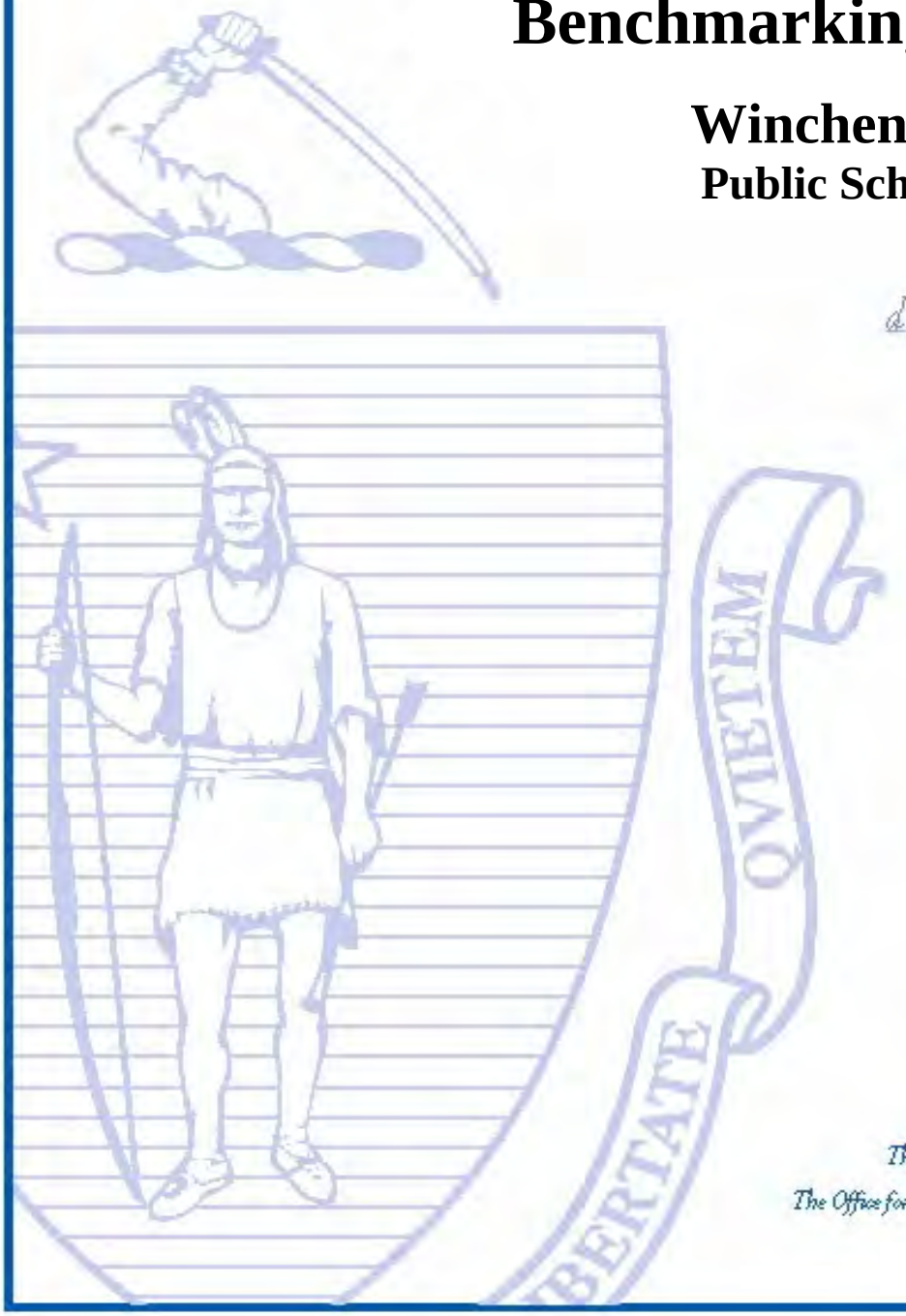
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report:

Winchendon
Public Schools

data driven
standards based
learner centered



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

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Educational Management Audit Council

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

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

The EQA conducted its first review of the operations of Winchendon Public Schools in May 2003, which led the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) to recommend the district to the Board of Education (BOE) for a 'declaration of underperformance.' Following the BOE's declaration of underperformance in November 2003, the EQA conducted a fact-finding review in February 2004 to serve as a benchmark for the district's improvement and to inform improvement planning. Winchendon Public Schools used the findings from this review to inform the work of the district's Performance Improvement Mapping Team, assisted by the Department of Education (DOE), in creating its turnaround plan. The Board of Education approved Winchendon's DTAP in April 2005, and later provided the district with the Education Development Center (EDC) as a Turnaround Partner for the 2005-2006 and the 2006-2007 school years. In January 2007, approximately 18 months after implementation of the turnaround plan began, a six-member EQA team conducted a four-day site visit and a review of student achievement data and documents provided by the district to examine Winchendon's work since the benchmark visit.

Overall, the team learned that Winchendon Public Schools has improved many deficiencies in the management and delivery of educational programs and services through its improvement process. Previously in a state in which it did not have a structure to address the mandates of education reform, the district is no longer in a state of active crisis management, with clearer structures and a management system in place. District planning efforts are now linked through the DTAP, but implementation efforts are fragmented by the attempt to address a myriad of action steps in the turnaround plan rather than a set of priorities that are manageable, given Winchendon's current capacity. With a reversal from its past, the district has actualized the motto of "Winchendon working together." The new "esprit de corps" within the district and the

leadership's consistent communication of district priorities has increased the cogency, communication, awareness, collective effort, and consensus in the Winchendon Public Schools. The staff is cooperative, although the district continues to struggle with limits of capacity. However, tension between the district and town continues to impede the district's improvement efforts. There has been no intervention to mitigate the district and town relationship or to bridge the gap between the district's current operating budget and a needs-based budget. Even considering its accomplishments, the district's ability to improve student achievement and fully implement the turnaround plan within the expected time frame is still unproven.

The District Turnaround Plan

The Winchendon District Turnaround Plan consists of five initiatives: 1) develop a comprehensive instructional program; 2) tailor instruction to meet students' needs; 3) establish set standards and high expectations for students; 4) provide preventative programs to address students' social needs; and 5) strengthen the system of governance and communication between the school committee and other town committees.

The first initiative of Winchendon Public Schools' DTAP is to develop a comprehensive instructional program. At the time of the review, Winchendon was still working on its first articulation of a comprehensive curriculum, and fidelity of curriculum implementation was focused on the elementary level. The lack of district resources limited the systemic completion, revision, and implementation of the curriculum to effectively promote achievement for students at all levels.

Initiative 1 includes four strategies: A) maximize student time on learning by adjusting scheduling and increasing student engagement; B) allow time for grade-level, cross grade-level, and cross school-level meetings to ensure consistency and continuity of instruction; C) implement the curriculum to foster student achievement; and D) provide professional development districtwide in the content areas. Winchendon adjusted learning time, but was unable to maximize learning time because school schedules were determined by budget constraints rather than learning needs in the content areas. Budget constraints also limited time for faculty meetings, but the district was able to provide some release time for K-8 teachers by providing substitute coverage during the school day in 2005-2006. Curriculum guides were

complete at grades K-6 in math, English language arts (ELA), and science, and at grades 7-8 in science. Guides at the secondary level were not fully developed, were heavily dependent on teacher-created syllabi and textbooks, lacked the aligned resources, lacked the level of planning for vertical alignment as conducted in the lower grades, and were not supported by sufficient professional development to aid all teachers in content currency. The district provided professional development, but it was not largely guided by student achievement needs determined from data, as planned, because of limited funding and the priority to train elementary teachers in the instructional programs the district purchased to address ELA and math standards in the state curriculum frameworks.

Initiative 2 of the District Turnaround Plan is to tailor instruction to meet students' needs. This initiative consists of seven strategies to deliver data-driven classroom instruction, programs, and services. Winchendon has improved its use of assessments to inform district and school decisions and has completed many of its action steps for each strategy within the initiative. At the time of the review, the district had not adequately tailored instruction to meet student needs at grades 4-12. The district's use of assessments has not yet had adequate impact on instruction in the classroom and on direct academic support services for students. Classroom use of student assessment data to monitor student learning and modify instruction occurs systemically at the lower elementary level but not at grades 4-12, although there are exemplars of practice in use by some grade-level teams. Data are present in conversations in the district at all levels, but as time for conversations is limited, especially due to budget constraints and the sheer number of improvement activities in the district, the district does not have a sustainable assessment and evaluation system. Inconsistent funding for support services and programs has not allowed a stable continuum of supports for students' needs at each grade level or from year to year.

The specific strategies of the second initiative are to: A) provide professional development in inclusion, *The Skillful Teacher*, and differentiated instruction for all staff; B) develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the academic needs of all students; C) create databases for teachers to access student records/hard data in a way that informs instruction; D) develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the social needs of all students; E) identify academic and support programming that would meet the needs of all students and develop an approval process to project, finance, and

implement new/innovative/expanded programs; F) develop a protocol for student placement and services between grades and buildings; and G) assess current education staff, including paraprofessional staff, for their area of certification, training, and expertise to guide teacher program assignment and student placement. Only a minority of teachers was trained in inclusion, but the district was very successful in ensuring that a vast majority of teachers were trained in *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction. The district has completed many preparations to give teachers access to relevant student achievement data. Examples of effective practice exist at some grade levels, but the data management varies among teacher teams, with some needing more planning time to discuss the use of data, more efficient ways of organizing the data, more training in data analysis, staff to provide support services, software and hardware, and/or more guidance and structure concerning expectations for teaching to individual student needs. Assignments to student support services and programs were much more informed by data, but the available services and programs changed from year to year and were limited due to funding. The assignment of teachers to address student needs is not completed.

Initiative 3 of the DTAP is to establish set standards and high expectations for students. The district did not have a systemic method for setting high student standards and expectations as a component of the initiative, however. Instead, the strategies within this initiative focused on improving student participation by addressing issues of attendance, retention, promotion, discipline, and recognition of student success. Specifically, the strategies are to: A and B, merged) create retention and promotion policies and write the procedures for these policies; C) develop building-level plans that address attendance issues and create alternatives for students who have lost instructional time due to attendance issues; and D) acknowledge/celebrate student success and create higher self esteem. In support of the strategies, Winchendon did set new policies and developed new procedures to encourage greater student participation. The gap in the district's efforts to increase participation is that the initiative does not address the root causes of academic failure and poor attendance or a strategy to provide resources to enable low-performing students to fully participate in the instructional program. The district does not have a continuum of academic supports for efforts to promote the participation of all students in the academic program.

Initiative 4 of the turnaround plan is to provide preventative programs to address students' social needs. The district does not have clearly defined strategies to develop programs targeted to at-risk students, as indicated by the initiative. Instead, the strategies are to: A) develop a student attendance policy with consequences that address tardiness, dismissal, absences, and family vacations; and B) develop a plan to increase parents' involvement with their child's education. Still, the district and the schools have developed some strategies to assist at-risk students identified by staff, and the district has prioritized working with parents to address non-academic needs.

Initiative 5, the final initiative of the DTAP, is to strengthen the system of governance and communication between the school committee and other town committees. This effort represents a huge attempt on the part of the superintendent and his leadership team. The strategies of the initiative are to: A) provide oversight and accountability of programs and instruction; B) demonstrate to the community that policies, budgets, and professional practices support improved student performance; C) develop meeting protocols/guidelines for joint meetings between the school committee, finance committee, selectmen, and community; D) provide training and support for district leadership (superintendent, administrators, school committee, business manager) including supervision, evaluation, leadership skills, hiring and retention of quality personnel, and policy; E) analyze the capacity of the district's organizational structure to implement the District Turnaround Plan to improve student performance; and F) provide oversight and accountability of the District Turnaround Plan. The EQA team found that the district substantially improved its ability to implement an improvement plan since the arrival of the new superintendent in November 2004. Winchendon started the improvement process by developing the DTAP in an inclusive and thoughtful manner that supported successful implementation. Further, the district established many favorable conditions to set the stage for successful implementation of improvement initiatives, by training the leadership, creating structures for communication and planning, clarifying organizational procedures, developing the curriculum, organizing its system of assessment, and refining its mechanisms for accountability of the district, administrators, and instruction. Program and teacher evaluation systems were in development at the time of the review.

Findings

The EQA team had three general findings and 18 sub-findings. The sub-findings in this section are labeled by the corresponding finding in the body of the report. For a complete list of the general findings and sub-findings, see Appendix F: List of Findings.

The first general finding is that gearing up for change has been time and energy consuming for Winchendon Public Schools. The district has had to spend a great deal of time creating a functional operational system, improved working environment, and very basic organizational structures, and this has been a considerable effort. By committing itself to do so, Winchendon Public Schools improved its ability to implement an improvement plan since the arrival of the new superintendent (Finding 5A). The district developed its DTAP through a process that supported successful implementation. Also in support of the DTAP, the district established many favorable conditions to set the stage for successful implementation of improvement initiatives (Finding 5B). This process has been very time consuming for a district with limited capacity and a need to unite stakeholders in the effort as a first step. Between 2004 and 2006, Winchendon's MCAS performance showed little improvement overall, no improvement in ELA, slight improvement in math, and a decline in STE.

The second general finding is that efforts have been characterized by fragmented activities rather than strategic and systemic implementation. The focus on process has benefited the district by creating a sense of buy-in within the district rather than a top-down approach; yet the need is imminent to embed best practices internal and external to the district in instruction, assessment, and evaluation. At this point, the district has pieces of completed work that have not ensured that all students are receiving the needed remediation. First, the district is still working on its first articulation of a comprehensive curriculum (Finding 1A). Curriculum guides are complete at grades K-6 in math, ELA, and science, and at grades 7-8 in science. Second, Winchendon focused on fidelity of curriculum implementation at the elementary level (Finding 1B). Unfortunately, lack of district resources limited the systemic completion, revision, and implementation of the curriculum to effectively promote achievement for students at all levels (Finding 1C). Classroom use of student assessment data to monitor student learning and modify instruction occurs systemically at the lower elementary level, but not at grades 4-12 (Finding 2C). To its credit, Winchendon has improved its use of assessments to inform district and school

decisions (Finding 2A). However, the district has not yet established student achievement as the basis for implementing effective and sustainable assessment and evaluation systems tied to improving student achievement (Finding 2B). To address supporting at-risk students, the district worked on an initiative to improve student participation, and set new policies and developed new procedures to encourage greater student participation by addressing issues of attendance, retention, promotion, discipline, and recognition of student success (Finding 3A). Yet, the district did not have a strategy to provide a continuum of academic supports for efforts to strengthen student participation in the academic program (Finding 3B). Similarly, the district does not have a clearly defined strategy to develop programs targeted to at-risk students, but the schools have developed some strategies to assist at-risk students identified by staff, and the district has prioritized working with parents to address non-academic needs (Finding 4A). The district did provide some academic supports, although the supports were not adequate to improve student achievement (Finding 3C). Concerning the overall monitoring for quality and accountability, the district has a developing, but incomplete, system for using evaluations of programs and staff (Finding 5C). In general, the district improvement efforts have been fragmented by the attempt to address a myriad of action steps rather than a manageable set of priorities. This is attributable partly to the underperforming label, which has reportedly increased the district pressure to complete action steps to show progress in implementing its plan, partly to the budget, partly to capacity within the district, and partly to the approach chosen by the district to prioritize the previously developed action steps rather than to consider only the most efficient methods for accomplishing the broader goals.

The third general finding is that mistrust and a history of unfortunate events have had a draining legacy. Strained relationships with the town hindered implementation of the DTAP in spite of district efforts (Finding 5E). For example, the district developed the budget through an inclusive process focused on priorities identified and clearly communicated to the school committee and the community, and Winchendon Public Schools employed sound business practices to manage the budget (Finding 5D). Yet, without adequate town support, the budget and supplemental funding were not adequate to implement priority improvement initiatives, and the district over-relied on grants (Finding 5F). Given all the issues, including but not limited to the town relationship and the budget, the district has not yet developed the capacity to meet its completion deadlines for its improvement initiatives (Finding 5G).

However, Winchendon has more strengths it can build upon than it did at the time of the benchmarking visit in 2004. As a result of the turnaround process and the commitment of the leadership, Winchendon Public Schools has benefited from the increased exposure to the district, school, and classroom practices expected in the education reform environment. Data are present in conversations. Other examples are present in the district. The district has established classroom walk-throughs. The district has a curriculum and set of assessments to build upon, updated K-6 materials, an elementary reading coach, and a newly established math analysis teacher position. Memorial Elementary School is an exemplar of practice upon which to build. Its School Improvement Plan (SIP) has a strong instructional focus, with clear practices and procedures for student assessment and classroom instruction, and assessment practices are strong throughout the building. Pockets of effective practice at the other schools also exist, providing the district with the opportunity for institutionalizing and embedding Winchendon's best practices. Two of the three schools have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the last two years.

The culture within the district has been renewed, justifying the motto of "Winchendon working together" in the school district. Leadership in the central office and the schools are supportive of each other and the staff. The new principal of the high school has created an environment of hope and seriousness of mission. A renewed positive working environment transcends to teacher teams and to the classroom level. Classroom management is a strength in the district, as are positive, respectful, fair, and courteous teacher-student interactions.

Still, the district's progress is tenuous because of the fragile relationships between the district and town officials, the lack of embedded system-wide education reform practices, the uncertainty of the sustaining of key positions and programs necessary to support improved academic achievement, the fact that capacity inside the district is still being built, and the uncertainty of the budget. With repeatedly failing overrides, particularly the last failed override of $983,204 in June 2005, the district has cut 24 positions, Title I services, MCAS support, and other academic support classes. All professional development had to be funded from supplementary funding because the local budget had no allotment. There was an increasing reliance on grants. Basic materials and supplies were level funded even as costs rose, and the district was unable to provide updated and aligned curriculum materials and basic support programs. The district's

progress is contingent upon increased professional capacity to make effective practices systemic, institutionalized, and automatic; a clear and urgent focus on the important end goals rather than process and activities; defined resources clearly linked to the budget for improvement planning; and more concentrated efforts in directly improving the quality of education delivered to students in the classroom and through programs. With only approximately half of all students in Winchendon attaining proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, more than half attaining proficiency in English language arts, and more than one-third attaining proficiency in math, the overall flat performance over the last two years demonstrates continued need for improvement.

District Overview

The town of Winchendon is located on the Millers River in northern Worcester County in central Massachusetts. The town developed as a center of woodworking and later toy manufacturing, harnessing the power of the river. Technological advances in transportation, materials, and electric power transformed the economy from agriculture to manufacturing, and the region has suffered as manufacturing in New England has declined. The largest sources of employment in the town are manufacturing and educational, health, and social services, and many residents find work in communities to the east. The town has a Board of Selectmen/Town Manager/Open Town Meeting form of municipal government.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Winchendon had a median family income of $50,086 in 1999, compared to the statewide median family income of $63,706, ranking it 308 out of the 351 cities and towns in the commonwealth. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the town had a total population of 9,611 with a population of 2,356 school-age children, or 25 percent of the total. Of the total households in Winchendon, 42 percent were households with children under 18 years of age, and 21 percent were households with individuals age 65 years or older. Fourteen percent of the population age 25 years or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33 percent statewide.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, in 2005-2006 the Winchendon Public Schools had a total enrollment of 1,754. The demographic composition in the district was: 92.8 percent White, 4.3 percent Hispanic, 1.3 percent African-American, 0.4 percent Asian, 0.3 percent Native American, 0.5 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.5 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic; 0.6 percent limited English proficient, 1.7 percent first language not English, 27.0 percent low income, and 21.4 percent special education. Ninety-four percent of school-age children in Winchendon attended public schools. The district offers school choice, and 23 students from other school districts attended the Winchendon schools in 2005-2006. A total of 281 Winchendon students attended public schools outside the district, including 146 students who attended Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School, 64 who attended the Gardner Public Schools, 26 who attended the Narragansett Regional School District, 15 who attended charter schools, and one who attended the Massachusetts Academy of Math and Science.

The district has four schools serving pre-kindergarten through grade 12: the Marvin School, pre-K; Memorial Elementary School, grades K-3; Toy Town Elementary School, grades 4-6; and Murdock Middle/High School, grades 7-12. The administrative team includes a superintendent who began his tenure one year after the BOE's declaration of underperformance, a business manager, a special education director, a director of instructional services, and a director of curriculum and instruction. The two elementary schools each have a principal and an assistant principal; the middle/high school has a principal and two assistant principals. The district has a five-member school committee.

In FY 2006, Winchendon's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was $10,300, compared to $11,196 statewide, ranking it 177 out of 325 of 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $13,705,852 to $14,403,315; Chapter 70 aid increased from $9,523,654 to $9,746,972; the required local contribution decreased from $4,165,335 to $4,042,511; and the foundation enrollment decreased from 1,876 to 1,821. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending decreased from 69.5 to 67.7 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total Schedule 1 net school spending reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report decreased from 66.1 to 64.5 percent.

The Review Process and History

In accordance with regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Education and Chapter 69 of the Massachusetts General Laws, a six-member team from the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability visited the Winchendon Public Schools during the week of January 29, 2007. The objective of the visit was to collect information and analyze the depth and scope of the district's progress in implementing its District Turnaround Plan.

The EQA conducted the first examination of the operations of the Winchendon Public Schools in May 2003, with a primary focus on management practices. This district-level audit led to the decision of the Educational Management Audit Council in October 2003 to recommend that the Massachusetts Board of Education assign the district the status of 'underperforming.' Besides the "history of low performance," the EMAC noted the "lack of structure" and the lack of systems to collect data, as indicated in council meeting minutes. In November 2003, the Board of Education declared the district underperforming due to "serious deficiencies in the management and delivery of educational programs and services." The Board of Education further directed the EMAC to conduct a fact-finding visit to "to help guide the district's improvement planning."

The EQA conducted this fact-finding visit in February 2004. In its May 2004 report of that examination, the EQA noted that the district was "actively involved in crisis management, multiple initiatives, fragmented planning, and other actions that constituted a serious drain on the time, energy, and ability of the district's administration." The EQA team found evidence that progress in management or student performance was unlikely without external intervention. The report stated that "the lack of cogent and clearly communicated strategic planning, and the absence of a comprehensive effort to build awareness, consensus, and capacity to address issues surrounding underperformance, has led the fact-finding team to find a lack of cooperation and capacity in the district to independently initiate and engage in successful change at this time." The team also found that the improvement efforts by the district leadership and school committee were impeded by mistrust and lack of engagement within the district and by tension between the district and the town.

Due to the underperforming status, the Board of Education required the Winchendon Public Schools to create a District Turnaround Plan. The Department of Education helped the district

create its DTAP through the DOE's Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process. The Board of Education approved Winchendon's DTAP in April 2005. The DOE also partnered the district with the Center for Leadership and Learning Communities at the Education Development Center to work with the Winchendon superintendent and his leadership team in the 2005-2006 school year. The contract was extended in the 2006-2007 school year.

Between the summer of 2004 and the winter of 2007, the district worked under the direction of the Department of Education. A district Performance Improvement Mapping Team developed the DTAP and monitored the status and progress of its strategies and action steps on a monthly basis using benchmarks associated with the five initiatives in the DTAP. The district's Performance Improvement Mapping Team originally consisted of the superintendent; representatives of the school committee, board of selectmen and finance committee; a representative from the Department of Education; a central office administrator; a principal; teachers and parents representing each of the schools; and community representatives. After limited initial participation, the representatives from the board of selectmen and finance committee ceased to participate, which district and town officials attributed to the mistrust between the school district and the town. Within the school system, however, staff adopted and actualized the town motto of "Winchendon working together." Interviewees referred to the DTAP as both the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the vision of the school system.

The Department of Education monitored implementation through site visits, quarterly reports from the district, and the evidence boxes required by the DOE containing updated and completed components of each strategy in the DTAP. The district leadership met regularly to discuss the progress of the plan's implementation and next steps to be undertaken. Central office administrators and principals took responsibility for action steps in the plan appropriate to their roles.

In January 2007, the EQA again visited the Winchendon Public Schools to review the district's implementation of its DTAP. The EQA review team was comprised of members with expertise in the domains of leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, student assessment and program evaluation, professional development and human resource management, student academic support, and financial management. The team completed a two-day document review

prior to its four-day site visit. During the site visit, the team conducted 30 interviews (approximately 45 hours) with the superintendent, five district administrators, three principals, 60 teachers in focus groups, five school committee members, four town officials, and three teachers' association representatives. The team also reviewed district documents on-site, including Winchendon's DTAP evidence box, policies, handbooks, curriculum documents, 12 administrator personnel files, and 40 teacher personnel files. The team also observed 54 randomly selected classrooms among the three district schools serving grades K-12 with a focus on English language arts and mathematics instruction.

Summary of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The following is a summary of EQA's analysis of the student achievement data of Winchendon Public Schools as measured by the district's performance on the MCAS tests from 2004 to 2006. For the complete analysis, see Appendix A: Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data.

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

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

- Winchendon's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 74 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points less than that statewide. Winchendon's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 26 PI points.
- In 2006, Winchendon's proficiency gap in ELA was 19 PI points, three PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of more than two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Winchendon's proficiency gap in math was 34 PI points in 2006, six PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than four PI points per year to achieve AYP. Winchendon's proficiency gap in STE was 31 PI points, two PI points wider than that statewide.

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

Between 2004 and 2006, Winchendon's MCAS performance showed little improvement overall, no improvement in ELA, slight improvement in math, and a decline in STE.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories did not change between 2004 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by one percentage point. The average proficiency gap in Winchendon was 28 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.

- Over the two-year period 2004-2006, ELA performance in Winchendon was essentially flat. The proficiency gap in ELA was 21 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.
- During this period, math performance in Winchendon improved slightly, by one PI point. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 34 PI points in 2004 to 33 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of three percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Performance in STE in Winchendon declined between 2004 and 2006 by nearly two PI points.

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Winchendon students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Winchendon in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 28 PI points in ELA and 29 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Winchendon in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Twelve percent of students with disabilities and 36 percent of low-income students attained overall proficiency .
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students. Fifty-three percent of regular education students and 50 percent of non low-income students attained overall proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. Forty-eight percent of female students and 45 percent of male students attained overall proficiency.

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

The equity of achievement among Winchendon's student subgroups increased more in math than in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-

performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 29 PI points in 2004 to 25 PI points in 2006, while the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 36 to 25 PI points over this period. The increase in equity resulted from both improved performance by the district's lower-performing subgroups and a decline in performance by the higher-performing subgroups.

- In Winchendon, students with disabilities and low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students. ELA performance of regular education students and non low-income students declined during this period.
- In math, students with disabilities and low-income students in Winchendon also had improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities. Math performance of regular education students and non low-income students also declined during this period.

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

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

Examination of the Implementation of the Winchendon Public Schools Turnaround Plan Initiatives

Initiative 1: Develop a comprehensive instructional program

Finding 1A: The district is still working on its first articulation of a comprehensive curriculum. Curriculum guides are complete at grades K-6 in math, ELA, and science, and at grades 7-8 in science.

- The majority of the existing curriculum was developed and disseminated during the 18-month period under review.
- Math and ELA committees worked under the director of curriculum and with the DOE to align the written curricula in these subjects with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
- The district was evaluating the implementation of math and ELA curricula using a walk-through protocol, and had scheduled a cycle of revision.
- The district had effectively and systemically developed, written, and implemented curricula in mathematics and ELA at grades K-6. It had also developed and had just begun to implement a science curriculum at grades K-8.
- The district curriculum was significantly less developed at grades 7-12, with little evidence of using student achievement data to develop and implement curriculum. The secondary mathematics curriculum was more fully developed than the ELA curriculum, which lacked specific scope and sequence and materials.
- The delivered curriculum did not yet fully align vertically and with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks at grades 7-12 in all content areas.

Finding 1B: Winchendon focused on fidelity of curriculum implementation at the elementary level.

- All K-6 teachers had access to the curriculum guides.
- At the K-6 level, the district had extensively trained faculty in effective implementation of the Everyday Math program and the Houghton Mifflin ELA curriculum.

- In K-6 classroom observations, 91 percent of the teachers observed had aligned their curriculum and instruction to the district curriculum and the state curriculum frameworks.
- For 2005-2006, the underperforming school district grant funded the elementary reading coach position. For 2006-2007, the district's budget funded this position. Reading coaches provided some classroom-based professional development.
- Training for effective implementation of the district curriculum was not in evidence at the secondary level. Although some content courses were offered, the majority of districtwide professional development focused on instructional practices such as differentiated instruction and those embodied in Research for Better Teaching's *The Skillful Teacher*.
- The district purchased no new instructional programs for the secondary level during the period under review, nor did it offer training on curriculum implementation.
- Winchendon used feedback from the leadership team and its own survey of teachers' perceptions of ways to improve student achievement to make schedule changes for grades K-6. This resulted in the district's decision to move from a self-contained model to a three-person team to a two-person team from fall 2006 to fall 2007.
- At grades 7 and 8, it was possible for students to spend nearly one-third of their day without a curriculum in place; students could be assigned a directed study, sustained silent reading, or a "study skills" program that lacked a curriculum. Thus, it was unclear if instructional time met the state requirements on a consistent basis.
- Winchendon did not significantly increase instructional time in specific content areas at the middle and high school levels. Because specials positions were cut at the middle school, all subjects were increased by 10 minutes, and math and ELA were not prioritized over other subjects. At the high school, only in the 2004-2005 school year did the students scoring in the 'Warning' category, in math only, have access to an additional class.
- At the elementary level, the district increased time on learning to 90 minutes in ELA and 60 minutes in math. This was a cost-effective measure that required no additional funds from the district.

Finding 1C: District capacity limited the provision of adequate professional development to support effective curriculum delivery to improve achievement for students in grades 4-12. District capacity also limited the systemic completion and revision of the curriculum.

- The DTAP did not explicitly address funding for adequate staffing, professional development, textbooks, and instructional materials.
- Nearly one-third of the teachers whose files were reviewed by the EQA team and who were employed in the district at the time of the site visit were either uncertified or teaching out of their area of certification.
- The district had lost 27 teaching positions between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007, according to a review of documents, and teachers were reluctant to identify instructional and staffing needs because of continued district budget cuts, as determined in interviews.
- Teachers expressed the need for more professional development in their areas of certification. Interviewees were unclear who was responsible for monitoring certification information.
- Professional development at the elementary level did not focus on areas of student weakness identified through data analysis. Rather, professional development at the elementary level focused on the implementation of the ELA and math curricular programs.
- Review of documentation, faculty interviews, and classroom observations revealed that much instruction was textbook driven and heavily dependent upon prepared commercial packages. Implementation at the secondary level relied heavily on teacher-created syllabi.
- Although 74 percent of the students in grades 7 and 8 failed to meet the state standard of proficiency in mathematics, there was not a sustained adjustment in time on learning in mathematics for students at these grade levels. The elimination of specialists for grade 7 and 8 students in 2006-2007 increased the percentage of time students had without a formal curriculum.
- The high school building scheduling committee disbanded in 2006-2007 due to budget constraints.

- In terms of "maximizing student learning time" in the classroom, the team found that the teacher used classroom time effectively in 65 percent of the classrooms observed by the EQA team, and the pace of the classroom instruction helped students stay engaged in 74 percent of the observed classrooms.
- The use of classroom time and pacing was most effective in grades K-3, followed by grades 9-12, then grades 7-8. In grades 4-6, the use of classroom time was less effective compared to other grades in the district and compared to the same grades in other districts examined by the EQA in 2006-2007. On average, teachers at these levels used classroom time effectively in 29 percent of the observed classrooms, and the pace of the classroom instruction helped students stay engaged in 64 percent of the observed classrooms.
- Observations of classrooms indicated unevenness among schools in the classroom-level implementation of *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction strategies. However, classroom management and positive student-teacher relationships were strengths in the district.
- At the Memorial Elementary School (grades K-3), the EQA team observed highly effective instructional practices, high levels of student engagement, and high expectations for students. At grades 7-12, more effective instructional practices were observed in math than in ELA.
- Instructional practices, student engagement, and expectations for students were weakest in the observed classes at Toy Town Elementary School (grades 4-6). School administrators and teachers recognized the drop in student achievement at grade 4 as a challenge.
- The team observed indicators of student engagement in 62 percent of the classrooms, with a high of 75 percent at Memorial School (grades K-3), and a low of 53 percent at Toy Town Elementary (grades 4-6).
- All observed classrooms at grades K-3 had multiple resources to address diverse learning styles in ELA and math. Over half of observed ELA classes and one-third of observed math classes had multiple resources for content instruction visible in the classroom.
- High school departments worked on "expectations for implementation of differentiated instruction," which included principles but no clear mechanism, structure, or resources to

support active differentiation in the instructional task. In grades 7-12, no observed ELA and 14 percent of math classrooms had visible resources to address diverse learning styles.

- The resources to support curriculum alignment were lacking across content areas and grade levels. This was particularly acute at grades 7-12. Teachers expressed concern about the limited and dated resources available for student instruction in all content areas at the secondary level.
- Students in grades 7 and 8 used mathematics and ELA texts from 1999 and 1997, respectively, that pre-date the 2005 curriculum revision. When the mathematics books were realigned at grades 7 and 8 in 2005, the district chose to purchase additional copies of the old text rather than update these resources. Some materials used in grades 7 and 8 mathematics and ELA were more than 20 years old.

Evidence

Winchendon's work in developing a comprehensive instructional program is not complete, but the district is progressing on the key element of this initiative—developing and refining the curriculum—so that it can be implemented comprehensively. Winchendon recognized the need to delegate leadership over this area, to prioritize vertical and horizontal alignment, to align assessments with learning expectations, to link professional development to instructional expectations, and to ensure that curriculum leaders hold educators accountable for effective implementation of the curriculum.

Initiative 1 includes four strategies: A) maximize student time on learning by adjusting scheduling and increasing student engagement; B) allow time for grade-level, cross grade-level, and cross school-level meetings to ensure consistency and continuity of instruction; C) implement the curriculum to foster student achievement; and D) provide professional development districtwide.

The district identified the director of curriculum and instruction and the director of instructional services as the key team to ensure that the Winchendon instructional program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. The district created a schedule for development and implementation of the K-12 curricula in all content areas. Key examples of progress in implementing the DTAP in this area included the revision of a series of administrator walk-

through checklists, the effectiveness of the implementation tools for the Houghton Mifflin ELA and the Everyday Math programs at the elementary schools, the curriculum guides at the elementary level, and the organizational charts.

While Winchendon has worked hard to make progress in key areas, much work remains. The district lacks a cohesive, clear, systemic procedure for the development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement of K-12 curricula across the content areas and grade levels. While the district has made a diligent attempt to develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum and instructional program in K-6 math and ELA, during the period under review it had not successfully completed comprehensive curriculum documents in all content areas, as evidenced by both curriculum documents and teacher and administrator interviews.

Winchendon administrators, teachers, and parents all articulated their commitment to implementing the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks; classrooms across the content areas and grade levels had the frameworks posted and students even spoke in terms of the frameworks. The district had successfully created a schedule of curriculum revision for all content areas, but did not widely share it. Although the review cycle is listed in the DTAP, no clear protocol or system was in place to review and revise the curriculum; rather, the district was engaged in completing the curriculum for the content areas. Limited evidence exists of the use of student achievement data to refine the curriculum in grades 7-12 or to improve learning in grades 4-12 to provide curricular improvement for all students. The district was beginning to train teachers to use student achievement data to modify delivery of curriculum and instruction, but at the time of the EQA site visit there was no K-12 system in place to use analysis of student achievement data to inform change and revise the curriculum. The district also tried to provide time for vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment; however, budget constraints stymied these efforts.

Systemic curriculum implementation in the classroom had been a priority at the elementary level only. The Winchendon school district had worked diligently, as it implemented the DTAP, to ensure all K-6 teachers had access to the curriculum guides and training in their use, and that classroom instruction aligned with the curriculum; this was not the case at the secondary level (i.e., grades 7-12). At the K-6 level, the district has done extensive training in effective implementation of the Everyday Math program and the Houghton Mifflin ELA curriculum. In

elementary classroom observations, the EQA team noted that 91 percent of the teachers aligned their curriculum and instruction to the district curriculum and the Massachusetts frameworks. Training for effective implementation of the district curriculum was not in evidence at the secondary level. Rather, the majority of professional development at this level focused on instructional practices such as *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction. The district did not purchase new instructional programs for the secondary level during the period under review; therefore, it did not offer training on curriculum implementation at that level.

As the district implemented its DTAP, it addressed time on learning in a general manner, but did not formally address the instructional time in specific content areas. Winchendon did look at schedules of schools in surrounding communities but did not formally evaluate this information; rather, the district used its own survey of teachers' perceptions to make schedule changes at grades K-6. At grades 7 and 8, it was possible for students to spend nearly one-third of their day without a curriculum in place; students could be assigned a directed study, sustained silent reading, or a "study skills" program that lacked a curriculum. Thus, it was unclear if instructional time met the state requirements on a consistent basis.

The district had not devoted adequate resources, materials, professional development, staffing, programs, or time to promote higher levels of student achievement for proficient students. Rather, both memos and interviews revealed that the district focused on moving students toward attaining proficiency in all content areas and at all grade levels. The district has consistently been below the state average of the percentage of students who scored in the 'Advanced' category on the MCAS tests at every grade level and in every content area. Parents offered anecdotal evidence of gifted students whom former administrators had counseled out of the district. The EQA team reviewed memos written by principals congratulating teachers on moving students out of the 'Warning/Failing' MCAS performance level. Insufficient resources and attention have been directed toward enhancing the achievement of students at all performance levels.

