



Winchendon Public Schools

Level 3 District Review

Review of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of Low-Income Students

Review conducted January 10-14, 2011

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This document was prepared on behalf of the Center for District and School Accountability of the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Commissioner

Date of report completion: February 2012

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Table of Contents

Overview of Level 3 District Reviews	1
Purpose	1
Methodology	1
Overview of Low-Income Reviews	2
Purpose	2
Selection of Districts	2
Key Questions	3
Methodology	3
Winchendon Public Schools	4
District Profile	4
Student Performance	8
Findings	17
Leadership and Governance	17
Curriculum and Instruction	20
Assessment	24
Human Resources and Professional Development	27
Student Support	30
Financial and Asset Management	35
Low-Income Findings	41
Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?	41
Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved? ...	46
Recommendations	48
Level 3 Recommendations	48
Leadership and Governance	48
Curriculum and Instruction	49
Assessment	50
Human Resources and Professional Development	51
Support	53
Finance	54
Low-Income Recommendations	58
Appendix A: Review Team Members	60
Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule	61
Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements	65

Overview of Level 3 District Reviews

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts district reviews under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws. This review is focused on “districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations.” Districts subject to review in the 2010-2011 school year include districts in Level 3¹ of ESE’s framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state’s six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management**. The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that may be impeding rapid improvement as well as those that are most likely to be contributing to positive results. Team members preview selected district documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a two-day site visit in the district and a two-day site visit to schools. The team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the standards.

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

Overview of Low-Income Reviews

Purpose

In the 2010-2011 school year, in addition to the Level 3 reviews described above, the Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking another group of reviews, aimed at identifying district and school factors contributing to improvement in low-income (L-I) student performance in selected schools, providing recommendations for measures to be taken on the district and school levels to maintain or accelerate the improvement in student achievement, and promoting the dissemination of promising practices among Massachusetts public schools.

This second group of reviews is part of a series of reviews by CDSA to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom an achievement gap exists. The series is to focus in turn on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students, and students who are members of racial minorities. While the Level 3 reviews carry out CDSA's mandate under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws to review "districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations," the reviews of district systems and practices addressing the needs of low-income students carry out the law's further mandate to review districts whose students achieve at high levels relative to districts that educate similar student populations. The L-I reviews are part of ESE's program to recognize schools as "distinguished schools" under section 1117(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows states to use Title I funds to reward schools that significantly closed the achievement gap. Districts and schools with exemplary practices identified through the review process may serve as models for and provide support to other districts and schools.

Selection of Districts

ESE identified 28 Title I schools in 18 districts where the performance of low-income students has recently improved. These districts, which included two of the districts chosen for Level 3 reviews in 2010-2011, had Title I schools which substantially narrowed proficiency gaps for low-income students over a two-year period: schools where the performance of low-income students improved from 2008 to 2009 and from 2009 to 2010 in English language arts or mathematics both in terms of low-income students' Composite Performance Index (increased CPI in the same subject both years and a gain over the two years of at least 5 points) and in terms of the percentage of low-income students scoring Proficient or Advanced (at least one percentage point gained in the same subject each year).² As a result of having these "gap-closer" schools,

² To be considered, a school had to be a Title I school and had to have been recognized as a 2010-2011 Commendation School (for narrowing proficiency gaps, high growth, or exiting NCLB accountability status). In addition to having an increase in CPI and proficiency rate in English language arts or mathematics both years, the

the two districts scheduled for a Level 3 review were invited to participate in a low-income review also, to identify district and school practices associated with stronger performance for low-income students.

Key Questions

Two key questions guide the work of the review team in the low-income reviews.

1. To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

- school leadership;
- curriculum;
- instruction;
- tiered instruction and adequate learning time; and
- social/emotional support

2. How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Methodology

By answering the two Key Questions, the low-income reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that most likely contribute to positive results, as well as those that may impede rapid improvement. Reviews are evidence-based and data-driven. Two to four review team members preview selected documents and ESE data and reports before participating in the Level 3 site visit in the district and conducting a one- to two-day site visit to each of the identified schools in connection with the low-income review.

school could not have experienced a decline in CPI or proficiency rate either year in either subject; had to meet the 2010 AYP participation rate and attendance or graduation rate requirements; and had to have had at least 40 low-income students tested each year from 2007-2008 through 2009-2010.

Winchendon Public Schools

The site visit to the Winchendon Public Schools was conducted from January 10–14, 2011. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: Memorial Elementary School (K-2), Toy Town Elementary School (3-5), and Murdock Middle/High School (6-12). The visit to the Toy Town Elementary School, which was identified as a “gap closer” for its low-income students, as described above, was conducted as part of the low-income (L-I) component of this review. Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

District Profile³

The town of Winchendon is a community comprising 44.1 square miles in north central Massachusetts, on the border with New Hampshire. It has a selectmen/town manager/open town meeting form of government, with five selectmen serving staggered year terms. The school district is managed by a five-member school committee, along with a superintendent of schools. The current superintendent began her duties with the district in May, 2008. Other central office administrators include a director of curriculum and instruction who has been in the position since 2004, a director of special education who has also served since 2004, a director of instructional services, employed since 2002, and a business manager who was appointed in 2010.

The district, which educated 1551 students as of October 1, 2010, consists of four schools: Memorial Elementary School (K-2), Toy Town Elementary School (3-5), Murdock Middle/High School (6-12), and the Winchendon preschool program (also referred to as the Marvin School). The district’s student population is nearly 90 percent white, with a 4.6 percent Hispanic or Latino population, and other racial or ethnic populations at 2.1 percent of students or lower. Almost half of the student population faces economic challenges, with 46.0 percent of the students qualifying for either the free or reduced-price lunch program. See Table 1 below.

³ Data derived from ESE’s website, ESE’s Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

Table 1: 2009-10 District Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	25	1.6	First Language not English	47	3.0
Asian	27	1.7	Limited English Proficient	15	1.0
Hispanic or Latino	72	4.6	Low-income	714	46.0
Native American	3	0.2	Special Education	310	19.7
White	1,392	89.7	Free Lunch	552	35.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0	Reduced-price lunch	162	10.4
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	32	2.1	Total enrollment	1,551	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

As can be seen from Table 2 below, the Winchendon Public Schools have a higher percentage of low-income students than the state has (46 percent to 34.2 percent); a lower percentage of limited English proficient (ELL) students (1.0 percent to 7.1 percent); and a higher percentage of special education students (19.7 percent to 17.0 percent). The percentages of students in these subgroups do not vary greatly over the three K-12 schools in the district.

Table 2: Comparison of State, District, and All District Schools by Selected Population: 2010-2011 (in Percentages except for Total Enrollment)

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	955,563	34.2	29.1	5.1	7.1	17.0
Winchendon Public Schools	1,551	46.0	35.6	10.4	1.0	19.7
Memorial Elementary	341	41.9	34.0	7.9	2.3	17.6
Toy Town Elementary	378	50.5	39.2	11.4	1.1	16.4
Murdock Middle/High	755	49.5	37.4	12.2	0.4	18.3
Winchendon Preschool	77	7.8	7.8	0.0	0.0	31.2

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

In the fall of 2010, Toy Town Elementary and other Massachusetts schools were recognized by the governor as Commendation Schools “for their steady progress in raising student achievement while at the same time demonstrating a consistent narrowing of achievement gaps among students.”⁴ Such an achievement for Winchendon was in contrast to a previous history of poor student performance. On November 25, 2003, the Board of Education⁵ voted unanimously to declare the Winchendon Public School District “underperforming,” a status then shared with only one other district. Working with targeted assistance staff from the Department of Education⁶, the district developed a district turnaround plan and began addressing the weaknesses pointed out in a report prepared for the Board in 2004 by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).⁷ In addition to low student achievement and lack of improvement over a period of years, the report also described weaknesses in such areas as curriculum and instruction, community involvement and support, and student support systems. Mistrust and conflict between town officials and school committee members was cited as well.

The district partnered with a non-profit organization and worked steadily for several years, and in April of 2008 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to declare that the district was no longer considered to be an underperforming district. During its visit in January of

⁴ See ESE press release from September 14, 2010, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=5729>.

⁵ Now known as the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

⁶ As ESE was then known.

⁷ Available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/reports/technical/04_0343_t3.pdf.

2011, review team members noted a more positive attitude throughout the interviews with both district and school personnel, a reduction of the previously mentioned level of mistrust between school committee members and town officials, and an improved relationship between the superintendent and selectmen. The team also found increased stability and increased emphasis on the use of data and the management systems instituted since 2003. These findings will be described in more detail in the following pages.

The local appropriation to the Winchendon Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$13,210,431, up from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$12,386,668. School-related expenditures by the town were estimated at \$7,280,703 for fiscal year 2011, up from the estimate for fiscal year 2010 of \$6,648,936. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$12,477,991), expenditures by the town (\$6,859,482), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$3,470,639), was \$22,808,112. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 was \$15,361,820.

Student Performance⁸

Table 3 below shows that for ELA, both the composite performance index and median student growth percentile are lower for all reported Winchendon subgroups than for their statewide counterparts. For low-income students, however, the gaps between district and state CPIs and median SGPs are relatively small in comparison to other subgroups. The largest gap in CPI between district and state in ELA is the gap for special education students.

**Table 3: 2010 Winchendon and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
by Selected Subgroups, for ELA**

	Winchendon		State	
	CPI	Median SGP	CPI	Median SGP
All Students (870)	77.4	43	86.9	50
Asian (9)	---	---	89.8	59
African American/Black (20)	63.8	---	76.6	46
Hispanic/Latino (38)	69.1	43	73.6	47
White (789)	78	42	90.5	50
ELL (4)	---	---	59.8	50
FLEP (4)	---	---	80.1	55
Special Education (174)	51.4	36	67.3	41
Low Income (398)	72.7	44	76.5	46

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.

2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only calculated for groups of 10 or more.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

In mathematics as in ELA, both the CPI and the median SGP are lower for all reported district subgroups than for the same subgroup statewide. See Table 4 below. Low-income students again had the smallest gap in CPI when compared to their state counterparts (but not the smallest gap in median SGP). Followed closely by white students, special education students again had the largest gap in CPI; they also had the largest gap in median SGP.

⁸ Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

**Table 4: 2010 Winchendon and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
by Selected Subgroups, for Mathematics**

	Winchendon		State	
	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
<i>All Students (869)</i>	69	45	79.9	50
Asian (9)	---	---	89	62
African American/Black (19)	60.5	---	65.1	48
Hispanic/Latino (39)	58.3	38	63.9	47
White (787)	69.6	46	84.1	50
ELL (4)	---	---	56.2	53
FLEP (5)	---	---	73.3	55
Special Education (173)	41.9	28.5	57.5	43
Low Income (397)	62.8	39	67.1	47

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.

2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only calculated for groups of 10 or more.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Tables 5 and 6 below allow the reader to gain a three-year perspective on Winchendon proficiency rates and median SGPs compared with the state. In ELA, the district's proficiency rate was higher in 2010 than in 2008 in grades 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10, and lower in 2010 than in 2008 in grades 6 and 7. In mathematics, it has was higher in 2010 than in 2008 in grades 4, 5, 6, and 8, was the same in grade 3, and was lower in grades 7 and 10. Although proficiency increased in most grades in both subjects, increasing for all tested grades by 5 percentage points in ELA and 4 percentage points in math in 2010 over 2008, because state proficiency rates also increased the overall proficiency gap remained the same in math and narrowed by only one percentage point in ELA.

Table 5 shows that median student growth percentiles in ELA were higher in 2010 than 2008 in grades 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10, and lower only in grade 6; for all tested grades the median SGP was 43 in 2010, in the moderate range (40.0-59.9), as compared to 30 in 2008. For mathematics, the story is comparable (see Table 6). The median SGP in math was higher in 2010 than 2008 in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 and was lower only in grade 10. The median SGP in grade 8, 65.5, was notably high. For all grades the median SGP in math was 45 in 2010, in the moderate range, as compared to a very low 24 in 2008. Since annual increases in median SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful, the district's median SGP in math experienced meaningful growth between 2008 and 2010.

**Table 5: 2008-2010 Winchendon Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade, for ELA**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	47	NA*	45	NA*	50	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	16	13	21	17	25	24
Grade 4—State	49	48	53	50	54	50
Grade 5—District	38	30	42	43	42	38.5
Grade 5—State	61	51	63	50	63	50
Grade 6—District	54	55	45	42	51	50
Grade 6—State	67	50	66	50	69	50
Grade 7— District	59	37.5	56	45	54	57
Grade 7— State	69	50	70	50	72	50
Grade 8— District	60	30	65	34.5	69	48
Grade 8— State	75	49	78	50	78	50
Grade 10— District	62	NA**	72	40	69	58.5
Grade 10— State	74	NA**	81	50	78	50
All Grades— District	46	30	48	37	51	43
All Grades—State	64	50	67	50	68	50

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.

** NA: ESE did not compute SGP for grade 10 until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table 6: 2008-2010 Winchendon Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade, for Mathematics**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	56	NA*	48	NA*	56	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	18	10	30	25	29	30
Grade 4—State	49	49	48	50	48	49
Grade 5—District	26	25	25	36.5	36	39
Grade 5—State	52	51	54	50	55	50
Grade 6—District ²⁴	24	23.5	36	46	33	46
Grade 6—State	56	50	57	50	59	50
Grade 7— District	32	41	38	72	31	53
Grade 7— State	47	50	49	50	53	50
Grade 8— District	36	35.5	42	66	41	65.5
Grade 8— State	49	51	48	50	51	51
Grade 10— District	67	NA**	58	53.5	60	39
Grade 10— State	72	NA**	75	50	75	50
All Grades— District	36	24	38	48	40	45
All Grades—State	55	50	55	50	59	50

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.

** NA: ESE did not compute SGP for grade 10 until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Tables 7 and 8 below show that in the low-income subgroup from 2008 to 2010, Winchendon students progressed from 36 percent scoring at or above proficient in ELA to 44 percent and from 26 to 32 percent in mathematics, over a period when the state proficiency rates for the low-income subgroup went from 41 to 47 percent in ELA and 33 to 37 in math. Thus, within this subgroup, the district has narrowed but not closed the proficiency gap with the state, by two percentage points in each subject. During the period from 2008 to 2010, low-income students had meaningful increases (of 10 points or more from one year to the next) in their median SGPs

in both subjects. The median SGP for low-income students in ELA rose from 34.0 to 44.0 from 2009 to 2010, having risen from 28.5 in 2008, and in math rose from 22.0 to 42.0 from 2008 to 2009, falling to 39.0 in 2010).

