



Massachusetts Department of  
**ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION**

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

---

October 2009



This document was prepared on behalf of the  
Center for School and District Accountability of the  
**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.**  
**Commissioner**

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Members**

Ms. Maura Banta, Chair, Melrose  
Ms. Harneen Chernow, Jamaica Plain  
Mr. Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge  
Mr. Michael D'Ortenzio, Jr., Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley  
Dr. Thomas E. Fortmann, Lexington  
Ms. Beverly Holmes, Springfield  
Dr. Jeff Howard, Reading  
Ms. Ruth Kaplan, Brookline  
Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater  
Mr. Paul Reville, Secretary of Education, Worcester  
Dr. Sandra L. Stotsky, Brookline  
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner  
and Secretary to the Board

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an affirmative action employer, is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public.

We do not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

Inquiries regarding the Department's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the Human Resources Director, 75 Pleasant St., Malden, MA 02148, 781-338-6105.

© 2009 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

*Permission is hereby granted to copy any or all parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes. Please credit the "Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education."*

*This document printed on recycled paper*

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906  
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  
[www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)



## Overview of the Reviews of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of All Students

---

### Purpose:

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

### Key Questions:

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

- **How do district and school leaders assume, communicate, and share responsibility for the achievement of all learners, especially those with disabilities?**
- **How does the district create greater capacity to support all learners?**
- **What technical assistance and monitoring activities from ESE are most useful to districts?**

### Methodology:

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

The review visit to the Westwood Public Schools was conducted from June 1 through 4, 2009. The review included site visits to the following district schools: Martha Jones Elementary School, grades K-5; Deerfield Elementary School, grades K-5; Thurston Middle School, grades 6-8; Westwood High School, grades 9-12. Further information about the review and its schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

## Westwood Public Schools

---

### District Profile<sup>1</sup>

Westwood is recognized for the quality of its schools and for the community's support of its schools. This does not go unnoticed by the district's educational leaders, who consistently comment on how the community values education and all of its children. Westwood's students consistently score in the top percentiles on national and state tests, and an overwhelming majority of students graduating from the high school continue to higher education.

The district provides programs and services to 3,066 students in one integrated preschool, five elementary schools for grades K through 5, a middle school for grades 6 through 8, and a high school for grades 9 through 12. The preschool enrolls 49 pupils and the enrollment in the five elementary schools ranges from 230 to 350 pupils. At the secondary level, 703 students attend the middle school and 831 students are enrolled at the high school. Table 1 below profiles Westwood's students by race/ethnicity and selected populations in the 2008-2009 school year. The district also enrolls 40 METCO students in grades 6 through 12.

**Table 1**  
**Westwood Student Enrollment Percentages**  
**by Race/Ethnicity and Selected Populations**  
**2008-2009**

<b>Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Selected Populations</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
African American	2.2%	First Language not English	3.6%
Asian	5.7%	Limited English Proficient	1.0%
Hispanic or Latino	1.8%	From low-income families	3.1%
Native American	1.0%	Special Education	15.1%
White	89.4%	Free-lunch	1.2%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	0.6%	Reduced-price lunch	1.8%

The district's senior leadership has changed significantly in recent years. Almost half of the principals are new to the position within the past few years, including the middle and high school principals, who previously served as teachers and then vice-principals in their respective schools. The director of student services is an experienced special education administrator who returned from retirement in September 2007 to assume a leadership role in the district. The director of finance and business was new to the role in September 2008 although he previously served as director of operations. The superintendent is in his fifth year as the district's leader and the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development is in her tenth year.

---

<sup>1</sup> Student demographic data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The prevailing philosophy and culture in the district is one of collaboration and partnership among and between educators and school leaders as well as with the community. All focus on the overarching goal of meeting the needs of *all* learners. In Westwood, “all learners” truly means special education students as well as general education students. The focus of this report—addressing the differentiated needs of all students—provides numerous examples of the strategies and exemplary practices that Westwood’s educators have put in place to meet the needs of all learners.

**Student Performance**

To support student learning, the district promotes students’ engagement with the regular academic program rather than intervention for remediation. It targets placing students with IEPs in the most inclusive educational environment to ensure access to the curriculum and the socializing aspects of school life. This is reflected in the large percentage of students with IEPs who are enrolled in regular education programs and in the number and variety of learning strategies the district offers to support all students, not just those with differentiated learning needs. These will be described later in this report.

As Table 2 below shows, in the 2008 school year, of the 455 Westwood students with IEPs, a combined 90.3 percent were enrolled in either full or partial inclusion classes. Alternatively, a combined 9.7 percent of students were in substantially separate or out-of-district placements compared to 21.8 percent statewide. The 19 students in out-of-district placements in 2008 represent slightly more than one-half of one percent of the 3,066 students enrolled in the district.

**Table 2  
Learning Environment for IEP Students by  
Percent of Time in Regular Education Classroom  
Westwood Compared to State for School Year 2007-2008<sup>2</sup>**

Learning Environment for IEP students by percent of time in regular education classroom	Westwood	State
Full Inclusion (at least 80%)	70.1%	55.7%
Partial Inclusion (at least 40-79%)	20.2%	22.5%
Substantially Separate (less than 40%)	5.2%	15.1%
Out-of-District Placement (0%)	4.5%	6.7%

With most students in inclusive classrooms, the district has met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in the aggregate and for all subgroups for every testing cycle of NCLB accountability since its inception. Table 3 below shows AYP proficiency indices for regular and special education students based on the 2008 results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Both regular and special education students demonstrate strong proficiency in both ELA and mathematics, although mathematics results lagged behind ELA

---

<sup>2</sup> Data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

results. The district has recently addressed this discrepancy and it too will be discussed in more detail below.

**Table 3**  
**2008 Westwood Composite Performance Index (CPI):**  
**All Students and Students with IEPs, by Grade Span**

Grade Levels	ELA		Mathematics	
	All Students	Students with IEPs	All Students	Students with IEPs
Grades 3 through 5	93.4	76.0	91.7	73.1
Grades 6 through 8	97.3	88.5	86.8	63.7
Grades 9 through 12	98.0	89.5	97.3	88.3

A closer look at 2008 AYP data reveals that special education subgroups in grades 3 through 5 failed by a narrow margin to meet both performance and improvement targets in ELA and also failed by a narrow margin to meet performance targets in mathematics. Grade 6 through 8 special education students met AYP requirements in ELA but failed by a narrow margin to meet performance and improvement targets in mathematics. Even with these narrow shortfalls, the district’s special education subgroups still outperformed, by a wide margin, comparable cohorts statewide. Statistically, it is also true that for districts with very high scoring students, reaching improvement targets becomes more elusive the higher the starting score.

## **Findings**

### *Student Achievement*

**Westwood’s high school graduates, in both regular and special education, are among the state’s highest performing.**

Westwood’s students demonstrate high achievement in terms of graduation rate, college attendance, and participation in advanced placement examinations. In the 2008 school year, the district’s four-year graduation rate was 95.2 percent (no state average available). In the 2007 school year (most recent data), the four-year graduation rate for Westwood’s special education students was 82.4 percent compared to the state average of 62.8 percent. In 2008, no students with IEPs dropped out of school in Westwood.

Eighty-three percent of the Westwood High School Class of 2008 enrolled in four-year private colleges or universities compared to a state average of 30 percent. Ten percent of graduates enrolled in four-year public colleges or universities compared to a state average of 27 percent. The high school program of studies lists 18 advanced placement courses—two in English, two in foreign languages, four in mathematics, four in the sciences, four in social studies, and two in the arts, although not all courses are offered every year. Interviewees stated that approximately 350 AP exams were administered in 2008-2009 to a student body of 831 students. Also in 2008-2009, five students with IEPs enrolled in 15 AP courses, according to interviewees. And the high school principal noted that, as a matter of practice, grade 10 students, with few exceptions, are encouraged to try only one advanced placement course during the sophomore year.

One can extrapolate from these numbers that all students, including those with IEPs, demonstrate strong achievement as they complete their schooling in the Westwood Public Schools.

**Westwood’s MCAS results for regular and special education students are strong in comparison to state results and demonstrate stronger achievement in ELA than in mathematics. This has led the district to specifically address improvement in mathematics learning and teaching.**

When 2008 MCAS scores are reviewed as an indicator of student achievement, Westwood’s results exceed state results by a meaningful margin in all tested subjects at all grade levels for all students. As Table 4 below shows, the percentage of all students scoring within the proficiency range (advanced /proficient) in both ELA and mathematics meaningfully exceeds statewide proficiency rates. The average proficiency rates in the tested grades of 87.8 percent in ELA and 77 percent in mathematics indicate stronger achievement in ELA over mathematics by a margin of slightly over ten percentage points.

The district has recently identified mathematics as a priority for improved teaching and learning. Mathematics specialists have been appointed at each elementary school to improve teaching strategies and, in one pilot school, to explore co-teaching in mathematics at grade 4. At the secondary level, the middle school math curriculum coordinator and the high school mathematics department head have led a strong effort to strengthen teaching strategies while the district has



focused on job-embedded mathematics professional development at each school level. Job-embedded professional development means that teachers and leaders incorporate the daily work into professional development, for instance by using the work as examples in whatever topic they are studying.

**Table 4**  
**2008 MCAS Results for ELA and Mathematics**  
**Percentage of All Students in Proficient Range**  
**Westwood and State of Massachusetts**

Grade Level	Westwood ELA	State ELA	Westwood Math	State Math
Grade 3	<b>77%</b>	56%	<b>78%</b>	61%
Grade 4	<b>83%</b>	49%	<b>78%</b>	49%
Grade 5	<b>87%</b>	61%	<b>79%</b>	52%
Grade 6	<b>90%</b>	67%	<b>72%</b>	56%
Grade 7	<b>92%</b>	69%	<b>74%</b>	45%
Grade 8	<b>92%</b>	74%	<b>65%</b>	49%
Grade 10	<b>94%</b>	74%	<b>93%</b>	72%
All Students	<b>87.8%</b>		<b>77%</b>	

Table 5 below indicates that Westwood’s students with IEPs also demonstrate stronger MCAS proficiency rates when compared to statewide cohorts, with higher achievement, for the most part, in ELA than in mathematics.

