aid, local tax revenue, and other sources. According to an administrator, the vocational school receives substantial donations as a result of partnerships with area businesses. According to a city official, the city is at its levy limit, which restricts the amount that can be raised by taxation. School committee members, the superintendent, and teachers all told the review team that the city has been supportive of the school system, and the new mayor who took office in January 2010 has indicated his support, also. At the time of the site visit he had requested a level-funded school budget, exclusive of salary increases, for fiscal year 2011 as part of the city's budget.

According to city officials education, not including indirect charges, accounts for 50.4 percent of the city's budget. In fiscal year 2010, the district exceeded required Net School Spending (NSS) by approximately $3.5 million. However, Chapter 70 state aid for fiscal year 2009 was reduced by $2,377,830, or 7.2 percent, affecting the delivery of educational services and staffing levels.

During the past three years, the district eliminated 48 positions, most of which were teaching positions. In some cases the positions of retiring staff were left vacant. These reductions have resulted in an increase in student-teacher ratios, a decrease in support programs, and an elimination of supervisory positions. In the judgment of the review team, it will be a challenge to meet AYP performance requirements in the future with the reduction of financial support and staffing.

The school district does not have a written agreement with the city regarding expenditures provided by the city in support of the school system, including indirect charges.

In interviews, the city auditor and the financial accountant told the review team that there is no written agreement between the schools and the city defining how indirect costs will be managed. The treasurer provides the information regarding indirect charges for the End-of-Year Report (EYR) at the written request of the CFO. The fiscal year 2009 EYR has the city providing $17,747,247 of expenditures in support of the schools, including indirect charges to the school district. This is a 9.87 percent increase from the previous year. Health insurance for active members went from $5.4 million to $7.1 million or a 31.2 percent increase. Health insurance for retired school employees was $3 million. Tuition to charter schools increased from $184,275 to $263,291. The review team was unable to determine if the school department financial office verified the accuracy of these expenditures. The review team found that the district and city do

not have a written agreement on indirect costs. The 2006 report from the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) also noted that there was no signed agreement. A written agreement is, however, recommended. The lack of oversight by the school department of indirect costs may have the effect of showing more costs classified as school costs than is required, thus affecting the calculation of actual net school spending and of the district's per-pupil expenditures.

Although the district shares the MUNIS financial accounting system with the city, promoting shared communication and controls, some additional economies and good practices might be implemented to increase efficiency and lower costs.

The financial office had several business managers and consultants over the last few years before the arrival of the new superintendent, who was confronted with a $950,000 deficit. This deficit was attributed by interviewees to past practices and business operations. The superintendent appointed an interim business manager, followed by the hiring of a new CFO in fiscal year 2008. Financial reports for state and federal grants are prepared by a grants manager. The review team was not able to review the revolving and student activity accounts, including audits of these accounts and the End-of-Year Report.

The school system and the city use the MUNIS system as the financial accounting system. There is an encumbrance system for the supplies and materials portion of the budget, but salaries and other entries are not encumbered. The failure to monitor salary expenditures on a real-time basis may result in overspending. Each school secretary monitors expenditures other than salaries. School committee policy designates the superintendent as the purchasing agent and requires that he or she sign all purchases. The CFO's job description, however, lists the CFO as the purchasing agent. Salary information including attendance, hour sheets, and invoices are submitted to the city auditor's office for processing. Each entity is maintaining the same information on salaries, attendance, and invoices. The assistant auditor stated that the auditor's office provides oversight of school financial activities. According to the assistant auditor, the most recent city audit did not have any exception related to the school financial system.

The review team observed that members of the school committee were required to sign twenty-two separate warrant batches due to distribution of the work load in the auditor's office. The superintendent stated that this practice is currently being reviewed in order to improve efficiency.

Each school maintains an inventory of its assets. There is no districtwide computerized inventory and control of assets.

Interviewees believed that the CFO is overburdened due to the volume of work, additional mandates from state and federal requirements, and the lack of a full-time assistant financial administrator to help promote efficiency and to monitor budget projections and encumbrances in a more timely manner.

Although the review team found sound management and control of school finances there appear to be some additional efficiencies possible. Without an opportunity to interview the CFO, the

review team cannot make a firm judgment, but such efficiencies could streamline operations and provide small economies.

ELL Findings

Leadership and Governance

The ELL department has created a highly effective educational program that supports the learning and achievement of ELL students.

The Westfield ELL department offers programs and services through a network of schools. At the elementary level, all ELL students are assigned to the appropriate grade level in one of the sheltered English immersion (SEI) classes at the Highland Elementary School. The middle school program is located at South Middle School. ELL teachers and SEI staff administer English language proficiency assessments and provide instructional support to ELL students in grades 9 through 12 at both of the district's high schools. Students who demonstrate English language proficiency at registration and do not require services are enrolled in the appropriate neighborhood school.

The review team found that this system effectively supports the district's teachers and students. In interviews with the review team, administrators, teachers, parents, and students expressed a high level of confidence in district ELL programs and services. They clearly believe that Westfield supports and educates its ELL students well.

According to interviews and observations, the ELL coordinator provides effective leadership and has developed a highly effective team of teachers within the ELL department. ELL department teachers consult and collaborate with content coaches and regular and special education teachers in order to provide appropriate services to ELL students. ELL students are partially integrated into regular education classes. ELL students who exit the program are monitored for two years. Some monitored students are eligible to receive continuing ELL services.

District administrators and principals stated in interviews that the ELL coordinator convenes interdepartmental meetings to develop effective educational plans for ELL students. In a focus group, parents told the review team that the ELL personnel ensure that all of the appropriate staff attend meetings concerning children entitled to both special education and ELL services.

According to interviewees, conversations in Westfield about ELL students focus on teaching and learning rather than solely on compliance and procedures. District and school administrators stated that the ELL coordinator has developed a reputation for facilitating and conducting useful meetings that target improved student learning and achievement.

Professional development in effective ELL learning strategies and SEI category training has been systematically provided for content coaches, ELL department teachers, regular education teachers, and special education teachers. As described later in the Human Resources and Professional Development section of this report, the ELL coordinator has formed partnerships with Elms College and Westfield State College to provide category training and courses leading to ESL certification for Westfield teachers. These partnerships also enhance teacher recruitment, ensuring that the ELL program is staffed by highly trained and qualified teachers.

In the judgment of the review team, the ELL department has been creative and proactive in leveraging resources to support students in a difficult economy. Interviewees told the review team that the district decision to create a kindergarten through grade 12 strand within a network of schools to support the learning and achievement of ELL students ensures that students are effectively placed and consistently monitored. In addition, given the training and competency of the teachers in the four programs, students receive high quality instruction, and the programs and services are designed and modified to meet their needs. The ELL department has also developed a clear set of policies and procedures for the registration, placement, monitoring, and exiting of ELL students. Focusing the ELL program at four school sites ensures that students and parents receive a high level of services and makes it possible for the ELL coordinator to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

The larger educational system demonstrates certain weaknesses in meeting some of the academic and development needs of formerly limited English proficient (FLEP) students.