The performance of the special education subgroup, not shown in the tables, appears to be static or declining in comparison with the state. The percentage of special education students scoring at or above proficient rose from 2008 to 2010 from 12 to 13 percent in ELA and declined from 9 percent to 4 percent in math, while the state proficiency rates for special education students rose from 27 to 28 percent in ELA and from 19 to 21 percent in math. Thus the proficiency gap between district and state special education students remained the same over these years in ELA (15 percentage points) and grew in mathematics (from 10 to 17 points). Median student growth percentiles for district special education students did show improvement from 2008 to 2010, however, rising from 16.0 to 36.0 in ELA and from 18.0 to 28.5 in math, as compared with median SGPs for the statewide subgroup, which increased from 39.0 to 41.0 in ELA and from 40.0 to 43.0 in math. Though district special education students' median SGPs rose, they are still below 40.0, the lower end of the range considered to represent moderate growth; in mathematics, they are well below.

Tables 7 and 8 also show the performance of the Toy Town Elementary School, the district's Commendation School and the school that was selected as a "gap-closer" for the set of low-income reviews (see page 2 above). From 2008 to 2010, the CPI for Toy Town low-income students increased from 61.6 to 67.6 in ELA and from 50.4 to 67.2 in math, while their proficiency rate increased from 22 percent to 37 percent in ELA and from 12 percent to 33 percent in math. In ELA as of 2010 there was still a gap not only between Toy Town low-income students and all Toy Town students, but also between Toy Town low-income students and district and state low-income students, both in terms of proficiency rate and in terms of CPI. In math, however, in 2010, Toy Town low-income students had a higher proficiency rate and CPI than the district subgroup (33 percent and 67.2 as compared to 32 percent and 62.8), and a higher CPI than the state subgroup (67.2 as compared to 67.1). It is important to remember, though (see note on tables), that Toy Town low-income students were in only three grades, which changed between 2009 and 2010, whereas district and state low-income students came from all tested grades.

Table 7: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Toy Town Elementary School, Winchendon, and State, Compared to All Students: ELA

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
State Low-Income Students	41	73.2	45.0	45	75.5	45.0	47	76.5	46.0
State All Students	64	85.2	50.0	67	86.5	50.0	68	86.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	36	68.9	28.5	38	72.5	34.0	44	72.7	44.0
District All Students	46	76.2	30.0	48	77.5	37.0	51	77.4	43.0
Toy Town Elementary School Low-Income Students	22	61.6	26.0	29	66.1	34.0	37	67.6	29.0
Toy Town Elementary School All Students	36	70.0	28.0	36	70.5	33.0	41	71.4	31.0

Note: In 2008 and 2009 Toy Town Elementary comprised grades 4, 5, and 6. In 2010, after reconfiguration of the district's schools, it comprised grades 3, 4, and 5.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 8: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Toy Town Elementary School, Winchendon, and State, Compared to All Students: Mathematics

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	CPI	Median SGP
State Low-Income Students	33	63.1	45.0	33	64.5	44.0	37	67.1	47.0
State All Students	55	77.7	50.0	55	78.5	50.0	59	79.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	26	58.5	22.0	31	62.9	42.0	32	62.8	39.0
District All Students	36	66.3	24.0	38	68.6	48.0	40	69.0	45.0
Toy Town Elementary School Low-Income Students	12	50.4	16.0	25	56.6	32.5	33	67.2	29.0
Toy Town Elementary School All Students	22	59.2	17.0	31	63.4	36.0	41	71.4	34.0

Note: In 2008 and 2009 Toy Town Elementary comprised grades 4, 5, and 6. In 2010, after reconfiguration of the district's schools, it comprised grades 3, 4, and 5.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

As shown in Tables 9 and 10 below, except in grades 3, 5, and 6 in ELA and grade 4 in math, district low-income students had lower proficiency rates by grade than their state counterparts. While Winchendon students' proficiency rates were generally below their statewide fellow students' by small margins, there were larger differences in proficiency rates at grade 4 in ELA (21 percent versus 31 percent) and in grades 6 and 7 in math (27 percent versus 37 percent and 24 percent versus 32 percent).

**Table 9: Comparison of 2010 Proficiency Rates
for Low-Income Students by Grade: ELA**

Grade	Toy Town Elementary	Winchendon	State
3	46 (55)	45 (56)	43
4	24 (55)	21 (61)	31
5	42 (62)	41 (66)	40
6	---	49 (68)	48
7	---	48 (54)	52
8	---	55 (53)	59
10	---	58 (40)	59
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for schools and district. --- School does not include this grade. Source: School/District Profiles or District Analysis and Review Tool on ESE website</p>			

**Table 10: Comparison of 2010 Proficiency Rates
for Low-Income Students by Grade: Mathematics**

Grade	Toy Town Elementary	Winchendon	State
3	42 (55)	41 (56)	45
4	27 (55)	28 (60)	28
5	31 (62)	30 (66)	33
6	---	27 (68)	37
7	---	24 (55)	32
8	---	27 (52)	30
10	---	53 (40)	57
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for schools and district. --- School does not include this grade. Source: School/District Profiles or District Analysis and Review Tool on ESE website</p>			

The attendance rate in Winchendon between 2007 and 2010 varied between 94.0 and 94.6 percent, compared to the state rate each year of 94.6 percent. Lowest attendance was demonstrated at Murdock Middle/High School at 93.3 percent in 2010. Among those students was a 10th grade population reported as chronically absent in 2010 at the rate of 25.2 percent, meaning that that percentage of the grade's students were absent for more than 10 percent of the

school year, as opposed to 18.5 percent of 10th graders statewide.⁹ The percentage of out-of-school suspensions in the district was not much higher than the statewide percentage in 2010 (7.2 percent compared to 6.0 percent) and was lower than the state percentage in 2009 (5.0 percent compared to 5.3 percent). But the percentage of in-school suspensions in the district was 11.2 percent in 2010 as compared with 3.7 percent statewide. The four-year graduation rate was 73.3 percent in 2010, compared to the rate statewide of 82.1.

⁹ Or more than 10 percent of their days enrolled, if they were not enrolled for the whole school year.

Findings

Level 3 Findings

Leadership and Governance

The culture among the staff in the Winchendon Public Schools has become more positive and collaborative in recent years, creating a better environment for students as well as staff.

Since May 2008 when she assumed her position, the new superintendent and her administrative team have brought about a positive attitude in the school system. Her energy and enthusiasm are contagious in the school system according to interviewed leaders and teachers. Interviewees stated that there is a feeling of trust, appreciation, and support in the school district. Administrators reported that they are now working as a unit; as an example, they cited the development of the budget. They described preparing their individual school budgets initially and then meeting collectively with the superintendent and the central office directors to examine the pre-K-12 budget.

The superintendent said—and other interviewees confirmed—that a “culture of true self-reflection” now exists in the school system. In addition, administrators indicated that “straight talk meetings” are conducted by the superintendent as needed. Teachers in focus groups and the leadership of the Winchendon Teachers’ Association echoed the view that a positive, supportive attitude now exists in the district. And the school committee members who were interviewed by the review team mentioned the attitude change since the last review of the district, by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), in January 2007. Interviewees from the school committee and the town also mentioned that this superintendent has an improved relationship with town officials. Furthermore, the superintendent stated that the school committee has been recognized on a statewide level for the effective working relationship between it and the superintendent.

During this review, school committee members, the superintendent, directors, principals, assistant principals, and teachers commented about the team-building that has taken place in the district since the arrival of the current superintendent. This is in contrast to the past, when high turnover in the superintendent’s position and other central office and school administrative positions resulted in what interviewees indicated was a lack of unified commitment to initiatives that adversely affected student learning. They said that the schools acted independently rather than as a school system, staff morale was poor, teachers tended to “do their own thing,” and there was no long-term commitment to initiatives proposed by administrators since they left the school system before the initiatives were able to take root.

A number of teams have been established, such as the Investment Plan of District (IPOD) team that developed a plan to replace the earlier district turnaround plan. The focus of the new plan is on literacy, mathematics, and assessment. The IPOD team consists of central office and school administrators, teacher representatives from each of the schools, and the president of the teachers’ association.

A second team cited by leaders was the District Reconfiguration team. This team, which consisted of central office and school administrators, was responsible for moving the pre-kindergarten into the Memorial Elementary School, the 3rd grade into the Toy Town Elementary School, and the 6th grade into the Murdock Middle School.

Interviewees also commented about a third team, the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (CIA) team. The charge to this team is to provide intervention for struggling students in the elementary schools. Members of the team include the three directors (the director of curriculum and instruction, the director of instructional services, and the director of special education), the elementary school administrators, and both classroom and special education teachers.

A fourth team brought to the attention of the review team is the Data Coaching team. The purpose of this team is to have the data coaches assist teachers by working with grade-level teams to understand data and use it in their classrooms to improve student achievement. The director of instructional services, the two elementary principals, and an elementary teacher for each grade level serve on this team.

Administrators remarked on the establishment of the Intervention team and its value. This team, which includes all the special education and Title I teachers, makes available special education/Title I services in literacy through the use of an intervention model.

The sixth team identified was the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) team. This team, which consists of the Toy Town Elementary School and Murdock Middle School administrators, teacher representatives, guidance counselors, and the president of the teachers' association, focuses on the use of the behavioral components of tiered instruction.

Interviewees repeatedly referred to the recently established Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Student Support (CIAS) team at the Murdock Middle/High School. This team is implementing a change from department heads to lead teachers at the middle/high school. There are four new lead teachers at the secondary level, each responsible for one of the four CIAS areas. The team includes the director of curriculum and instruction, the secondary school administrators, the lead teachers, and teacher representatives.

Some of the other teams mentioned by interviewees or referred to in documents provided by the district are the central office administrative team, districtwide administrative team, individual school leadership teams, technology team, literacy grant team, Early Reading Intervention (ERI) team, professional development team, Harvard Forest team, elementary scheduling paradigm shift team, senior partnership team, and the custodial team that assisted with the move associated with the grade reorganization.

The president of the teachers' association summed up the involvement on the various teams of professional and non-professional staff at all levels in the district with the statement, "There's no 'I' in team."

The impact that the current superintendent has in the district is evident from observation and interviews. Her ability to get the staff in the district involved on teams on which they share ideas

and implement initiatives has resulted in a more positive attitude in the school system, which is sure to benefit students.

Although the district has a mission statement, it does not have a written vision statement and at the time of the review was about to have two district plans, leading to some confusion about the direction of the school system.

The district has the following mission statement, “Winchendon Public Schools aspires to develop in all children the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable them to live a productive and self-fulfilling life and engage in responsible citizenship in an ever-changing society.” Interviewees told the review team that the district staff refer frequently to the mission statement.

When asked about the district’s vision statement, several administrators referred to the mission statement, while others were unable to recall whether or not the district had a vision statement. The superintendent stated that the district did not have a written vision statement. She said that she and her administrative staff had a vision of where they would like to see the school system head, but as yet had not committed it to writing. She said that the members of the district’s Investment Plan of District (IPOD) team “work to establish the district’s direction and tie it in with the overarching District Improvement Plan. This has worked well for us.” But the review team was concerned that without a written vision statement the vision for and direction of the district would be less well communicated to others in the district.

Administrators and teachers told the review team that the IPOD was the District Improvement Plan. As mentioned previously, the IPOD was a document prepared by a representative committee of central office and school administrators, teachers, and the president of the teachers association to replace the district turnaround plan. The IPOD contains the following district goal: “Achieve consistency, continuity, and rigor in curriculum, instruction and assessment throughout the district for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, promoting student growth and achievement and increasing the percent of proficient by 10% and increasing median growth by five percentile points.” The plan contains two strategies and uses a template with columns for (1) action steps/district, (2) responsibility, (3) timeline, (4) evidence of effectiveness/measurements, and (5) in progress/complete. The action steps focus on intervention strategies, scheduling, professional development, special needs and Title I, cross curricula planning, assessments, common planning time, data, authentic assessment, grading, and staff assessment.

The review team also received a copy of the draft Winchendon Public Schools District Improvement Plan (DIP). According to leaders, this document was prepared by a team of administrators and teacher representatives. The draft DIP does not have goals or strategies, rather, it has action steps organized under ESE’s District Standards and Indicators; under curriculum and instruction and assessment it refers to the strategies included in the IPOD. In addition to action steps, the DIP template has columns for person(s) responsible, and in progress/complete.

At the time of the review team’s visit, each school in the district had a School Improvement Plan. The SIPs aligned with the IPOD using the same template. The SIPs at the Memorial School and

the Toy Town Elementary School were two-year plans, for 2009-2011, whereas the Murdock Middle/High School had a one-year plan, for 2009-2010.

While some school personnel described the direction in which they hoped the district would move, there seemed to be some uncertainty due to the absence of a written vision statement. In addition, with a draft DIP that was ready to be approved by the school committee while the IPOD was still considered to be in effect, some confusion existed among interviewees as to which plan would be the operative one. Without a written vision statement and a clarification of the relationship between the two plans and the priorities among their action steps, it will be difficult for the district staff to move in the same direction.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district's curriculum documents have not been recently revised; district staff rely on a mix of oral and written communications about a subset of the district's academic standards rather than a complete, up-to-date written curriculum.

The district provided the review team with an overview that listed development dates for curriculum documents: a series of curriculum guides were developed or revised between 2005 and 2010. While the physical education K-12 and the science 6-8 curriculum guides (revised) were developed in 2010, and the ELL K-12 and Technology K-12 curricula were developed in 2009, the math curricula for the various grade spans were developed in 2005 and 2006. Several of the volumes making up the written curriculum library were dated 2006 or earlier. Teachers and administrators cited the "power standards" as the resource curriculum documents and reported that meetings of staff and ad hoc communication, rather than any particular document or plan, were driving the curriculum in the district.

The curriculum guides were similar in format and demonstrated evidence of both horizontal and vertical alignment. While there is not a particular advantage to reducing all curriculum to writing during the same year, consistency of approach is valuable. Most of the samples reviewed by the team consisted of equivalent basic sections, but particular volumes had several valuable additional sections. All of the guides consisted of local academic standards. In some cases these were listed in chronological order, while in others they were listed both in chronological order and in the order of the state curriculum frameworks. The science 6-8 curriculum guide included a section that organized local academic standards by science strands, while in the math curriculum guide 7-12 the local academic standards were organized by course. The guides contained curriculum maps detailing the Winchendon learning standard, the Massachusetts framework standard, the timeframe for instruction, expected levels of achievement (introduce, develop, master and review), suggested assessment tools, and suggested resources and materials. Some, but not all, also contained common vocabulary for teachers to use or a recommended instructional philosophy. Many of the features found in some individual guides would have improved the usefulness to teachers in the others.