The declining budget of the Winchendon Public Schools has also affected resources available for student learning. The amount of money available for instructional services has decreased from $9.1 million to $8.8 million over the last three years. Without accounting for inflation, this resulted in a significant decrease in district personnel to align and implement curriculum and

instruction for Winchendon students. According to district administrators, the district cut 24 positions after a failed override. Although 2005-2006 DOE data indicated that 95.6 percent of the teachers held appropriate licenses for their teaching assignment and 97.5 percent of core academic teachers were highly qualified, the personnel files the EQA team reviewed during the 2007 visit revealed that one-third of teachers were teaching outside their area of certification.

During the last three years, educational program materials were primarily grant and trust funded, including the Everyday Math and the Houghton Mifflin reading programs purchased for grades K-6. The district had purchased few resources for use in any content area at grades 7-12. Some materials observed in use in the middle school were over 20 years old. The primary texts in grades 7 and 8 were purchased in 1997 for ELA and in 1999 for math. Teacher analysis of student MCAS scores led to the realization that the texts do not cover slope and linear equations at the grade 8 level, both of which are part of the Massachusetts frameworks. Grade 8 ELA teachers used grammar books with a 1986 copyright; grade 8 math teachers used an *Informal Geometry* textbook with a 1988 copyright. Teacher interviews revealed a culture of low expectations for updated classroom texts and materials. The Education Development Center (EDC) funded professional development for grades K-6, but the primary professional development offerings for grade 7-12 teachers were grant funded.

Analysis of the Instructional Program Through Classroom Observations

Observations of classrooms indicated unevenness among schools in the classroom-level implementation of *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction strategies. During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 54 randomly selected classrooms and recorded the presence or absence of 26 attributes reflected in the Principles of Effective Teaching. The attributes were grouped into five categories: classroom management, instructional practice, expectations, student activity and behavior, and climate. The EQA examiners checked the attributes that they observed in each of the five categories during their time spent in the classroom. In four of the categories, classroom practices were strongest at the lower elementary level and weakest at the upper elementary level. Observations were conducted at the district's schools as follows: 12 at Memorial Elementary School (kindergarten-grade 3), 14 at Toy Town Elementary School (grades 4-6), and 28 at Murdock Middle/High School (grades 7-12). In total,

the EQA examiners observed 25 ELA classrooms, 16 math classrooms, and 13 classrooms of other subjects. (See Appendix E: Classroom Observations Chart.)

Classroom management refers to the maintenance of order and structure within the classroom. Positive indicators of classroom management were evident in 93 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 100 percent at the Memorial School, 93 percent at the Toy Town Elementary, and 89 percent at the Murdock Middle/High School.

Instructional practice was the largest category reviewed by the examiners. Effective instructional practice is considered evident when the teacher's questions transcend direct recall and include open-ended questions that require the use of higher order thinking skills. Students should be encouraged to go beyond their initial responses, to analyze, to synthesize, to compare and contrast, and to explain their own thinking. Class time should be focused on student learning. Students who have finished their work should be provided with other appropriate tasks; students who are off-task should be redirected to their task. The work should engage all students; it should be age-appropriate, and attuned to many learning modalities, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The pace of the class should be appropriate, challenging, and engaging for all students. Instruction should be differentiated so that all learners are challenged. The lesson should be clearly aligned with the state curriculum frameworks and either posted on the board or cited in the teacher's planner. The lesson's objectives should be clear and explicitly articulated. The teacher should use standards-based instruction to set objectives, to plan activities, to assess the effect of the lesson, and to measure progress for all learners. Positive indicators of instructional practice were evident in 68 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 91 percent at the Memorial School, 47 percent at the Toy Town Elementary, and 69 percent at the Murdock Middle/High School.

Expectations refers to the maintenance of high standards for students by teachers. Evidence of high expectations could include recent examples of high quality student work posted in the classroom. In addition, high quality work should be evident through rubrics that may sometimes be generated by students. Tasks should be challenging for all students, and all students should have access to the same curriculum, although the instruction and strategies may be adapted to the needs of students. The teacher should clearly maintain and communicate high expectations for

student work during class time. All students should be expected to be on task and engaged in the lesson. High expectations for students were evident in 59 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 94 percent at the Memorial School, 41 percent at the Toy Town Elementary, and 54 percent at the Murdock Middle/High School.

Positive student activity and behavior are considered evident when students are actively engaged in the learning process. They must show a clear understanding of the objective of the lesson and interact with the teacher and each other in accomplishing the tasks at hand. They should be attentive and responsive. While the environment may be busy and constructive, it must also be controlled and orderly. There should be few distractions, and the learning process must be clearly evident. Indicators of positive student activity and behavior were evident in 62 percent of the classrooms districtwide, with 75 percent at the Memorial School, 53 percent at the Toy Town Elementary, and 60 percent at the Murdock Middle/High School.

Finally, the concept of *climate* is considered evident when the classroom is welcoming, and the teacher is an active listener and treats all students with respect. Students should listen attentively to and be respectful of all other students. Many resources and means beyond the textbook should be available for learning; these may include technology, manipulatives, cassettes, visuals, overhead projectors, and a classroom library. Positive indicators of climate were evident in 79 percent of the classrooms observed districtwide, with 100 percent at the Memorial School, 71 percent at the Toy Town Elementary, and 74 percent at the Murdock Middle/High School.

The EQA team also considered the ELA and math instruction at the different levels and compared Winchendon's observational data to the data collected across districts examined by the EQA in 2006-2007 and entered into the EQA database. This analysis allowed the team to compare instruction among content areas and schools within the district and among districts observed at the same grade levels.

The team found that the most effective instructional practices for ELA and math were at the K-3 level, with 91 percent of the observable indicators of instructional practice in both subjects found. Winchendon favorably compared to other K-3 classrooms in the database, which had averages of 81 percent for ELA and 78 percent for math in instructional practices. The team found instructional practices at the middle/high school to be the next most effective among the

Winchendon schools, with 57 percent of the observable indicators in ELA (lower than the inter-district average of 65 percent for grades 7-12), and 70 percent in math (higher than the inter-district average of 68 percent). Instructional practices at Toy Town negatively compared with the district schools and the inter-district average for grades 4-6. Indicators of instructional practices were evident in 45 percent of observed ELA classes (compared to the inter-district average of 74 percent for the same grades) and in 52 percent of observed math classes (compared to the inter-district average of 76 percent).

Strategy 1A: Maximize student time on learning by adjusting scheduling and increasing student engagement.

Strategy 1A includes 9 action steps: 1) survey surrounding schools for scheduling formats; 2) create building-level scheduling committees; 3) review and develop scheduling alternatives at the building level to accommodate time on learning; 4) implement adjusted schedules at the building level to maximize student time on learning; 5) explore new professional development activities in the areas of thematic units, student peer coaches, cooperative learning, hands-on activities, and learning centers; 6) offer professional development in selected courses/activities to make systemic change; 7) review the number of times students are pulled out of classrooms in an average week and for what purpose; 8) revise student schedules to reduce the number of times students are pulled out of classrooms; and 9) reduce the number of times students are pulled out of classrooms.

During the period under review, the Winchendon school district tried to adjust scheduling and increase student engagement to maximize student time on learning, but was unsuccessful in this effort. Budget constraints, rather than analysis of student achievement data, dictated most schedules. From 2005 to the present, Winchendon engaged in 10 action steps designed to maximize student time on learning. It successfully initiated all 10 action steps, completed six, and was completing the other four at the time of the site visit. Budget constraints have delayed some of the action steps, according to faculty and administrators interviewed.

The first action step of strategy 1A was to survey schools in surrounding communities for scheduling formats. During 2005-2006, the district surveyed these schools to determine schedule alternatives in practice. This survey included a wide variety of rural and suburban schools and

included grades K-12. Documents and interviews did not reveal how the survey data gathered from other schools informed Winchendon's decision-making process.

The second action step directed the district administration to create building-level scheduling committees. During 2005-2006, the district created building-level scheduling committees to examine the schedule in each school. Interviews and review of documentation revealed that these committees met regularly over the course of that year. The Toy Town Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School scheduling committees surveyed the teachers in the buildings to determine how they felt about scheduling. Teachers' self-reporting of their opinions and feelings formed the foundation for adjusting the schedules at the K-6 level.

The third action step called for the scheduling committees to review and develop scheduling alternatives at the building level to accommodate time on learning. At both Memorial and Toy Town, the removal of students from class during critical instructional periods was a widely shared concern. Reasons for removal included supplemental academic services, band, chorus, counseling, and a variety of meetings. Toy Town revised its schedule to ensure that the scheduled offerings of individual instrumental music did not conflict with the scheduling of the core academic offerings of mathematics or English language arts. Similarly, Memorial protected "core instruction" (math and ELA) from pullouts and revised the chorus schedule to avoid interference with classroom instruction in these content areas. Data indicated that the district had reduced pullout times leading to an increase in time on learning for Winchendon students in grades K-6.

During 2005-2006, the Murdock Middle/High School scheduling committee also surveyed schools in surrounding communities and learned many had implemented block or modified-block scheduling. According to both teachers and administrators interviewed, the acting interim principal advised against any wholesale change to the schedule without sufficient time for faculty professional development. He also shared that in his experience block schedules required additional funding, not budget cuts. The district decided to leave the schedule intact, and during the 2006-2007 school year the high school scheduling committee disbanded.

It was not clear that the scheduling committees at any of the three buildings used student achievement data as a decision-making tool for scheduling. Rather, budget constraints and

teacher concerns or feelings drove changes to the schedule at all levels. The district had neither a clear mandate regarding time on learning for particular content areas by building or district, nor a system at any level to address gaps in student achievement through adjusting the schedule.

The fourth action step was to implement adjusted schedules at the building level to maximize student time on learning. Again, budget constraints drove the schedule at both Toy Town and Memorial. During 2006-2007, all teachers provided instruction to students from 8:40 a.m. until dismissal at 3:00 p.m. with the exception of a 30-minute lunch break each day and 30 minutes of music per classroom per week. The district has successfully implemented no-cost initiatives to increase time on learning at the elementary level such as 90-minute ELA blocks and 60-minute math blocks. It has also allocated the second monthly faculty meeting to grade-level meetings to facilitate communication about curriculum and instruction.

During the period under review, budget constraints resulted in the Murdock Middle School eliminating all art and music teachers. In 2006-2007, some middle school students had four hours of core academic courses (ELA, math, science, and social studies), then a 50-minute period of "directed study" and a second 50-minute period of "MCAS review." This occurred for students who might not have health or physical education courses in a given quarter. Interviews with teachers and administrators, as well as classroom observations, revealed no curriculum for either directed study or MCAS review, leaving these students with only 720 hours of content area curriculum per year. This is well short of the Massachusetts state law requirement of 900 hours of content area instruction for elementary students and 990 hours for secondary students.

The constraints on district resources negatively affected time for grade-level and cross grade-level meetings, leading to a lack of formalized time for communication about curriculum and instruction. Both school administrators and teachers recognized the drop in student achievement at grade 4 as a challenge area. There was less systemic focus on the fact that 74 percent of the students in grades 7 and 8 failed to meet the state standard of proficiency in mathematics. This fact did not lead to a sustained adjustment in time on learning in mathematics for students at these grade levels. Winchendon cut the teachers at each of the schools who in the 2004-2005 school year had provided additional math support for students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing'

category. No equivalent support was provided in ELA or in math for the 2005-2006 or the 2006-2007 school years for all such students.

The district scheduled two meetings for the grade 3 and 4 teams during the 2006-2007 academic year. In 2006-2007, the district's K-6 teachers operated on a schedule that allowed for 30 minutes per week of planning time during the student school day. The district expected all teachers to plan between 8:10 and 8:40 a.m. when students arrive, and to assume responsibility for students for the remainder of the day, except for lunch. However, teachers communicated on a regular, informal basis, according to teacher interviews.

The fifth action step directed the district to explore new professional development activities in particular areas including thematic units, student peer coaching, hands-on activities, and cooperative learning. Again, it is noteworthy that these represent instructional strategies rather than content focused professional development opportunities. During the period under review, the district offered many professional development opportunities both in-district and through strategic alliances with neighboring districts, Fitchburg State College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI). Many teachers, particularly at grades 7-12, indicated an unmet desire for district-sponsored content area professional development. The EQA found in its review of documents and a random sample of 40 Winchendon personnel files that 12 teachers either were uncertified or had expired certification, or were teaching out of their area of certification. This was nearly one-third of all files sampled, supporting the expressed desire for additional content area support.

The sixth action step directed the district to offer professional development in selected courses or activities to make systemic change in the service of "maximizing student learning time and student engagement." The district implemented a systemic and focused professional development program in differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher* during the past five years. Interviews with faculty demonstrated that teachers were well versed in these courses, with nearly all teachers and even the high school guidance staff completing these courses. The district used a walk-through tool to measure the effectiveness of this training.

The district data from the walk-throughs conducted from January to June 2006 revealed differentiated instruction in six percent of the middle/high school classrooms, 14 percent of the K-3 classrooms, and 27 percent of the grade 4-6 classrooms.

EQA classroom observations indicated that 37 percent of the observed classrooms had teachers who planned multiple tasks to engage all levels of learners, and 39 percent of the classrooms observed across the district used a variety of instructional techniques, one of which may include differentiated instruction.

Classroom observation data indicated that the district achieved its goal of attaining student engagement in some classrooms. The team observed indicators of student engagement in 62 percent of the classrooms, with a high of 75 percent at Memorial School, serving grades K-3, and a low of 53 percent at Toy Town Elementary, serving grades 4-6.

In terms of "maximizing student learning time," the team found that the teacher used classroom time effectively in 65 percent of the observed classrooms, and the pace of the classroom instruction helped students stay engaged in 74 percent of the classrooms. In grades K-3, teachers used classroom time effectively in 100 percent of the observed classrooms, and the pace of the classroom instruction helped students stay engaged also in 100 percent of the classrooms; this was higher than the inter-district comparison (91 and 88 percent, respectively). In grades 4-6, teachers used classroom time effectively in 29 percent of the classrooms, and the pace of the classroom instruction helped students stay engaged in 64 percent of the observed classrooms; this was lower than the inter-district comparison (84 and 83 percent, respectively). In grades 7-8, the same figures were 62 and 69 percent, respectively, for Winchendon compared to 77 and 72 percent, respectively, of the same grades across districts. In grades 9-12, the same figures were 77 and 67 percent, respectively, for Winchendon compared to 78 and 74 percent, respectively, of the same grades across districts.

The analysis of classroom observation data and interviews with faculty and staff demonstrated that, while the district has spent a great deal of resources ensuring all teachers receive training in differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher*, support for effective implementation and reflective teaching was less apparent after grade 3. See Appendix E: Classroom Observations Chart. High school departments worked on "expectations for implementation of differentiated instruction," which included principles but no clear mechanism or structure to support active differentiation in the instructional task. A walk-though protocol is reportedly in draft form. The IDE portal was available for all grades and contained a database of differentiated lessons, but the

use of the database was not evidenced during the site visit. Materials were consistently available to support differentiated instruction in ELA and math at the K-6 level. All observed classrooms at the K-3 level had multiple resources to address diverse learning styles in ELA and math. In grades 4-6, the team observed multiple resources for content instruction visible in the classroom in 64 percent of the ELA and 33 percent of the math classrooms. In grades 7-12, in only one of 15 observed ELA and math classrooms (0 percent for ELA and 14 percent for math) were multiple resources for content instruction visible.

The professional development committee met regularly to evaluate programs for 2007-2008. Members of the committee indicated a concern about the funds available for professional development.

Action steps seven, eight, and nine directed the district to review the number of times students are pulled out of classrooms and for what purpose, revise student schedules accordingly, and reduce the number of times students are pulled out of class. Each of these steps was implemented in 2005-2006 at grades K-6, according to teachers and administrators in interviews and a review of district documentation. Efforts to reduce interruption of core instructional time continued in 2006-2007 through both a formal tracking of data on students' dismissals and an informal collaboration on scheduling of all types of classroom interruptions from field trips to student support services.

The restructuring of the student schedule at the elementary level served to support full inclusion for special education students. The district fully integrated students into the classrooms and provided support services in the context of grade-level curriculum and instruction. Interviews with teachers indicated that the district delivered almost all special education services directly to students in the classroom. Classroom observations supported the fact that many students received assistance in the full inclusion classroom through effective collaboration between the regular education and special education teachers.

Murdock Middle/High School had not significantly adjusted student schedules during the period under review, except for reducing the middle school day from seven to six periods per day in 2006-2007 due to the elimination of the art and music specialists from meeting with students in grades 7 and 8. This action increased the number of classes that operated without a formal

curriculum or detailed instructional program at this level. The high school building scheduling committee disbanded in 2006-2007 due to budget constraints, according to teachers, as noted above.

Strategy 1B: Allow time for grade level, cross grade level, cross-school level meetings to ensure consistency and continuity of instruction.

Strategy 1B includes three action steps: 1) utilize building-level scheduling committees to evaluate timeframes for coordination meetings; 2) convene a professional development committee to determine the schedule for cross building meetings as well as use of professional development days and staff meetings; and 3) evaluate possible timeframes for meetings to take place. During the period under review, the Winchendon administrators and K-8 faculty worked diligently to ensure grade-level and building-level meetings occurred on a regular basis. During 2005-2006, the district provided substitute teachers and used release time to align curriculum and coordinate instructional practices at the K-8 level. According to teachers and administrators, district budget constraints negatively impacted time for faculty collaboration, as determined in interviews and through a review of documents.

The first action step of strategy 1B directed the district to use the building-level scheduling committees to evaluate timeframes for coordination meetings. In 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, both Toy Town Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School used the scheduling committee of the building to find time for grade-level meetings. During 2005-2006, grade-level teams met weekly. The following year, grade-level meetings occurred after school during the second monthly faculty meeting and during "movie time" once a month, in which students in a grade watch a film aligned with the theme they are studying and teachers use the time to meet and evaluate curriculum.

The second action step was to convene a professional development committee to determine the schedule for cross building meetings, professional development days, and staff meetings. The district had a standing professional development committee that included teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals. During the period under review, the committee met on a regular basis to set the agenda for districtwide and building-level professional development. It

developed a districtwide professional development calendar using student achievement data to determine faculty need.

The third action step directed the professional development committee to evaluate possible timeframes for meetings to take place. The administrative team provided time for teachers in grades K-6 to meet as grade-level teams after school during staff development time. During the period under review, cross grade-level meetings were less consistent, according to both district documentation and interviews. In 2005-2006, there was one meeting for teachers of the transition grades of 3 to 4 and a second one for grades 6 to 7. During 2006-2007, the number of meetings for teachers of these grades to address student transitions doubled. Both building principals and faculty members acknowledged that the student achievement data indicated a need for further examination of curriculum and instruction around student transitions.

At the grade 7 and 8 levels, team meetings for each grade level occurred weekly. No evidence was found of using the time for vertical curriculum alignment, but interviews and observations indicated that grade-level curriculum was clearly aligned and consistent across teams. Administrators reported, and observations confirmed, that the district had adjusted schedules of grade 7 and 8 teachers to ensure all content area teachers had the same prep period. Observations and interviews both indicated that this happened frequently and informally at individual grade levels, but not as often across grade levels. Interviews and document reviews indicated the district had no formal system in place, outside of departmental meetings, to ensure vertical curriculum and instruction alignment at the grade 7 and 8 levels.

Departmental meetings were one of four monthly faculty meetings at the Murdock Middle/High School. According to faculty interviewed, they used these meetings to evaluate, revise, and refine the curriculum; develop benchmark assessments; and plan for resources for student learning, as reflected in department agendas and minutes. Although the high school level building scheduling committee disbanded for 2006-2007, staff was still addressing time on learning issues in the context of the departmental meetings, as determined through interviews and a review of the minutes from the meetings. An example of this was the planning for the grades 9-12 science course sequence during 2006-2007. The department was concerned about content mastery and decided to offer students the option of a one- or two-year biology sequence.

Strategy 1C: Implement the curriculum to foster student achievement.

The Winchendon DTAP included 14 action steps designed to support effective implementation of the curriculum to foster student achievement. At the time of the EQA site visit, the district had developed and implemented mathematics and ELA curricula at grades K-6. It had also developed a science curriculum at K-8. Review of documentation, faculty interviews, and classroom observations revealed that much instruction was textbook driven and heavily dependent upon prepared commercial packages. The curriculum for K-12 social studies was in development, according to interviewees; no documentation was available. The curriculum at the secondary level was not fully developed, and implementation would rely heavily on teacher created syllabi. The secondary ELA curriculum lacked specific scope and sequence and materials. The mathematics curriculum was more fully developed than the ELA curriculum, and the district had created course-level benchmarks.

The first action step associated with strategy 1C was to complete and disseminate revised curriculum guides for math and ELA. The second action step was to implement this curriculum at grades K-12. The district had completed and disseminated mathematics and ELA curriculum guides at grades K-8. The comprehensive guides clearly indicated content to be taught and scope and sequence for implementation. During the period under review, Winchendon had implemented the K-6 mathematics and ELA curricula it developed to foster student achievement. The district relied heavily upon both the Everyday Math and the Houghton Mifflin reading series programs as the foundation of resourcing the district's K-6 curricula. A review of documents as well as interviews with faculty and administrators indicated that prior to 2004, each teacher implemented his or her own curriculum, and teachers used different programs and materials at the same grade level.

During 2004-2005, Winchendon purchased and implemented Everyday Math for all students in grades K-6, and trained all teachers in effective implementation. The series was the driving force behind the math curriculum at grades K-6. The mathematics curriculum at grades 7-12 clearly indicated content and scope and sequence, although it was less clearly developed than the K-6 curriculum. Teachers expressed concern about the limited and dated resources available for student instruction in all content areas at the secondary level.

At grades 9-12, the district used the course syllabi and the curriculum interchangeably. There was no clear, district-based scope and sequence for instruction in the content areas at the secondary level. Department chairs indicated that a new teacher would learn what to teach through a combination of reviewing the course syllabi, the mentoring relationship, input from department chairs, and use of the state curriculum frameworks. The district had no formal system in place to develop, implement, or revise curriculum at the secondary level.

During 2004-2005, the faculty realigned the texts to ensure that they taught the grade 7 framework in grade 7. Prior to that, students in grade 7 had been working from a textbook designed for use at grade 6, and students in grade 8 were using a grade 7 text. Teachers and administrators both reported expending district funds to have full classroom sets of these 20-year-old texts. In the same interview, teachers noted that these texts did not fully align with the state mathematics framework. They referred to the case of learning from analysis of achievement data that students did not know slope and linear equations and subsequently creating units to address the fact that this content was missing from the text as an example of data-driven, reflective instruction.

Implementation of the curriculum at the grade 7-12 level was inconsistent across content areas. Classroom observations revealed a lack of high quality student work and uneven classroom instruction. One class left the EQA observer unsure about what the instructional content was supposed to be after 20 minutes of observation; there were no objectives or agenda posted, nor any clear learning standards visible. Students worked from a text, and the teacher's comments did not serve to clarify course content. Similarly, several examples of student work displayed at the secondary level came directly from the Internet, all without citations. Another class was reviewing for a quiz using MCAS questions; however, the teacher had not proofread the handout and the questions included several from a completely different content area. Only one of eight secondary ELA classes observed implemented questioning techniques designed to promote higher order thinking skills, while in all classes the team often observed the filling in of worksheets and copying from dated textbooks.

There were also examples of very effective curriculum implementation in the Winchendon Public Schools. These included science teachers who had clearly aligned and articulated the

curriculum to the point where the EQA team observed two classes learning the same content in two different yet highly engaging and effective ways. Another science class fully engaged the students in content through performing group projects in a mature work environment. In an ELA class on poetry, strong questions were asked and students were engaged in a dynamic learning environment while promoting critical analysis and higher order thinking skills. There were multiple examples of effective, engaging, and well-paced instruction at the K-3 level. Teachers were widely observed using a variety of instructional strategies, checking often for student understanding, and using formative assessment to modify instruction.

The third action step in strategy 1C was to revise ELA and math curriculum guides based on gaps in student learning identified through data analysis. At the time of the EQA visit, the director of curriculum and instruction was able to pull a schedule for revising the curriculum off her wall. However, the schedule was not widely known although it was listed in the DTAP, and there was no evidence of implementation. Rather, the district was absorbed in attempting to complete curriculum guides for incomplete content areas and focused on using several tools to evaluate fidelity of curriculum implementation at the K-6 grade levels.

The fourth action step, scheduled for completion in May 2006, was to complete and disseminate revised curriculum guides for science at grades 9-12. The fifth action step was the implementation of this curriculum. At the time of the EQA visit in January 2007, there was limited evidence of a district-based science curriculum at the secondary levels. Interviews with department chairs and faculty indicated that a great deal of work and collaboration took place during the period under review to ensure curriculum consistency and alignment with the state science curriculum framework. A review of departmental meeting agendas revealed that the district addressed student achievement in science through evaluating and revising the biology course to ensure all students successfully attain competency. The district codified this work in course syllabi, standardized exit exams, and a department-based review of resources. Curriculum and instruction administrators had limited involvement in codifying these documents into a district-based curriculum guide. The sixth action step was to revise the science curriculum guides. The district had not yet initiated this action step, because, according to district administrators, the 9-12 science curriculum was in draft form at the time the district received the new science curriculum framework from the DOE, which was four months prior to the site visit.

The seventh and eighth action steps, scheduled for completion in May and August 2006, were completion and dissemination, followed by implementation, of revised curriculum guides for science at grades 6-8. Review of the curriculum documents indicated that the guides were in place and effectively disseminated. However, they lacked a full complement of identified resources and standardized district-based benchmarks to evaluate student achievement. Classroom observations revealed fidelity of curriculum implementation as two separate science classrooms both learned about adaptation in two different, very engaging lessons on the same day. Teachers used varied instructional strategies and different student activities to teach the content.

The ninth action step was to revise the science curriculum at grades 6-8 based on gaps in student learning identified through data analysis. While there was a schedule in place to do this, it was not a widely known process. Science teachers were consumed with effective implementation of the curriculum during the last six months of the period under review.

Action steps 10, 11, and 12 in strategy 1C were to complete and disseminate, implement, and revise the science curriculum at grades K-5. Scheduling for these action steps was concurrent with the development of the middle and high school curricula. The district completed the creation, dissemination, and implementation of the science curriculum at the elementary grades. The revision has been scheduled but not known.

The pattern of development of the science curriculum was indicative of the system of curriculum development across the content areas. The district has clearly focused the majority of the available resources at the K-6 grade levels. During the period under review, there has been an interim principal at the high school. Interviews and a review of documents indicated that the focus at the secondary level was on preparing for a New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) visit through the self-study.

Action steps 13 and 14 addressed monitoring curriculum delivery. The building principals monitored the lesson plan books at the K-6 level and department chairs did so at the grade 7-12 level. Classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed that lesson plan books clearly aligned with the state curriculum frameworks and district curriculum. Like the curriculum, they tended to be program dependent rather than focused on student outcomes.

Monitoring of curriculum implementation by using a walk-through protocol was an evolving practice in Winchendon. During the period under review, the district implemented, evaluated, and refined the walk-through instrument. At the time of the EQA visit, the tool focused on the effectiveness of teacher implementation of the Everyday Math and Houghton Mifflin ELA programs.

The district tabulated the October-December 2006 walk-through data for each school and shared the information. Neither the document review nor interviews revealed staff understanding of how to use the walk-through data to effect systemic change in order to improve learning for all students. The analysis contained observations and no recommendations for instruction. Rather, the report recommended more analysis, data gathering, and background work for the directors to complete.

The general findings in the report noted that the instructional programs were used in 97 percent of the observed classroom periods and that the math program materials were used. The report also noted that for the ELA program, the current pacing would not allow teachers to complete the program's themes. For the math materials, the report noted that the pacing would allow teachers to complete the "Program Priorities." This is consistent with the team's observations that the instructional materials were the focus of the delivered curricula. Also consistent with the team's observations was the report's findings that differentiated instruction was a weakness in the district.

No direct reference to specific standards or the district curriculum was in the district's classroom observation report. The report indicated that pacing concerns could be addressed by completing "a preliminary Program Priorities for ELA and Houghton Mifflin materials. This would be informed by the design of the Houghton Mifflin themes and the concepts and skills particularly relevant to the MCAS and to gaps in Winchendon's student achievement. It could provide some guidance to teachers as they make their way though these materials, and would be revised to reflect teacher's experience using the materials for a full year." The report also indicated that differentiation could also be addressed though "Program Priorities" rather than the curriculum. The driving factor—or the independent variable—appeared to be the program materials in the

delivery of the curriculum, with MCAS data and teacher perceptions as additional sources of information.

Strategy 1D: Provide professional development districtwide.

The DTAP included nine action steps and two implementation benchmarks in strategy 1D.

The first action step was to identify "high quality" professional development according to NCLB/DOE guidelines. The Winchendon professional development committee was charged with providing high quality professional development activities to district employees. The committee identified and coordinated districtwide professional development activities. Interviewees indicated that the committee was comprised of one administrator and two teachers from each building, the technology coordinator, the superintendent, three directors, two paraprofessionals, one member of the school committee, and a union representative. Additional professional development assistance for the district was provided by the Education Development Center (EDC). Interviewees further indicated that all professional development relied on grant funding.

The second action step directed the district to provide professional development in standards-based instruction in conjunction with the Winchendon curriculum guides. Math and ELA curricula at grades K-6 conformed to the Everyday Math and Houghton Mifflin reading series' textbooks. The district implemented its mathematics curriculum at grades K-6 through use of Everyday Math, and at the time of the review was in the third year of the program's implementation. During 2005-2006, the district's elementary school teachers received three full days of math content professional development and Everyday Math training. For 2006-2007, professional development activities included early release days in which math analysis teachers (MATs) facilitated grade-level meetings focused on developing consistent grade-level assignments. Additionally, the district scheduled four after-school content specific grade-level meetings facilitated by the math analysis teachers. Professional development offerings for content-based instruction occurred in the priority area of middle school mathematics. Professional development in standards-based instruction in ELA at grades 7-12 and in math at grades 9-12 did not occur.

Action step 3 in strategy 1D was to provide preK-12 ELA/math professional development based on the analysis of student achievement data. Interviewees stated that the district lacked content-based professional development in areas of student weakness identified through data analysis.

Professional development at the elementary level did not focus on areas of student weakness identified through data analysis. Rather, professional development at the elementary level focused on the implementation of the ELA and math curricular programs. In 2005, Winchendon adopted and implemented the Houghton Mifflin reading program at grades K-6. Funding for the Houghton-Mifflin reading program came from John Silber Early Reading Initiative for Underperforming School Districts of the Massachusetts Department of Education, and from the Robinson Broadhurst Trust. In anticipation of immediate implementation of the Houghton-Mifflin reading program, the district provided one half-day of professional development in December 2005 and one half-day in January 2006. In September 2006, the district provided a reading refresher course entitled How to Use the Houghton-Mifflin Reading Program. Reading coaches provided some classroom-based professional development. For 2005-2006, the Underperforming School District grant funded the elementary reading coach position. For 2006-2007, the district's budget funded this position. The district also provided extensive training in the Everyday Math program at the elementary level.

Documents indicated that the district provided additional voluntary ELA professional development activities through grants. During 2004-2005, 17 elementary school teachers completed year one of Writing for Success and then continued in year two. In year two, an additional 13 elementary teachers participated in the program. Summer professional development included Writing for Success for those participants who participated in the program during the previous school year. Teachers developed lessons and activities that integrated technology into ELA teaching and learning with a concentration on writing skills. Funding for Writing for Success came from the Enhancing Technology grant. Additional 2006 voluntary summer professional development included LANGUAGE! training for middle school teachers at Fitchburg State College funded through NCLB Title IIA and Fitchburg State College.

Professional development offerings for content-based instruction did occur in the priority area of middle school mathematics. In the fall of 2003, Winchendon Public Schools began a partnership

with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to offer mathematics courses for middle school mathematics teachers designed specifically to enhance middle school mathematics instruction at Murdock Middle/High School. During 2004-2005, some middle school mathematics teachers participated in a course entitled Number Sense, Polygons & Algebraic Strategies. The district offered additional mathematics courses through WPI, including Middle School Math and MCAS Studies and Geometry. Professional development through WPI in the summer of 2006 included Reasoning and Problem Solving: Number Sense, Algebra, and Measurement designed for teachers at grades 4-9. Funding came from the Content Institute grant and the NAWWG (Narragansett, Ashburnham-Westminster, Winchendon, and Gardner) collaboration. During 2005-2006, EDC provided full-day professional development training to middle school math teachers in standards-based instruction and classroom assessment on September 13, October 6, November 8, and January 13.

From interviews and a review of documents, the EQA team saw little evidence of content-based professional development based on data analysis in the areas of elementary math, middle school ELA, and high school ELA and math. Murdock teachers expressed the need for professional development in their areas of certification.

In a review of 40 randomly selected personnel files, EQA examiners found that 33 percent of professional staff whose files were reviewed were not certified for the positions held. In total, 18 percent were not certified for the position held and 15 percent had expired certifications. Interviewees were unclear who was responsible for monitoring certification information, and the representative sample conflicted with the data provided to the DOE. DOE data indicated that over 91 percent of the district's staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure for teaching assignments. Of those without appropriate licensures, 58 percent were not certified, 25 percent were teaching out of the area of certification, and 17 percent had expired certifications, according to the DOE data provided by the district.

Action steps 4, 5, and 6 required the district to provide teachers at grades preK-5, 8, and 9-12 with science professional development based on the analysis of student achievement data. The DTAP had no plan to provide professional development in science at grades 9-12. The professional development offered in science content was not sufficient to ensure that teachers

had the knowledge to deliver quality instruction in the areas of the state science curriculum framework, and particularly in areas of student weakness. In the summer of 2006, the district provided professional development in Physical Science & Technology: Inquiry & Experimentation for K-6 teachers through funding from the Content Institute grant. Additionally, the district offered Physics and Engineering of Forces for grade 5-9 teachers at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, as reported in the annual professional development survey for 2006-2007 summer professional development.

Action steps 7 and 8 required the district to provide teachers at grades preK-6 and 7-12 with social studies professional development based on the analysis of student achievement data. Few professional development courses were offered and were insufficient to ensure that all teachers were prepared to deliver instruction in the areas of the state social studies curriculum framework. During 2004-2005, six Winchendon teachers from grades 6-12 participated in the federal grant-funded Teaching American History program at Fitchburg State College. Prior to the start of 2005-2006, the district released two of these teachers due to budget cuts. During 2005-2006, four teachers from Winchendon participated in the Teaching American History program funded through the American History grant from the Department of Education.

Action Step 9 was to provide foreign language professional development for teachers based on the analysis of student achievement data. The EQA found no evidence of foreign language professional development.

The first implementation benchmark in strategy 1D was classroom observation of whether teachers are current in the content. The walk-through checklist document referenced three major objectives: checking for open plan book, did the teacher display the state learning standards, and were the day's activities posted on the board or was there an outline of the class period. The end of the year walk-through summary reports submitted to EQA examiners did not include reporting of these benchmark data. Additionally, EQA examiners found no evidence that the administration addressed this in professional staff evaluations.

The second implementation benchmark was classroom observation of teachers being reflective and continuous learners. The end of the year walk-through summary reports submitted to EQA

examiners also did not include these benchmark data. Additionally, EQA examiners found no evidence that the administration addressed this in professional staff evaluations.

Initiative 2: Tailor instruction to meet students' needs

Finding 2A: Winchendon has improved its use of assessments to inform district and school decisions.

- Winchendon used MCAS test data to inform curriculum revisions at the elementary level, to inform the DTAP committee, to use in professional development days for teachers, and to develop K-12 (draft) math assessments.
- The district used the PIM process to create standards-based School Improvement Plans based on the analysis of student achievement data in each school.
- The district has also implemented the use of TestWiz to analyze MCAS test data and Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) data, with plans to expand the data analysis system to include other student assessments and to link with the COGNOS system at the Department of Education.
- Twelve districtwide users and central office staff were involved in the production of hard copies of data reports for schools, grade-level teams, and departments.
- The district had trained 88 percent of Winchendon professional staff in *The Skillful Teacher* and 91 percent in differentiated instruction.
- The district considered the participation and assessment results of the special education students, and provided professional development in inclusion in order to address Initiative 2, Strategy A: provide professional development for inclusion, *The Skillful Teacher*, and differentiated instruction for all staff.

Finding 2B: The district has not yet established student achievement as the basis for implementing effective and sustainable assessment and evaluation systems tied to improving student achievement.

- Discussion of student assessment data was often present in conversations about district decisions, but the district did not have embedded practices for using the data in consistent ways.

- The district lacked a sustained use of developed assessments at grades K-12 that would allow it to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of its programs from year to year.
- Teachers in grades K-3 used data in meaningful ways to impact instruction in reading, but this was a very time-consuming process because of the lack of software.
- The use of assessment data was not systemically established, the personnel and technology resources for use of the data were limited, and teachers had limited time for planning; therefore, efforts to use data to inform decisions strained the time of district staff, who were also involved in other efforts to improve student achievement in the district.
- The district used aggregate and special education subgroup data to inform some areas of curriculum and instruction.
- Reliance on grant funding limited content-based professional development offerings with the potential to improve the use of assessment data to modify content area instruction.
- The district had not developed written procedures to ensure the continuity of data analysis practices to ensure that instruction, services, and programs focused on the assessment results of the district's subgroup populations, such as a DCAP, a specific inclusion model, or a program evaluation process. The DOE did not require the district to have a DCAP because of the DTAP.
- In 2004-2005, Winchendon provided additional math support for students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing' category on the MCAS tests. No equivalent support was provided in ELA or in math for the 2005-2006 or the 2006-2007 school years for all such students.
- The achievement gap between higher-performing and lower-performing student subgroups decreased because non low-income and regular education student performance decreased as special education and low-income student achievement increased.
- The most improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students; the more improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities.
- The district did not have a program evaluation process in place, but had drafted a program evaluation form for DTAP review to address the first action step in Initiative 2, Strategy E: identify a protocol, schedule, and timeline to assess existing programs.