Through focus groups with parents and students the review team determined that the ELL department has developed a clear vision and set of practices to ensure that ELL students have the support to develop and achieve at high levels; however, focus groups also revealed that the district has limited capacity to provide appropriate remedial and special education services for students who have exited the ELL program.

The district has invested time and resources to develop a kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum, but this curriculum has not been aligned with the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO). As a result, teachers may not consistently use instructional approaches that support both the language and content development of ELL students. Classroom observations revealed that teachers in mainstream classrooms rarely post objectives related to language growth, although they usually provide scaffolding to support language and content development. In a focus group, parents described a lack of urgency in the schools to provide the appropriate placement and educational program for their children who require both ELL and special education services.

District administrators and ELL department staff told the review team that budget reductions have decreased the availability of relevant and timely professional development for both ELL and other classroom teachers on strategies and techniques for supporting ELL students. While acknowledging the problems presented by a limited budget, ELL staff continue to focus their energies and efforts on meeting the needs of students as best they can.

The district has not fully included representatives from the ELL department in districtwide conversations on planning, curriculum revision, and effective teaching and learning practices. However, the ELL department is represented on some, but not all, curriculum teams led by the director of curriculum and instruction. The District Improvement Plan does not contain any goals or actions specifically related to improving educational services for ELL students. In the broader discussions to develop the District Improvement Plan, ELL staff were placed on a parent/community outreach committee and were not involved in conversations about curriculum,

instruction, and assessment. This lack of full and appropriate representation at the district level has meant that the district is limited in its understanding of the needs of ELL students as it deliberates on and plans curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices and policies. As a result, new provisions for ELL students are unlikely to be considered and included in developing plans. In addition, ELL staff have limited opportunities to be fully informed about the district's evolving planning and decision-making. Nevertheless, the ELL department and its leadership were instrumental in advocating for and securing category training for regular classroom teachers to support ELL and FLEP students.

The ELL department has created a highly developed system based largely on the expertise and initiative of its staff. The ELL department operates nearly autonomously, and ELL staff have limited time and opportunity to collaborate with other educators in the district beyond the four school program sites. Under these conditions, it is difficult for ELL staff to monitor the progress of ELL students who have exited the program and to collaborate with and support their regular and special education teachers. Interviewees told the review team that in several instances, the ELL department advocated for retaining students eligible to exit the program when it was evident that they could not receive appropriate support outside of it.

In the review team's judgment, although the ELL program has made important and positive strides in developing ELL students and teachers, more opportunities for collaboration with regular and special education outside of the four schools could benefit many more district leaders and teachers, and ultimately their students, given the nature of sheltered immersion programs and instruction.

Curriculum and Instruction

Although the district uses the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO) to guide instruction for ELL students, and the ELL department has developed a kindergarten through grade 8 ESL curriculum, district curriculum maps do not align the Massachusetts frameworks to the ELPBO.

According to interviews with district and school ELL department staff and a review of documents, the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO) guides the instruction of all ELL students, and serves as the foundation for language objectives. ESL and SEI teachers confirmed this expectation by stating that they align their daily lessons to language objectives. Language objectives were posted in all ESL and SEI classrooms observed by the review team. For example, in one ESL class, the posted language objective was "Write a personal interpretation of a literary text." In this lesson, students analyzed four novels about addiction, and discussed their responses to a series of comprehension questions on this theme.

The department has drafted an ESL curriculum that is aligned to the ELPBO. The draft kindergarten through grade 8 ESL curriculum outlines objectives for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The objectives are organized according to grade levels (kindergarten through

grade 2, grades 3 through 4, grade 5, grades 6 through 8, and grades 9 through 12) and levels of English language proficiency (beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, and transitioning). For example, creating a story in drawing/picture form is a writing objective for grade 3 and 4 students at the beginning level of English language proficiency. Evaluating a work of fiction that is read or heard using the elements of plot, character and setting is a reading objective for intermediate ELL students in grades 6 through 8.

Although the district's ESL curriculum is still in draft form, classroom observations indicated that instruction by ELL department teachers at the South Middle School is intended to provide ELL students opportunities to read, write, speak and listen to English based on their levels of English language proficiency. When interviewed, teachers described how they used the ELPBO to plan ESL and sheltered content instruction. It was evident to the review team that they based instruction on the English language proficiency benchmarks.

According to documentation, the district intends to use the ELPBO in conjunction with the district curriculum. As stated in the Level 3 curriculum and instruction section of this report, curriculum development in Westfield is in transition. District administrators stated that the district has not yet developed a bridge document to integrate the general education and ESL curricula.

Adherence to the ELPBO and the draft ESL curriculum have made a positive impact on language and content learning for ELL students in ESL and sheltered content classrooms. However, the absence of an integrated districtwide curriculum addressing the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and the ELPBO limits the degree to which more proficient ELL students transitioning to mainstream classrooms will continue to receive instruction that supports the development of their academic skills and English language proficiency.

The district's ELL department reinforces and monitors the use of effective language acquisition and content instructional practices that support ELL students in ESL and sheltered content classrooms. There is evidence that teachers in mainstream classrooms have knowledge of effective instructional strategies for ELL students.

The district's ELL department has clear expectations for effective language and sheltered content instruction in South Middle School's ESL and SEI classrooms. The ELL department communicates, reinforces and monitors these expectations through faculty meetings and professional development facilitated by the district's ELL supervisor and walkthroughs in ESL and sheltered content classrooms. The district's efforts to share and reinforce effective ELL practices in mainstream classrooms are limited by the infrequency of coordination meetings between the ELL department and faculty members in mainstream classes. However, there was evidence in the review team's interviews and observations that mainstream teachers are aware of and attempt to use effective instructional strategies for the ELL students. In addition, district and school staff credit the South Middle School principal for assigning a vice principal to oversee ELL instruction and support, and establishing a school climate where ELL students "feel like they are a part of the school."

The review team found evidence of presentation of content appropriate to students' developmental and English language proficiency levels in the six ELL department classes observed at South Middle School. For example, in one content support classroom (an additional period of ESL for students at earlier stages of English language proficiency), students used a concept map they had developed as a class to draft essays about different aspects of their school. In an advanced ESL class, students analyzed, compared, and contrasted characters from four novels about addiction, including two selected because their grade 7 peers were reading them in mainstream classes. The review team observed 9 classrooms in all and found solid evidence of instruction appropriate to students' developmental and English language proficiency levels in 4 of the classrooms visited, and partial evidence in 5 classrooms.