**Table 5**  
**2008 MCAS Results for ELA and Mathematics**  
**Percentage of Students with IEPs in Proficient Range**  
**Westwood and State**

Grade Level	Westwood ELA	State ELA	Westwood Math	State Math
Grade 3	<b>44%</b>	23%	<b>36%</b>	29%
Grade 4	<b>50%</b>	14%	<b>45%</b>	18%
Grade 5	<b>45%</b>	23%	<b>44%</b>	18%
Grade 6	<b>54%</b>	28%	<b>34%</b>	18%
Grade 7	<b>63%</b>	27%	<b>38%</b>	12%
Grade 8	<b>67%</b>	36%	<b>26%</b>	12%
Grade 10	<b>71%</b>	35%	<b>73%</b>	33%

Consequently, when considering MCAS results as a measure of student achievement, all students in Westwood demonstrate strong proficiency in both ELA and mathematics.

## Leadership

### **The superintendent, who is an advocate of site-based management, delegates educational and operational leadership of the schools in Westwood to the principals.**

During an interview with members of the review team, the superintendent stated that he supports the concept of site-based management and that he empowers his principals to oversee all facets of leading their schools. Also, the superintendent commented that, even though he delegates leadership of the schools to the principals, he still holds them accountable for their performance. The principals and other central office administrators in separate interviews concurred with the statements of the superintendent about the implementation of site-based management.

District administrators and the principals cited four examples of responsibilities delegated to them by the superintendent. The first was the development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and the monitoring of progress toward attainment of the goals in the plans. The principals stated that school councils prepare the goals included in their SIPs, which align with the Westwood District Goals such as Goal #1: Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development; Objective: to promote academic excellence. In addition, principals remarked that they periodically update members of their school councils on the progress made toward each goal. Teachers and parents who serve on the school councils and were interviewed by the review team indicated that they are informed about the status of the goals throughout the year.

A second example mentioned was the development of the school budgets. According to the principals, they prepare their proposed annual budgets with input from teachers and other supervisory personnel based upon their schools' needs. The principals, separately, have the opportunity to review their budgets with the superintendent and to justify their proposals. In addition, the principals reported that if there is a need to make budget reductions, the superintendent convenes the administrative council to seek suggestions from all administrators.

The screening, interviewing, and recommendation of candidates to fill vacant positions were other examples of delegated responsibilities. Leadership personnel mentioned that the principals use various staff members to assist them in reviewing the materials submitted by applicants and in interviewing applicants. The high school principal stated that she observes demonstration lessons taught by finalist candidates. In addition, the superintendent, almost one-hundred percent of the time, appoints the principals' recommended candidates.

As a fourth example, principals cited the professional development program that allows them to select programs of interest and relevance to their staffs. Several professional development themes such as improving student achievement in math, implementing differentiated instruction, and putting professional learning communities into practice emerged in the schools throughout the 2008-2009 school year. Furthermore, interviewees commented that the principals, with the assistance of their school's professional development leaders, determine what additional programs will be made available to their staffs to address the needs of *all* learners in each school.

The principals told members of the review team that they are not only the curriculum leaders in their schools but that the superintendent delegates to them the responsibility to both lead and

manage their schools. This is evident from interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents. Also, it is evident from the time the review team spent in visits to the schools.

The commitment and support of the superintendent, along with the diligent efforts of the principals and of other central office administrators, result in the successful implementation of a site-based management model.

**The superintendent is leading an initiative to develop a strategic plan in order to identify and address the needs of *all* students in the school system.**

The superintendent stated that one of his goals for the 2009-2010 school year is to oversee the development of a strategic plan for the district. He reported that, with the assistance of a consultant and other leadership personnel, a survey instrument was developed and made available to the staff and residents of Westwood. The survey specifies that the purpose of the strategic plan is “to articulate the overall goals of the system and to identify strategies to achieve them.”

The superintendent made available to the review team a report presented to the school committee dated November 20, 2008, entitled “Update on Westwood Public Schools’ Strategic Planning Process.” Some of the features in the report include the components of a strategic plan and the following mission statement, which received overwhelming community support, “Members of the Westwood Public School community will strive for excellence in academic, co-curricular, and professional endeavors. We recognize that intellectual, social and emotional growth is the shared responsibility of students, faculty and staff, administrators, parents, and the community at large.” The report also lays out a vision for the future, 2009-2014, provides the results to each survey question, and concludes with “next steps.”

The next steps listed in the strategic plan update report consist of (a) “continue to evaluate community input, (b) leadership teams will continue developing goals, strategies, actions and measures, (c) distribute draft strategic planning documents to wider audience, and (d) finalize plan by the end of February.” The superintendent commented that during the year significant progress was made on all four steps and that he anticipated presenting the proposed strategic plan to the school committee by the end of June 2009.

The superintendent envisions the strategic plan as a blueprint for the future of the Westwood Public Schools and acknowledges the contributions made by administrators in preparing the proposed strategic plan. It was anticipated that the strategic plan would be more elaborate and detailed than the list of thirteen Westwood Public School goals for 2008-2009.

**Interviewees expressed satisfaction with the level of funding for the 2009 school budget and its ability to meet the needs of *all* students, but raised concerns about the adequacy of funding for 2010 and subsequent years.**

The superintendent, other central office administrators, principals, teachers, and parents interviewed by the review team indicated that there were adequate resources in the schools and that the current school budget was adequate to meet the needs of all learners. Several interviewees spoke about the successful \$2.8 million override in 2008 that restored or added

personnel and other items such as 34.77 full-time equivalent positions at approximately \$1.75 million. Furthermore, two administrators mentioned and the superintendent confirmed that before the successful override, the superintendent participated in 37 neighborhood meetings advocating for and explaining the district's educational needs.

A review of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's FY08 Expenditures Per Pupil, All Funds, Summary by Function Report for the Westwood Public Schools showed that the Westwood expenditure per pupil exceeded the state average in nine of eleven categories. They included instructional leadership; classroom and specialist teachers; other teaching services; professional development; instructional materials, equipment and technology; guidance, counseling and testing; operations and maintenance; and payments to out-of-district schools. The two categories in which Westwood was below the state average per pupil were administration, \$416.73 versus \$422.15, and insurance, retirement programs, and other, \$1,429.25 versus \$2,079.33. The district reported a FY08 regular education per-pupil cost of \$9,415.33 and a special education per-pupil cost of \$15,459.92. Westwood's FY08 budget expenditure for special education was \$7,467,143 or 24.3 percent of the total \$30,739,387 budget.

The FY09 school department budget was \$32,488,686. In addition, during FY09 the district was awarded \$1,207,433 through six federal and state grants which include Teacher Quality, \$45,005; Sped 94-142 Allocation, \$736,705; and Special Education Program Improvement, \$9,839. From the state, the school department received funding for Racial Imbalance (METCO), \$235,594; Kindergarten Enhancement, \$178,800; and Safe Schools II, \$1,500. Also, the district receives approximately \$700,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA 2009). Furthermore, various interviewees commented favorably about donations made to the school system by the Westwood Educational Foundation for special initiatives and program enhancements. The Westwood Educational Foundation is a non-profit community foundation that supports educational initiatives in the Westwood Public Schools.

The superintendent told members of the review team that the town's auditor examines the procurement procedures and expenditures of the school budget. When questioned about the yearly auditing of the student activities account at the high school, the superintendent expressed the opinion that it was not done, but said he would look into the matter. Later, the high school principal also indicated that the school's student activity account was not audited.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the superintendent proposed a budget of \$33,434,700 or a 2.91 percent increase. However, the school committee approved a level-funded budget resulting in teachers not receiving a cost-of-living salary increase and potentially resulting in other school personnel not receiving salary increases. The superintendent and another central office administrator indicated that the \$946,014 in budget cuts also consisted of items such as the elimination of an elementary teaching position and two half-time instructional aide positions, a reduction in the New England Center for Children program, and decreases in technology equipment, supplies, materials, and maintenance. Some of the administrators, teachers, and parents interviewed told review team members that unless the school department receives

additional funding in the future, there is a possibility of larger class sizes, further elimination of staff positions, and reductions in programs and services to the students in Westwood. The superintendent responded to the inquiry about the level of funding of the district's budget by stating, "We won't be able to continue to maintain the current level of programs and services, if the ... economic situation continues to decline."

**District and school leaders work together to ensure that *all* students, regardless of need, have equal access to and opportunities for success in all programs and services.**

Throughout the district's planning and policy documents there is a stated commitment to the inclusion of special needs students in the least restrictive environment. In the system's goals for the 2008-2009 school year, Goal 4.b. states, "Provide professional development to general education staff to enhance effective inclusive educational practice."

Interviews with staff at all levels, both faculty and administration, reflected this commitment to high academic achievement for all students. Specifically, principals and the director of student services reported cooperating in hiring special education staff. Teachers reported that all students are expected to study the regular education grade-level curriculum with support as needed. The Curriculum Accommodation Plan outlines several paths to success for students with diverse learning needs. The plan reflects many interventions and programs, such as programs for diverse learners, consultation available for classroom teachers, and in-class supports such as instruction by literacy and math specialists, professional development to employ a wider range of instructional strategies, and the "X block" for academic reinforcement.

Classroom observations confirmed that the same high expectations are held for all students. In the 43 classroom visits, students on IEPs were indistinguishable from their regular education peers. The district reported that seven students having either IEPs or 504 Plans, five of whom required modifications and/or accommodations, participated in 15 Advanced Placement courses during 2008-2009.

Child study teams (CSTs) are in various stages of implementation across the school system. These teams, composed of classroom teachers, specialists, and often the principal, provide support to classroom teachers in addressing the needs of regular education students and may result in a referral for a special education evaluation. The process employed by the CSTs focuses on classroom interventions used by teachers to meet the needs of students within the regular classroom. The protocols used by the teams are extensive, and represent effective educational practice.

