



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

New Bedford Public Schools

District Review

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Attachment #2: New Bedford District Review Report



This document was prepared on behalf of the Center for District and School Accountability of the
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Overview of 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 3 or 4 of ESE’s framework for district accountability and assistance¹ 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 See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/framework/default.html>

New Bedford Public Schools

Report Summary

The New Bedford Public Schools have a history of low student achievement and insufficient progress. The district is now in Level 4 of ESE’s accountability and assistance framework² because the Parker Elementary School has been designated as a Level 4 School.

For all students, New Bedford’s 2010 proficiency rates for ELA (44 percent) and mathematics (39 percent) were among the four lowest and nine lowest, respectively, of all multiple-school districts in the state. Its 2010 CPI for all students in ELA (75.4) was among the eight lowest of multiple-school districts, and its 2010 math CPI (68.0) for all students was among the 11 lowest. The 2010 median SGPs for all district students in ELA and math were 39.0 and 40.0, among the six lowest in ELA and the 13 lowest in math of all multiple-school districts, and among the two lowest for both subjects of the state’s 10 largest urban districts (“Commissioner’s districts”).³

District 10th graders’ 2010 ELA proficiency rate⁴ (46 percent) was one of the two lowest of any multiple-school district in Massachusetts, as was district 10th graders’ 2010 Composite Performance Index (CPI) in ELA (76.0). Proficiency rates for district 10th graders in mathematics (42 percent) and science (28 percent) were both among the four lowest of state multiple-school districts, as were the CPIs for 10th graders in mathematics (68.6) and science (61.3). The ELA and mathematics median student growth percentiles (SGPs)⁵ for New Bedford 10th graders in 2010 were both 24.0, which was the lowest in ELA and the second lowest in mathematics of all districts.

The New Bedford Public Schools also struggle with student attendance, discipline, graduation, and retention. The district’s 2010 four-year graduation rate (53.5 percent) and annual grade 9-12 dropout rate (8.1 percent) were each one of the five worst for multiple-school districts in the state. Its 2010 attendance rate (92.2 percent) was one of the six lowest, and the district’s overall retention rate in 2010 (6.6 percent) was one of the four highest among state multiple-school districts. Its out-of-school suspension rate (12.7 percent) was the ninth highest for the state’s multiple-school districts.

² See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/framework/default.html>.

³ The 10 districts are Boston, Brockton, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester.

⁴ “Proficiency rate” refers to the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Rankings have been calculated from data available on the ESE website at http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/mcas.aspx.

⁵ “Student growth percentiles” are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student’s MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see “MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide” and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

A team of six independent reviewers conducted a review of the school district in November 2010 as one of a series of accountability reviews overseen by ESE's Center for District and School Accountability under Mass. Gen. Laws c. 15, s. 55A. The team found serious problems with respect to each of the six district standards.

Findings:

Under **Leadership and Governance**, the team found that the school committee assumes responsibility for issues that are better addressed through policies or by administrators, while devoting too little time to addressing its important educational responsibilities; that the central office does not have adequate leadership and capacity to support a continuously improving educational system; that principals have to work too independently, without adequate direction or support; and that principals are not held sufficiently accountable for their work through evaluation.

Under **Curriculum and Instruction**, the team found that teachers in the district are not provided sufficient leadership, supervision, common planning time, or coaching support; that the district has developed curriculum maps in mathematics and science at all grade levels that are based on the state curriculum frameworks and are aligned horizontally and vertically, but that the ELA curriculum is incomplete in kindergarten through grade 8; that the processes of curriculum development and revision are not being well managed; and that teachers have too little guidance in their task of providing high-quality instruction to students with varied needs. In observations, the team found little evidence of many characteristics of effective teaching; the quality of instruction was lowest at the high school.

In the area of **Assessment**, the findings describe the limited amount of assessment data leaders and teachers have to inform their work and the limited evidence of a districtwide function to collect, analyze, and disseminate all pertinent data in order to improve instruction and raise student performance. The team found the district to be more advanced in using data to assess mathematics achievement in grades 3-9 than in using data to assess performance in ELA.

Under **Human Resources and Professional Development**, the team found that the New Bedford teachers' contract, its interpretation, and established practices hinder the efforts of principals to improve the quality of teachers' instruction, and that because district professional development priorities have not been adequately defined, professional development in New Bedford is too unfocused and is not sufficiently coordinated from school to school.

The findings under **Student Support** discuss high school students' low attendance and graduation rates and high dropout rates and rates of chronic absence, retention, and suspension. Many of these rates are worsening and there is little evidence that the district is addressing them effectively. Proficiency gaps between district special education and ELL students and their statewide counterparts are wider in the upper than in the lower grades, and graduation rates for both of these district subgroups are extremely low.

Finally, in the area of **Financial and Asset Management**, the team found that the district struggles to make its local budget and other sources of funding meet school and student needs;

that principals have little input into budget decisions and limited authority over their school budgets; that there was little evidence that budget decisions are determined by an analysis of student needs; and that the district does not have a capital improvement plan to address the poor condition of some school buildings and the underutilization of elementary space.

These findings led to recommendations under all six district standards.

Recommendations:

In the area of **Leadership and Governance**, the recommendations are that the school committee focus more attention on district performance and the use of data to make high-level decisions on district goals, the budget, and policy; that policies and practices be updated; that the district reorganize, re-culture, and staff the central office to provide more support and work more collaboratively to improve teaching and learning; and that the district hold principals more accountable for meeting high professional standards and raising student achievement, in accordance with new regulations for evaluation of educators.

Under **Curriculum and Instruction** there is a recommendation to further develop the curriculum in a collaborative way that better prepares and engages school leaders and teachers, is informed by student achievement data, and gives priority to the development of the English Language Arts curriculum. There are also recommendations that principals monitor instruction more regularly to provide sufficient feedback to teachers for professional growth; that barriers to principals providing feedback from informal classroom observations be removed; and that the district establish clear expectations for teacher supervision. The final recommendation in this area is that the district make every effort to restore instructional coaching positions while implementing a more effective coaching model.

The recommendation under **Assessment** is to develop a system-wide approach to assessments that equips district and school staff to adjust academic programs and instructional practices to respond to the needs of their students.

In the area of **Human Resources and Professional Development**, the review team recommended that the school committee and the New Bedford Educators Association work together to ensure principals have the authority to place and retain the best qualified teachers who are committed to carrying out school goals; and the ability to conduct evaluations that hold staff accountable for improvements in practice and student achievement. Another recommendation is to increase the amount of common planning time for teachers and ensure that principals have the ability to direct that time.

Student Support recommendations include a recommendation that the district and schools work together more effectively and with greater urgency to determine and address the root causes of high school students' poor growth, proficiency, attendance, retention, suspension, dropout, and graduation rates; and a recommendation that the district be more deliberate in implementing much stronger practices to meet the needs of its English language learners and students with disabilities.

Under **Financial and Asset Management**, the team recommended the development of a five-year financial plan that incorporates capital needs and reflects consideration of ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses through operational efficiencies. It also recommended that the development of the district budget be based on a more thorough analysis of student achievement and program evaluation data and involve principals more throughout the process. The final recommendation is that principals should have authority over the use of resources in the budgets of the schools they oversee.

Site Visit

The site visit to the New Bedford Public Schools was conducted from November 15-18, 2010. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: Ashley Elementary (K-5), Campbell Elementary (K-5), Devalles Elementary (K-5), Hathaway Elementary (K-5), Hayden/McFadden (K-5), Keith Middle (6-8), New Bedford High School (9-12), Normandin Middle (6-8), Parker Elementary (K-5), Pulaski Elementary (K-5), Roosevelt Middle (6-8). 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 Profile⁶

New Bedford is a seaport city 54 miles south of Boston, formerly famous for whaling,⁷ with a 2009 population of 91,112.⁸ Its 2010 unemployment rate was 14.6 percent, and its 2009 average weekly wage was \$778.⁹ The tax levy is close to the maximum allowable. For fiscal year 2011 residential property is taxed at \$12.88 per thousand and commercial, industrial, and personal property is taxed at \$27.14 per thousand. The Department of Revenue lists the average single family tax for fiscal year 2011 in New Bedford at \$2,762. The state average for a single family tax bill for the year 2010 was \$4,390.¹⁰

New Bedford has a mayor and city council and a school committee with seven members including the mayor, who serves as school committee chair *ex officio*. The superintendent was appointed on April 9, 2010, during the middle of the 2009-2010 school year. Since the time of the site visit she has been given a three-year contract as superintendent. She has been with the district for 26 years; many other central office staff are also long-time district employees. The

⁶ Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

⁷ See Department of Housing and Community Development's community profiles at <http://www.mass.gov/Ehed/docs/dhcd/profiles/205.doc>

⁸ See At-A-Glance report for New Bedford on the Department of Revenue (DOR) website at http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=dorterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Local+Officials&L2=Municipal+Data+and+Financial+Management&L3=Data+Bank+Reports&sid=Ador&b=terminalcontent&f=dls_mdmstuf_aag_aagindex&csi_d=Ador.

⁹ See Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development statistics at <http://lmi2.detma.org/lmi/Townbox.asp>.

¹⁰ See DOR At-A-Glance report for New Bedford cited in footnote 8 above.

district has recently gone from having a deputy superintendent and three assistant superintendents to having one assistant superintendent, responsible for student services.

The student enrollment in 2010-2011 is 12,538 students; the district has 26 schools. As Table 1 below indicates, about half the student population in New Bedford is white, and there is a large population of Hispanic students (27.8 percent). Nearly three-quarters of the district's students are low-income, and for about one in five English is not their first language.

Table 1: 2010-2011 New Bedford Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	1,467	11.7	First Language not English	2,683	21.4
Asian	111	0.9	Limited English Proficient	519	4.1
Hispanic or Latino	3,488	27.8	Low-income	8,927	71.2
Native American	119	0.9	Special Education*	2,491	19.8
White	6,471	51.6	Free Lunch	7,997	63.8
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	68	0.5	Reduced-price lunch	930	7.4
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	814	6.5	Total enrollment	12,538	100.0

*Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data

The local appropriation to the New Bedford Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$102,582,495, down from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$106,469, 613. School-related expenditures by the city were estimated at \$42,769,034 for fiscal year 2011, up from the estimate for fiscal year 2010 of \$37,207,625. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$106,469,613), expenditures by the city (\$37,517,163), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$33,023,141), was \$177,009,917. Actual net school spending¹¹ in fiscal year 2010 was \$124,234,153.

¹¹Net school spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures, transportation, grants, and revolving funds.

Student Performance¹²

Table 2 below presents the 2010 CPIs and median SGPs in English language arts (ELA) of New Bedford and state students by selected subgroups. CPIs of the New Bedford subgroups were consistently below those of subgroup populations in the state. The CPI for all district students was 11.5 points below the CPI for all state students, and the CPIs for the various district subgroups shown ranged from 3.7 points (low-income students) to 18.4 points (LEP students) below the CPIs for their state counterparts.

The state regards median SGPs between 40 and 60 as showing moderate growth. In only three instances were the median SGPs of the district subgroups shown within that range: those of multi-race non-Hispanic/Latino students at 41.0, LEP students at 40.0, and FLEP students at 49.0. The median SGPs for all of the rest of the selected district subgroups were between 35.0 and 39.0. For most subgroup populations, median SGPs in ELA in 2010 showed relatively low growth.

**Table 2: 2010 New Bedford and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
by Selected Subgroups
ELA**

	New Bedford		State	
	CPI	Median SGP	CPI	Median SGP
All Students (6,268)	75.4	39.0	86.9	50.0
African American/Black (697)	70.7	37.0	76.6	46.0
Hispanic/Latino (1,747)	69.4	38.0	73.6	47.0
White (3,277)	79.5	39.0	90.5	50.0
Multi-Race Non-Hispanic/Latino (400)	77.3	41.0	86.3	49.0
LEP (198)	41.4	40.0	59.8	50.0
FLEP (190)	68.0	49.0	80.1	55.0
Special Education (1,291)	57.6	35.0	67.3	41.0
Low Income (4,653)	72.8	38.0	76.5	46.0

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of 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.
 Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 3, showing CPIs and median SGPs for selected district and state subgroup populations in mathematics, indicates that again, district subgroup population CPIs were consistently below those of the state, with all district students having a CPI 11.9 points lower than all state students. In three cases, though, the district and state subgroup CPIs were remarkably close—for African

¹² Data derived from ESE’s website, ESE’s Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

Americans/Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, and low-income students. These district subgroup populations had CPIs just below those of the state subgroups. The other subgroups shown had a considerably larger gap between their CPIs and those of the same subgroup statewide; the largest of these gaps (18.8 points) was for the LEP subgroup. Of the median SGPs shown by Table 3, only those for Hispanic/Latino and special education students were below 40, indicating less than moderate growth. However, median SGPs for three other subgroups shown were not much higher: for African American/Black and low-income students they were at 40.0, and for white students at 41.0. Those for LEP and FLEP students were above 50, at 57.0 and 51.0 respectively. But New Bedford students as a group in 2010 had a median SGP in mathematics, 40.0, only slightly higher than their median SGP in ELA, 39.0. Overall, growth was on the borderline between moderate and low in both subjects.

**Table 3: 2010 New Bedford and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
by Selected Subgroups
Mathematics**

	New Bedford		State	
	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students (6,239)	68.0	40.0	79.9	50.0
African American/Black (694)	62.5	40.0	65.1	48.0
Hispanic/Latino (1,730)	62.4	38.0	63.9	47.0
White (3,265)	72.4	41.0	84.1	50.0
Multi-Race Non-Hispanic/Latino (402)	67.4	44.0	78.6	48.0
LEP (203)	37.4	57.0	56.2	53.0
FLEP (190)	60.1	51.0	73.3	55.0
Special Education (1,280)	51.0	37.5	57.5	43.0
Low Income (4,631)	65.5	40.0	67.1	47.0

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of 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.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

As Table 4 indicates, when proficiency rates and median student growth percentiles in ELA from 2008 to 2010 are analyzed by grade, the results vary. Though experiencing varied changes in 2009, proficiency rates for grades 3 through 6 were higher in 2010 than in 2008, with Grade 3 showing a 15 percentage point increase in 2010 (after no increase in 2009). In grades 7, 8, and 10, proficiency rates were the same or lower in 2010 when compared with 2008. With the exception of grade 3, the 2010 proficiency rates in all grades were within 5 percentage points of the 2008 rates.

All grades but 5 and 6 showed a lower median SGP in ELA in 2010 than in 2008. And grade 10 median SGPs in ELA were remarkably low, decreasing from 29.0 to 24.0 (from 2009 to 2010, the two years with available growth data for that grade). Grade 6 showed an increase of 8 points in 2010 over 2008, though in 2009 the median SGP had decreased by 5 points.

Median SGPs in ELA for all grades in the district hovered at the bottom of or just below the moderate range. The increase in the proficiency rate in ELA for all grades in the district, four percentage points, mirrored the increase in the proficiency rate for all grades in the state from 2008 to 2010, but the discrepancies between proficiency rates in the district and the state in 2010 were very large, ranging from 10 to 34 percentage points, with a 24 percentage point difference for all grades. Without greater gains in proficiency than those made in New Bedford from 2008 to 2010, it seems as though gains at the state level will keep the gap between New Bedford and the state from diminishing.