The review team also observed use of supplemental materials to provide students with context for the concepts introduced, as well as opportunities to access and engage with the material. For example, in a social studies lesson on the South American economies and gross national products, the teacher used globes, maps, and strawberries from Chile to provide context as students developed a business plan. The review team found solid evidence that supplemental materials were appropriately aligned to students' developmental and English language proficiency levels in 6 of the 9 classrooms visited, and partial evidence in 3 classrooms. Additionally, across ESL and sheltered content lessons, the review team observed frequent opportunities for discussion and interaction, either through individual conversations with the teacher or with peers.

Meetings and professional development facilitated by the district's ELL coordinator are used to reinforce instructional expectations. Interviewees stated that the entire kindergarten through grade 12 ELL department meets throughout the school year. For example, six meetings were held in 2008-2009. These meetings provide an opportunity to reinforce effective instruction for ELL students. An ELL department staff member stated that meetings typically focus on components of sheltered English instruction as well as best practices for supporting content and language learning, such as the integration of skills and collaborative learning. According to a South Middle School administrator, the ELL coordinator's presentations to South Middle School faculty focus on pedagogy and instruction rather than administrative details.

The ELL department also participates in staff meetings at South Middle School and shares information relating to ELL students, including MEPA performance levels and the definitions of student performance at each level. In interviews, district and school staff told the review team about other methods of disseminating information on effective language acquisition and content instructional practices to all faculty members at South Middle School, including facilitating access to sheltered content for all South Middle School teachers, and instructional support provided through the literacy and mathematics coaches who are fully trained in all four SEI categories.

The implementation of instructional strategies in South Middle School ELL and sheltered content classes is periodically monitored through the use of an SEI walkthrough tool. The tool

collects information on a number of topics including classroom structure, curriculum and lesson planning, student tasks, and learning environment.

According to interviews, the ELL department coordinator conducts walkthroughs at least twice a year and as often as possible. Teachers receive feedback after the walkthrough. Examples of recommendations from these walkthroughs include providing students with a summary and asking students to outline an outcome. The impact of feedback and instructional support provided to South Middle School ESL and sheltered content teachers was evident. When interviewed, the teachers were able to describe the characteristics of different English language proficiency levels and could articulate a model of instruction that includes, but is not limited to classroom strategies that allow ELL students to develop English language proficiency and conceptual understanding of grade-level material.

According to interviews with teachers in mainstream classes, the ELL department's focus on effective instructional practice for ELL students has also had an impact on mainstream classes. In focus groups at South Middle School, mainstream classroom teachers, especially those who had participated in SEI category training, described the needs and strengths of English language learners in their classrooms and the characteristics of learners at each English language proficiency level. They also related some instructional techniques to facilitate comprehension. For example, they cited reinforcing concepts visually through graphic organizers to allow ELL students to engage in higher order thinking by making inferences and articulating their understanding of a topic.

There is evidence that the ELL department has important processes in place to communicate instructional expectations for ESL and sheltered content teachers; monitor and assess teachers' progress in using strategies; and provide teachers with adequate feedback on the implementation of sheltered content and language development strategies. This cycle ensures that ELL teachers not only know what and how to teach, but receive the necessary feedback to build their capacity to deliver instruction that effectively targets students' needs. Efforts to provide all teachers throughout the district with training on appropriate classroom strategies for ELL students have increased the capacity of mainstream classroom teachers to teach ELL students. However, without practices to reinforce these expectations and provide teachers with specific, frequent feedback, the impact of the efforts with respect to all teachers is not as great.

Assessment

The ELL department frequently collects and analyzes data to ensure appropriate placement, frequent monitoring, and timely reclassification of ELL students.

School staff described the procedures to identify and assess ELL students. According to school documents and an interview with district staff, Westfield administers the Home Language Survey to identify entering students who speak a first language other than English at home. In addition, trained ESL and SEI teachers administer the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) and

Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) assessments at registration to determine students' English language proficiency levels. A student is designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP) when the results indicate that the student cannot perform ordinary class work in English. In addition, according to district administrators, a conversation between bilingual teachers and newcomers is arranged to assess the native language proficiency.

According to evidence from district and school interviews and school documents, the district has a flexible system for placement of students in the most appropriate setting for their level of English language proficiency. ELL services are provided in the following settings: the full SEI program, self-contained classrooms of only ELL students, who receive sheltered content instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies from a certified teacher and ESL instruction from a certified ESL teacher; mainstream classrooms with instruction by SEI category-trained teachers and ESL instruction; and mainstream classrooms with ESL instruction provided on a check-in basis. The district ensures that the amount of ESL instruction at the elementary and middle school levels is sufficient to meet state guidelines. ESL courses at South Middle School are organized according to beginning, middle, or advanced levels. South Middle School also offers an additional period of ESL (a content support course also taught by South Middle School certified ESL teachers) to provide students with additional ELL instruction and help fulfill state mandated requirements for ESL instructional time.

According to district staff, a transition team composed of ELL teachers from the Highland Elementary and South Middle schools analyzes student performance data to place Highland's graduating fifth grade students in sixth grade classes at South Middle School. Specifically, the team considers the results of the GRADE, DIBELS and other literacy assessments and each student's classroom performance. Students who have attained English language proficiency transition out of the ELL program and are reclassified. Students who need continuing ESL and sheltered content support are placed in South Middle School's ELL department classes.

There are procedures for monitoring the academic and language proficiency gains of ELL students. In interviews, school and district staff also told the review team that a mathematics benchmark assessment is administered four times a year at South Middle School, and the results are analyzed with support from the school's mathematics coach. The sheltered program mathematics teacher is included in the mathematics benchmark data analysis sessions. When asked, mathematics teachers described the analysis of mathematics benchmark results as "trying to get in the heads of students, thinking like a student and picking the question apart," and "considering how different students [for instance special education or ELL students] may interpret or misinterpret the question." For example, in the most recent collaboration meeting, teachers realized that a mathematics benchmark question contained key vocabulary that students had not been taught.

The South Middle School English language arts (ELA) department analyzes student performance on the MCAS test. The South Middle School SIP has a series of objectives and standards for each of the school's subgroups, including ELL students, based on an item analysis of MCAS test data (e.g., "Write a brief interpretation or explanation of literary or informational text using

evidence from the text as support.") Additionally, the district and South Middle School administered the GRADE assessment for the first time in 2009-2010. According to school and district staff, the literacy coach met individually with students to review their fall administration scores. The test was to be administered again in the spring as a post-assessment. When asked about the results of the fall GRADE assessments, teachers and school staff stated that although ELL students struggled with figurative language, they excelled on the vocabulary component of the GRADE.

