



Saugus Public Schools Level 3 District Review

June 2010



This document was prepared on behalf of the Center for District and School Accountability of the
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Overview of Level 3 District Reviews

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (DSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts district reviews under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws. This review is focused on “districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations.” Districts subject to review in the 2010 school year were districts in Level 3 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 eight districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

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

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

Saugus Public Schools

The site visit to the Saugus Public Schools was conducted from February 8-11, 2010. The site visit included visits to all of the district's schools: Lynnhurst Elementary School, grades K-5; Oaklandvale Elementary School, grades K-5; Veterans Memorial Elementary School, grades K-5; Waybright Elementary School, grades K-5, then housed at Saugus High School because of pest infestation at the school site; Belmonte Middle School, grades 6-8; Saugus High School, grades 9-12. 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 Profile²

The Saugus Public Schools consist of four elementary schools serving students in grades K through 5; one middle school, grades 6 through 8; and one high school, grades 9 through 12, where a preschool is also located. Student enrollment as of October 2009 was 2866 pupils; the year before, over 750 Saugus residents attended private and parochial schools. Since summer 2008, a new superintendent has fostered a new districtwide culture of transparency, professionalism, and transformation. Staff at all levels have committed to a multi-year systemic improvement initiative to provide a stronger education for the town's young people. In 2009, teachers and leaders concluded a multi-year effort to complete and implement curriculum maps and pacing guides for all academic subjects for grades K through 12, following a common format and aligned to state curriculum frameworks.

Under a new organizational structure, professional leadership, quality management, and new procedures in business and operations, human resources, and pupil personnel services have been instituted. Notably absent is strong districtwide leadership in curriculum and instruction. Currently, all six principals as well as curriculum specialists in core academic subjects for grades 6 through 12 share leadership for those key teaching and learning functions. There is a new principal in the middle school, a school that has been specifically identified for improvement. One of the four elementary principals has announced that this is her last year in the system after many years as a teacher and leader in the district. All new teachers hired in the district must now meet Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) criteria as described in the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

The local appropriation to the Saugus Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2010 is \$24,050,250, up slightly from the appropriation for fiscal year 2009 of \$23,500,250. In addition to the appropriation to the district budget, school-related expenditures by the town are estimated at \$10,875,730 for fiscal year 2010, down slightly from the estimate for fiscal year 2009 of \$11,331,719. In fiscal year 2009, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures,

² Student demographic data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

including expenditures by the district (\$23,060,238), expenditures by the town (\$10,602,380), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$3,509,215), was \$37,171,833.

As the economy has declined, the school system’s demographics are shifting slightly, with increasing numbers of homeless students, whose families have been housed by the state in motels along a highway that traverses the town and whose first language is often not English. These students and other English language learners living principally in a nearby housing complex attend one elementary school. The student population is 84 percent white: the district serves only small proportions of students from other racial/ethnic groups. (Please see Table 1 below.) Nearly 15 percent of students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs); in the last two school years, the district has adopted a full-inclusion model in all schools, grades K through 8, with the high school to move to full inclusion in the 2011 school year.

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

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African-American	2.9	First Language not English	9.3
Asian	3.6	Limited English Proficient	2.4
Hispanic or Latino	8.0	Low-income	19.9
Native American	0.3	Special Education	14.9
White	84.1	Free Lunch	15.9
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.2	Reduced-price lunch	4.0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	0.9		

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

The weakened economy has also put pressure on the town’s already strained capacity to meet the financial needs of all town departments, including the schools. In two of the last seven years state aid has been cut (in fiscal year 2004 alone, by 20 percent) and in three of them the town’s appropriation to the school budget has been reduced. Relations between the town manager and the new superintendent are cordial but uneasy, mainly due to scarce resources and the town manager’s practice of setting bottom line figures for the school budget without discussion or negotiation with the school department.

Student Performance³

In both English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, the proportion of Saugus students rated as Proficient on MCAS has been smaller than the state proportion for the last two school years. In the 2009 school year, only 60 percent of Saugus students demonstrated proficiency (by scoring at the Advanced and Proficient levels) in ELA, versus a 67 percent proficiency rate for all Massachusetts students. In mathematics, 47 percent of Saugus students demonstrated proficiency versus 55 percent of all Massachusetts students. Although Saugus's grade 10 MCAS results, on the whole, have demonstrated a consistent increase in proficiency since 2006, MCAS results for middle school and elementary school students have either trended flat or declined in recent years.

The district as a whole has made Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB in the aggregate and for all subgroups in both ELA and mathematics for the last four years. However, in ELA in 2009, two of the six schools did not make AYP in the aggregate or for all subgroups. In mathematics, three did not make AYP in the aggregate and four did not do so for all subgroups. One elementary school and the middle school have been identified for improvement in ELA. In mathematics, one elementary school is in corrective action and the middle school is in year two of restructuring. Please see Table 2 below.