This year the district instituted professional learning communities (PLCs) to effect improvements in student achievement. At the elementary level the PLCs meet every month during release time to examine student achievement data. These teams, alternatively known as student success teams (SSTs), have also been studying strategies to improve performance in targeted areas of mathematics. Teachers within their respective schools provide leadership for the SSTs.

The students within the Westwood Public Schools benefit from this commitment to high achievement for *all* students by having universal access to support services throughout their K-

12 education. Special education students are included in all academic programs and all services offered by the district.

In the opinion of the review team, the Westwood Public Schools puts its commitment into action by including *all* students in all of its offerings.

**The district ensures that all learners are appropriately transitioned from one level to the next.**

The Westwood Public Schools has a number of transition activities for students at all levels, including parental meetings with administrators and staff, meetings between sending and receiving teachers, and student visits to the next educational setting.

In addition to these student-centered activities, a data portfolio with students' academic progress and performance on state assessments accompanies each student to the next level. Teachers also share information related to student achievement and behavior in meetings. Some of these meetings focus on preventing regression during the summer months. For example, a child study team observed by review team members recommended a student-generated goal to have the child practice skills at home over the summer recess.

A number of opportunities are offered to students and families to ease transitions to new school settings. Administrators offer additional tours and classroom visits in August before the opening of school. Students and parents at the high school are offered a video featuring high school students' perceptions of the opportunities and programs at the school. On the opening day of school entering kindergarten students and their parents meet in their respective classrooms for orientation, including a visit to a school bus. Kindergarten classes begin the following day. A delayed opening at the high school provides a similar orientation for entering ninth graders who are brought into the high school for two hours before other students' arrival.

For students with disabilities there are targeted efforts to minimize the disruption that accompanies moving from level to level. Parents and students have the opportunity to meet with the staff of the program at the end of the prior school year. Receiving teachers and staff also have the opportunity to observe students in their current settings. IEPs are shared with the receiving staff along with classroom practices that have proven successful with students. These methodologies are reinforced with professional development.

In cases where students require more extensive modifications, including minor renovation and/or the purchase of specialized equipment, the transition meetings between the staff begin as early as the fall of the year prior to the move. Similar transition activities are established for students returning from out-of-district placements. Westwood staff members attend all IEP meetings at the outside placement and thus are fully aware of the services provided. Because of this practice, the Westwood staff is able to smoothly transition students from outside placements into their home school district.

The district provides an orientation program called "Running Start" for entering METCO students during the summer. This program is open to all students entering the Westwood Public Schools.

The impact of these carefully planned transitions for students is a seamless educational experience K through 12. The students of the Westwood Public Schools are moved appropriately from one level to the next with plans for their educational needs incorporated into their upcoming setting.

**The district engages both administrators and teachers in collaborative practices that result in well-coordinated and articulated programs and services for *all* students.**

The district has created an atmosphere and culture of collaboration focused on student success. Throughout the school system there are collaborative structures that provide administrators and teachers with opportunities to work together on district or school-based initiatives to improve instruction.

The administrative council meets every other week to discuss districtwide issues. The elementary principals, two of whom are in their first year, meet during the off weeks to discuss common issues. These meetings also serve as part of the mentoring effort for new administrators.

The professional development council, a districtwide team of administrators and teachers, meets periodically to plan and provide offerings to teachers to support district and school instructional goals. In 2008-2009 the focus of professional development activities was differentiating instruction to facilitate all students' access to the curriculum. In addition, cyclical curriculum review teams meet to evaluate and revise curriculum to ensure that effective practice is incorporated in the district's curriculum. These teams have representation from special education.

At the school level, newly reconstituted child study teams (CSTs) meet weekly to recommend support and interventions to classroom teachers for specific students. These teams are constructed to incorporate special and regular education in a coordinated effort to make classroom instruction more effective for *all* students.

Professional learning communities meet twice each month to focus on instruction. In 2008-2009 the focus was on mathematics. These teams are teacher-led and often collect and analyze data to better understand the implications for instruction. The teams are in an emerging stage and hold the promise of extending the collaborative model of instruction throughout the system.

Other, more traditional teams that meet regularly to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment include the curriculum coordinators who meet twice monthly at the middle school, the academic council at the high school, and team leaders at the middle school. School Improvement Councils meet regularly at all levels. An MCAS analysis team meets as appropriate.

Many of these teams have common members. Most of the teams include special educators. This enhances the communication among the teams and throughout the system. It also ensures that initiatives around curriculum, instruction, and assessment are infused into both regular and special education.

As a result of this intertwined collaborative structure all students in the Westwood Public Schools benefit from effective practices in the classroom. This structure also results in a seamless cooperation between regular and special education. The district reported that 95 percent of graduating students go on to four-year colleges and universities. With a reported special education population of 15 percent, it is apparent that many of the district's students with disabilities pursue higher education with their non-disabled peers.

In summation, the collaborative structures put in place in the Westwood Public Schools create and support well-articulated programs and services for all students.

### Curriculum Delivery

**The district's curricula vary in format. They appear aligned to state standards, and curricular delivery provides rich learning and support opportunities for *all* learners.**

A review of curricula and descriptions of courses of study for major academic subjects revealed mostly lean documents that clearly described key knowledge and skills students are expected to learn. Some curriculum documents were more extensive and comprehensive than others and all displayed varied formats with a variety of components. All examined curricula appeared aligned to state frameworks.

Through interviews and classroom observations, it became evident to the review team that teachers are highly skilled at extending and supplementing the curriculum and their instruction to promote engagement and learning for all students—students with special education needs whose learning requires alternatives and support, as well as more advanced students who demonstrate the potential to reach farther and stretch their learning. These extensions and supplementary opportunities to engage learners occur both within the classroom and outside of it.

Inside elementary classrooms, meeting the needs of diverse learners is obvious in the amount and quality of differentiated instruction observed. Interviewees from all school levels noted the focus of professional development on differentiated instruction over several years at the elementary schools and more recently at the middle and high schools. At the middle school, observed curriculum delivery was simultaneously academic and experiential: rigor was obvious, and, at the same time, students appeared to engage in and enjoy their work.

At the high school, a number of outside-of-the-classroom learning alternatives provide reinforcement for students who need extra support. Some students are provided support as a result of the child study team meetings described on page 11 of this report. Other students find support on their own when they perceive they are struggling temporarily with a concept or an assignment. For example, to better complete a writing assignment, students can seek either required or supplementary support in the English Study Lab staffed with an English teacher and provided with computers. Students can obtain extra help in mathematics by dropping in to the Math Seminar Room where a rotating staff of math teachers tutors students daily. Interviewees noted that the Math Seminar Room typically receives 300 student visits a month. A Math Plus option offers entering grade 10 students who scored low on grade 8 MCAS mathematics tests an



additional 11 to 12 class periods over an eight-day cycle to review math content and strengthen test-taking strategies before taking the next MCAS test.

In addition, general education students who struggle academically can work with a teacher twice in an eight-day cycle in academic support classes conducted in small groups of 2 to 4 students for each subject. Other students can work one-on-one with teachers in a tutoring format. Learning centers are located at each school, including the high school, and are staffed by teachers and aides who work with special education students on special assignments or “problems of the day.” When review team members observed instruction in learning centers, it was difficult to differentiate the teacher from the aide(s). Also, at Westwood High School, reading instruction is in place and current. Special education teachers teach Reading I and Reading II classes particularly geared to freshmen who arrive at the high school with reading difficulties; but any student struggling with reading—regular education or special education—is welcome.

The FLEX program, short for “flexible” since students can move in and out of it, offers an alternative for students with social, emotional, or behavioral challenges and/or mental health issues that are impeding their success in school. Participation in the FLEX program is included in a student’s IEP as a result of the team meeting process or a meeting of the CST. Teachers describe FLEX as a “wraparound program” rather than a self-contained one: it does not bypass a student’s normal classroom experience, but “wraps around it.”

Interviewees cited several reasons for the variety of options to support curriculum delivery that meet diverse student learning needs. The district displays an easy collaboration between leaders, general educators, and special educators to promote student learning. The district facilitates multiple formats for teachers to construct conversations about the curriculum—at the subject level, at the grade level, and at the school level. Teachers at all instructional levels easily consider multiple approaches and entry points to engage their students with academic work. At the high school, students can choose three levels of courses as well as advanced placement courses “to maximize success and minimize failure,” as the program of studies states. Also, the high school attempts to keep the size of level III classes below 15 students to ensure support and success. One member of the high school academic council stated that as far as teachers were concerned, there was no difference among students, regardless of their learning needs and styles.

As a result, by tuning both curriculum and instruction to the needs of multiple learning styles and needs, the district serves students well in both general and special education programs. As noted earlier, the theme of “engagement versus intervention” prevails at all levels and in all subjects; although safety nets are still in place to support and even rescue students in need.

**The district implements a multi-year curriculum review and development cycle that ensures the continual review and renewal of all curricula to meet standards of effective practice.**

Westwood's curriculum review cycle is implemented on a five-year revolving schedule with discrete activities taking place in each of the five years. Review committees include representatives from multiple constituencies throughout the system, and even the community, and are directed by the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development. According to the review procedures document, committee representatives include, but are not limited to, representatives from each level (elementary, middle, and high school), district and school administrators, classroom teachers, special educators, parents and community representatives, and, where appropriate, students.

According to a document provided by the director of curriculum, the review committee participates in the review processes over a three-year period and then continues to implement and monitor the new curriculum for two years before restarting the cycle. The district initiates one major and one minor curriculum review each year and there is an extended posted schedule to enable departments to anticipate the timing of their next review.

Typically, the review committee begins with a close look at the mission of the curriculum or the program and revises it, if needed. Then the review committee defines the current curricular goals and generates a brief historical perspective on key changes and modifications over the prior decade. The committee then collects and analyzes data to evaluate the current program, including surveys targeted to teachers, administrators, students, parents and even to educators in like schools in other comparable districts. Through an analysis of internal and external survey data, the committee compares the program's status and standards to national and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks as well as to current research on effective practices in teaching and learning in the field. Another special focus of the review is to evaluate access to the program and any elements of discrimination in either content or curriculum delivery, to address the needs of *all* learners. In a final review step, the committee develops recommendations for curriculum, instruction, assessment, technology, professional development, communication, equality of educational access, and prevention of discrimination.