Multiple data sources, including MEPA, MELA-O, DIBELS, report card grades, the ELA component of the MCAS, LAS and BSM results, are examined to monitor student progress and determine whether a student is ready to exit the ELL program. Interviews with district and school level ELL staff indicated that careful attention is given to providing students with access to ESL and sheltered content instruction for as long as needed; and ensuring that "exit decisions are sound, and that ELL students can function without adapted materials or native language assistance in the mainstream classroom." District and school staff described a flexible and adaptive approach, where a teacher's observation of student performance within the classroom is considered together with other student performance data to determine whether a student is ready to exit the ELL program, or should continue to be designated as ELL. According to district documents, the change in a student's status from ELL to FLEP should occur only at natural breaks in the academic cycle, such as grading periods and semesters.

According to teachers, district staff, and school documents, South Middle students who are reclassified and designated as FLEP are assigned to classes taught by category-trained teachers. Once a student exits the ELL program, district and school staff continue to monitor the student's performance and personal adjustment. District staff and South Middle School teachers stated that a trial period is often provided for students who are transferred to mainstream classes, and the option of being transferred back to the ELL department is available if needed. Interviews and documents confirmed that teachers complete quarterly monitoring reports during a two-year period. A sample monitoring form examined by the review team asks teachers to describe potential areas of concern (such as attendance, motivation, daily work assignments, and study skills); English language proficiency in speaking, writing, and reading; strengths; and any assistance that the student has received (such as tutoring, after school programs, increased parent involvement, counseling, and special education), and the results of this assistance. Teachers are required to submit these forms to the district ELL coordinator.

The Westfield ELL department has given significant attention to accurately identifying the English language proficiency levels and academic needs of ELL students, placing them in the academic setting that will best support their English language and academic development needs, and exiting them from the ELL program to the mainstream program when they can succeed. In an interview, one school leader told the review team, "We balance pushing students to their potential with supporting them and building community." Empirical studies have found that it typically takes second-language learners four to seven years to catch up to their native speaker peers. This means that an early exit from an ELL program generally does not provide students

with ample time to learn a second language to a level of academic proficiency.[8] Westfield's customized approach to meeting the needs of the district's ELL students is critical to their academic success.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district hires and trains highly qualified teachers and staff to implement the district's ELL program and support the academic and language needs of ELL students.

The district uses strategic and intentional methods to hire and train highly qualified staff to support the learning needs of ELL students.

Partnerships between the ELL department staff and the ESL program at Elms College provide access to a pool of teachers qualified to work with ELL students. District leaders stated that they participate in university job fairs and contact professors to seek desirable candidates. The ELL coordinator is working with Westfield State University to develop a series of courses to prepare teachers to pass the ESL licensure examination. Additionally, the ELL coordinator networks with local organizations and cultural organizations, such as Lutheran Social Services, to recruit staff, including ELL department teaching assistants, called tutors, to support students from low-incidence language groups. During classroom visits, the review team observed a tutor who spoke Nepali providing one-on-one support for a Highland Elementary student.

Through interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, the review team found that in addition to the ESL, SEI, and mainstream teachers, other staff members play a key role in providing academic support to ELL students across the four district schools housing ELL programs. At South Middle School, the ESL and sheltered content teachers work closely with two tutors who provide native language support for Russian-, Ukrainian-, and Spanish-speaking students. A special education staff member oversees the placement and instruction of Russian and Ukrainian students in the district's special education program. This staff member also serves as an important link between the district's special education program and Westfield's Russian and Ukrainian families, many of whom are initially reluctant to have their children identified for special education services.

School staff and district leaders told the review team that the South Middle School mathematics and literacy coaches have completed all four levels of SEI category training. These coaches collaborate with mainstream educators as well as ELL department faculty members. For example, interviewees told the review team that the mathematics coach works closely with the ELL mathematics and science teacher and they co-teach units, such as the unit on slope. Additionally, teachers and district leaders stated that the librarian works closely with ESL

[8] Ovando, C.J., & Collier, V.P. (1998). *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts.* Boston: McGraw Hill.

teachers to provide ELL students access to high quality and high interest texts at their reading levels.

District leaders said that the ELL department coordinator is instrumental in ensuring that teachers are appropriately dual-licensed to teach both their content area and ESL. Additionally, a human resource specialist works with teachers to facilitate the process of acquiring dual licensure. According to district documents, 16 of the 18 ELL department teachers are dual-licensed, and interviewees stated that the other two teachers are working toward licensure. According to documentation, ELL and mainstream teachers are participating in SEI category training at Elms College. In interviews, South Middle School mainstream teachers and staff discussed the impact of category training on their ability to teach ELL students, and provided examples of classroom strategies supporting ELL students, including using clear, idiom-free language, building upon prior knowledge, making the classroom environment comfortable, and using graphic organizers.

The Westfield ELL department has developed a strong foundation for teaching ELL students, including recruiting a cadre of bilingual teachers and instructional staff, ensuring that all teachers who teach ELL students are highly qualified, and facilitating access to quality sheltered English instruction professional development for teachers across the district. These actions have contributed to the success of ELL students in Westfield.

Changes at the district level have had an impact on opportunities for South Middle School ELL department teachers to receive ongoing professional development. Although South Middle School is less compartmentalized than before, ELL teachers have limited opportunities to collaborate with colleagues outside their department and each other.

Changes at the district level have had an impact on the ability of the ELL department to provide ongoing professional development for ESL and sheltered content teachers at South Middle School. According to district leaders, the elimination of district release days from the schedule has affected the ability of the district's ELL coordinator to meet with ESL and sheltered content teachers across the schools. Additionally, more stringency in the district's process for approval and allocation of funds for professional development, along with reductions in these funds, has affected the ELL department's professional development offerings. One district leader told the review team that a session on the MELA-O assessment was the only proposal approved out of the six ELL professional development proposals submitted.

District and school staff reported that changes in school leadership have made South Middle School less compartmentalized than before, as an example citing the fact that ESL teachers now serve as a resource to colleagues throughout the school. Interviewees also told the review team that there is more collaboration between ELL department teachers and teachers in mainstream classrooms. For example, the sheltered content mathematics teacher meets with colleagues in the mathematics department to analyze mathematics benchmark results under the guidance of the mathematics coach. However, opportunities for other sheltered content teachers or ESL teachers to collaborate with mainstream classroom teachers at South Middle School are not built into the

schedule. Also, there are few opportunities for members of the ELL department to collaborate with each another. Teachers and district leaders told the review team that, unlike their colleagues in other departments, teachers in the ELL department do not have common planning time. According to a district leader interviewed by the review team, collaboration happens on an "as-needed basis," such as when new ELL students arrive at the school and need to be assessed and placed in an appropriate instructional setting.