- In 2004-2005, professional staff completed staff profile sheets. In 2005-2006, the district neither disseminated nor used staff profile sheets for staff/student placement issues, as it had planned.
- Professional development offerings for content-based instruction were a priority for middle school mathematics. During full-day professional development offerings in 2005-2006, middle school math teachers received training in standards-based instruction and classroom assessments provided by EDC.
- With a reliance on grant funding, professional development offered in the content areas did not comprehensively address areas of student weakness identified through data analysis. Grant proposals did require data to justify district needs.

Finding 2C: Classroom use of student assessment data, to monitor student learning and modify instruction, occurs systemically at the lower elementary level, but not at grades 4-12.

- The Memorial Elementary School had a strong instructional focus, with clear practices and procedures for student assessment and the use of student achievement data.
- The activities listed in the SIPs of the other two schools were not specific enough to penetrate to the daily classroom level at grades 4-12.
- The team found significant differences in practice within and among the three schools with respect to instructional practices and expectations for students.
- The district consistently used Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to modify instruction at the K-3 level.
- EQA observations indicated that K-3 classes were highly effective, but grades 4-6 were not highly effective in providing instruction "tailored to student needs."
- All observed classrooms at the K-3 level had multiple resources for tailoring instruction in ELA and math, but only one of 15 observed English language arts and math classrooms at grades 7-12 had such resources.

- Teachers in grades 4-12 were beginning to learn how to use data to modify instruction, but the most systemic use of data at these grades was for student placement in courses, classes, and programs.
- Toy Town performed 'Low' in ELA and math, not meeting AYP in 2005 or 2006 for the aggregate or subgroups. Memorial and Murdock both made AYP in 2005 and 2006 for the aggregate and subgroups, and were in the 'High' performance category in ELA.
- Teacher evaluations did not hold teachers accountable for student achievement.
- Of the 36 teacher evaluations reviewed, the EQA team considered 94 percent informative, but only 13 percent instructive and three percent conducive to professional growth or overall effectiveness.

Evidence

Winchendon's initiative to tailor instruction to meet students' needs consists of seven strategies to deliver data-driven classroom instruction, programs, and services. These strategies are: A) provide professional development in inclusion, *The Skillful Teacher*, and differentiated instruction for all staff; B) develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the academic needs of all students; C) create a database for teachers to access student records/hard data in a way that informs instruction; D) develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the social needs of all students; E) identify academic support programming that would meet the needs of all students and develop an approval process to project, finance, and implement new/innovative/expanded programs; F) develop a protocol for student placement and services between grades and buildings; and G) assess current education staff, including paraprofessional staff, for their area of certification, training, and expertise to guide teacher program assignment and student placement.

Winchendon leadership recognized the need for making standards-based and student-centered decisions based on data, and to continuously assess and modify at all levels. This recognition, encouraged by educational audits and the creation of the DTAP, has led to increased use of assessments and greater dissemination and discussion of student achievement data. However, the use of data to modify instruction and programs is not yet deeply embedded. Moving from the highest to the lowest levels—district to school to classroom—data use has less impact. The

district has not systematized and used data effectively at all levels to enable effective development and revision of programs targeted to students who need them the most, and to ensure classroom instruction meets the level of student need at grades 4-12.

Although "tailoring instruction to meet student needs" was not an embedded practice throughout the district, the DTAP had prompted greater use of data, especially at the district and school levels. Prior to the DTAP, the district made efforts, but little progress, to use student data to set priorities at any level—the district, school, or classroom. In the February 2004 EQA review of the Winchendon Public Schools, the EQA noted key factors inhibiting the district's ability to improve student achievement, including the lack of ongoing evaluation of programs and services to inform and evaluate improvement initiatives, and the lack of capacity to sustain the level of change necessary to improve the quality of teaching and learning. At the time of the February 2004 site visit, the EQA observed little use of formal or informal student assessment and determined that since the adoption of the district's objectives, "there had not been sufficient time for the district to increase the utilization of student test data in order to improve curricula or instructional practices."

The district engaged in analysis of MCAS data with DOE staff who led the schools through a Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process to create the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and to create the District Turnaround Plan that the Board of Education approved in April 2005. The district had recognized the need to increase the use of data in decision-making, and the superintendent and the district leadership team worked to collect and disseminate data to inform school leadership, district committees, and departments responsible for curriculum development, grade-level and content area leadership, professional development, and supporting students academically and socially. Already engaged in school and district discussions around MCAS data to create SIPs, the DOE also required the district to collect quantitative and qualitative data to provide evidence of DTAP implementation for district, school, and classroom "evidence boxes." The district began to identify the data to show its progress in implementing the DTAP and to help it synthesize information needed for key decisions. The district has simultaneously worked to prepare data needed for an upcoming NEASC visit.

The district was still developing its program evaluation process and its ability to use data to evaluate decisions such as the implementation of professional development initiatives and support programs. Schools used the PIM process to create SIPs with aggregate and subgroup goals, and activities for each improvement objective. The Memorial Elementary SIP leadership team updated its SIP in February 2006 from its original SIP developed with DOE assistance in the fall of 2004, according to central office administrators. Its SIP had a strong instructional focus, with clear practices and procedures for student assessment and the use of student achievement data. The activities listed in the SIPs of the other two schools were not specific enough to penetrate to the daily classroom level at grades 4-12. The district has not yet established a standard protocol, procedures, or consistent tools to analyze the data it collects to impact instruction in meaningful and efficient ways. Teachers in grades K-3 used data in meaningful ways to impact instruction in reading, but this was a very time consuming process because of the lack of software. Development and discussion has been time consuming and the district has had limited capacity, time, and resources to move much further in refining its assessment practices, as it also focused on its other priorities.

Key to the success of this initiative was the establishment of an effective and accessible system of student assessment and program evaluation, so that the district could ensure that trained and qualified staff had the information and tools to meet student learning needs. While the district has made progress, it has not organized the student assessment and program evaluation processes in an established system that staff could sustain without a high level of work and commitment. The district formulated strategies to improve leadership, instruction, and student performance to address needs identified through the EQA reviews, DOE feedback from the DTAP and SIP planning processes, and feedback from the EDC, Winchendon's turnaround partner. The district was also preparing for a NEASC review of the Murdock Middle/High School. Winchendon intensively engaged central office administrators, teacher leaders, and ultimately the entire staff in formulating strategies that responded to the needs identified through these external review processes. The district aimed to improve leadership primarily through the DTAP process and aided with training for administrators by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). Winchendon formulated strategies to improve instruction by developing curricula, developing observation tools for walk-throughs and classroom implementation, and providing professional development in *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction. The district formulated

strategies to improve student achievement primarily through the SIP process and DTAP initiatives. The district still has not established a formal process to respond to the needs identified through program and personnel evaluations, although it had a program evaluation protocol in draft form at the time of the site visit.

There was a gap between administrator and teacher ability to use data in their respective roles because of limited teacher time for discussions in, knowledge of, and accountability for the appropriate use of data. The district had started to identify, develop, and ensure administration of ELA and math assessments in order to inform instruction and evaluate student progress. Because the curriculum was not complete and aligned at all grades K-12, and because the district had lacked an established, complete, and aligned continuum of math and ELA assessments from year to year across the grades, the use of assessments was still in development. The district had purchased an expanded version of TestWiz and trained one staff member at each grade K-6 and department coordinators in the use of TestWiz and TestWiz.net to analyze MCAS and GRADE data to generate data analysis reports and serve as information conduits for all teachers. Central office administrators coordinated the team responsible for data analysis; they discussed with the group the expectations for use of data to identify issues related to curricular and instructional priorities. This was still a new process for the district. Winchendon also had plans to expand the data analysis system to include other student assessments and to link with the COGNOS system at DOE.

Winchendon trained few teachers to analyze or use data, although it did train K-3 teachers in using DIBELS and selected staff in using TestWiz. Teachers were familiar with item analyses, but classroom observations, interviews, and a review of the walk-though protocol indicated that teachers in grades 4-12 did not consistently and regularly use data to adjust instruction. The district has not completed the structure to support and ensure that classroom-based assessments align with state curriculum frameworks. During the time of the site visit, the district used DIBELS testing at grades K-3, which assesses reading fluency and literacy required for the grade 3 reading test. Interviewees and the district's assessment catalogue indicated that the district implemented the use of the Houghton-Mifflin unit tests at grades 1-6 (only grades 1-2 used the assessments in 2004-2005), and the Everyday Math unit assessments at grades 1-6. Interviewees indicated that the unit assessments addressed the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, and that

the newly implemented curriculum aligned the sequence of the lessons and assessments with the grade-level learning standards.

Department heads indicated that common final exams integrated MCAS-related questions at the secondary level, and teachers based development of the midterms on the final exams. Winchendon developed K-12 math assessments linked to the state curriculum framework standards. The EQA team reviewed these assessments, which were in draft form at the time of the site visit. The district had teachers develop these assessments by identifying areas of weaknesses in math achievement through item analyses, according to interviewees and documents reviewed by the team. The curriculum documents for grades 7-12 revealed that the district still needed to complete the curriculum, including resources and materials aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and revisions to ensure vertical alignment.

Other factors inhibiting effective teacher use of data included lack of professional development and time for collaboration. In spite of years of differentiated instruction training, and new access to IDE portal, teachers had found that they lacked the technology, content area professional development, and planning time to thoughtfully and meaningfully incorporate data into ongoing modification of instructional delivery, while also in the midst of other activities and change processes the district is focused on.

Besides *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction, the district also focused its professional development on implementing K-6 Everyday Math and Houghton-Mifflin reading programs. The district offered some content-based professional development in math, science, and social studies, but grant funding dictated these offerings. Limited funding for professional development in content areas and data analysis hindered the district's ability to ensure staff had adequate knowledge of subject matter to provide multi-leveled, targeted, topic area instruction. Additionally, one-third of the teachers either had no certification or their certification had expired, and teacher evaluations did not hold them responsible for improved student achievement. However, the K-3 level was a model for effective use of data in the district. In the lower elementary program, teachers have established practices of using DIBELS data to modify reading instruction, and Title I as well as special education teachers to support differentiated instruction.

While a work in progress, the district has set a positive direction for capacity building to support the use of data. With a clear commitment to establishing new practices to use formative rather than summative assessment data, the central office and schools have been very busy collecting and discussing data. The district now uses data systemically for placement decisions and conversations about classroom, school, and district decisions.

The team also observed that there was a gap in practices and resources allowing for instruction "tailored to student needs" between the grade groupings. In observed K-3 classes, 83 percent of ELA and 67 percent of math classes had multiple tasks for different levels of learners (compared to 54 and 39 percent, respectively, of the peer classrooms across districts). In both ELA and math, 83 percent of observed classes at this level had a variety of instructional techniques (compared to 48 and 39 percent, respectively, of their district counterparts). Grades 4-6 negatively compared to the district and peer classrooms across the state recorded in the EQA database on measures related to instruction tailored to student needs. None of the grade 4-6 classes in ELA presented multiple tasks for different levels of learners or a variety of instructional techniques. By comparison, these were present in approximately one-third of the grade 4-6 ELA classes in the database of districts examined by the EQA in 2006-2007. In observed grade 7-12 math classrooms, 14 percent used multiple tasks and 29 percent used a variety of instructional techniques. While evidence of critical questioning was observed at Memorial School in 67 percent of the ELA and 83 percent of the math classes, it was observed at Toy Town in 18 percent of the ELA and none of the math classes. At the middle/high school, 13 percent of the ELA classrooms used critical questioning to support deeper student thought. In stark contrast, 86 percent of the math classrooms demonstrated critical questioning. Besides professional skills or expectations, resources presented an issue in the upper grades. All observed classrooms at Memorial had multiple resources to address diverse learning styles in ELA and math, but only one of 15 observed ELA and math classrooms at grades 7-12 (0 percent for ELA and 14 percent for math) had such resources.

Student achievement data by subgroup provides mixed results of the district's progress in "tailoring instruction to meet student needs." In Winchendon Public Schools, the achievement gap between higher-performing and lower-performing student subgroups decreased. Non low-income and regular education student performance decreased as special education and low-

income student achievement increased. Students with disabilities and low-income students had improved performance in ELA and math between 2004 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students; the more improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities. Both the ELA and math performance of regular education students and non low-income students declined during this period. (See Appendix A: Analysis of Student Achievement Data.)

Strategy 2A: Provide professional development for inclusion, *The Skillful Teacher*, and differentiated instruction for all staff.

The DTAP includes six action steps and two implementation benchmarks in strategy 2A.

District records for 2006-2007 indicated that 88 percent of the professional staff completed *The Skillful Teacher* graduate level course and 91 percent of Winchendon teachers completed the differentiated instruction graduate level course. By comparison, in May 2004 the EQA found that the district had trained 35 percent of professional staff in *The Skillful Teacher* and 35 percent in differentiated instruction. The professional development survey form dated December 4, 2006 indicated that the district would continue to offer differentiated instruction training during the summer of 2007.

The first action step of strategy 2A was to check availability of differentiated instruction instructors. Records indicated that between March 2005 and April 2005 the Winchendon director of instructional services contacted Teachers 21, a provider of differentiated instruction training, to check on the availability of instructors for 2005-2006 professional development activities. The district offered differentiated instruction professional development in the summer of 2005 and during districtwide professional development days in 2005-2006.

The second action step directed the district to tabulate results from a staff professional development preference survey. Documents submitted to EQA disclosed that the district distributed and analyzed annual professional development staff surveys in both 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. The district utilized the staff time preferences to schedule necessary professional development. For example, in the January 2005 professional development staff survey, teachers expressed a preference for *The Skillful Teacher* training during the summer from June 27-July 1.

Professional development documents from the summer of 2005-2006 indicated that the district offered *The Skillful Teacher* training from June 27-June 30 with follow-up days in the fall.

Action step 3 was develop a timeline for completion of differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher* for all professional staff. Documents indicated that 88 percent of Winchendon teachers completed *The Skillful Teacher* graduate level course. The district described the remaining 12 percent of teachers as new to the district. As a result, the district expected all teachers new to the district to take *The Skillful Teacher* training during hours beyond the school day.

Interviewees indicated that differentiated instruction continued to be a focal point for professional development in the district during 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. During 2005-2006, in conjunction with Lesley College, the district offered a differentiated instruction graduate level course. In November 2006, the district, in conjunction with NAWWG (Narragansett, Ashburnham-Westminster, Winchendon, and Gardner) offered a regional full-day of professional development focusing on differentiated instruction. Teachers were organized into grade-level and content area groups and by their familiarity with differentiated instruction.

The professional development survey form elicited several preferences from professional staff: for offering professional development in ELA, math, science, social studies, and special education; for dates in the summer; and for professional development days. According to the survey form, the district will plan all professional development activities for 2007-2008 according to the DTAP and SIPs.

The Winchendon Turnaround Plan Update Executive Summary dated October 30, 2006 indicated that most current teachers completed the graduate courses in differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher*. For 2007, the Winchendon Public Schools decided it would no longer offer the courses during professional development days. Pending adequate enrollment, teachers new to the district were expected to take either differentiated instruction or *The Skillful Teacher* during hours beyond the school day.

The fourth action step in strategy 2A directed the district to develop a plan for the training of new professional staff in differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher*. Interviewees indicated that the district required all new teachers to attend a three-day induction program in

August. Topics included school district expectations, IPDPs, introduction to the town of Winchendon, professional development offerings, and introduction to differentiated instruction. As part of the new teacher induction program, teachers voluntarily attended monthly meetings throughout the first year. Topics included standards-based instruction, introduction to differentiated instruction, and application of differentiated instruction. The mentor coordinator indicated that she tried to connect mentors and teachers new to the district by grade level, subject level, and subject area. Additionally, all new teachers participated in differentiated instruction districtwide professional development days and half-day professional development activities, as well as grade-level meetings.

Teachers new to the district had to complete graduate level courses in *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction and had to take these courses beyond the school day. The Winchendon Public Schools Annual Professional Development Survey indicated that the district would offer differentiated instruction during the summer of 2007.

Action step 5 was to check availability of instructors to provide professional development in inclusion. Action step 6 was to schedule dates for professional development in inclusion according to the master professional development plan. From October 2006 through January 2007, the district offered a professional development course entitled Effective Inclusion. Documents showed 28 Winchendon teachers participated in the 36-hour graduate level course. Winchendon Public Schools offered three Winchendon credits at the completion of the course. Participation was voluntary.

Implementation benchmark 1 for strategy 2A was a list of teachers who have completed differentiated instruction, *The Skillful Teacher*, and inclusion. A list of teachers who completed differentiated instruction, Skillful Teacher, and inclusion was on file in the evidence box.

Implementation benchmark 2 was classroom monitoring with walk-throughs and informal and formal evaluations of the implementation of the curriculum. The DTAP update of June 2005 indicated the district developed in 2004 the first of two walk-through checklist forms. The administrator would note whether the state and/or Winchendon learning standards were posted, appeared in the lesson plans, were observed in instruction, and whether the daily agenda was posted. The administrators would also note how the teacher checked for understanding and what

instruction strategies the teacher was using during the lesson. The purpose of the walk-through document was to provide feedback to teachers. Documents provided to the EQA indicated that the administrators tallied the data quarterly. The EQA noted that the form needed revision to include expectations for 2005-2006. EQA examiners found no substantive change in the phase two walk-through form. Principals tallied the quarterly reports into an end-of-year summary.

Strategy 2B: Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the academic needs of all students (groups and individual students).

Winchendon Public Schools engaged in a continuous process of defining and refining its assessment system. While it is not yet a comprehensive system capable of ensuring that the district can identify the academic needs of all students, central office and building-level staff provided evidence that the district has worked on each action step included in this strategy. The district has attained some of its self-identified implementation and outcome benchmarks in its effort to implement this strategy, but it has yet to reach some of the benchmarks.

The most recent version of the DTAP (last updated December 20, 2006) includes eight action steps for the development and implementation of a comprehensive assessment system to identify students' academic needs.

The district has completed the first action step in Strategy 2B, to catalogue current assessments used across the district, although the district's assessment system is continuing to evolve. According to interviewees, the DTAP, and meeting notes provided to the EQA team, the district convened a Winchendon Assessment Committee in 2004-2005 to plan improvements to its system of student assessment. In that year, the committee released a list of standardized, diagnostic, and basal assessments matched with grade level, subject, and period of administration. The district provided to the team a list of district assessments administered in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. The January 2006 report of the Winchendon Assessment Committee explained the rationale for changes made to the assessment system, and central office staff on the committee explained to the team the changes made to date.

The most recent catalogue of assessments, for 2005-2006, identified the following district assessments, and interviewees and reports provided to the team confirmed that the district administered them as indicated. The district administered standardized and diagnostic

assessments in reading to all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Teachers administered the DIAL-R once in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten to assess cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, and language development. Teachers administered the DIBELS three times per year in kindergarten through grade 3. The assessment list did not indicate, but interviewees stated, that teachers also used the DIBELS progress monitoring tools to assess students not meeting grade-level benchmarks in DIBELS in midpoint testing cycles, three additional times per year. The district also administered the GRADE at the beginning and end of the school year to students in grades K-8; administration of the test was expanded from grades K-3 in 2004-2005. The district did not implement standardized or diagnostic assessments in reading for all students in grades 9-12.

The list of assessments also included the basal unit tests teachers administered to students in grades K-6. The reading assessments were Houghton Mifflin theme tests, administered at grades 1-2 in 2004-2005 and at grades 3-6 in 2005-2006. The math assessments were Everyday Math unit assessments, new to the district in 2005-2006 with the purchase and implementation of the Everyday Math program. For math, the district used a basal placement test for students in grade 6 and AccuPlacer for students in grade 11.

The district administered ELA, long composition, and math MCAS practice tests to all students in grades 4-10, for the subject area of testing at each grade level, once a year prior to the administration of the state tests.

The most recent catalogue of assessments did not include some assessments in use and others recently developed that the district planned to implement. The chart did not indicate DIBELS progress monitoring practices, or the common final exams that department chairs indicated were in use at the high school. The list also did not yet include the newly created math assessment for all students in grades K-12 that was still in draft form at the time of the review.

The district has addressed the second action step in Strategy 2B, to provide professional development on the use of data, while noting the need for increased time and funding to make data analysis an embedded part of instruction at grades 4-12. The initial DTAP action step indicated that the district would provide professional development “on the use of data to drive instruction,” and the district trained teachers in grades K-3 on the use of DIBELS and teachers in

grades 4-8 on the use of GRADE, according to district documents and interviewees. The revised action step indicated that the district would provide data analysis training to non-professional staff, and this has not yet been completed. Interviewees and classroom observations indicated that practices of using DIBELS data to drive instruction were well embedded at grades K-3. The DTAP and teachers in focus groups indicated that they need more time for team planning in order for additional professional development to result in greater use of data to drive classroom instruction at grades 4-8. Further, the DTAP indicated that the district needs more funds in order to increase professional development in data analysis, and interviewees indicated that the cost of user fees limited the number of staff trained in the use of TestWiz. The district did not provide formal professional development in data analysis to all staff in grades 9-12. Rather, department heads led discussions with teachers in grades 7-12 in their respective departments using hard copies of TestWiz analyses of ELA and math MCAS test data.

The district has addressed the third action step in Strategy 2B, to include some time within the professional development calendar to analyze data. In 2006-2007, the district scheduled professional development days in August and October to analyze data, according to the DTAP and building administrators. In 2005-2006, the district used professional development days to begin developing math assessments to support the elementary Everyday Math program and to link it with the MCAS tests. Newly instituted math analysis teachers further refined this work in 2006-2007, according to superintendent reports to the DOE and verified by interviewees and the draft of the K-12 math assessments. During 2005-2006, the district also used professional development days to incorporate MCAS questions into classroom-based assessments at the secondary level, according to the report of the superintendent to the DOE. Building-level staff also indicated that teachers reviewed student assessment data in grade-level and departmental meetings, and that some staff further reviewed data in special committees, such as the DTAP, professional development, and math analysis committees. Further, the district has incorporated data analyses into the ongoing work of several committees, including the SIP teams, the DTAP committees, and the group of staff trained in TestWiz.

The fourth action step in Strategy 2B—to schedule professional development based on need determined by data analysis—was an addition to the DTAP, with a timeline for completion during 2006-2007, and the district has not yet completed it. Winchendon has not yet developed a

professional development program informed by specific content area needs identified through data analysis. At the time of the site visit, interviewees stated that professional development for all teachers focused on *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction. Central office administrators stated that as the district created the turnaround plan, it recognized the need for prioritizing overall instructional improvement, and identified the priorities for focused professional development in those areas early in the process. In focus groups, teachers stated that training in *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction had saturated returning teachers, and that the current priority was content-based professional development.

The fifth action step in Strategy 2B has been an ongoing process: to research and identify which additional assessment tools the district will use. Interviewees and documents confirmed that the district updated its list of assessments to include classroom-based unit assessments, although the common high school assessments were not included in the latest version of the list (February 2006). The district has produced a draft of math assessments for grades K-12 linked to the instructional program at the elementary level and to the curriculum framework at all levels. Once the district has implemented the K-12 assessments, it will have a continuous assessment system for math at all grades and for reading at grades K-8 (using DIBELS at grades K-3 and GRADE at grades 1-8).

A Winchendon Assessment Committee report indicated that the district revised its assessments based on a committee review and discussion of district needs. For example, the district decided to eliminate the Terra Nova test previously administered at grade 2 because the tool was inadequate and redundant with DIBELS and GRADE. The district also decided to phase out the MCAS practice tests at grades 3-6 because of redundancy with the assessments embedded within the new elementary reading and math programs. The DTAP team decided to "encourage" students to take the PSAT and the SAT, but administrators stated that Winchendon lacked the funds to pay for the administration of the PSAT and SAT, as well as AP exams, to all students in order for the district to make the tests required for all students.

The district has maintained a districtwide calendar for administering its assessments, as directed by action step 6, and administered assessments according to the plan, as directed by action step 7. The most recent assessment list provided to the team, dated February 2006, listed the

administration dates. The district did not produce an updated list of assessments and administration dates for 2006-2007, although administrators indicated that the assessments from the previous list were administered as indicated, and the district would update its assessment calendar once it finalized the new math assessments. The assessment list lacked the common final exams at the middle and high school.

The district implemented the eighth action step in Strategy 2B, to disseminate assessment results in a user-friendly format to building administrators and guidance staff. The director of instructional services organized the work of a core group of teachers and administrators trained in TestWiz, according to administrators and teachers. This group performed an analysis of MCAS test data using TestWiz.net and the district disseminated paper copies of the data to principals, guidance staff, and department coordinators who disseminated and discussed the results with teachers. The team reviewed samples of the analyses and found that the district consistently provided item analyses in a clear format to help teachers understand the types of questions and subtopics that represented grade-level weaknesses. The team did not see protocols for the systemic production of data reports, but did see a 2006 memo for reviewing disaggregated MCAS data using Test Wiz, and interviewees described common practices. In a review of the SIPs, the team found that SIPs also identified and addressed areas to improve student achievement. Interviewees stated that the Performance Improvement Mapping Team at each school analyzed MCAS test data to create SIP goals, and SIPs were also disseminated to staff, according to interviewees. The district also incorporated GRADE data into TestWiz.net in the summer of 2006, and provided training to the core group of staff. Administrators and teachers stated that having a core group of staff trained in TestWiz allowed teachers to request data from multiple staff members. Interviewees also acknowledged that the restricted number of access licenses the district was able to purchase limited individual access to and use of TestWiz , and that increasing access to TestWiz for all teachers could potentially increase the use of data in instruction across the district.

The district provided evidence of the attainment of the four implementation benchmarks in Strategy 2B, still in the development phase or limited by district resources. The district provided a professional development calendar with professional development days led by trained staff and dedicated to considering the data, but not instructing all teachers on the use of data. Winchendon

did provide a districtwide calendar of assessments, and indicated that improving the assessment system was still an active and ongoing task. The district did disseminate TestWiz data to staff. The district also trained a core group of staff in TestWiz, and although not all teachers were trained or had access to TestWiz.net, the district created channels for teachers to access data from the core group.

The district was continuing to work on the four outcome benchmarks in Strategy 2B, although three still lacked a specific systemic definition. The fourth benchmark, "revised curriculum maps," was still a work in progress. A central office administrator was responsible for working with teachers and department coordinators in the revision of curriculum maps, especially at the middle and high school levels which had the least developed curriculum materials.

The first three outcome benchmarks pertained to classroom use of assessment data: evidence of the use of data to formulate lesson plans; lesson plan books reflect teachers addressing student strengths and weaknesses; and written narrative on how teachers address student gaps in learning. These three benchmarks lacked a specific and systemic definition at grades 4-12. Rather, principals used their professional judgment to determine the extent to which teachers used data in instruction, through classroom observations, discussions with grade-level teams or departments, student study teams, and ISSPs. At grades K-3, lower level elementary teachers had systematic practices to use DIBELS testing to modify classroom groupings and instructional content. This was evident as an embedded practice according to classroom observations, teacher focus group interviews, and interviews with the building principal.

The district also provided Title I reading to support students performing below DIBELS benchmarks and Title I math support for students performing poorly on Everyday Math unit assessments. The team did not see evidence of widespread and deeply embedded practices of using data consistently to inform instruction at grades 4-12, although the team found evidence of substantial improvement in the use of data at these levels since the EQA review in February 2004. The district used assessment data to place students in math classes at grades 4-7, and made midyear grouping changes at grades 4-6 after assessments indicated that individual students needed to shift to a lower or higher level.

Teachers articulated an awareness of the use of assessments to provide information on which students needed additional support from their teacher after school, referral to Student Study Team or programs such as the 21st Century program. Staff stated that administrators instructed teachers to provide evidence on the use of data in plan books and evidence boxes. Professional development in differentiated instruction, administrative and department chair instructional monitoring using the Implementation Tool, and test data provided teachers with tools to use data to inform instruction. The team found in classroom observations pockets of effective implementation of the use of data to inform instruction at all levels. Teachers in focus groups said the main obstacle for increasing the use of data to modify instruction was limited planning time; lower elementary teachers added that the lack of modern classroom computers made instructional planning and recording of DIBELS data time-consuming.

Strategy 2C: Create databases for teachers to access student records/hard data in a way that informs instruction.

The original Strategy 2C in the DTAP approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education in April 2005 addressed the creation of a database to allow teachers to access student data. According to the superintendent's reports to the DOE, Winchendon revised the action steps in this strategy from the original idea of creating a district-specific assessment database to a plan to using an upgraded TestWiz software package. The reports and the superintendent indicated that the plan was revised because of lack of funding. The current version of Strategy 2C in the District Turnaround Plan has six action steps, two implementation benchmarks, and two outcome benchmarks.

The first action step in Strategy 2C is to investigate software upgrades and other software available from DOE; this step has been completed. In 2005-2006, the district identified and purchased access to TestWiz.net for 12 users districtwide, and upgraded TestWiz software to incorporate other assessments besides MCAS. Interviewees report that the district has incorporated GRADE data in the TestWiz program, and has the potential to integrate other assessment data as well. The district has also identified interest in the use of the COGNOS database recently piloted by the DOE.

The second action step in Strategy 2C is to collaborate with DOE regarding available software; the district has also completed this step. Originally, the district planned to hire a consultant, but changed the action step due to limited funds. Rather, the district decided to apply for a competitive grant, Technology of Data Driven Decisions. The central office administrator overseeing the use of student assessment data in the district has attended the introductory workshop for grant recipients, a networking meeting for the grant recipients, and a conversation with EDC in order to begin planning for the use of the grant. The superintendent wrote in the October 2006 report to the DOE that "it was anticipated that the competitive grant award would finance the purchase of the COGNOS software. Since the Massachusetts Department of Education has received additional funding to access COGNOS software for all districts within Massachusetts, Winchendon's implementation plan will be redefined in future years to include COGNOS."

By the time of the site visit, the district had not addressed the third action step, to access computer software upgrades. As noted, the district's database is TestWiz, which it upgraded with software to accommodate other assessments such as GRADE, and the district purchased access to TestWiz.net for 12 users districtwide. Also, the district has plans to further develop its assessment database with Technology of Data Driven Decisions funding and COGNOS. Although the assessment database was in development, and the district has been providing data to teachers through the 12 districtwide users, central office and building administrators recognized the limits of the access rights attributed to lack of funding. First, the district has not had funding for additional access rights to TestWiz. Second, teachers in focus groups and classroom observations indicated that the district lacks adequate technology for all teachers to use the TestWiz program or to use technology well in planning lessons. Particularly at the elementary level, teachers lack access to modern computers and upgraded software. According to the DTAP, "The District Committee is recommending that the Robinson-Broadhurst (R-B) proposal be reconsidered to fund a software program and computer for each classroom. [The] 2007 R-B proposal was written to fund hardware but amended due to budget cuts to instead fund [a] staff position."

The fourth and fifth action steps in Strategy 2C have been completed: identify key staff to be trained to use software; and train staff in the use of software. The district identified and trained

12 users across the district, one at each grade level K-6 and department coordinators at grades 7-12. The district sent two central office administrators to two workshops, one on TestWiz use and another on TestWiz.net, in the fall and winter of 2005-2006. These administrators trained the 12 users, who later attended a basic TestWiz training in June 2006, according to interviewees and the superintendent's reports.

The sixth action step is professional staff uses data to adjust instruction. The DTAP provided no status update for this action step and noted that the resources needed to complete this step include staffing, time, software, and hardware. Teachers in focus groups indicated that the lack of common planning time, staff to provide support services, and adequate software and hardware limited the extent to which teachers make progress in using data to adjust instruction.

The implementation benchmarks in Strategy 2C are the attendance sheet of staff attending trainings and evidence of staff use of the database. The outcome benchmarks are that the ISSPs reflect the use of data and evidence of the use of data to formulate lesson plans. While the team did not review evidence of the given benchmarks during the review, the team found compelling evidence through district documents and interviews that the district implemented the use of TestWiz and TestWiz.net, provided training to key staff, disseminated analyzed data, and encouraged the use of differentiated instruction.

Strategy 2D: Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the social needs of all students (groups and individual students).

Strategy 2D consists of four action steps and four implementation benchmarks. The first action step in Strategy 2D was to collect and review current student data available including discipline, attendance, and retention data, and grades. The DTAP called for annual collection of these data. Central office administrators in interviews stated that the discipline and attendance codes differed between the three schools until recently, when the district aligned the coding for grades K-6. Grades 7-12 have a different coding. Interviewees stated that aligned coding allows the district to print out comparable reports and to better track student progress from year to year. Guidance staff and the school adjustment counselor for the district stated that they regularly review attendance data through computer-generated reports that automatically provide the running total of student absences. Guidance staff reported that they regularly reviewed data on

student attendance and discipline, and principals reported that they reviewed school reports on student achievement (e.g., failure lists at the high school) in order to identify students in need of follow-up or referral to a program or a Student Study Team (SST) conference.

The second action step in Strategy 2D was to research and choose additional assessment tools (i.e., surveys) needed to determine gaps in data. This step is tied to the third action step, to administer assessments/surveys according to identified needs. Both of these action steps have been implemented. The DTAP indicated that the district had gathered surveys required by NEASC to use at the Murdock Middle/High School, and also used a Second Step survey completed in fall 2005-2006. The quality, comprehensiveness, and utility of the surveys to identify student needs and program implications have not been determined pending completion of the fourth action step.

The fourth action step in Strategy 2D was to examine all data to determine the student needs and program implications. Guidance staff and principals indicated that they used the data to address individual student needs, and both sets of interviewees articulated a general awareness of the social and academic needs of the student population through direct contact with students and families as well as through attendance and retention data and grades. The team did find evidence that the district has used the social data to address individual student needs and to understand the pervasiveness of issues affecting school attendance, achievement, and discipline. Although the district has not developed procedures for using the data to address group needs, the identification of student needs through formal and informal discussions, anecdotal information, and professional judgment has led Winchendon to implement and modify programs for students.

The district identified no outcome benchmarks for Strategy 2D in the DTAP, but had four implementation benchmarks for this strategy: survey identified, survey administered, data collected from survey, and students' needs identified. According to central office administrators, implementation began in spring 2006, and results were reviewed at a May 2006 DTAP meeting. The DTAP specified that surveys were to be administered biannually, with October 2006 as the next administration. At the time of the site visit, interviewees indicated that the district had not administered the applicable survey.

Strategy 2E: Identify academic support programming that would meet the needs of all students and develop an approval process to project, finance, and implement new/innovative/expanded programs.

Strategy 2E has not been implemented, although the district has partially completed the first action step, to develop a protocol, schedule, and timeline to assess existing programs. According to the DTAP, the district has developed a draft protocol and planned to review it in the January 2007 DTAP meeting. The team reviewed the draft of the program assessment protocol and learned that it included procedures to provide a detailed program description, student descriptors including participation, and data collected from pre- and post-tests and/or surveys. The second action step in Strategy 2E was to identify resources needed to conduct the assessment; the needed resource identified was "time." The DTAP indicated that the second action step was not complete, but the draft of the assessment protocol appeared to contain additional requirements that could be time consuming and beyond the scope of a cost effectiveness or an outcome analysis. It was clear to the EQA team that the district invested much effort in creating this document. The revised timeline included program review team formation, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, and financial evaluation, and a final report with recommendations related to all existing programs. The remaining action steps, four through seven, were not completed because they are contingent on the completion of the first three action steps. The last four action steps are to identify improvements needed or elimination of existing programs; budget and implement improvements to existing programs; explore and identify potential new research-based program models; and budget and implement new programs. Strategy 2E notes that "Benchmarks will be set when the needed programs are identified." Therefore, the district had not attained implementation or outcome benchmarks by the time of the site visit.

Action step 1 was to identify a protocol, schedule, and timeline to assess existing programs. Action step 2 was to identify resources needed to conduct assessments. The district submitted evidence documents (via the evidence file) to the EQA team at the time of the site visit. The district changed the original timeline for setting a protocol, schedule, and timeline for assessing existing programs from September 2005 to September 2006 and then, most recently, to January 2007. The district focused for the first two years of this initiative on developing the protocol for assessing existing programs. It established a draft protocol just prior to the visit by the EQA team

in January 2007. The draft was ready for submission to the superintendent for review in February 2007.

The district provided the EQA team with a draft document, Protocol to Assess Existing Programs, that placed the responsibility for the process in the hands of the director of curriculum and instruction. It was clear to the EQA team that the district invested much effort in creating this document. The revised timeline included program review team formation, process evaluation, outcome evaluation and financial evaluation, and a final report with recommendations related to all existing programs. This January 2007 plan moved the final report and recommendations on existing programs forward to November 1, 2007. In the plan, the district will systematically review existing programs for their usefulness in meeting the needs of all students. When that review is completed, the district, in the 2007-2008 school year, will budget and implement improvements in existing programs, and then begin to identify and assess new programs that will assist the district in meeting the needs of all students.