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

Table 2: 2009 District and School AYP Status

District/School	ELA					Math				
	Status 09	CPI 09	CPI Chg 08-09	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 09	CPI 09	CPI Chg 08-09	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
Saugus	None	83.9	1.4	Yes	Yes	None	74.1	-0.2	Yes	Yes
Lynnhurst Elementary	None	87.0	4.0	Yes	Yes	None	80.0	3.7	Yes	Yes
Oaklandvale Elementary	II1	79.4	3.3	Yes	Yes	None	74.2	2.8	Yes	Yes
Veterans Memorial Elementary	None	87.3	3.7	Yes	Yes	CA-Sub	79.0	-0.6	No	No
Waybright Elementary	None	79.9	-6.8	No	No	None	75.2	-4.0	No	No
Belmonte Middle School	II2-Sub	82.4	0.3	No	No	RST2	68.1	-1.2	No	No
Saugus High School	None	90.3	1.1	Yes	Yes	None	86.9	-0.3	Yes	No

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website.

It is notable that at Saugus High School the attendance, dropout, and graduation rates have all improved in each of the last two years. Both the grade 9-12 dropout rate and the four-year graduation rate have improved past the state rate; the state attendance rate for grades 9-12 combined is not available to compare to the Saugus High School attendance rate. Please see Table 3 below.

Table 3: Saugus High School Attendance, Dropout, and Graduation Rates 2007-2009

	2007		2008		2009	
	Saugus High	State	Saugus High	State	Saugus High	State
Attendance rate	92.5	--*	92.8	--*	93.2	--*
Dropout rate (Grade 9-12)	4.7	3.8	3.0	3.4	2.5	2.9
Graduation rate (4-year)	74.4	80.9	79.8	81.2	81.7	81.5

*Note: State attendance rates for grades 9-12 combined are not available. The overall state attendance rate in each of these years was 94.6 percent.

Source: School/District Profiles and District Analysis and Review Tool on ESE website; Education Data Warehouse.

Findings

Leadership and Governance

The superintendent's Entry Plan is a comprehensive assessment of needs and recommendations for the district and has become the clear, focused, and transparent driving force for district and school improvement.

Shortly after being employed by the district during the summer of 2008, the superintendent began a thorough examination of the district and completed an Entry Plan in November 2008. A review of this document and interviews with the superintendent and school committee disclosed that it was created after the superintendent conducted a series of individual and group interviews with staff, students, parents, business people, and community representatives. In addition, the superintendent reviewed plans, documents, and audits to gather information that formed the basis for improving the district and moving it forward. Findings in the Entry Plan were categorized by leadership, curriculum and instruction, policy and governance, maintenance and operations, human resources, budget and finance, and pupil personnel services. The Entry Plan determined an extensive list of district strengths and needs followed by clear, wide-ranging recommended actions to improve the school system.

Interviews with the school committee and the superintendent revealed the consistent view that the Entry Plan forms the document that drives district and school improvement. Members of the school committee reported a close familiarity with the "white board" in the superintendent's office that translates his Entry Plan into actionable goals. Central office administrators and principals also described a close working knowledge of the white board's updated version of the initiatives and activities to address district needs identified in the Entry Plan. The content of the white board during the site visit and a document copy of last year's version showed a focus on more than 60 specific activities that have been carried out or are in process for the purpose of district and school improvement.

A review of all School Improvement Plans (SIPs) showed them to have a consistent format, as outlined in a 2008 district document. All SIPs but one have been completed and approved. Included in the SIPs are an analysis of student performance and achievement based on MCAS results and the establishment of objectives to improve student success. Each school's action plan to accomplish objectives includes action steps, responsible person(s) to carry out the action, timelines, means for knowing if action is taken and means for measuring progress. These plans are reviewed periodically. The school improvement plans reflect district priorities because of the principals' intimate knowledge of those priorities through bi-monthly leadership meetings. The superintendent's budget process binder contains five school improvement plans (one has not yet been approved) as well as the districtwide needs identified on the white board.

The district's Strategic Plan 2004-2009 was extended to June 30, 2011 by the school committee on January 14, 2010. According to school committee members interviewed, a review and evaluation process was not begun soon enough to have a new strategic plan completed for implementation beginning in 2009. The district's strategic plan, although extended to 2011

without revisions, links clear district and school priorities with a planning process that ensures that identified improvement needs become priorities of the school department budget. This provides a transparent and effective planning protocol for district and school improvement. The superintendent's Entry Plan, originally intended to serve as a foundation for a new strategic plan, has been the impetus for significant improvement of the Saugus Public Schools.