The review team found that although teachers described an open and collaborative environment at South Middle where much teacher collaboration occurs through informal networks, the absence of common planning periods for ELL department teachers, and the limited participation of ELL department staff in mainstream grade level and departmental meetings reduces the opportunities for all teachers to share instructional strategies, examine student work, collaboratively develop lessons, and examine problems of practice. Additionally, changes in the way the district makes decisions on professional development and funds it have decreased the offerings on effective practices for addressing the learning needs of ELL students. This will have implications for the quality of instruction for ELL and FLEP students.

Student Support

The ELL department effectively uses teaching assistants, called tutors in Westfield, to support student learning and to establish a bridge between school and home cultures.

The ELL program model is based on two priorities: capitalizing on students' home languages to develop English language fluency, and using students' home languages to build content knowledge. The teaching assistants, or tutors, play a critical role by working with teachers to carry out these priorities and supporting effective communication between school and families. According to interviews and focus groups with students, parents, teachers, and the tutors themselves, ELL staff, students, and families view tutors as professionals. Classroom observations confirmed that tutors and teachers have equal professional status; in a number of instances the teacher requested the assistant's opinion on how to proceed with a particular student.

As stated previously in the District Profile section of this report, Westfield has had a recent influx of immigrants from Nepal, Russia, and Ukraine. Teachers rely on tutors to provide targeted translations to increase students' English language fluency and understanding and their content knowledge. The tutors also serve as important resources to the teachers, deepening their understanding of students' linguistic and academic needs. For example, the families of Ukrainian students have established a clear code of acceptable social behavior in their community. When some Ukrainian students were invited to attend a school dance, a tutor who had established positive relationships in the community explained that parents might not allow their children to attend. After several conversations between the families and school staff facilitated by the tutor, the families decided that the Ukrainian students could attend the dance.

In interviews with tutors, the review team found some problems external to the ELL program. Tutors are sometimes assigned to monitor students who have transitioned into the regular education program. The assistants told the review team that in some instances, regular education teachers stated that they would not give priority to the assistant's recommendations. This dynamic was clearly evident to students in the class, and the tutors believed that their views were not being considered as seriously as they had expected. This attitude was particularly of concern because, as the tutors and ELL teachers explained in interviews with the review team, the ELL coordinator had provided training and guidance for teachers on the role and responsibilities of the tutors and had hoped to set expectations for the collaboration of tutors and teachers.

Level 3 Recommendations

The review team concurs that the single most significant factor impeding student achievement is a lack of district-level direction and leadership in the areas of teaching and learning. This necessarily results in uneven and inconsistent instruction. Philosophy, instruction, and resources vary widely among individual schools in Westfield. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the review team that the Westfield Public Schools work toward consensus in order to articulate a direction for teaching, learning, assessing and supporting student progress that incorporates the recommendations below.

Without a clear direction for the district, individual schools will continue to work in isolation and with the same results in addressing the issues confronting the district. A systematic review and synthesis of the philosophies and practices in the district is essential to set a course that will result in a well-articulated instructional program. The district will then be able to monitor student progress across schools and grade levels, and use the information to enhance instruction. These improvements will enable the district to raise student achievement.

The district should establish, document, and communicate clear priorities and accountability measures to ensure community support and realize the district vision of being a child-centered learning community focused on student achievement where decisions are based on data, exemplary practices, and research.

The community takes pride in its school system based on student accomplishments, prudent fiscal management, good communications, decentralized management, school safety, and facilities improvements in difficult economic times. Community satisfaction with the schools is not based exclusively on student performance on the MCAS tests and other criteria-referenced assessments. But a review of the district and school websites and improvement plans and reports, including the budget and state of the school reports, provides evidence of the limited depth of reporting on student achievement or district priorities to the community. The district has not developed consensus on a direction for the district, sent a clear message to schools about which goals are the priority goals to address student needs, and held principals accountable for implementation of improvement plans.

Interviews and document reviews determined that no central data collection and analysis of student achievement data currently takes place in the district across all schools. An effective data system should be established to generate, collect, and analyze student achievement data. However, the district cannot wait for this system to be fully implemented. The district should now develop district and school data teams to identify student strengths and weaknesses through a thorough analysis of available MCAS test data.[9] The teams might also collect best practices identified by ESE or their own research. A presentation of student strengths and weaknesses and best practices can be made to district leaders and school principals at a planning session held at

[9] A resource provided by ESE to support district-level data analysis is the District Data Team Toolkit, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ucd/.

an off-site location to minimize interruptions. An outside facilitator who is not an employee of the district can facilitate the activities and prioritize strategies using a group nominal technique to help create a shared philosophy, collective ownership, and a unified effort to improve student achievement. Through this process, district and school leaders can develop goals, objectives, strategies, activities, and measurable evaluative criteria, and identify responsible persons, timelines, and funding resources to form the basis of revised and aligned District and School Improvement Plans. These revised and aligned improvement plans can in turn form the basis of better communication with the community and can constitute the first step toward realizing the district's vision.

The district should continue to develop and expand the curriculum so that curriculum documents for pre-kindergarten through grade 12 can guide effective daily instructional delivery.

The current curriculum clearly states what students should know and be able to do in all subjects in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Expectations are high and topic coverage is thorough. In addition, topics and concepts are expanded and scaffolded. The curriculum is well-articulated at the junctures between levels: elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school.

The curriculum is, however, incomplete. It should include such currently lacking and necessary components as

- pacing guides;
- common instructional resources (references to systemwide core programs, appropriate interventions and media and technology resources);
- links to common assessments and sources of assessment data;
- strategies, resources and questioning techniques to challenge students to use higher-order thinking skills; and
- other resources to meet the needs of diverse learners such as ELL students, FLEP students, students with IEPs, and gifted and talented students.

In order to begin to address this, district leaders have already begun a pilot project to incorporate some of these missing components in the social studies curriculum. Without the inclusion of these components in all curriculum documents, there will continue to be variation in schools and classrooms on what to teach, when and how to teach it, and what resources to use to best meet diverse student and programmatic needs.

By adding components to the curriculum, leaders and teachers can clarify district expectations and translate them into practice at both the school and classroom levels. Creating complete uniformity among schools and classrooms in a particular subject is not the goal of this recommendation. The intent is to construct a more common framework for teaching and

learning, supported by a clear vision and guidance from leaders at the district, school, classroom, and subject levels.

The district should provide a clear vision, priorities, and leadership for consistent and effective development, implementation, and monitoring of the curriculum, and should create, support, and monitor clear and high expectations for teaching across the district.

The district has numerous school-based practices for the delivery and monitoring of curricula and the development and supervision of instruction. Resources, including time, personnel, and funding, are deployed inconsistently to meet the diverse needs of students and the instructional needs of teachers. In addition, there is lack of clarity on the part of leaders and teachers about what constitutes excellence in teaching and how it will be nurtured, developed, and monitored. Communication and collaboration between the district and school levels are needed to address all of these issues and so promote continuous growth in student achievement.