**Table 4: 2008-2010 New Bedford Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
ELA**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP
Grade 3—District	38	NA*	38	NA*	53	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	28	40.0	33	37.0	32	39.0
Grade 4—State	49	48.0	53	50.0	54	50.0
Grade 5—District	37	45.0	39	41.0	42	46.0
Grade 5—State	61	51.0	63	50.0	63	50.0
Grade 6—District	44	39.0	36	32.0	48	47.0
Grade 6—State	67	50.0	66	50.0	69	50.0
Grade 7— District	38	37.0	41	35.0	38	32.0
Grade 7— State	69	50.0	70	50.0	72	50.0
Grade 8— District	53	46.0	54	44.0	49	37.5
Grade 8— State	75	49.0	78	50.0	78	50.0
Grade 10— District	50	NA*	55	29.0	46	24.0
Grade 10— State	74	NA*	81	50.0	78	50.0
All Grades— District	40	41.0	42	37.0	44	39.0
All Grades—State	64	50.0	67	50.0	68	50.0

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. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 5 below shows proficiency rates and median growth percentiles by grade over the period 2008-2010 for mathematics. Four grades (3, 5, 6, and 7) showed a higher proficiency rate in 2010 than in 2008, while three grades (4, 8, and 10) had the same or a lower rate. Mathematics proficiency rates for 2010 in grades 7 and 8, at 26 and 23 percent, were remarkably low. Again with the exception of grade 3, where the proficiency rate rose 17 points from 2009 to 2010 after falling 6 points from 2008 to 2009, math proficiency rates in 2010 were all within 5 points of the 2008 rates, in three grades (4, 6, and 8) within one point.

Median SGPs in mathematics were lower in 2010 than in 2008 for three grades (5, 6, and 7); the 2010 median SGP for grade 8 showed no change over 2008, that for grade 4 showed a 6-point increase over 2008, and that for grade 10 showed a 2-point increase over 2009, when data on student growth became available for that grade. The median SGP for all grades was 7 points lower in 2010 (40.0) than in 2008 (47.0). At 37.0, the median SGP for grade 8 in 2010 was below the moderate range, while the median SGPs for grades 7 and 10 were even more notably low, at 28.0 and 24.0.

The increase in the mathematics proficiency rate for all grades in New Bedford from 2008 to 2010 (3 percentage points) was very similar to the increase in the math proficiency rate for all grades in the state (4 points). As for ELA, however, the differences in 2010 between proficiency rates in the district and proficiency rates for the state were very large, with the exception of grade 3: the district's grade 3 proficiency rate (61 percent) was only 4 percentage points below the state's (65 percent), while the gaps for other grades ranged from 14 to 33 percentage points, with a gap for all grades of 20 percentage points. As for ELA, the district has a long way to go to increase the mathematics proficiency of its students to a level close to that of students statewide.

**Table 5: 2008-2010 New Bedford Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	50	NA*	44	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	34	47.0	34	44.0	33	53.0
Grade 4—State	49	49.0	48	50.0	48	49.0
Grade 5—District	35	54.0	40	49.0	37	45.0
Grade 5—State	52	51.0	54	50.0	55	50.0
Grade 6—District	44	56.0	40	50.0	45	51.0
Grade 6—State	56	50.0	57	50.0	59	50.0
Grade 7— District	21	42.0	24	27.0	26	28.0
Grade 7— State	47	50.0	49	50.0	53	50.0
Grade 8— District	23	37.0	22	41.0	23	37.0
Grade 8— State	49	51.0	48	50.0	51	51.0
Grade 10— District	46	NA*	43	22.0	42	24.0
Grade 10— State	72	NA	75	50.0	75	50.0
All Grades— District	36	47.0	35	40.0	39	40.0
All Grades—State	55	50.0	55	50.0	59	50.0

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. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

In addition to their academic achievement, New Bedford students' attendance and chronic absence rates are of serious concern, as are high school students' suspension, retention, dropout, and graduation rates. See the Student Support section of this report.

Findings

Leadership and Governance

The school committee assumes responsibility for issues that are better addressed through policies or by administrators, while devoting too little time to addressing important educational issues for which it is responsible.

Meetings of the school committee are not sufficiently focused on issues of budget, policy, and student performance. Instead, school committee agendas and minutes demonstrate that the school committee spends time making some decisions that are better made by administrators in accordance with district policy. For example, the school committee votes on whether an outside group may distribute flyers to the students and approves teachers' out-of-district travel for professional growth, even if there is no charge to the district. The school committee also approves all individual line-item budget transfers. For example, the minutes of November 8, 2010, show the following transfer requests from the assistant superintendent for student services:

- \$1,539 from 4001-2800-22-4018-400-00 (Psychological Middle School Evaluations) to 4001-2320-00-4049-000-48 (Speech and Language Therapy Services)
- \$8,000 from 4001-2800-32-4018-500-00 (Psychological High School Evaluations) to 4001-2320-00-4049-000-48 (Speech and Language Therapy Services)

School committee minutes also show that the committee decides who will use school buildings and whether they will pay for the use of those buildings. The mayor reported that the school committee makes these decisions because the chief administrator for finance and operations (business manager) does not allow residents to use the buildings without charge. Rather than develop a policy that expresses its will, the school committee has assumed this responsibility from the business manager. A reason given by the mayor for the school committee assuming this responsibility rather than dealing with the matter through a policy was that it is important to organizations using the buildings to have their organization mentioned on the broadcast of the meeting.

To some extent, school committee meetings have become a forum for the public to present on areas that interest them. A review of school committee minutes showed that a portion of meeting time is dedicated to community recognition. To create the agenda, the superintendent's office compiles community requests for use of facilities and fee waivers, distribution of flyers, and other items the school committee approves, in addition to including standing agenda items such as public comment. The mayor approves the agenda; the superintendent noted she takes particular care to seek approval from the chair and discuss the meeting on the preceding Friday. The superintendent reported that when a member of the public calls her and asks to have something put on the school committee agenda, she calls the mayor, who serves as the school committee chair, and asks him if she should do so.

Some matters best handled by the superintendent are addressed by the school committee. For example, several school committee members reported in interviews that if a parent complained to them about something that happened in a school, rather than go through the superintendent, they would call the principal or teacher in that school to pass on the complaint. Additionally, although the authority to hire principals belongs solely to the superintendent by statute, School Committee policy and the personnel files of several principals show that appointments require a vote of the school committee. A review of representative samples of principal appointment letters going back to approximately 1995 shows that the superintendent approves the appointment after the school committee has been "notified." School committee minutes show that the "notification" requires a vote of the committee to "receive and place on file" the personnel report. Employment approval letters sent to principals state the prior date that the notification to the school committee was made and indicate that principal appointments are made "in accordance with the Policies and Regulations of the New Bedford Public Schools." One letter supplied specifically indicates that the appointment was "contingent upon . . . compliance with School Committee Policy GCD" (last amended in 1986), which states, in part:

It is the responsibility of the Superintendent and of persons to whom he delegates this responsibility to determine the personnel needs of the school district and to locate suitable candidates to recommend for employment to the Committee.

It shall also be the duty of the Superintendent to see that persons nominated for employment in the schools meet all certification requirements and the requirements of the School Committee for the type of position for which the nomination is made.
(School Committee Policy GCD)

Such policies and procedures have not been updated to reflect the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and School Committee as described in the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Important educational issues for which the school committee is responsible remain inadequately addressed, as revealed from interviews and a review of documents including school committee minutes. The reviewers found that the school committee does not have sufficient knowledge of pertinent information concerning student performance such as recent attendance and dropout data and benchmark testing results. In addition, the school committee has not engaged in a process of setting goals and monitoring progress toward them, as a way to focus its work on budget and policy and lay out how its work on both relates to improving student achievement. Further, as indicated, the school committee has not ensured that it has followed and is following policies in line with the Education Reform Act.

In summary, the school committee has assumed administrative responsibilities that more appropriately belong to the superintendent or her staff. On the other hand, it is not attending to important school district issues that are fully within its purview, such as student attendance, graduation, growth, and achievement, and has not set goals for its budget and policy work.

The central office does not have adequate leadership and capacity to support an improving educational system.

The district has gone from having a deputy superintendent for human resources, an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, an assistant superintendent for accountability and special programs, and an assistant superintendent for special education to having one assistant superintendent, responsible for student services. Three positions were eliminated when two administrators retired and one became superintendent. The superintendent is new to her position as of April 2010, although she has been a district employee for many years. Principals reported on several occasions during the site visit that the superintendent is working very hard and that she is considered “a healer” by some. However, the principals reported in individual and group meetings that they have too little exposure to her as a group.

Following the elimination of the position of assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, curriculum and instruction, K-12, became the responsibility of the district’s academic directors. In the absence of an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, they report to the superintendent. According to the high school principal and the superintendent, until about five years ago, the high school had department heads for each department. Approximately five years ago, those department heads were renamed “directors” with K-12 responsibility. Two years ago, the former superintendent moved the offices of these academic directors from the high school to the central office. Although the academic directors are now located in the central office, middle and elementary principals reported that only some of the directors come to their schools. Principals also said that the elimination last year of the position of assistant superintendent for curriculum leaves the district with little district-level curriculum coordination. In a focus group, the academic directors reported confusion about their roles and about the direction of the district with respect to curriculum and instruction. For this reason, some of them continued to work mostly at the high school, while others had branched out to some middle or elementary schools.

The principals spoke of conflict arising from uncertainty about the role and authority of the academic directors. One elementary principal said that most principals think that the positions of principal and academic director are equivalent in rank, but that this was conjectural because principals did not appear on the district organizational chart at the time of the review. The principals cited examples of disagreements and misunderstandings that accompany the absence of specificity about the role of the academic directors and lack of structured meeting time with them. At the elementary level, these included differences about use of the new science kits and the design of the literacy program.

In interviews with the review team central office administrators expressed awareness of these conflicts and said they had moved to resolve them by instituting regular meetings of the principals with the academic directors, moderated by the superintendent. They said that the purpose was to facilitate joint, consensual decisions by the principals and academic directors. But principals felt that the presence of the directors in the principals’ meetings with the superintendent constrained open discussion. Since directors are members of a collective

bargaining unit, the discussion of some matters would be inappropriate. Seeking to clarify the roles of the academic directors and the principals, central office administrators stated that the academic directors are the subject specialists and the principals are school-based leaders.

With the elimination last year of the assistant superintendent of curriculum position, curriculum direction was much reduced. This reduction, along with lack of clarity as to the academic directors' roles and a general shortage of direction for principals from the central office, leaves the district without much-needed support, clarity and direction in the area of curriculum. The result is that the district is paying insufficient attention to some key functions such as curriculum and instruction.

Without a shared understanding of the district's direction or adequate support for their roles as educational leaders, principals have to work too independently to improve student learning in their schools.

Principals receive inadequate direction and support from the central office to provide consistent educational leadership. As a group, they have one monthly meeting with the superintendent. According to the superintendent, that meeting is scheduled to be one hour and 15 minutes, but it can go over. Principals reported that to them the meetings are not effective; they indicated that little gets accomplished because of the large number of people in attendance (26 principals, 5 academic directors, 1 assistant superintendent, 1 supervisor, the superintendent and possibly others). Since the academic directors in attendance are Unit B members, sensitive issues pertaining to the collective bargaining agreement cannot be discussed. The principals also said that with such a large group, the meeting is used more to deliver announcements than to engage in problem-solving and decision-making. They reported that because of limited time with the superintendent and little participation in discussion of district-level decisions, they have little common understanding of the vision for the district and its direction.

The superintendent indicated in an interview that she might need more frequent meetings with the principals but had not yet scheduled those meetings. She reported that she has met with several principals individually, and that when there are issues at a school and a principal emails her, she responds immediately and often keeps up an email dialogue with that principal. She confirmed the principals' concern that she does not have time to be at the schools with any regularity.

Principals reported that the monthly meetings do not focus on the district's expectations and support for their role in ensuring strong classroom instruction. Principals interviewed indicated also that they are getting little direction from other central office personnel in the area of curriculum and instruction. They reported that they receive an occasional call from a director telling them about a decision on curriculum and instruction that will affect them, but that they are seldom involved in discussing the issue, providing input, or making the decision. Directors confirmed that because their roles are not defined, they have little regular interaction with principals. Directors and supervisors are not being brought together to discuss new initiatives and their implementation districtwide. In addition, principals, teachers, directors, and the superintendent reported that the district does not have a cycle or process for curriculum

development and modification. Principals do not have the direction and support they need to do their jobs effectively as educational leaders and drivers of high student achievement.

The problem of inadequate direction and support for principals is most pronounced at the elementary and middle school levels. Principals at those levels reported that their interaction with academic directors is highly variable. The review team heard from academic directors that some of them never go to the elementary or middle schools while others go to a few, and that some of them go only where principals invite them, while others attempt to be equitable in sharing their time among schools. The high school principal, on the other hand, reported that he meets with academic directors as a group once a week. They play an active role at the high school by helping with teacher evaluation, demonstrating their comfort at that level. Academic directors reported that elementary and middle school curriculum and instruction is for many of them neither their strength nor part of their expertise. Review of the job postings for their positions showed that although they listed the performance responsibilities for the positions as covering kindergarten through grade 12, none of the job postings specified knowledge of and experience with K-8 teaching and curriculum among the qualifications for the position.

The district has a model of practice that can be expanded. A supervisor of mathematics K-8 pays visits to all schools; she provides professional development to teachers; and she analyzes data and works with teachers and administrators to help them understand how that data can inform their instruction. Principals and teachers uniformly said that this support is extremely helpful in improving instruction. The district has not at this point expanded this model into a strong collective system of support to ensure consistent leadership and support for instruction. Without a systemic approach to ensuring two-way communication between school and central office staff, and a strategic approach that is commonly understood and supported with leadership direction and resources, efforts to improve teaching and learning will be piecemeal and falter rather than bringing about whole-scale improvement.

Principals are not held sufficiently accountable for their work; they are not being annually evaluated as required by Massachusetts law.

A review of personnel files for the district's 26 principals revealed the following:

- Files for 10 of 20 principals hired before 2009 did not have any evaluations. They do not appear ever to have been evaluated in their role as principal.
- The other ten principals hired before 2009 do not have current evaluations in their personnel files for their work as principals. Three were last evaluated in 2004, one in 2003, and one in 2002. Five were evaluated during the 2008-2009 school year (but not during 2009-2010); none of the 2008-2009 evaluations included recommendations for specific professional growth.
- The six principals appointed for the 2009-2010 school year have not been evaluated.

Contracts for recently appointed principals include language requiring the establishment of performance goals, and the superintendent suggested that under the supervision of her predecessor principals established goals during the 2009-2010 school year. In reviewing the

principals' personnel files, the review team did not find those goals or any evidence that goals have been established. The vast majority of principals have not been evaluated regularly or recently; therefore the district does not have a record of their performance to determine whether those principals have been effective leaders.

Without clearly defined performance goals for principals, including goals related to student achievement, or annual formal evaluation of principals, a culture has been established without objective accountability for those school leaders. Principals are not being held sufficiently accountable for the improvement of their students' achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

New Bedford teachers are not provided sufficient leadership, supervision, common planning time, and instructional coaching support to maximize their potential as professional educators.

Principals stated that their ability to provide specific feedback to teachers during the supervision process was limited because, they believed, the collective bargaining agreement did not allow them to make notes during informal classroom observations, even for personal use as a memory aid or to provide teachers with written feedback. Principals expressed the view that it is not possible for them to remember with specificity what occurred in a round of informal classroom observations without taking notes. The principals went on to say that they hesitated to give teachers oral feedback based on memory because such feedback would be prone to inaccuracy, and they could not always furnish examples to illustrate it. Some principals stated that their teachers allowed them to make notes and provide written feedback, but this was voluntary and not the norm. However, examination of the collective bargaining agreement did not show any basis for the belief that it prevents principals from making notes during informal classroom observations. The only provision under Article 8, section A of the agreement, on monitoring, states that monitoring of professional employees will be conducted with the employee's knowledge, and that video surveillance will not be used.¹³ In interviews, central office administrators, principals, and teachers told the review team that the principals were the instructional leaders for their schools; however, the principals' role has been limited by this interpretation and, apparently, past practice.

Instructional coaching has been drastically reduced even though elementary and middle school staff found it valuable in the past in spite of variations in the effectiveness and use of the coaches. Elementary principals and teachers told the review team that before this year the literacy and mathematics coaches in each elementary school helped teachers to improve their instruction, primarily through modeling and co-teaching. Central office administrators and some principals told the review team that the district eliminated the coaches at the elementary level during the summer of 2010 in order to retain teaching positions and maintain class sizes. They added that there had been variations in the ways that principals used the coaches as well as in the

¹³ The collective bargaining agreement is available at <http://educatorcontracts.doemass.org/view.aspx?recno=193>.

quality of the coaches, and that there was no objective evidence of the effectiveness of the coaching model. Some principals and teachers as well as central office administrators reported that some principals used the coaches as occasional substitutes and for clerical and administrative purposes; another problem in the implementation of the coaching model was that some coaches did not have the necessary training and skill for their roles and were ineffective.