An internal district culture of transparency, professional respect, and trust is being developed while the external culture with town officials remains strained despite meaningful changes in relations with the community.

Based on a performance evaluation that showed the superintendent's performance as exceeding expectations, the school committee and the superintendent exhibit a collaborative rapport and the committee has a high level of confidence in the superintendent. A review of the superintendent's evaluation for the 2009 school year revealed a combined rating from the entire school committee of 4.5 out of 5, with 4 signifying "exceeds expectations," and 5 signifying "commendable." The seven categories of the evaluation form are generally aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership in 603 CMR 35.00, to which two or three goals have been added by mutual agreement. The 18 goals with recommended actions are virtually all derived from the superintendent's Entry Plan. The superintendent attained a rating of 5.0 for the category of Budget Management, which had among its goals providing a transparent budget supported by school improvement plans.

For its part, the school committee does not interfere in the daily operations of the schools, as confirmed by review of the subcommittee structure and interviews with committee members and school leaders. In interviews, committee members exhibited knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993.

A transparent and effective planning practice linking clear district and school priorities has encouraged open participation and trust within the school system. Central office administrators and principals expressed awareness in interviews of this effective planning process. They also acknowledged the urgency to implement the many planned initiatives and actions as well as indicating their appreciation for the superintendent's knowledge, commitment, and sense of urgency. The leadership team described the superintendent as motivated and demanding while being professionally respectful of feedback and recognizing realistic time lines. Leaders saw the superintendent's school visits as supportive and not micromanagement. In their interviews, teachers and parents expressed an awareness of the significant improvements in facilities, curriculum, and services that have taken place since the arrival of the new superintendent. Trust in the new administration is growing as the quality of the school system improves.

Public articulation of the district's needs and priorities is required while working to gain community support and confidence. In addition to the commendable performance rating for the superintendent in the category of Budget Management, a review of the superintendent's district budget binder and Power Point budget presentation showed the existence of a transparent budget process depicting to the community the needs and priorities of the school district. School committee members confirmed the efforts of the superintendent to reach out to town officials

through clear and informative budget presentations to the annual town meeting and the finance committee as well as to the board of selectmen, town meeting members, and the town manager. In addition, parent groups, businesses, and the community at large are hearing a clear and consistent message about the changes that are taking place and the resources needed to continue in this direction. It is recognized that the school buildings need repairs and that three schools need to be replaced. The superintendent is given credit for a good job in presenting the needs and direction of the school district.

Friction between the school department and the town regarding educational funding has intensified since the superintendent and the town manager each strongly advocate for their respective areas of responsibility. Parents interviewed expressed an awareness of “phenomenal” changes during the last two years despite the limitations on funding, as well as expressing confidence in the willingness of the community to provide funding for public education. Parents viewed the town manager, selectmen, and finance committee members as resistant to providing adequate financial support to the school department. The town manager, in an interview, described his role as being to provide a bottom line recommendation to the selectmen for all town departments. According to the manager, he chooses not to participate in the school department budget discussion because he has no authority over line items and has no time to do so. Coping with shortfalls in town receipts has required the town manager to establish a practice of covering contractual increases, fixed costs, and assessments for the regional vocational school, while level-funding the balance of the school department budget. At this time, because of the financial condition of the town, the availability of funds is the primary factor in the town manager’s determination of the recommended amount for the school department. He expressed the view that the school department is doing a good job with the funding that is provided. According to the town manager, a better understanding of the low tax structure and a mutual respect for each party’s responsibilities would result in improved relations.

A high degree of confidence in the integrity of the superintendent and his competency to establish a clear and transparent direction for district and school improvement has resulted in an internal culture of collaboration. The internal culture of collaboration has engendered the good will of district personnel and their motivation to implement many changes that have the potential to improve the quality of education provided by the Saugus Public Schools. The community’s improved view of the school department has also resulted from the integrity and competency of the superintendent. The lack of mutual understanding and the mistrust between the superintendent and town manager, however, remain obstacles to establishing a more collaborative working relationship between the schools and the town and put at risk community support for the schools.

District structure and systems for school support are highly dependent upon the high energy level of the superintendent, especially in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, for which there is no central office director.

Central office personnel are assigned to essential systemwide administrative functions that include finance, human resources, pupil personnel services and technology support; however,

there is no districtwide leadership for the key teaching and learning components—curriculum, instruction, and assessment—noted as “Accountability and Instruction” on the organizational chart. The school committee has not approved this position, and the superintendent oversees this area while delegating some oversight to the principals. With this position unfilled, four part-time curriculum specialists for grades 6-12 and one elementary curriculum specialist, who teaches full-time, have direct reporting lines to the superintendent.