Once prepared, the recommendations are presented in writing to the superintendent and then in writing and publicly to the school committee. Finally, they are submitted by the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development for communication and implementation at each school. Plans and procedures are then developed to implement and monitor recommended changes and modifications over a period of years before the cycle begins anew.

ESE review team members were able to attend a subcommittee meeting in connection with the ELA curriculum review that is in its first year of implementation. Present were an elementary literacy coach, five or six teachers, and a parent member of the subcommittee. The subcommittee was identifying strengths and weaknesses described in internal and external surveys and selecting issues to address. The group also cross-walked survey data with ideas

from one text that addressed closing the achievement gap and another that described best practices in elementary literacy instruction. In addition, the subcommittee reviewed “representation, expression and engagement” guidelines from the Center for Applied Special Technology’s Universal Design for Learning and discussed how they either have already been or might be integrated into the ELA elementary curriculum to better address the needs of students with IEPs as well as students in general education. The conversation was intense, collegial, intellectual, and committed.

The curriculum review process does more than just revitalize the academic curriculum. The multi-year process of inquiry, research, review, development, and implementation encourages a culture of thinking and understanding for teachers and school leaders as well as for the students to whom the newly revised curriculum is targeted. In addition, it offers one or two community members a role in school improvement each year and a glimpse into the culture of learning and teaching in Westwood.

**Students with diverse needs have multiple opportunities throughout the K-12 program for academic and personal success.**

The Westwood Public Schools has a rich complement of programs and safety nets for students with diverse learning needs. In addition, the district’s commitment to accommodating diverse learners in the regular classroom as much as possible provides all students with instruction in the general curriculum.

For students whose disabilities require more specialized programs, the Westwood Public Schools provides articulated programs from grades K through 12. Learning centers are provided for students who require moderate levels of modification, resource rooms for students with more intensive instructional needs, and specialized resource rooms for students on the autism spectrum, for example. Students in these more restrictive environments have tiered access to the regular curriculum. This fully developed in-house array of programs and services facilitates students’ progression to less restrictive environments.

The district’s move to full-day kindergarten in 2009-2010 will extend students’ first school experience deeper into the regular curriculum. With full-day kindergarten will come the opportunity to support students in the emergent phase of their literacy. This support should result in a lessened need for interventions in the elementary grades.

The system also has an array of intervention programs for all students when needed. At the middle school an “X block” is included in the schedule for support in reading and math for all students. At the elementary level, a pilot co-teaching model in mathematics in grade 4 is focused on ensuring that all students receive appropriate instruction in the general curriculum.

The Westwood Public Schools also attends carefully to students’ social needs. High school students in special education programs participate fully in the athletic and social life of the school. Last-minute arrangements were made this year to allow a Westwood student who attends an out-of-district program to go to the prom. The high school principal, class advisor,

guidance counselors, and director of special education all worked together on short notice to give this student this experience.

Because of the commitment to include diverse learners in all aspects of student life, the students in the Westwood Public Schools benefit from a carefully constructed system of safety nets that encourage and support them in all aspects of school.

**With clarity and common language, teachers and leaders explain what constitutes good teaching to meet the needs of all learners.**

When asked, both teachers and school leaders articulated expectations and characteristics of what constitutes good or excellent instruction in Westwood and how good teaching responds to the needs of diverse learners. Teachers and principals noted “the need to empower students,” “to guide them in their learning,” “to engage and meet students’ needs and instill in all students the responsibility for taking charge of their own learning.” This is accomplished by providing an array of academic programs and services. It is also accomplished through an active teaching style that encourages students to interact with one another and with the teacher. Through child study team meetings, the schools provide students and parents with options and decisions to meet students’ diverse learning needs as they develop as learners.

In addition, teachers and principals stated that they hold students with IEPs to the same high standards as general education students, although pacing and depth of content might vary. Trained instructional aides teach special education students to advocate for themselves and become independent learners. Teachers and aides believe that this is a lesson for life that all students need to learn. In an observed learning center session at the middle school, seven students with IEPs began class by clearly articulating, one by one, what their learning need was for that day (their “problem of the day”), and then the teacher and two aides divided up the group to address each student’s needs. The observer found it impossible to tell who the teacher was and who the aides were.

Teachers and principals pointed to the district’s goal of implementing more differentiated instruction and admitted that teachers’ skills are also differentiated: elementary teachers are highly competent in differentiating instruction, secondary teachers, less so. Middle and high school teachers have prioritized differentiation in their professional development and, according to interviewees, had recently experienced explicit training to work with colleagues to develop differentiated lessons to try in class. However, observations in classrooms in grades 6 through 12 revealed little differentiation in practice.

Teachers and principals used common language to describe teachers and teaching practices including, “passion for teaching and for subject matter,” “liking students and wanting them to succeed,” “a willingness to try something new,” and “sharing in the camaraderie and safety of a subject team or colleagues.” There was more: “clarity of objectives,” “structuring learning around essential questions so that lessons are related and not ‘stand alones’,” “integrating critical and creative thinking into lessons,” and “developing positive relationships between students and

teachers.” More than one principal noted that their faculty takes great pleasure and pride in what they do as professionals.

As a result of the clarity of what constitutes good teaching for all students, instruction, at least in classrooms observed by the review team, attains standards of effective practice. All students have the opportunity to find appropriate programs and services and the support they need to fulfill their potential.

**Instructional practices draw on research-based effective practice at all school levels, particularly those practices targeted to students with IEPs.**

In interviews, principals noted that they are the curriculum and instructional leaders in their buildings. They monitor instruction through classroom visits and through dialogue with teachers, teacher-leaders such as elementary literacy and math coordinators, and the numerous school-based teams that contribute to the instructional life of each school. This reflects the strong emphasis on a multi-level system of collaboration. In addition, there is time during the school day for special teams to meet regularly, apart from grade-level and subject-level meetings, to identify and resolve learning issues for regular and special education students at every school. For example, student success teams at the elementary schools were focusing in 2008-2009 on developing more collaboration among grade-level teachers.

Curriculum coordinators at the middle school hold responsibility for solidifying and improving teaching, learning, and the curriculum. Team leaders at the middle school (this group included one special educator) concentrate on the quality of the student experience, often resolving issues related to mental health or student behavior as well as planning special events such as field trips. The high school’s academic council functions in a department head model but also meets regularly as an advisory group to the principal to monitor and improve instruction and help guide professional development.

The high school faculty also engages in reflective practice days, or RPDs. During RPDs, teachers might look at student work, work in groups to identify learning or teaching needs, and then develop a pilot solution. They are constantly in a state of re-examining and tinkering with practice in order to improve their work with all students. Interviewees described RPDs as “the most valuable time we have” and alluded to how they created “habits of mind” applied to their craft of teaching. RPD meetings can also stretch across disciplinary boundaries: teachers across departments collaborate to develop interdisciplinary projects that are more substantial than the typical thematic approach used in most interdisciplinary instruction. Special educators engage in all of these collaborative endeavors and bring the perspective of meeting the needs of all learners to the discussion.

Because teaching draws on and attains research-based effective practices, particularly in terms of teacher collaboration and professionalism, instruction can maximize student potential in Westwood, and all students have multiple opportunities for success.

**The district’s encouragement of exploration and risk-taking for teachers provides instructional practices that serve the needs of *all* learners and engages teachers in innovative work.**

In interviews and observations, review team members noted a number of inventive practices instigated by teachers. These demonstrate the willingness of both the teachers and the district to take risks and break out of normal modes in order to improve learning for all students.

In 2008-2009, a pilot program in mathematics in grade 4 explored differentiation through a co-teaching model. A regular education teacher and a special educator collaborated in the summer of 2008 to plan and teach mathematics to several grade 4 pilot classrooms. In an observed pilot classroom, one teacher presented a lesson on cubes and then both teachers worked with various subgroups within the classroom using structured activities and assignments that met the specific needs of each student group. It was impossible to tell who the special education students were and which teacher was the special educator.

Two math specialists developed an Early Numeracy Project to invent and then conduct screening assessments for students in kindergarten and grade 1 to better understand their conceptual understanding in mathematics. By “intervening early rather than remediating later,” the teachers were able to develop math tools for math recovery targeted to the specific conceptual needs of these early learners.

Elementary teachers also created some intellectual cross-fertilization between ELA and mathematics by borrowing a practice from ELA. They established flexible grouping in mathematics so that students, once proficient in various skills, could move to another group to build on strengths or address weaknesses.

The middle school faculty made innovations in technology a priority in 2008-2009. One activity was to create “wiki” sites for students to post academic work and engage teachers and each other about it—a sort of a middle school “academic blog.” One English teacher noted that his students had never written or shared as much poetry as they did this year using the wiki site.

As a result of the district’s encouragement of innovation, teachers have created unique and workable strategies to support student learning at all levels of the system.

**Modifications and accommodations for diverse learners are seamless in classroom instruction so that learning differences are indistinguishable in the classroom.**

Throughout the Westwood Public Schools diverse learners are included in the regular education program to the highest degree possible. There is districtwide commitment to accommodate their learning needs and modify the curriculum for them in every setting. The district reports that 70 percent of its students with disabilities are fully included in classrooms where teachers teach the regular curriculum. This was evident in every classroom visited. So seamless is the instruction that students with IEPs are not distinguished from their regular education peers. The same is true for the adult staff. Many of the instructional aides are well schooled in the language and strategies of the mathematics and literacy programs.

As a result of this instructional model, all students in the Westwood Public Schools benefit not only from quality instruction, but also from very advantageous teacher-pupil ratios. All staff, faculty and support staff, move about the classroom assisting, coaching, and clarifying for all students.

The Westwood Public Schools has made its commitment to inclusion into a set of outstanding instructional practices that ensure that all students have equal access to the general curriculum.