Elementary teachers in focus groups, however, were unanimous that the coaches had served as instructional leaders in their schools. The superintendent stated that some of these elementary teachers were former coaches themselves. One elementary teacher said, and the others agreed, that the coaches introduced “best practices strategies that matched instruction to students’ needs.” This teacher added that she had seen “enormous student growth on standardized reading tests” because the coaches had brought “best practices into our classrooms.” According to elementary teachers interviewed, the coaches met monthly, which helped them import promising practices from one school to another. Elementary teachers told the review team that the coaches helped to enhance communication among the elementary schools and to bind them together. In the absence of the coaches, the elementary teachers interviewed by the review team stated that they felt more isolated in their classrooms.

According to central office administrators, the number of coaches was reduced because of the budget to one in each of two of the middle schools, and two in the largest middle school. These remaining middle school coaches widened their disciplinary scope from literacy or mathematics to all subject areas. In interviews with the review team, middle school teachers were highly positive about the coaches and provided the review team with numerous examples of how the coaches help them address students’ learning style differences and the range of achievement levels in their classrooms.

Central office administrators stated that the K-12 academic directors of ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies provide instructional supervision at the district level. In an interview with the review team, the academic directors stated that they are each responsible for supervising and evaluating 20 to 25 high school teachers. Many of these teachers are either beginning teachers or new to the school. They went on to say that they spend most of their time at the high school, visit the middle schools approximately once each month, and are “on call” at the elementary schools.

The team found little evidence to suggest that needs of elementary and middle schools for instructional leadership support were met by academic directors. Elementary and middle school principals told the review team that they rarely see the academic directors in their schools and do not meet with them regularly to discuss programs and services. One elementary principal said that he was not sure who the academic directors were. The principals went on to say that the academic directors usually visit the schools unannounced, without an explicit purpose. One principal added that it is therefore difficult to “anticipate how to utilize the time with them to best advantage.”

Common instructional planning time is limited in New Bedford, especially for elementary and high school teachers. At the elementary level, teachers have 90 minutes of planning time on early

release Friday afternoons and 30 minutes of planning time on alternate Wednesdays. According to the collective bargaining agreement, however, “administrative meetings” are not to be scheduled during the early release time, and teachers determine the use of the Wednesday planning time.¹⁴ In some elementary schools, teachers meet voluntarily by grade level and across grade level teams to plan instruction, but elementary principals told the review team that they do not control the use of this time. In two of the three middle schools, teachers have at least two periods of grade level or departmental planning time weekly. Planning time is more limited in the third middle school because of scheduling difficulties. At the high school, teachers attend a monthly departmental meeting. The principal, academic directors, and high school teachers told the review team that this time is inadequate.

In short, New Bedford does not have necessary supervisory processes, sufficient supervisory personnel, and adequate common planning time to improve the quality of teachers’ instruction. As detailed in the last curriculum and instruction finding below, the review team’s classroom observations showed that the characteristics of high quality instruction are more prevalent at the middle school level. It is worth noting that teachers have access to coaches and the greatest amount of common planning time at the middle school level. Nevertheless, as shown by Tables 4 and 5 in the Student Performance section above, middle school proficiency rates lag considerably behind statewide rates for those grades.

New Bedford has developed curriculum maps in mathematics and science at all grade levels that are based on the curriculum frameworks and aligned horizontally and vertically.

New Bedford’s documented curriculum consists of maps organized by month, term, or unit. The review team found that the kindergarten through grade 12 mathematics and science maps contain the essential curriculum components in at least minimal detail, including generic assessment techniques and teaching resources. The mathematics maps for kindergarten through grade 8 include learning standards, monthly topics, teaching resources, teaching strategies, benchmarks, and benchmark assessments. The grade 9 through 12 mathematics maps consist of learning standards, units of study, learning outcomes, teaching strategies, benchmarks, benchmark assessments, resources and materials, and cross-curricular connections. The science maps are arranged by trimester objectives in kindergarten through grade 2, monthly topics in grades 3 through 8, and units of study in grades 9 through 12. All the science maps also contain framework standards, learner outcomes, teaching strategies, resources, generic assessments, and cross-curricular connections. According to the science director, assessment at the elementary level is based in part on periodic review of students’ science notebooks.

In interviews, some teachers stated that they had participated in developing the maps by working in grade-level and across-grade-level teams. In classroom observations, the review team found that lessons were mostly timely in accordance with the appropriate curriculum map.

¹⁴ See Article 12, A.3.A, and Article 12, G.2, in the Unit A contract, available at <http://educatorcontracts.doemass.org/view.aspx?recno=193>.

New Bedford's curriculum maps serve as pacing guides to keep instructional content and topics consistent within particular grades in a school, among schools at the same grade level, and in the same high school course taught by different teachers. The maps are the basis for the district's assessments and facilitate analysis of curricular content, scope, sequencing, and emphasis in order to identify and address weaknesses.

The ELA curriculum is incomplete in kindergarten through grade 8, providing teachers with inadequate information to consistently deliver a standards-based education.

The district does not have English language arts (ELA) maps for kindergarten through grade 5, and its ELA maps for grades 6 through 8 do not have instructional strategies. Only the ELA maps for grades 9-12 contain the essential curriculum components in detail.

The review team found that the district has a kindergarten through grade 5 ELA guide consisting of learning standards, objectives, suggested assessments, and suggested resources in the areas of language, reading literature, and composition. This ELA guide, however, does not specify when the learning standards are to be addressed and does not provide advice for teachers on instructional strategies and techniques.

In interviews with the review team, teachers and administrators stated that the elementary ELA guide is based on the district's core *Open Court* reading program and has not been updated since a former assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction encouraged principals to supplement the core program with leveled trade books, at their discretion. In a focus group, teachers said that the guide was "pieced together to fill a void" and does not inform their daily practice. Several teachers stated that they were unaware of it. Administrators told the review team that the elementary ELA program is inconsistent from school to school. While some schools have instituted a balanced literacy program using leveled trade book libraries, others use the *Open Court* basal series almost exclusively. In an interview, a director stated that the elementary ELA program was in need of review.

The review team found that the grade 6 through 8 ELA maps are arranged by month according to literary genres (such as non-fiction; short story; drama; and myths, legends, and fables) and include framework strands, standards, before, during and after reading strategies, daily written responses, resources, and materials. The maps do not include advice on instructional techniques. Administrators and teachers told the review team that these maps were developed in 2009-2010 and that the district was continuing to add to them. Several administrators said that it was necessary to give the teachers the maps-in-progress to promote consistency from school to school in addressing curricular topics.

The district's ELA maps for grades 9 through 12 are arranged by month and contain framework standards, learner outcomes, teaching strategies, assessments, resources, materials, and cross-curricular connections. The high school curriculum maps, including those for ELA, are augmented by course descriptions in the program of studies and detailed course syllabi, including information on readings, projects, and assignments.

Unlike the New Bedford mathematics curriculum which includes most essential components, the ELA curriculum is incomplete in kindergarten through grade 8. District performance in ELA is unlikely to improve significantly until the curriculum is completed.

Curriculum development and revision processes are not being well managed to complete the missing curriculum components and to improve curricular alignment.

Central office administrators and principals told the review team that New Bedford does not have a phased cycle for curriculum development and review. The district is also without a curriculum steering committee and standing curriculum subcommittees organized by discipline and grade span. A review cycle and coordinating structures sustain curriculum development and renewal. The review team learned from interviews that in the absence of a comprehensive district plan for curriculum development and review, New Bedford initiates ad hoc curriculum projects to meet immediate needs. For example, the district recently revised the mathematics, science, and fine arts curricula, and was planning to begin a revision of the ELA curriculum. Principals and teachers told the review team that while there is a great deal of activity, there is little corresponding central coordination of the curriculum review and revision process, and little clarity on the priorities.

New Bedford currently has inadequate leadership and insufficient planning time for curriculum development and review. According to central office administrators, the position of assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction was not filled for the 2010-2011 school year. The district's academic directors now report directly to the superintendent, who has many competing responsibilities. As mentioned previously, the academic directors told the review team that they were unclear about their role and about the direction of the district. The principals identified themselves as the curriculum leaders in their schools, in combination with their other responsibilities, but went on to tell the review team that they were uncertain about the role and responsibilities of the academic directors and how and when to work with them.

Principals told the review team that they do not have any scheduled curriculum planning time with teachers. Teachers are paid a stipend for volunteer summer curriculum work, but there is not any regularly scheduled time to continue the process during the school year. Recently, the principals and some teachers at the elementary schools that are feeder schools for two of the middle schools began to meet with their respective middle school principal and middle school teachers for an informal review of the vertical curriculum from kindergarten through grade 8. Although these meetings were informal, voluntary, and not initiated by the district, some participants told the review team that they were "the most productive and meaningful meetings we have ever had."

New Bedford does not have a formal curriculum development and renewal cycle, has minimal staffing of curriculum leadership roles, and does not have adequate planning time for curriculum work. Continuous development and modification of the curriculum enhances student learning, provides a focus for instruction, and facilitates the design, delivery, and assessment of learning experiences. Without a process for keeping the curriculum current, students will not achieve 21st

century standards, veteran teachers will not know how to prioritize instruction, and new teachers will not know what to teach.

Teachers are without a shared definition of high quality instruction and have too little guidance as they face the enormous task of providing the most appropriate instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of their students. In many classrooms observed, the review team found little evidence of multiple characteristics of effective teaching; the quality of instruction was lowest at the high school level.

In interviews with the review team, principals and teachers did not express a common definition of high quality instruction. Principals stated that they were “on their own” in setting instructional expectations for their teachers. One said, and the others agreed, that the district does not provide any direction in “identifying the elements of effective instruction.” When asked to define high quality instruction in focus groups, some teachers cited the district’s programs and instructional materials, while others described student-centered, active learning strategies. Many of the teachers interviewed by the review team were eager to engage in a dialogue about best practices, but said that there is not a district format for holding such a discussion. At one point in a focus group with the review team, teachers began to discuss promising practices and one teacher said, “This should happen much more often here.”

The review team’s observations of district classes showed that many of the characteristics of highly effective teaching were not solidly in place. The quality of instruction in observed classes was highest at the middle school level and lowest at the high school level. The review team observed instruction in 48 district classrooms: 18 at the elementary level; 14 at the middle school level; and 16 at the high school level. These classes included 10 ELA and 8 mathematics classes at the elementary level; 5 ELA, 5 mathematics, and 4 science classes at the middle school level; and 5 ELA, 5 mathematics, and 6 science classes at the high school level. Four of the classes were ELL classes. The observations ranged between 20 and 30 minutes in length. Observers used a standard record form including 15 characteristics of effective instruction and learning grouped under two categories: Organization of the Classroom and Effective Design and Delivery. The data below describe the percentage of observed classes in which a characteristic was solidly evident, meaning well demonstrated during the observed period.

Organization of the Classroom:

Respectful behaviors, routines, tone and discourse were solidly in place in all (100 percent) of the elementary level classes observed. These were present less often at the middle school level (solid evidence in 78 percent of observed classes), and even less at the high school (solid evidence in 50 percent of observed classes). For example, in one high school class the teacher completed a lecture over students’ private conversations, singing, and noise-making, before finally allowing them to sit idly for 11 minutes until the bell signaled the end of the period. In another, the teacher arrived five minutes late for class and prepared for another three or four minutes before initiating the learning activity. In a third class, the teacher slowed the instructional pace by repeatedly re-directing a misbehaving student, using the same ineffective language each time.

A learning objective for the day's lesson was solidly evident in only 33 percent of the elementary level and 13 percent of the high school level classes observed, though the team did find it solidly evident in 79 percent of the middle school classes observed.

Time available was maximized for learning in only 31 percent of the high school level classes observed, though this characteristic was solidly evident in 79 percent of middle school level and all (100 percent) of elementary level classes observed. Most elementary teachers preserved instructional time by employing effective and efficient routines. For example, in one class the teacher asked students to state the rules for moving to the activity centers, then counted backwards from 10 to monitor and expedite the transition. By contrast, practices were different at the high school. For example, in one high school class, many students chatted with one other instead of completing an independent assignment while the teacher worked with individual students at his desk. In two of the high school classes observed the teacher left the room for a short time without explaining the reason to the students and providing them something meaningful to do in the teacher's absence. In another high school class, the teacher took eight minutes to draw and label a chart representing rising and falling action in a drama on the white board, while the students quietly looked on.

Instructional Design and Delivery:

Instructional strategies activated students' prior knowledge in 61 percent of the elementary level, 73 percent of the middle school level, and 31 percent of the high school level classes observed. For example, in one high school level class the teacher likened Macbeth, in his feeling of invulnerability, to a character in a short story the students had read earlier in the year. In an elementary level phonics lesson, the teacher asked the students what rules they had learned for long 'e' before proceeding with the day's lesson on long "i."

Instruction including a range of techniques (such as direct instruction, facilitating, and modeling) was solidly evident in 57 percent of middle school level classes observed. However, a range of instructional techniques was solidly evident in only 33 percent of elementary level classes, and not observed at all in any of the high school level classes observed by the team. There was some small group learning and partner work at the elementary and middle school levels. For example, in one elementary level class, students observed chemical changes in groups of three or four under teacher supervision and recorded their observations in their science notebooks. The high school classes were mostly teacher-centered.

The review team found little evidence of instruction emphasizing advanced reading skills, such as analysis and evaluation, especially at the high school level. Observers saw solid evidence of teachers asking questions requiring students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation in 50 percent of middle school level classes observed, but only 33 percent of elementary classes and 13 percent of high school level classes observed. In one middle school level class observed by the review team the teacher asked the students whether all metals were included on the periodic table, and which were not made by nature. The teacher broadened involvement by stating, "I should see more hands" and "Who haven't I heard from?" In another middle school level class observed by the team, the teacher asked students to remember

historical instances of restrictions on personal freedom, and to consider whether a “person of power could use his or her fame to take over a country, or the world.” At the high school level, on the other hand, few strategies to promote higher order thinking were observed.

Teachers paced instruction to actively engage students in 94 percent of the elementary classes and 50 percent of middle school level classes observed, but rarely at the high school (solid evidence, by contrast, in only 6 percent of the high school level classes observed). For example, some of the high school classes observed by the review team did not begin on time, creating little sense of urgency. In several high school classes observed teachers used class time to organize or prepare materials, reducing the instructional time for students. In two high school ELA classes labeled “college preparatory” students took turns reading aloud to the class from an anthology while the teacher interjected comprehension questions, mostly at the literal level. The ELA academic director said that students are not assigned reading homework because many do not have the skills to make meaning from the text independently. High school classrooms almost never demonstrated the use of strategies to engage students.

Students articulated their thinking and reasoning in 50 percent of the middle school level classes observed. At the elementary level, solid evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning was observed in only 22 percent of classes visited. This was not observed at all at the high school level. In most high school classes observed by the review team, the practice was to lecture and ask questions; teachers either answered their own questions or accepted brief and unelaborated student responses.

Students were observed inquiring, exploring, or problem solving together, in pairs or in small groups in 57 percent of middle school level classes. The percentage was only 33 percent at the elementary level; and the lowest percentage of solid evidence of this characteristic—12 percent—was again found at the high school level. As a positive example, a middle school teacher asked students to turn to a partner to discuss why it was important to know that the likelihood of an event was greater than chance. The teacher subsequently called on students to share with the entire class what they had discussed in pairs.