Instruction at the elementary level was modified during the 2009-2010 school year with the addition of “sacred time,” a 90-minute uninterrupted period during which no student meetings are to be held and no guidance appointments or office announcements are allowed. This period is dedicated to literacy, using the Houghton Mifflin program. According to administrators, the 2010-2011 school year was projected as a time to study the possibility of adding a 90-minute period for mathematics instruction. The middle-high school has continued a standard schedule with periods that revolve, except for the “long block” around lunch time. Interviewees reported that a revolving block schedule was under consideration for 2011-2012.

Administrators identified 2007 as the year when they had planned to update some of the early curriculum guides, but explained that they had held up revisions to both the ELA and the mathematics curriculum pending the release of revised Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. They said that once the revised frameworks were released, the state was considering adoption of the Common Core curriculum standards, and the corresponding uncertainty coupled with the financial investment required made the revision of these curriculum documents a lower priority than some other district initiatives. Curriculum revision work was rescheduled to a later date. In July of 2010, Massachusetts adopted the Common Core curriculum standards and began redefining the curriculum frameworks, a process that was still incomplete at the date of the district review. In its application for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Race to the Top grant, the district committed to revising its curriculum to align with the new Common Core standards.

Since 2007 the district has begun to focus on “power standards.” These standards, according to educational literature provided to the district review team, constitute the approximately 30 percent of the academic standards that are considered to be the most important for students to know. Teachers meet regularly during common planning time or staff meetings to discuss the power standards identified in the curriculum documents, validating or revising the list. At the elementary level, common planning time was initiated during the 2009-2010 school year. Common planning time had been instituted several years before at the middle school level. There is no common planning time in place for high school teachers. At both elementary schools, the review team observed evidence that there is substantial opportunity to review and revise curriculum. Data coaches regularly attend these meetings as well, providing teachers with additional information upon which to base decisions. At the middle school there is less common planning time and so less opportunity for these activities.

Without planned, regular revision of the whole curriculum and written documentation of that revision, administrators and teachers are left with only oral or ad hoc communications about a relatively small subset of standards to inform them of what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. While the district has in the past had a plan for maintaining and revising curriculum and has committed to a major effort to revise the curriculum documents in the future, there has been no systematic curriculum revision for several years, leading to inconsistencies in the curricula and their implementation. There is a real benefit to students presented by a system of planned, regular curriculum revision. Neglect of such a system, even during times of economic

uncertainty and changing standards at the state level, lessens the emphasis on a planned, districtwide curriculum and hinders the improvement to student achievement associated with it.

The district reorganized the supervisory structure at the middle/high school in 2010, replacing department chairpersons in academic disciplines with lead teachers with responsibility for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support—a promising change.

Over a period of years, administrators and teachers reported in separate interviews, the traditional department chairperson structure had been increasingly weakened by the pressures of competing financial priorities. By 2009, only four department chairpersons were left in place, for ELA, math, science, and social studies. Administrators suggested also that they had perceived some “stagnation” in the functioning of the traditional structure, and noted organization with reference to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support not only in ESE’s District Standards and Indicators, but also in the standards of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, which had reviewed the Middle/High School in 2007.

During the summer of 2010, the district decided to change the structure of supervision, creating districtwide lead teachers for the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support. There is a rotation of eight weeks, during which teachers at all levels of the district, organized into teams corresponding to the former academic departments, meet with the new lead teachers, none of whom served previously as a department chair. The lead teachers do not have responsibility for evaluating teachers; that is left to school administrators. With principals and district administrators, the lead teachers participate in walk-throughs at all the schools, providing feedback to teachers specific to their areas of responsibility. Teachers and administrators reported satisfaction with the new structure, citing the potential for collegial feedback on instructional practices, increased focus on the areas the lead teachers are responsible for, and a perceived increase in academic energy as the result of the new system.

Since the reorganization had only been in place for a few months at the time of the review, it is premature to assess its impact. Administrators told the review team that they intended to evaluate the new structure, inviting teacher input as well as comments from the administrative team. However, the district deserves recognition for the innovative structure and in particular for its potential to provide teachers with a multi-faceted view of student performance and the practices that support it. This structure has the potential to improve teaching and learning in as yet unexplored ways within the district.

Classroom observations revealed several positive aspects of instructional practice in the Winchendon Public Schools, but less evidence of a range of instructional techniques or of aspects of instruction that elicit higher-order thinking.

Review team members observed 34 classes in the Winchendon Public Schools, remaining in each for about 20 minutes. The team observed 16 ELA, 8 mathematics, and 10 science or social studies classes. In each class, review team members recorded whether they observed solid evidence, partial evidence, or no evidence of 14 characteristics of instruction in three categories: organization of the classroom; instructional design and delivery—general; and instructional design and delivery—higher order thinking.

The first category was organization of the classroom; the team found strong evidence of these characteristics.

- In 91 percent of all classes visited the review team members saw solid evidence of a positive classroom environment, with respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. There was solid or partial evidence of a positive classroom environment in 100 percent of classes.
- In 82 percent of the classrooms review team members saw solid (56 percent) or partial (26 percent) evidence that the learning objective for the day's lesson was evident, along with applicable language objectives for English language learners.
- In 94 percent of the classrooms visited team members found either solid (68 percent) or partial (26 percent) evidence that classroom time is maximized for learning.

Results were also strong for some characteristics related to instructional design and delivery.

- In 97 percent of the classrooms visited there was solid (50 percent) or partial (47 percent) evidence that instruction linked academic concepts to students' prior knowledge and experience.
- In 86 percent of classes there was solid (62 percent) or partial (24 percent) evidence that the presentation of content was within students' developmental level.
- In 100 percent of classes there was solid (41 percent) or partial (59 percent) evidence that teachers paced the lessons to ensure that students were actively engaged in learning.

For some characteristics related to instructional design and delivery, however, the team found less evidence, notably characteristics related to instruction that includes a range of techniques and instruction that elicits higher-order thinking.¹⁰

- In 69 percent of classes the team found solid (24 percent) or partial (45 percent) evidence of instruction that included a range of techniques. At the high school, however, only 9 percent of classes showed solid evidence of a range of techniques.
- In 73 percent of the classrooms there was solid (38 percent) or partial (35 percent) evidence of questions requiring application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- In 71 percent of the classes team members saw solid (24 percent) or partial (47 percent) evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning.
- In 36 percent of the classrooms visited, review team members found solid (18 percent) or partial (18 percent) evidence of students working in pairs or small groups.

It is important to note that for this last group not only was the percentage of classes where review team members found evidence of each characteristic lower, the percentage where they found solid evidence was considerably lower. Without a concerted effort to improve instructional

¹⁰ For one characteristic in the category of "instructional design and delivery—higher order thinking" the team found somewhat stronger evidence. In 83 percent of the classrooms visited the team found solid or partial evidence that lessons had opportunities for students to apply new knowledge. However, only 32 percent of classes showed solid evidence of this characteristic.

practice in the district in relation to these characteristics, it will be difficult to engage students more deeply in learning or to raise student achievement to the level the district would like to see.

Assessment

The district has developed a comprehensive written protocol that it employs to assess the effectiveness of existing programs. The assessment process is comprehensive and well-defined and includes an analysis of multiple types of data.

The Winchendon Public Schools have developed a formal, detailed process to evaluate existing instructional and support programs. The district's Protocol to Assess Existing Programs describes eight detailed, carefully articulated components of the process. The process begins with the formation of a program review team by the director of curriculum and instruction. A core part of the protocol is the requirement that the outcome evaluation include reference to a variety of specific data sources. These include student achievement data; results from consistent grade level assessments; and parent, student, or teacher survey results, if applicable. Also required is an explanation of how the program improves student achievement. The assessment process culminates with a final written report on an "assessing existing programs" template and an executive summary with supporting data and an interpretation of that data. The final decision whether to act upon the recommendations of the program review team rests with the superintendent and the district administrative team.

District and school leaders reported that the Protocol to Assess Existing Programs is employed regularly and followed consistently. They identified a number of important instructional and support programs that have been evaluated during the past several years. A review of numerous district files and documents confirmed that these included: ACES, a remedial program for students with developmental disabilities; English language learner education (K-12); science and technology/engineering (9-12); the dropout prevention program; Title I; LINKS, an instructional program for all students including diverse learners linking reading, writing, and study skills across content areas; and "Second Step," a program that supports social and emotional learning. The Protocol to Assess Existing Programs provides the district with a consistent mechanism for systematically monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its programs, maintaining currency with existing research and current practice in other districts, and ensuring appropriate educational opportunities for all learners. It is a tool for sound data-based decision-making. Using it, the district can obtain the information it needs to allocate human and financial resources in a way that will allow it to deliver enhanced programs and services to its students.

The district has been making expanded and steadily improving use of student performance data, especially in its elementary schools, to systematically monitor learning progress, improve instruction, modify academic programs and services, and develop or revise educational goals.

Key district documents, including the draft District Improvement Plan (DIP), the Investment Plan of District (IPOD), and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of both elementary schools,

include among their action steps the collection and use of student assessment results and other pertinent data. Data is to be used to improve teaching and learning and inform major decisions made in connection with prioritization of goals, budget development, program assessment, curriculum development, and choice of assessment practices.

At the district level, action steps contained in the DIP and IPOD include: presentations to the school committee on reading data, the student growth model, and MCAS results; the use of data to support budget development; and expanded use of professional development focusing on data. Additionally, plans were articulated for district and school leadership to monitor the use of frequent common assessments at the classroom level to track student progress and drive instruction and to determine how to collect and report data more efficiently for these purposes. According to interviews with administrators and teachers, these initiatives were well underway and progress was being achieved.

An examination of the SIPs of both the Memorial Elementary School (K-grade 2) and the Toy Town Elementary School (grades 3-5) revealed numerous Action Steps (with specific responsibility assignments, timelines, and requirements for evidence of effectiveness/measurements) related to data collection, analysis, and use by staff in all grade levels and content areas. The Winchendon Public Schools assessment schedule clearly indicates what assessments are in use in each of the schools, what subjects and grades they are used in, and how often they are administered. These include: Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-3), a diagnostic screening tool (pre-K-K); Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) (math, grade 2); DIBELS Next (K-6); Fountas-Pinnell Benchmarking Assessment System (K-5), for placement of students into reading groups; and Galileo (ELA and math, grades 3-10). DIBELS is administered three times a year, the other assessments once or twice. The use of the district's Protocol to Assess Existing Programs, as well as the creation of ad hoc committees to explore new standardized assessment tools and approaches to benchmarking, is helping to ensure that the district's assessment system remains current and comprehensive.

Review team members were provided with considerable evidence of the district's efforts over the past several years to develop improved data collection policies and practices. Giving particular credit to the superintendent and director of curriculum and instruction, interviewees described the work of district and school administrators to create a more comprehensive and uniform system of formative and benchmark assessments, both standardized and local, to collect student performance data, guide instruction, and better determine the individual learning needs of all students in kindergarten through grade 5. Reviewers learned of structural supports established at all grade levels in each of the elementary schools to promote the schools' shared data goals. These included common planning time for all staff and the assigning of data coaches trained in the district to every grade-level team to assist teachers in the collection, analysis, and use of student performance data in their classrooms. Teachers indicated that this ongoing, embedded, collaborative assistance, together with formal districtwide and school-level professional development, is significantly enhancing their data analysis skills, as well as promoting their

ability to use aggregated and disaggregated assessment results to adjust instruction and modify curriculum.

The progress noted in the elementary schools has not been replicated at Murdock Middle/High School (MMHS) (grades 6-12). At the time of the review, MMHS did not have the trained personnel, formal support structures, and systems (data teams, data coaches, [standard benchmark assessments](#), etc.) that are currently in place in at the elementary level. Consequently, except for MCAS results, scant evidence could be presented of ongoing, systematic collection, analysis, and use of student performance data to inform instruction or modify curriculum. Nevertheless, review team members were presented with evidence of plans for improvement in assessment at MMHS. For example, MMHS's 2009-2010 SIP identified the creation of "common expectations for assessment" as a major strategy. Action steps for implementation included increasing the use and documentation of formative assessments, as well as creating and using common benchmark assessments.

Some important developments support the improvement of assessment at MMHS. First, the Galileo formative assessment program was introduced in 2010-2011 at grades 3 through 10 in both ELA and mathematics. Teachers reported that training for staff on its implementation has been ongoing. Also in 2010-2011, a new leadership model was initiated at MMHS which replaced the traditional content area department heads with four interdisciplinary lead teachers in the areas of "curriculum," "instruction," "assessment," and "student support." Although it is clearly too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of this new leadership model, many teachers and administrators expressed their support for it and their belief that it would serve to promote MMHS's efforts to create and implement an effective, uniform, and comprehensive student assessment system.

Progress is being made in using student assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Winchendon Public Schools. At the two elementary schools in particular, it was clear to the review team that school leaders, together with classroom teachers and support staff, share a growing belief that instructional practices and student achievement can be substantially strengthened through the systematic collection, careful analysis, and appropriate use of data. The superintendent agreed that attention and resources in this area were concentrated initially at the elementary level, with the intention of gradually introducing similar initiatives at the middle/high school. The assessment systems that have been established at the elementary schools appear to have already gained traction and teachers spoke uniformly of their support for and confidence in those systems. Because of them, administrators and teachers from kindergarten through grade 5 are better able to monitor academic achievement and make timely and appropriate modifications to curriculum and instruction.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Reduction of the number of district staff every year between 2005 and 2010 has resulted in an emphasis on reassigning remaining teaching staff. Because of this emphasis and the layoffs it saves, the stresses on teachers and learning in the district are not readily apparent to the community at large.

According to data submitted annually to ESE by the district, nearly 50 teaching positions—almost one-third of the number of positions—were eliminated in Winchendon between 2005 and 2010.¹¹ In several interviews, administrators and some teachers expressed concern that additional staff reductions would be necessary for the 2011-2012 school year.

As a strategy to make use of the skills and training of the current teaching staff without having to hire a new staff member, administrators reported that they have become adept at reassigning teachers whenever vacancies occur because of retirements, resignations, or layoffs. While the administrators do not consider the mere fact of appropriate certification as necessarily synonymous with quality teaching, at the time of the onsite review they were reviewing teacher certifications with a view to possibly redeploying teachers with multiple certifications if the need arose for 2011-2012.

The district has had remarkable success in continuing to employ properly certified teachers. The administration reported that only one teacher was on waiver, and that four were in the process of completing certification requirements. Indeed, in the random survey conducted of teacher and administrator personnel files, 100 percent of the administrators and 97 percent of the teachers were found to be certified.

In recruiting staff for vacancies that cannot be filled by reassignment, the administration posts the vacancies for 10 days (as required by the collective bargaining agreement), advertises in several publications, uses online services, and contacts area colleges—including Franklin Pierce University and Keene State College in New Hampshire.