**The district is proactive in making its collaboration and participation with external service providers more cost-effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners.**

The district is committed to providing students high quality programming in the least restrictive environment. The Westwood Public Schools has been successful in assigning instructional aides to classrooms to assist all students, including those whose IEPs require classroom assistance. By deploying classroom aides in this manner, not only is the required support provided, but also support for other students without IEPs is provided. To accomplish this, the district has ensured that the instructional aides (IAs) become fluent in the mathematics and literacy programs and instructional strategies by attending professional development sessions at each school along with classroom teachers. Also, many IAs are credentialed as teachers.

As further evidence that the district is committed to all of its students, representatives from the district attend IEP meetings for students attending out-of-district programs. In this way the district is fully represented, not solely by the out-of-district coordinator, but by the practicing professionals who can assess the students' skills and progress and best fit to district programs. The ultimate goal is to return students to their home school and community. Recently, a student was moved, through the IEP process, from a private placement to a collaborative one. The collaborative placement is a less restrictive environment and can better meet the needs of the student.

The district has a partnership program with the New England Center for Children (NECC) for autistic children. Through the leadership of the director of student services, this program was recently modified substantially. The NECC model is typically a self-contained one requiring direct instruction delivered by trained instructional assistants in a one-to-one setting supervised by a licensed teacher. Now, instruction is delivered by a licensed teacher with instructional assistants assisting. As a result of this modification, some students have been moved to regular classrooms. The program is now less costly and provides services to more students in more inclusive settings.

The district also houses a program at the high school supervised by The Education Collaborative (TEC). These students with disabilities, some of whom are Westwood students, are included in high school programs as appropriate. They are also included in the extra- and co-curricular activities at the high school.

The result of this proactive leadership is more effective and cost-efficient programs for students. Student who otherwise would spend their class time in more restrictive environments and self-

contained classes have the opportunity to be included in school settings with their non-disabled peers.

The Westwood Public Schools establishes and modifies programs for disabled students to meet the intent of state and federal legislation. Disabled learners in Westwood have multiple opportunities to access educational opportunities with their non-disabled peers.

**Classroom observations revealed strong instructional practices that engage all students at all school levels.**

Team members observed 43 classrooms for 20 to 30 minutes each in grades K through 12: 19 English language arts, 13 mathematics, 4 science, 3 social studies, 1 foreign language, 2 resource rooms, and 1 learning center. The grade configuration of observed classrooms included 1 kindergarten, 2 grade 1, 4 grade 2, 3 grade 3, 4 grade 4, 3 grade 5, 3 grade 6, 2 grade 7, and 4 grade 8 classrooms, and 13 classrooms for grades 9 through 12; others were multi-grade special education settings.

Fifteen observed classrooms, or 35 percent, had one or more adults working with students either in a co-teaching environment or using one or more instructional aides. In all classrooms with more than one adult, review team members noted that it was difficult to discern who the classroom teacher was, even in the three special education settings with more than one adult present. Team members also noted that it was impossible to tell who the students with IEPs were in co-taught classrooms or in classrooms with one or more instructional aides.

Table 6 below illustrates observed trends in classroom practice based on the 17 characteristics in the Instructional Inventory Record designed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Observers noted all 17 characteristics and focused on the seven shown with an asterisk. Observers frequently asked students what they were doing or what they were learning.

Overall, the evidence reveals very strong instructional practices across classrooms, indicated by the high number of ratings with *solid evidence*. Observers' written comments also reinforced observed instructional strengths. For example, at the elementary level, observers typically commented, "teachers used a variety of techniques and monitored student work," "probing questions asked in every classroom observed," "excellent use and reinforcement of mathematics vocabulary by teacher and students," "students respond clearly to questions and articulate their thinking in complete sentences, not softly mumbled one-word answers," and "even kindergarten students were able to explain the nature of their lesson and what the objectives were."



**Table 6**  
**Trends in 17 Classroom Characteristics**  
**By Number of Observations in 43 Classrooms<sup>3</sup>**  
**Westwood Public Schools, June 3 & 4, 2009**

<i>Characteristic Description</i>	<i>No Evidence</i>	<i>Partial Evidence</i>	<i>Solid Evidence</i>
1. Classroom climate is characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse.		2	39
2. A learning objective (not simply an agenda or activity description for the day's lesson) is evident.	3	6	32
3. Available class time is maximized for learning.		3	33
4. Instruction links academic concepts to students' prior knowledge and experience.	7		36
5. Supplemental materials are aligned with students' developmental level and level of English proficiency.			30
6. Presentation of content is within the students' English proficiency and developmental level.	1	2	40
7. Depth of content knowledge is evident throughout the presentation of the lesson.*	1	4	38
8. Instruction includes a range of techniques such as direct instruction, facilitating, and modeling.	2	4	35
9. Questions require students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.*		1	32
10. The teacher paces the lesson to ensure that all students are actively engaged.*	2	5	36
11. Students articulate their thinking and reasoning.*	3	4	35
12. Students are inquiring, exploring, or problem solving together, in pairs or in small groups.*		1	30
13. Opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content are embedded in the lesson.*	11	1	27
14. On-the-spot formative assessments check for understanding to inform instruction.*	1		25
15. Formative written feedback to students is frequent, timely, and informs revision.		1	9
16. Students can explain how routines, procedures, and processes are helping their thinking and learning.			15
17. Students can express in their own words what they are learning and why, when asked.			20

Classroom observers at the middle school described how “a variety of activities took place in the classrooms, i.e., individual seat work, paired activities, problem solving at the board, demonstrations, and presentations,” “students were able to explain to me what the lesson entailed

<sup>3</sup> Total responses do not add to 43 because some categories, mostly in resource rooms or learning centers, were appropriately left “blank” by observers.

and what was expected of them,” “teachers, and in some instances instructional aides, periodically checked the work students were doing,” and “students’ literacy vocabulary and approach to close reading indicates they are used to examining texts and working with abstract ideas.”

At the high school, observers’ notes described “excellent learning environment in all classes,” “all observed classes included reviews of previously learned material with an introduction to new material,” “high expectations for students obvious in all classes,” “teacher circulates among the groups, clarifying, probing, assisting,” “reasoning has to be included in their outlines for their speeches,” and “content is from a combination of primary and secondary sources.”

Clearly, it is risky to over-generalize about instruction based on a small sample of classroom observations during a short period of time. However, review team members are able to glean impressions of the state of the art of instruction in a school or a district whenever a classroom is observed. In their professional opinion, the members of the review team agreed that instructional practice in the district strongly reflects attention to effective practices.

**Many observed classrooms absorbed all students in lively, creative lessons that emphasized understanding and thinking skills.**

Many of the 43 observed classrooms demonstrated exemplary practices that support diverse learning styles and learning needs. These classes blended high expectations, important skill and knowledge development, and rigorous content, and asked for critical and creative thinking on the part of teachers as well as students. Lessons often displayed the application of the theory of multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, research skills and critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving, literary genre study, flexible grouping, vocabulary development, and the appropriate use of technology as a tool to better instruction. The following examples drawn from a few classrooms from all levels and disciplines are included as evidence of observed good practice.

A grade 2 class conducted a dress rehearsal of a performance dramatizing fairy tales. This was the culminating activity of a grade level ELA unit on fairy tales. Students performed several fairy tales for an audience of their peers in grades K through 5. Students had worked with their teacher to create dramatizations of the stories. They created scenery, props, costumes and dialogue. With the assistance of the teacher, students tailored the traditional fairy tale dialogue to represent a voice more suited to their individual personalities. The students were able to demonstrate their deeper understanding of plot, characterization, and motivation.

Each student in a grade 5 class was working on a computer retrieved from a laptop cart. The teacher and a literacy coordinator were moving about the room, conferencing with students individually. When asked what they were doing, students responded: “We’re working on our independent research papers.” “We’re learning to write a research paper. We’ve done our research in the library and on the web and we’ve made note-cards” (holding up a stack of 3” by 5” cards clipped together in six or eight sections). “Today I’ve ordered my cards into paragraphs and I’m writing the paragraphs on the computer.” Students’ computer screens were filled with

edited paragraphs or new paragraphs were being entered. When asked to describe their topics, students enthusiastically complied and added the personal connection and interest that led them to the choice of research. Among the students' topics were non-verbal communication, sleep and sleep disorders, the human eye and how it works, the archeological site of Petra in Jordan, and the Mauna Kea volcano in Hawaii.

A grade 6 middle school math class was focused on cross-multiplication. The teacher distributed a handout with a floor plan of a house along with a scale and asked the students to determine the area of each room. Using the overhead projector, the teacher demonstrated how to determine the area of one of the rooms and sought input from the students in solving the problem. Once the teacher's demonstration was completed, both the teacher and the instructional aide circulated throughout the classroom, checking students' work and asking individual students to explain how they determined the area of various rooms. The teacher then proceeded to give the students the actual size of five pieces of furniture and asked the students to reduce each piece using the same scale they used to determine the area of the various rooms. In addition, the students were asked to place the furniture in a specific room, cognizant of windows and doors. All students were actively engaged in the lesson, and the teacher and the instructional aide both had a good rapport with the students. Furthermore, the observer was unable to tell how many special needs students were in the class as assistance was given to each of the students by both the teacher and the aide.

A high school AP history class was studying American foreign policy between 1990 and 2001. The students used laptops to access primary and secondary sources related to the topic, including presidential speeches and government reports. Students were then asked to answer a series of questions relating to significant events and/or policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Mogadishu War, and U.S. involvement in Haiti. As students read information on websites, they were asked to evaluate the information as well as the website regarding accuracy and appropriateness for academic research. The culminating assignment of the lesson required each student to write a thesis statement characterizing American foreign policy for the period under study. The lesson required students to use technology to obtain, analyze, and synthesize information to create an original thesis. The lesson embodied hallmarks of good teaching that fostered intellectual rigor and students' curiosity.

Our last example is an inclusive kindergarten class with both of the school's kindergarten classes involved in an interactive ELA lesson. There were two regular education teachers, a special education teacher, and two instructional aides present during the lesson, with 34 students. When the observer entered, all the students were sitting on the carpeted floor, busily working in groups of four, writing in full sentences their recollections of a story they had read concerning dragons and dungeons. The learning environment was stimulating and the five adults in the room were moving from one group to another assisting the students with their writing assignment. It was obvious that the teaching staff held high expectations for every student and used differentiated instruction throughout the lesson. The lesson was impressive due to the enthusiasm for learning demonstrated by the kindergarteners and their obviously well-developed writing skills.