Overall, in summary, New Bedford does not have a common understanding of what constitutes high quality instruction, and the results were evident in the review team’s observations of district classes. Inconsistencies and weaknesses in teachers’ instruction hinder the district’s efforts to raise expectations for student learning and improve student achievement. Students in the New Bedford Public Schools are not making sufficient progress to close the considerable achievement gap between them and their peers across the state. Median student growth percentiles (SGPs) for 2010 show that students in grades 7-10 are progressing more slowly than their statewide peers. With a median SGP of 50.0 statewide, New Bedford students have ELA median SGPs of 32.0 in grade 7, 37.5 in grade 8, and 24.0 in grade 10. In math, median SGPs are 28.0 in grade 7, 37.0 in grade 8, and 24.0 in grade 10. At the high school level, where instruction is the weakest, New Bedford has the lowest median SGP for ELA and the second lowest median SGP for math in the Commonwealth.

Assessment

With a limited amount of assessment data to work with, leaders and teachers must make educational decisions without adequate student performance data to inform their work.

The New Bedford Public Schools' Strategic Plan 2008-2011 states the following activity for assessment under Goal 1, related to high academic standards for all students: "Develop common quarterly formative assessments for mathematics, ELA, science, and social studies to measure students' attainment of standards." The district also planned to review the current use of DIBELS and GRADE and research other assessments to provide student progress information. The expected outcomes were accountability for what is taught in class, measurement of students' progress throughout the year, and aid for teachers in addressing student weaknesses. The review team learned from interviews that these assessment activities have not been completed.

The district regularly administers Galileo mathematics benchmark assessments in grades 3-9. However, this year the district delayed the first Galileo administration until late November, so schools that administered the assessments at the earlier scheduled time scored them by hand. This meant that at the time of the review team visit, the district had been unable to provide districtwide analysis of the results. In previous years, coaches had scanned the Galileo results and provided teachers with the analysis. Once machine scoring is available this year, teachers will scan the results.

Last year (2009-2010) elementary schools had the option of administering the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Most schools administered at least the DIBELS and the GRADE in 2009-2010. In 2010-2011, the only early direction from the central office was that schools could make their own decisions concerning which assessment to administer. Interviews with principals revealed wide variation as to use of assessments. Some schools chose to go ahead with the DIBELS. Previously, however, teachers had administered the DIBELS using palm pilots, which had led to schoolwide results that principals and teachers could review and analyze. This year, however, schools that chose to use the DIBELS had to hand-score the assessments since the palm pilots were in such bad repair. And hand scoring by individual teachers meant that there could not be a schoolwide analysis.

The only schools that were able to administer GRADE this year were those that had the test booklets. A number of schools did not. However, the district announced in November that it was not supporting the use of the GRADE, so those schools that had the booklets and had administered the GRADE were left wondering what they would do with their initial results.

The district also announced in November that it would be developing an ELA benchmark assessment in the future and that while it would not be supporting the use of the GRADE, it recommended that schools continue to administer the DIBELS.

The results of this late decision were many. All elementary schools were left without the data the GRADE provided. Schools that had the booklets and had made the decision to establish GRADE baseline data by hand scoring were left without the support to continue with GRADE. Schools

that had been uncertain about district support of the DIBELS and had chosen not to administer it and score it by hand were faced with directions to begin administering it well into the year. And all schools would be scoring the DIBELS by hand and would have only classroom level results, since schoolwide results were dependent upon the use of the palm pilots. Until the ELA benchmark assessment is developed, there will be a gap in the ELA assessment data available in schools. Elementary schools will have little assessment data in 2010-2011 to determine their students' progress.

There is little evidence of a districtwide function to collect, examine, and disseminate all pertinent data for the purposes of informing instruction and having an impact on student performance. The district is more advanced in using data to assess mathematics achievement in grades 3-9 than in using data to assess performance in English language arts.

Because the amount of data collected and analyzed at the district level and then distributed to schools is limited, principals and staffs do not have ample data at their disposal and work at a disadvantage.

The district does distribute MCAS data: principals reported that a central office administrator ensures that schools receive the MCAS results. The administrator meets with principals and school teams at individual schools to present a broad overview the MCAS data for the school. Once this data is distributed, however, school leaders reported that they must do most of the work at the school level of determining what the MCAS results mean for their students. Principals reported that district leaders do not gather principals together to engage in discussion and analysis of districtwide MCAS results or results from districts with comparable demographics but better results to determine how their schools can improve student performance.

The district is more advanced in using data to assess math achievement in grades 3-9 than in using data to assess performance in ELA. Galileo benchmark assessment results in grades 3-9 are collected and analyzed by the math supervisor, and principals interviewed confirmed that these are pivotal in triggering data-based discussions and decisions by teachers and principals. While there is discussion about developing Galileo ELA benchmark assessments, none are yet in place. The district has not, as it has with the Galileo mathematics benchmark assessments, collected the data from other districtwide assessments to establish a district profile. In the past the district has supported the administration of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), but the data from these assessments has remained at the schools. And now, with the district moving away from support of the GRADE, and with DIBELS administration reduced to hand scoring, there will be even less district or school student data available for decision-making.

Principal interviews indicated that the district does not collect and analyze data across grades and subjects in areas other than mathematics. As described above, the K-8 math supervisor collects and analyzes mathematics data and works with teachers and administrators to use the data to

inform instruction, and another central office administrator distributes MCAS data. However, administrators confirmed that there is not a districtwide strategy for making data-based decisions, so that staff use what they have to make the best possible decisions for their students. Principals assume that responsibility for their schools independently for the most part, by forming teams within their schools to review data and generate initiatives for students with low scores. Some principals reported that they analyze the data by themselves and then spend time with their staffs reviewing it. District administrators and principals reported that principals have access to MCAS data in ESE's Education Data Warehouse. Most principals indicated that they use the MCAS data to formulate goals for their School Improvement Plans, but they do not receive assistance in this effort from a district data team.

Middle school teachers have common planning time that permits the teachers to meet regularly to examine data and to make decisions on the basis of student performance results. Unfortunately, teachers in other grades do not have ample opportunities to look at student work and assessment results to make decisions about what programs or strategies are effective. Principals, too, are limited in supporting instructional improvement based on data since the current interpretation of the teachers' contract limits them from making written notes on classroom observations beyond one formal observation.

Appropriate and consistent analysis and dissemination of data enables districts and schools to think systemically about the work that they do and how that work impacts student achievement. Due to the district's limited role in collecting and disseminating assessment data, neither the district nor the school has the capability to think systemically about its work and to formulate strategies to advance achievement.

Principals, staff, and school committee members expressed agreement on the importance of data-based decision-making. At this point, however, the district has not yet developed the systems and practices it needs to support consistent analysis and use of data throughout the school system to make important educational decisions.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The contract between the New Bedford School Committee and the New Bedford Educators Association, its interpretation, and established past practices inhibit the efforts of principals to improve instructional quality.

The contract states and interviews with principals and union leadership confirm that the most senior teacher in the district who has matching certification and who desires an open position has the "right" to that position. Article 13 of the July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2011 teachers' contract, on Transfers and Reassignments, states,

A professional employee in a building where a vacancy occurs [for the next school year] who wishes to fill that vacancy shall be placed in that position

provided the vacancy becomes known prior to the May 1st posting, and provided the professional employee is qualified in that teaching area. (Section D, 2a)¹⁵

Vacant positions that are not filled within the school per this language by May 1st are subject to Article 13, section D, 3a, of the contract on systemwide transfers, which states, in part, “Vacancies on the May 1st posting shall be filled by a voluntary transferee based on seniority.”

This strong seniority language in the teachers’ contract interferes with the principals’ authority to hire and assign personnel covered by the teachers’ contract. Any position that is posted in the spring according to the contract’s procedures as a vacancy for the next school year is open for bidding. For example, if a third-grade teacher is retiring at the end of a school year and the position is posted according to procedures as a vacancy for the next year, the principal does not have the authority to move another teacher in the school into that position, even with the agreement of that teacher. The position is open for bidding first in the school and then throughout the district, and the qualified bidder with the most seniority is awarded the position, whether that person is a good choice for that particular assignment or not. If a position becomes immediately open during the school year or becomes open for the next school year between May 1st and the end of the school year or during the summer, the principal may choose a teacher to fill that position temporarily, but it must be posted as a vacancy at the end of the school year and filled permanently by the bidding procedures. See Article 13, Section D, 11. Principals emphasized that seniority provisions in the contract governing transfers interfere with their ability to get the strongest and most appropriate teacher into a position; they prevent them from filling open positions within their schools based upon the qualifications, experience, and performance records of candidates. Principals stated that teachers who transfer to their schools frequently would not be their first choice among candidates for the position, since they had deemed that these teachers would not likely meet the instructional needs of their students in support of the school’s effort to increase student achievement. They also explained that the contract provides teachers with the opportunity to move from position to position, so weak teachers may move from school to school every year or two to try to avoid a formal negative evaluation.

Principals reported that the principle of “ownership of positions” is also detrimental to improving student achievement. Article 13, section D, 3e, of the contract states,

When Special Education Classes are redesignated, the professional employee owning the position in the redesignated class shall have the option of remaining with the class or becoming an involuntary transferee. If the Special Education Class must change buildings, the professional employee owning the position shall have the option of remaining with the class or becoming an involuntary transferee.

The term “owning” is not found anywhere else in the teachers’ contract.¹⁶ However, teachers, principals and a central office administrator stated that an established, unwritten practice in the

¹⁵ The contract is available at <http://educatorcontracts.doemass.org/view.aspx?recno=193>.

district allows teachers under certain circumstances to “own” a position they occupy and, if they leave the position, to retain the right to that position for two years. So, if another teacher is hired for or moves into a teacher’s previous position and the original teacher wants it back within two years, the new teacher must be moved from that position to another. This can happen even in the middle of the school year. Principals told the review team that this often causes turmoil in their classrooms. The recognition of “ownership” of positions within a school means that principals have difficulty in recruiting effective teachers for positions that are “owned” by other teachers and in establishing a community of teachers with long-term commitments to the school. The school’s promotion of effective instructional practices is disrupted by teachers returning to positions they “own” and recently appointed teachers leaving those positions when “owners” reclaim them.

In a teacher focus group, teachers reported that seniority provisions and practices in the district, including the ownership principle, are very difficult for new teachers. New teachers are often moved from school to school and have little stability in their positions. They reported that this practice is disruptive to their professional life and one of the reasons that young teachers leave the district.

Interviewees, including principals and union leadership, stated that when principals engage in evaluation of a teacher that results in identified areas of improvement and suggestions for growth in performance, possibly in a contractually allowed Professional Improvement Plan (see Appendix F of the contract), teachers often use their contractual ability to transfer to move to a different school, and the improvement plan does not follow them. Principals and the human resources manager indicated that teacher improvement plans are kept only in schools and are not filed in the human resources office. When a teacher is able to transfer from a school without an improvement plan following them, the district’s efforts to enhance the performance of that teacher are thwarted. Motivation for personal professional growth among teachers is limited under these circumstances. Further, several principals indicated that, on occasion, poorly performing teachers have been allowed to ignore their improvement plan.

Teacher supervision in New Bedford is limited by the absence of a well-understood process for promoting instructional improvement outside of the formal evaluation process. The teachers’ contract, as interpreted in the district, prevents principals and other administrators from writing informal comments or reflections on drop-in visits. Such visits are perceived as evaluations, which must be preceded by a pre-conference and followed by a post-conference. This interpretation prohibits principals from documenting, for the purpose of assisting growth, what they are seeing in classrooms from day to day. The contract, however, only requires pre- and post-conferences for “formal observations/evaluations” that are part of the formal evaluation of staff. See Appendix F, section entitled “Formal Observation Year.” See also Article 8, section A, on monitoring, mentioned under Curriculum and Instruction above.

¹⁶ In Article 13, section D, 11, there is a reference to professional employees retaining rights to their previous position in limited circumstances when they are assigned to fill a position during the school year that has not been posted

Article 12, section A, 3, a, provides for common planning or grade-level meetings for elementary teachers twice a month. By implication (“with the agenda determined by the Teachers”), it prohibits the principal from determining important agenda items for all teachers or a subset of teachers. Teachers alone determine what will happen during these meetings. Some principals have learned to work around this restriction, but many principals report that it interferes with their ability to do their jobs. Again, elementary teachers have 90 minutes of planning time on early release Friday afternoons, but according to Article 12, section G, 2, of the collective bargaining agreement, “administrative meetings” are not to be scheduled during this early release time.

These provisions and practices undermine principals’ ability to be educational leaders by interfering with their authority in six important areas. They interfere with principals’ ability (1) to assign the most appropriate teachers to vacancies; (2) to prevent teacher turnover based on “ownership” of a position; (3) to recruit and retain new teachers; (4) to require improvement of practice when evaluations have shown it is needed; (5) to help teachers improve their instruction through informal classroom visits and comments; and (6) to influence the content of teachers’ common planning and grade-level meetings.

They are impeding the enhancement of instruction within the New Bedford schools, and thereby hindering efforts to improve the academic achievement of the students.

Because district-level professional development priorities have not been adequately defined, professional development is too unfocused and schools’ initiatives are not sufficiently coordinated.

The district does not have a current district professional development plan, according to the director of professional development and several academic directors interviewed. At the time of the review team’s site visit the district website included, within its professional development link, a sub-link titled “District PD Plan.” That document was limited to a title page for the “New Bedford Public Schools Professional Development Plan, 2008-2011.” During its visit, the team received a document titled, “New Bedford Public Schools Professional Development Plan, September 1, 2010- June 30, 2012 (Working Draft).” The document does not include any specific districtwide teacher professional development activities. On page 7, the document states, under “School-based Professional Development Days”: “Two of the three scheduled Professional Development Days are considered building-based days. On these days, the schools can decide how best to taylor [sic] their professional development to support their School Improvement Plans.” Principals and the union leadership confirmed the autonomy principals are given in this area, stating that principals most often use those days to pursue goals included in their individual School Improvement Plans. Interviews with principals indicated that there is insufficient direction from the central administration regarding the focus of school-level professional development.

The director of professional development and various academic directors stated that the district professional development plan is a “work in progress.” The director of professional development stated that she also works to support the professional development efforts of individual principals

through grant funds when they approach her with such requests. Interviews with principals confirmed this. Academic directors and principals indicated that they also support the professional development efforts of individual principals, but that support varies by school since individual schools have different professional development priorities.

Many of the professional development opportunities posted on the district website are sponsored by outside agencies (e.g., colleges, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts). Interviewees indicated that staff take advantage of these opportunities and often find them valuable in their pursuit of personal professional growth. They acknowledged, however, that those offerings are usually not linked to an established district priority.¹⁷

Achievement data for New Bedford students consistently reflects, across grade levels and subjects, performance that is well below state levels. Student growth is consistently at moderate or relatively low levels, with the median student growth percentile for district students in 2010 in both ELA and math just at the borderline between moderate and lower growth. The absence of a centrally coordinated professional development program to support effective instructional practices limits teachers' opportunities to develop needed strategies to improve student achievement.

The insufficiency of centralized focus on professional development in the district demonstrates the need for more leadership from the central office to ensure that teachers in all schools are supported in their efforts to improve performance.

Student Support

The district's high school students have low attendance and graduation rates as well as high dropout rates and rates of chronic absence, retention, and suspension. The 2010 four-year graduation rate was only 53.5 percent, one of the five lowest in the state for multiple-school districts. None of these rates has shown any appreciable improvement over time, many are worsening, and there is little evidence that the district is addressing them effectively.

The district's overall attendance rate in 2010 was 92.2 percent, a rate below the statewide attendance rate of 94.6 percent. This rate has fallen every year since 2005, when it was 93.7 percent, while the state rate has increased slightly during those years from 94.4 percent. New Bedford High School's attendance rate has also fallen every year since 2005, from 90.1 percent to the 2010 rate of 85.2 percent.

In addition, almost one in every four students in the district were chronically absent in 2010—24.3 percent, an increase over 2009 (23.8 percent) and 2008 (22.0 percent), and much higher

¹⁷The district did apply for a grant that required it to propose professional development activities aligned to district and school goals and ESE's Conditions for School Effectiveness (ESE's 2010-2011 grant for "Dissemination of Effective Practices from Title I Commendation Schools," fund code 316 C).

than the statewide 2010 chronic absence rate of 13.0 percent.¹⁸ At the high school level, approximately half of the students were chronically absent in 2010. In grade 9, 55.5 percent of students were chronically absent; in grade 10, 47.9 percent; in grade 11, 52.3 percent; and in grade 12, 52.6 percent. These attendance problems are not new, and they persist despite the programs designed to address them.