Candidates for teaching positions are interviewed by the principal, other administrators, and, customarily, by a committee of other teachers. Administrators reported that although they are cognizant of possible salary differentials in replacing a teacher, salary is never used as a determinant in making a hiring decision. When the principal selects a candidate for the position, the candidate is referred to the superintendent's office in order to complete the hiring process.

Newly hired teachers are assigned a mentor from the same grade or content area. The mentors, who are trained, are given a stipend for their mentoring duties. The mentoring program is overseen by the director of instructional services. In several interviews, teachers expressed strong support not only for the mentoring program, but also for the general approach used by the administration in introducing new teachers to the expectations of the district. They referred to

¹¹ See the Winchendon profile, teachers tab, at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/teacher.aspx?orgcode=03430000&orgtypecode=5&>.

curriculum mapping documents, rubrics for assessments, and a thorough introduction to the scope and sequence of the curriculum. The frequency of meetings with the mentor—even before the beginning of the school year—serves to make the teacher’s entry into the district as seamless as possible.

The total number of teachers went from 151.5 in 2005 to 102.0 in 2010, a reduction of nearly a third: 32.7 percent. Over the same years, the student population in the district went from 1,781 to 1,626, a reduction of only 8.7 percent. The practice of reassigning staff rather than hiring to fill vacancies avoids layoffs and the necessity and cost of training new teachers, but it stresses the capacity of the teaching staff. It uses available staff with an appropriate certification rather than the best possible person for the vacancy. Furthermore, because the district has avoided layoffs where possible, the fact that the capacity of the teaching staff is now strained, with all that implies for the district’s ability to undertake new initiatives and improve teaching and learning, is not readily apparent to the wider Winchendon community.

Evaluations of district personnel are not always completed on time, and too infrequently make comments intended to improve practice or recommendations for professional development.

In several interviews with the review team, teachers and administrators indicated that they took the evaluation process seriously and saw it as an opportunity to improve performance. Both teachers (including representatives of the teachers’ association) and administrators expressed confidence that the guidelines contained in the collective bargaining agreement for evaluating teachers are strictly adhered to. According to these requirements, teachers without professional status are to be evaluated three times a year, and teachers with professional status are to be evaluated every other year. Independent of these contractual requirements, however, the administrators have the latitude to conduct more frequent evaluations. A random review of personnel files generally confirmed that this expressed confidence in the frequency of evaluations was well-placed for regular classroom teachers, but indicated that it was less well-placed for specialists, including those assigned to special education and guidance. The file review represented a sample of 22 percent of the district’s teachers covered by the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers’ association. Sixty-seven percent of the evaluations were done on time. Of the evaluations that were not, 70 percent belonged to personnel other than regular classroom teachers. All of the evaluations were signed by the teacher and the evaluator.

Teachers reported that they found the evaluations to be helpful—not only the formal report itself, but also the conferences held with administrators both before and after the classroom visitation. In the teachers’ view, when concrete and specific advice was received from the administrators, the value of the evaluation was greatly enhanced. The random file review showed that 80 percent of the evaluations were aligned with the Principles of Effective Teaching, and 83 percent were informative, meaning that they included references to practice, rather than simply a description of circumstances encountered during the review. Only 30 percent, however, were instructive, meaning that they included comments intended to improve instruction. And rarely do evaluators

recommend a particular professional development activity in connection with an evaluation. That particular link was discovered in only 13 percent of the files in the random review.

The superintendent is evaluated annually by the school committee. The basis of the evaluation is goal achievement. The review team examined the personnel files of 11 other administrators and discovered, with the exception of four administrators hired in July and August of 2010, that all had been evaluated by their supervisor, and all of the evaluations had been signed. All eight administrative evaluations were at least partially aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership, and all were found to be informative, but only three (38 percent) of the evaluations were instructive (in other words, included comments intended to improve the administrator's practice). Finally, a particular recommendation for professional development was identified in only one (13 percent) of the administrative evaluations.

Outside of the formal evaluation process, the district makes use of walkthroughs, training in ESE's Learning Walk protocol having been conducted by a consultant. Interviews with teachers disclosed a universal approval for the process. Among the plaudits heard for the walkthroughs was praise for the provision for immediate feedback and for the frequent presence of administrators in classrooms (as well as the hallways and the cafeteria). Teachers expressed the belief that administrators are looking for rigor, student engagement, and the ability of students to express what they are learning, as well as the ability to make connections between earlier and later learning activities.

The informal supervision carried out by means of walkthroughs results in high visibility of administrators and frequent feedback to teachers. The district's formal teacher evaluation process, however, is not always conducted when it should be, especially for specialist staff, and most teacher and administrator evaluations do not contain sufficient feedback—they are not instructive and do not contain recommendations for professional development. Though teachers reported that they found evaluations and the associated conferences helpful, the district has not implemented its evaluation system consistently and realized its full potential for improving teacher and administrator practice and so improving teaching and learning.

Though the district recognizes the substantial importance of professional development and provides both embedded training and training outside the school day, its professional development program has been cut back and is now dependent to some degree on grant funding.

The district currently schedules three professional development days each school year. In addition, monthly early release days are generally devoted to professional development at the school level. Districtwide professional development is overseen by a very active professional development committee with 18 members. The membership is truly a cross-section of the district, including the principals and representatives from among teachers in the three schools, central office administrators, the school committee, the teachers' association, and paraprofessionals. The committee meets monthly. In October it begins to plan activities for the following school year by issuing a survey to the staff through Survey Monkey. In addition to the survey, the committee reviews each of the School Improvement Plans to ascertain needs.

According to an extensive interview with six members of the professional development committee, the 2010 survey showed a desire for more training in the content areas as well as training on the integration of technology in the classroom.

School committee members are kept abreast of professional development activities. They receive a copy of the professional development calendar and a description of the activities. The school committee itself actively engages in its own professional development by attending Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) meetings; in addition, each member receives an individual policy book from the superintendent.

There have been two significant changes in the area of professional development, both of which are attributable to the fiscal condition of the district. First, the number of days devoted to professional development, as set by the collective bargaining agreement, has been reduced from five to three, a fact interviewees frequently referred to, expressing pride in the number of professional development days in the district in the past. Second, administrators reported that a significant portion of the funding for professional development now comes from grants, rather than fiscal support from the district itself, which had previously been the primary funding source.

As noted above, teacher evaluations rarely recommend professional development. However, teachers do generate Individual Professional Development Plans in concert with the principal, and the principals, in their capacity as members of the professional development committee, apprise the committee of these identified teacher needs.

Beyond the formal professional development activities included in the calendar under the auspices of the professional development committee (and conducted in concert with surrounding districts on one of the professional development days), the district provides a significant amount of job-embedded professional development, for instance during common planning time and through Lab Teachers who, through the K-12 Literacy Grant, model instruction in their classrooms, focusing on conceptual skills.

The district's professional development program is generally strong, including both embedded and traditional training, but it has been negatively affected by budgetary constraints in recent years, with the program now dependent to a significant degree on grant funding and with the number of professional development days reduced from five to three. In addition, the district is missing an opportunity to link professional development with staff evaluations.

Student Support

The district has a new, collaborative approach to supporting students and many new support programs, though financial constraints have prevented the provision of the guidance and special education staffing district leaders view as necessary.

In interviews with administrators as well as the staff, including teachers, special education personnel, counselors, and Title I teachers (called interventionists in the district), students in Winchendon were described as “belonging to everyone” regardless of what their differing

learning needs were. In several interviews the positive school climate, concern for students, and attention to student learning needs were cited. School year 2009-2010 was the first year of the new grade-level configurations for the three schools. The pre-kindergarten moved into Memorial to join the kindergarten and grades 1 and 2, the 3rd grade moved from Memorial to Toy Town, and the 6th grade moved from Toy Town to the Murdock Middle/High School (MMHS). It is noteworthy that preparation for these transitions was well planned in the spring beforehand, involving visits to their new schools for students and parents, meetings of guidance counselors to discuss students, and Title I/special education meetings about student data and IEPs.

The pre-kindergarten program is free for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and tuition for others is on a sliding scale. This program is now part of the Memorial Elementary School (K-2), where it begins to provide resources to at-risk families and children who then continue at Memorial in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2. For instance, therapists are available to provide skill groups for students with and without IEPs. Parent support groups and adult literacy programs are available for families, as well as referrals to outside agencies when indicated.

Memorial is known for its developmental programming as well as activities such as second graders reading to preschoolers. It has a home visiting program for all new students, and students participate in a Second Step social skills program. Small skill-based groups of students work together on social and behavioral issues. The integration of the pre-kindergarten into Memorial was believed by interviewees to improve the transition to kindergarten and to allow families to begin a relationship in pre-kindergarten with the school nurse and the guidance counselor and to have access to other therapeutic services.

During the team's visit to Toy Town Elementary School it was stated repeatedly that special education teachers and Title I teachers, among other groups, now work together, meet together, and decide on intervention strategies together. All teachers have been trained by the members of the data team for their grade in differentiating instruction and in looking at data and using it to inform instruction.

The district's special education model, at least at the elementary level, is to use inclusion whenever this is appropriate; Title I interventionists and special education teachers work in the regular education classroom after setting goals for students based on assessment results discussed with each school's grade-level data teams. There are 1 ½ Title I positions at Memorial and at Toy Town; the staff in these positions collaborate on intervention teams with special education teachers.

As reported in the December 2010 issue of the Murdock Middle/High School News, some seniors were being trained to mentor freshmen and were to be paired with them for leadership activities. This is another way the schools are building in practices that will aid in the transition of students from one level to the next. Guidance counselors reported in interviews that the high school is doing more than in the past to prepare students for college. Data provided to review team members by the guidance department identified over 20 visits by colleges during the first half of the 2010-2011 school year to meet with students. Counselors also described a recent

panel for juniors and seniors of nine college students who were alumni of the high school. Outside agencies such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Mount Wachusett Community College's Division of Access and Transition are working with the guidance department to introduce students to college possibilities.

In the area of health education and support the district has programs at every school. As well as taking care of ill students, school nurses in each building provide preventive health education for students and parents, conduct health assessments, give referrals to outside agencies when appropriate, and follow up on frequently absent students. Nurses participate in IEP meetings when necessary. At Toy Town the school nurse goes into classrooms and teaches lessons on hygiene, diet, and exercise. The MMHS nurse works with the Winchendon Project, which is a school-based health center providing health and wellness education and counseling services to students in school. At an interview with special education staff the Winchendon Project was credited with reducing a previously high rate of teen pregnancy and with addressing risky behaviors by providing mental health services on site and resources for other schools, including a play therapist for the Memorial School.

The guidance counselors coordinate referrals to them and the one school adjustment counselor for pre-K through 12th grade. The superintendent and other administrators agreed that there was not enough guidance support for the middle school, with only one half-time position, which the superintendent viewed as insufficient given an age-group of students in middle school who may be experiencing transition issues. There are two guidance counselors at the high school, one for grades 9-10 and one for grades 11-12, one at Toy Town, and one at Memorial School. In addition to more guidance staff, the superintendent stated her belief that the district is in need of more special education staff to be able to provide inclusion classes at MMHS. Special education teachers and administrators also expressed the belief that more special education teachers are needed for the middle and upper grades to continue the inclusion model in appropriate classes. According to district staff, the number of special education paraprofessionals has been greatly reduced over the years. Staffing data submitted to ESE by the district shows that from 2010 to 2011, the number of special education paraprofessionals was reduced from 40 to 29.¹² Teachers in focus groups stated that since the loss of these positions they are overwhelmed trying to meet the needs of students at different levels in their classes. As the next budget preparation cycle approached, more cuts were expected and it was unclear how services would then be provided for students at all levels.

The district has programs at each school to promote positive behavior and recognition of student effort. These were mentioned in all of the interviews about student support as being pivotal to changing school culture for students and staff. Memorial has the Save One Student (SOS) program, in which 20 staff members are each voluntarily paired with one child needing attention. Memorial also has a "Word of the Month" project ("respect" is one "word of the month" example mentioned during interviews) and a 110% club to reward students showing improvement. At Toy Town the principal, assistant principal, and staff credit the Positive

Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program with a much improved school climate. The program provides professional development for new and veteran teachers on how to model and reinforce good classroom and school behaviors. Students are given tickets whenever they behave well, which are then put into a drawing for prizes. The prizes are displayed near the main office. Interviewees mentioned that students now behaved better in the hallways at Toy Town, and it was emphasized that teachers were moderating student behavior in gentler, more positive ways than before the PBIS initiative and training.

The PBIS program is also at MMHS, which in 2010-2011 was in year two of a three-year grant funding PBIS training and implementation. Teacher leaders manage the program; teachers expressed hope that it will help with the challenges being experienced by 6th graders who are challenged by MMHS's large building and a schedule with frequent changing of classes and teachers.

The new Curriculum Instruction Assessment Support (CIAS) model at MMHS in 2010-2011 was designed to help teachers with their instructional practice and to identify students in need of intervention with the help of the Support lead teacher and the grade-level teacher teams. They share possible strategies with teachers and follow up as necessary with referrals to the Student Support Team in each school, accompanied by documentation of implemented interventions. The Student Support Team completes an evaluation and designs an improvement plan. In interviews with coordinators and directors, the large role of sports, music, and drama was mentioned in allowing at-risk students to be recognized and feel more a part of the school community. Project Success works with high school dropouts and there is a Safe Haven Club to support student diversity at MMHS.

Interviewees said that they believed the administration has made the implementation of a collaborative model of education a priority for everyone in the district and has put into place a student-centered support model that encourages staff ownership of all students. The district informed the review team that the next priority was increased support for middle school students. At the time of the team's visit, it was thought that the schedule would probably change so as to increase the length of periods and decrease the number of class changes for both the middle and high school in 2011-2012. The assistant principal was looking into an advisory program for the high school. Comments from interviews with groups of teachers included: "We love these kids!" "It's all about the kids now!" These comments reflect the positive direction Winchendon is taking now that the superintendent has been able to develop an administration that is more stable and team-centered (see first Leadership and Governance finding above), which has led to better coordination of efforts in each school to move forward.

The new support programs described above, in combination with the new administrative teams and the staff's new collaborative approach to supporting students, enhance the stability of the Winchendon Public Schools and the support they provide, improving the schools' ability to improve student achievement.

Although the district has some programming for high-performing students, the percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses has decreased and the percentage of students with plans to attend a four-year college is low. The expectations conveyed to students, in terms of course options, graduation requirements, and career education, are not high.