Action steps 3 through 7 were not yet acted on. Action step 3 was to assess existing programs for cost effectiveness, student need, and desired outcome. Action step 4 was to identify improvements needed or elimination of existing programs. Action step 5 was to budget and implement improvements to existing programs. Action step 6 was to explore and identify potential new research-based program models." Action step 7 was to budget and implement new programs. District interviewees stated that these action steps will be implemented in the spring of 2007. The EQA team reviewed the timeline for this initiative. The two-year timeline to complete steps 1 through 5 has delayed the activation timeline for steps 6 and 7.

Implementation benchmark 1 was to set benchmarks, such as the number of students served and the number of referrals, when the needed programs are identified. The benchmarking process for this initiative was delayed until the new programs are selected and implemented in the 2007-2008 school year.

Aside from the specific action steps, the district did take action in a number of areas to meet the needs of all students. The evidence box shared information about district actions to meet the needs of potential dropouts. In November 2005, the assistant principal and the high school principal, along with the recently appointed superintendent of schools, reported to the school

committee the current status of dropout prevention programs. The Project Success program linking potential dropouts to area businesses to encourage continuation in the high school replaced the discontinued School to Work Program. The Senior Alternative Program was also in place; this was a program designed to attract dropouts back into school. The administrators noted some improvement in the dropout rate in 2004-2005. They also publicly stated the district's concern that this rate "which averaged at almost double the state average" was a concern of the district. School committee members in their November 2005 meeting expressed their concern that more be done earlier in order to decrease the dropout rate. Student Support Teams were being developed at that time to address the issues of weak attendance leading to dropout status. The local paper, *The Gardner News*, reported that the assistant principal shared with the school committee that the students interviewed expressed a desire to "feel a little more welcome in the school community." Interviews with principals and other central administration personnel during the EQA site visit confirmed that the staff now has a broader understanding of the fundamental importance of each school developing a welcoming culture that will encourage all students to succeed academically. This improved school culture would also encourage more parents to participate in and support the education effort in Winchendon.

The district instituted a summer program in 2006 with grant money to offer a combined academic and community service program to high school students who were in jeopardy of repeating a grade. This demonstrated a district understanding of a need to offer new and innovative programs to students—programs that would meet the particular needs of potential dropouts. The funding was from the federal multiyear 21st Century grant program. Long-term benefits of this type of summer programming will be dependent on continued federal funding or on including such programming into the locally funded portion of the school budget.

Winchendon Public Schools has been writing Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) since 2001. In March 2006, the director of instructional services requested ISSP reporting of all "grade level teachers" on students who did not perform at the 'Needs Improvement' level or higher on the MCAS tests. During 2006-2007, the district has made efforts to make the ISSP process serve as a tool to assist all low-performing students. Interviews with administrators and guidance staff indicated that the director of instructional services, in conjunction with teachers and building administrators, was guiding the ISSP process for students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing'

category. Principals also reported that the district refined and better utilized the Student Support Team (SST) process to meet the needs of at-risk students in all buildings through the past two years.

The district has put a walk-through instrument into use to assist administrators with different ways to give feedback to teachers on the instructional practices they use in their classrooms. The district has annually adjusted this instrument to focus on the specific materials adopted (Houghton Mifflin ELA and Everyday Math) and, in August 2006, on the implementation of the differentiated instruction initiatives of the past three years. The EQA team could not see the impact of the last iteration of this instrument since the district administration (with the help of the EDC consultant) only put it forward in August 2006. What the EQA team noted about this instrument was that, if followed and consistently used by the district, instruction could change and the instrument could help teachers meet the academic needs of all students. A consistently used walk-through instrument with a focus on differentiated instruction could serve to focus all staff on the important area that has been a major professional development initiative of the district during the past three years. The instrument was too new for the EQA team to see any impact on district instructional practices as of the January 2007 site visit.

However, the district collected data on the use of the original walk-through document as it was used by principals, assistant principals, and department heads for the January to June 2006 period and then for the September to December 2006 period. These data showed a small decrease in walk-through frequency at the Memorial Elementary School (133 to 108), a sharp decline at the Toy Town Elementary School (215 to 16), and a sharp increase in use at the Murdock Middle/High School (154 to 289). The EQA team did not see consistency in the use of the walk-through document as it was used in the three schools of the district. Because the walk-through tool was constantly evolving into something new and different, the EQA team could not conclude that the use of this innovative instructional review and feedback instrument would necessarily improve instruction in the district. The effectiveness of the walk-through tool(s) can only be determined after a multiyear district implementation of an accepted and standard district tool.

Strategy 2F: Develop a protocol for student placement and services between grades and buildings (to ensure continuity for students and early identification).

This strategy includes three action steps as follows: 1) develop a district philosophy of placement to ensure continuity between grades and buildings; 2) develop a building procedure to aid in the implementation of philosophy of placement; and 3) disseminate the philosophy of student placement (student/parent handbooks, newsletters, staff handbook, staff memo/meeting, etc.).

The superintendent reported the following in the District Turnaround Plan Update of both June 2006 and October 30, 2006: "A district philosophy of placement to ensure continuity between grades and buildings has been finalized at the May 15 (2006) administrators' meeting. Based on the district philosophy of placement, each building will develop procedures specific to their building to implement the policy and philosophy. The district philosophy of placement is scheduled to be included within student and parent handbooks before July 12, 2006 and will be highlighted in parent newsletters over the summer."

The EQA team reviewed the materials in the evidence box related to this strategy and all student and parent handbooks. Handbooks did not contain the philosophy that administrators finalized in May 2006. All documents in this 2F file related more to the issue of retention and promotion policy rather than to appropriate class placement and referrals to appropriate services to meet individual student academic needs. The philosophy discussed at the May 2006 administrators' meeting was also related to retention and promotion.

In this strategy, the district measured its success with two implementation benchmarks and one outcome benchmark. Implementation benchmark 1 was districtwide philosophy created. Implementation benchmark 2 was placement procedures created that are building specific. Outcome benchmark 1 was students are placed on district philosophy and building procedures.

The district did not attain the benchmarks. The work in this area (philosophy dissemination and school-specific procedure development and handbook clarification to parents) stalled after May 2006 due to a mixing of the action plans with those related to retention and promotion policy and procedures. The EQA team saw a need for the district to clarify and separate actions related to student placement and services (2F) and retention and promotion policy (3A).

Despite the strategy confusion described above, the district took some steps that led to more consistency within the district. The interim superintendent created two new positions, director of curriculum and instruction and director of instructional services, in summer 2004. The new superintendent created a new organizational structure in May 2005. This structure helped develop continuity within the system. The director of curriculum and instruction coordinated K-12 curriculum alignment to the frameworks, implemented walk-through and implementation tools, and focused on data collection to improve instruction. The director of instructional services supervised the planning of K-12 professional development in the district and oversaw grant writing and the PIM process. She also brought more rigorous data analysis procedures into district operations. In the 2006-2007 school year, the assistant principal positions were changed from 10-month to 12-month positions to assist with administrative cohesion from the elementary to secondary levels. Principals and central administrators met on a biweekly basis to address issues on a system-wide basis always using the DTAP as the guiding document for district improvement. The EQA team learned from interviews and document review that the district created a sound organizational structure that could oversee consistency of programs and instruction addressing the needs of all students. The district refined and improved the use of the Student Support Team (SST) process, which reviewed individual student needs and placed students in specialized programs that would help their academic progress. The director of instructional services assumed responsibility for supervising the writing and filing of Individualized Student Success Plans which would reference programs and services that individual students would access as they moved from grade to grade and then from elementary to middle to high school levels.

In teacher interviews, teachers expressed that the “revolving door” of administrators coming to and going from the district had ended during the past two years. They described a district with more cohesion and a district that worked as a team to improve instruction. The window of time that the EQA team reviewed, April 2005 to January 2007, was not long enough to conclude that the district had stabilized for the long term—something necessary for bringing about systemic change.

Teachers stated in their interviews that meetings took place to discuss students and how they should be placed in classes in the following year as they transitioned to the next elementary

building. They stated that the district did not consistently follow the recommendations they made; they found this difficult to understand. The district has not yet developed a consistent process of communication around placement decisions as students move from one building to the next.

The EQA team visited 54 classrooms during the site visit. The team reviewed the aggregated classroom observation data. The team noted that there appears to be an underlying inconsistency in educational philosophy and classroom instructional practices as one observes the different schools in the district. An example is that a student attending the Memorial Elementary School would have spent four years in classes with multiple workstations and flexible activity classroom settings. Team members observed elements of differentiated instruction. In moving to the Toy Town Elementary School, this student would be presented with a very different instructional format. Classrooms were set up with chairs in rows and highly teacher-centered instruction took place. Classroom observation data indicated that flexible groupings and the use by teachers of a variety of classroom activities were significantly less observed in Toy Town Elementary School classrooms than in Memorial Elementary School. Samples of differentiated instruction practices were rare in the Toy Town classrooms.

The team found significant differences in practice within and among the three schools with respect to instructional practices and expectations for students. See Appendix E for a comparison chart of classroom observations among the three schools across all observed classrooms.

The 2006 MCAS results for grade 3 (Memorial School) reading and math mirrored the state test results with small differences in each area; the Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) was 80.8 in reading and 80.6 in math. As the students transitioned to Toy Town Elementary School, the 2006 grade 4 MCAS results showed a marked performance decline from grade 3, and the results did not compare well to state test results; the CPI was 67.6 in ELA and 65.6 in math. The sharp decline in CPI from grade 3 to grade 4 and the classroom observation data indicating clearly divergent instructional strategies and educational visions in these two elementary schools suggested that continuity of educational programming needed analysis by district leadership. Toy Town also fared the poorest on the AYP and CPI determinations, falling in the ‘Low’ category in ELA and math, not meeting AYP in 2005 or 2006 for the aggregate or subgroups, and having

'Declined' in ELA with 'No Change' in math. Memorial and Murdock both made AYP in 2005 and 2006 for the aggregate and subgroups, and was in the 'High' category in ELA. Murdock was 'Low' in math, however.

The EQA team did not receive any evidence that the district had a plan to look at consistency of vision at this level and on up through the Murdock Middle/High School. The EQA team received no information from interviews that the 2006 MCAS data and the low CPI scores in grades 4-8, particularly in mathematics, had led the district to assess the possible impact that the lack of a unified vision might have on implementing consistent instructional practices across grades K-12 in the district.

Strategy 2G: Assess current education staff, including paraprofessional staff, for their area of certification, training, and expertise, to guide teacher program assignment and student placement.

The first action step in Strategy 2G was to obtain a list of current staff, their assignment, and number of students they service. For the period under review, according to records, the principals at Memorial and Toy Town and the interim principal at Murdock created lists annually of currently employed regular education teachers, special education teachers and specialists, counselors, nurses, secretaries, and paraprofessionals. Each list contained the name of employee, the employee's assignment, and the number of students serviced.

Action Step 2 was to create and disseminate a profile sheet that identifies areas of specialization, training, and interests of the entire staff. Records indicate that in 2005, the district PIM team created and, through the superintendent, distributed a staff profile sheet to all staff, Each staff member was required to report his/her certification, trainings, teaching grade or subject matter preference, and professional development needs including *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction. The stated purpose was to poll the educational staff, including paraprofessionals, to identify their area of training and expertise.

According to the Toy Town principal, in June 2005 all staff in her school completed the staff profile sheet. The DTAP update dated October 30, 2006 stated that new staff would complete the profile survey that identifies areas of specialization, training, and interests of entire staff during the new teacher orientation program in August of each year. The principals of Memorial and

Murdock told the EQA they were unaware of the staff profile sheet. For 2006, the principals stated they did not disseminate nor use the staff profile sheet.

The third action directed the administration to compile and utilize profile sheets to assist with staff/student placement issues. The Toy Town principal indicated that for 2005-2006 she used the profile information to restructure multiage teams into grade-level teams. She indicated further that she used the profile information to place students in need of reading support with teachers with reading expertise. In interviews, the Toy Town principal stated that student placements in ELA and math were based on MCAS ELA and math scores and unit assessments. Additionally, she shifted teacher team assignments and group schedules within teams based on assessments such as MCAS, DIBELS, GRADE, unit assessments, and the Ekwall Reading Inventory, and informally by matching student/teacher personalities.

According to information the district provided to DOE, over 91 percent of the district's staff (128 of 140) had appropriate Massachusetts licensure for teaching assignments. Of the 12 remaining staff, 58 percent (7 of 12) were not certified, 25 percent (3 of 12) were teaching out of the area of certification, and 17 percent (2 of 12) had expired certifications. However, in a review of 40 randomly selected personnel files, EQA examiners found that 33 percent of professional staff were not certified for the positions held. EQA examiners found 18 percent (7 of 40) of professional staff were not certified for the position held and 15 percent (6 of 40) had expired certifications. The district provided evidence of one waiver request but provided no evidence of district waiver approvals. Interviewees were unclear who was responsible for monitoring certification information.

According to the examination of the personnel records presented by the district, of the 12 administrators that the district employed, 83 percent (10 of 12) had certifications for the positions they held. Review of the administrators' personnel files indicated one of the assistant principals' files contained no evidence of certification, and another administrator personnel file contained a licensure document that indicated an expiration date for the position held. The district provided no evidence of waiver requests.

For 2005-2006, the district's evaluation practices for teachers complied with the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 38, which requires biennial evaluation for

professional status teachers and annual evaluations for non-professional status teachers. A review of the randomly chosen personnel files indicated that 97 percent (35 of 36) had timely evaluations and all non-professional teachers had evaluations. Of the teacher evaluations reviewed, the EQA team considered 94 percent (34 of 36) informative, 13 percent (5 of 36) instructive, and three percent (1 of 36) conducive to professional growth or overall effectiveness.

Teacher evaluations did not hold teachers accountable for student achievement. For 2006-2007, the superintendent instituted an evaluation tracking system to ensure compliance with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 38.

A review of the district's evaluation of the performance of district administrators in 2005-2006 indicated that administrators' evaluations mostly complied with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 38, which requires annual evaluations for administrators. Further, the administrators' evaluations were informative, instructive, promoted personal growth, and were likely to enhance student achievement. In interviews, administrators perceived that everything in the district revolved around improving student achievement. In 2005-2006, the superintendent did not evaluate the interim principal at Murdock.

Initiative 3: Establish set standards and high expectations for students

Finding 3A: The district worked on an initiative to improve student participation, and set new policies and developed new procedures to encourage greater student participation by addressing issues of attendance, retention, promotion, discipline, and the recognition of student success.

- The district established initial policy focus on the two areas of student attendance and retention/promotion. The school committee approved these policies in June 2006. Administration began implementing the related procedures in the fall of 2006. Previously, there was a lack of attention to attendance policies by the school committee, central office, and building administration.
- Attendance committees existed in the schools, and data were collected that would inform the district as to the impact of district planning to improve student attendance patterns. The superintendent was fully involved in the process of overseeing actions in this area.
- Accurate record keeping with consistency across all three buildings started in the district in the fall of the 2006-2007 school year.
- The district established staffing and student behavior expectations and practices that created a positive learning climate in all schools.
- The team found overwhelming evidence that "interactions between teacher and students are positive and respectful" and that classrooms are largely "characterized by active listening, courtesy, fairness and respect" in all schools, grade levels, and content areas.

Finding 3B: The district did not have a clear strategy to set high expectations for students in the classroom or to provide a continuum of academic supports for efforts to strengthen student participation in the academic program.

- A focus on setting expectations in the classroom was absent in the initiative to "set standards and high expectations for students."

- In classroom observations, indicators demonstrating high expectations for students were observable at a rate of over 90 percent at Memorial, higher than the inter-district average. At Toy Town and Murdock, high expectations were observable at a rate lower than the average in the inter-district comparison for the same grades, with respective rates of 40 and 50 percent of the indicators of high expectations.
- While the district aimed to provide a continuum of support services, budget constraints reduced academic supports, including Title I and MCAS support classes.
- Financial circumstances, in part, have resulted in the over-reliance on grant funding for academic support services.
- Without adequate academic support programs, the district did not sufficiently address the root causes of students whose participation is affected by the need for greater time for content mastery.

Finding 3C: The district did provide some academic supports, although the supports were not adequate to improve student achievement.

- The district strengthened its early reading intervention program, and Winchendon students outperformed the state in 2006 in grade 3 reading. However, the advantage is lost by grade 4, when Winchendon students perform below the state average in ELA.
- Academic support services decreased at the secondary level, and only grant-funded academic support services remained at the elementary level since the district implemented the DTAP .

Evidence

In order to set standards and high expectations for students, the DTAP had three strategies as part of this initiative: A and B merged) create retention and promotion policies and write the procedures for these policies; C) develop building-level plans that address attendance issues and create alternatives for students who have lost instructional time due to attendance issues; and D) acknowledge/celebrate student success and create higher self esteem.

This initiative focused on setting appropriate expectations, policies, procedures, and school culture to encourage students to meet higher expectations for academic performance and attendance standards. Based on this initiative, district teachers and administrators tackled the

issues of attendance, promotion, retention, and celebrating student success. Although the initiative addresses these areas, it does not address the root causes for academic failure and poor attendance. The plan lacks the continuum of supports that not only encourages but ensures that all students access and participate effectively in the educational programs of the district.

Some of the DTAP work inherently supports improved access for all students. In the implementation of its turnaround plan, the district established some policies and practices to comply with the requirements of the Education Reform Act to better provide for underperforming students. The district provided supplementary and remedial services through Title I in reading and math at grades K-3. Interviewees and documents indicated that the district created ISSPs for students who performed in the 'Warning/Failing' category on the MCAS tests. The district developed the elementary curriculum, but curriculum at the secondary level was still a work in progress. The district provided professional development in *The Skillful Teacher* and differentiated instruction for all teachers, and it provided training in inclusion, data analysis, and the role of the instructional paraprofessional to relevant staff in order to support instruction for all students, particularly lower-performing students.

The district did not have a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), but it did provide the team with a reference to a statutory exemption from the requirement of a formal DCAP because of redundancy with the work of the DTAP. Initiatives 1 and 2 respectively address curriculum alignment for all students and professional development in differentiated instruction. In carrying out Initiative 3, the school committee and administration have clarified policies on retention, promotion, and school attendance, as the district also completed a comprehensive rewrite of the school committee's policy manual with the assistance of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). The resulting policy manual has the components for promoting access and equity on a policy level. The district has retained some existing and created some new supports that increase access for diverse students. The district has retained full-day kindergarten for all students and has kept class sizes small during the period under review.

The high school has worked to create additional support programs and to provide needed services; but staff indicated that the needs exceeded availability of staff and funding. Aside from

lacking sufficient resources for at-risk students, the district did not have sufficient programs for advanced students; staff said they lost higher-performing students to neighboring districts and vocational and private/parochial schools.

The district has confronted budgetary constraints that have in the last two years led to reductions in art, music, physical education, library services, Title I and MCAS support, Reading Recovery, and foreign language, as well as other academic and support instructional areas. Each of these losses reduced the ability of the district to meet the needs of all students and all subgroups within the district. Just as the district developed its plan to address past deficiencies that led to its designation as underperforming, financial limitations reduced program offerings that were essential to district success. The lack of comprehensive and current instructional technology in all classrooms at all levels is another example of the district not offering educational services that assist all students to learn and perform at higher levels.

Through the DTAP, the district strengthened its reading program by implementing DIBELS assessments, continuing Title I support for struggling students, aligning the elementary ELA curriculum, and implementing a common instructional program in ELA at grades K-6. The district adopted the Houghton Mifflin series in the middle of 2005-2006. Although the district has not had substantial time to evaluate the program's effect on student achievement as measured by the 2006 grade 3 reading test, Winchendon's rate of proficiency was 66 percent, higher than the state rate of 58 percent. From 2004 to 2006, DOE data revealed a performance dip from grade 3 to grade 4. The decline in student achievement is evident in a decrease in the proficiency rate from grade 3 to grade 4, and an increase in the performance gap between the district and state from grade 3 to grade 4. Only 29 percent of grade 4 students performed at or above the 'Proficient' level in 2006, compared to the state average of 50 percent.

Overall, however, the district decreased rather than strengthened its academic support services program at the secondary level as it implemented the DTAP. Academic support services decreased because the district has reduced funding to support academic support programs. Only grants-based academic supports remain, and the district has only retained funding or implemented new programs at the elementary levels. The district still lacked a grants

administrator after being declared underperforming, and it has not had access to grants that would require the time of a dedicated grants administrator.

At the secondary level, the district reduced the staffing for the MCAS Strategies class when budget cuts resulted in the elimination of the full-time MCAS Strategies teachers in 2005-2006. By reducing full-time staffing for the MCAS Strategies course, a teacher with other math class preparations taught the course. Teachers and administrators indicated that funding limited the provision of a comprehensive set of supplementary and remedial services capable of moving all students from 'Needs Improvement' to 'Proficient,' although the district has made progress in moving students from the 'Warning/Failing' category on the grade 10 MCAS tests from 2004 to 2006.

At the elementary level, the district retained Title I reading and math teachers at grades K-3, and implemented a 21st Century grant-funded program for students in grades 4-6.

Winchendon sought outside funding to supplement its budget. The district applied for and received a competitive Technology of Data Driven Decisions grant to support Initiative 2, "Tailor Instruction to meet students' needs" through Strategy D, "Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment system that would identify the social needs of all students." The district also received a 21st Century grant that supported after-school programming at the upper elementary school. The district also continued to receive Title I entitlement funding to support math and reading at grades K-3.

A focus on setting expectations in the classroom was absent in the initiative. None of the strategies in the initiative to "set standards and high expectations for students" provided a specific link to classroom instruction, but the team learned through classroom observations that progress toward the goal was strengthened by some of the district's instructional strengths, while in other cases there was a missed opportunity to further the district's objective in Initiative 3.

In classroom observations, indicators demonstrating high expectations for students were observable at Memorial in 92 percent of ELA and 96 percent of math classrooms (higher than the inter-district averages of 77 and 79 percent, respectively). At Toy Town, high expectations were observable in 41 percent of ELA and 42 percent of math classrooms, (lower than the inter-district

averages of 65 and 72 percent, respectively). At Murdock, high expectations were observable in 41 percent of ELA and 54 percent of math classrooms (lower than the inter-district averages of 56 and 63 percent, respectively).

For example, one indicator of expectations in the EQA examiner checklist was "the classroom time is focused on challenging tasks." Remarkably, at the Memorial School 100 percent of ELA and math classrooms met this indicator. This far surpasses the inter-district average for grades K-3, with approximately 84 percent of ELA and math classes demonstrating evidence of challenge. By contrast, at Toy Town the percentage of classrooms meeting that indicator was 36 percent for ELA and 33 percent for math, compared to 64 and 75 percent, respectively, across the other districts for these grades. At Murdock Middle/High School, challenging tasks in math classes rated comparably to the inter-district average of 73 percent, but fell short in ELA classes with 38 percent demonstrating a focus on challenging tasks compared to 61 percent in grades 7-12 across districts.

One of the strategies in Initiative 3 is to "create self esteem" by "celebrating student success." Although the district's plan did not include a classroom-based approach, the team did see evidence of a supportive student-teacher culture. The team found overwhelming evidence that "interactions between teacher and students are positive and respectful" in percentages that met or exceeded an inter-district comparison. For example, 100 percent of the K-6 classes and over 90 percent of the grade 7-12 classes in the content areas met this indicator. The team also found that classrooms were "characterized by active listening, courtesy, fairness and respect" in 100 percent of observed classes at the K-3 level, 100 percent of the grade 7-12 math classes, and 92 percent of the grade 7-12 ELA classes, outperforming the inter-district peer classrooms. Grades 4-6 demonstrated a similar pattern for observed math classes (100 percent), but not ELA (64 percent).

<u>Strategy 3A and 3B (merged): Create retention and promotion policies and write the procedures for these policies.</u>

The merged Strategy 3A and 3B consists of nine action steps. The first five action steps were: 1) inform the school committee of the need for K-12 retention/promotion policy; 2) seek input from building administrators and staff on retention/promotion policy; 3) review retention/promotion

policies/procedures from surrounding districts and consult MASC; 4) develop a retention /promotion policy or use MASC template; and 5) readings/adoption of policy.

Interviews with school committee members and administrators described a district without an organized and monitored school committee policy manual in 2004. The then interim superintendent contracted with the MASC to review, organize, update, and rewrite the policy manual. The process began in 2004 and concluded in June 2006. In April and June of 2006, the district collected sample policies from other school districts. The DTAP required that a new retention and promotion policy be included in the comprehensive policy manual rewrite, and it was. Members of the school committee stated that having the new manual, and having the superintendent's office responsible for ongoing updates and adjustments as they voted upon new policy, was a major improvement for the district. The EQA team reviewed the new policy manual. Although the manual was comprehensive and professional in appearance, the EQA team noted that no policies had included the date of vote of the school committee. This applied to the retention and promotion policy. The lack of this information could lead to confusion again, as years pass by and the district adjusts the policy manual and adds new policy. When the EQA team wanted to document the specific date of the adoption of this particular policy, it could not turn to the policy manual for this. The team depended upon staff recollection to determine the date of adoption.

Strategy 3A and 3B merged consisted of four additional action steps: 6) establish a retention/promotion procedure committee at each building level; 7) develop building-level procedures to implement the policy; 8) review for approval a set of procedures to be included in building-level handbooks along with district policy; and 9) implement policy and procedures.

Central administration and principals met in May 2006 and wrote a "district philosophy" on promotion and placement procedures in the district that delegated the responsibility to building principals. Toy Town Elementary School had no procedures or history of actions in this area in the evidence folder supplied to the EQA team. At the high school, promotion was based on specific credit requirements as stated in the program of studies. The district provided the EQA team with copies of the pages of the program of studies and the PowerPoint presentation given at

the welcoming meeting for grade 8 parents as their students transition to the high school as evidence of the work done on promotion procedures.

In the Murdock Middle/High School program of studies, the guidelines for promotion and grade placement are presented. The required credits for grade promotion for grades 9 through 12 are clearly stated. At the middle school level, students failing "two or more classes may be retained." Summer school would be strongly recommended. Parents would be informed. The student involved would be referred to the Student Support Team "for review." Middle school students "will be retained if he or she fails all four major subjects." Parent meetings would take place in this case.

In the evidence file presented by the district to the EQA team, the Memorial School (grades K-3) submitted a comprehensive packet of information documenting what had been done since the first action meetings of staff to formalize promotion and retention procedures. The Memorial Elementary School staff produced a Memorial School placement information timeline in March 2006. Staff meeting time and a half professional day in May was dedicated to placement meetings and write-up activities by groups of Memorial School teachers. The Memorial School also in May 2006 had clearly defined actions to be taken by teachers to complete the promotion and placement process. The handbooks of the two elementary schools did not include entries with either the language of the retention and promotion policy or the specific procedures that would be used in each building related to the new policy. Principals stated in their interviews that the handbooks had already "gone to print" in the summer of 2006 by the time the policy was finalized. They stated the policies and related procedures would be entered into handbooks for the 2007-2008 school year.

The strategy had three implementation benchmarks and one outcome benchmark. Implementation benchmark 1 was "school committee policy rewritten and approved." Implementation benchmark 2 was "building committees meeting to create procedure." Implementation benchmark 3 was "procedure accepted and published." Outcome benchmark 1 was "reduce the number of student retentions by 20 percent."

The superintendent stated to the EQA team that he was meeting with administrative and guidance staff during the week of the EQA visit to monitor final actions related to procedure

implementation around retention and promotion issues. Interviews indicated that the superintendent was overseeing the codification of building-specific procedures that were developing pursuant to the adoption of the new policy in June 2006. Interviews also indicated that the district needed more time to finalize procedures and publish them for the two elementary schools. The timeline for the procedure and publication part of this strategy was, in effect, delayed from June 2006 to June 2007 as the district worked in this area. The outcome benchmark of a reduction of student retentions by 20 percent can only be verified by a district data presentation that would look at retentions from 2004 to 2009 as the new policy and procedures begin to take effect. Documents in the evidence box made clear that administrators determined that extensive student absences and the overuse of retention can result in increased student dropout problems.

Strategy 3C: Develop building level plans that address attendance issues and create alternatives for students who have lost instructional time due to attendance issues.

This strategy has three action steps: 1) establish or use existing building-level committees including guidance representation; 2) develop alternatives at the building level; and 3) implement alternatives. This strategy also has two implementation benchmarks. Implementation benchmark 1 was a decrease in students who have lost credit. Implementation benchmark 2 was building-level committees will share with the PIM team documentation of cases where alternatives have prevented failure.

A review of the DTAP indicates a timeline change for the establishment of building-level committees. Originally, it was designated as September 2005, and later was adjusted to January 2007. The strategy was revised to place responsibility in the hands of the building-level administrators as their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were developed. The Memorial Elementary School SIP did not specifically address attendance. Toy Town Elementary School had a SIP that specifically addressed the impact of student failures or low level performance resulting from weak attendance. The Student Support Team was charged with the responsibility to address the issue. The new timeline for action was listed as September 2007. The Murdock Middle/High School SIP contained no in depth and focused reference to specific actions to plan for attendance improvements and create alternatives for students who lost instructional time due to attendance issues.

Evidence supplied to the EQA team in the evidence box indicated that the high school used the following alternative approaches: 1) early intervention through the Student Support Teams; 2) change in homeroom time to after period 1; 3) creative contracts with students to give a clean slate and provide incentives instead of punitive actions; 4) expanded breakfast program to improve climate and make school more nurturing; 5) develop mentor programs to maintain connections with students; and 6) recognize improvement of students who struggled in the past. This plan was presented in a memo to curriculum leadership in January 2007, and the district needs to now demonstrate implementation and monitor the impact of the actions with regularly collected data. The EQA team observed that actions were taking place at the middle/high school, but they were not a part of the SIP, which the district had determined to be the vehicle for making progress in the attendance area.

A summer Service Learning Program was developed through a grant received by the curriculum office aimed at dropout prevention (federal Learn and Serve America grant). Students attended for four hours per day, four days per week for a five-week period. Students received instruction in mathematics and ELA and completed a service learning project in the community. The superintendent reported that 19 of the 31 eligible students participated (61 percent), and eight of the participants (42 percent) received sufficient credit to gain promotion to the next grade. The district intended to collect annual data with pre-program baseline data (04-05 and 05-06 retention rates) compared to post-program data to monitor the effectiveness of this and other programs.

For four years the district has partnered with Heywood Hospital and Winchendon Health Center to offer a school-based health center at Murdock Middle/High School. Physical health issues that can lead to increased student absence and mental health issues of students (about 50 percent of students served) received attention from the medical staff available on site. The Health Center also assisted students with teen pregnancy support. Guidance and teaching staff stated that the intervention on health issues offered by this center assisted with keeping students in school and helped them to be productive academically.

Just as the school district has had to reduce staff due to funding limitations, the police department faced significant funding challenges. The position of school resource officer was eliminated for 2006-2007. This position played a central role in helping to prevent truancy. The

school adjustment counselor had to assume the full responsibility for working with these students due to the elimination of the school resource officer position. This impacted her regular workload and made for less effective school response in assisting those students with deep-seated attendance issues. The organizational chart structured by the new superintendent in the summer of 2005 included the school resource officer position, and it was an integral part of proactive work in the area of improving attendance. The EQA team saw the loss of this position as a significant loss to district efforts to improve attendance and diminish the tendency for students to drop out of school at the high school level.

Strategy 3D: Acknowledge/celebrate student success and create higher self esteem.

This strategy includes six action steps: 1) develop criterion for academic recognition for students in grades pre-K to 12 (academic); 2) develop criterion for non-academic recognition for students in grades pre-K to 12; 3) develop procedures for acknowledging academic recognition for students in grades pre-K to 12; 4) develop procedures for acknowledging non-academic recognition for students in grades pre-K to 12; 5) establish protocol to inform community of student successes of students in grades pre-K to 12; and 6) schools will publicly display student recognition.

Each building in the district developed the criteria to be used to recognize and celebrate student academic and non-academic success. The standards were established at the end of the 2004-2005 school year, and each school began the recognition/celebration process during the following school year. The EQA team visited each school and saw prominently displayed recognitions in the lobbies of each building. The evidence box showed numerous articles from the local press which served to inform the public of the successes of Winchendon students.

The evidence box (as well as school visits) also showed the EQA team various artifacts that confirmed active school efforts to celebrate student success. Toy Town Elementary School recognized student of the month, honor roll, and citizens of the week outside the main office area. The school celebrated perfect attendance via a posting across from the principal's office. Students received a special certificate signed by the principal and assistant principal when they attained the perfect attendance status. In April 2005, the principal of the school informed all staff of the standards to be used for high honors (A's in all subjects) and honors (A's and B's in all

subjects). Memorial School celebrated the honor roll and students of the month in the front lobby of the school. At the end of the year, it also recognized artists of the week.

The high school posted the honor roll and students of the month. It also has adjusted its foyer student recognitions from the older format which focused only on athletic accomplishments to honor roll and students of the month. The student of the month recognition reached beyond academics and recognized students who contributed to the school in any number of special ways. The Murdock Middle/High School published a comprehensive listing of non-academic recognitions for 2006-2007 prior to the start of the year. These covered numerous recognition areas: student of the week, student of the month, middle school "caught in the act" (good behavior), perfect attendance, athletic team recognitions, clubs and organizations, and community service. The high school continued to host its annual scholars recognition dinner. The superintendent attended and spoke at this event. An alumnus was also a featured speaker.

In October 2005, the Murdock Middle/High School presented a unified arts night that was covered by the local press. The accomplishments of Murdock students in art, music, physical education/health/wellness, and culinary arts were all put on display. Also, in January 2006 a special assembly took place at Murdock Middle/High School to recognize the Abigail Adams Scholarship recipients who reached a high level of success on the MCAS tests. The local press covered this event.

Students of the month were recognized in all schools in all three buildings via announcements and their posted photographs. Also, school administrators presented these students at school committee meetings, all on the same night. The local press reported on these recognitions with text and photo coverage. In the period under review, the district made a concerted effort in this particular area of celebrating student success to have a unified and consistent approach to meeting a DTAP goal. The district also achieved some success in getting coverage of these recognitions with photos of the students appearing in the *Winchendon Courier*.

Teachers who volunteered their after-school time conducted the mentor program at grades 7 and 8, which matched a staff member with a student, to assist, encourage, and commend academic success of students. At the time of the EQA team visit, guidance staff had entered into planning for an expansion of this innovative program up to grades 9 and 10. Interviewed staff members

were enthusiastic about the positive impact that direct and individualized teacher-student interactions had on students involved in the mentor program. The program was new, and at the time of the visit the EQA team did not receive any data collected by the district that documented specific impacts of this program.

To verify completion of the strategy, three benchmark were included, two for implementation, and one for outcome. Implementation benchmark 1 was survey student attitudes toward school and expectations. Implementation benchmark 2 was publish results of student recognition. Outcome benchmark 1 was results of student attitude survey show a 10 percent increase.

When asked about student surveys, the only surveys mentioned by staff were those at the middle/high school that related to preparing for the NEASC visit, which will occur in October 2007. There was no evidence in the evidence box or in interviews that the district had planned or implemented a formal survey of student attitudes. No benchmark “increase” of the desired 10 percent was demonstrated. The EQA team was not clear how a pre- and post- “attitude survey” could establish valid assessment of student attitude change.

Initiative 4: Provide preventative programs to address students' social needs

Finding 4A: The district does not have a clearly defined strategy to develop programs targeted to at-risk students, but the schools have developed some strategies to assist at-risk students identified by staff, and the district has prioritized working with parents to address non-academic needs.

- No action steps in Initiative 4 work to "provide [prevention and intervention] programs to address students' social needs," although action steps for assessing students' needs are detailed in Initiative 2.
- The schools have made connections with outside agencies in order to provide services beyond the district's capacity, including the Department of Social Services, the court system, and local hospitals providing counseling and mental health services.
- Winchendon has implemented and modified some programs for students identified by staff as priority areas of need, rather than a formal process of analysis.
- Winchendon has implemented and modified programs for at-risk high school students, instituting the Project Success program for potential dropouts, the Senior Alternative Program to recover dropouts, a revised SST structure, a revised ISSP process, and a 21st Century grant-funded program for high school students at risk of retention.
- Lacking sustained adequate funding and staffing or a systemic focus as the district worked on other key areas, Winchendon struggled to provide prevention and intervention support to its at-risk and marginally at-risk students.
- The school adjustment counselor was less able to provide services to at-risk students in 2006-2007 when the counselor had to assume responsibility for truant students after budget cuts led to the police department's elimination of the school resource officer.
- The superintendent established a Parent Advisory Council that met monthly and that served as a sounding board, and a support group, for potential school initiatives.

Evidence

Winchendon's initiative to provide preventative programs to address students' social needs was similar to the third initiative, by also addressing student attendance policies and procedures and school culture, but with a parent focus rather than the student focus in Initiative 3. The two strategies in Initiative 4 are: A) develop a student attendance policy with consequences that address tardiness, dismissal, absences, and family vacations; and B) develop a plan to increase parent involvement with their child's education.

Previously, the district had lacked clear expectations for attendance and had not explored root causes of poor student attendance or the relationship of poor attendance to student achievement. But in the implementation of the district's turnaround plan, the district had established an attendance policy by June 2006. Central administration and building leaders and guidance and other staff joined in meetings and in research to decide on actions that should take place to improve student attendance. The efforts and immediate impact of actions were delayed by not having new policy and procedures entered into the student handbooks for 2006-2007. There is no consistent data collection to date that has confirmed that individual and subgroup attendance has improved due to actions taken. The work was ongoing at the time of the EQA visit; building attendance committees may have more to show with regard to the impact of district efforts in this area in June 2007.