Also of serious concern are the high retention rates at the high school level.¹⁹ Every year since 2007-2008, the district has retained over 1 in 5 of the students in grades 9 and 11; 24.9 percent of district 9th graders and 20.8 percent of district 11th graders were retained in 2010-2011. By comparison, the state retention rates in 2010-2011 for these grades were 7.2 percent for 9th graders and 2.8 percent for 11th graders. The highest retention rate in any other grade in the district was 8.5 percent in grade 1. In explanation, interviewees indicated that there are minimum credit requirements for being promoted from grades 9 and 11; there are no such requirements for being promoted from grade 10. Interviewees also stated their belief that the district holds back in 9th grade students who staff feel are not capable of passing the 10th grade MCAS assessment. High school interviewees believed that promotion standards were lower at other levels, so that the high school must reverse that trend by applying higher standards for promotion.

At the same time, as the tables below show, high percentages of New Bedford students in grades 9-12 are receiving in-school suspensions, and even higher percentages are receiving out-of-school suspensions. The rates of in-school suspensions have increased greatly between 2008 and 2010.

Table 6: 2008-2010 New Bedford In-School Suspension Rates: Grades 9-12

	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
2008	22.1	9.7	6.9	4.8
2009	28.8	13.2	11.5	5.8
2010	41.7	29.0	20.3	12.1

Source: ESE's Education Data Warehouse

Out-of-school suspension rates are somewhat stable, but unacceptably high. As Table 7 below indicates, in each year between 2008 and 2010, about half of 9th grade students were suspended at least once.

¹⁸ The chronic absence rate is defined as the percentage of students who are absent for more than 10 percent of the days that they are enrolled in the district.

¹⁹ The retention rate is the percentage of students who are not promoted to the next grade.

Table 7: 2008-2010 New Bedford Out-of-School Suspension Rates: Grades 9-12

	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
2008	50.1	33.7	28.1	15.7
2009	51.4	26.6	28.6	15.0
2010	50.5	35.6	25.9	16.1

Source: ESE's Education Data Warehouse

An interview with union representatives and a review of the teachers' contract revealed an unusual provision in the contract (Article 29, section B, 1) related to the discipline of students that allows a teacher, "for just cause," to make a request to the principal that a student be removed from the teacher's class. If the teacher does not agree with the disposition of the request by the principal he or she may take it to the superintendent. If the superintendent denies the request, the teacher may appeal to the School Committee.

The annual dropout rate²⁰ for grades 9-12 was 8.1 percent in 2010. This compares most unfavorably with the state rate of 2.9 percent. And the district annual dropout rate has changed little over the last three years, while the state rate has decreased by nearly 1 percentage point.

Table 8: 2007-2010 New Bedford Public Schools Annual Grade 9-12 Dropout Rates, Compared to State

	District	State
2007	8.3	3.8
2008	8.2	3.4
2009	8.4	2.9
2010	8.1	2.9

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Finally, the district's four-year graduation rates are unacceptably low; this rate has decreased every year since 2007, while the state four-year graduation rate has increased in every one of those years. In 2010, the district's four-year graduation rate was one of the five lowest in the state for multiple-school districts.

²⁰ The percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school between July 1 and June 30 prior to the listed year and did not return to school by the following October 1. Dropouts are defined as students who leave school before graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school.

Table 9: 2007-2010 New Bedford Public Schools Four-Year Graduation Rates, Compared to State

	District	State
2007	58.2	80.9
2008	56.1	81.2
2009	55.7	81.5
2010	53.5	82.1

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

The above data shows unacceptable percentages of high school students not coming to school; being retained; being suspended; dropping out; and not graduating. It was clear that there are a number of programs at New Bedford High School and in the district to address issues related to attendance, credit recovery, and dropout prevention, as well as academics and plans for after high school. It was not clear that these programs are coordinated and executed in a way that improves results for students.

Academic support and support for postsecondary planning:

- Through a state MCAS grant, the high school tracks students who have been unsuccessful on MCAS. Small-group tutoring for these students is available after school and on Saturdays.
- Dual enrollment programs at Bristol Community College and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth are in place.
- The New Bedford High School Engineering Academy, a smaller learning community within the high school, offers a thematic approach to learning focused on providing the guidance, skills, and opportunities needed for its students to pursue postsecondary careers in either higher education or employment. In connection with the academy, the high school received a federally funded 2010-2011 21st Century Community Learning Centers High School Innovation Grant to establish an after-school program providing high interest educational activities to deepen student’s school-day learning.
- Through one-on-one meetings with students not yet pursuing a post-secondary program, the Talent Search program at the high school works toward the goal of having every student apply to one.

Attendance:

- Until this year, the high school had four attendance officers. This year, because of budget cuts, the number has been reduced to two, to deal with attendance issues in a high school of over 2700 students half of whose students were chronically absent last year.

- An Attendance Task Force at the high school, with members from among administrators, teachers, students, parents, and police, has begun to look at attendance issues.

Dropout prevention and recovery:

- A Twilight program offers students classes after school.
- A night school also offers high school classes, though the costs for this program can be an obstacle for some New Bedford students.
- A Parenting Teens program, operated in cooperation with a coalition of agencies in the greater New Bedford area, offers classes, support services, and childcare to teen parents, including those who have dropped out. Through a grant from Easter Seals, this school offers a program called My Reading Coach. The program also focuses on building relationships among students and between students and teachers.
- An alternative school created in 2008, Whaling City Junior-Senior High School, serves students involved with the criminal justice system in a small setting. The school participates in New Directions, a program designed to put all students on the path to college through an after-school program. The alternative school itself offers monthly college visits and an annual trip to visit colleges in Washington, D.C. or New York.
- A second alternative school, Trinity Day Academy, is a special education day school for students in grades 6 through 12, most of whom have social /emotional disabilities.
- Last year the high school introduced a program called, “Where Are You Headed?” It uses as models former and current New Bedford High School students, some successful and some not, who say on video where they are going. A pediatrician is going to work with a patient, a homeless mother is going to find a place for her family to live, one young man is headed back to his jail cell.
- A dropout prevention counselor meets weekly with a high school team to address dropout issues and reviews cases of students with problematic attendance monthly.

Although programs exist, there was little evidence that the programs are knit together into a systemic and systematic response to the challenges. And except for programs funded by grants, such as the Academic Support grants administered by ESE, for which evaluations are required, they are not being evaluated as to their adequacy or effectiveness. As a result, the district and New Bedford High School do not yet have a clear understanding of how to provide high school students with the support they need to engage successfully in school. Moreover, the data indicates that the programs have yet to appreciably improve results for students. Large proportions of New Bedford high school students face challenges that it will be difficult for them to overcome.

Proficiency gaps between district special education and ELL students and their counterparts statewide are wider in the upper grades; graduation rates for both district subgroups are extremely low.

Interviews with special education staff in the central office and based in schools revealed an extensive professional development program for special education staff. There is ongoing use of consultants both to work directly with teachers and to offer workshops on topics such as behavioral interventions, co-teaching and collaborative support, strategies for working with students on the autism spectrum, and legal issues. Approximately 60 percent of special education students are now fully included in general education classrooms,²¹ but staff expressed the view that not all regular education teachers feel responsible for the special education students in their classrooms.

At the elementary level, programs for ELL students²² are concentrated at five schools. At the middle and high schools, a newly appointed director of sheltered English immersion (SEI) and world languages is introducing the “cognitive academic language learning approach” (CALLA). ESE’s 2007 Coordinated Program Review Report found several instances of noncompliance with respect to ELL students, including lack of SEI training for teachers working with ELL students.²³ Since that time the district has provided SEI trainings each year; fewer mainstream elementary teachers than middle and high school teachers have been trained, though efforts to bring SEI training to mainstream elementary teachers are beginning this year (2010-2011) with a training for all teachers at the Winslow school. Figures on the percentages of regular education teachers who teach ELL students who have received SEI training were not available from the district.

²¹ ESE data for 2009-2010 shows: 62.2 percent in full inclusion (outside of general education classroom <21 percent of the time); 11.8 percent in partial inclusion (outside of general education classroom 21-60 percent); 20.7 percent substantially separate (outside of general education classroom >60 percent); and 5.0 percent in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/in hospital.

²² The terms “ELL students” and “LEP students” are used interchangeably in this report.

²³ See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2007/0201.doc>.

**Table 10: 2010 New Bedford Special Education and LEP/FLEP Proficiency Rates, by Grade, Compared to State Rates
ELA and Mathematics**

		ELA—Percentage Proficient/Advanced		Mathematics—Percentage Proficient/Advanced	
Grade	Subgroup	District	State	District	State
Grade 3	Special Education	27	25	35	30
	LEP/FLEP	34	34	48	43
Grade 4	Special Education	11	16	15	16
	LEP/FLEP	23	26	21	28
Grade 5	Special Education	18	23	20	18
	LEP/FLEP	19	31	19	30
Grade 6	Special Education	12	28	16	19
	LEP/FLEP	31	36	23	32
Grade 7	Special Education	8	30	3	15
	LEP/FLEP	8	34	6	24
Grade 8	Special Education	12	36	3	13
	LEP/FLEP	12	34	6	20
Grade 10	Special Education	6	38	13	36
	LEP/FLEP	0	28	5	36
All Grades	Special Education	14	28	16	21
	LEP/FLEP	20	32	21	31

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

As shown by Table 10 above, in 2010 lower percentages of both special education and LEP/FLEP students achieved proficiency in both ELA and math at the upper grades tested by MCAS than at the lower grades, and the gap between district and state subgroups—both special education and LEP/FLEP—was significantly wider at the upper grades.

- Except for grade 8 special education and LEP/FLEP students in ELA (12 percent proficient in each case) and grade 10 special education students in math (13 percent proficient), the proficiency rates for both subgroups in both subjects in grades 7, 8, and 10 were all single-digit.

- For special education students, the differences between the district subgroup’s ELA proficiency rate and the state subgroup’s ELA proficiency rate ranged from -16 to +2 percentage points in grades 3-6 but from -32 to -22 in grades 7-10; in math, the differences ranged from -3 to +5 in grades 3-6 but from -23 to -10 in grades 7-10.
- Gaps widened similarly for LEP/FLEP students in the upper grades: the differences between the district subgroup’s ELA proficiency rate and the state subgroup’s ELA proficiency rate ranged from -12 to 0 percentage points in grades 3-6 but from -28 to -26 in grades 7-10; in math, the differences ranged from -11 to +5 in grades 3-6 but from -31 to -14 in grades 7-10.

The review team was not able to gather enough information during the review to uncover all the reasons for lower proficiency rates and wider proficiency gaps for district special education and limited English proficient/formerly limited English proficient students at the upper grades. Interviews with district special education and ELL administrators and teachers did not clarify them. It is clear that, in general, the curriculum, instruction, and use of data in the district need improvement, and it is possible that these areas requiring more attention have a greater impact on these students with greater instructional needs. It is also clear that the achievement of district special needs and LEP/FLEP students in grades 7, 8, and 10 is notably low, indicating a need for improved support for these students to enable them to achieve at the same rates as their peers across the state.²⁴ Their graduation rates also make clear the need for improved support for these subgroups at the upper grades. The 2010 four-year graduation rate for LEP students was 38.8 percent, the fifth lowest for any multi-school district (compared to the state rate for LEP students of 57.8 percent); the 2010 rate for New Bedford special education students was 22.4 percent, the third lowest for any multi-school district (compared to the state rate for special education students of 64.0 percent).

Financial and Asset Management

New Bedford struggles to make its \$102.6 million local budget and other sources of funding meet school and student needs.

The New Bedford school district has not met the net school spending (NSS) requirement for two of the last three years, as shown by ESE figures.²⁵ In fiscal year 2008, actual NSS was under the requirement by \$1,293,118. The school district met the NSS requirement for fiscal year 2009. The NSS requirement for fiscal year 2010 was \$127,129,915, and the actual expenditure was

²⁴In both ELA and math, LEP and FLEP students in particular had CPIs in 2010 that were significantly below the CPIs of their statewide counterparts. In ELA, the gap was 18.4 points for LEP students and 12.1 points for FLEP students. In math, the gap was 18.8 points for LEP students and 13.2 points for FLEP students. See Tables 2 and 3 in the Student Performance section above.

²⁵ See New Bedford’s chapter 70 profile at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>. Required net school spending comprises the “required local contribution” and state aid under G.L. c. 70. Net school spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures, transportation, grants, and revolving funds.

\$124,234,153, under the requirement by \$2,895,762. It is anticipated that the fiscal year 2011 NSS will be under the requirement by \$98,917. These figures do not include American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or Education Jobs grant funds. The district received ARRA funds in both fiscal year 2009 and fiscal year 2010; the grants were used to maintain services and retain teachers. The district is using Education Jobs funds to supplement the fiscal year 2011 school district budget; it has applied for \$6.3 million, the full amount of the available Education Jobs funding, which is for two years.

To support its educational programs and services, the school system relies on grants besides the extraordinary ARRA and Educational Jobs grants, as well as other revenue. The grants received are both entitlements and competitive grants. There is a director of grants who oversees and is responsible for the preparation and administration of all grants. The district's End-of-Year Report for fiscal year 2010 lists revenue of \$1,779,713 from tuition from other districts, primarily from Acushnet, whose educational system does not have a high school. The business manager stated that the system does not have access to these funds and that they are used by the city, a statement borne out by the End-of-Year Report's summary of expenditures.

The district has faced cutbacks in recent years. In fiscal year 2009, the school budget was \$113,839,262 and in fiscal year 2010, \$106,469,613. In the fiscal year 2011 budget for the City of New Bedford, the school budget was \$102,582,495, a \$3,887,118 reduction from fiscal year 2010 and \$15,113,350 less than the \$117,695,845 budget originally presented by the superintendent at the school committee's May 2010 meeting. The fiscal year 2011 budget and other fund sources reflect the loss of 42 coaches (transferred to teaching positions), 4 instructional supervisors, 6 teaching positions, 5 special education positions, 46 paraprofessionals, 2 attendance officers, 2 school adjustment counselors, 1 dropout prevention specialist, 30 custodians, 10 maintenance staff, 7 clerks, 4 guidance clerks, and a half-time IT director. Many interviewees told the review team that the budget does not provide the financial resources to assure that students will receive a quality education and to improve student achievement.

The problem of limited financial resources is exacerbated by the fact that New Bedford does not have systems that make it easy to manage its resources. For their accounting systems, the city uses CCS financial system, a 1984 system that is dated, while the school district uses Pentamation. The district has an encumbrance system that takes into account purchase orders and projects heating and utility costs. Salaries are not formally encumbered in the financial system, but a separate system of analysis is maintained using Excel spreadsheets, which projects each employee's salary for the year. The school district maintains a comprehensive list of assets that is updated annually. Payroll is weekly. The school department has 20 staff members in its financial office, while the city's financial office employs 8.

With federal as well as state funding anticipated to be less in coming years, the city's failure in recent years to meet the net school spending requirement takes on added significance. The inadequacy of the district's current financial resources was widely acknowledged to the review

team in interviews. Without changes at the local level, the district may be unable to meet the financial needs of its schools and provide for the educational needs of their students.

Principals have little input and limited authority concerning the school budget.

The review team found several challenges that interfere with principals' ability to guide the development and use of school budgets to meet educational goals. One example is the freezing or partial freezing of school budgets. According to minutes of a special meeting of the school committee on June 28, 2010, the committee voted to initiate a spending freeze at the start of the fiscal year on July 1, 2010. According to district administrators, principals were allowed to spend 30 percent of their budgets by the end of October and 50 percent by the end of December; requests for materials or services from principals or other budget stakeholders are processed by the business manager.

Second, the negotiated collective bargaining agreement gives the business manager, not the principal, the authority to approve or deny resource requests from teachers. The teachers' contract, Article 6, F states:

During the school year all professional employee requests for supplemental supplies shall be reduced to writing and forwarded to the Principal who will forward said request to the Business Manager within three (3) school days of receipt of the written request.