The district has many initiatives to raise achievement for its underperforming students—such initiatives as professional development in differentiated instruction, co-teaching and inclusion for special education students, and Response to Intervention (RTI) training for teachers. Still, the number of students attempting more challenging courses and the number of students preparing for four-year colleges are low. According to ESE’s District Analysis and Review Tool, 9 percent of 11th and 12th grade students were enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course in 2010, a decline from 24 percent in 2006; the statewide rate was 17 percent.¹³ According to district data, the number of students taking the PSAT and SAT exams in their junior and senior years is low; however, the principal of Murdock Middle/High School told the review team that he had applied for a Massachusetts Insight grant to assist students taking the PSAT test the following year in paying the fee. According to the district profile on ESE’s website, the percentage of high school graduates between 2006 and 2010 indicating plans to attend four-year private colleges ranged between 9 and 24 percent, while the state percentage was consistently between 30 and 32 percent. The percentage of graduates indicating plans to attend four-year public colleges over that period ranged between 16 and 23 percent, while the statewide percentage was 27 or 28 percent in each of those years. All teachers have attended a course in differentiated instruction, but it is unclear from review of teacher evaluation reports whether taking this course has affected the teaching of students who are not below grade level.

The course catalogue for the Murdock High School has very distinct course selection options with a basic and/or applied level, a college preparatory level, and some honors and AP courses. Some high schools have abandoned basic and/or applied level courses as providing students with an unchallenging option and not preparing them adequately for future education and career choices. And the requirement to complete three years of mathematics and three of science in order to graduate is not a high expectation. According to the District Analysis and Review Tool, only 19 percent of 2010 Winchendon high school graduates had completed MassCore, whose recommended program of studies includes four years of English, four years of math, three years of a lab-based science, three years of history, two years of the same foreign language, one year of an arts program, and five additional "core" courses such as business education, health, or technology.¹⁴

In interviews counselors and administrators suggested that a bad economy or parents not being college graduates were reasons why more students did not aspire to higher education. One long-

¹³ The District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>. See the curriculum tab of the DART for Districts.

¹⁴ Again, see the curriculum tab of the DART for Districts. For more information on MassCore, please see the ESE website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hsreform/masscore/summary.pdf>.

time staff member spoke about concerns that aspirations for students were not high enough and that the schools could do more to make students aware of the world outside Winchendon. In response, another staff member talked about the annual trip to Boston and the Museum of Science for students in grades 3-5. This trip is an exposure to new ideas but is not an in-depth introduction to possible future career choices or opportunities.

The many initiatives to help students that are underway in the district are not as effective as they could be without higher expectations for all students. A sense of urgency is required about more students preparing for and setting their sights on four-year colleges even if they need to start in a two-year college because of financial issues. An area that deserves attention from the early grades on is education about careers beyond those students may already be familiar with. There is a plan for career education for the middle school, but it is on hold until there is a full-time grant-funded position to implement the plan. Expanding the visions students have for their futures could be an exciting part of the curricular initiatives the district is now undertaking, with applications to the common core subject areas.

In the district turnaround plan one major initiative focused on establishing and setting high standards and expectations for all students. Special programs such as senior projects and dual enrollment at Mount Wachusett Community College attract some of the higher-performing students. The district reported no initiatives to increase participation in these programs by lower-performing students at the middle/high school. This conclusion was supported in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report on the high school based on a visit in October 2007. At Toy Town Elementary, the staff has initiated some programs for advanced students, including courses based on student interests before and after school. A book group with the librarian was cited as just one example of several voluntary activities provided.

The district does not have a framework to encourage and support students in taking on more challenging work and in planning ahead for challenging career and college options. Though the state of the economy may be one reason more students do not aspire to higher education, the state of the economy also means that they need to complete the rigorous set of high school courses that will open up their postsecondary options, including the option of going to college.

Financial and Asset Management

At the time of the review, the school district and the town finance committee had inadequate communication, and issues of trust and cooperation between them remained. For a number of years the town has funded the school district at the minimum level needed to meet the amount of required net school spending set by the state.

A previous review by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in 2007 found that the school district and the town had misunderstandings about financial transactions, that issues arising from the mutual conflict and mistrust created time-consuming distractions, and that the mistrust negatively impacted the educational programming offered in the Winchendon Public

Schools.¹⁵ Interviews in the current review indicated that district/town relations have been better since the current superintendent has been in the position; nevertheless, it was universally agreed that there were still difficulties in the relationship between the school committee and superintendent on the one hand and the town finance committee on the other. According to town officials interviewed, greater trust and cooperation were needed.

The school budget process preceding the review, to develop the fiscal year 2011 budget, was described by one town official as “contentious.” Within the district, the process included the involvement of principals and other administrative personnel led by the superintendent and school business manager. The goal of the preliminary budget process was to create a “level services” budget that met the needs of the district. Under this “level services” budget, if any new initiatives were added to the budget, funding for others had to be reduced or discontinued. The preliminary budget was prepared in an Excel sheet format organized by location and function codes. The fiscal year 2011 budget document did not reference the fiscal year 2010 budget, which was a departure from past practice. While the principals and administrators discussed class sizes, need for textbooks, and expanding educational programs, information on these was not presented in a written document to the town finance committee. According to district administrators, no meetings were held with the town finance committee or the board of selectmen during the fiscal year 2011 budget development process.¹⁶ The superintendent, principals, and other administrators discussed the preliminary budget with the school committee in a budget presentation.

According to interviews, the town finance committee was at odds with the school district because the school budget documentation was in a different format from that previously agreed upon. The two primary issues were (1) individual account code line items were aggregated by function code and (2) the fiscal year 2011 proposed budget did not reference the fiscal year 2010 budget. The finance committee requested additional information from the school district by email. According to a town official, the finance committee does not have a formal liaison to the school committee to handle communication. The subsequent information received by the finance committee was viewed as insufficient and confusing. On a motion at the May 11, 2010, finance committee meeting to approve the fiscal year 2011 school budget for Town Meeting consideration, there was no second for discussion. The next motion made was to disapprove the school budget. This motion was approved. Citing lack of cooperation from the school committee, finance committee members also voted not to approve a separate warrant article for additional funding submitted by the school committee. At Town Meeting, an article for a budget reflecting required NSS was approved; a second article for additional funding for the schools was not.

¹⁵ See pp. 104-5 of the Turnaround Plan Benchmarking Report: Winchendon Public Schools, at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/reports/turnaround/07_0343.pdf.

¹⁶ In addition, according to town officials, the board of selectmen does not meet with the school committee regularly—rather, the board of selectmen, the town finance committee, and the school committee have joint meetings as needed.

According to information received from the district by ESE, a subsection of the school committee and a subsection of the finance committee had several meetings during the development of the fiscal year 2012 budget.

It was reported by those interviewed and confirmed by reference to data reported on the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) website that the town taxes to the levy limit.¹⁷ Overrides to increase the levy limit in order to supplement the school department's operating budget were defeated by the Winchendon community in July 2006 and July 2010.¹⁸ The stabilization fund was reported to be \$1.8 million (confirmed by the DOR website for fiscal year 2010)¹⁹ and there was no free cash. There were no plans to use stabilization funds for the general operating expenses of the community.

For a number of years, the town of Winchendon has funded the school district at the minimum amount necessary to meet the state's net school spending (NSS) requirement. According to one town official, the town finance committee wants to see a school budget balanced against the net school spending level: "That's the way it has been here." From fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2010, actual NSS fell below required NSS three times, and only rose more than 1.6 percent above required NSS twice.²⁰ This was in contrast to actual NSS across the state, which exceeded required NSS every year from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2010, by percentages (ranging from 8.7 percent to 16.2 percent) that increased every year but one.²¹ What happens is that the school district reduces the preliminary school budget to the amount acceptable to town officials before Town Meeting, when it is acted upon: the school committee submits a school budget that reflects required NSS for consideration at Town Meeting rather than submitting a school budget that reflects the needs of the school district. When in the past the school committee has submitted separate warrant articles to increase the school budget for various reasons, such as funding paraprofessional staff not included in the NSS level budget or the purchase of a replacement school district truck, these articles have been disapproved, sometimes at Town Meeting, sometimes by a referendum vote of the community.

After Town Meeting, if the projected amount of required NSS is revised, the budget is revised, too, to reflect the revision in required NSS. The approved fiscal year 2011 school budget was reduced in November 2010 by \$210,000 due to this circumstance, after chapter 70 aid was reduced and replaced with EduJobs funds. Community leaders have determined that the school district budget will be funded at the level of required NSS.

In addition to the disagreement between the finance committee and the school district on the details of the presentation of the fiscal year 2011 budget, the review team found the inadequacy of the communication between them and the continuing difficulties in their relationship at the time of the review to be barriers to having a clear, comprehensive, complete understanding of the financial needs of the district. Such barriers impede good budgeting and the larger community's ability to understand the district's challenges and goals.

¹⁷ See <http://www.mass.gov/Ador/docs/dls/mdmstuf/aag/aag343.doc>.

¹⁸ See the DOR website at http://www.mass.gov/Ador/docs/dls/mdmstuf/Prop2_LevyCap_RefVotes/overrides.xls.

¹⁹ See link in previous footnote.

²⁰ See the Winchendon c. 70 profile on the ESE website at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>.

²¹ See the state c. 70 profile on the ESE website at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>.

The district has made significant cuts to the numbers of teachers and paraprofessionals and has not been able to make additions to the staff that administrators regard as needed. It has had to cut professional development and must fund core district needs through the use of various unpredictable funding sources.

When district funding needs are at a level greater than the amount of a budget that reflects required NSS, the district must reduce expenses, notably by reducing staff. Approximately 50 teaching positions were eliminated between 2005 and 2010: the total number of teachers dropped from 151.5 to 102.0.²² This was a reduction of nearly a third, 32.7 percent, while the student population at the same time fell only 8.7 percent. And according to data submitted to ESE, 19 paraprofessional positions were eliminated before the 2010-2011 school year, including 11 special education paraprofessional positions. According to administrators, the district was in need of more special education teachers at MMHS in order to provide inclusion classes there (as required by federal special education law on least restrictive environment); meanwhile, teachers reported to the review team that they feel overwhelmed by the needs of their students in the wake of cuts to special education paraprofessional staff. Administrators also stated that the one half-time guidance position at the middle school was insufficient for the needs of middle school students, and that plans for career education at the middle school were on hold until a position could be grant-funded—though the percentages of students in AP courses and with plans to attend four-year colleges were lower than across the state. In addition, although in many classrooms the team did not observe solid evidence of instruction that includes a range of techniques or elicits higher-order thinking from students, professional development in the district is dependent to a significant degree on grant funding and the number of professional development days has been cut from five to three.

In general, the district makes use of non-recurring grants, private foundations, and private contributions to supplement the district budget, relying on one-time or unpredictable resources outside of the school budget to fund ongoing core district needs. A literacy coach is grant-funded, and district officials told the review team that if the grant did not exist, the position would be eliminated. The Murdock Fund is used primarily to fund general supplies throughout the district. The Robinson Broadhurst Foundation is used primarily to fund technology items throughout the district. Private grants for fiscal year 2010 totaled approximately \$410,000 as reported on the End of Year Report. In fiscal year 2011 a community member donated money to the school district for the replacement of a disabled school truck previously denied at Town Meeting. But in addition to the previously mentioned needs identified by district administrators, it was reported to the review team that unmet needs due to lack of funding included specialists in reading and math, updated textbooks, and supplies and materials.

Needs are funded from one-time or unpredictable sources or remain unmet in spite of the distance the district has to make up in terms of student achievement. From 2008 to 2010, the difference in proficiency rates between Winchendon students and all state students remained the

²² See ESE's School/District Profiles at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/teacher.aspx?orgcode=03430000&orgtypecode=5&>

same in math (at 19 percentage points) and narrowed by only one percentage point in ELA (from 18 to 17 percentage points). See Tables 5 and 6 and the accompanying text, in the Student Performance section above. For the low-income subgroup, constituting 46 percent of the student population in 2010, the proficiency gap with the state subgroup narrowed slightly more: by two percentage points in each subject (from 5 to 3 points in ELA and from 7 to 5 points in math). See Tables 7 and 8 above and the accompanying text. For the special education subgroup (19.7 percent of students in 2010), the picture is worse. From 2008 to 2010 the proficiency gap with the state special education subgroup remained at 15 percentage points in ELA and increased from 10 to 17 points in math. Winchendon special education students' proficiency rate in 2010 was 13 percent in ELA and 4 percent in math. See Student Performance section above.

The Composite Performance Index (CPI) was lower in 2010 in both ELA and math for African-American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, white, special education, and low-income students than for their counterparts in the same subgroups statewide; the gaps were greatest for special education students. The median student growth percentile in 2010 for all of these district subgroups was also lower than for the corresponding state subgroup, in both subjects. See Tables 3 and 4 above. Although median SGPs were higher in both subjects in 2010 than in 2008 for all students, low-income students, and special education students, in some cases showing meaningful growth during those years (growth of 10 points or more in a year), median SGPs for all of these groups in 2010 were still only moderate or below moderate. See Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 above, and accompanying text.

The district recognizes the need to weed out ineffective programs and determine what improvements need to be made in programs to be kept. Unlike many other districts, it has a protocol for program evaluation, which was reported to be used regularly (see first Assessment finding above). Nevertheless, needs have been identified by its staff that it is unable to meet with existing resources, and some of the needs currently being met are being funded by one-time or unpredictable resources. It is important to have predictable financial resources to meet the needs of the district. Because of the continuing issues of trust and cooperation between the district and the town finance committee and the inadequate communication between the district and the town, it may be that neither town officials nor members of the wider community have a clear understanding of the district's needs and of its goals. This is particularly true given that the district's avoidance of layoffs when possible (see first Human Resources finding above) may have obscured from town observers the stresses on the capacity of the teaching staff brought about by the substantial reductions in recent years in instructional personnel.

The district does not have a formal preventive maintenance program and capital improvement plan to maximize and prolong the effective use of facilities.

Each school building appeared to be safe, clean, and well-maintained. Those interviewed commented on the importance that school facilities have for student behavior and achievement. The custodial staff work together to balance workloads and share resources. There is a good working relationship with the department of public works and police and fire departments. The review team was told that each year custodians are expected to do more with less, but, as one

interviewee said, “We keep moving forward.” Custodians interviewed expressed pride in their building. One said, “The buildings reflect on us, and we are tax payers in the community as well.” Staff at each school contribute to the budget development process and maintain inventory records. The district uses a maintenance management system for creating work orders. Preventive maintenance for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning is conducted by an outside vendor. There is no documented preventive maintenance program for other types of equipment and systems. Energy management consists primarily of turning the lights and computers off and monitoring fuel consumption: there is no documented energy management plan. Environmental safety concerns such as indoor air quality are acted upon immediately, but there is no environmental safety plan in place. Capital planning consists of an informal audit of the facilities by school personnel and the creation of a spreadsheet that contains a list of building-related items that need attention. There is no formal capital planning process.