Previously, there was a lack of attention to attendance policies by the school committee, central office, and building administration. Since the implementation of the DTAP, the district addressed attendance issues through Strategy 3C, develop building-level plans to improve attendance and offer alternatives to students who lost instructional time, and Strategy 4A, developing a student attendance policy. The school committee adopted the new policy in June 2006 as a part of the complete rewrite of the policy manual of the school district. The printing timeline for handbooks did not permit the new policy to be printed in handbooks for 2006-2007. The district pointed to several programs that assisted students who struggled with attendance, but they were not coordinated and part of a consistent and clearly planned district strategy. Planning in this area was taking place during the week of the EQA site visit; it included central administration, building principals, and guidance staff.

The district established a new focus on the impact of attendance and suspensions on student learning—and also on the dropout rate. Accurate record keeping with consistency across all three buildings started in the district in the fall of the 2006-2007 school year. Attendance committees exist in the schools, although the district does not yet have a summary report from each school detailing an analysis of the problem, the actions to be taken throughout a full school year, and data collected that would inform the district as to the impact of district planning to improve student attendance patterns. The superintendent was fully involved in the process of overseeing actions in this area.

Notably, this initiative had no strategies or action steps that specifically sought to assess student social needs or to provide targeted prevention or intervention programs. Action steps in Strategy 2D sought to provide the assessment data through surveys and a review of school data that would help the district identify the appropriate "preventative programs to address students' social needs" as stated in Initiative 4. The first action step in Strategy 2D was to collect and review current student data available including discipline, attendance, retentions, and grades. This has been done by guidance staff and principals, aided by the district's aligning of the attendance coding in the three schools that allow multiyear comparisons of similarly coded data. The goal is generally to identify students in need of follow-up or referral to a program or a Student Study Team conference. The third action step in Strategy 2D, to administer assessments/surveys according to identified needs, was implemented using NEASC and Second Step surveys, but the district has not yet examined "all data to determine the student needs and program implications" as required in the fourth action step in Strategy 2D.

Even without a systemic plan to do so, Winchendon has implemented and modified programs for students following formal and informal discussions of student needs. Prevention and intervention programs and services instituted include the Project Success program linking potential dropouts to area businesses, the Senior Alternative Program to recover dropouts back into school, a revised structure for Student Support Teams, and a 21st Century grant-funded summer academic and community service program for high school students at risk of retention. The district had also renewed efforts to make the ISSP process serve as a tool to assist all low-performing students.

Lacking sustained adequate funding and staffing or a systemic focus as the district worked on other key areas, Winchendon struggled to provide prevention and intervention support to its at-risk and marginally at-risk students. Interviewees indicated that in spite of very committed staff and extra efforts, the schools struggled to deal with social needs that interfered with student attendance and participation, especially at the high school level. The school adjustment counselor and guidance staff reported that, in order to increase student attendance, offer support to students and their families, and support a safe climate in the schools, the district had worked to strengthen and sustain the relationships with the Department of Social Services, the court system, and local hospitals providing counseling and mental health services. Reliance on outside agencies made the district vulnerable to the availability of agency resources. The police department's elimination of the school resource officer in 2006-2007 impacted the school adjustment counselor's service provision when the counselor had to assume responsibility for truant students.

Strategy 4A: Develop a student attendance policy with consequences that address tardiness, dismissal, absences, and family vacations.

Strategy 4A consists of eight action steps: 1) review current practices at each building; 2) research causes and influences that affect attendance issues as outlined in this strategy; 3) create a districtwide attendance committee; 4) develop procedures, with agreed upon language and coding, for addressing attendance issues, i.e., when letters go home, meetings; 5) place procedures in school handbooks and publish them; 6) research alternative approaches to improve student attendance; 7) submit recommendations to administration; and 8) disseminate attendance policy (newspapers, handbooks, memos home, etc.).

Interviews with school committee members and administrators described a district without an organized and monitored school committee policy manual in 2004. The then interim superintendent contracted with the MASC to review, organize, update, and rewrite the policy manual. The process began in 2004 and concluded in June 2006. The DTAP required that a new attendance policy be included in this comprehensive rewrite, and it was. During the site visit, the superintendent provided the EQA team with a copy of the new policy on student attendance. This included policy JH, Student Absences and Excuses, and policy JHD, Exclusions and Exemptions from School Attendance. The policy language was generic MASC language; it formed a solid

base for determining district actions regarding attendance and admissions to school but did not focus explicitly on "tardiness, dismissal, absences, family vacations, and outside interferences such as doctor appointments, CCD, lessons, etc." The EQA team noted that the district work in the policy area had its major focus on the total rewrite of the policy manual rather than detailed emphasis on any particularly focused or necessary language that would address specific Winchendon school district concerns about correcting deep-seated attendance patterns and practices of students (with family support) within the district. The EQA team also noted that while the district has completely rewritten the policy manual, it was not in the practice of noting the date of approval of each policy. This initially caused some confusion at the time of the visit as to exactly when the school committee adopted the policy.

The new policy did not go into the parent/student handbooks for 2006-2007. Principals stated they had already sent their handbooks to the printer by the time the school committee approved the policy. Principals stated that they would enter the new policy and procedure into the handbooks for the 2007-2008 school year. The work on the specifics of the implementation procedures for this policy was delayed through the fall of 2006. In September 2006, staff proposed a draft listing of coding for the attendance program of the Administrators Plus (Rediker) software package. The evidence documents supplied to the team and interviews with guidance staff indicated the district had taken no system-wide final action on this key implementation step. In interviews, principals did, however, state that a common coding process around student absences was being implemented in the fall of 2006, and this was confirmed by the superintendent in the October 2006 DTAP progress report. The implementation benchmark and outcome benchmark folders supplied by the district contained no documents demonstrating district implementation strategies for the new attendance policy beyond the common coding mentioned above. The superintendent was actually meeting with the guidance counselors on the last day of the EQA site visit to press forward with implementation actions. Although the superintendent mentioned to administrators and counselors in a memo dated March 22, 2006 that the district would establish a board to review school attendance, the EQA received no evidence that the district has put such a board in place. Meetings took place in 2006-2007 to discuss building plans to address patterns of weak attendance in the schools, as stated in interviews with principals and guidance staff. In the evidence box and with the interview responses, the EQA

team did not see that attendance committees met with regularity and wrote specific building-level plans to address attendance issues based on current research.

Strategy 4A had four implementation benchmarks. Benchmark 1 was that the school committee completed the policy and voted on it in the May/June period of 2006. Benchmark 2 was attendance at committee meetings. Benchmark 3 was completed procedures. Benchmark 4 was that the district placed the procedure summary in handbooks. Although the school committee passed the policy in June 2006, the district did not develop procedures to improve attendance and so could not place the procedures in the handbooks.

This strategy had two outcome benchmarks: average daily attendance will increase by one percent and tardies/dismissals will decrease by one percent. Only after the district publishes the policy and related building procedures in handbooks and other school documents in September of 2007 can this be evaluated.

Strategy 4B: Develop a plan to increase parent involvement with their child's education: parent volunteers; communication between school and family; parent support/family support; teaching parents how to support curriculum at home; parents involved in school governance.

Strategy 4B consists of three action steps: 1) bring school site councils and PTO representation together to develop a plan to increase parent involvement emphasizing the five areas listed above; 2) develop and implement a plan to increase parent involvement; and 3) create surveys and other methods to evaluate the plan and its activities based on the five areas listed above.

The interim superintendent led efforts to develop a Cohesion Committee in the summer of 2004 to link the school committee to parents and community and town leaders. The new superintendent continued the work of this committee. Unfortunately, these efforts came to no avail by the late winter/spring of 2006. Parents actively worked together to develop strategies to pass the override efforts of June 2005 and July 2006. The votes failed, but school committee members reported to the EQA team that the parent school advocates who helped with this issue remained active and have formed a corps of people to support school needs both now and in the future. In interviews, the EQA team learned that past misunderstandings between some town officials and the school committee and administration continued. As of January 2007, efforts to develop a mechanism for open and non-judgmental communication had not succeeded. In

interviews with the EQA team, school committee members stated that they continued to work within civic organizations after the override failure to retain and harness expanded parent involvement in school support and improvement efforts.

The superintendent's report on DTAP progress dated June 2006 stated that the district had completed none of this strategy. The superintendent asked building leaders to report to the district leadership team in November 2006 with new plans for parent involvement. The district amended the DTAP timeline on developing a plan to increase parent involvement from September 2005 to February 2007; therefore, the EQA team determined that this was a stalled initiative during the time under review.

The district developed a website that garnered more parent and community support. In 2006-2007, a medical issue incapacitated the technology director, so the website has lacked the supervision necessary for this tool to serve as a major contributor to disseminating information about school success and attracting both parental and community support. The EQA team noted that the curriculum section of the site listed ELA and math curricula, but the specific grade-level descriptions fell in the wrong subject category and the formatting of the curricula presented was inconsistent. At the time of the EQA visit, not all schools had posted their SIPs on the site. At the time of the EQA visit, the parent handbooks posted on the site did not demonstrate a consistent approach to the use of a handbook as a public relations tool that would serve to garner increased parental and community support. The district has not yet taken the necessary actions to gain the full potential benefit of the website.

This strategy had one implementation benchmark and two outcome benchmarks. Implementation Benchmark 1 was meeting documentation (11/06), completed plan (2/07), survey completed (5/07), and baseline data (6/07). Outcome Benchmark 1 was results of survey show positive parental responses to the five areas. Outcome Benchmark 2 was increase the number of parent volunteers by 10 percent.

The district plans to report the survey results for outcome benchmark 1 in May 2008. The district did not present evidence of survey results to the EQA team at the time of the visit. The reconstituted initiative in this area rested in the hands of the superintendent, PTO, and school site councils at the time of the EQA visit. Benchmark folders were empty in this strategy area.

The district has taken steps to increase parental support for educational programs. School committee members and teachers mentioned the active theater and music opportunities for children in the district. The Athletic Boosters Club has also traditionally been strong. In the 2006-2007 budget, the district almost totally eliminated art, music, and physical education due to budget constraints. Only one elementary music teacher remained to offer music instruction at grades 1-6.

Initiative 5: Strengthen the system of governance and communication between the school committee and other town committees

Finding 5A: Winchendon Public Schools improved its ability to implement an improvement plan since the arrival of the new superintendent. The district developed its District Turnaround Plan through a process that supported successful implementation.

- The district created the DTAP through a comprehensive, inclusive process. Winchendon had prepared its strategic plan for 2000-2006 under the direction of a previous administrator without institutionalizing it.
- The district engaged all stakeholder groups in the PIM process, except for the town officials, who declined to participate.
- The DTAP provided a vision for the school system. Before the DTAP, there was an absence of a clear vision reflecting the values of the community and the educational needs of the students.
- The new superintendent focused district and school efforts around the DTAP. Before, the focus of decision-making was more localized at the school level and less evident at the district level, and schools had become more separate and autonomous.
- The DTAP led to active monitoring of the progress in the district and its schools toward set goals. The district had not evaluated or monitored its previous District Improvement Plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) based on student performance assessments or benchmarks.
- The school committee was informed of and engaged in the work to improve the district. Previously, the school committee lacked information from the central office, was not involved in the planning process, and did not take the initiative.
- Administrators regularly reported on the progress of their implementation of DTAP initiatives to the Department of Education, school committee, and the executive team.

Finding 5B: The district established many favorable conditions to set the stage for successful implementation of improvement initiatives.

- The new superintendent stabilized the administrative team and created an "esprit de corps." Before the new superintendent and the DTAP, the district had been plagued with instability and the interruption of district leadership.
- The school committee completed the update of its policy manual.
- School committee members stated that they understood their roles and responsibilities and had received professional development training.
- The district prepared an organizational chart and anticipated completing the process of developing new and revising former job descriptions by the end of 2006-2007.
- The district prepared and implemented an administrator's walk-through checklist form for informal observations that later extended to an effectiveness of implementation tool at the elementary level for English language arts and math.
- Principals prepared quarterly reports on the data from the administrator's walk-through checklists and shared the results at administrative team meetings.
- Administrators reported that in 2006-2007 the superintendent included three goals in the administrators' evaluation instrument, namely the SIPs, the DTAP, and an area decided by the superintendent.
- Administrators participated in the Observing and Analyzing Teaching course (Research for Better Teaching) and the National Institute of School Leadership training program as part of the three-year professional development plan for leadership personnel.
- Besides coverage of the school committee meetings on cable television and by the *Winchendon Courier* and *The Gardner News*, the superintendent periodically wrote articles for the local newspapers and participated in a local radio program.

Finding 5C: The district has a developing, but incomplete, system for using evaluations of programs and staff to ensure accountability.

- The DOE required the district to regularly report on the progress on its initiatives and keep updated evidence boxes to demonstrate progress on its initiatives.
- The district and the leadership team regularly reviewed the DTAP to monitor implementation in their respective areas.
- The district developed a draft of its program evaluation protocol.
- The district has not prioritized program evaluation, as the district lacks adequate resources to maintain and improve support programs. Title I reading and math support was available at grades K-3, but support services were limited at the upper grades. Grades 4-6 only had access to 21st Century program support, and grades 7-12 only had access to an MCAS Strategies class for support and the district eliminated full-time MCAS Strategies teachers.
- SIPs were standards-based and the high school SIP contained measurable goals that the district used for school and administrator accountability.
- School administrators were held accountable in the evaluation process for implementing DTAP and SIP goals.
- Teachers were not held accountable in the evaluation process for implementing DTAP and SIP goals.
- The district prepared an organizational chart that delineated the line and staff relationships of personnel in the school system to clarify job responsibilities.
- The district developed a walk-through tool to monitor the implementation of instructional programs at the elementary schools.
- The district had developed a walk-though tool to monitor the implementation of differentiated instruction, but the teachers' association had not yet approved the tool.

Finding 5D: The district developed the budget through an inclusive process focused on priorities identified and clearly communicated to the school committee and the community, and Winchendon Public Schools employed sound business practices to manage the budget.

- Goals and objectives in the School Improvement Plans and the District Turnaround Plan were the focus of budget decisions.
- The internal control procedures in the business office were sound. Impressions communicated by town officials stated the contrary. Other than a final financial report for the special education grant cited in the town's fiscal year 2005 annual audit and single audit, all other reports were timely. The 2005 audit was in draft form at the time of the EQA site visit.
- Reporting mechanisms were frequent, communicated to appropriate officials, and were sound.
- The district has improved forecast mechanisms and control procedures to ensure spending remains within fiscal budget limits.
- The district employed business practices to maximize cost effectiveness.

Finding 5E: Strained relationships with the town hindered implementation of the District Turnaround Plan in spite of district efforts.

- The district created a Cohesion Committee in the attempt to create a shared understanding about district needs. It eventually dissolved due to lack of participation of town officials, who indicated that the committee lacked vision and direction regarding its purpose.
- Written agreements were in place between the district and community regarding indirect charges.
- Despite using the same financial accounting system (MUNIS), the school and town had misunderstandings about financial transactions.
- District and town officials both indicated that issues arising from the mutual conflict and mistrust created time consuming distractions.
- The district's attempts to get an override have repeatedly failed, and the district has had to make cutbacks affecting operations and hindering its ability to fund planned initiatives.

- The failed override of $983,204 resulted in 24 positions cut.

Finding 5F: Without adequate town support, the budget and supplemental funding were not adequate to implement priority improvement initiatives, and the district over-relied on grants.

- The mistrust between the town officials and school officials negatively impacted the educational programming offered in the Winchendon Public Schools.
- The district had an increasing reliance on supplemental sources of funding for school related services, programs, staffing, professional development, and supplies.
- In fiscal years 2006 and 2007, the town funded more and more budget requests from the two trust funds in town.
- In fiscal year 2006, the district level funded all materials and supplies. The local budget had no funding for professional development.
- All professional development was from supplemental funding.

Finding 5G: The district has not yet developed the capacity to meet its completion deadlines for its improvement initiatives.

- The district reported to the DOE in June 2006 that 59 percent of the plan has been implemented.
- The district report to the DOE in December 2006 had no statements about the status of 47 of the 143 action steps (33 percent) in the DTAP.
- Planning efforts remained fragmented in part because of the district's urgency to complete action items in the DTAP rather than set a clear focus on discrete and manageable priorities to show progress in the attempt to have its 'underperforming' status removed.
- Because of a troubled history, the district has had to focus at the same time on building morale, community, and to move the culture toward greater accountability.
- Staff capacity building is taking time due to hiring constraints, staffing cuts, and the need to ensure that staff are all mentored, trained, coached, supervised, monitored, and qualified to fully carry out their respective roles for DTAP implementation.

Evidence

A significant focus of the new superintendent since his arrival in November 2004 has been to "strengthen the system of governance and communication between the school committee and other town committees." This considerable effort was an attempt to free the district from historical issues concerning perceptions and facts about district governance and relations with the town. This initiative has five strategies: A) oversight and accountability of programs and instruction; B) demonstrate to the community that policies, budgets, and professional practices support improved student performance; C) develop meeting protocols/guidelines for joint meetings between the school committee, finance committee, selectmen, and community; D) provide training and support for district leadership (administrators, superintendent, school committee, business manager) including supervision, evaluation, leadership skills, hiring and retention of quality personnel, and policy; E) analyze the capacity of the district's organizational structure to implement the district's turnaround plan to improve student performance; and F) oversight and accountability of the district's turnaround plan. Initiative 5 and the superintendent's professional goals are both concerned most deeply about overseeing educational delivery and the DTAP (5A and 5F), maximizing the efficacy of district leaders by providing training and support and deploying them effectively (5D and 5E), and establishing effective working relationships with the community to foster support for the schools, especially in matters relating to the budget (5B and 5C).

Planning

Through the implementation of the district's turnaround plan, the district and the schools had an inclusive, comprehensive planning process, in contrast with the history of the district. Winchendon's strategic plan for 2000-2006 had been prepared under the direction of a previous administrator, but was not institutionalized or used as a comprehensive planning process for the district, according to interviewees in 2003. At the time of the recent site visit, however, interviewees indicated that the district PIM team developed the DTAP. The district PIM team originally included the superintendent; a representative of the school committee, the board of selectmen, and the finance committee; a representative of the Department of Education; a central office administrator; a principal; teacher and parent representatives from each school; and community representatives. The superintendent said that although the board of selectmen and the finance committee received an invitation to have a representative on the district PIM team, none

had participated. Leadership personnel stated that the district PIM team started work in the fall of 2004 and that its members had received DOE training.

Before the new superintendent and the DTAP, the district had been plagued with instability and the interruption of district leadership, and the focus of decision-making was more localized at the school level and less evident at the district level. District leadership and building principals conveyed in interviews in 2003 that schools had become more separate and autonomous. The DTAP has provided some direction for a district vision. While the instability and absence of leadership had resulted in the absence of a clear vision reflecting the values of the community and the educational needs of the students, interviewees indicated that the DTAP provided a vision of the school system. The new superintendent stated, "The DTAP is the basis for everything that we do." Interviewees confirmed the superintendent's statement about the DTAP.

Administrators linked the DTAP and the SIPs to the development, presentation, and review of the proposed school budgets. The superintendent commented that the five initiatives in the DTAP defined the vision. When questioned about the vision of the district, school committee members, administrators, teachers, and parents also referred to the DTAP, indicating a consensus of shared understanding. Some interviewees commented about the need of the district to develop a written vision statement. According to the superintendent, the National Institute of School Leadership training program, in which the district's administrators began participating in the fall of 2006, involved the development of a new vision statement.

The district attempted to align SIPs with the DTAP. Before the DTAP, individual School Improvement Plans did not align with the DIP or clearly focus on an assessment of student performance data. Principals commented about the alignment of their SIPs with the DTAP, and leadership personnel remarked that the DTAP and SIPs "are all tied together" with the focus of the DTAP and SIPs centered on improving student achievement and meeting the needs of the students.

Within the school system, staff adopted and actualized the town motto of "Winchendon is working together." Interviewees referred to the District Turnaround Plan as both the District Improvement Plan and the vision of the school system. School leadership teams, using the standards based Performance Improvement Mapping process, prepared School Improvement

Plans for each school that aligned with the District Turnaround Plan. Leadership personnel wrote and submitted quarterly progress reports on plan implementation to the school committee and the Department of Education, and administrators reported that the superintendent held them accountable for implementing the DTAP through their evaluation process.

The district administration also formed a committee called the Cohesion Committee with the intent to unify community and town stakeholders around the turnaround plan. According to the district administration, the committee dissolved due to lack of participation of town officials. According to town officials, the Cohesion Committee lacked vision and direction regarding its purpose. Town and school officials cited a deep level of mistrust on both sides.

Communication

The superintendent mentioned that he primarily used e-mails to communicate with school committee members, administrators, teachers, town officials, and the public. He reported he also had communicated with individuals face-to-face, by telephone, and by written correspondences. To inform the public, the superintendent pointed to the information available to the public on the district website and from his periodic radio interviews and articles written for the local newspapers. In addition, administrators reported that e-mails and the telephone served as the major vehicles for staff to communicate with one another in the district.

One overarching issue evident to the EQA team during the site visit was the strained relations between the school officials and town officials. Interviewees used terms and phrases such as “mistrust,” “too much animosity,” and a “lack of respect” to characterized the strained relations. Interviewees reported the cancellation of scheduled joint meetings of the school committee, board of selectmen, and finance committee. In addition, communications, had resorted to e-mails, letters, and telephone calls rather than face to face.

Governance

In the spring of 2006, the district completed a two-year comprehensive rewrite and reorganization of the district policy manual via a contract with the MASC. This established a foundation and legal guide for further decision-making and action planning in the district.

The DTAP led to active monitoring of the district's and schools' progress toward set goals. The district had not evaluated the previous DIP against student performance assessments, and schools made changes to their SIPs independently of the district. Administrators stated that the school leadership teams and the district PIM team prepared periodic progress reports on the SIPs and DTAP, respectively. Administrators further indicated that monthly meetings of the school leadership teams and the district PIM team included progress reports on the goals in the SIPs and the initiatives in the DTAP. The current superintendent commented that the leadership personnel prepared quarterly reports for the school committee on the status of the action steps and benchmarks in each of the initiatives and strategies of the DTAP, which the superintendent presented to and discussed with the school committee. This was confirmed by administrators, who stated that these presentations occurred at open school committee meetings with coverage on cable television and by the local press. By contrast, the former superintendent provided no written progress reports to the school committee or community. Furthermore, the current superintendent and the school committee mentioned, and the district provided to the EQA team, periodic update reports on the DTAP that the district had submitted to the DOE.

The administrators commented that the district PIM team met once each month to discuss the progress made with the DTAP. The superintendent stated that his administrative team, which consisted of all the central office administrators and the principals, met once a month to discuss various educational issues such as the DTAP, the SIPs, MCAS test results, curriculum initiatives, policies, and budget proposals. Principals remarked that every month the superintendent met with each principal informally at his/her school. Interviews with the district leadership and a review of the district's documents indicated principals had not had the opportunity to discuss published policies and the DIP under the prior superintendent.

The school committee previously did not take the initiative to exercise its responsibility until issues with the former superintendent's accountability became public. It attributed this to the lack of written data or reports from central office and the lack of involvement in the planning process. Leadership personnel mentioned that a member of the school committee served on the district PIM team that developed the DTAP and monitored the progress made on each of the initiatives, strategies, action steps, implementation benchmarks, and outcome benchmarks. School committee members confirmed representation on the district PIM team. The school committee

members, the superintendent, and the other administrators reported that the initiatives in the DTAP and the goals in the SIPs formed the basis for the school department's budget.

Accountability

The district has a developing, but incomplete system, for using evaluation of programs and staff to ensure accountability. Accountability mechanisms decreased from the district to the school to the classroom level. On the other hand, development of assessment tools (measures for evaluating such as performance tests and program evaluations) increased from the student to the classroom to the program and school to the district level, and from the elementary to the secondary level.

The DOE required the district to regularly report on the progress on its initiatives, and the district regularly reviewed the DTAP, each school reviewed its SIP, and the district made changes to the plans. Winchendon did make progress in developing tools capable of addressing program effectiveness and school and administrator accountability. The district had drafted a program evaluation protocol. School SIPs were standards-based and the high school SIPs contained measurable goals that the district could use for school and administrator accountability. School administrators were accountable for implementing DTAP and SIP goals in the evaluation process, and the evaluations reviewed by the EQA team supported improved performance in their roles. On the other hand, teacher evaluations reviewed by the team were not instructive and conducive to improving instruction. The district did not go as far as to establish a system for monitoring program quality or for holding schools and administrators accountable for student achievement.

The district used data from the MCAS tests, GRADE, and unit assessments to identify students not meeting grade-level standards and provided students supplementary and remedial services when available. At grades K-3, teachers used DIBELS data to identify students in need of Title I reading support, and used Everyday Math program assessments to identify students in need of Title I math support. Support services were severely limited for students above grade 3. At grades 4-6, interviewees reported that teachers made student referrals to the 21st Century program when students were struggling in school as indicated by a range of factors, including test data. The district provided an MCAS Strategies class for students in need of extra support at

the middle/high school in 2004-2005, but the district reduced the support when budget cuts resulted in the elimination of the full-time MCAS Strategies teachers.

While remedial and support services were not consistently available at the secondary level throughout the implementation of the DTAP, the middle/high school used student achievement data to place students in a leveled math course. At grades 4-6, staff decided Math I and Math II placements using Everyday Math assessments, and at grade 7 staff decided placement using a basal assessment at the end of grade 6. Students continued the math course sequence in grades 7-12, but the district would place those in danger of failing, or those who had failed, the MCAS math test in a Math Strategies course. Teachers and administrators indicated that funding limited the provision of a comprehensive set of supplementary and remedial services capable of moving all students from 'Needs Improvement' to 'Proficient,' although the district has made progress in moving students out of the 'Warning/Failing' category on the grade 10 MCAS tests.

The superintendent indicated that the district had begun the process to hold administrators and teachers accountable for implementing the goals in the SIPs and the initiatives in the DTAP. This is in contrast to previous years, when the administrative structure was in flux and job accountabilities were unclear. For the DTAP, the district prepared an organizational chart that delineated the line and staff relationships of personnel in the school system. The EQA team members reviewed a document on job descriptions that stated, "The Winchendon Public Schools, over the past three months, has been in the process of reviewing job descriptions for all positions. While some descriptions are close to being completed, others are still in process. Plans are for all job descriptions to be completed by the end of 2006-2007." When questioned about the status of the job descriptions, the superintendent verified the statement in the document. The district had not had an organizational chart indicating lines of responsibility and job descriptions before this effort. Interviewees commented about the administrators' walk-through checklists and the effectiveness of implementation forms for the Houghton Mifflin ELA/reading and Everyday Math programs implemented at the elementary schools. Some leadership personnel referenced the draft differentiated instruction tool that the teachers' association developed but had not yet been approved for implementation.

The Role of the Budget

The Winchendon school district's budget development and financial management system attempted to help address the goals and objectives in the turnaround plan. The primary obstacle to these was the strained relations between town and school officials at all levels. Resources were not adequate to fully address the goals and objectives of the turnaround plan and the SIPs. Many of the issues found in the May 2003 EQA review the district had addressed or improved by the time of the February 2004 EQA review. From the time of that review to the most recent EQA review in January 2007, the district and town have regressed in the area of effective communication and in their working relationship. Relations have deteriorated to the point that, according to school and town officials, they hindered operations and implementation of the District Turnaround Plan.

Budget Development

The district had an open and participatory budget process that focused on two primary areas: addressing the District Turnaround Plan and restoring positions that had been lost over the past fiscal years. According to the superintendent, the district used the first DOE-approved turnaround plan to develop the budget. The school administration developed the budget with input from principals and administrators with budgetary authority. The superintendent involved the district administration and staff in building the budget. The superintendent used a questionnaire to solicit input from the board of selectmen, finance committee, and town manager in areas of budget development, overcoming historical issues, addressing future needs, input into the school section of the town master plan, and other general thoughts. To address the revised turnaround plan the school district developed a three-tier budget plan. The first tier was a level service plan. The second and third tiers were attempts to return positions that the district previously lost. The district administration stated that the principals developed their respective budgets. They prioritized their requests to itemize requests for town overrides.

Additionally, the superintendent had a survey entitled Entrance Plan Questions that he sent to the town finance committee, board of selectmen, town manager, and a community member who was on the district turnaround committee. This survey/questionnaire asked for input in the areas of budget preparation, history (dealing with past hurdles), future, master plan, and an area for general input. The survey asked the question "Do you feel our communications are

clear?…concise?…timely…?". Respondents said "Yes but Town Gov[ernment] interpretation and SC interp[retation] of budget needs to be the same"; "Okay, Need to go to townspeople"; "clear but need more detail, can be more concise and to the point, not a problem for timely"; "overall very good"; and, regarding clarity, "Don't know what more you can do."

The district's fiscal year 2007 budget booklet, dated January 26, 2006, contained the following information. In the "Winchendon Public Schools Executive Summary," the superintendent wrote an explanation of how the district proposed to use funds to implement the District Turnaround Plan and School Improvement Plans. He wrote, "This is the second year that we have provided a detailed narrative to describe our needs and budget requests." He explained that the district administration and staff identified priorities using a three-tiered format. The next section, "A Year in Review: A Great Deal of Progress and Miles to Go – SETBACKS," described the failed override in June 2005. The superintendent wrote that the override of $983,204 was to hire staff to implement the plans. The next section, "Creation of New Initiatives," described the programs created and implemented in previous years and their continuation in the proposed budget. The "Rejuvenation of Old Initiatives" section described the programs restarted or adjusted such as the differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher* training. The section "What Determines a School Budget?" described the items considered in building the budget. It contained a list of items such as student needs, state and federal mandates, data, and PIMS. It also depicted the school finance and its relation to all other sources of revenue (federal and state grants, school operating budgets, school revolving accounts, Murdock Trust Fund, school construction loans, student activity accounts, school lunch program, and Robinson Broadhurst Foundation.) "Facts & Figures" were charts and graphs depicting net school spending from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2006. The "Trends in School Choice" section was a description of the school choice program and two graphs depicting funds received from fiscal year 1996 to fiscal year 2005 and funds for tuition out from fiscal year 1996 to fiscal year 2005. "Per Pupil Expenditure Information from the Department of Education Website" was a graphical comparison of total per pupil versus state expenditures from fiscal year 2000 to fiscal year 2004, and special education per pupil versus state. "Winchendon Public Schools Robinson Broadhurst Foundation Requests FY2006-FY2008" listed fiscal year 2006 to fiscal year 2008 projects funded and purchases bought through the trust. "Winchendon Public Schools Fiscal Year 2006 Grants" listed the grant amounts from fiscal year 2003 to fiscal year 2006. "WPS School Revolving Accounts/Murdock

Trust Fund (1/25/06)" listed activity in the district revolving accounts and the Murdock Trust from June 30, 2004 to January 25, 2006. "WPS FY2007 Budget Development Timeline" detailed the budget development process with meeting dates, presentation dates, and approval and adoption dates. The next sections were for each school with explanations of their budget requests.

The Winchendon Public School Executive Summary 2005-2006 School Budget (dated February 11, 2005) had the same format of information. In the executive summary, the superintendent wrote, "In addition to a revised budget format, we are using new procedure to create the budget. This budget is the result of a collaboration of district and building administrators: first, to identify what each school needs to meet the challenges faced each day; second, to begin incorporating the materials, people & professional development identified in our year long PIM, Performance Improvement Mapping; and, third, to include the recommendations included in our District Technology Plan." The "Performance Improvement Mapping: Budget Implications" section described how the PIM process influenced the SIPs and the DIP. "Items from the PIM Process That Require Funding-FY 2006 Budget" was a list of requests by district and each school.

The superintendent based the budget development and allocation of resources on the continuous analysis of aggregate and disaggregated student assessment data to assure the budget's effectiveness in supporting improved achievement for all student populations.

The district's turnaround partner, EDC, provided professional development for the district to address components of the plan. According to the superintendent, the EDC provided professional development in ELA and math at grades K-6. Based on the February 2004 EQA report, the district increased the time for professional development by adding in more half days in the calendar for school-based professional development. A major focus of the professional development was in differentiated instruction and inclusion methods. The district funded these offerings through grants. The district participated in professional development offerings with the communities of Narragansett, Ashburnham-Westminster, and Gardner, as a member of the school consortium group NAWWG.

In addition to addressing the DTAP, the district administrators built the budget with the intent of restoring positions lost in previous years. According to the superintendent's executive summary of the fiscal year 2007 budget booklet, "This proposal reflects a request to reinstate some of the nineteen teaching positions and supplies and materials we lost due to the failed override in the spring of 2005." These positions included a foreign language and computer teacher at the middle school, a science teacher and a social studies teacher at the high school, three elementary school teachers, three MCAS remediation teachers, and a special education teacher. The district lost nine paraprofessionals, an early child coordinator, and two department coordinators at Murdock.

The district did continue to implement programs with the use of outside funding and local funds. This was the second year of implementation of the Everyday Math program; the district purchased the initial program with Murdock Trust funds. The Safe and Drug Free school grant funded the Second Step program. ELA materials for K-6 students were purchased with $90,000 from the Department of Education, the generosity of the Houghton Mifflin publishing company (approximately $110,000), and $30,000 from the local budget. During the past three years the district trained all staff in differentiated instruction and *The Skillful Teacher*. DOE funds were used to hire a reading coach.

At the Murdock Middle/High School, the focus of the fiscal year 2007 budget was on restoring faculty, staff, and programs to fiscal year 2005 levels. Each department provided justification for each request. They recommended basing restoration of faculty positions on a set of priorities: a Math Strategies position at the middle school, a Math Strategies position at the high school, a reading teacher at the middle school, a middle school art teacher, a middle school foreign language teacher, a middle school computer applications teacher, a high school social studies teacher, and two special education paraprofessionals.

The Toy Town Elementary School requested to purchase the required consumables for the reading and math series. It asked to restore the second office secretary position to full time. The Robinson Broadhurst grant provided for a computer lab. The Memorial School requested an increase in supplies for newly adopted ELA and math programs, a special education teacher, consumables for ELA and math, the restoration of a media center/library paraprofessional, and

the reinstatement of the grade 3 position eliminated last year to maintain the student-teacher ratio at 22 or 23 to one.

The fiscal year 2006 budget identified what each school needed to meet the challenges faced each day; second, to begin incorporating the materials, people, and professional development identified in the year-long Performance Improvement Mapping; and, third, to include the recommendations included in the district technology plan. PIM has dominated the professional development and staff meeting time. Examples of student needs influencing budget decisions included the Murdock Middle/High School request for funds to address dropout issues with the continuation of Project Success, originally funded from the Robinson Broadhurst Trust in fiscal year 2005. The math department requested a remediation class for math at the high school. The middle school offered a math remediation class at grades 7 and 8 (supplementary math support for one quarter per year). The Robinson Broadhurst Trust also funded this position in the fiscal year 2006 budget.

Reporting Mechanisms

According to the district administration, the school committee received reports regarding the status of the budget, revolving accounts, and trusts every other month. This reporting schedule worked for the school committee. The district administrators with budget authority received reports regarding their respective budget on the same reporting schedule as the school committee or more frequently if asked. The district's End of Year Pupil and Financial Report was timely from fiscal year 2003 forward.

Forecast Mechanisms and Control Procedures

At the time of the review, the team found that the business manager forecast expenses such as fuel oil by analyzing heating degree-days and estimating use based on this. This was in contrast to the 2003 site visit, when the EQA team found that the district did not employ any mechanisms of forecast or control procedures to ensure that spending was within the limits of the fiscal budget, and the district had not determined a cost projection for the current teacher contract or capital improvement. However, last year the district did encumber the payroll and accrued payroll at the end of the fiscal year. The business manager forecast expenses such as fuel oil by analyzing heating degree-days and estimating use based on this. The district did encumber the

payroll and accrued payroll at the end of the fiscal year. The principal initiated transfer requests reviewed and processed by the business manager on the MUNIS system. The school committee had a contingency of $50,000 each year for emergencies. The district did not freeze the budget this past year.

Maximizing Cost-effectiveness

A review of the school district's purchasing procedures revealed that the district business office had sound purchasing procedures and the business manager had completed the first two courses for MCPPO certification. The district used requisitions and purchase orders for purchasing goods and services. District administrators with budget authority generated the requisitions. They sent the requisitions to the business office for review and approval. After approval, they became purchase orders. The town had a procedure in place that any contract that exceeded $50,000 required review and approval by the town manager. The district business manager provided the EQA team with a list and copy of all bid specifications done in fiscal year 2006.

The school district reviewed its educational programs and non-direct educational programs for cost effectiveness. The school business manager reviewed the food service program to determine if outsourcing the services would have been more cost effective. The district's participation in the NAWWG group for professional development saved the district some money. The school business manager provided training to secretarial and custodial staff. The district participated in collaborative purchases for office supplies, classroom supplies, and technology. For the elevator service contract, it joined with the town's contract. District administrators stated that for professional development they did more in-house and "train the trainer model."