Thus the decision does not belong to the educational leader of the school; in particular, according to this provision the principal does not have the power to deny requests from teachers that the principal determines to be non-priority requests or requests that do not accord with School Improvement Plan goals. This provision undermines the authority of the principal and is not in the best interest of the school.

Finally, principals are not involved in making decisions on budget priorities. In interviews, principals reported that they have little input into building the budget. Their formal input is limited to the ability early in the budget process to submit a form to the business office with their requests, which they may subsequently discuss with the superintendent. The superintendent and business manager then develop the budget. After it is submitted to the school committee, any necessary cuts are made by the school committee and central office without input from the principals. The review team learned in separate interviews with principals that the principals met and as a group made recommendations on the budget to the central office, none or few of which were acted upon. Without sufficient authority to allocate resources, principals are hindered in their attempts to meet basic school and student needs.

The central office administration determines the budget priorities, but there was little evidence that budget decisions are determined by an analysis of student needs.

Budget preparation begins at the end of November with the distribution of forms to the principals and other administrators with budget responsibility to gather requests for additional positions or overtime funds and for supplies, materials, or services above those requested in the recurring budget fund. The superintendent in an interview indicated that she requests that the principals

and other administrators with budget responsibility “develop their budget to be consistent with their goals in their SIPs and based on the monies that have been allocated.” The principals are not required to include a rationale as to how the requested additional funds will lead to the improvement of student achievement. According to the principals and teachers, their involvement in the budget after this point is minimal. The central office administration determines the budget priorities. There was no indication during interviews with these administrators that budget priorities are based on needs as reflected in student achievement or other data. The superintendent and the business manager then review the submitted requests and prepare a budget for submission to the school committee in March. The budget as submitted is not clearly built based upon student needs as established through an analysis of student achievement.

Given some school buildings’ poor condition and some school buildings’ underutilization, it is a challenge to provide an environment conducive to learning. The school district does not have a multiple-year capital improvement plan that addresses the dual needs for facility consolidation and renovation/construction.

The district has 27 buildings, including 20 elementary school buildings, 3 middle school buildings, a high school building, an alternative special education building, an administration building, and a transportation and maintenance shop. Along with the demolition of the old building and opening of a new building for the Lincoln Elementary School, two other buildings (those of the Phillips Avenue and Ottiwell schools) were recently taken off line and will be turned over to the city. All the schools have a security system and access codes. Eleven of the schools are not handicapped accessible.

A feasibility study of the elementary schools prepared ten years ago (in fiscal year 2001) is still being used as a guide. The study reported that 65 percent of the existing buildings were 80 years old or more and had reached a point of diminishing return concerning their operational and educational viability. The exteriors were in poor condition, thus contributing to building decay. Mechanical systems were costly to operate and maintain. The study projected that by the year 2023, the number of school buildings would be down to 12. Both the superintendent and the mayor indicated that there are several schools with low enrollment that could be combined. Table 11 below presents the numbers of enrolled students and of openings in each of the district’s 20 elementary schools.

Table 11: New Bedford Elementary Schools: 2010 Enrollment and Vacancies

Elementary School	Enrollment	Vacancies
Ashley	324	52
Brooks	245	55
Campbell	205	71
Carney	488	70
Congdon	235	90
DeValles	212	42
Dunbar	105	45
Gomes	590	63
Hannigan	217	37
Hathaway	162	63
Hayden-McFadden	574	131
Kempton	125	27
Lincoln	674	30
Pacheco	269	57
Parker	246	54
Pulaski	448	58
Rodman	145	55
Swift	224	76
Taylor	263	65
Winslow	275	28

Source: Documentation supplied by the New Bedford Public Schools

In interviews with school district and city officials, the review team heard that the age and condition of some school buildings creates a challenge to make them suitable for learning. As a result, they are a priority that must be addressed in the near future. According to district administrators, capital equipment is not dealt with through the school committee budget; instead, a capital equipment budget is bonded through the City of New Bedford for major building renovations. The last time this occurred was in fiscal year 2001, when the city funded \$5 million for school building repairs, including repair or replacement of 12 school building roofs and the addition of an elevator at the high school building. It has been ten years since the last set of major building renovations for the New Bedford Public Schools, but the district does not have a

multiple-year capital improvement plan. Without a capital plan, the district is without guidance concerning how to approach its future capital needs. Further, the underutilization of some buildings with low enrollment is not cost-efficient.

Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

The school committee should focus more attention and allocate more meeting time to strengthen its understanding of district performance and its practice in using the data to make high-level decisions related to district goals, the budget, and policy. Policies and practices should be updated to better reflect district needs, current practice, and the Education Reform Act.

The review team found that school committee meeting time and attention could be significantly more focused on weighing the costs and benefits of budget and policy decisions for school and student performance. To give some examples, the committee could increase time spent on reviewing student achievement data and other performance indicators such as student attendance, discipline, and graduation rates; using this data and information on educational practice to make big-picture budget decisions; and reviewing and updating policies to address needed changes to practice. One factor limiting the time spent by the school committee on these matters has been the amount of meeting time spent on making decisions that are better made by administrators in accordance with policy set by the committee. Examples from school committee minutes include decisions on teachers' travel, budget transfers, and the use of school buildings by outside groups. Further, some individual school committee members have contacted principals or teachers directly about concerns rather than notifying the superintendent. Information collected suggests that some policies and practices have not been updated to align with expectations for superintendent and school committee roles and responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993. For example, under the Education Reform Act the authority to hire principals belongs to the superintendent, but school committee policy, school committee minutes, and principal personnel files indicate that their appointments require a school committee vote.

To strengthen leadership practices, the school committee, with the superintendent, should seek out resources available through ESE and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) that can help it allocate more time to discuss important school district issues, set goals for itself, monitor progress toward those goals, identify which matters are better addressed by school department administrators, and develop and refine policies that will guide school committee and administrators' time and effort.

A laser-like focus on using a variety of data to make budget and policy decisions will support the school committee in being a more effective governing body. Giving district administrators the authority to implement the school committee's refined policies and make specific decisions concerning staff and minor resource allocations will not only give the school committee more time to focus on broader issues of greater impact, but also allow such decisions to be better informed by the knowledge of district administrators responsible for the day to day decisions.

The district should reorganize, re-culture, and staff the central office to provide more support and to work more collaboratively to improve teaching and learning.

In regard to central office *staffing*, the district should assess central office positions, responsibilities, and prerequisite qualifications; school needs; and the current professional capacity of the central office to fulfill its primary responsibility to provide an effective system of support and intervention for schools. In interviews with teachers and administrators throughout the district, the structure of the central office was a common concern. Teachers and administrators alike reported that a leader with strong curriculum knowledge is needed to oversee the district's work on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The elimination of the position of assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the drastic reduction in coaching positions have left New Bedford schools without the amount of support that would help school leaders and teachers maximize their efforts to improve student achievement. The current structure with academic directors responsible for curriculum is insufficient, particularly since they have had insufficient direction, role clarity, and regular interaction with principals. A core need is the reallocation and clarification of the responsibilities of central office administrators that gives greatly needed curriculum and instruction support to schools and provides leaders and staff with a thorough analysis of data that will equip them to make specific decisions throughout the year to appropriately modify the educational program and supports for students.

In regard to central office *organization*, the review team found that a higher level of centralized district support and direction is needed for school leaders and teachers. Curriculum needs further development, and instruction is not sufficiently strong across the district to move students to significantly improved achievement. The district has an insufficient amount of assessment data, and it does not take sufficient responsibility for the collection, analysis, dissemination, and use of data. For example, this year the central office allowed principals to make their own decisions about what assessments to administer, resulting in wide variation in the use of assessments, and later withdrew its support for the GRADE. Schools have assumed a great deal of the responsibility for the analysis of data themselves without sufficiently organized support structures. Most professional development is school-based, with inadequate direction from the central administration, such as clear coordination among school-based initiatives, or a district professional development plan that is clearly informed by current district priorities and teacher data such as evaluations or surveys. There has not yet been a thorough evaluation of student support programs even with unusually high dropout rates and rates of absenteeism, suspension, and retention at the high school level.. The budget process is centrally controlled but is not based on an adequate analysis of student achievement or other data, nor does it benefit from meaningful input from the schools. Further, the business manager, not the principal, has the authority to approve or deny resource requests from teachers, with the result that such decisions on the use of resources are not being made by the educational leader of the school. To move forward, the district needs centrally coordinated leadership, systems for curriculum development and instructional improvement, comprehensive assessment and data systems, professional development, student support systems, and systems of budget development. To be fully effective, these systems will need the full participation and support of principals and teachers.

In regard to *re-culturing*, as it develops strong centrally-directed systems the district should develop a strong staff culture of collaborative decision-making for district and school improvement. There is too little collaboration and coordination of efforts in the district. School leaders are too frequently left out of decision-making and too frequently informed of decisions after they are made; principals had not been included in the district organizational chart. The nexus of school improvement is at the school level. The superintendent and principals should become partners in school and district improvement and learn from one another. Principals need to better understand the elements of teaching and learning that will improve instruction. At the same time, the central office administrators need to learn from the principals how they can become more responsive to the needs of the schools. The central office team must support principals as they move from a culture of independence to a culture of interdependence. A strong culture of professional collaboration is needed for the New Bedford Public Schools to improve the system.

The district needs to hold principals more accountable for meeting high professional standards and raising student achievement, in accordance with new regulations for educator evaluation.

The district has not reliably held principals accountable for their performance as educational leaders. Performance evaluations are inconsistent, untimely, and in many instances absent. Of the 20 principals hired before 2009, 10 did not have current evaluations in their personnel files and 10 had none. The six principals appointed for 2009-2010 did not have evaluations for their first year in the position. Contracts for recently appointed principals include language requiring the establishment of performance goals; however, there was no evidence of established goals for any principals. As a result, the district does not have sufficient information about the effectiveness of principals as educational leaders.

The district's evaluation process for principals should be aligned with regulations for educator evaluation adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Ratings of principals should be used to inform key personnel decisions, including, the review team suggests, salary determinations.

To assure that children will grow in their roles as learners, there must be assurances that those adults responsible for leading children on that learning pathway are performing at the highest possible level. A critical first step in that process is an understanding of what is expected of those adults, or their goals. As the instructional leaders of their schools, principals must also be held to the standards for effective leadership of the regulations. Then the district will be better equipped to systematically assess whether the course within each school is being well charted to improve student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district needs to further develop the curriculum in a way that better prepares and engages school leaders and teachers, is collaborative, is informed by student achievement data, and prioritizes development of the English language arts curriculum.

Specifically, the district should:

- develop and implement a process for curriculum development and renewal informed by data and highly correlated with its professional development program;
- continue to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the principals and academic directors in curriculum development and renewal, and increase their collaboration;
- assess the educational implications of the unfilled position of assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and consider re-organizing central office functions in order to minimize the impact of not having this position;
- consider allocating more time during the school year for teachers to participate in curriculum planning; and
- give revision of the ELA curriculum highest priority in the district curriculum plan.

A systematic process for curriculum development and renewal is needed. Currently the district appoints ad hoc committees to address curricular needs in order of urgency, rather than according to a cyclical plan. New Bedford's curricular, assessment, and professional development functions are not fully integrated, and often operate separately. The district should develop a procedure for structuring and phasing curriculum development and renewal. There are many models to consider, but most have common features, beginning with formation of a curriculum steering committee. For example, the New Bedford curriculum steering committee might be composed of curriculum leadership, principals representing the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and teachers representing the three levels.

A steering committee typically establishes a continuous multi-year cycle for curriculum development and renewal, such as a five-year repeating cycle consisting of an analysis year, followed by two design and development years and two implementation years. The steering committee usually appoints a subcommittee for each discipline, consisting of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers. In the analysis year, the subcommittee reviews student performance and other data to determine curricular strengths and weaknesses and reports its findings to the steering committee. In the first design year, the subcommittee revises the curriculum to correct deficiencies, circulating preliminary drafts to the steering committee and faculty for comment. In the second design year, the subcommittee finalizes the revisions for the approval of the steering committee.

In the first implementation year, teachers are introduced to the approved curriculum and receive professional development on the new instructional and assessment practices. In the second implementation year, the steering committee begins to assess the effectiveness of the curricular

changes. New Bedford should adopt this, or a similar model for curriculum development and renewal.

Under current conditions, New Bedford's curriculum and professional development functions are not formally linked. Under any model the district chooses for curriculum development and renewal, New Bedford should have a professional development committee that is linked to the curriculum steering committee to ensure that the district's curricular and instructional needs are given highest priority in its professional development program. The professional development committee should create a professional development plan. Currently, the district does not have one. Principals typically plan available teacher professional development time themselves, so professional development varies from school to school rather than being led by district priorities.

Under current conditions, New Bedford's curriculum/instruction and data analysis functions are also not formally linked. The review team encourages New Bedford to make sure that there is a data team in each school and to consider forming a district data team composed of data team members representing the three levels to analyze relevant data for the curriculum steering committee and inform curriculum renewal and instructional improvement.

Central office administrators in interviews recognized the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the principals and academic directors in curriculum development, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, in order to promote their collaboration. The review team encourages central office administrators to proceed with their plan to schedule and moderate joint meetings of the principals and curriculum leadership. Under current conditions, the academic directors report directly to the superintendent, who has assumed many responsibilities with the loss of a number of central office positions. The review team encourages New Bedford to assess the educational implications of the unfilled assistant superintendency for curriculum and instruction, and to re-organize central office functions to minimize the impact if the position cannot be restored because of finances.

Teachers earn stipends for summer curriculum development work, but there is little time for the principals and academic directors to meet with them during the school year to continue their work. New Bedford should consider allocating more time for curriculum planning and management. For example, time before and after school might be allotted to augment the district's summer curriculum development work days and professional days. Teachers might earn a stipend or accumulate professional development points for vertical movement on the salary scale.

New Bedford has developed curricula in mathematics and science at all grade levels that contain the essential components in at least minimal detail, but the ELA curriculum is incomplete in kindergarten through grade 8, and there is insufficient emphasis on advanced reading comprehension and higher order thinking skills at all grade levels. According to the review team's classroom observations, there was little evidence of ELA instruction emphasizing advanced reading comprehension skills, such as evaluative and analytical comprehension, especially at the high school level. The district should give revision and completion of the ELA curriculum high priority in its curriculum plan.

With a continuous process for curriculum development and renewal and sufficient time and personnel to implement it, New Bedford will ensure that its curricular content is current, research-based, and aligned with state standards. Integration of the district’s curricular, assessment, and professional development functions will result in more systematic identification of student, curricular, and instructional strengths and needs, as well as relevant topics for professional development. Professional development on these topics will in turn result in improved instruction and improved student engagement, which will lead to increased attendance. Integration will also help to increase the effectiveness of the resources the district has available for improving educational results.

Principals should actively monitor instruction more regularly to provide teachers with sufficient feedback for professional growth. Any written or perceived contractual barriers to the conducting of informal observations should be removed, and the district should establish clear expectations for teacher supervision.

Principals are the instructional leaders of their schools, according to New Bedford administrators, principals, and teachers. But principals told the review team that they are unable to provide effective supervision because, they believe, the collective bargaining agreement does not allow them to make notes during informal classroom observations, even to provide teachers with feedback or for informal use as a memory aid. Without notes, principals said that it is not possible for them to remember with specificity what occurred in a round of informal classroom observations. They therefore hesitate to give teachers oral feedback based on memory.

The review did not find a provision in the collective bargaining agreement that prevents principals from writing notes during informal classroom observations. The only provision on monitoring states that it must be conducted with the employee’s knowledge and that video surveillance will not be used.²⁶ Apparently principals’ hesitation to write notes during informal classroom visits is based on the idea that for notes to be written during a classroom visit it must have been preceded by a pre-conference and must be followed by a post-conference. The contract, however, only requires pre- and post-conferences for “formal observations/evaluations” that are part of the formal evaluation of staff.²⁷ For an informal observation that is not part of the formal evaluation of the teacher, pre- and post-conferences are not required, even if notes are written.