Time needs to be provided during the school day for teachers who share teaching assignments to meet in teams with coaches, supervisors, and principals. Meeting time can be used to review student achievement data and student work, discuss teaching strategies, and explore curriculum issues. Time is also needed for teachers to develop and analyze common assessments and other student achievement data. Time is needed for teachers to strengthen skills for differentiating instruction and analyzing data. This work should not be delegated exclusively to curriculum committees. It is a core responsibility of all educators and should be the focus of ongoing professional conversations to promote a culture of continuous improvement.

In carrying out supervisory and evaluative responsibilities, school leaders, supervisors, and coaches need direction from district leaders. For example, if walkthroughs are used, district and school leaders need to develop shared expectations and a common protocol to maximize their effectiveness. If rubrics are used, they should be uniformly applied. When benchmark assessments and formative assessment are implemented, there should be consistency of purpose and application. When professional development is prioritized, funded, and allocated, it should align with curricular and instructional priorities expressed in School Improvement Plans aligned to the District Improvement Plan. The needs identified by analysis of student achievement data must inform all decision-making. These strategies promote a culture of continuous improvement.

In review team members' visits to 71 district classrooms they observed consistent evidence of only a few of the characteristics of effective teaching practice assessed by the observation tool developed by ESE. In addition, in interviews and focus groups teachers and leaders did not articulate a common and clear definition of what qualities constitute excellence in teaching in the district, to be embedded in practice. Development of this definition requires a multi-level, collaborative, and deep conversation over time, but the effort, combined with district support for schools to help teachers reach excellence, will help ensure that all students have equal opportunity for a successful education.

The district should develop a cohesive, well-articulated assessment program that includes norm- and criterion-referenced tools and authentic assessments.

The district should come to consensus on the purposes of assessment and the types required to yield consistent and useful data at each level: district, school, subject/grade, and classroom. Westfield administers many assessments, but there are few common assessments in use across the district. For example, there are currently more than 10 different assessment tools in use at the elementary level, with the data provided in different formats. There is also wide variation in the instruments used by the individual schools, and in the grade levels in which they are used. At the middle school level, because the two middle schools developed local benchmarks in mathematics independently of each other and do not collaborate in using them, there is much inconsistency in assessing student performance. Departmental exams are administered twice yearly at the high school; there are no common, formative assessments to inform instruction.

The district should identify and eliminate uninformative assessments and school-specific assessment strategies. There have been impressive systemwide efforts to develop local benchmark assessments. The review team encourages the district to expand and standardize these assessments in order to provide the criterion-referenced data to track student progress in attaining grade level standards quarterly. This will enable the district to collect and analyze data districtwide.

A standard district assessment program documented for all schools will provide consistency and allow the district to track student progress over time. It will also provide an accountability system for curriculum and instruction. Tracking student progress and modifying curriculum and instruction based upon assessment data will result in meaningful changes that will result in improved student achievement.

The district should coordinate the collection and disaggregation of assessment data and provide systemic support to ensure that the data is used to inform instruction.

With the variety of assessments in Westfield, data cannot be easily collected and analyzed. There is no coordinated, consistent assessment system to provide data in a format that is usable to teachers to inform instruction. Without consistency, the district is unable to accurately assess student progress. The data collected through a variety of assessments is incomplete, and there are differences in the types of data available to teachers and leaders. In addition, with the exception of MCAS data, student achievement data is not aggregated for the entire district or disaggregated by school or subgroup. The data is highly fragmented and insufficient to inform instruction.

According to district and school leaders, many principals have not determined and communicated the uses of data, and most teachers' understanding of data is at an introductory level. Although teachers analyze student achievement data, there is little emphasis on its instructional implications. In mathematics, for instance, the review team found no evidence that data is used to inform instruction. And although the review team was told of plans for each school to have a data team, principals and teachers knew little about this when asked.

Having determined common formative assessments that will provide useful data to inform instruction, the district should coordinate the collection and disaggregation of that data and provide teachers with training and support—for instance, by means of the planned data teams—to help them make good use of that data. Consistent assessment practices, the availability of disaggregated data, and improved understanding of data and its uses will provide focus for improving instruction so as to raise student achievement.

The Westfield Unit A contract evaluation cycle for professional status teachers should be revised to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirement for a cycle of no more than two years. Evaluation procedures for all teachers and administrators should be revised to include identification of weaknesses as well as strengths, suggestions for improved practice, and recommendations for professional development.

Although the Westfield Unit A contract aligns with the state requirements for the annual evaluation of non-professional status teachers, the district's evaluation procedure for professional status teachers does not comply with 603 CMR 35.06(1) because it employs a four-year rather than the required two-year cycle. The successor to the present contract to be negotiated next year presents a prime opportunity for the school committee to bring the teacher evaluation instrument into compliance.

In addition, evaluations of teachers with and without professional status, evaluations of central office administrators, and evaluations of principals read by the review team did not contain suggestions for improved practice or recommendations for professional development. Evaluations of teachers did not contain any rating of teaching or any reference to student learning outcomes; evaluations of principals did not include any ratings of "recommended for professional growth" or "unsatisfactory" on any measure or any reference to the DIP or SIPs; and evaluations of assistant principals had no ratings. Evaluations of central office administrators were not aligned, as required, with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00.

The district should revise the procedures for all of these evaluations and train evaluators so that evaluations routinely include specific identification of weaknesses as well as strengths, suggestions for improved practice, and recommendations for professional development. The district should also ensure that the evaluation procedures for all administrators are aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. By implementing a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation system, especially if improvement in student performance and, for administrators, progress in implementing improvement plans are looked to as evidence of staff effectiveness, the district will not only arrive at compliance with 603 CMR 35.00, but will also enhance the professionalism and accountability of teachers and administrators and assist all students to perform at high levels.

As the district negotiates a new approach to evaluating teacher performance, it should retain the contractual ability, as part of the teacher evaluation process, to assess the impact of district-funded professional development on teaching and learning and to use the information it gains to improve the effectiveness of the professional development program.

In years two and three of the current four-year professional status teacher evaluation cycle, teachers are required to state the impact of professional development on student learning. This requirement in the collective bargaining contract is advantageous to both the teachers' union and the district leadership. In an examination of year two and year three teacher evaluations, the review team found descriptions of various professional development activities with broad statements of impact on student achievement. These impact statements, however, lacked clarity about how instructional practice was actually improved. In the future, the district should ensure that teachers write clear specific statements of the impact of each professional development activity on instructional practice and student learning.