Conflict Between the District and Town

The mistrust between the district and the town has had a significantly negative impact on the relations between the town officials and school officials in their shared budgetary responsibilities. Since 2004, the school district and town finance department used MUNIS for its financial accounting system. Prior to 2004, they were on the same system as well. Despite this shared system there were still issues regarding financial transactions or operations that added to the mistrust between the district and town. The district business office provided administrators with budget authority with Microsoft Excel reports every other month regarding the status of

their respective budgets. The town accountant had access to the school records. The district's business office was the only office with access to the financial accounting system. The school administration developed its last two fiscal year budgets not using MUNIS. This lead to some perceived lack of transparency by the town administration, finance committee, and board of selectmen. Town officials confirmed the perception of a lack of transparency.

The district and community did have a signed written agreement regarding the indirect charges. The district and town used the Department of Education method for administrative costs and actual costs for expenses such as health insurance. Any increases or decreases in the actual costs resulted in adjustments in the following year's indirect charges. In addition to the written agreement, the town and the district had a verbal agreement for sharing the Medicaid receipts. The district received 20 percent of the reimbursement and the town received 80 percent.

Inadequate Funding

According to all interviewees, the budget and supplemental funding were not adequate, as confirmed in a review of district finance. In fiscal years 2006 and 2007, the town funded more and more budget requests from the two trust funds in town. In fiscal year 2006, the district level funded all materials and supplies. The local budget had no funding for professional development. All professional development was from supplemental funding. District administrators stated that the failed override of $983,204 resulted in 24 positions cut. The cuts included grades 1 and 2 teaching positions, an art teacher at the middle school, the School to Careers Program teacher, paraprofessional positions, and one high school coordinator. The district cut electives in ELA, math, science, and social studies at Murdock.

Net school spending (NSS) calculations were insufficient to ensure adequacy of resources. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education data, Winchendon actually exceeded NSS requirements each year from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2006. From fiscal year 2004 to 2006, the town exceeded NSS by $16,863, $319,084, and $613,832 respectively. The total Schedule 1 NSS expenditures for instructional services (DOE function code 2000) decreased two percent ($9,000,325 to $8,808,198) from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2006, and four percent from fiscal year 2005 to fiscal year 2006 (from $9,147,429 to $8,808,198). Instructional services represented 66 percent of total Schedule 1 NSS expenditures ($9,000,325 of $13,624,713) in

fiscal year 2004. Instructional services represented 60 percent of total Schedule 1 expenditures ($8,808,198 of $14,600,121) based on the unaudited fiscal year 2006 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report.

Although the EQA team found the Winchendon school facilities to be clean and well maintained in its walk-throughs, there was a need for facility improvements, and the town's capital improvement committee included school-related projects only when funding was available.

An analysis of the district's End of Year Pupil and Financial Report also revealed that the district increased its reliance on supplemental funding for instructional services. As the local spending for instructional services decreased, the total expenditures for instructional services from grants and other supplemental sources increased. From fiscal year 2003 to fiscal year 2005, instructional services expenditures from grants and special revenue funds as a percent of total expenditures (both local and grants and special revenue funds) represented 16 percent, 15 percent, 20 percent, and 22 percent respectively ($1,762,965/$10,911,583 in fiscal year 2003, $1,592,052/$10,592,377 in fiscal year 2004, $2,329,112/$11,476,541 in fiscal year 2005, and $2,456,577/$11,264,775).

Another problem was that the district did not budget for any supplies in its budget due to the funding issues and the mistrust issues between the district and the town. It relied on the trust funds to provide for these consumables. The district focused on using the local funding for personnel and reoccurring expenses. In recent years, it used the trusts for reoccurring expenses.

Strategy 5A: Oversight and accountability of programs and instruction.

The District Turnaround Plan includes seven action steps and three implementation benchmarks in Strategy 5A. The first action step was to develop and utilize a walk-through form for informal observations. The superintendent, the other administrators, the teachers in focus groups, and the teacher association representatives interviewed by EQA team members stated that the district had developed and used the walk-through checklist form for informal observations. Leadership personnel mentioned that they began the process of developing the walk-through checklist in the fall of 2004, then implemented it at all levels in the school system later during 2004-2005.

The Winchendon Pubic Schools Administrators Walk-Through Checklist Form consisted of four sections. The first section of the checklist form included general information such as teacher, grade or subject, observer, date, and time. Section two, State and/or Winchendon Learning Standards, had the following items: posted, appear in lesson plans, observed in instruction, and daily agenda posted. The third section, Checking for Understanding, consisted of: reads body language; asks periodic questions, with subdivisions recall questions and comprehension questions; and dipsticking, with subdivisions self-evaluation, direct content check, and non-signals. Section four, Instructional Strategies, included: whole group, small group, cooperative groups, hands-on activities, pairs, individual, centers, lecture, and differentiated instruction. The checklist form also included space for comments.

The second action step in Strategy 5A was to revise walk-through form expectations based on data collected from informal observations, teacher evaluations and district initiatives. According to the interviewees, the administrative team revised the walk-through checklist several times during the period under review. The administrators remarked that the revisions to the walk-through checklist resulted from an examination of the data gleaned from the informal observations and the teacher evaluations. Principals stated that they prepared quarterly reports on the data collected from the walk-throughs and shared the results at the administrative team meetings. In addition, the superintendent commented that he had read all the teacher evaluations prepared by the building administrators. In addition, leadership personnel indicated that during the revisions of the walk-through checklist form, they considered the initiatives in the DTAP and the SIPs.

The superintendent stated that the district had reached “stage three of the walk-through tool.” According to the superintendent, the revisions to the initial administrators’ walk-through checklist form occurred in August 2005 and in June 2006. The representatives of the teachers’ association confirmed the statement of the superintendent as did the review of the various walk-through checklists that the district provided the EQA team.

Furthermore, leadership personnel and some of the teachers stated that the walk-through checklist had expanded into an effectiveness of implementation tool at the elementary level. These interviewees commented about both the Houghton-Mifflin Implementation Rubric Form

and the Everyday Math Implementation Rubric Form used in kindergarten through grade 6 by the principals and the director of curriculum and instruction. Interviewees also mentioned the draft implementation tool for differentiated instruction that the teachers' association had yet to approve or implement.

Action Step number three under Strategy 5A was to review and revise the negotiated teacher evaluation tool and timelines. Administrators mentioned that the district had not accomplished this action step. The school committee members and the superintendent indicated that they hoped to negotiate a new teacher evaluation instrument with timelines when they enter into collective bargaining with the teachers' association in the spring. In addition, the superintendent expressed interest in the Research for Better Teaching (RBT) model.

The fourth action step under this strategy directed the district to use the negotiated evaluation tool to improve teacher performance and student achievement. The superintendent reported the status of this action step as "to be determined." In addition, the superintendent stated, "We really haven't moved into negotiations yet." Furthermore, the administrators commented favorably about potentially using a new teacher evaluation tool to improve instruction as opposed to the current instrument.

Action step 5 was to complete the evaluation of teachers according to the negotiated timelines. The superintendent stated that last year, "Teacher evaluation timelines were a priority for the superintendent." The superintendent's office maintained a list of teachers in each school scheduled for evaluation in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. The superintendent mentioned that all teachers scheduled for evaluations had them completed in 2005-2006, and that he read all of last year's teacher evaluations.

The superintendent reported, "We tweaked the system this year." He also stated that last year he instituted a "goals piece" in the evaluation process. According to the superintendent, he did not like what he saw last year for measurable goals. As a result, administrators participated in a four-day summer institute about evaluations that encouraged principals to use the teacher evaluation system more broadly. The superintendent indicated that he wanted to see more facts in the observations and evaluations, more focus on teacher goals, and more reinforcement of good performances and notes of corrective areas. Other leadership personnel confirmed the statements

of the superintendent about teacher evaluations and timelines. Representatives of the teachers' association stated that they had not received any complaints from teachers relative to unmet teacher evaluation deadlines.

The sixth action step under Strategy 5A was to review IPDP procedures and deadlines. The superintendent stated, "In 2005-2006, the district was not in compliance with this matter." However, the superintendent remarked, "All staff now had them in place." Building principals oversaw the IPDPs and the superintendent reported that he monitored them through status reports provided by the director of instructional services. In late November, the director of instructional services reminded staff about the IPDPs. Principals and teachers confirmed the review of IPDP procedures and deadlines during 2006-2007.

Action step 7 was to connect Individual Professional Development Plans to strengths and weaknesses identified in teacher evaluations and walk-throughs. The superintendent characterized the status of this action step as a work in progress with the administrators. The superintendent referenced two items pertaining to the action step, namely modeling, which appeared as a goal in each of the administrators' evaluations, and goal statements, whereby administrators used last year's evaluations to develop this year's goals. In addition, the superintendent reiterated the statements made about the development and revisions to the walk-through checklists and implementation rubrics. Leadership personnel confirmed the modeling, goals, statements, and connections between the IPDPs, the walk-throughs, and teacher evaluations.

Strategy 5A included three implementation benchmarks. The first was a revised walk-through form. The district had revised the walk-through form twice during the period under review, and the district developed and used the Implementation Rubrics Forms for Houghton Mifflin ELA/reading and Everyday Math at the elementary level.

Implementation benchmark 2 was completed teacher evaluations. According to the superintendent, not all teachers received evaluations in 2004-2005, but all teachers scheduled to receive evaluations in 2005-2006 did so. The principals and the representatives of the teachers' association concurred with the statement of the superintendent.

The third implementation benchmark referred to completed and signed IPDPs. The superintendent indicated that the district had not met the IPDP requirements in 2005-2006. However, the superintendent remarked that the district complied with the IPDP requirements in 2006-2007. Interviewees concurred with the statements of the superintendent.

Strategy 5B: Demonstrate to the community that policies, budgets, and professional practices support improved student performance.

Strategy 5B of the DTAP consists of two action steps and three implementation benchmarks. The first action step was to establish and use protocol to disseminate information about policies, budgets, and professional practices to the appropriate government bodies. During the period under review, the school committee developed a policy manual with the assistance of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the superintendent and the business manager prepared a yearly budget calendar. The school committee members and the superintendent indicated that the district had forwarded copies of the policy manual, the budget calendars, and the proposed school budgets to the appropriate town officials.

According to the superintendent, only three of the scheduled meetings with town officials occurred in 2006-2007 Also, the school committee members and the superintendent commented that the "cancellations came from the town side." Although the school committee and the superintendent talked about attempts to engage town officials in discussions on district and municipal issues, policies and practices, such meetings rarely happened. One example cited involved the school budget that consisted of some joint discussions during spring 2006 rather than "ongoing conversations."

During the early stages of the period under review, the superintendent reported that the business manager and he met bimonthly with the town manager and town accountant. According to the superintendent, these four individuals no longer met bimonthly. In addition, the superintendent commented that during the latter stages of the period under review, he met only sporadically with the town manager. The town manager and the town accountant confirmed the infrequent meetings with the superintendent and/or the business manager. Both the superintendent and the town manager stated that, by and large, the communications between them now did not involve face-to-face meetings, but consisted of e-mails, letters, or telephone calls.

The second action step under Strategy 5B was to establish and use protocol to disseminate supporting data and rationale to the community at large. The superintendent stated that the district had not established a protocol. As part of the district budget development and review process, the superintendent and the business manager mentioned that the district had prepared a budget calendar for appropriate school personnel, town officials, interested parties, and the public at large. In addition, the superintendent presented the proposed budget to the school committee at one of its meetings. Later, the school committee conducted budget review sessions. The superintendent stated that the presentation of the proposed district budget and the budget review sessions had coverage via cable television, the *Winchendon Courier*, *The Gardner News*, and the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*.

The superintendent indicated that prior to 2005-2006, the school committee, finance committee and board of selectmen met quarterly and then on a monthly basis in the spring to share budget information with the town side. However, interviewees reported that during 2005-2006 strained relationships existed between district officials and town officials. Examples cited, among other things, included "mistrust," "too much animosity," and a "lack of respect."

The first implementation benchmark under Strategy 5B was number of presentations at community meetings. The school committee and the superintendent mentioned that for 2005-2006 the leadership personnel prepared a "needs budget" based upon the initiatives in the DTAP and the goals in the SIPs. They also commented that for 2006-2007 the administrators developed three budgets: 1) "a level services budget," 2) "a budget with additional support services," and 3) "a budget with more additional support services." Besides the presentation of the budget and review sessions at open school committee meetings, the superintendent held budget sessions during 2005-2006 at each of the schools, and before such groups as the Kiwanis and the Council on Aging. He stated that he periodically did radio interviews on school issues.

Implementation benchmark number two consisted of the number of written communications. One example cited involved a "District's Corner" article in the local newspaper dated November 10, 2006 on School Improvement Plans. The superintendent remarked that he regularly wrote articles for the newspapers along with letters to the editor. Interviewees confirmed the statement of the superintendent. Another example involved the examination of documents made available

to the EQA team, which showed that at the superintendent's advisory council meeting on April 26, 2006, the agenda included such items as e-mail to parents (notices) and update website. Leadership personnel commented about all the information available to interested individuals included on both the district and individual school websites. Administrators indicated that, from time to time at administrative team meetings, discussions took place about ways to continue to improve the communications between the schools and the community.

The third implementation benchmark focused on "Survey school committee, parents, and constituents in regard to quality of communications (information received)." The superintendent commented that he had both a Teacher Advisory Council and a Parent Advisory Council. According to the superintendent, the Teacher Advisory Council consisted of two to three teachers per school and met monthly in 2005-2006 and every two to three months in 2006-2007. The agendas targeted such items as local educational issues, communications, and state (MCAS) and federal (NCLB) mandates.

The Parent Advisory Council included at least two parents from each school. The council met monthly during 2005-2006 and approximately every two to three months in 2006-2007. The agendas consisted of a wide variety of issues pertaining to education such as school finances, communications, website information, and the DTAP. Some school committee members, administrators, and teachers mentioned that both the Teacher Advisory Council and the Parent Advisory Council provided the superintendent with a sounding board for potential school initiatives.

The superintendent commented that one of the six general areas on which the school committee evaluated him was communications and community relations. A review of the superintendent's evaluation confirmed this statement.

<u>Strategy 5C: Develop meeting protocols/guidelines for joint meetings between the School Committee, Finance Committee, Selectmen, and community.</u>

Five action steps and two implementation benchmarks comprise Strategy 5C. The initial action step in this strategy was to identify a consultant to bring committees together. The school committee members and the superintendent reported that the district contracted with a consultant to assist the superintendent to bring the school committee, board of selectmen, and finance

committee together. Furthermore, the district received assistance from a Department of Education consultant who helped with the DTAP.

The second action step was to develop a community vision and mission statement for Winchendon. When questioned about a written vision statement for the district, the superintendent commented that it did not exist and needed to be developed. Furthermore, interviewees pointed to the DTAP as the vision of the school system.

The school system had a mission statement posted on the district website. It stated, "The mission of the Winchendon Public Schools is to enlighten, motivate, and educate all who pass through our doors. We will provide a safe environment that promotes an appreciation of diversity and preparedness for the future."

The third action step under Strategy 5C directed the district to recommend the development of common protocols/guidelines for joint meetings between the school committee, finance committee, and selectmen. The superintendent reported that the "common protocols did not go forward." In addition, the superintendent stated that he tried to do it, but that it did not move forward on a vote of the joint committee. The school committee members corroborated the statements of the superintendent.

Action step 4 was to schedule joint meetings. The superintendent and the town manager indicated that the school committee, the board of selectmen, and the finance committee met quarterly in accordance with the provisions in the town charter. They mentioned that last year the three committees met, not always together, on a monthly basis during the budget review process (February through May).

The fifth action step in this strategy was to advertise joint meetings on the community calendar. The school committee members and the superintendent indicated that the community calendar, which the town maintained through its website, advertised the joint meetings. Town officials confirmed the advertisement of the joint meetings on the community calendar.

The first implementation benchmark under Strategy 5C referred to attendance at meetings. The superintendent characterized the attendance at the joint meetings last year as "good." The superintendent stated that in 2006-2007 attendance "continued to be good," but that the meetings

only involved two committees. School committee members agreed that, overall, “attendance was good.”

Implementation benchmark 2 was written meeting evaluations. The superintendent commented about the written evaluations that the school committee members and he had prepared of the school committee meetings held twice a month during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. When questioned about the written evaluations of the joint committee meetings, the superintendent responded that evaluations did not exist.

Strategy 5D: Provide training and support for district leadership (administrators, superintendent, school committee, business manager) including supervision, evaluation, leadership skills, hiring and retention of quality personnel, and policy.

Strategy 5D of the DTAP consists of six action steps, one implementation benchmark, and one outcome benchmark. The initial action step in this section was to provide ongoing training for new administrators in Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT I). The superintendent and the other leadership personnel reported that in 2004-2005 the district provided all administrators with training in Research for Better Teaching methods. He acknowledged that the DOE had provided funds for two coaches to assist the two new principals. In addition, the superintendent indicated that any new administrator hired by the district needed to participate in the OAT I course.

The second action step directed the district to identify professional development needs of administrators. Administrators reported that in 2006-2007 they began participating in the National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) training program. The administrators involved in the NISL program included the superintendent, the director of curriculum and instruction, the director of instructional services, the two elementary school principals, and the high school assistant principal.

The superintendent commented that the district contracted with a DTAP partner, EDC, to assist the administrators with the effectiveness of implementation tools and to assist the district with the development of a three-year professional development plan for administrators. Central office administrators confirmed the work of the DTAP partner.

The third action step in Strategy 5D dealt with identification of professional development needs for the school committee. According to the superintendent, the district hired a consultant to work with the school committee, and an individual from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) reviewed with school committee members their roles and responsibilities. He indicated that the MASC representative explained the expectations of school committee members. The superintendent stated that all new school committee members had attended the MASC workshop Charting a New Course. School committee members confirmed the professional development provided by MASC and the consultant. Furthermore, the school committee members acknowledged the information that the superintendent provided them on matters pertaining to the Education Reform Act and current educational issues.

Action step 4 was to develop a three year professional development plan for district leadership. The superintendent indicated that the administrative team, in consultation with its DTAP partner EDC, had begun the process to develop a three-year professional development plan for administrators. Leadership personnel remarked that they had the opportunity to provide input into the development of the administrators' multi-year professional development plan.

The fifth action step under Strategy 5D was to develop an induction/mentoring plan for new administrators. The superintendent stated that the district did not have a formal induction/mentoring plan for administrators and that one needed to be developed. According to the superintendent, he served as the mentor for the new principals and new the central office administrators. The new administrators confirmed that the superintendent served as their mentor.

The superintendent mentioned that he met informally with each principal monthly in his/her school. Principals acknowledged the monthly meeting with the superintendent in their schools. Furthermore, the superintendent stated that the district took a proactive step in contracting with a retired former high school principal from the region to administer and lead the high school for 18 months and to mentor the high school assistant principal who the district designated to be the Murdock Middle/High School principal in 2007-2008.

In addition, the superintendent reported that through the district's involvement with the NAWWG, principals and central office administrators had the opportunity to participate in the

job-alike structures recently established. Some administrators acknowledged an awareness of this opportunity.

The sixth action step was to develop incentives to retain quality personnel (include salaries of other districts). The superintendent commented that no changes occurred in the teachers' contract yet. He also mentioned the restructuring of the paraprofessional contract "in order to get advanced training or a degree." In addition, the superintendent acknowledged the restructuring of the administrators' contracts. Furthermore, the superintendent expressed concerns about "restrictions in contracts due to future financial challenges." Both the superintendent and the business manager reported that they had examined the contracts of school employee associations/unions in other districts.

The one implementation benchmark for Strategy 5D stated, "Survey staff of building and district leadership, supervision and climate." The superintendent reported, "The survey has not been done."

The single outcome benchmark for this strategy was, "The tenure of administrators will be longer." The superintendent reported, "I'm working on it. I've got a really good team." He provided some history about the turnover of administrators in the district since the 2000-2001 school year.

Strategy 5E: Analyze the capacity of the district's organizational structure to implement the district's turnaround plan to improve student performance.

Strategy 5E includes four action steps and two implementation benchmarks. The initial action step in this section was to conduct organizational needs assessment. The superintendent mentioned that the Education Development Center had assisted the district in this area. He commented that the DTAP partner "continues to do much of the leg work" especially in ELA and math, and that EDC provided help with the effectiveness of implementation tools and the draft differentiated instruction instrument. Two of the other central office administrators concurred with the statements of the superintendent about the DTAP partner.

The second action step was to assess the capacity of the current organizational structure to reflect on and refine instructional practices (asset mapping). The superintendent stated that the district

had not done a formal assessment of this matter. When questioned, the other administrators mentioned that they had no knowledge of any formal assessment of the organizational structure to address asset mapping during the period under review.

Action step 3 was to develop an organizational structure plan that meets the identified needs. In response to this action step the superintendent said, "The district had no plan yet."

The fourth action step was to make necessary changes to the organizational structure to implement the identified needs. The superintendent commented about assigning a person to the position of director of curriculum and instruction, with revised responsibilities, two years ago. He also mentioned the revision to the duties and responsibilities of the director of instructional services. In addition, the superintendent stated that even though the district had either developed some new or revised some previous job descriptions, he anticipated having job descriptions for all school employee positions by the end of 2006-2007. Both the director of curriculum and instruction and the director of instructional services confirmed the statements of the superintendent about the revisions to their job descriptions.

The first implementation benchmark under Strategy 5E consisted of documentation of asset mapping aligned with identified needs. The superintendent said "Not done" regarding this implementation benchmark.

Implementation benchmark 2 was documentation of the implementation of the plan. The response given by the superintendent to this implementation benchmark was "Not done, no mapping plan yet."

Strategy 5F: Oversight and accountability of the district's turnaround plan.

Strategy 5F concerns the overall implementation of the DTAP. In the Winchendon Public School District Turnaround Plan Update on the Status of Implementation, DOE update June 2006, the final sentence stated, "Overall 86 out of the 145 action steps (59 percent) have been completed and are ongoing in the Winchendon Public Schools." Nevertheless, the District Turnaround Plan, Winchendon Public Schools, updated December 20, 2006, that the district provided to the EQA team members had no statements about the status of 47 of the revised 143 action steps (33 percent).

Interviewees repeatedly reported that the district needed to complete or initiate some action steps. Examples included improving the relationships between the school committee and the town boards/committees; providing adequate resources to give students a quality education; training staff to use data to improve student achievement; and developing strategies to keep students in the school system as opposed to enrolling elsewhere. Other needs cited included developing a written district vision statement; preparing new and revising former job descriptions; writing curriculum guides for all subject areas at the secondary level; restoring staff, programs and services previously eliminated; and addressing asset mapping.

Even with a significant investment in a focus on implementing the DTAP, the district did not meet its own expected deadlines. The district has a small central office staff with many responsibilities. There has been administrative turnover, and although the superintendent mentored new administrators, the district had yet to develop a formal induction/mentoring program for new administrators. The district has more work to do in the area of ensuring certified teachers for content areas, providing professional development in all key areas of need, and making effective use of supervision and evaluation tools for successful DTAP implementation. Frequently, short-range timelines for change actions (three to six months) stretched out to two years. Nonetheless, the district had made progress by the time of the EQA team visit. Some areas of the DTAP required extensive preparatory work, such as the planning to assess existing programs, and investigating and implementing new and innovative or expanded programming. The interdependence between action steps in different stages of completion slowed some of the plans in the DTAP. For instance, embedding of new instructional practices required a multi-pronged approach such as aligning student and teacher needs with professional development and the supervision and evaluation of classroom practices. In other areas of the DTAP, a lack of consistency of vision among the three schools of the district affected the planning effort, such as developing a consistent student placement model for effective access to all classes and programs. Finally, political impediments such as the override failures of the past two years and longstanding misunderstandings between some town boards, the school board, and authorities took some initiatives off track. Despite the challenges and setbacks, in interviews the EQA team observed a strong work ethic among school officials, staff, and school committee members and motivation to improve instruction in the district and to meet the needs of all students.

Strategy 5F of the DTAP contained six action steps and two implementation benchmarks. The first action step was to develop a procedure to implement the District Improvement Plan. Interviewees considered the District Turnaround Plan to be the District Improvement Plan. The school committee members, the superintendent, the other administrators, and both the teachers and parents in focus groups acknowledged the School Improvement Plans and their alignment with the DTAP. The superintendent stated that the district PIM team reviewed the DTAP on a monthly basis and reported the progress made on "all parts of it." Leadership personnel confirmed the statement of the superintendent about the DTAP monthly progress reports.

The second action step was to monitor the implementation of the plan. The superintendent indicated the district PIM team monitored the DTAP and provided its members with monthly progress reports. Administrators confirmed the periodic reports on the DTAP. The district also prepared three Winchendon Public Schools District Turnaround Plan Updates, dated June 16, 2005, November 22, 2005, and October 30, 2006. In addition, the district prepared a report entitled Winchendon Public Schools District Turnaround Plan Update on Status of Implementation, DOE Update June 2006. The district provided the EQA team with a copy of each of these four reports.

Action step 3 in this strategy directed the district to revise and adjust implementation strategies. According to the administrators, the district used three criteria to prioritize DTAP activities. The three criteria were: 1) "Does it advance student achievement?"; 2) "Is it a NCLB or mandate by law?"; and 3) "Is it a new initiative that will add to what is already on the platter?". A review of the agenda for the district PIM meeting on December 21, 2005 focused on these three criteria to prioritize DTAP activities. Furthermore, leadership personnel commented that the revisions and adjustments to the implementation strategies "was an ongoing process."

The fourth action step was to designate a district PIM team to review the effectiveness of the plan. The superintendent reported that the district PIM team, comprised of the superintendent, a representative from each of the three major town boards/committees, a DOE representative, a central office administrator, a principal, teacher and parent representatives from each of the schools, and community representatives, met monthly to review the effectiveness of the DTAP. The superintendent commented that "This continues to be an ongoing process." The school

committee members confirmed that the district PIM team met every month to assess the effectiveness of each part of the DTAP.

Action step 5 in Strategy 5F was to revise and adjust strategies. The comments made by the superintendent about this action step included “It’s ongoing,” “There have been some cross-outs,” and “The document is evolving.” Other leadership personnel supported the statements of the superintendent about the changes in strategies.

The sixth action step in this section was to notify those people affected by the change(s). Besides making the district PIM team members aware of the revisions and adjustments to the strategies in the DTAP, the superintendent stated that he shared the information with his administrative team, who in turn shared the information with appropriate stakeholders. Administrators confirmed having received this information periodically throughout the year. The superintendent further stated that he also prepared regular reports for the school committee on modifications made to the DTAP and progress made on the action steps and benchmarks. The reports on the DTAP made at school committee meetings had coverage on cable television and by the local newspapers.

The first implementation benchmark in this section referred to percentage of benchmarks met. The superintendent stated that the district had prepared a report that included the percentage of benchmarks met, which he indicated he would provide the EQA team. The report Winchendon Public School District Turnaround Plan Update on the Status of Implementation, DOE Update June 2006 included a section (pages 11-13) that showed the number and percentage of action steps completed under each initiative and strategy. The final sentence in this report stated, “Overall 86 out of 145 action steps (59 percent) have been completed and are ongoing in the Winchendon Public Schools” (p.13). Nevertheless, the District Turnaround Plan updated December 20, 2006 that the district provided to the EQA team members had 47 of the 143 action steps (33 percent) with no statements about the status of the action steps.

The second implementation benchmark under Strategy 5F had to do with revisions of the plan produced. The superintendent said of this benchmark, “It’s an ongoing process to revise it.” The other administrators had similar responses to that of the superintendent about the benchmark**.**

Conclusion

The EQA team determined that the district has created some structure from turmoil and conflict. The turnaround process and the leadership's efforts have created a culture of "Winchendon working together" within the district and a new awareness of education reform practices. The district has models within the district upon which to build. Two schools made adequate yearly progress for the past two years.

In spite of improvements, Winchendon Public Schools has not demonstrated its capacity to implement a turnaround plan and adequately improve student achievement within the timeframe examined. The district did not make AYP in the past two years, with overall flat student achievement and half the students not scoring at a proficient level on the MCAS tests. Issues concerning the district's capacity to make systemic improvements continue to exist, as indicated by the following three general findings.

General Finding I. Gearing up for change has been time and energy consuming for Winchendon Public Schools. The district has had to spend a great deal of time creating a functional operational system, improved working environment, and very basic organizational structures, and this has been a considerable effort. With a small administrative team that has developed a new "esprit de corps," the district has created an updated policy manual, new policies, an organizational chart, a curriculum framework, an emerging system of assessments, and instructional monitoring tools. The use of data is no longer absent in the district, and the district has used data in informed ways in developing SIPs using the PIM process, in elementary curriculum revisions, and in developing assessments. Even as the district experienced a simultaneous growth of awareness of education reform practices, student achievement has remained flat over two years.

General Finding II. Efforts have been characterized by fragmented activities rather than strategic and systemic implementation. The underperforming label has reportedly increased the pressure on the district to complete action steps to show progress in implementing its plan. In some cases the EQA team determined that completing the action steps did not address the goal of the initiative. The district has not mastered the use of assessment data to determine priorities, and the means and frequency of using data to make decisions are inconsistent. The district was still

building its bevy of assessments and lacked a sustained use of them for all grades K-12, and the district has not yet reached the point of using assessment data to create a sound professional development strategy, to create a grades 7-12 curriculum, to modify instruction, to make adjustments to time on learning, to use in personnel evaluations, or to provide effective support programs. The depth and effectiveness of planning, instruction, and use of assessments varied among schools and among teacher teams in two of the schools. There has been a focus on process, and in some cases the discussion has not translated into embedded practices that directly impact student learning to improve achievement in ELA and math. District improvement efforts have been fragmented by the attempt to address a myriad of action steps rather than a manageable set of priorities.

General Finding III. Mistrust and a history of unfortunate events have had a draining legacy. Strained relationships between the district and town and an inadequate budget have been serious distractions and formidable impediments to improvement efforts. The district has cut 24 positions, Title I services, MCAS support, and other academic support classes. There was an increasing reliance on grants, and all professional development had to be funded from supplementary funding because the local budget had no allotment. Basic materials and supplies were level funded even as costs rose, and the district was unable to provide updated and aligned curriculum materials for upper grade levels and support programs for all students in need. Given the current situation, the district's progress is still tenuous, and systemic and sustained improvement is uncertain.

Appendix A: Analysis of MCAS Student Achievement Data

The EQA's analysis of student achievement data focuses on the MCAS test results for 2003-2006, with primary attention paid to the 2006 MCAS tests. This analysis is framed by the following five essential questions:

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

In order to respond accurately to these questions, the EQA subjected the most current state and district MCAS test results to a series of analyses to determine whether there were differences between the mean results of district students and those of students statewide or among student subgroups within the district. Descriptive analyses of the 2006 MCAS test results revealed differences between the achievement of students in Winchendon and the average scores of students in Massachusetts.

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

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

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

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

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

Achievement

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

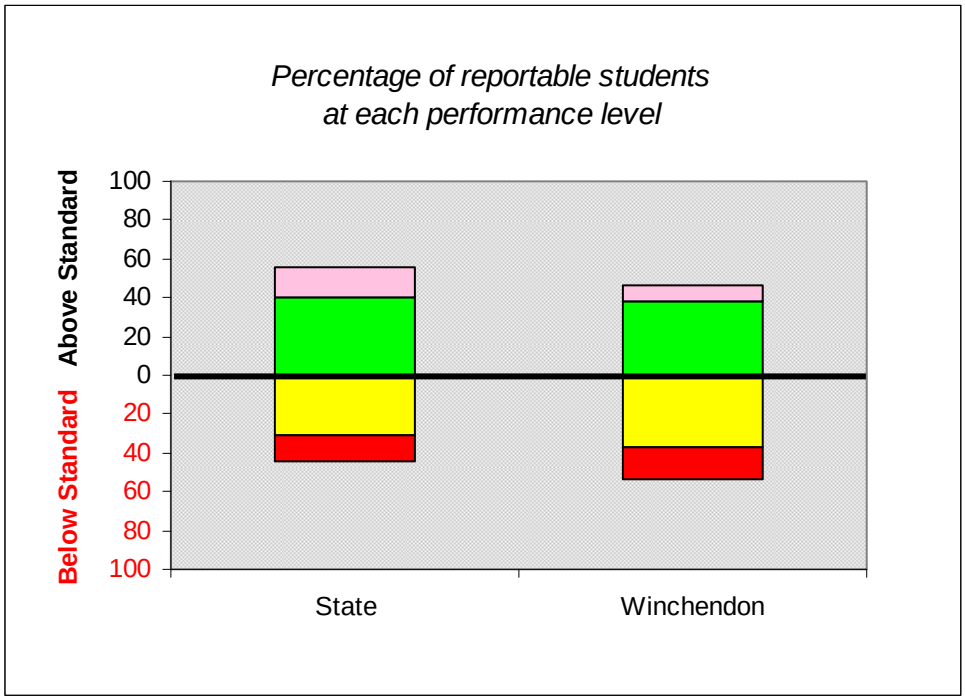
Findings:

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

- Winchendon's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 74 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points less than that statewide. Winchendon's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 26 PI points.

- In 2006, Winchendon's proficiency gap in ELA was 19 PI points, three PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of more than two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Winchendon's proficiency gap in math was 34 PI points in 2006, six PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than four PI points per year to achieve AYP. Winchendon's proficiency gap in STE was 31 PI points, two PI points wider than that statewide.

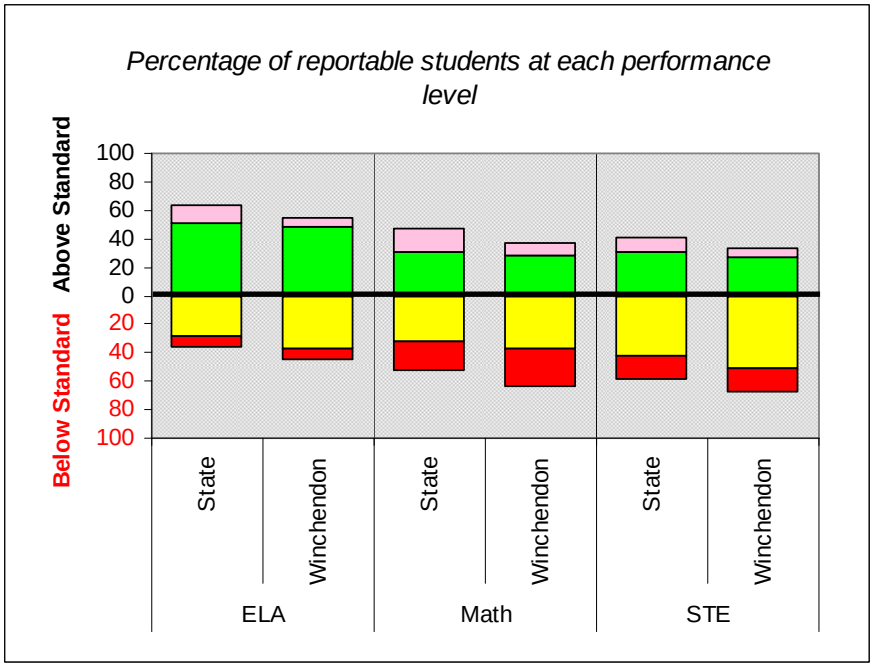
Figure/Table 1: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2006



	State	Winchendon
Advanced	15	8
Proficient	41	39
Needs Improvement	31	37
Warning/Failing	14	17
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	47
Average Proficiency Index (API)	78.3	73.6

In 2006, 47 percent of Winchendon students attained proficiency on the MCAS tests overall, nine percentage points less than that statewide. Seventeen percent of Winchendon students scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category, three percentage points more than that statewide. Winchendon's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 74 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points less than that statewide. Winchendon's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 26 PI points.

Figure/Table 2: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Subject, 2006



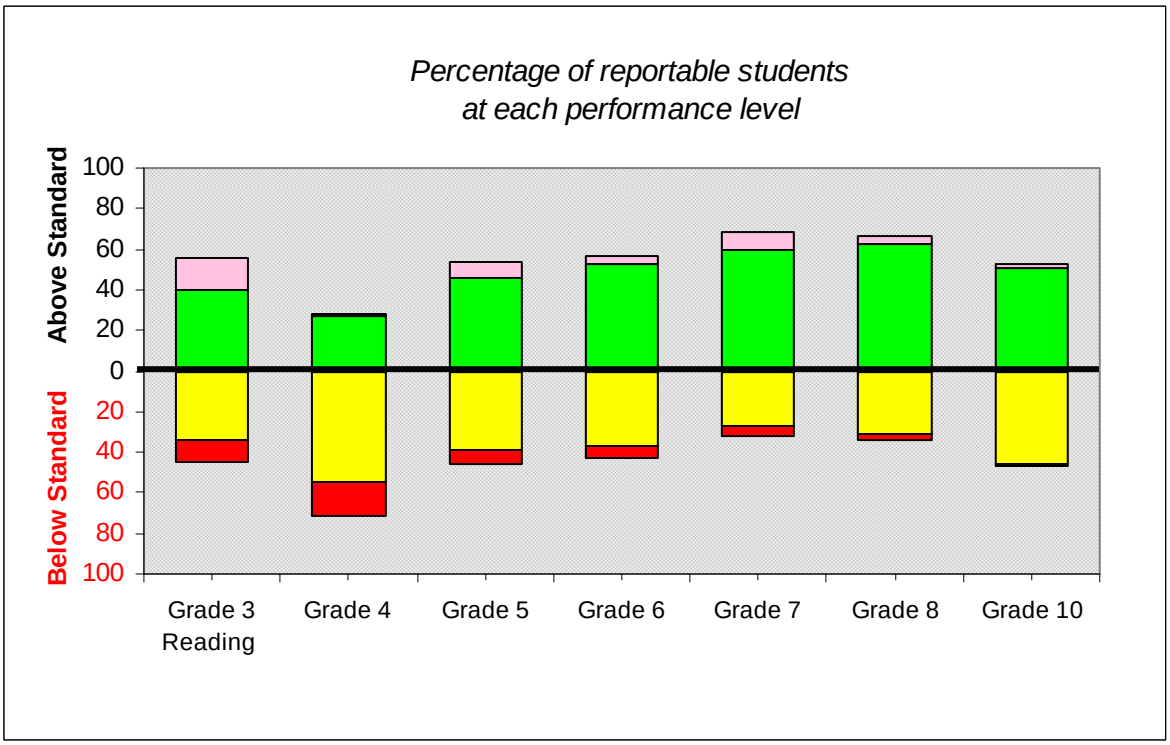
	ELA		Math		STE	
	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon
Advanced	13	7	17	9	10	7
Proficient	51	49	30	28	31	26
Needs Improvement	29	38	33	37	42	51
Warning/Failing	7	7	20	26	17	16
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	56	47	37	41	33
Proficiency Index (PI)	84.3	81.2	72.3	66	71.4	68.6

In 2006, achievement in English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE) was lower in Winchendon than statewide. In Winchendon, 56 percent of students attained proficiency in ELA, compared to 64 percent statewide; 37 percent attained proficiency in math, compared to 47 percent statewide; and 33 percent attained proficiency in STE, compared to 41 percent statewide.