New Bedford central administrators should immediately take steps to clear up this misunderstanding among principals and teachers and establish clear expectations for supervision practices. Principals should regularly monitor their teachers’ instruction and take notes as needed in order to provide teachers with the feedback they need to assist them to grow professionally. The review team found that inconsistencies and weaknesses in teachers’ instruction hinder the district’s efforts to raise expectations for student learning and improve student achievement.

²⁶ Article 8, section A.

²⁷ See Appendix F, section entitled “Formal Observation Year.”

Establishing an informal process for improving teachers' instruction will be an essential aid in removing those inconsistencies and weaknesses.

New Bedford should make every effort to restore instructional coaching positions and implement a more effective coaching model.

New Bedford eliminated its elementary level literacy and mathematics coaches in 2010-2011 in order to maintain class size. Central office administrators and some principals told the review team that class size took priority since there was no objective evidence of the effectiveness of the coaching model. Some central office administrators, principals and teachers also told the review team that some principals used the coaches as occasional substitutes and to perform administrative and clerical tasks, taking them away from their primary responsibilities. They indicated that another problem was that the coaches varied in background and skill, and some were ineffective.

However, all of the elementary teachers interviewed by the review team (including some former coaches) stated that the coaches served as instructional leaders in their schools, helped them to improve their instruction through modeling and co-teaching, and kept them informed about best practices. The middle school level teachers interviewed by the review team were also highly positive about the value of the middle school coaches, although the number of coaches at each middle school was reduced for financial reasons, and each remaining coach is now responsible for all of the disciplines, rather than only literacy or mathematics.

Surveys of principals, teachers, coaches and former coaches could help New Bedford Public Schools to understand the weaknesses in the former coaching model and develop a model that better responds to school and teacher needs. It is noteworthy that many districts have literacy and mathematics coaches and consider them critical to improving instruction and student achievement. It is clear from an analysis of ESE data and from the review team's classroom observations that the academic performance of many New Bedford students is low and that the quality of instruction is highly variable throughout the district and weak in many classrooms. The district should research and carefully consider the potential benefits of improving upon, rather than limiting, its coaching model.

Assessment

New Bedford Public Schools need to develop a systemwide approach to assessments that equips district and school staff to adjust academic programs and instructional practices to respond to the needs of their students.

The review team found that the district had not completed the activities in its Strategic Plan for 2008-2011 related to developing common formative assessments and reviewing the use of external assessments such as DIBELS and GRADE. Leaders and teachers in the district have a limited amount of assessment data to work with. Furthermore, the district does not collect and analyze data across grades and subjects to the extent needed, leaving principals too often without the support they need in making educational decisions using the data. However, effective

practices in using math data in grades 3-9 could serve as a starting point for the district's discussion about how to develop a systemwide approach to assessments.

The district needs to develop ways to expand its system of assessments and to optimize data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Without sufficient central office support for determining assessments districtwide and collecting and communicating all pertinent data regarding performance and growth, school and district leaders do not share a systematic approach to making informed decisions. Such an approach could assist them in using data to better support each others' improvement efforts.

The review team recommends that the New Bedford Public Schools develop a refined system for collection, analysis, and dissemination of both formative and summative assessment data and for making data-based decisions with respect to students in all grades and in all core subject areas. Such a system might be coordinated by a district data team whose responsibilities would include:

- Standardizing the frequency, format, and practices for collecting, analyzing, and reporting benchmark and summative student performance data and holding staff accountable to clear expectations for the use of this data to make districtwide and school-based decisions about needed changes to curriculum, instruction, staffing, and academic support.
- Standardizing and implementing common district formative assessments.
- Collecting and analyzing data from these common formative assessments and disseminating it to schools.
- Developing regular and standard practices for the superintendent, other district administrators, and principals to review district and school performance and comparative achievement data together and make districtwide as well as school-specific decisions to improve student performance.
- Developing a process to evaluate current programs and initiatives and analyze their effectiveness in improving student attendance, engagement, achievement, and graduation in the light of research-based best practices.

By improving districtwide practices related to collecting, analyzing, and disseminating formative, benchmark, and summative data, a district data team could be influential in shifting the paradigm from a district of 26 individual schools operating somewhat independently to a more coordinated, focused district with a shared vision and common goals across all schools. Improved student performance would be the anticipated outcome.

The district urgently needs a system to focus both the central office and the schools on student data, to better position district and school leaders to make more informed decisions concerning school improvement and the effectiveness of programs and initiatives.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The New Bedford School Committee and the New Bedford Educators Association must take steps to ensure that principals have the authority to place the best qualified teachers in open positions; the ability to establish a community of teachers with a shared commitment to instructional improvement without unnecessary turnover as the result of the practice of “ownership”; and the ability to hold staff accountable for improvements in practice and student achievement.

Existing teacher contract language providing for the right of district teachers to transfer into open positions on the basis of seniority appears to prevent principals from selecting teachers of their choice for open positions within their schools. Teacher performance history is not a consideration in decisions regarding teacher assignments. In addition, principals reported that weak teachers often use their right to transfer to try to avoid negative evaluations.

Although it is not a contractually provided right, through an established past practice teachers are granted “ownership” of positions they occupy. This “ownership” extends for two years after teachers have vacated a position through transfer or reassignment. Teachers have the right to reoccupy a position they own, even in the middle of a school year. Principals’ responsibility to improve student achievement is undermined in several ways by this practice. Principals’ ability to recruit effective candidates for positions “owned” by New Bedford teachers currently working in other positions is limited, as they are unable to assure candidates for such a position of a long-term assignment. Also, principals are often unable to maintain momentum in instructional improvement within their schools or to establish a community of teachers with long-term commitments to the school because teachers move back to reoccupy positions they “own,” and other teachers with whom principals have been working then depart. Finally, new teachers reported that the instability they experience as the result of transfer and “ownership” practices is one reason young teachers leave the district.

Teachers deemed to be less than satisfactory in performance by their principal and put on a Professional Improvement Plan are often able to use their rights under the contract to transfer to another school and thereby interrupt the improvement process. The Improvement Plan does not follow the teachers to their new assignment and, in effect, becomes null and void. Improvement Plans are school-based and are not filed in the district human resources office.

Establishing practices that assure principals of the best chance of recruiting, appointing, retaining, and promoting the growth of the highest quality teaching staff available is a critical step in creating a community of teachers dedicated to improving student achievement. And empowering principals to evaluate staff effectively and require efforts toward meaningful professional growth will contribute to the establishment of a culture within the district in which excellence is a goal for all, students and staff alike.

Teacher common planning time should be increased and directed by principals.

Common instructional planning time is limited in the district, especially for elementary and high school teachers. At the elementary level, teachers have 90 minutes of planning time on early release Friday afternoons and 30 minutes of time for common planning or grade-level meetings on two Wednesdays per month. According to the collective bargaining agreement, however, “administrative meetings” are not to be scheduled during the early release time, and teachers rather than principals determine the use of the Wednesday planning time.²⁸ Some principals have learned to work around this restriction, but many principals reported that it interferes with their ability to do their jobs. In some elementary schools, teachers meet voluntarily by grade level and across grade level teams to plan instruction, but principals told the review team that they do not control the use of this time.

At the high school, teachers attend a monthly departmental meeting, which the principal, academic directors, and teachers told the review team is inadequate as common planning time. In two of the three middle schools, teachers have at least two periods of grade level or departmental planning time weekly, but planning time is more limited in the third middle school because of scheduling difficulties.

The district should work with the New Bedford Educators Association to provide for an adequate amount of common planning time at the elementary and high school levels and at the one middle school with less common planning time than the others. Principals, as the educational leaders in their schools, should be able to direct this common planning time. The increase in common planning time can not come at the expense of the required 900 hours per year of structured learning time for elementary school students and 990 hours for secondary school students.²⁹

With adequate common planning time and with the current restrictions on the use of common planning time removed, administrators and coaches will be able to work with teachers on developing and implementing curriculum and improving instruction, and thus on raising student achievement.

²⁸ See Article 12, G.2, and Article 12, A.3.A, in the Unit A contract, available at <http://educatorcontracts.doemass.org/view.aspx?recno=193>.

²⁹ See 603 CMR 27.04 at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr27.html?section=04>. In the 2007 Coordinated Program Review report, criterion MOA 7B on structured learning time was found to be partially implemented. The finding noted that the Department was unable to determine whether elementary students were receiving the required 900 hours. See p. 64 of the report, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2007/0201.doc>.

Student Support

The district and schools should work together more effectively and with a greater sense of urgency to determine and address the root causes of high school students' poor growth, proficiency, attendance, retention, suspension, dropout, and graduation rates.

In 2010 New Bedford 10th graders showed the lowest median growth in ELA of 10th graders in any district in the state. New Bedford 10th graders showed the second lowest median growth in math of any district. The proficiency rates and Composite Performance Index (CPI) scores of district 10th graders in ELA, mathematics, and science were similarly low—among the two to four lowest of state multiple-school districts. Approximately half of students in all four high school grades were chronically absent in 2009-2010. Retention rates are high in grades 9 and 11 (24.9 percent and 20.8 percent in 2010-2011). Half of 9th graders received one or more out-of-school suspensions in 2009-2010. The dropout rate is stable but is not decreasing appreciably and is considerably higher than that of the state. And the four-year graduation rate has dropped to nearly 30 percentage points below the statewide rate. Only about half of district students graduate in four years. (At 53.5 percent in 2010, the district's four-year graduation rate is one of the lowest in the state.) These rates have been at similarly concerning levels among high school students for several years. The district and the high school do have some programs that are not clearly coordinated with each other. There are programs to support students with attendance issues, to help them succeed on MCAS, to prevent them from dropping out, to provide alternative settings, and to focus them on academic life after high school. Yet the severe problems reflected by these rates continue and in many cases have been worsening in recent years. There is little evidence that the programs are knit together into a systemic and systematic response to the challenges, or that they are being evaluated as to their adequacy or effectiveness.

Because of the extent and severity of these issues with student attendance, engagement, discipline, and retention and because of the number of years they have persisted, resolving them and establishing a culture of learning at the high school is and will be a serious challenge. Simply adopting more isolated programs will not be sufficient to turn things around. The district and the high school must begin by determining what lies at the root of the problems. This analysis will have to include an examination of whether and to what extent classroom instruction is a factor in the lack of student engagement in school. Out of this analysis, which must be conducted with urgency, should come a long-term strategy that engages an effective team of school leaders and teachers to address the seriousness of the problems and implement more effective practices at the high school.

The district should be more deliberate in implementing much stronger practices to meet the needs of its English language learners and students with disabilities.

In 2010 lower percentages of both special education and LEP/FLEP students achieved proficiency in both ELA and math at the upper grades tested by MCAS than at the lower grades, and the gap between district and state subgroups—both special education and LEP/FLEP—was significantly wider at the upper grades. On 9 out of 12 assessments in 2010, grade 7, 8, and 10 students had proficiency rates in the single digits.

The review team was told that—though 62.2 percent of special education students were in full inclusion in 2009-2010—not all regular education teachers take sufficient responsibility for the special education students in their classrooms. The district is only beginning efforts to bring sheltered English immersion training to general education teachers at the elementary level, and information on the percentages of regular education teachers who teach ELL students who have received SEI training were not available from the district. Interviews with district special education and ELL administrators and teachers did not clarify, however, why proficiency rates were so much lower for upper-grade students in these two subgroups in comparison with their peers across the state.

To improve the academic achievement of its special education and LEP/FLEP students in these upper grades, the district should examine the level of instructional and social supports provided the students in these subgroups at these grades and determine what additional changes are needed to increase their very low proficiency and graduation rates (four-year graduation rates were 22.4 percent for special education students and 38.8 percent for LEP students in 2010).

Financial and Asset Management

A five-year financial plan should be developed that incorporates capital needs and reflects consideration of ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses through greater attention to operational efficiencies.

The district has experienced budget reductions in recent years; these have resulted in cuts in staff and school services. These reductions affect the ability of the district to provide the high quality education its students need. To address the deleterious effect of financial cutbacks on education, the district should work with city officials to develop a five-year financial plan. The five-year financial plan would be based on projections of revenue and enrollment changes anticipated in the school system.

Developing the plan and making these projections would provide the opportunity to consider ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses—for instance, by means of school consolidations and school grade reconfigurations. In the course of developing the financial plan a review might be conducted of financial operations that focuses on the possible efficiencies to be gained by combining school and city operations. Consideration could be given to adopting a single district and school accounting system to improve efficiency of operation and to reduce costs. Payroll is done weekly; a change to a biweekly payroll would result in cost savings. Another possibility that could be considered is the merging of the city and school system financial services. There are 20 personnel in the school department financial offices while the city employs 8. Combining the city and school system purchasing into a single procurement department could result in efficiency of operation.

Capital equipment is not dealt with through the school committee budget; instead, a capital equipment budget is bonded through the City of New Bedford for major building renovations. The last time this occurred was in fiscal year 2001. The financial plan should take into account

the capital needs of the district's buildings, many of which are very old and present challenges, and the need for educational equipment to improve the quality of the education of New Bedford students. This would involve updating the 2001 elementary feasibility study to take into account the current conditions of the buildings and the loss of enrollment since 2001. The district should address inefficiencies considering that eleven of the system's elementary schools have fewer than 250 students (see Table 11 above), and many are seriously underenrolled. If needs are established, the district should propose that the city consider issuing a capital bond to provide the needed financial resources.

The development of the district budget should be based on a more thorough analysis of student achievement and program evaluation data and involve principals more throughout the process.

The review team found little to indicate that the district makes budget decisions on the basis of evidence that items included in the budget will further the improvement of student achievement. The budget is developed with minimal input from the principals; as a result, their perspectives on how possible cuts will affect student achievement are not a factor in budget decisions. Key decisions regarding reductions in the budget are made by the central administration.

For example, central office administrators and some principals told the review team that the district eliminated the coaches at the elementary level for the 2010-2011 school year in order to retain teaching positions and maintain class sizes. The school committee and the superintendent assumed that maintaining small class size was the key to improved student achievement. The belief expressed by central office administrators was that there was no evidence coaches had contributed substantially to the improvement of student achievement, so coaching positions could be cut. What the review team heard from teachers, however, was that although some coaches did not have the necessary training and skills for their roles and that some principals had diverted coaches from their intended roles to clerical or substitute teaching duties, the coaches were enormously valuable instructional leaders in their schools, helping them import best practices and improve instruction. As recommended earlier, the district should make every effort to restore coaching positions and to implement a more effective instructional coaching model; investigating effective models used by similar districts and possibly conducting surveys could help the district understand the weaknesses in the former model.

The coaching model serves as one example of making budget decisions without having sufficiently analyzed the effectiveness of programs. To maximize the use of available financial resources, the school district should develop a formal process for evaluating the effectiveness of all of its programs and staff positions. It should also make sure that central office staff consult principals throughout the budget process to get their perspectives on how budget decisions would affect student achievement. As the budget is developed, the central office administrators, with the principals' input, should base budget decisions partly on the information gained concerning whether specific staff positions or programs have a positive impact on student achievement.

In addition to having input into decisions on budget development, principals should have authority over the use of resources in the budgets of the schools they oversee.

During the review team's site visit it found that school budgets had been frozen or partially frozen, so that principals had to request anything they needed from the business manager. According to Article 6, F, of the teachers' contract, too, teachers' requests for supplemental supplies are to be forwarded from the principal to the business manager for approval or denial, thus preventing the educational leader of the school from making this decision on the use of the school's resources.