It is important to have custodial and maintenance staff work as a team and thus provide a unified effort in creating a learning environment that supports teaching and learning. This kind of teamwork and unified effort exists in the district. However, it is equally important to have a well-conceived school facilities maintenance and capital improvements plan. This would address preventive maintenance, energy management, environmental safety, and capital planning. Such a plan, properly implemented, provides school leaders the “blueprint” for protecting the community’s capital investment, managing long-term costs, and providing a physical environment that supports teaching and learning.

Low-Income Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

- **school leadership;**
- **curriculum;**
- **instruction;**
- **tiered instruction and adequate learning time; and**
- **social/emotional support**

Under the current leadership at Toy Town Elementary School, the school is using collaborative approaches to improving teaching and learning to change the weak instruction, low expectations, and poor student achievement that characterized the school in earlier years.

A review by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in January 2007 found that “[i]nstructional practices, student engagement, and expectations for students were weakest in the observed classes at Toy Town Elementary Schools ([which was then] grades 4-6).”²³ In addition, flexible groupings and a variety of instructional activities were significantly less observed at Toy Town than at Memorial, and examples of differentiated instruction were rare in the Toy Town classrooms.²⁴ Toy Town also fared the poorest in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Composite Performance Index (CPI).²⁵

In this review it was found that the new administrative team, headed by a principal appointed in 2008, has spearheaded the development and implementation of a comprehensive, well-designed, and data-driven plan for improving student achievement. In addition, both the district and school administrative teams have nurtured a culture of professional development and continual improvement among the entire staff; staff members serve on a variety of teaching, learning, and support committees that meet regularly and have taken on responsibility for implementing the key components of the school improvement plan and assessing progress made on them.

Interviews with teachers, supporting staff, and the administrative team showed that the school is dedicated to ensuring that no student falls through the cracks and that all students receive the support they need when they need it. The Toy Town School Improvement Plan (SIP), based on

²³ Turnaround Benchmarking Report: Winchendon Public Schools, p. 23, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/reports/turnaround/07_0343.pdf.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁵ Ibid.

the staff's analysis of student MCAS data, outlines a plan for focusing on objectives and strategies tied to improving student achievement, the action steps necessary to achieve them, person(s) responsible for implementing the goals, the timeline, and evidence of effectiveness/measurements.

The SIP contains strategies and action steps aimed at basing instruction on data collected from formal and informal assessments and analyzed by the grade-level teams. Through a one-year grant secured with the support of the district, at the time of the review the school had lengthy weekly common planning time for teachers to meet in grade-level teams, led by two teacher leaders for each grade-level team who had been trained as data coaches. The grade-level teams analyzed data on student achievement, received regularly through a schedule of assessments including assessments devised by teachers as well as Galileo and DIBELS. They worked on fine-tuning their teaching strategies to improve student achievement. During one of the two staff meetings held each month, teachers shared their students' academic progress and challenges across grades while discussing the key content strategies they were teaching that month.

The school has a system for identifying students who need assistance in mastering specific skills, along with a plan to provide intensive support, both short-term and long-term, to all such students. With the assistance of the school's literacy coach, classroom teachers and a team of interventionists, now called the Response to Intervention (RTI) Team, meet regularly to select teaching strategies tailored to the learning needs of individual students and the objectives of the school's SIP. Agendas and minutes for all such meetings are compiled, made available to all staff members, and regularly reviewed by the administrative staff. The RTI team also meets by itself regularly, again facilitated by the school's literacy coach. The literacy coach, hired on a short-term grant, creates the master schedule for all students supported by the RTI team and helps team members analyze data and develop strategies for students, both in the team's own meetings and in meetings with classroom teachers. A review of meeting agendas and minutes showed that the school's administrators comment on them soon afterward, with specific written feedback on the work of each grade-level team and any questions that they have about the direction of the work.

The district has provided professional development to six Toy Town teachers staffing the Literacy Lab grant-funded program. These teachers were trained to institute best literacy practices on the elementary school level. They observe each other teach and then have a facilitated discussion of the lesson during their lunch-time. Plans were in place for inviting other teachers to participate in observing and debriefing the lessons, a way of embedding professional development and encouraging good practices throughout the school.

According to Toy Town teachers, school leaders work as a team, conveying great expectations to staff members while supporting them and nurturing a positive climate. After a history of weak instruction, low expectations, and poor student achievement, Toy Town is now experiencing a thoughtfully conceived and forward-thinking improvement initiative, with staff members collaborating to improve achievement for every student. And from 2008 to 2010 achievement at

the school did improve significantly (see Tables 7 and 8 and accompanying text above), resulting in the school being named a Commendation School by the state in fall 2010.

Toy Town Elementary School has changed its grade span, its schedule, and its instructional model to be more characteristic of an elementary school and has accompanied these changes with multiple types of professional development for staff. Review team members observed some positive instructional characteristics in classrooms and saw teachers beginning to use strategies learned from the professional development provided.

Within the past few years, Toy Town Elementary School has embarked on wholesale change in the direction of a more developmentally appropriate learning setting for elementary-age children. The first changes in the plan to address the weaknesses documented in the 2007 Turnaround Benchmarking Report (see previous finding) were the new principal's changes in scheduling. These changes included restructuring from a secondary school instructional model with short class periods and frequent changes in classrooms to a model attuned to the developmental needs of elementary school students. The model changed from students moving from subject-specific teacher to subject-specific teacher a minimum of four times a day to a classroom of students taught all subjects by one teacher, except when they are being taught by specialists or interventionists for targeted skill work. Instructional periods were modified from a 45-minute classroom period with seven minutes between classes to a 90-minute daily block for both English language arts and math taught by one classroom teacher. With district support, the composition of Toy Town changed as well; it changed from a school that spans grades 4 to 6 to one that spans grades 3-5.

Changes in the instructional model at Toy Town, documented in administrative memos and in the agendas of staff meetings, have been accompanied by corresponding professional development. Teachers were supported in taking a graduate-level course in differentiated instruction, two teachers from each grade have been selected as Literacy Lab teachers in order to model best practices in literacy across their grade, and two teachers from each grade have received extensive training in data coaching.

In addition, the school hired a literacy coach to provide day-to-day support in using best literacy practices in every classroom, as well as to coordinate the school's team of interventionists in working with any student who needs additional support in mastering academic skills in ELA or math. The literacy coach offers an after-school workshop on a best teaching practice each month; copies of the agendas and materials for all of the workshops were provided to the review team. This voluntary professional development, attended the first time by about 6 teachers, is now attended each month by 12-14 teachers, virtually all of the classroom teachers. Workshops go until 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

The nine classrooms observed by the review team all had a positive classroom climate focused on learning. Objectives were written in student-friendly language and actively reviewed at the beginning of each class. There were clear routines, so that a minimum of time was spent in moving from one activity to another and from one group to the next. Teachers gave directions crisply and deliberately, and students followed them with dispatch, without tension or resistance.

Students in the observed classrooms were engaged in learning throughout the period of observation in large groups, in small guided-reading groups led by the classroom teacher, and in individual and small-group work. Students were clearly used to working independently while the teacher worked with a small group and knew exactly what materials to use and where to find them and return them. Teachers were beginning to try out the strategies they had learned about in the after-school professional development by using questions suggested in the workshops and giving their classes activities introduced in the workshops; they displayed student work resulting from the use of those strategies in their classrooms.

Observers saw numerous examples of guided reading as a teaching strategy, one example of a best teaching practice. Students and teachers were engaged in discussing the day's reading, and students answered the questions with enthusiasm. Observers noted, however, that much of this work was on the knowledge-base level, with few opportunities for students to analyze, evaluate, or apply critical concepts that are part of the curriculum for students in each grade. The team was told during interviews that teachers used the teacher's guide, much of which is on the literal level, as the source for questions. The team did not see many examples of tailoring the lesson and the questions to the particular needs, interests, and prior knowledge of the students in the classroom.

In addition, few examples of differentiated instruction were seen during the observed lessons or in student work displayed in the classrooms; most questions and activities were the same for all students, with the notable exception of a strong program of independent reading, which allows for student choice based on academic development. Interviews with classroom teachers and classroom observations seemed to indicate that differentiated instruction is generally understood as small-group instruction.

Small-group instruction is one important component of differentiated instruction and a critical first step in its development. However, Toy Town teachers have not yet begun to move to the next level of differentiation and the heart of this practice: creating assignments and activities that are differentiated in their approach and complexity yet ensure that all students work on and are evaluated on their mastery of the same critical, higher-order concepts. Minutes of grade-level meetings and data coaching sessions do not indicate a focus on creating such assignments and activities or expanding the range of questions explored by the class to include those that develop more in-depth and critical thinking skills and dispositions.

Teachers in Toy Town, as indicated in focus group interviews and in the classrooms observed by the review team, are working hard at creating classrooms that are respectful of each student's developmental stage and potential and alive with learning. Their efforts have been fostered by the changes to the instructional model and the professional development they receive both during the school day and after school. They are ready to take their practice to the next level, differentiating instruction more, tailoring lessons to their students more, and giving their students more opportunity for analysis, evaluation, and the application of concepts.

Toy Town Elementary School has developed a schoolwide model of tiered instruction and individualized support that is flexible and effective.

No student is ignored at Toy Town Elementary School: the review team learned from the district assessment schedule and from interviews that all students are assessed regularly and that the data from these assessments are carefully analyzed by each grade-level team almost weekly. Two classroom teachers on each team have been trained as data coaches, and they lead this analysis.

In addition, the school has a procedure, described by interviews with classroom teachers and supporting staff, to identify those students who are not meeting expectations for mastering a skill, to analyze whether the teaching strategies used to teach that skill are appropriate for those students, and, finally, to design appropriate interventions for those students within their own classrooms and in small pull-out sessions held during the school day. Different students receive different, specifically tailored interventions. Students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) receive “long-term tutoring” as designated by their IEPs, while other students receive “short-term tutoring” as needed. This short-term tutoring may happen for two days, or one week, or three to four weeks, four weeks being the maximum. The sessions, usually 20 minutes long, take place during specially designated RTI blocks that have been built into the school schedule three days a week. This is in addition to the daily 90-minute blocks for both ELA and math instruction that area part of the school’s schedule following a major scheduling change by the present principal.

The review team learned that no student is assigned to an RTI intervention before the classroom teacher has tried at least two different strategies to teach the skill to that student and has shown that he or she is still struggling. At that point, the teacher discusses the student’s work with the RTI team during a monthly meeting held during the grade’s common planning time or with the literacy coach, who serves as the coordinator of the RTI team and schedules all of the RTI small group sessions with students. Through such close and flexible coordination, classroom teachers said, they work closely with the interventionists. Teachers reported that because so many students participate in the RTI interventions, going in and out of the classroom with their groups always changing, students do not feel stigmatized by participating. They reported that students return from short- and long-term tutoring “buoyed up” and eager to demonstrate their newly developed mastery of the targeted skill.

The present RTI model, like most of the initiatives in the SIP, is new, having been introduced in 2009-2010 and only fully established in November of 2010. Interviewees credited it with being a reason for students’ improved academic achievement. One teacher said that RTI had “changed the school from night to day.” Yet an administrator stated that the RTI work that was done in math in 2009-2010 had to be cut back in 2010-2011 because of losing paraprofessionals, and another staff member said that there were not enough staff at the school to implement short-term tutoring as school staff would like to. The school has instituted a promising model of tiered instruction, but it is heavily dependent on having the appropriate staffing in terms of interventionists and a coordinator for the interventions.

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Toy Town administrators and staff attributed the renewed enthusiasm, greater commitment to the academic success of all students, and improvement in student achievement at the school to the leadership of the superintendent and the district administrative team she has created.

Teamwork and collegial and respectful working relationships are, according to interviews with the Toy Town teaching staff and administrators, the outstanding characteristics of the present superintendent's administration. According to a document supplied by the district, between 2001, when the then superintendent was asked to resign, and 2008 when the current superintendent assumed the position, the district alternated between interim superintendents and superintendents whose contract was bought out or not renewed. The staff expressed the view that the present superintendent has now brought consistent, stable, knowledgeable, and thoughtful leadership to the district. They gave credit to her leadership for creating the professionalism and direct and open feedback critical to improving student achievement. They also credited the superintendent and her administrative team for supporting the school in the major changes upon which it has embarked, changes which they saw as undergirding the recent progress in achievement the school's students have made.

The team found that the superintendent has:

- Supported and facilitated the reorganization of the two elementary schools, Memorial and Toy Town, from K-3 and 4-6 to K-2 and 3-5, with grade 6 now part of the middle school. This has consolidated the elementary grades tested by MCAS into one elementary school, Toy Town, and according to the Toy Town teacher focus group given it more of an elementary school atmosphere.
- Hired a principal and an assistant principal for Toy Town who are committed to instituting best practices for an elementary school and monitoring and supporting their continued development. The principal has nurtured a climate of professional learning and high expectations for all staff and students, according to staff interviews and the agendas for grade-level and staff meetings.
- Supported the school-level decision to significantly change the school schedule to increase time spent on learning ELA and math, creating 90-minute blocks for both subjects.
- Provided funds, with the support of the district staff responsible for grant writing, to pay for professional development for the major initiatives that are seen as critical components of the recent success of the school—data coaching, lab teachers, and the current RTI model, with an intervention team coordinated by a literacy coach and working with classroom teachers who have been supported in receiving training in differentiated instruction.

- Included Toy Town teachers on key district committees and given them the responsibility, trust, and support needed to develop sound procedures and policies to guide the district toward continual academic achievement by all students. In the view of the review team, the belief in the teachers on the part of the district and school administration has given them new, higher expectations for themselves as a staff and has increased Toy Town teachers' willingness to commit themselves to the hard work needed to change the school from one with a history of low student achievement to one with continually improving teaching and learning.
- Given the system needed stability and a consistent direction during her time as superintendent.

Recommendations

Level 3 Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

Under the leadership of the superintendent, a written vision statement should be developed and the draft District Improvement Plan and the Investment Plan of District should be consolidated into one plan.

The district has a mission statement, but not a vision statement. At the time of the review, it had a draft District Improvement Plan (DIP), which referred to the earlier Investment Plan of District (IPOD). In interviews, there seemed to be some uncertainty about the direction in which the district would move, and some uncertainty as to whether the DIP or the IPOD would be the operative plan.

It is important for the superintendent, with input from representatives of stakeholder groups, to develop a written vision statement about the future direction of the school system. This will provide everyone—staff, school committee, town officials, students, parents, and residents of Winchendon—with a clearer understanding of the aspirations for the school system of the superintendent and other leaders. Upon its completion and review by the school committee, the vision statement should be added to the district website and widely circulated throughout the schools and the community.