Winchendon students had stronger performance on the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA than in math and STE. The proficiency index for Winchendon students in ELA was 81 PI points; in math it was 66 PI points; and in STE it was 69 PI points. These compare to the statewide figures of 84, 72, and 71 PI points, respectively.

The proficiency gap in 2006 for Winchendon students was 19 PI points in ELA, 34 PI points in math, and 31 PI points in STE. These compare to the statewide figures of 16, 28, and 29 PI points, respectively. Winchendon's proficiency gaps would require an average annual improvement of more than two PI points in ELA and more than four PI points in math to meet AYP.

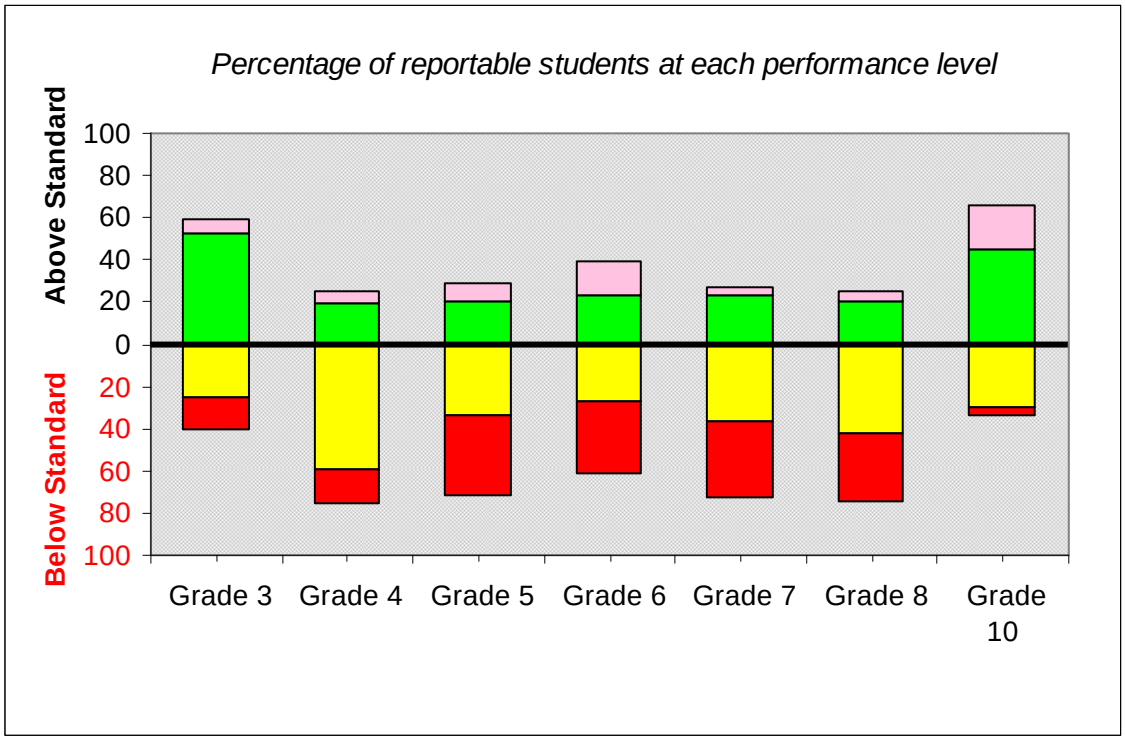
Figure/Table 3: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	16	1	8	5	9	4	2
Proficient	40	28	45	52	60	63	51
Needs Improvement	34	55	39	37	27	31	46
Warning/Failing	11	17	7	6	5	2	1
Percent Attaining Proficiency	56	29	53	57	69	67	53

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining proficiency in 2006 in ELA varied somewhat by grade level, ranging from a low of 29 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 69 percent of grade 7 students. ELA proficiency at grade 4 was substantially less than at other grades.

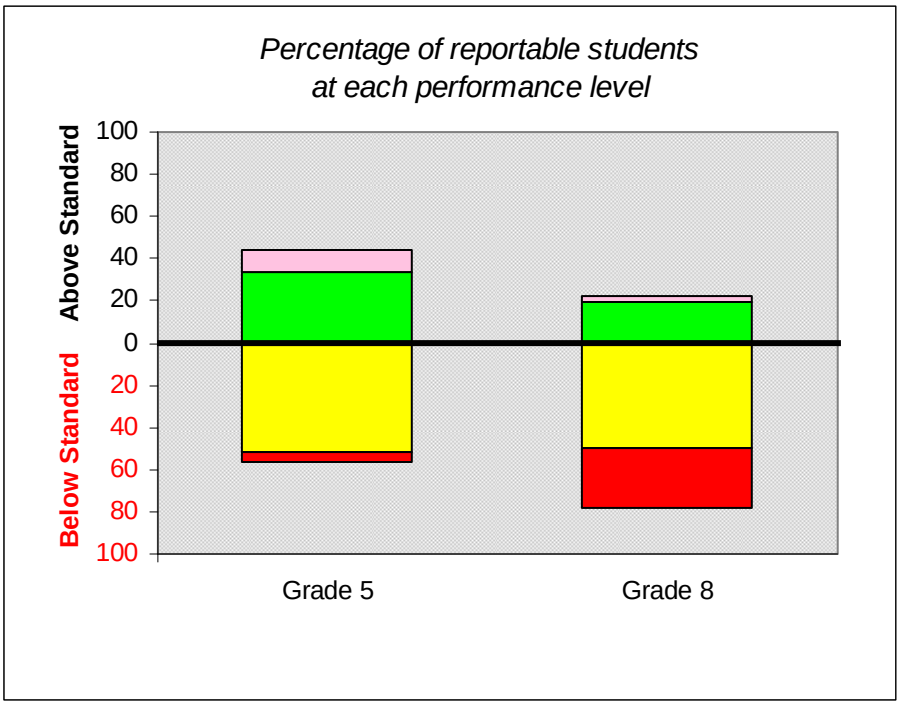
Figure/Table 4: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Advanced	7	6	9	15	3	5	21
Proficient	53	19	20	24	24	21	45
Needs Improvement	26	59	34	27	36	42	30
Warning/Failing	15	16	37	34	36	32	4
Percent Attaining Proficiency	60	25	29	39	27	26	66

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining proficiency in 2006 in math varied more by grade level than in ELA, ranging from a low of 25 percent of grade 4 students to a high of 66 percent of grade 10 students. Math proficiency at grades 3 and 10 was substantially greater than at other grades.

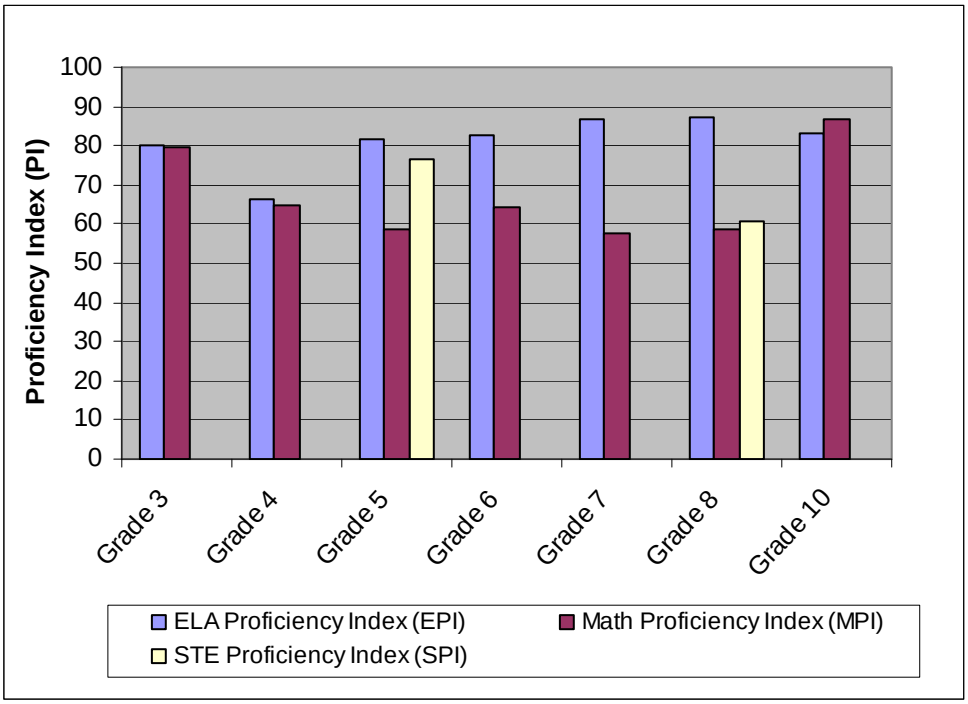
Figure/Table 5: Student MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Test Performance, by Grade, 2006



	Grade 5	Grade 8
Advanced	10	3
Proficient	34	19
Needs Improvement	52	50
Warning/Failing	5	28
Percent Attaining Proficiency	44	22

In Winchendon in 2006, 44 percent of grade 5 students attained proficiency in STE, and 22 percent of grade 8 students did so.

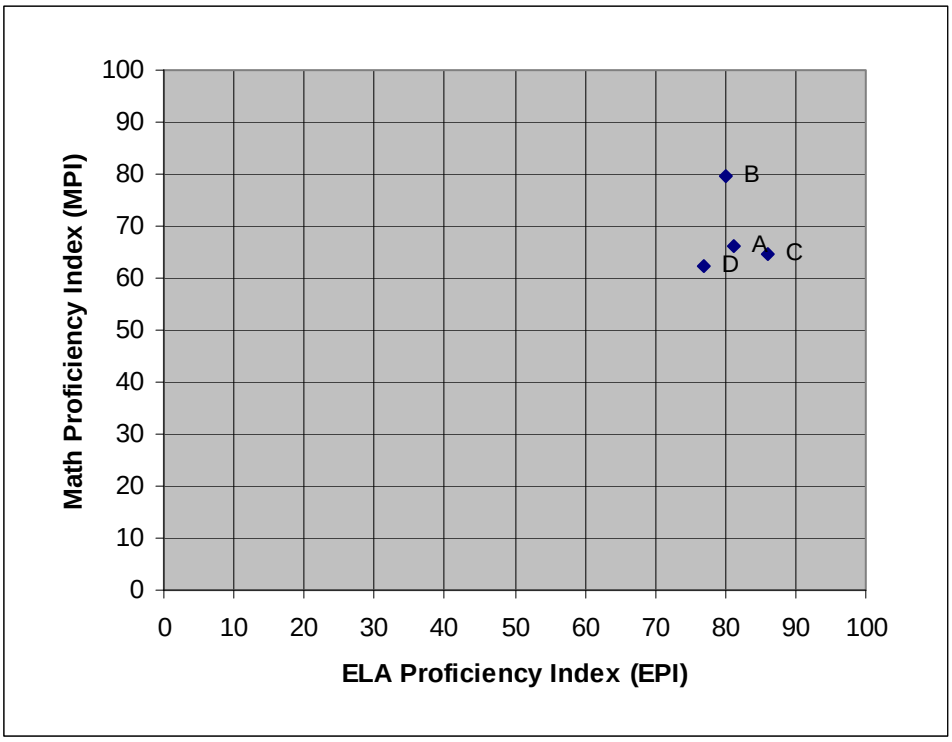
Figure/Table 6: Student MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Grade and Subject, 2006



	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
ELA Proficiency Index (EPI)	80.1	66.5	81.5	82.6	86.6	87.0	83.1
Math Proficiency Index (MPI)	79.8	64.6	58.9	64.5	57.4	58.8	86.9
STE Proficiency Index (SPI)			76.7			60.5	

By grade, Winchendon's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of 13 PI points at grades 7 and 8 to a high of 33 PI points at grade 4. Winchendon's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 13 PI points at grade 10 to a high of 43 PI points at grade 7. Winchendon's STE proficiency gap was 23 PI points at grade 5 and 39 PI points at grade 8. Proficiency levels in ELA and math were most comparable at grades 3, 4, and 10; at other grades proficiency in ELA was much stronger than in math.

Figure/Table 7: Student MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index, by School, 2006



		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Winchendon	81.2	66.0	1,701
B	Memorial Elementary	80.1	79.8	262
C	Murdock Middle/High	86.0	64.5	721
D	Toy Town Elementary	76.8	62.5	718

Winchendon's ELA proficiency gap in 2006 ranged from a low of 14 PI points at Murdock Middle/High School to a high of 23 PI points at Toy Town Elementary School. Winchendon's math proficiency gap ranged from a low of 20 PI points at Memorial Elementary School to a high of 37 PI points at Toy Town Elementary School.

Equity of Achievement

Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

Findings:

- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Winchendon students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Winchendon in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 28 PI points in ELA and 29 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

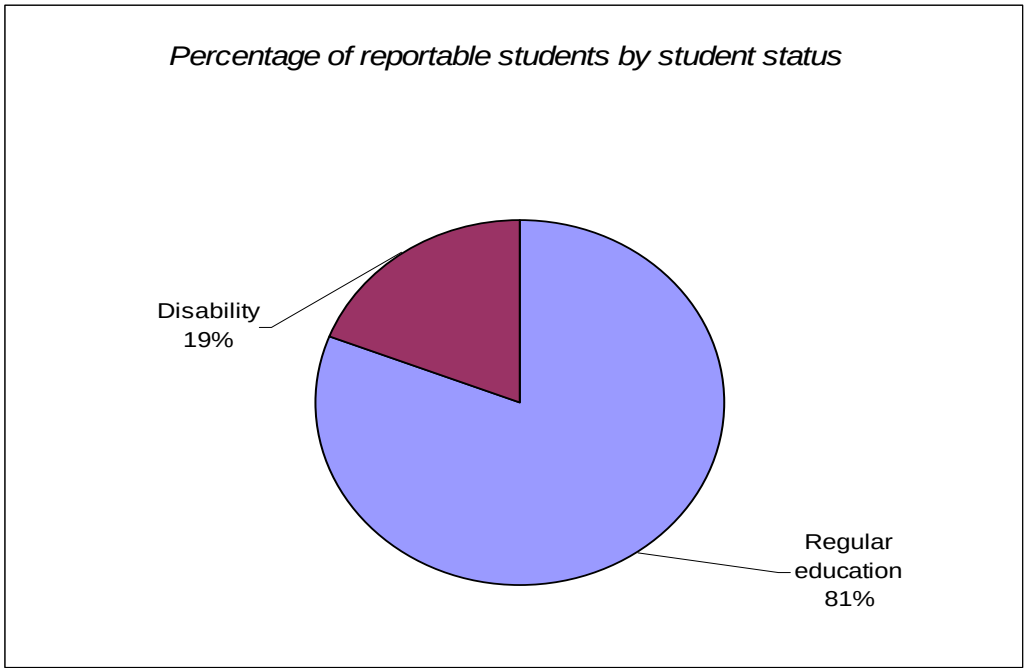
- The proficiency gaps in Winchendon in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Twelve percent of students with disabilities and 36 percent of low-income students attained overall proficiency .

- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students. Fifty-three percent of regular education students and 50 percent of non low-income students attained overall proficiency.

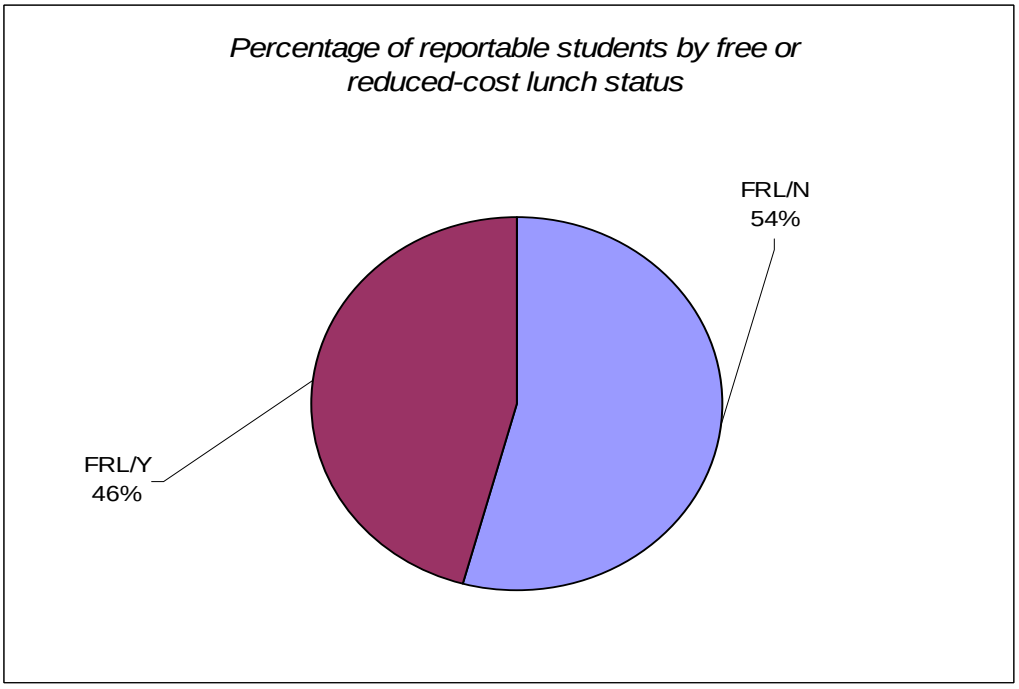
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. Forty-eight percent of female students and 45 percent of male students attained overall proficiency.

Figures 8 A-B/Table 8: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2006

A.



B.

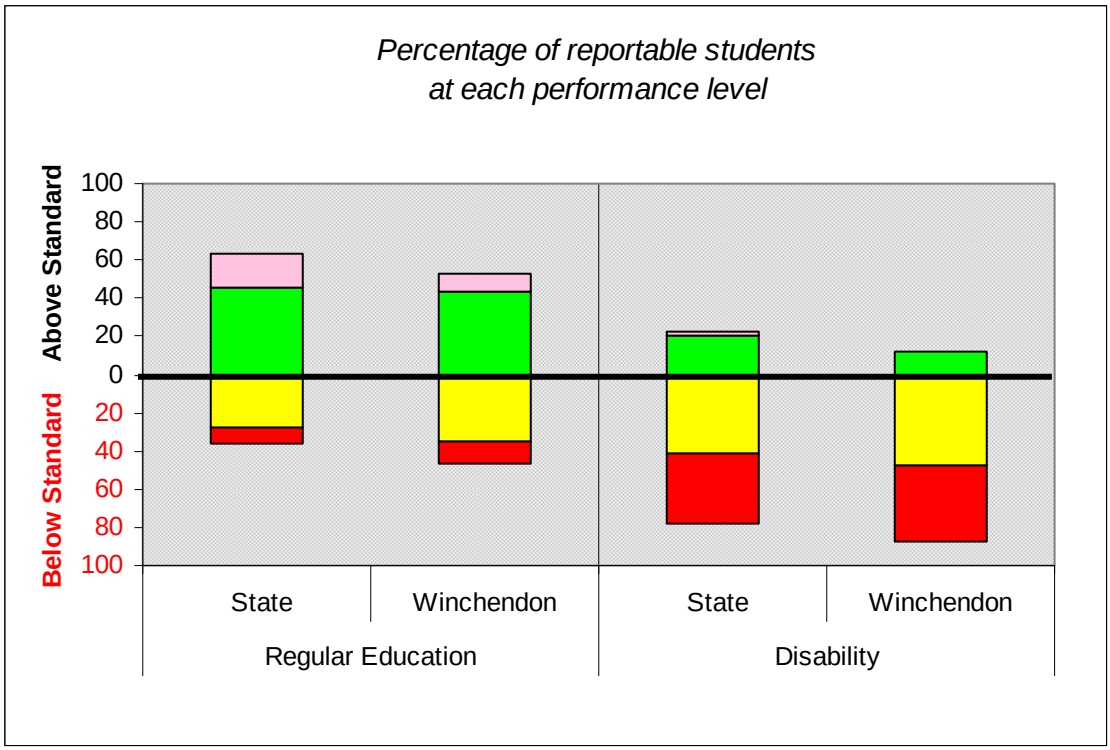


Note: These data include students in the tested grades only.

	Subgroup	Number of Students
Student status	Regular education	706
	Disability	166
Free or reduced-cost lunch status	FRL/N	621
	FRL/Y	525

Of the students in the tested grades in 2006 in Winchendon, the percentage of students with disabilities was 19 percent, and the percentage of students participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program was 46 percent.

Figure/Table 9: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Student Status Subgroup, 2006

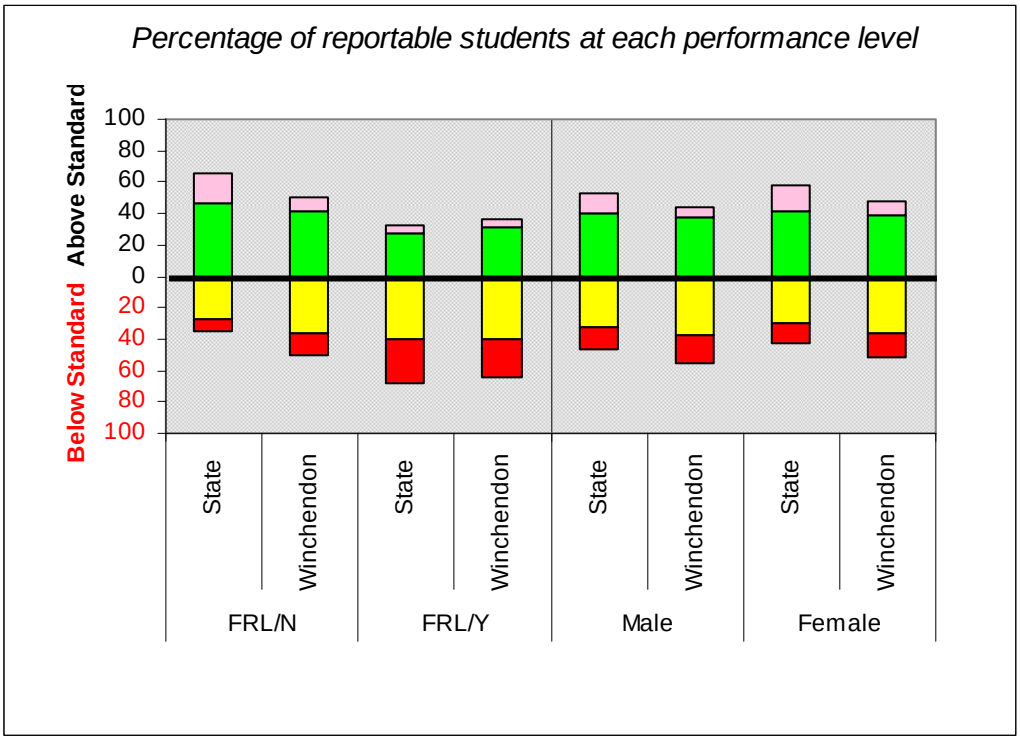


	Regular Education		Disability	
	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon
Advanced	18	9	2	0
Proficient	46	44	20	12
Needs Improvement	28	35	41	47
Warning/Failing	8	12	36	40
Percent Attaining Proficiency	64	53	22	12
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.0	78.4	55.9	50.3

In Winchendon in 2006, the proficiency rate of regular education students was more than four times greater than that of students with disabilities. Fifty-three percent of regular education students and 12 percent of students with disabilities attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests.

Winchendon's average proficiency gap in 2006 was 22 PI points for regular education students and 50 PI points for students with disabilities. The average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities was 28 PI points.

Figure/Table 10: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Socioeconomic Status and Gender Subgroups, 2006

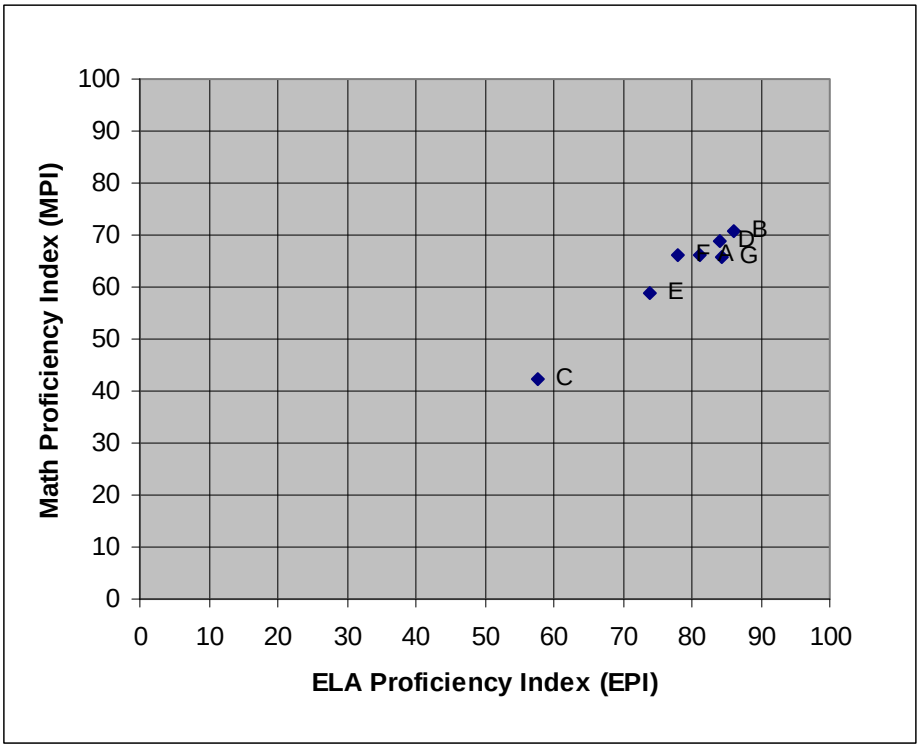


	FRL/N		FRL/Y		Male		Female	
	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon	State	Winchendon
Advanced	19	9	5	4	13	7	17	9
Proficient	46	41	27	32	40	38	41	39
Needs Improvement	27	36	40	40	32	37	29	37
Warning/Failing	8	14	27	24	15	18	13	15
Percent Attaining Proficiency	65	50	32	36	53	45	58	48
Average Proficiency Index (API)	84.5	76.5	63.5	66.4	77.1	72.2	79.6	75.0

In Winchendon in 2006, 36 percent of low-income (FRL/Y) students attained overall proficiency on the MCAS tests, compared to 50 percent of non low-income (FRL/N) students. The average proficiency gap was 34 PI points for low-income students and 23 PI points for non low-income students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was 11 PI points.

Performance on the 2006 MCAS tests was fairly comparable for male and female students in Winchendon, with 48 percent of female students and 45 percent of male students attaining overall proficiency. The average proficiency gap was 25 PI points for female students and 28 PI points for male students, and the average performance gap between the two subgroups was three PI points.

Figure/Table 11: Student MCAS ELA Proficiency Index vs. Math Proficiency Index, by Subgroup, 2006

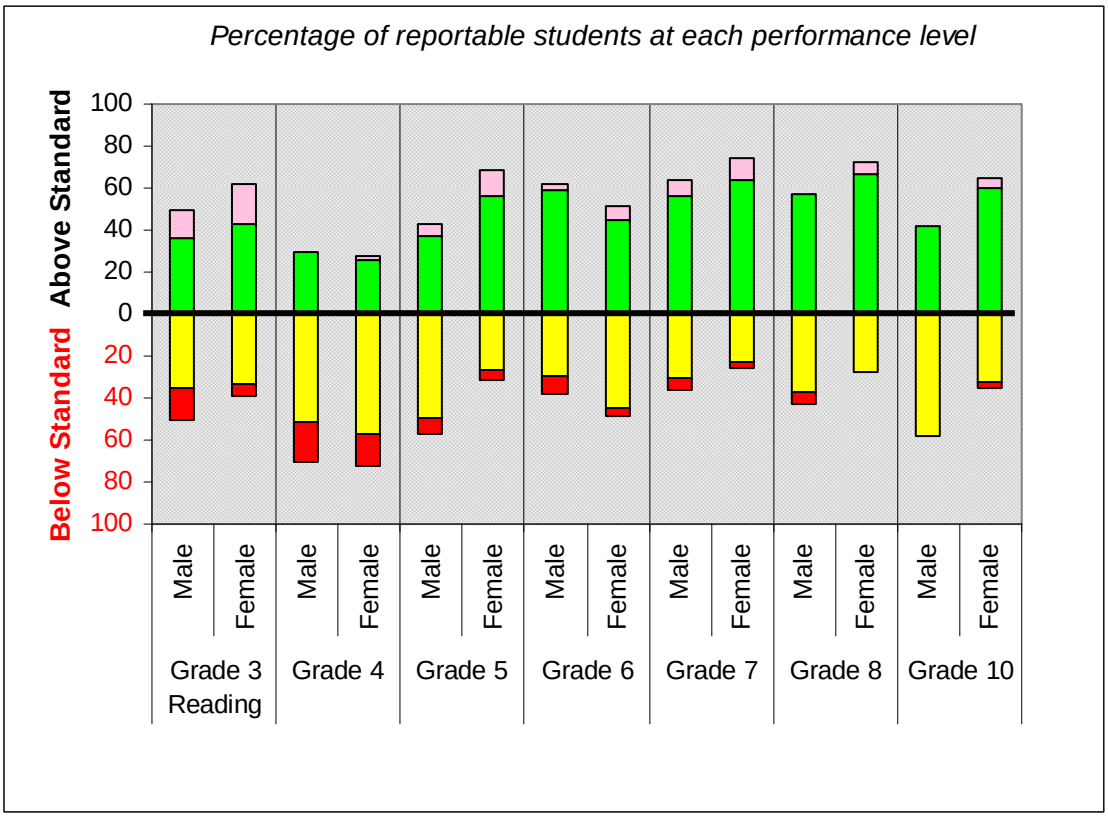


		ELA PI	Math PI	Number of Tests
A	Winchendon	81.2	66.0	1,701
B	Regular Education	86.1	70.7	1,409
C	Disability	57.7	42.4	290
D	FRL/N	84.1	68.8	1,222
E	FRL/Y	73.8	58.9	479
F	Male	78.0	66.3	846
G	Female	84.3	65.7	855

Of the six measurable subgroups in Winchendon in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 28 PI points in ELA and 29 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

The proficiency gaps in Winchendon in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income (FRL/Y) students. The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income (FRL/N) students. The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA.

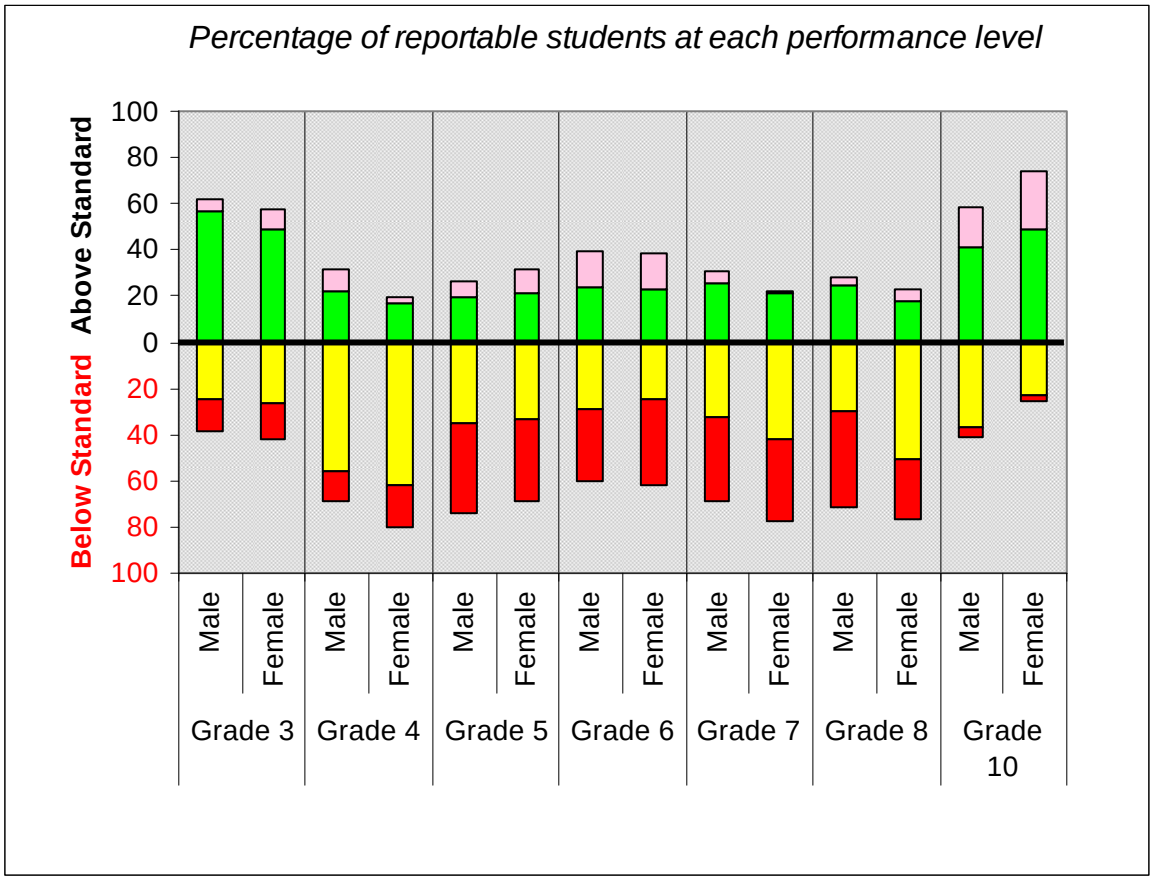
Figure/Table 12: Student MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3 Reading		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	13	19	0	2	5	12	3	6	7	10	0	6	0	5
Proficient	37	43	30	26	37	56	59	45	56	64	57	66	42	60
Needs Improvement	35	33	52	58	49	26	29	45	30	22	37	27	58	33
Warning/ Failing	16	6	19	15	8	5	9	4	6	3	6	0	0	3
Percent Attaining Proficiency	50	62	30	28	42	68	62	51	63	74	57	72	42	65

In Winchendon in 2006, female students outperformed male students on all grade-level ELA tests except at grades 4 and 6.

Figure/Table 13: Student MCAS Math Test Performance, by Grade and Gender, 2006



	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Advanced	5	9	9	3	7	11	16	15	5	1	4	5	17	26
Proficient	57	49	22	17	19	21	24	23	26	21	25	18	41	49
Needs Improvement	25	26	56	62	35	33	29	25	32	42	30	51	37	23
Warning/ Failing	13	16	13	18	39	35	31	37	37	36	42	26	5	3
Percent Attaining Proficiency	62	58	31	20	26	32	40	38	31	22	29	23	58	75

On the 2006 MCAS tests in math, male students outperformed female students at all grades levels except at grades 5 and 10.