**The district has systems in place that primarily focus on student achievement.**

Interviewees repeatedly commented about various initiatives in the Westwood Public Schools aimed at improving student achievement. They cited the strength of the curriculum, student support systems, resources such as money, people, and materials, supervision, professional development, and collaboration and communication.

Administrators, parents, and teachers stated that the district has a comprehensive curriculum for grades K through 12 that provides learning opportunities for all students. They also cited the high school, where students are able to enroll in a wide range of advanced placement courses. One supervisor mentioned, as noted before, that seven students with disabilities participated in 15 advanced placement courses this year. Administrators and teachers reported that they regularly discuss the curriculum and improving student achievement at faculty, grade-level, team, and department meetings. In addition, they remarked about the district's curriculum review cycle, mentioning that the review of science was almost completed and the review of ELA starting.

Interviewees spoke favorably about the various support systems that the district has developed to assist students. The superintendent indicated that administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors monitor student progress throughout the year. He also mentioned the establishment at each school of new student support teams. Administrators told about the broad range of programs offered to special education students besides inclusion, such as learning centers, resource rooms, peer moderate and peer intensive programs, and the RISE, STAR, and FLEX programs. (RISE and STAR are elementary programs, one cognitive/language and one emotional/behavioral; the FLEX program, described above, is a high school program.) District leaders stated that the district employs a full-time METCO coordinator at the high school and a full-time instructional aide at the middle school for the 40 METCO students in grades 6 through 12. Furthermore, they indicated that 1 ½ teachers were hired to serve the 17 English language learners in the district.

The superintendent and other interviewees remarked that the school budget for FY09 is adequate. They acknowledged that the \$2.8 million school budget override in 2008 helped restore and add over 30 FTE staff positions. Furthermore, the override provided funds needed for technology equipment, supplies and materials, textbooks, equipment repair, and maintenance. However, these interviewees expressed concerns about future funding of the schools in Westwood.

Administrators and teachers reported that the district has a supervision system in place under which each professional staff member is evaluated once a year. Principals mentioned that they meet with the superintendent early in the fall to discuss goals for the year, meet again in January or February for a progress report on the goals, and then meet at the end of the year for a final evaluation. Teachers stated that they are evaluated every year by their supervisors, namely, the principal, the assistant principal, or the department head. Furthermore, leaders stated that the district was investigating other potential evaluation instruments that better reflect what is happening and what should happen in the classroom and better promote professional growth for teachers.

The Westwood Public Schools makes a major commitment to professional development. Besides the several professional development days when school is not in session, the district provides regular early-release days for both district and individual school professional development programs. In 2008-2009 professional development programs focused primarily on improving students' performances in math, differentiated instruction, and professional learning communities. In addition, the district offers an extensive array of professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators and support staff.

A highly developed and coordinated collaboration and communication system is evident in the district. Administrators, teachers, and parents referred to meetings of the administrative council, elementary school principals, academic council, curriculum review teams, school improvement councils, MCAS analysis team, professional development leadership teams, and the student support teams. Some interviewees reported that these meetings have as their main purpose improving the teaching/learning process and, ultimately, student achievement.

**To improve student achievement, administrators and teachers use aggregated and disaggregated assessment results to make modifications to programs and services.**

The superintendent reported that one of the responsibilities of the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development is to work with an MCAS analysis team consisting of principals, coordinators, and teachers. The team analyzes MCAS results and then prepares a districtwide MCAS report, which it presents to the school committee. Principals mentioned that they share MCAS results with their staffs at faculty meetings at each level. At the elementary schools, teachers meet by grade levels, at the middle school by teams and departments, and at the high school by departments, to further analyze aggregated and disaggregated data. Interviewees stated that the teachers examine the information from item analyses and focus on the results of students who scored 230 or lower. In 2008-2009, at the middle school, the principal asked teachers to focus on individual students: who were the students who scored poorly on MCAS and what did they have in common? She believed that making results person-focused rather than using an item focus would speed the process for targeted assistance.

In 2008, Westwood made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) except for the special education subgroup in ELA in grades 3-5 and in math in grades 6-8. It did, however, make Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate. Administrators commented that teachers looked at the MCAS results of special education students and cross-walked them to their IEPs. They also reported that child study teams and student success teams provide assistance to meet students' needs and monitor their progress.

The superintendent indicated that the district has added 3.2 full-time equivalent math specialist positions. Principals confirmed the hiring of additional math personnel to provide direct services to struggling students and to work with teachers in further developing their skills in math instruction. Administrators stated that the math specialists demonstrate model classes for teachers. Both administrators and teachers commented that math was one of the major themes in the professional development program in the 2008-2009 school year. The goal of the districtwide and individual school math in-service programs was "excellence in math."

Besides examining MCAS results, administrators and teachers reported that they analyze the data from the Scholastic Aptitude, Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude and Advanced Placement tests. In addition, interviewees said that the results from the common mid-year and end-of-year exams at the high school are analyzed. Some teachers at the middle and elementary schools indicated that they are currently working with colleagues to develop common unit tests. The superintendent and principals stated that the development of common formative assessments in the schools is a “work in progress.”

**District and school leaders as well as teachers are in the process of developing a more comprehensive assessment system to better measure and understand all students’ academic progress and learning needs.**

In interviews, district and school leaders admitted that the district is much further advanced in instruction than in how it considers and applies assessments. The district practices the development, scheduling, administration, and analysis of all kinds of pre-tests, post-tests, standardized formative assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), quizzes, chapter tests, unit tests, benchmark assessments, and common mid-year and final exams. Although MCAS data has been systematically analyzed for years and the results keenly inform curricular and instructional decisions, the district believes that a pro-active rather than a reactive approach to assessing student work will better serve more students’ learning needs. The idea of using assessment as a key to open a door to better teaching and better learning and growth rather than as a ticket to exit a course or a unit of study has already made an impact on how assessments will be improved in the future.

As a professional community led by the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, groups of teachers and school leaders are now moving to a new level in how they use student assessment, but they concede that they are not yet there. That new level could consist of using more varied formative and authentic assessments, as well as technology, to better inform students and teachers about learning and teaching and what each needs to do to improve.

Already, teachers are taking meaningful steps to transform the development and use of assessments. A breakthrough for elementary teachers was the research of Kathy Richardson, who compares “early literacy” in mathematics with early literacy in ELA. When students fall behind, more intensive and appropriate support is offered, based on the principles of reading recovery that send students to a literacy specialist when a benchmark is not met. As a result, elementary teachers have created a math recovery program similar to the well-known “reading recovery.”

Elementary teachers and specialists are creating more formative assessments to use as diagnostic tools in elementary mathematics. Teachers can stage the levels of support students receive based on a suite of formative assessments and lessons found in a teacher-developed Math Tools binder. At the first tier, the teacher supports students’ learning. At the second tier, a math specialist works more intensively with two students at a time at least twice a week, using formative benchmark assessments to move each student to the next level. In another example, elementary

math teachers are interested in understanding how students arrive at answers in mathematics, not just in the answers alone, in order to gauge students' conceptual understanding. In the earliest grades, two teachers have developed math concept screening tools to offer short term interventions very early in students' learning in mathematics.

In special education, students and regular as well as special education teachers benefit from having a school psychologist at every school and two districtwide behavioral specialists available to staff when needed. Multiple assessments by these specialists inform IEPs, clearly, but the professional staff is also available to meet with parents and teachers to explain student learning needs and describe instructional opportunities to promote better learning.

At the middle school, reviewers found teachers and school leaders also thinking differently about assessment. In 2008-2009, under the principal's direction, teacher groups analyzed 2008 MCAS scores with the test-takers in mind rather than the test items. When MCAS data was disaggregated and they looked at the profiles of students scoring poorly, subgroups such as special education, low-income, and METCO students surfaced. Although this analysis would be a normal procedure in a focused urban district, it opened eyes in this high-performing suburban district, where MCAS analyses typically focus on the items and the kinds of questions on which students demonstrate strengths and weaknesses, and where low-performing subgroups are so small in number they tend to get lost. The analyses focused teachers' attention on the need to create stronger opportunities to work with students who need more support, such as supplementary math classes both before and after school and the summer math program.

The high school has a group led by a high school teacher-leader, the Committee for 2011, looking at how technology and online tools can change classroom instruction and create more expansive and collaborative learning communities. Given the potential for technology and the fluency with which "twenty-first century learners" (as the district calls them) use technology, teachers are also considering how the use of technology and more authentic assessments might support learning and teaching.

The high school principal displayed an attuned sensitivity to the stress and powerful pressures brought to bear on students in a high-performing school in a community with very high expectations. Interviewees noted that the cultural aspects of stress, anxiety disorders, depression, and substance abuse can sometimes be directly linked to school-related causes and the highly competitive systems in which students operate. To relieve these pressures, the school's site council has discussed stress reduction and taken cues from the Dr. Herbert Benson Mind-Brain Institute. In one example in 2008, the high school revamped its summer reading program so that students could choose, for their summer book, one of 50 books from a list appealing to a wide variety of readers. In the first week of school, a different teacher led a discussion group for each book. Reports were that students, who no longer had to compete to read the most books, actually, on the whole, read more books during the summer, and that the book discussions created worthwhile learning experiences for both teachers and students.

This ongoing shift to new forms and uses of assessment could change the culture of assessment in Westwood. Not only would assessment be a process of assigning grades and making global

decisions about curriculum and instruction, but it could also be a process of seeking evidence of what both students and teachers can address together, and individually, to improve learning and teaching.

### Human resources and professional development

**The hiring process for professional staff used by the Westwood Public Schools is both complex and comprehensive and provides the district the opportunity to hire the highest quality teachers and administrators in both regular and special education.**

When a teaching vacancy exists in the district, the central office advertises the position in local papers, including the *Boston Globe*, and notifies placement offices at colleges and universities in the Boston area, requesting that application material be sent directly to the superintendent's office. Because the Westwood Public Schools uses site-based management, the screening process used by each school varies. However, each principal has created a comprehensive screening and interviewing process that gives that school an excellent opportunity to hire high quality teachers.