The district has existing enabling contract language in the Unit A evaluation protocol to promote action research and measurement of the impact of its professional development program on student learning. School districts that successfully negotiate and implement such language have a valuable local procedure for improving instructional practice and student learning. Westfield is such a district, and this procedure should be retained and strengthened as the district shortens the cycle of evaluation for professional status teacher to comply with the law.

The review team recommends that the district build upon its efforts to align district-sponsored professional development with evidence of student learning gains and strengthened instructional knowledge and skills. There are success stories in the district. The review team found some documented in official records. These stories might be catalogued and shared for organizational learning. Once catalogued, the successes will become a documented rationale for creating and maintaining revenue streams that support the district's investment in professional development.

The district should continue to make use of grant-funded support programs offering academic assistance to identified students, but should investigate better ways to plan and deliver such programs.

The district demonstrates a consistently creative approach to identifying, pursuing and acquiring external funding to support student learning. Title I, special education, and other grants underwrite Reading Recovery, Fast Math, LIPS, extended day and year, and other student support programs. But Title I programs are offered in only some schools. Students attending these schools are well served, and the district is amenable to enrolling students from other schools who need support as space becomes available. This occurs regardless of whether the student is in the target population for the grant program. Few programs, however, are offered districtwide.

The review team believes that the district could create better procedures for identifying students who might benefit from certain support programs, and could identify ways of increasing their

access to these programs. This might involve administering common assessments, transporting students and support staff to program sites, and other ways of ensuring that students who could profit from a particular program are not assigned to another simply because it is the only program available in the school they attend.

The district planning could include consideration of sustaining successful support programs initially funded by grants, once the grant funding ends. The district should seek avenues to continue programs that show positive results in student attendance, achievement, social adjustment, or career advancement based upon valid data. Westfield delivers support for ELL students effectively in part because it is so well targeted. All ELL students are assigned to one elementary school for support services and channeled into one middle school that continues to support them. This is an efficiently functioning model that serves students well at that school and maximizes the district's resources. The district might consider replicating this model of delivery for other programs and services in order to ensure access to appropriate services for students with low-incidence needs.

The district should explore consolidating school and city functions, when appropriate and without sacrificing its educational mission, to provide efficiencies that could redirect funds to other priorities more closely linked to teaching and learning. It should also explore increased collaborative planning with the city.

The district has experienced budget reductions from revenue losses resulting in decreases in staffing and services that affect the ability to provide adequate and high quality programs. The school system and city should consider areas of collaboration in order to produce additional resources to meet student needs. For instance, they might consider combining city and school system maintenance or human resources functions and merging some financial functions. The financial office could have oversight responsibility for all grants. Such economies and efficiencies might result in savings that could be used to restore educational programs and services.

The current five-year city capital plan includes recommendations for school renovations, new schools, and the closing of schools. This plan might be reviewed and revised annually based on the availability of state and local funding and the developing needs of the educational system. The school district might also consider developing a five-year strategic operational and financial plan involving all stakeholders, including city officials. The development of this plan might include consideration of projected student enrollment and the growing diversity of the student population. The plan could be reviewed periodically to consider updated information. This planning process would enable the district to anticipate needs and target limited resources.

The district should arrange an independent review of its financial system; the district and the city should collaborate to arrive at a signed agreement that describes the allocation of the indirect costs of services the city provides in support of the school system.

During the review, it was noted that some financial functions between the city and the school district are redundant and several procedures might be streamlined. For example, the processing

of warrants and their signing by the school committee members appeared to be time-consuming, and an excessive amount of paper is used. The review team found that both the school district and city use the MUNIS financial accounting system. The assistant auditor stated that the auditor's office provides oversight of school financial activities. The processing of information between the school system and the city for payroll and payables might be improved through an analysis of the process in order to find economies and efficiencies. The system does not currently provide for a complete encumbrance of salaries and other line items which may make it difficult to project expenditures. An independent assessment of the financial system should be undertaken in order to optimize its operation and potentially reduce duplication and costs.

For the sake of certainty, it would be in the interest of both the city and the district to reach a signed agreement on the allocation of indirect expenditures, as recommended by ESE. And with a written agreement the district could make sure that no more costs are classified as school costs than is required, thus preventing an unnecessary increase in the amounts calculated for net school spending and for the district's per-pupil expenditure.

ELL Recommendations

The Westfield Public Schools should strengthen and formalize the links between departments, both at the district and school levels, to establish shared responsibility for the instruction and support of the district's ELL students and the teachers who work with them.

The district has intentionally developed a cohesive and focused program to serve ELL students, including clear and consistent procedures for identifying, placing, and supporting, them, and monitoring their progress once they exit the program and transition to the regular education program. The ELL department effectively communicates expectations for successful content and English language development instruction in South Middle School's ESL and sheltered content classrooms. These expectations are reinforced and monitored through faculty meetings and professional development facilitated by the district's ELL supervisor and instructional walkthroughs in ESL and sheltered content classrooms.

Progress has been made at the district and school levels in integrating faculty and staff across departments. For example, teachers in mainstream classes have knowledge of effective instructional strategies for the ELL students placed in their classrooms. Additionally, district and school staff credit the South Middle School principal for assigning a vice principal to oversee ELL instruction and support, and establishing a school climate where ELL students "feel like they are a part of the school."

The district's ELL department is primarily responsible for ensuring that the curriculum supports the needs of ELL students, training teachers to use appropriate instructional strategies for ELL students, monitoring and supporting teachers' implementation of appropriate classroom strategies, and monitoring the academic progress of ELL students in language proficiency and content knowledge. The ELL department has limited influence on the classrooms outside of its jurisdiction. Although most ELL students are supported by district and school level ELL department staff, once students are reclassified, school and district staff from outside of the ELL department assume responsibility for their education. In interviews, school staff, students, and parents told the review team that once students leave the ELL support system, their academic experiences are less consistent.

Efforts to strategically align initiatives across district departments and share key lessons learned could serve as an opportunity to leverage limited funding and enhance learning opportunities for district and school staff. Efforts to strengthen and formalize links across the district could be made in the following areas:

- **Curriculum development:** Measures to finalize curriculum development efforts for general education and ESL curricula, and measures to align the general education and ESL curricula could strengthen the district's curriculum development process. The review team recommends that the district complete the ESL curriculum map and align curricular maps with ELPBO standards and the Massachusetts frameworks. Curriculum materials, resources,

and planning guides should be developed for each subject, and there should be time designated during the school year for continued curriculum development. Lesson plans should be consistently formatted so that all teachers share the same lesson planning vocabulary, which will facilitate collaboration in developing plans that address the needs of ELL students.