In addition, the superintendent should consolidate the District Improvement Plan and the Investment Plan of District into a single document. This will prevent any confusion as to which plan contains the goals, strategies, and action steps for the district. Also, the review team suggests that the newly consolidated DIP use the columns²⁶ from the template for the IPOD action steps, but add to them two more columns, with benchmarks and resources needed indicated. Using the benchmarks as a guide, the superintendent should provide the school committee, the professional and non-professional staff and the community with periodic reports on progress made toward carrying out the newly consolidated DIP and attaining its goal or goals. In addition, given the level of funding for the school department budget, it is important for everyone to know what resources are needed to accomplish each goal in the newly consolidated DIP. Once completed and approved by the school committee, the newly consolidated DIP should be added to the district website, shared with all employees in the school district, and made available to the residents of the community.

With a widely-known written vision statement and a widely-known unitary improvement plan that includes goals, strategies, and action steps with the information described above, both district leaders and district staff will better understand the direction of the district and the means being taken to move in that direction, so as to be able to aid in moving it. With regular progress reports using the benchmarks, they will have a detailed and current idea of has been done and

²⁶ The IPOD template has filled-in columns for the action steps, responsibility, timeline, and evidence of effectiveness/measurement, as well as columns to be filled in to show whether the step is in progress or complete.

what needs to be done. Also, the school committee and wider community will understand the vision for the district and have current information on what is being done to realize that vision and what resources are needed for the initiatives in progress. This understanding and knowledge will help both the school committee and the community at large support the school system.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should follow up on its commitment to revise its curriculum to align with the new Common Core standards, completing the revision and implementation by the end of the 2012-2013 school year. It should also institute a system for the regular, scheduled review and revision of curriculum documents.

Many positive steps have been taken in the area of curriculum in the Winchendon Public Schools in recent years. A new director of curriculum and instruction was appointed in 2004. Curriculum guides were published in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, and three were revised in 2010. Still, revision was mostly put on hold in about 2007, as the district awaited revised curriculum frameworks from ESE and then the redefinition of the curriculum frameworks after the adoption of the Common Core curriculum standards. Though the district had had a plan for maintaining and revising the curriculum in the past there has been no systematic curriculum revision for several years. Instead, the district has focused on “power standards” (which constitute only about 30 percent of academic standards), relying mostly on oral or ad hoc communication about these standards to inform teachers of what is to be taught and how. The curriculum guides reviewed by the team were similar (though not identical) in form, but valuable features were present in some of them, but not in others. Now that the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks have been completed, the district should revise its curriculum to align with them, planning so as to have the new curriculum implemented, in accordance with the ESE timeline, by the end of the 2012-2013 school year.²⁷ Carefully planning a standard form for curriculum guides will lead to consistent inclusion of useful features in all guides across the curriculum, helping teachers implement the new curriculum. And adopting a regular cycle of review and revision, whether three years or five years, informing that review and revision by analysis of data (see assessment finding below), and linking it with professional development planning will yield dividends in improved teaching and learning.

The district should follow through on plans to evaluate the new supervisory system of CIAS lead teachers at the middle/high school.

During the summer of 2010, the district reorganized the Murdock Middle/High School’s instructional supervision system from one depending on department chairs to a new design. In the new system, districtwide lead teachers for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support, known as CIAS lead teachers, provide guidance and support to teachers by meeting with them, conducting classroom walkthroughs, and providing them with collegial feedback. They do not

²⁷ A new search tool for the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks may be useful in this project. It is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/search/default.aspx>

have the responsibility of evaluating teachers. Teachers and administrators both reported satisfaction with the new system, citing the collegial feedback, increased focus on these four areas, and a perceived increase in energy.

Administrators told the review team members that they intended to evaluate the new structure, inviting teacher input as well as comments from the administrative team. They should follow through on that intention and might consider adopting benchmarks and rubrics to use in refining the positions' responsibilities. The review team believes that the new approach is creative and promising. With its emphasis on feedback in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support, it has the potential to pay dividends in improved teaching and learning, especially if that emphasis is combined in each area with the careful data-based analysis that the district has become more adept at at the elementary level. Like every program and service, however, the new system should be evaluated. Evaluation will determine whether the initial satisfaction with the system was warranted and, assuming it is kept, will allow the district to minimize any disadvantages of the system while making the most of its advantages.

Assessment

The district should continue and expand the collection, analysis, and use of data to inform curriculum and instruction and improve student achievement at the elementary level. It should also follow through on plans to expand the work on assessment and data use from the elementary schools to Murdock Middle/High School, so that in all grades and content areas it has a comprehensive and balanced assessment program and the systems and structures needed to support the effective use of data.

Elementary level

The district has made substantial progress during the past several years in creating a comprehensive assessment system in its elementary schools and in improving their analysis and use of assessment data. At both the Memorial and Toy Town Elementary schools, assessments are being used with increasing effectiveness to monitor student learning and make appropriate data-driven modifications to curriculum and instruction.

The district is encouraged to continue to collect and use performance and other student data, to provide ongoing training for classroom teachers in data analysis and application, and explore additional ways in which both standardized and local benchmark assessment data can be used to improve teaching and learning. For example, according to the district's assessment schedule, with the exception of DIBELS testing, which is administered three times a year, all major student assessments, (including DIAL-3, Fountas-Pinnell, and Galileo) are currently given only once or twice during the school year. In order to realize the full benefit of these programs, benchmark results should be collected more frequently. The district should expand its current K-5 assessment system through the more frequent use of common and standardized student assessments, including the use of local benchmarks. This would provide an ongoing stream of

more timely and comprehensive student performance data to assist staff in measuring academic progress and modifying instruction.

Middle/high school level

The superintendent told the review team that in the area of assessment attention and resources were concentrated initially at the elementary level, with the intention of introducing similar initiatives at the middle/high school later on. At the time of the review, Murdock Middle/High School (MMHS) did not have the trained personnel, support structures, and systems (data teams, data coaches, [standard benchmark assessments](#), etc.) that were in place in the elementary schools. The team saw little evidence at MMHS of systematic collection and analysis of student performance data or its use to inform instruction or modify curriculum, though it did see evidence of plans for improving assessment and there had been some promising developments such as the introduction in 2010-2011 of the Galileo formative assessment program in grades 3 through 10.

The district should follow through on its intention to expand its work on assessment and on the collection, analysis, and use of data from the elementary level to the higher levels. It should focus attention and resources on implementing a comprehensive student assessment program at MMHS. The full potential of assessment systems like Galileo should be explored and a comprehensive and balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments, both standardized and local, should be created for use in all content areas and grade levels. Such a system will enable faculty to measure student progress more accurately, make timely adjustments to instructional practices, and modify curriculum as needed. Creating comprehensive assessment and data systems will require the full support and direct involvement of district and building leadership, as well as targeted and ongoing professional development for staff. Structures similar to those that are proving so effective at the elementary level (e.g., data teams, data coaches, common planning opportunities) should be put in place to support the use of data in a wide range of decisions and actions.

An improved, expanded, and carefully coordinated K-12 assessment and data system will result in wide-ranging benefits for all the district's schools. The systematic collection and analysis of student achievement and other relevant data will significantly enhance classroom instruction, support services, and curriculum, affect all aspects of decision-making, and enable more accurate measurement of progress in the attainment of goals, resulting in increased learning and better outcomes for students.

Human Resources and Professional Development

As it aligns its evaluation system with the new Educator Evaluation Framework, the district should ensure that all educators are evaluated regularly, that evaluators provide instructive comments and specific recommendations for professional development, and that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals.

Interviews showed that teachers and administrators took the personnel evaluation process very seriously, seeing it as an opportunity to improve performance. Teachers found the evaluations

useful, and they judged that the value of the evaluations increased whenever advice from the evaluator was concrete and specific. But only 30 percent of teacher evaluations and 38 percent of administrator evaluations reviewed included comments on how the teacher or administrator could improve his or her practice, and only 13 percent of teacher and administrator evaluations included particular recommendations for professional development. In addition, only 67 percent of the evaluations that the review team saw for staff covered by the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' association were done on time. Most of the evaluations that had not been done on time belonged to personnel other than classroom teachers.

As the district transitions to a new system of evaluation under the new state regulations, evaluators should increase the number of instructive comments and recommendations for professional development in their evaluations. The district should establish a system for reviewing evaluations to make sure that they are being completed on time for all categories of staff and that more such comments and recommendations are being included. It should provide training for evaluators as needed. Including such comments and recommendations will increase the value of the evaluation and help improve the practice of the person evaluated. If the district provides a means, during review of professional practice and student learning goals and evaluations, to note for the professional development committee what professional development has been recommended, it will also provide additional information for the committee to use in planning professional development.

The district should consider reinvesting in more staff professional development, by restoring the two professional days, by including more time in the school day for professional collaboration, and/or increasing opportunities for embedded professional development through instructional coaching.

The number of days devoted to professional development has been reduced because of budget constraints. In several interviews, administrators and teachers spoke with pride of the time when the district had five full professional development days instead of the current three days. Although the interviewees applauded the activities provided by the district and the professional development committee and the team found the professional development program to be generally strong, the frequent reference to the greater number of professional development days in the past indicated recognition that even more successful professional development could be achieved with more time devoted to it. This could be accomplished by restoring the two days, by including more time during the school day for professional collaboration, and/or by increasing the amount of embedded professional development through instructional coaching. In any case, the professional development should be linked with the goals and priorities in the district's newly consolidated DIP and its SIPs.

The number of teacher work days beyond the student calendar is a function of the collective bargaining agreement, and an increase would need to be negotiated. The review team recognizes that there are costs associated with any of these types of professional development. But now that the district has embarked on a road to improved student performance in a newly created culture

of enthusiastic determination, it should consider the value of increasing the opportunities for all of its teachers to engage in professional development, thus accelerating progress.

Support

The district should develop a plan to increase the number of students in college preparatory, honors level, and Advanced Placement courses, and, more generally, to raise teachers and administrators' expectations for students and students' aspirations for themselves.

Only 9 percent of 11th and 12th grade students were enrolled in one or more Advanced Placement courses in 2010, a decline from 24 percent in 2006. The statewide rate was 17 percent. The number of students taking the PSAT and SAT exams is also low, and the percentages of students with plan to attend four-year colleges were consistently lower than statewide percentages.²⁸

It was suggested in interviews that the state of the economy or parents not being college graduates were reasons why more students did not aspire to higher education, while one long-time staff member spoke about concerns that aspirations for students were not high enough and that the schools could do more to make students aware of the world outside Winchendon.

The administrative team reported to the review team its plan to shift emphasis and resources from the elementary schools to the middle and high school level concerns at Murdock Middle/High School (MMHS). Making this shift provides the opportunity to analyze the placement of students in lower-level courses and develop strategies to expose all students to more challenging material, promote their acquisition of higher-order thinking skills, and interest them in varied future career possibilities. Carrying out the plans the district has for the addition of a career education specialist and the increase of a half- to a full-time guidance counselor at the middle school would be of great assistance in this initiative.

Professional development to assist teachers and administrators in raising expectations, setting higher standards, and understanding adolescent identity development should be an intrinsic part of the new CIAS model at MMHS. District and school staff should consider giving students incentives to master harder material and to risk taking more challenging courses, perhaps as a part of the PBIS program. And outreach to parents and education about the impact students' choices in school have on their future might help increase the number of students with aspirations to higher education.

Because of the progress the district has made these past few years, it is now possible to reach for higher achievement goals for more students. The message needs to be clear to all in the community that education in Winchendon provides ways for all students to achieve at higher levels. Raising expectations, setting higher standards, and encouraging students to aspire to

²⁸ ESE data shows that the percentage of the district's graduates between 2006 and 2010 indicating plans to attend four-year private colleges ranged between 9 and 24 percent, while the state percentage was consistently between 30 and 32 percent. For four-year public colleges over that period, the district's percentages ranged between 16 and 23 percent, while the statewide percentage was 27 or 28 percent in each of those years.

greater achievement will help to increase that achievement and make a difference in the students' futures.

Finance

The district should continue to take steps to improve communication with town officials and the community as a whole.

At the time of the review, it was universally agreed that though relations between the district and the town had improved since the current superintendent assumed the position, there were still difficulties in the relationship between the school committee and superintendent on the one hand and the town finance committee on the other. Communication was an issue. During the fiscal year 2011 budget process, information on current educational matters being discussed in the district, such as class sizes, need for textbooks, and expanding educational programs, was not presented in written form to the town finance committee. According to district administrators, no meetings were held with the town finance committee or the board of selectmen during the fiscal year 2011 budget development process.²⁹ In addition, the finance committee does not have a formal liaison to the school committee to handle communication. Because communication between the district and the town has not been adequate, it may be that neither town officials nor members of the wider community have a clear understanding of the district's needs and goals.

District officials should ensure that information about the needs of the district are communicated to town officials and to the wider community. Means for regular communication should be established so that information about educational issues and needs in the district is widely disseminated to residents and town officials in writing, through formal presentations, and through informal communications. These means could include regular joint meetings between the school committee and the board of selectmen, the school committee and the finance committee, or all three; presentations by the superintendent to these joint meetings or to meetings on the town side; written explanations of the background for various budget needs; and the establishment of a position for a liaison between the finance committee and the school committee. Making sure that communication is regular and that important information about the district is conveyed will improve relations between the district and the town even further and lead to greater understanding of and support for the needs of the district.

The district should adopt a complete and transparent budget format that can be used to present information multiple ways.

According to interviews, the town finance committee was at odds with the district during the fiscal year 2011 budget process because budget documentation was in a different format from

²⁹ In addition, according to town officials, the board of selectmen does not meet with the school committee regularly—rather, the board of selectmen, the town finance committee, and the school committee have joint meetings as needed.

According to information received from the district by ESE, a subsection of the school committee and a subsection of the finance committee had several meetings during the development of the fiscal year 2012 budget.

that previously agreed on. The two primary issues were (1) individual account code line items were aggregated by function code and (2) the fiscal year 2011 proposed budget did not reference the fiscal year 2010 budget.

It is the responsibility of the district to implement a budget process that is complete and transparent so that the Winchendon community can make an informed decision when the vote comes on supporting the budget. One part of this responsibility relates to the budget format. The district should describe the budget in multiple ways so that various stakeholders with different perspectives are able to understand the needs of the district. In furtherance of this aim, the district should determine what information is needed by the various stakeholders. It is recommended that school officials meet with stakeholders to identify budget formats that are viewed as complete and transparent. The finance committee would be one such stakeholder. In addition, the district may wish to research the budget documentation used by other districts in the Commonwealth.