At some of the elementary schools, the principal paper-screens all the candidates, interviews several whom he or she believes best fit the school's needs, and then chooses three or four finalists. The finalists are then interviewed by a committee made up of grade-level teachers, curriculum leaders, and sometimes a parent or two. At other elementary schools, principals have chosen to use the committee structure from the start of the process to the selection of the final candidate.

At the middle school, the principal assembles a team—including the assistant principal, the curriculum coordinator for the particular discipline where the vacancy exists, and, often, a parent—to screen and interview all viable candidates. That group stays together throughout the process until a final candidate is chosen.

At the high school, the principal allows the appropriate department head to paper-screen the potential candidates and conduct the initial interviews, often with the assistance of a teacher or two from the department. Usually two or three finalists are chosen by this process, each of whom is requested to come to Westwood High School to teach a sample lesson observed by the principal and the department head. After the lesson has been taught, the candidate is interviewed by the principal, who makes the decision on whom to hire in concert with the department head.

Administrative vacancies are processed through the central office with a committee of administrators, teachers, department heads, and parents screening and interviewing candidates from start to finish.

One notable practice in the Westwood Public Schools is to hire, as a large percentage of the district's instructional aides, highly qualified individuals.

These complex and comprehensive hiring processes result in the district's employing high quality teachers and administrators who can well serve the needs of all students.



**The district supports newly hired teachers and administrators with a comprehensive induction program.**

Although interviewees stated that the Westwood Public Schools had an informal induction program in place for years, it was not until the 2007-2008 school year that the district initiated a formal and comprehensive induction program. At that time, an outside consulting firm was hired to train a cadre of district teachers from all levels in the art of successful mentorship. The program was conducted with more than 40 teachers in the summer and during professional development days during the school year. The idea was to train enough veteran teachers to mentor newly hired teachers for the first two or even three years of service in district.

Each principal has the responsibility to match up each new teacher with a mentor. This process most often matches the mentor and mentee from within the same grade level and/or department. Most importantly, time is scheduled in both parties' work week to have at least one face-to-face conference.

Because of the large number of new teachers hired in the last two years (15 new teachers were hired for the 2007-2008 school year and 12 for 2008-2009), the high school administration believed that assistance in addition to the above-mentioned one-on-one mentoring program was needed to help acclimate newcomers to their school. Subsequently, they initiated a three-layered acclimation program coordinated by two veteran high school teachers. The program includes monthly seminars for all new teachers on specific topics such as assessment and rubrics, problem-solving, classroom management, and grading procedures. A second aspect of the program involves arranging five or six peer observations a year by the new teachers of accomplished veteran teachers teaching a lesson. The third aspect of the program involves a peer observing the new teacher teaching, in a non-threatening learning experience. Everyone interviewed by the review team agreed that the entire induction program was successful in all aspects.

Newly appointed administrators also feel well supported by the district. The district appoints a mentor for each new principal, and the agenda at administrative meetings includes a variety of topics originating from either the district office or from the principals themselves. In addition, the district has an arrangement with Boston College's Lynch School of Education to provide additional consultation and support for new principals from someone from outside the district.

**The comprehensive professional development program offered and financially supported by the Westwood Public Schools is exemplary.**

The professional development program of the Westwood Public Schools begins with the Westwood School Committee's core belief that professional development for the entire staff is of utmost importance in educating the community's children well. To that end, the committee financially supports an effective professional development program and contractually provides teachers, administrators, and instructional aides with the time necessary for the program to positively affect instruction in classrooms. For the past several years, the Westwood Public Schools has expended more than 2 percent of its annual budget for professional development. In

the 2008-2009 school year that amount exceeded \$700,000. By contractual agreement, the time commitment for professional development each school year includes two full days (one each in November and March) and 18 early release days (approximately every other Wednesday). In addition to those professional development days, the staff has regular weekly meetings with the school's principal, grade level specialists, curriculum coordinators, team leaders and/or department heads.

Furthermore, pedagogical courses, where professional development points (PDPs) and incremental Westwood credits can be earned, are offered after school throughout the year, most often taught by Westwood staff members. These courses, all listed in the district's comprehensive and extensive Professional Development Handbook, have a full range of topics from Book Study Groups and Integrating Technology into the Curriculum to Sensory Integration in the classroom and Examining Features of Shapes in teaching. The principles obtained in this last course informed the exemplary practice—teaching area using rooms in a house—noted during the team's classroom observations and described earlier.

The district reimburses teachers for advancing their professional careers at accredited higher education institutions by paying \$500 per course or 50 percent of any course costing more than \$1000.

A professional development council made up of an equal number of administrators and teachers oversees the entire professional development program. Each spring the faculty is surveyed for input on what learning opportunities should be offered the following school year.

Because of the site-based management model used by the district, each principal steers the professional development opportunities at his or her school; district initiatives are an integral part of the program. During the last two years, the district has emphasized improving math MCAS results across grade levels and meeting the needs of all learners.

To those ends, the professional development programs at all the schools have a strong emphasis on comprehensively analyzing students' MCAS math results, making adjustments to mathematics instructional practices to meet the needs of all students, and infusing differentiated instruction in all classrooms. The district's all-inclusion policy results in a very healthy relationship between the regular education staff and the special education teachers and instructional aides. It is also important to note that the special education teachers participate in all the professional development opportunities with their regular education counterparts.

At the teacher focus group meeting, all agreed that they felt well supported in their professional growth by the district and that meeting the needs of every one of their students was an important aspect of teaching in the Westwood Public Schools. Teachers also informed the review team that they were allowed, in fact encouraged, to attend conferences and seminars in their areas of expertise as long as the experience enhanced their pedagogy.

In summary, the professional development opportunities available to Westwood Public School professionals are systemic in nature, aligned with school and district goals, and focused on the needs of all of the district's students. Professional development in Westwood is exemplary.

**Teachers unequivocally stated that the supervision and evaluation process used by the district’s supervisory personnel is instructive in nature and promotes their professional growth.**

The supervision model in use throughout the district enables the district’s supervisory personnel (principals, assistant principals, directors, and department heads) to have continuous and personal contact with each teacher, focusing on improving achievement for all learners. All interviewees agreed that this supervisory model is omnipresent in the district’s schools and that it enriches and enhances each teacher’s professional growth. Supervisory personnel observe classrooms, attend meetings of specific groups and teams, and meet regularly with school-based leaders. They stay attuned to classroom instruction and climate and offer suggestions to promote teacher development.

All teachers and administrators interviewed during the site visit stated that the evaluation process used by the district for teachers follows both state and contractual guidelines and that evaluations are, for the most part, timely and instructive in nature. Administrators, however, noted that the instrument used for the summative evaluation of the district’s teachers (the Professional Performance Evaluation Instrument or PPEI) is cumbersome and difficult to use. Interviewees were pleased that efforts had begun in the spring by a team of administrators and teachers’ union representatives to replace the instrument. All agreed that the district’s prevailing culture of collaboration would result in a more effective instrument being created that would better emphasize the professional growth of each teacher.

The superintendent stated during an interview that because of the thoroughness of the observation/evaluation process used in the district, approximately 10 to 15 percent of the non-professional status teachers hired in recent years had not been granted professional status.

The supervision/evaluation process varies from the elementary and middle schools, where the principals do all the observations and write the summative evaluations, to the high school, where the department heads have the responsibility to observe all the teachers in their respective departments and write their summative evaluations. The high school principal stated that she and her assistant observe the non-professional status teachers once annually. She collaborates with department heads in drafting the PPEI and then signs the final copy.

Although the teachers’ contract provides that professional status teachers have the option of having a goal-setting year during an “off year” from the PPEI, most professional status teachers throughout the district choose to continue to be observed and have a summative evaluation written every year.

It is important to note that the more than 50 instructional aides in the Westwood Public Schools are also evaluated annually by the special education director and her staff.

Although the review team was not able to review written teacher evaluations, it appeared from interviews and a review of procedural documents that the supervision and evaluation process used by administrators for the district’s teachers and aides is comprehensive, timely and effective.

**The evaluation process for each principal consists of a goal-setting conference with the superintendent at the beginning of each school year, a mid-year review of those goals, and an end-of-year self-evaluation.**

Each of the principals interviewed by the review team stated that the principal's evaluation annually consists of meeting with the superintendent at the beginning of the school year to go over the set of goals he or she has established for that particular year, using the Principles of Effective Leadership as a guide. That initial meeting is followed by a mid-year conference with the superintendent to discuss progress toward meeting those goals and finally, an end-of-year meeting with the superintendent to discuss the attainment of the goals. Furthermore, each principal stated that at the final meeting, he or she submits a self-evaluation to the superintendent.

## **Recommendations**

### **Leadership**

**Once the school committee approves the strategic plan, share it with the entire staff and educational community.**

The superintendent envisions the strategic plan as a blueprint for the future of the Westwood Public Schools. Upon its approval, it is important that all school personnel and citizens of Westwood be informed about the plan, especially the goals and the vision for the school system. It is suggested that goals in the school improvement plan for each school be aligned with the goals in the strategic plan. In addition, it is suggested that twice a year, at mid-year and at the end of the year, the superintendent update the school committee and community on the progress made on each of the goals in the strategic plan, and similarly, that each of the principals report to the superintendent on the status of every goal in his or her school's improvement plan as part of the annual performance evaluation cycle. A shared vision for the future of the district and its schools may be the best way to engage widespread support and involvement.

**Continue the close collaboration between regular and special education that results in the quality programs that promote high achievement for *all* students.**

The Westwood Public Schools has a carefully crafted set of programming for its special needs students that provides universal access to the curriculum. Its students perform at high levels on the conventional measures of student achievement. Students enjoy support in all aspects of the curriculum throughout the system.

- The district reported that 70 percent of its students with disabilities were fully included in classrooms where teachers teach the regular curriculum. This was evident in every classroom visited.
- The district reported that 93 percent of graduating students go on to four-year colleges and universities. With a reported special education population of 15 percent, it is apparent that many of the district's students with disabilities pursue higher education with their non-disabled peers.