Principals should be given the authority to make day-to-day decisions about the use of their budgets, which they are in the best position to make as the educational leaders of their schools. Only with authority over the use of their budgets will principals be able to obtain the resources for their schools needed to advance the schools' goals.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the New Bedford Public Schools was conducted from November 15-18, 2010, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Review Team:

Dr. Nadine Binkley, Leadership and Governance

Dr. James McAuliffe, Curriculum and Instruction

Willette Johnson, Assessment

Dr. Richard Smith, Human Resources and Professional Development

Patricia Williams, Student Support, Review Team Coordinator

Stratos Dukakis, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following New Bedford financial personnel: City Auditor, Mayor’s Executive Aide.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the New Bedford School Committee: Chair and four members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the New Bedford Educators Association, Inc.: President, representative.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the New Bedford Public Schools central office administration: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Directors of ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, Mathematics Supervisor, Director of SEI and World Languages, Acting Director of Special Education, Director of Pupil Personnel, Human Resources Manager, Equity Officer, Chief Administrator for Finance and Operations (Business Manager), Director of Federal and State Funded Programs, Director of School Support, Director of Title I, Director of Professional Development.
- The review team visited the following schools in the New Bedford Public Schools as part of the review: New Bedford High School, Keith, Normandin, Roosevelt Middle Schools, Ashley, Campbell, Devalles, Hathaway, Hayden/McFadden, Parker, and Pulaski Elementary Schools.
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, and coaches.
 - The review team conducted 48 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 11 schools visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data
 - District and Commendation Schools 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
- Teacher's contract, 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
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
 - 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
 - Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff

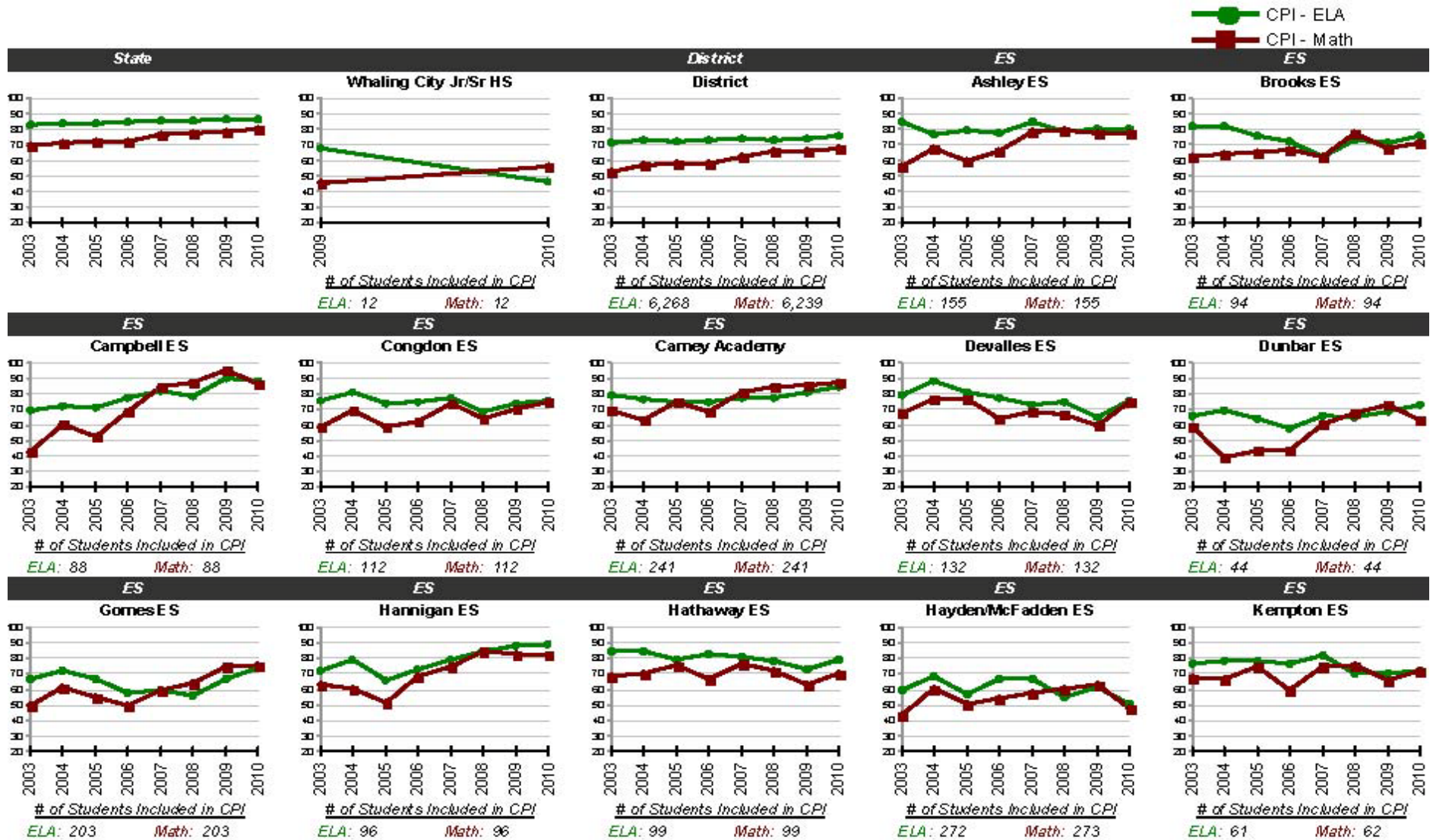
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Principal contracts
- Fiscal year 2001 elementary school feasibility study

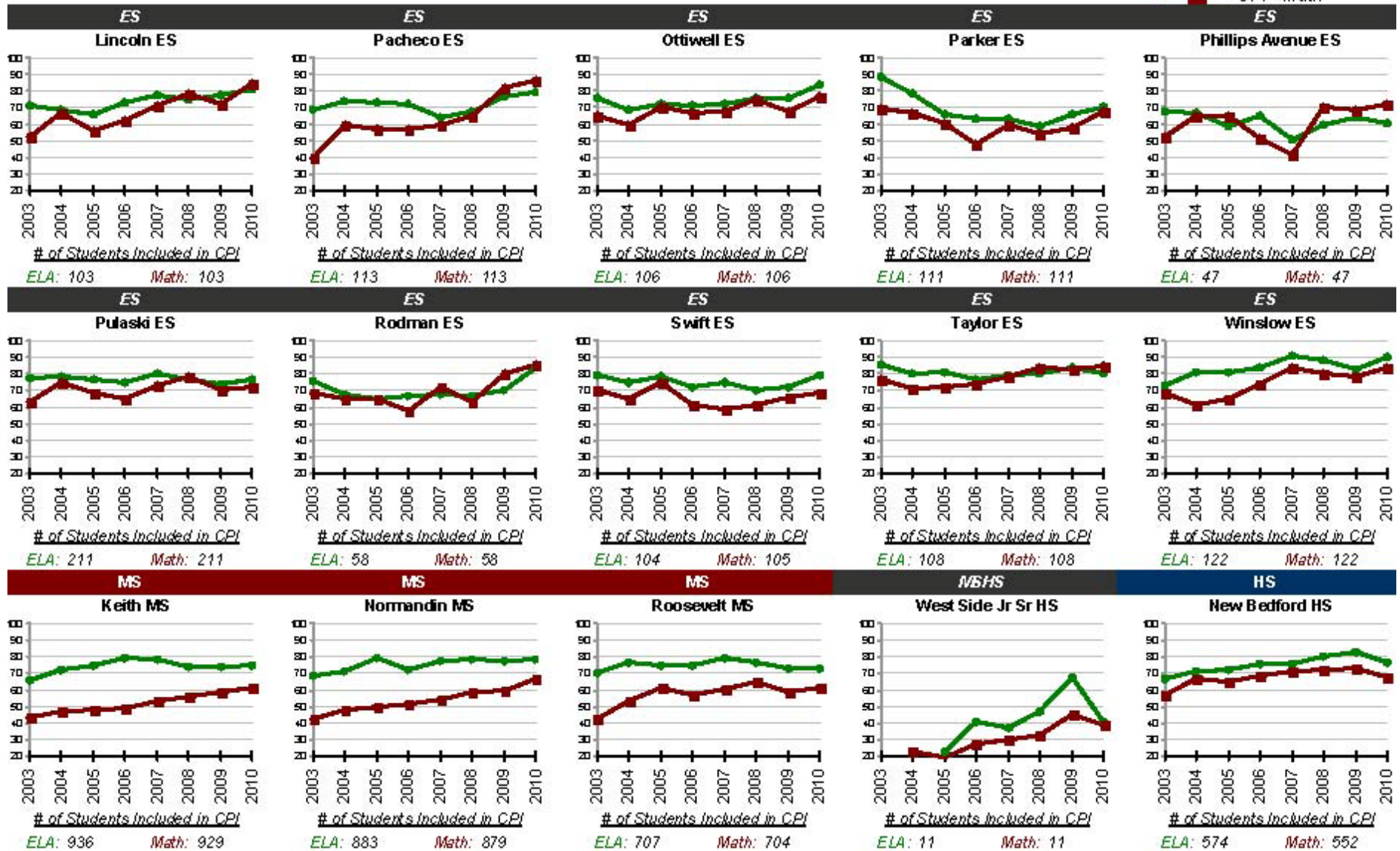
Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the review of the New Bedford Public Schools, conducted from November 15-18, 2010.

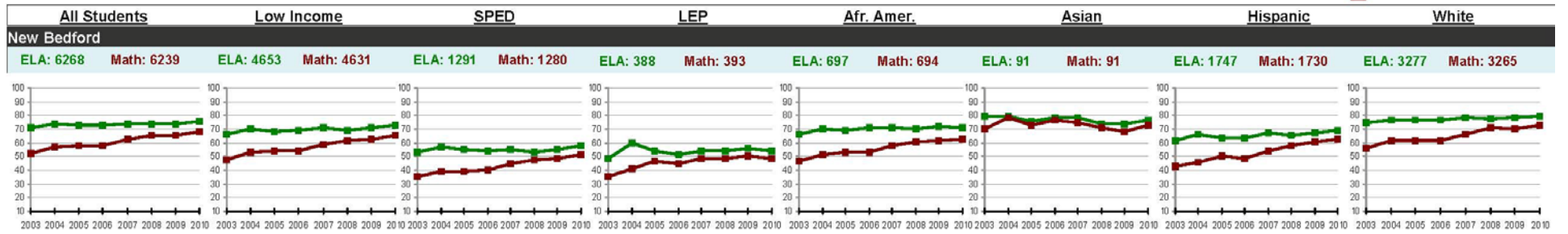
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p>November 15</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association</p>	<p>November 16</p> <p>Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits to New Bedford High School Keith and Roosevelt Middle Schools, and Pacheco and Swift Elementary Schools; classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups;</p>	<p>November 17</p> <p>Interviews with city personnel; school visits to New Bedford High School, and Congdon, Hathaway, and Swift Elementary Schools; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings, focus groups with teachers and students; parent focus group; school committee interviews; two commendation schools</p>	<p>November 18</p> <p>School visits to Parker, Devalles, Hayden/McFadden, Campbell, Ashley, and Pulaski Elementary Schools; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals</p>

Appendix C: New Bedford CPI Trends 2003-2010 for Schools and Subgroups





● District CPI - ELA
■ District CPI - Math



Finding Statements:

Leadership and Governance

- 1. The school committee assumes responsibility for issues that are better addressed through policies or by administrators, while devoting too little time to addressing important educational issues for which it is responsible.**
- 2. The central office does not have adequate leadership and capacity to support an improving educational system.**
- 3. Without a shared understanding of the district's direction or adequate support for their roles as educational leaders, principals have to work too independently to improve student learning in their schools.**
- 4. Principals are not held sufficiently accountable for their work; they are not being annually evaluated as required by Massachusetts law.**

Curriculum and Instruction

- 5. New Bedford teachers are not provided sufficient leadership, supervision, common planning time, and instructional coaching support to maximize their potential as professional educators.**
- 6. New Bedford has developed curriculum maps in mathematics and science at all grade levels that are based on the curriculum frameworks and aligned horizontally and vertically.**
- 7. The ELA curriculum is incomplete in kindergarten through grade 8, providing teachers with inadequate information to consistently deliver a standards-based education.**
- 8. Curriculum development and revision processes are not being well managed to complete the missing curriculum components and to improve curricular alignment.**
- 9. Teachers are without a shared definition of high quality instruction and have too little guidance as they face the enormous task of providing the most appropriate instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of their students. In many classrooms observed, the review team found little evidence of multiple characteristics of effective teaching; the quality of instruction was lowest at the high school level.**

Assessment

- 10. With a limited amount of assessment data to work with, leaders and teachers must make educational decisions without adequate student performance data to inform their work.**

11. There is little evidence of a districtwide function to collect, examine, and disseminate all pertinent data for the purposes of informing instruction and having an impact on student performance. The district is more advanced in using data to assess mathematics achievement in grades 3-9 than in using data to assess performance in English language arts.

Human Resources and Professional Development

12. The contract between the New Bedford School Committee and the New Bedford Educators Association, its interpretation, and established past practices inhibit the efforts of principals to improve instructional quality.
13. Because district-level professional development priorities have not been adequately defined, professional development is too unfocused and schools' initiatives are not sufficiently coordinated.

Student Support

14. The district's high school students have low attendance and graduation rates as well as high dropout rates and rates of chronic absence, retention, and suspension. The 2010 four-year graduation rate was only 53.5 percent, one of the five lowest in the state for multiple-school districts. None of these rates has shown any appreciable improvement over time, many are worsening, and there is little evidence that the district is addressing them effectively.
15. Proficiency gaps between district special education and ELL students and their counterparts statewide are wider in the upper grades; graduation rates for both district subgroups are extremely low.

Financial and Asset Management

16. New Bedford struggles to make its \$102.6 million local budget and other sources of funding meet school and student needs.
17. Principals have little input and limited authority concerning the school budget.
18. The central office administration determines the budget priorities, but there was little evidence that budget decisions are determined by an analysis of student needs.
19. Given some school buildings' poor condition and some school buildings' underutilization, it is a challenge to provide an environment conducive to learning. The school district does not have a multiple-year capital improvement plan that addresses the dual needs for facility consolidation and renovation/construction.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

- 1. The school committee should focus more attention and allocate more meeting time to strengthen its understanding of district performance and its practice in using the data to make high-level decisions related to district goals, the budget, and policy. Policies and practices should be updated to better reflect district needs, current practice, and the Education Reform Act.**
- 2. The district should reorganize, re-culture, and staff the central office to provide more support and to work more collaboratively to improve teaching and learning.**
- 3. The district needs to hold principals more accountable for meeting high professional standards and raising student achievement, in accordance with new regulations for educator evaluation.**

Curriculum and Instruction

- 4. The district needs to further develop the curriculum in a way that better prepares and engages school leaders and teachers, is collaborative, is informed by student achievement data, and prioritizes development of the English language arts curriculum.**
- 5. Principals should actively monitor instruction more regularly to provide teachers with sufficient feedback for professional growth. Any written or perceived contractual barriers to the conducting of informal observations should be removed, and the district should establish clear expectations for teacher supervision.**
- 6. New Bedford should make every effort to restore instructional coaching positions and implement a more effective coaching model.**

Assessment

- 7. New Bedford Public Schools need to develop a systemwide approach to assessments that equips district and school staff to adjust academic programs and instructional practices to respond to the needs of their students.**

Human Resources and Professional Development

- 8. The New Bedford School Committee and the New Bedford Educators Association must take steps to ensure that principals have the authority to place the best qualified teachers in open positions; the ability to establish a community of teachers with a shared commitment to instructional improvement without unnecessary turnover as the result of the practice of “ownership”; and the ability to hold staff accountable for improvements in practice and student achievement.**

9. **Teacher common planning time should be increased and directed by principals.**

Student Support

10. **The district and schools should work together more effectively and with a greater sense of urgency to determine and address the root causes of high school students' poor growth, proficiency, attendance, retention, suspension, dropout, and graduation rates.**
11. **The district should be more deliberate in implementing much stronger practices to meet the needs of its English language learners and students with disabilities.**

Financial and Asset Management

12. **A five-year financial plan should be developed that incorporates capital needs and reflects consideration of ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses through greater attention to operational efficiencies.**
13. **The development of the district budget should be based on a more thorough analysis of student achievement and program evaluation data and involve principals more throughout the process.**
14. **In addition to having input into decisions on budget development, principals should have authority over the use of resources in the budgets of the schools they oversee.**