In order to be able to easily present the school budget in a number of different ways to meet the needs of stakeholders, it is important to have budget data in a format that can be easily sorted and aggregated by fund, location, function, and object codes as defined by ESE. It is important to be able to compare budgets over time and to identify changes and trends for stakeholders. The preliminary budget should reference the most immediate past fiscal year budget and expenditures, current year budget, and upcoming year budget. School officials should be able to explain changes among fiscal years. A budget format that answers these needs will be a more useful tool in allocating resources as well as a more useful means of communication with town officials, other stakeholders, and the community at large.

The district should present and advocate for a budget that accurately reflects its needs.

For a number of years the town of Winchendon has funded the district at the minimum amount necessary to meet the state's net school spending (NSS) requirement. From fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2010, actual NSS fell below required NSS three times, and only rose more than 1.6 percent above required NSS twice.³⁰ This was in contrast to actual NSS across the state, which exceeded required NSS every year from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2010, by percentages (ranging from 8.7 percent to 16.2 percent) that increased every year but one.³¹ What happens is that the district reduces the preliminary school budget to the amount acceptable to town officials, so that a school budget is submitted for consideration at Town Meeting that reflects required NSS rather than the needs of the district. When in the past the school committee has submitted separate warrant articles to increase the school budget for various reasons, these articles have been disapproved, sometimes at Town Meeting, sometimes by a referendum vote of the community. Meanwhile, the district has had to make significant cuts to staff³² and to professional development, has been unable to add needed special education teachers, and must fund core district needs through the use of various unpredictable funding sources.

³⁰ See the Winchendon c. 70 profile on the ESE website at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>.

³¹ See the state c. 70 profile on the ESE website at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>.

³² The total number of teachers dropped from 151.5 in 2005 to 102.0 in 2010.

Obtaining sufficient resources to meet the needs of the district is and most likely will continue to be a challenge. The review team has several recommendations with regard to obtaining sufficient resources. The first is to develop and implement a strategy for communication with town officials and the Winchendon community so that they better understand the needs of the district (see first financial recommendation above). Building on that understanding, the district should also submit for consideration a budget that reflects the needs of the district rather than simply required Net School Spending. The district should also continue the aggressive pursuit of grant and foundation funding to supplement the budget. Finally, it should investigate ways in which it can partner with other communities and share resources as a way to save costs in educating students. Obtaining additional resources—while continuing to use its protocol for program evaluation to weed out ineffective programs and improve effective ones—will allow the district to maintain or add needed positions and programs, relieve the stresses on its teachers brought about by the deep cuts to staff, and thus continue improving the education it offers to its students.

The district should develop a formal facilities maintenance and capital improvements plan addressing preventive maintenance, energy management, environmental safety, and capital planning.

Preventive maintenance for the district for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning is conducted by an outside vendor. There is no documented preventive maintenance program for other types of equipment and systems, nor is there a documented energy management plan. Environmental safety concerns such as indoor air quality are acted upon immediately, but there is no environmental safety plan in place. Capital planning consists of an informal audit of the facilities by school personnel and the creation of a list of building-related items that need attention. There is no formal capital planning process.

The condition of the schools during the review appeared to be safe, clean, and well maintained. The staff spoke about their interest in doing the best job that they could to keep the schools in good condition. However, the importance of a formal preventive maintenance plan should not be overlooked. The goal of a formal preventive maintenance plan is to maximize and prolong the useful life of the facility while at the same time providing a safe, clean, well-maintained environment that supports teaching and learning. School facility maintenance helps to manage costs and avoid equipment failure, has an impact on student achievement and safety, influences staff morale, affects the credibility of the district, and protects the capital investment of the community. A preventive maintenance plan is the master plan for daily decision-making. It will provide a record of the district's needs and intentions. It is a formal way of communicating the district's priorities and establishes the necessary documentation for funding.

The implementation of an energy management plan will help the district to reduce consumption and reduce energy costs. These funds will then be available for reallocation in the budget. An environmental safety plan will help to ensure that students and staff are in a healthy and safe environment, providing the process for handling indoor air quality concerns and other environmental issues. Finally, a formal capital plan will provide the foundation for asset

management, helping decision-makers plan for the upgrade or replacement of buildings and equipment.

Low-Income Recommendations

Toy Town teachers are making progress in differentiating instruction, using data to inform and modify curriculum, and using a system of tiered instruction. The district should continue to support all three of these efforts at the elementary level and continue implementing its plan to expand these initiatives from the elementary level to the middle/high school.

The review team found that teachers at Toy Town were supported in taking a graduate level course in differentiated instruction, benefited from two literacy lab teachers in each grade who modeled best practices in literacy across the grade, and attended in large numbers voluntary after-school workshops conducted by the literacy coach. The team's classroom observations showed that teachers were beginning to try out the instructional strategies they were learning; however, few examples of differentiated instruction were observed, aside from the use of small-group instruction, a critical first step in its development. The team found that teachers were working hard at improving instruction and were ready to differentiate instruction more. In general in the district, all teachers have had professional development in differentiated instruction, but observations across the district showed that even the use of small-group instruction was not widespread.³³

The Toy Town SIP contained strategies and action steps aimed at basing instruction on data collected from formal and informal assessments and analyzed by the school's grade-level teams. At the time of the review, through a grant secured with the support of the district, the school's teachers had extensive common planning time to meet in grade-level teams led by two teachers from the grade trained as data coaches. The teams used this time to analyze data received regularly from assessments. See the second finding under Assessment in the Level 3 part of the report for a description of data use in the district generally: the review team found that data collection, analysis, and use was more prevalent in the elementary schools than at MMHS. See also the Level 3 recommendation on assessment.

The review found that Toy Town had instituted a model of tiered instruction in which students who were not meeting expectations for mastering a skill received long- or short-term tutoring, using designated blocks built into the schedule three days a week. Classroom teachers worked closely with the interventionists, coordinated by the literacy coach, and students were responding well to the interventions. However, the model was new and the school did not have the resources to implement it as staff would like to.

The district should continue to give support at the elementary level for differentiated instruction, use of data by teachers to improve curriculum and instruction, and tiered instruction. These depend on appropriate supervision and professional development, staffing, and common planning time. In addition, it should follow through on the plan it reported to the review team of extending the new initiatives instituted at the elementary schools to MMHS, so that older

³³ Review team members observed solid evidence of students working in pairs or small groups in 18 percent of classes visited, and partial evidence in another 18 percent.

students can also benefit from the improved curriculum, instruction, and supports that result from them.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Winchendon Public Schools was conducted from January 10 - January 13, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. John Kulevich, Leadership and Governance

Dr. John Roper, Curriculum and Instruction, Review Team coordinator

Dr. Frank Sambuceti, Assessment

Dr. Owen Conway, Human Resources and Professional Development

Helen Jacobson, Student Support

Roger Young, Financial and Asset Management

Dr. Sara Freedman, School Visitation Team

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Winchendon financial personnel: Town manager, Chairperson of the Board of Selectmen, the past chair of the Board, and a current member of the Board, member of the town Winchendon Finance Committee.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Winchendon School Committee: Chair, one member.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Winchendon Teachers' Association: President, Secretary and Treasurer.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Winchendon Public Schools central office administration: Superintendent, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Instructional Services, Director of Special Education, Business Manager, and Assistant Business Manager.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Winchendon Public Schools as part of the Level 3 review: Memorial Elementary School (K-2), Toy Town Elementary School (3-5) and Murdock Middle/High School (6-12).
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, and instructional coaches, lead teachers, guidance counselors.
 - The review team conducted 30 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the all three schools visited.
- The review team visited the following school(s) in the Winchendon Public Schools as part of the low-income review: Toy Town Elementary School.
 - During this school visit, the review team conducted interviews with the principal, assistant principal, a literacy coach and three focus groups with teachers and students.
 - The review team conducted 7 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the the school visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE: District profile data
 - District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)
 - Data from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
 - Latest Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report and any follow-up Mid-cycle Report
 - Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report

- Any District or School Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) or ESE in the past three years
- Collective bargaining agreement with teachers, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - Organization chart
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School Improvement Plans
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - Curriculum guide overview
 - K-12 ELA, mathematics, and science curriculum documents
 - High school program of studies
 - Matrix of assessments administered in the district and calendars listing their administration schedule
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools, including class reports of DIBELS results
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Program evaluations
 - Student and Family Handbooks
 - Faculty Handbook
 - Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
 - Teacher certification and qualification information
 - Teacher planning time schedules
 - Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals

- Classroom observation tools not used in the teacher evaluation process
- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Murdock Middle School News (various editions from SY2011)
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the school(s) visited in connection with the low-income part of the review:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Calendar of formative and summative assessments for the school
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in the school
 - Descriptions of student support programs at the school
 - Student and Family Handbooks for the school
 - Teacher planning time/meeting schedules at the school
 - Classroom observation tools/Learning walk tools used at the school

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Level 3/Low-Income review of the Winchendon Public Schools, conducted from January 10 - January 14, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Thursday*	Friday
January 10 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association	January 11 Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits at Toy Town and Memorial Elementary Schools ; classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents	January 13 Interviews with town or city personnel; school visits Murdock Middle/High School; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; focus group(s) with students; school committee interviews	January 14 School visits Murdock Middle/High School; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals

*Wednesday, January 12 was a snow day. District schools and offices were closed.

Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements

Level 3 Finding Statements

Leadership and Governance

1. The culture among the staff in the Winchendon Public Schools has become more positive and collaborative in recent years, creating a better environment for students as well as staff.
2. Although the district has a mission statement, it does not have a written vision statement and at the time of the review was about to have two district plans, leading to some confusion about the direction of the school system.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. The district's curriculum documents have not been recently revised; district staff rely on a mix of oral and written communications about a subset of the district's academic standards rather than a complete, up-to-date written curriculum.
4. The district reorganized the supervisory structure at the middle/high school in 2010, replacing department chairpersons in academic disciplines with lead teachers with responsibility for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support—a promising change.
5. Classroom observations revealed several positive aspects of instructional practice in the Winchendon Public Schools, but less evidence of a range of instructional techniques or of aspects of instruction that elicit higher-order thinking.

Assessment

6. The district has developed a comprehensive written protocol that it employs to assess the effectiveness of existing programs. The assessment process is comprehensive and well-defined and includes an analysis of multiple types of data.
7. The district has been making expanded and steadily improving use of student performance data, especially in its elementary schools, to systematically monitor learning progress, improve instruction, modify academic programs and services, and develop or revise educational goals.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. Reduction of the number of district staff every year between 2005 and 2010 has resulted in an emphasis on reassigning remaining teaching staff. Because of this emphasis and the layoffs it saves, the stresses on teachers and learning in the district are not readily apparent to the community at large.
9. Evaluations of district personnel are not always completed on time, and too infrequently make comments intended to improve practice or recommendations for professional development.
10. Though the district recognizes the substantial importance of professional development and provides both embedded training and training outside the school day, its professional development program has been cut back and is now dependent to some degree on grant funding.

Student Support

11. The district has a new, collaborative approach to supporting students and many new support programs, though financial constraints have prevented the provision of the guidance and special education staffing district leaders view as necessary.
12. Although the district has some programming for high-performing students, the percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses has decreased and the percentage of students with plans to attend a four-year college is low. The expectations conveyed to students, in terms of course options, graduation requirements, and career education, are not high.

Financial and Asset Management

13. At the time of the review, the school district and the town finance committee had inadequate communication, and issues of trust and cooperation between them remained. For a number of years the town has funded the school district at the minimum level needed to meet the amount of required net school spending set by the state.
14. The district has made significant cuts to the numbers of teachers and paraprofessionals and has not been able to make additions to the staff that administrators regard as needed. It has had to cut professional development and must fund core district needs through the use of various unpredictable funding sources.
15. The district does not have a formal preventive maintenance program and capital improvement plan to maximize and prolong the effective use of facilities.

Low-Income Finding Statements

Key Question 1

1. Under the current leadership at Toy Town Elementary School, the school is using collaborative approaches to improving teaching and learning to change the weak instruction, low expectations, and poor student achievement that characterized the school in earlier years.
2. Toy Town Elementary School has changed its grade span, its schedule, and its instructional model to be more characteristic of an elementary school and has accompanied these changes with multiple types of professional development for staff. Review team members observed some positive instructional characteristics in classrooms and saw teachers beginning to use strategies learned from the professional development provided.
3. Toy Town Elementary School has developed a schoolwide model of tiered instruction and individualized support that is flexible and effective.

Key Question 2

4. Toy Town administrators and staff attributed the renewed enthusiasm, greater commitment to the academic success of all students, and improvement in student achievement at the school to the leadership of the superintendent and the district administrative team she has created.

Recommendation Statements

Level 3 Recommendation Statements

Leadership and Governance

1. Under the leadership of the superintendent, a written vision statement should be developed and the draft District Improvement Plan and the Investment Plan of District should be consolidated into one plan.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The district should follow up on its commitment to revise its curriculum to align with the new Common Core standards, completing the revision and implementation by the end of the 2012-2013 school year. It should also institute a system for the regular, scheduled review and revision of curriculum documents.
3. The district should follow through on plans to evaluate the new supervisory system of CIAS lead teachers at the middle/high school.

Assessment

4. The district should continue and expand the collection, analysis, and use of data to inform curriculum and instruction and improve student achievement at the elementary level. It should also follow through on plans to expand the work on assessment and data use from the elementary schools to Murdock Middle/High School, so that in all grades and content areas it has a comprehensive and balanced assessment program and the systems and structures needed to support the effective use of data.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. As it aligns its evaluation system with the new Educator Evaluation Framework, the district should ensure that all educators are evaluated regularly, that evaluators provide instructive comments and specific recommendations for professional development, and that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals.
6. The district should consider reinvesting in more staff professional development, by restoring the two professional days, by including more time in the school day for professional collaboration, and/or increasing opportunities for embedded professional development through instructional coaching.

Support

7. The district should develop a plan to increase the number of students in college preparatory, honors level, and Advanced Placement courses, and, more generally, to raise teachers and administrators' expectations for students and students' aspirations for themselves.

Finance

8. The district should continue to take steps to improve communication with town officials and the community as a whole.
9. The district should adopt a complete and transparent budget format that can be used to present information multiple ways.
10. The district should present and advocate for a budget that accurately reflects its needs.
11. The district should develop a formal facilities maintenance and capital improvements plan addressing preventive maintenance, energy management, environmental safety, and capital planning.

Low-Income Recommendation Statements

1. Toy Town teachers are making progress in differentiating instruction, using data to inform and modify curriculum, and using a system of tiered instruction. The district should continue to support all three of these efforts at the elementary level and continue implementing its plan to expand these initiatives from the elementary level to the middle/high school.