The district has exemplary cooperation between regular and special education. Principals work closely with the director of student services to hire staff, modify programs, and assign students to appropriate programs. The staff demonstrates a commitment to meeting the needs of all students. The programming is both discrete and flexible, allowing students to move seamlessly through the various levels of support.

- Collaboration in the district is evidenced by a variety of teams, many of which have common members. Most of the teams include special educators. This enhances the communication among the teams and throughout the system. It also ensures that initiatives around curriculum, instruction, and assessment are infused into both regular and special education.

As the district moves forward it is important that the current array of programming, with the normal improvements and modifications, remain available to students.

**Consider measures to ensure continuity of existing special needs programs in light of a future leadership change.**

The current director of student services re-entered the profession after retiring from a nearby school system. Under her leadership the programs in the district have become more responsive to the changing needs of the student population.

- There is districtwide commitment to accommodate students' learning needs and modify the curriculum for them in every setting.
- Disabled learners in Westwood have multiple opportunities to access educational opportunities with their non-disabled peers.
- In classes with more than one adult present, review team members found it difficult to distinguish the classroom teacher from special education staff or students with IEPs from those without.
- Representatives from the district in addition to the out-of district coordinator attend IEP meetings for students attending out-of-district programs.

As the district prepares for the potential transition in leadership in special education, it should assess the requirements and future direction of special needs programming. This will assist the district in finding the best fit to continue to lead the department.

**The superintendent, district, and school administrators should continue to be proactive in sharing the current and future financial needs of the school system with the community.**

In FY08 the Westwood expenditure per pupil exceeded the state average in 9 of 11 categories. However, administrators, teachers, and parents shared concerns about the future financial needs of the district with the review team. The superintendent proposed a 2.9 percent increase for the FY10 budget, but the school committee approved a level-funded budget for FY10, under which teachers did not receive a cost-of-living salary increase, other school personnel might also not receive salary increases, and other cuts were to have an impact on instruction. Administrators stated that two FTE staff positions were eliminated and reductions made in supplies, textbooks, equipment, and maintenance. Others raised issues about the possibility of an increase in class sizes and the lack of space in some schools. The superintendent expressed concern that the district will be unable to maintain the level of programs and services currently offered to all learners if the economy does not improve.

It is essential for educational leaders and leaders of various stakeholder groups to describe to the residents of Westwood, in different types of forums, the current level of programs and services available to all students and what could potentially be reduced or eliminated without adequate financial resources. The citizens of Westwood should be periodically informed, as the superintendent informed them in 37 neighborhood meetings before the successful 2008 override, about what is needed to sustain the quality of education in the Westwood Public Schools.

**The student activity account at the high school should be audited every year.**

During separate interviews with the superintendent and the high school principal, it was learned that the high school activity account has not been audited. It is recommended that as standard practice, the superintendent make certain that the high school activity account is audited yearly.

**Curriculum**

**Consider standardizing the format and including specific key components when documenting curriculum.**

A review of curricula, both printed and online, revealed a variety of formats and of information about what to teach and how to teach it. Some curricula are quite detailed and complex, others are simpler and leave much to the judgment and experience of individual teachers. If the purpose of curriculum is to offer an overview and a guide to instruction as well as a map to design student learning experiences, then key components are necessary to help new as well as veteran teachers ensure that teaching and learning goals are met for every student in every classroom. While the purpose of this recommendation is not to “make work” that will result in “cookie cutter” documents, there is a case to be made for complete and sequential structuring of curriculum. This helps ensure equity across classrooms in a grade and within like courses of study. It also helps new teachers acclimate to teaching materials that form the core of their work with students.

**Continue to develop the student assessment system to create a planned process to deepen students’ understanding about their learning and build capacity for even better teaching.**

The district has begun to develop more formative assessments and is considering how authentic assessments might be used to better inform students and teachers about student academic progress.

- For instance, elementary teachers and specialists are creating more formative assessments to use as diagnostic tools in elementary mathematics, and the high school faculty engages in reflective practice days, or RPDs. During RPDs, teachers might look at student work, work in groups to identify learning or teaching needs, and then develop a pilot solution.
- The superintendent and principals stated that the development of common formative assessments in the schools is a “work in progress.”

New and multiple forms of assessment and the data they yield can inform teachers and school leaders about the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies for specific learning needs. More descriptive and evidence-based assessments can also help transform school climate and reduce competitive stress about grades, recognized by the high school principal and other interviewees. The focus can be more on the process of learning growth and less on “What did you get?” The district should continue to explore and expand how it assesses student academic progress.

**Continue to embed professional development, aligned with school and district goals, in the daily work of teaching and collaboration.**

One of the strengths of the district is its ability to convene teachers and leaders around common teaching and learning questions and priorities. In Westwood, the convening does not just take place after school for twice-a-month released time professional development, although this is important developmental time for all staff. Rather, the staff engages in professional development almost daily through meetings of the CSTs, SSTs, and curriculum review teams, as well as grade-level and subject-level meetings and meetings of a host of other interest and responsibility groups. The district should continue to foster this collaborative culture. It is a characteristic that defines the district's culture and contributes to its success.

**Human Resources**

**Continue the collaborative efforts of the district's administrators and teachers' association representatives begun this spring, so that a replacement for the Professional Performance Evaluation Instrument (PPEI) can be created to emphasize the professional growth of the district's teachers.**

Administrators noted that the instrument used for the summative evaluation of the district's teachers (the Professional Performance Evaluation Instrument or PPEI) is cumbersome and difficult to use. Interviewees were pleased that efforts had begun in the spring by a team of administrators and teacher union representatives to replace the instrument. School leaders with responsibility for conducting teacher evaluations noted that the PPEI could be a more effective tool in promoting teachers' professional growth. The review team encourages this current effort to create a new PPEI document.

**The superintendent should write annual evaluations of each direct-report administrator using as guidelines the Principles of Effective Leadership and evidence of accomplishment of school and district goals. The goal of these evaluations should be to promote the continuous professional growth of the district's principals and senior leaders and to provide a record of facts and assessments for personnel decisions.**

Based on interviews with school and district leaders and the superintendent, it was unclear whether or not the superintendent consistently writes annual evaluations appraising the performance of the senior administrators who report directly to him. The review team was unable to view written evaluations, and each of the principals interviewed by the review team stated that their personal evaluation consists of three annual meetings with the superintendent, at the last of which the principal submits a self-evaluation to the superintendent.

Senior leaders, also, seek appraisal, praise, and support for their hard work. In addition, contractual obligations necessitate written evidence of job performance to guide continuous professional growth and development and to provide factual evidence upon which to make personnel decisions. Thoughtful, clear written performance evaluations make a positive contribution to professional growth and serve as a protection to employees and employers.



## **Appendix A: Differentiated Needs Review Team Members**

---

The review of the Westwood Public Schools was conducted from June 1-4, 2009, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Magdalene Giffune, Ed.D., Special Education

Linda L. Greyser, Ed.D., Curriculum and Site Coordinator

John Kulevich, Ph.D., Leadership

William Wassell, Human Resources and Professional Development

## Appendix B: Differentiated Needs Review Activities and Schedule

---

### Differentiated Needs Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Westwood Public Schools central office administration:
  - Superintendent
  - Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development
  - Director of Student Services
  - Director of Finance and Business
  - High School Principal
  - Middle School Principal
  - Principal of Downey Elementary School
  - Principal of Sheehan Elementary School
  - Principal of Martha Jones Elementary School
  - Principal of Deerfield Elementary School
  - Professional Development Team
  - High School Academic Council
  - Middle School Curriculum Coordinators
  - Middle School Team Leaders
  - School Transition Coordinators
  - Coordinators for McKinney Vento, Student Support, and ELL
  - Middle School Curriculum Coordinators
  - Middle School Team Leaders
  - Elementary Subcommittee for ELA Review
  - Teacher focus group
  - Parent focus group
  - Student Assessment and Program Evaluation Leaders
  - The review team visited the following schools in the Westwood Public Schools:
    - Martha Jones Elementary School, K-5
    - Deerfield Elementary School, K-5
    - Thurston Middle School, 6-8

- Westwood High School, ,9-12
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, and leaders of the Deerfield Elementary School Success Team, and observed a meeting of a Child Study Team (CST) at the Martha Jones Elementary School.
- The review team conducted 43 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the four schools visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
  - District profile data
  - Individual school profile data for all district schools
  - Latest Coordinated Program Review Report
  - Staff contracts
  - Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
  - Long-term enrollment trends
  - End-of-year financial report for the district for 2008
  - 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
  - District Goals
  - School Improvement Plans
  - School Committee Policy Manual
  - Curriculum Guides for ELA, Mathematics, Biology, Social Studies, Fine Arts
  - High School Program of Studies
  - Calendar of Formative and Summative Assessments
  - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
  - Descriptions of Student Support Programs
  - Child Study Team pamphlet and all CST protocols and documents
  - Curriculum Accommodation Plan
  - Curriculum Review and Development Cycle documents
  - Science Curriculum Review Powerpoint Presentations
  - Program Evaluations
  - Student and Family Handbooks
  - Faculty Handbook
  - Professional Development Program/Schedule/Courses

- Teacher Planning Time/Meeting Schedules
- Teacher Evaluation Tool (Professional Planning and Evaluation Instrument (PPEI))
- Job Descriptions (for central office and school administrators and instructional staff)
- Description of Pre-Referral Process
- School Schedules
- Powerpoint orientation presentation for Thurston Middle School

**Review Schedule**

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the differentiated needs review of the Westwood Public Schools, conducted from June 1-4, 2009.

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<p><b>June 1</b> Introductory meeting with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals</p>	<p><b>June 2</b> Document review; interviews with district staff and principals</p>	<p><b>June 3</b> School visits (Martha Jones Elementary School, Deerfield Elementary School): interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; teacher and parent focus groups</p>	<p><b>June 4</b> School visits (Thurston Middle School, Westwood High School ): interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; follow-up interviews; team meeting; final meeting with district leaders</p>	<p><b>June 5</b> Findings development team meeting</p>