- **Professional development, common planning time, instructional support, and monitoring:** The review team recommends that the knowledge and expertise for supporting the learning needs of ELL students be distributed across the district. This can be accomplished by
    - establishing time for professional development;
    - implementing a professional development plan that ensures that teachers and school leaders across the district have the skills and knowledge to support the academic and language needs of ELL students at every level of English language proficiency; and
    - establishing common planning time within and across departments and grade levels to provide teachers with structured opportunities to share instructional strategies, analyze student work and performance data, collaboratively develop lessons, and productively address problems of practice.
    - Additionally, school leaders should monitor and assess teachers' progress in using strategies for ELL students, recognize teachers who demonstrate mastery of these strategies, and hold accountable the teachers who do not effectively implement professional expectations.

The district should consider capitalizing upon the linguistic and cultural assets of its tutors in order to provide more targeted student support.

As stated in the Student Support section of the ELL findings in this report, tutors are used effectively to provide academic support within classrooms and to help teachers understand students' needs and communicate with their families. Westfield uses a less focused approach to support students with interventions, since there does not appear to be a set of guiding criteria to determine when to implement a particular measure or strategy. In addition, there does not appear to be a formal process to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular intervention strategy or activity. The availability of grant funding seems to determine whether a particular intervention is available and maintained.

The tutors are a valuable resource that is underused. The review team recommends that the district explore using tutors more holistically in classrooms, for students other than ELL students as well. In the ELL department, the tutors have served as the bridge to students with specific learning needs. The district should consider making this practice more widespread and useful.

A review of ESE attendance data revealed that although the district's attendance rate was close to the state's in 2009, there were high rates of chronic absenteeism at the high school in grades 10, 11, and 12, with approximately one in four students designated as chronically absent.

Hispanic and multi-race, non-Hispanic students had similarly high levels of chronic absenteeism in 2009. Chronic absenteeism that is about 25 percent, or one in four students, could provide a partial explanation of why students are not achieving at higher levels. The review team believes that the tutors could be an effective resource in helping teachers understand why students are absent as well as offering valuable classroom support. The tutors could provide deeper insights into issues that students face and help the schools and the district choose more timely and relevant interventions.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The site visit portion of the review of the Westfield Public Schools was conducted from April 13-16, 2010, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Level 3 Component:

Dr. Wilfred J. Savoie, Leadership and Governance

Dr. Linda L. Greyser, Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Assessment

Dr. Tom Johnson, Human Resources and Professional Development

Dr. John Roper, Student Support

Stratos Dukakis, Financial and Asset Management

ELL Component:

Frank DeVito, Leadership and Governance, Student Support

Gwendolyn Casazza, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development.

Linda L. Greyser served as review team coordinator for the Level 3 component of the review.

Gwen Casazza and Frank DeVito shared coordination of the ELL component of the review.

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

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

The review team conducted interviews with the following Westfield financial personnel: assistant for business and transportation, business consultant to Westfield Public Schools, assistant city auditor, and city treasurer

The review team conducted interviews with the five of seven members of the Westfield School Committee including the chair and vice-chair.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Westfield Teachers Association: president and three members of the executive board.

The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Westfield Public Schools central office administration: superintendent; director of curriculum, Instruction, and assessment; administrator of student services and special education; chief officer for operations and human resources/general counsel to the school committee; assistant for business and transportation.

The review team visited the following schools in the Westfield Public Schools as part of the Level 3 review: Franklin Avenue Elementary School (K-5), Highland Elementary School (K-5), Munger Hill Elementary School (K-5), Paper Mill Elementary School (K-5), Southampton Road Elementary School (K-5), North Middle School (6-8), Westfield High School (9-12), and Westfield Vocational Technical High School (9-12).

- During the site visit, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, assistant principals, teachers, and coaches, and conducted focus groups with elementary, middle school and high school teachers.
- The review team conducted 62 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the eight schools visited.

The review team visited the following school in the Westfield Public Schools in connection with the ELL part of the review: South Middle School (6-8).

- During this school visit, the review team conducted interviews with the school principal, assistant principals, teachers, instructional coaches, tutors, parents, and students.
- The review team conducted nine classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the eight schools visited.

The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:

- District profile data

- Comprehensive Annual District and School Data Review
- Coordinated Program Review Report 2008; CPR Progress Reports, October 2009, November 2009, January 2010
- EQA Report, 2005
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2009
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile

The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):

- Organization chart and list of administrators
- District Improvement Plan
- School Improvement Plans for 11 schools
- School committee policy manual
- Curriculum guides for ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, etc.
- Sample new curriculum document for social studies
- High school program of studies
- List of formative and summative assessments
- Copies of MCAS data analyses/reports used in schools
- NEASC Report, 2007; Progress Report, 2009
- District Curriculum Accommodation Plan, 2009-2011
- Descriptions of student support programs
- Program Profiles, FY 2011
- State of the Middle Schools, 2008
- Student and Family Handbooks
- Faculty Handbook
- Professional Development Plan and program/schedule/courses
- Teacher evaluation tool
- Learning walk tool from one elementary school

- Sample standards-based lesson plans
- Sample checklists showing coverage of curriculum objectives
- Notes from teacher meetings on literacy
- Sample individual student success plan document
- Student Assistance Manual
- Notes, meeting agendas, and other documentation from various department meetings, both elementary and secondary, including reading/language arts, mathematics, unified life program, science 6-12, physical education 9-12
- Job descriptions (for central office and school administrators and instructional staff)
- Principal evaluations
- 57 randomly selected teacher personnel files
- District procedures and assessments to identify LEP students and assess their level of English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening

The review team reviewed the following documents at the South Middle School for the ELL component of the review:

- School Improvement Plan
- Copies of student performance reports used in the school
- Teacher and Student-Parent Handbooks for the school
- Teacher planning time/meeting schedules at the school
- Samples of ELL student work
- School-Family newsletters
- Professional development and staff meeting agendas

The review team reviewed the following documents at the district for the ELL part of the review at Westfield Public Schools:

- District guidelines for the education of ELL students
- Draft ESL curriculum
- LEP student monitoring forms and reports
- District intake and exit procedures and criteria
- District records of teacher participation in SEI Category training
- SEI Walkthrough Tool

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Level 3/LEP review of the Westfield Public Schools, conducted from April 13-16, 2010.

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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
April 13 Introductory meeting with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents	April 14 Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits: Highland Elementary, Munger Hill Elementary; classroom observations; interview with union and focus group with parents; review of personnel files	April 15 Level 3 review school visits: Paper Mill Elementary, North Middle Westfield Vocational-Technical High School; Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; three teacher focus groups; meetings with school committee members. ELL review school visit: South Middle School. Meeting/interviews with school/district leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings. Teacher focus groups.	April 16 Level 3 review school visits: Westfield High School, Southampton Road Elementary School; Franklin Avenue Elementary School; Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings. ELL review school visit: South Middle School. Meetings with school/district leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; closing meeting with school/district leaders. Follow-up interviews; team meeting; closing meeting with district leaders