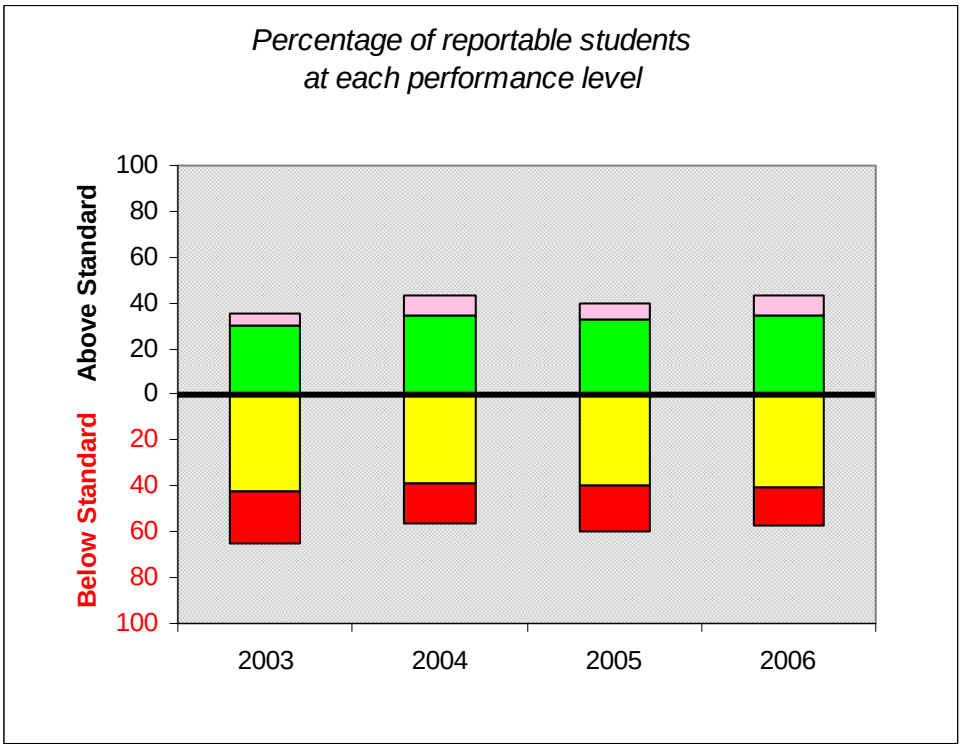
Improvement

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

Findings:

- Between 2004 and 2006, Winchendon's MCAS performance showed little improvement overall, no improvement in ELA, slight improvement in math, and a decline in STE.
- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories did not change between 2004 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by one percentage point. The average proficiency gap in Winchendon was 28 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.
- Over the two-year period 2004-2006, ELA performance in Winchendon was essentially flat. The proficiency gap in ELA was 21 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.
- During this period, math performance in Winchendon improved slightly, by one PI point. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 34 PI points in 2004 to 33 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of three percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Performance in STE in Winchendon declined between 2004 and 2006 by nearly two PI points.

Figure 14/Tables 14 A-B: Student MCAS Test Performance, All Students, 2003-2006



A.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	5	9	7	8
Proficient	30	34	33	35
Needs Improvement	42	39	40	41
Warning/Failing	22	17	20	16
Percent Attaining Proficiency	35	43	40	43
Average Proficiency Index (API)	66.6	71.5	69.6	72.2

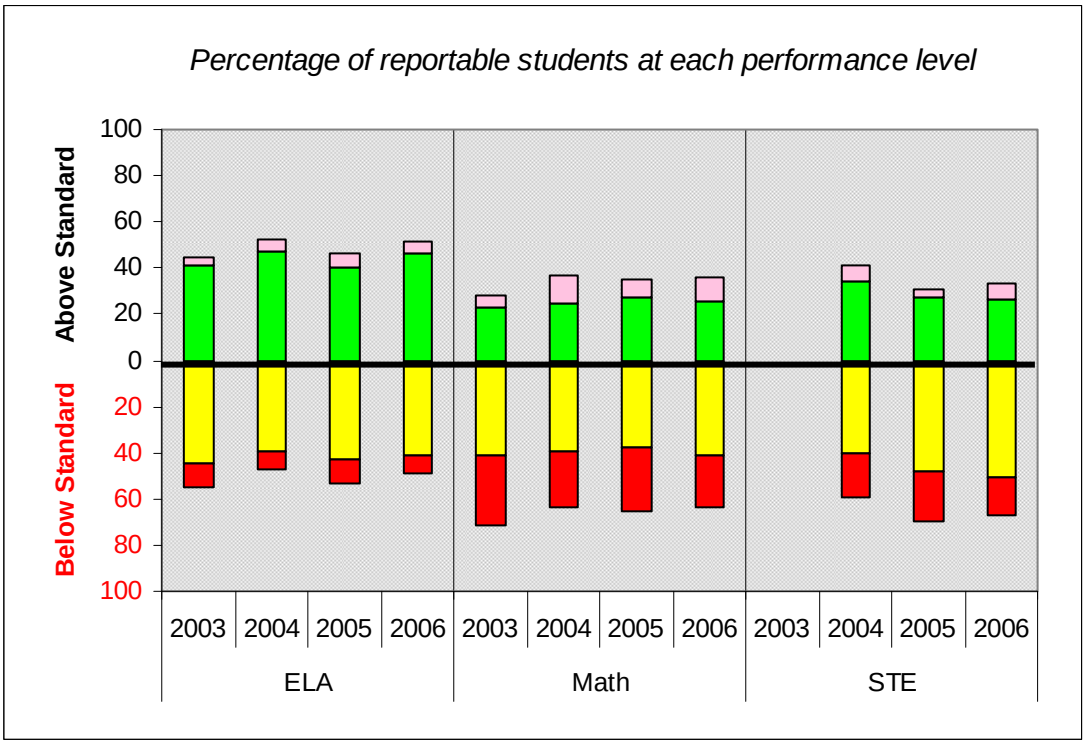
B. n-values

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	44	84	59	63
Proficient	288	324	295	276
Needs Improvement	402	370	357	324
Warning/Failing	213	165	179	129
Total	947	943	890	792

Note: Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2006 data may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 1.

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests remained at 43 percent in 2004 and 2006, rebounding in 2006 after a decline in 2005. This percentage had increased from 35 percent in 2003 to 43 percent in 2004. The percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased from 17 percent in 2004 to 16 percent in 2006. The average proficiency gap in Winchendon was 28 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.

Figure/Table 15: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Subject, 2003-2006



	ELA				Math				STE			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
Advanced	4	5	6	5	5	12	7	11		7	3	7
Proficient	41	47	41	47	23	25	28	25		34	27	26
Needs Improvement	44	39	43	41	41	39	38	41		40	48	51
Warning/ Failing	11	9	11	8	31	24	27	23		19	22	16
Percent Attaining Proficiency	45	52	47	52	28	37	35	36		41	30	33
Proficiency Index (PI)	75.5	79.1	76.7	78.9	60.3	65.9	64.1	66.9		70.4	65.4	68.6

Note: Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2006 data for ELA and math may differ from those reported in Figure/Table 2. STE data for 2003 are not available.

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining proficiency in ELA was 52 percent in both 2004 and 2006, and the proficiency gap in ELA was 21 PI points in both 2004 and 2006.

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining proficiency in math decreased from 37 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2006. The proficiency gap in math narrowed from 34 PI points in 2004 to 33 PI points in 2006, resulting in an improvement rate of three percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.

The percentage of Winchendon students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 41 percent in 2004 to 33 percent in 2006, and the proficiency gap in STE widened from 30 PI points in 2004 to 31 PI points in 2006.

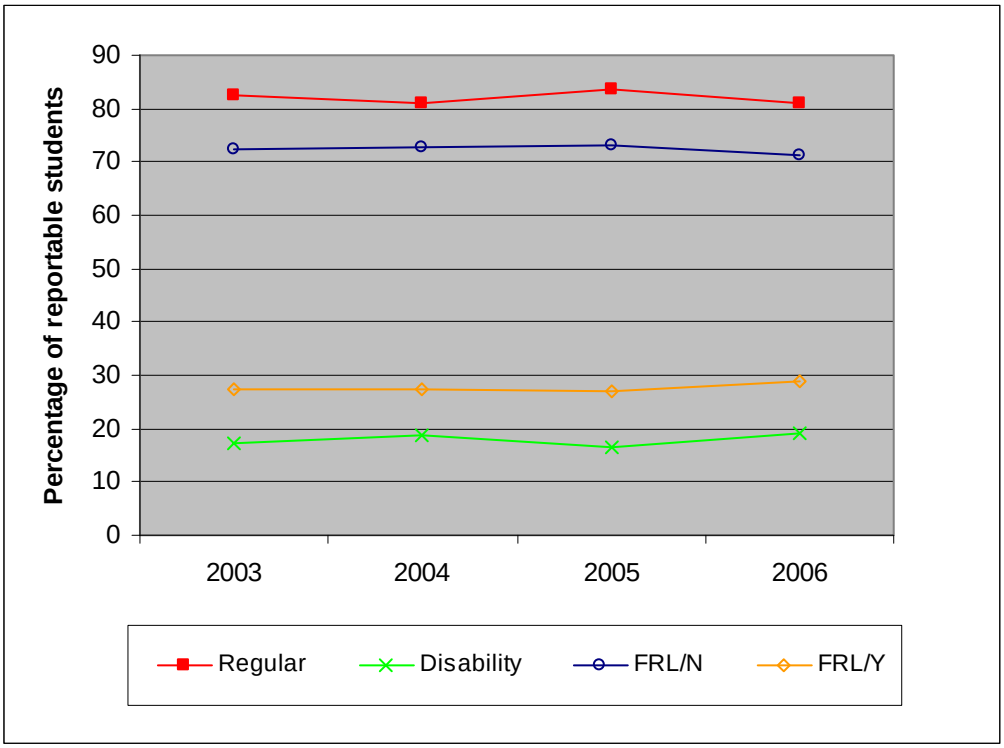
Equity of Improvement

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

Findings:

- In Winchendon, students with disabilities and low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students. ELA performance of regular education students and non low-income students declined during this period.
- In math, students with disabilities and low-income students in Winchendon also had improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities. Math performance of regular education students and non low-income students also declined during this period.
- The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 29 PI points in 2004 to 25 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 36 to 25 PI points over this period.

Figure/Table 16: Student Population by Reportable Subgroups, 2003-2006



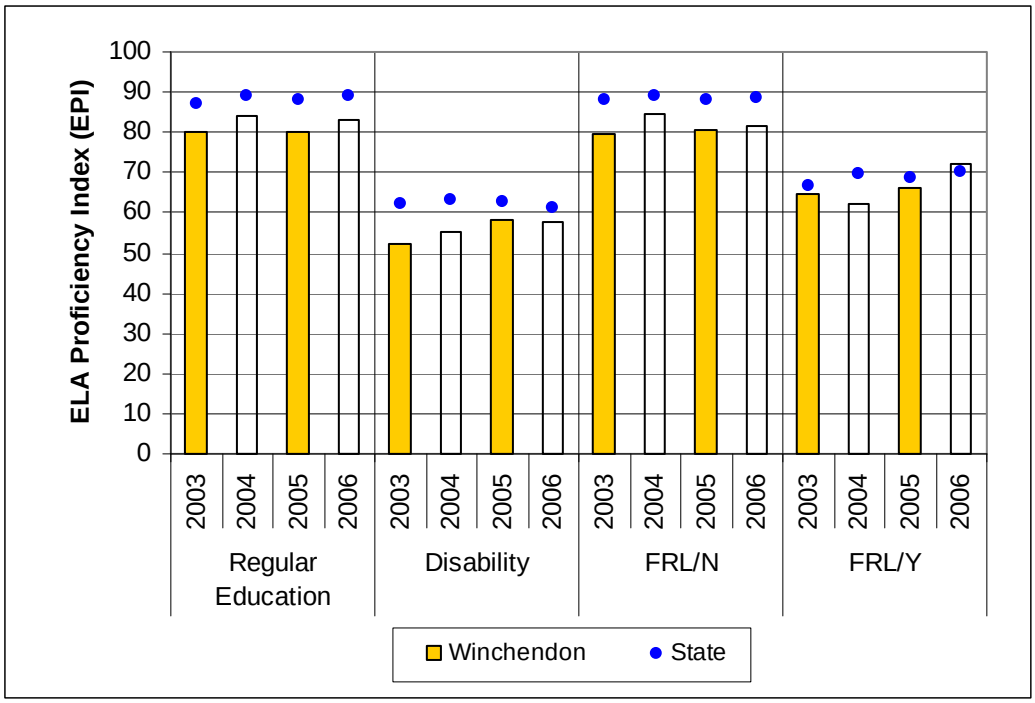
	Number of Students				Percentage of students			
	2003	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**
Winchendon	691	834	764	873	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regular	571	677	639	706	82.6	81.2	83.6	80.9
Disability	119	155	125	166	17.2	18.6	16.4	19.0
FRL/N	501	606	559	621	72.5	72.7	73.2	71.1
FRL/Y	190	228	205	252	27.5	27.3	26.8	28.9

Note: The 2006 percentages of students reported here may differ from those reported in Figure 8; the percentages shown here are based on the total number of students in the district, whereas the percentages shown in Figure 8 are based on the number of students in reportable subgroups. These data include students in the tested grades only.

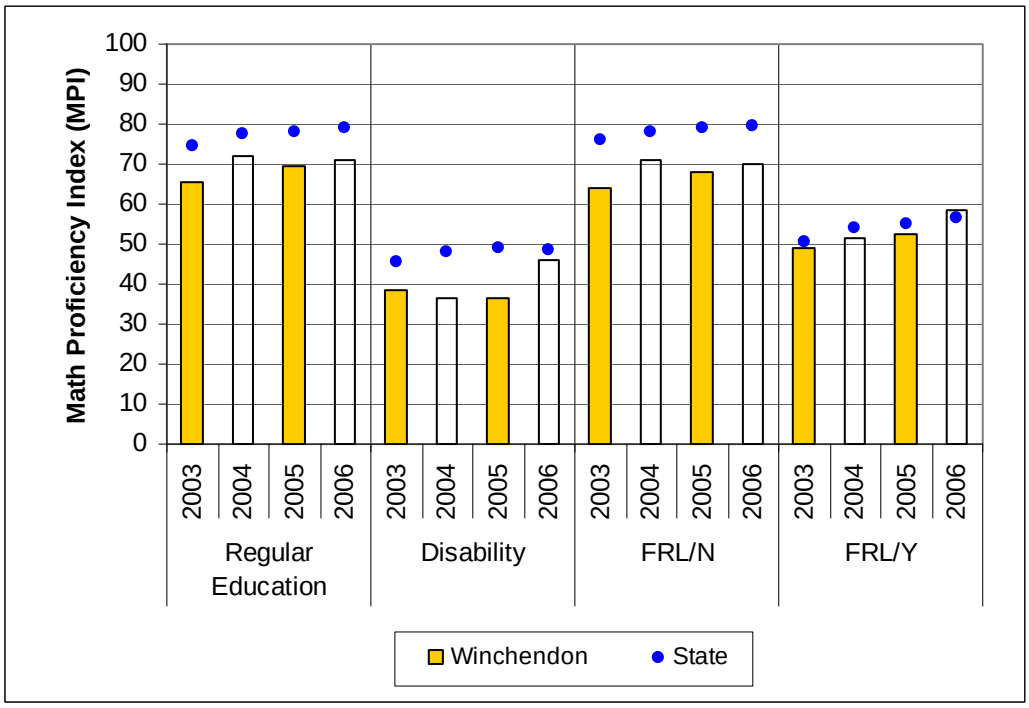
The makeup of the Winchendon student population in the grades tested in 2006 changed very little between 2004 and 2006. The proportion of students with disabilities increased by nearly one-half percentage point, and the proportion of low-income (FRL/Y) students increased by nearly one and one-half percentage points.

Figures 17 A-B/Table 17: MCAS Proficiency Indices, by Subgroup, 2003-2006

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



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

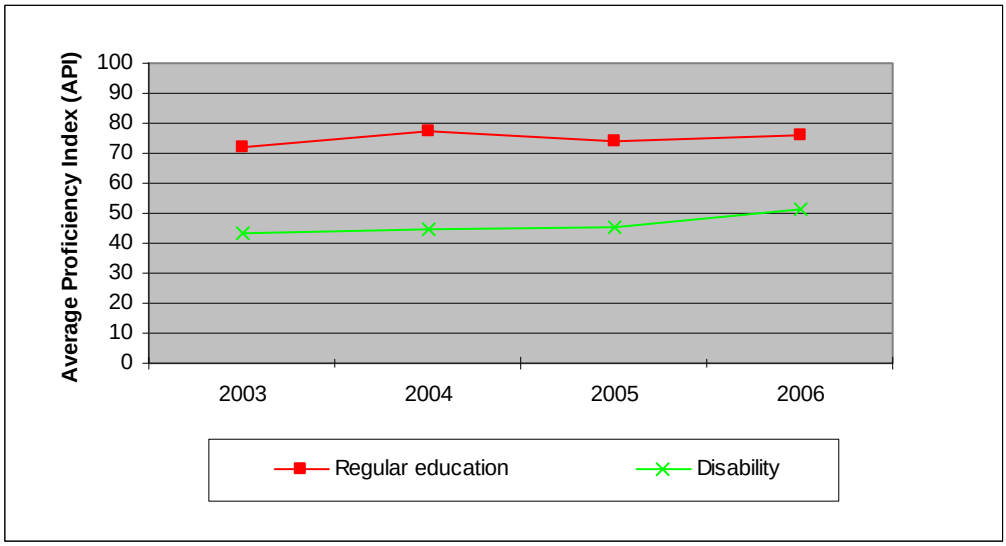


State				Winchendon			
Subgroup	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**	**Subgroup**	**Year**	**EPI**	**MPI**
Regular Education	2003	87.3	74.7	Regular Education	2003	80.1	65.7
	2004	89.2	77.4		2004	84.3	72.2
	2005	88.3	78.2		2005	80.1	69.4
	2006	89.0	78.9		2006	83.1	70.9
Disability	2003	62.1	45.3	Disability	2003	52.0	38.7
	2004	63.3	47.9		2004	55.4	36.4
	2005	62.9	49.0		2005	58.1	36.3
	2006	61.2	48.4		2006	57.8	46.1
FRL/N	2003	87.9	75.9	FRL/N	2003	79.5	64.0
	2004	88.9	78.1		2004	84.8	71.2
	2005	88.3	79.0		2005	80.5	68.0
	2006	88.6	79.7		2006	81.4	69.9
FRL/Y	2003	66.6	50.7	FRL/Y	2003	64.9	49.1
	2004	69.7	53.9		2004	62.0	51.6
	2005	68.8	55.0		2005	66.3	52.6
	2006	70.0	56.3		2006	72.0	58.6

In Winchendon, students with disabilities and low-income (FRL/Y) students had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students. In math, students with disabilities and low-income students in Winchendon also had improved performance between 2004 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities.

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed by four PI points between 2004 and 2006, from 29 PI points in 2004 to 25 PI points in 2006. The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed by 11 PI points over this period, from 36 PI points in 2004 to 25 PI points in 2006.

Figure/Table 18: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Student Status Subgroup, 2003-2006

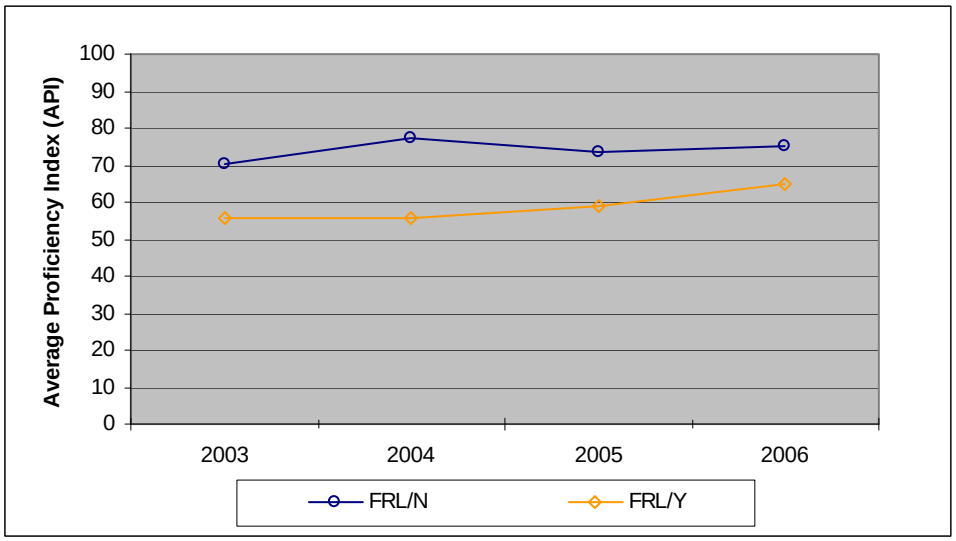


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Regular education	2003	71.8	80.1	65.7	50	32
	2004	77.3	84.3	72.2	61	44
	2005	74.0	80.1	69.4	53	40
	2006	76.3	83.1	70.9	58	41
Disability	2003	43.5	52.0	38.7	16	14
	2004	44.5	55.4	36.4	14	3
	2005	45.6	58.1	36.3	10	6
	2006	51.4	57.8	46.1	16	11

Students with disabilities in Winchendon had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006, while the performance of regular education students declined slightly over this period. The average proficiency gap for Winchendon's students with disabilities narrowed from 55 to 49 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 12 percent. The average proficiency gap for Winchendon's regular education students widened from 23 to 24 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between regular education students and students with disabilities narrowed by seven PI points.

Figure/Table 19: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Socioeconomic Status Subgroup, 2003-2006

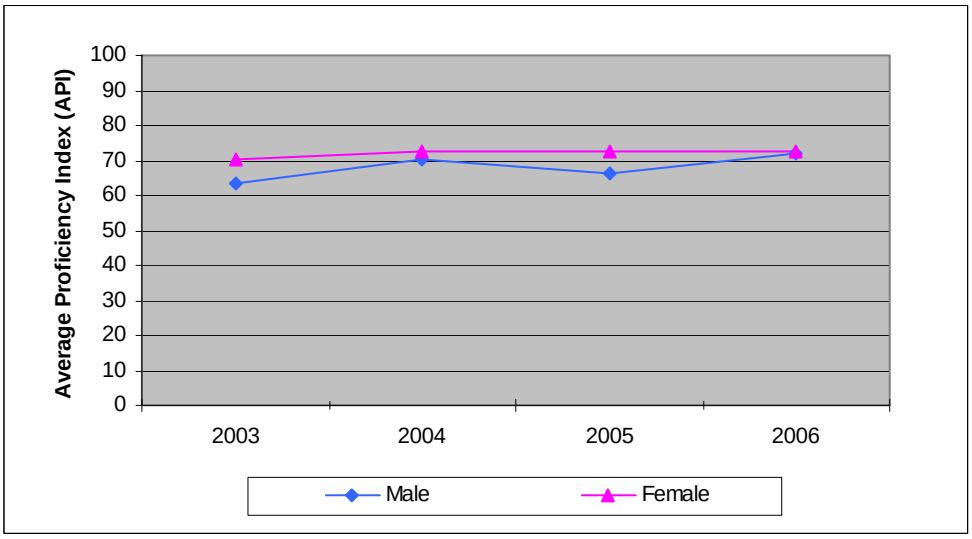


		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
FRL/N	2003	70.3	79.5	64.0	51	32
	2004	77.0	84.8	71.2	62	43
	2005	73.3	80.5	68.0	52	40
	2006	75.0	81.4	69.9	55	39
FRL/Y	2003	55.9	64.9	49.1	28	18
	2004	55.8	62.0	51.6	25	21
	2005	58.7	66.3	52.6	31	20
	2006	64.6	72.0	58.6	40	27

The low-income (FRL/Y) subgroup in Winchendon had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006, while the non low-income (FRL/N) subgroup had a decline in overall performance. The average proficiency gap for low-income students narrowed from 44 to 35 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of 20 percent. The average proficiency gap for non low-income students widened from 23 to 25 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between low-income students and non low-income students narrowed by 11 PI points.

Figure/Table 20: Student MCAS Test Performance, by Gender Subgroup, 2003- 2006



		API	EPI	MPI	Percent Attaining Proficiency ELA	Percent Attaining Proficiency Math
Male	2003	63.3	70.7	57.9	36	26
	2004	70.2	76.7	65.4	49	39
	2005	66.5	72.5	62.1	38	31
	2006	72.1	76.7	68.1	48	38
Female	2003	70.0	80.8	62.7	55	30
	2004	72.7	81.3	66.4	56	34
	2005	72.6	81.0	66.0	56	38
	2006	72.4	81.2	65.9	54	34

Male students in Winchendon had improved overall performance on the MCAS tests between 2004 and 2006, while female students had relatively flat performance. The average proficiency gap for male students narrowed from 30 to 28 PI points, resulting in an improvement rate of six percent. The average proficiency gap for female students widened from 27 to 28 PI points.

Between 2004 and 2006, the average performance gap between male and female students narrowed by three PI points.

Participation

Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Finding:

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

n-Values by Subgroup and Performance Level, 2006

Subgroup	Performance Level	ELA	Math	STE
Winchendon	ALL LEVELS	**855**	**846**	**261**
	Advanced	58	72	17
	Proficient	415	241	69
	Needs Improvement	321	311	132
	Warning/Failing	61	222	43
Regular Education	Advanced	58	72	16
	Proficient	390	228	67
	Needs Improvement	232	263	103
	Warning/Failing	25	141	31
Disability	Advanced	0	0	1
	Proficient	24	12	2
	Needs Improvement	89	48	29
	Warning/Failing	36	81	12
Limited English Proficient	Advanced	0	0	0
	Proficient	1	1	0
	Needs Improvement	0	0	0
	Warning/Failing	0	0	0
White	Advanced	56	69	17
	Proficient	398	228	68
	Needs Improvement	300	298	125
	Warning/Failing	54	206	38
Hispanic	Advanced	0	2	0
	Proficient	9	5	1
	Needs Improvement	13	4	4
	Warning/Failing	4	13	2
African-American	Advanced	0	0	0
	Proficient	3	4	0
	Needs Improvement	6	5	1
	Warning/Failing	1	1	2
Asian	Advanced	2	1	0
	Proficient	3	3	0
	Needs Improvement	2	3	2
	Warning/Failing	2	2	1
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/No	Advanced	49	61	17
	Proficient	322	182	51
	Needs Improvement	211	229	85
	Warning/Failing	31	137	33
Free or Reduced-Cost Lunch/Yes	Advanced	9	11	0
	Proficient	93	59	18
	Needs Improvement	110	82	47
	Warning/Failing	30	85	10
Male	Advanced	20	35	5
	Proficient	195	125	40
	Needs Improvement	173	144	65
	Warning/Failing	39	115	16
Female	Advanced	38	37	12
	Proficient	220	116	29
	Needs Improvement	148	167	67
	Warning/Failing	22	107	27

n-Values by Grade and Year, 2003-2006

Grade	Year	ELA	Math	STE
Grade 3	2003	137	0	0
	2004	133	0	0
	2005	123	0	0
	2006	133	129	0
Grade 4	2003	136	135	0
	2004	125	127	0
	2005	130	129	0
	2006	120	120	0
Grade 5	2003	0	0	0
	2004	0	0	136
	2005	0	0	115
	2006	130	129	130
Grade 6	2003	0	160	0
	2004	0	159	0
	2005	0	135	0
	2006	109	110	0
Grade 7	2003	150	0	0
	2004	164	0	0
	2005	161	0	0
	2006	149	148	0
Grade 8	2003	0	157	0
	2004	0	146	145
	2005	0	150	150
	2006	131	130	131
Grade 10	2003	104	105	0
	2004	111	111	0
	2005	94	91	0
	2006	83	80	0
All Grades	2003	527	557	0
	2004	533	543	281
	2005	508	505	265
	2006	855	846	261

Notes

Trend data include grades for which testing was administered for each subject in all four years. The following grades are included in the trend data for 2003-2006 reported in Figures/Tables 16-20 and in the table of n-values by grade and year:
English language arts (ELA): 3, 4, 7, 10
Math: 4, 6, 8, 10
Science and technology/engineering (STE): 5, 8

Data for science and technology/engineering (STE) are not included in computing overall proficiency and the average proficiency index (API); they will be included beginning in 2007 when STE becomes a graduation requirement.

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

Subgroup inclusion is based on the number of students and the number of schools in the district. To be included as reportable, a subgroup must have at least 10 times the number of schools in the district. Subgroup inclusion for all years of the trend data is based on the 2006 data.

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

Rounded values may result in slight apparent discrepancies.

Appendix B: Proficiency Index (PI)

The proficiency index is a metric used to measure and compare all schools and school districts regarding their performance on the MCAS tests. The proficiency index is a measure of the level of achievement a district, school, grade, or subgroup has made in relation to the 'Proficient' achievement level on the MCAS tests. There are four indices: the Average Proficiency Index (API), the English Language Arts Proficiency Index (EPI), the Math Proficiency Index (MPI), and the Science and Technology/Engineering Index (SPI). The API currently is a weighted average of the EPI and MPI; the SPI will be included beginning in 2007, when passing the STE test becomes a graduation requirement.

The proficiency index is calculated as follows:

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

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

Example: The Anywhere High School had the following results on the 2006 MCAS tests:

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

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

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

The EPI would use the same calculation using the ELA results for all students taking the ELA exam. The MPI would use the same calculation using the math results for all students taking the math exam. The SPI would use the same calculation using the STE results for all students taking the STE exam.

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

Appendix C: Chapter 70 Trends, FY 1997 – FY2006

	Foundation Enrollment	Pct Chg	Foundation Budget	Pct Chg	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid	Pct Chg	Required Net School Spending (NSS)	Pct Chg	Actual Net School Spending	Pct Chg	Dollars Over/Under Requirement	Percent Over/ Under
FY97	1,769	6.9	10,445,308	18.2	2,579,336	6,706,784	25.7	9,286,120	18.2	9,245,032	15.4	-41,088	-0.4
FY98	1,801	1.8	11,049,735	5.8	2,714,624	7,800,696	16.3	10,515,320	13.2	10,553,562	14.2	38,242	0.4
FY99	1,791	-0.6	11,248,955	1.8	2,917,137	8,242,752	5.7	11,159,889	6.1	11,778,709	11.6	618,820	5.5
FY00	1,815	1.3	11,593,820	3.1	2,996,868	8,754,525	6.2	11,751,393	5.3	11,748,540	-0.3	-2,853	0.0
FY01	1,856	2.3	11,405,224	-1.6	2,943,109	9,079,325	3.7	12,022,434	2.3	12,027,738	2.4	5,304	0.0
FY02	1,884	1.5	12,843,670	12.6	3,421,065	10,441,224	15.0	13,862,289	15.3	13,474,131	12.0	-388,158	-2.8
FY03	1,882	-0.1	12,666,056	-1.4	3,957,742	10,441,224	0.0	14,398,966	3.9	13,820,424	2.6	-578,542	-4.0
FY04	1,876	-0.3	13,110,447	3.5	4,165,335	9,523,654	-8.8	13,688,989	-4.9	13,705,852	-0.8	16,863	0.1
FY05	1,874	-0.1	13,447,420	2.6	3,791,498	9,655,922	1.4	13,447,420	-1.8	13,766,504	0.4	319,084	2.4
FY06	1,821	-2.8	13,575,447	1.0	4,042,511	9,746,972	0.9	13,789,483	2.5	14,403,315	4.6	613,832	4.5

	Dollars Per Foundation Enrollment			Percentage of Foundation			Chapter 70 Aid as Percent of Actual NSS
	Foundation Budget	Ch 70 Aid	Actual NSS	Ch 70	Required NSS	Actual NSS	
FY97	5,905	3,791	5,226	64.2	88.9	88.5	72.5
FY98	6,135	4,331	5,860	70.6	95.2	95.5	73.9
FY99	6,281	4,602	6,577	73.3	99.2	104.7	70.0
FY00	6,388	4,823	6,473	75.5	101.4	101.3	74.5
FY01	6,145	4,892	6,480	79.6	105.4	105.5	75.5
FY02	6,817	5,542	7,152	81.3	107.9	104.9	77.5
FY03	6,730	5,548	7,343	82.4	113.7	109.1	75.5
FY04	6,989	5,077	7,306	72.6	104.4	104.5	69.5
FY05	7,176	5,153	7,346	71.8	100.0	102.4	70.1
FY06	7,455	5,353	7,910	71.8	101.6	106.1	67.7

Foundation enrollment is reported in October of the prior fiscal year (e.g. FY06 enrollment = Oct 1, 2004 headcount).
Foundation budget is the state's estimate of the minimum amount needed in each district to provide an adequate educational program.
Required Net School Spending is the annual minimum that must be spent on schools, including carryovers from prior years.
Net School Spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures and transportation.

Appendix D: Crisis and Security Indicators

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

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

According to the superintendent, in 2005-2006 the two assistant principals at Murdock Middle/High School revised the Winchendon School District Emergency Response Protocol (WSDERP) with input from the police and fire departments. The WSDERP included protocols for emergencies such as a missing child, an automobile accident, a death, drugs, an intruder, a medical emergency, a weapon, a natural disaster, toxic fumes, violence, and a bomb threat. Also, the WSDERP contained an evacuation plan and lockdown procedures. The superintendent mentioned that all administrators and teachers had copies of the WSDERP.

Principals stated that they also had their own school safety plans that addressed the specific needs of their schools. In addition, the principals reported that they had implemented the evacuation plans. Administrators expressed the need for additional security measures in their schools. At the Memorial Elementary School, security measures requested included a new door with a camera, door swipes off the playground, and the ability to lock the doors for each of the pods. Security measures requested for the Toy Town Elementary School consisted of a locking system, a buzzer and video camera for the entrance door to the superintendent's office, and door swipes off the playground. Personnel at the Murdock Middle/High School expressed a need for a buzzer (audio) system for entry into the school.

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

Rating: Needs Improvement

Evidence

Interviewees indicated that, during the period under review, classroom teachers had pre-packed bags with student lists for attendance purposes, supplies, and call lists. During emergencies teachers were required to take attendance and report the names of missing students. Principals and teachers indicated that the district provided emergency training. The interviewees indicated that the district provided no crisis training for volunteers and substitute teachers.

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

Rating: Satisfactory

Evidence

The district had a safety plan. All school facilities had cameras at the main entrance. Visitors to facilities had to ring and the office staff at each facility had to unlock the door for entry. Each classroom had emergency plans and information related to safety. Plans were in place to secure the main entrance of the Murdock Middle/High School and the superintendent's section and entrance of the Toy Town Elementary School.

Appendix E: Classroom Observations Chart

	Number of Classrooms				Average Class Size	Average Paraprofs. per Class	Computers		
	ELA	Math	Other	Total			Total Number	Number for Student Use	Average Students per Computer
Memorial	6	6	0	12	17.7	0.7	16	13	16.3
Toy Town	11	3	0	14	19.4	0.7	25	17	15.9
Murdock	8	7	13	28	13.1	0.1	56	46	8.0
Total	25	16	13	54	15.7	0.4	97	76	11.2

	Classroom Management	Instructional Practice	Expectations	Student Activity & Behavior	Climate
Memorial					
Total observations	48	97	44	54	36
Maximum possible	48	107	47	72	36
Avg. percent of observations	100%	91%	94%	75%	100%
Toy Town					
Total observations	52	59	23	41	30
Maximum possible	56	126	56	78	42
Avg. percent of observations	93%	47%	41%	53%	71%
Murdock					
Total observations	93	160	57	92	62
Maximum possible	104	233	106	154	84
Avg. percent of observations	89%	69%	54%	60%	74%
Total					
Total observations	193	316	124	187	128
Maximum possible	208	466	209	304	162
Avg. percent of observations	93%	68%	59%	62%	79%

Appendix F: List of Findings

General Finding I: Gearing up for change has been time and energy consuming for Winchendon Public Schools. See Findings 5A and 5B.

General Finding II: Efforts have been characterized by fragmented activities rather than strategic and systemic implementation. See Findings 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 3C, 4A, and 5C.

General Finding III: Mistrust and a history of unfortunate events have had a draining legacy. See Findings 5D, 5E, 5F, and 5G.

Initiative 1: Develop a comprehensive instructional program

Finding 1A: The district is still working on its first articulation of a comprehensive curriculum. Curriculum guides are complete at grades K-6 in math, ELA, and science, and at grades 7-8 in science.

Finding 1B: Winchendon focused on fidelity of curriculum implementation at the elementary level.

Finding 1C: District capacity limited the provision of adequate professional development to support effective curriculum delivery to improve achievement for students in grades 4-12. District capacity also limited the systemic completion and revision of the curriculum.

Initiative 2: Tailor instruction to meet students' needs

Finding 2A: Winchendon has improved its use of assessments to inform district and school decisions.

Finding 2B: The district has not yet established student achievement as the basis for implementing effective and sustainable assessment and evaluation systems tied to improving student achievement.

Finding 2C: Classroom use of student assessment data to monitor student learning and modify instruction occurs systemically at the lower elementary level, but not at grades 4-12.

Initiative 3: Establish set standards and high expectations for students

Finding 3A: The district worked on an initiative to improve student participation, and set new policies and developed new procedures to encourage greater student participation by addressing issues of attendance, retention, promotion, discipline, and recognition of student success.

Finding 3B: The district did not have a clear strategy to set high expectations for students in the classroom or to provide a continuum of academic supports for efforts to strengthen student participation in the academic program.

Finding 3C: The district did provide some academic supports, although the supports were not adequate to improve student achievement.

Initiative 4: Provide preventative programs to address students' social needs

Finding 4A: The district does not have a clearly defined strategy to develop programs targeted to at-risk students, but the schools have developed some strategies to assist at-risk students identified by staff, and the district has prioritized attendance and working with parents to address non-academic needs.

Initiative 5: Strengthen the system of governance and communication between the school committee and other town committees

Finding 5A: Winchendon Public Schools improved its ability to implement an improvement plan since the arrival of the new superintendent. The district developed its District Turnaround Plan through a process that supported successful implementation.

Finding 5B: The district established many favorable conditions to set the stage for successful implementation of improvement initiatives.

Finding 5C: The district has a developing, but incomplete, system for using evaluations of programs and staff to ensure accountability.

Finding 5D: The district developed the budget through an inclusive process focused on priorities identified and clearly communicated to the school committee and the community, and Winchendon Public Schools employed sound business practices to manage the budget.

Finding 5E: Strained relationships with the town hindered implementation of the District Turnaround Plan in spite of district efforts.

Finding 5F: Without adequate town support, the budget and supplemental funding were not adequate to implement priority improvement initiatives, and the district over-relied on grants.

Finding 5G: The district has not yet developed the capacity to meet its completion deadlines for its improvement initiatives.