Reporting lines are clear in accordance with the organizational chart dated January 2010, except that the job description for the human resources manager indicates a reporting line to the superintendent, whereas the organizational chart indicates a reporting line to the finance director. District administrators expressed appreciation for access to the superintendent and valued the direct reporting lines despite the many hats worn by him. Six principals report directly to the superintendent and also value his accessibility. Under the current administrative structure, 16 individuals have direct reporting lines to the superintendent. This is twice the generally accepted number of reporting lines for an efficient and effective administrative operation. A review of the superintendent’s meeting calendar as of February 10, 2010, indicated an average of 17 meetings per month with 13 different groups.

The superintendent established and implemented an evaluation process for principals last year, described in a written evaluation procedure. Principals are held accountable through a documented evaluation process that includes student achievement goals. The procedure consists of a pre-evaluation conference to establish goals, a mid-year review to discuss concerns, and a conference to discuss the summative evaluation. A review of the evaluations revealed an instructive and informative process aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership in 603 CMR 35.00.

Besides planning district and school initiatives and informing town officials and community members about budget needs, the superintendent is actively involved in other arenas: professional development, technology implementation, facilities review, and grant writing. The widespread participation and level of contribution of the superintendent to the district organization drives the district and school improvement process.

In the judgment of the review team, the lack of full-time leadership and oversight for the functions of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is short-sighted in light of the stated needs and improvement priorities across the district. Generally, continued district and school improvement must be supported by an organization with a sustainable structure and the capacity to undertake all the administrative and leadership functions in an effective and efficient manner.

Curriculum and Instruction

In 2009, in a significant step forward, the district completed curriculum maps and pacing guides for ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science in grades K through 12 and for world languages in grades 9-12. It is now implementing these maps and guides.

Interviews with teachers and school leaders, a review of curriculum documents, and classroom observations indicated that the district is implementing curriculum maps in the core content areas in grades K through 12 and in world languages at the high school. One elementary teacher stated that they had started “from nothing” and credits the new superintendent for setting curricular expectations that became fully effective in September, 2009. At grades 6-12, curriculum leadership is provided by four subject specialists who teach in the high school and who carry a slightly reduced teaching load. At grades K through 5, a classroom teacher with a full teaching load is designated as the curriculum specialist. The superintendent, principals, and teachers, as well as the elementary curriculum specialist, stated that full-time teaching responsibilities do not allow her to provide the needed support, monitoring, and supervision of the elementary curricular areas. This responsibility currently is assigned, for each elementary school, to the principal.

Review of curriculum documents for grades K through 12 indicated that they are matched to the state curriculum frameworks and performance standards and contain sections for learning objectives, essential questions, suggested teacher and media resources, and evaluation/assessment activities, as well as space to record completion dates and teacher comments. Teachers and leaders for grades 6-12 reported that teachers routinely submit completed curriculum logs to subject specialists. Teachers for grades K through 5 keep curriculum notebooks to share pacing and to guide eventual revisions to the curriculum maps. Horizontal alignment occurs within grades and vertical alignment occurs across grades within the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Classroom observations revealed adherence to the maps, with minor variations. Principals and teachers acknowledged that alignment between the transition grades 5 and 6 is weak; curriculum is aligned between grades 8 and 9 because these grades are overseen by the grade 6-12 curriculum specialists.

Teachers reported, and the review team observed, that they follow the pacing guides. Elementary and secondary teachers also reported that changes will be forthcoming when maps are reviewed next summer, which also marks the end of the first year of implementation in grades K through 5. Essential questions, a key part of each map, are visible on boards in most classrooms; learning objectives are prominent in high school classes, though less so at the middle and elementary schools. Teachers also use the maps as a way to work together to monitor student learning, pacing, and content coverage, though this is particularly challenging at the middle school where the principal and teachers stated that there are few opportunities for teachers to collaborate. Teachers and curriculum specialists have taken steps to analyze student performance data to inform curricular modifications at each grade level.

Curriculum documents do provide a list of assessment activities for each lesson; however, for each subject's units of study, the curriculum maps stipulate generic assessments, e.g., quizzes, tests, spelling assessment, weekly assessment, with no detail or specificity.

Principals and teachers stated that on-the-spot formative assessments to inform instruction are weak and that this will be an area of focus in the future. Classroom observations by the review team validated their statements. Furthermore, the team found little connection between teacher questions asked in class and the posted learning objectives and essential questions.

The curriculum maps do not contain strategies or resources to meet the needs of diverse learners. Technology and media resources are listed in the documents and vary among subject areas, with frequent mention of textbook-related software.

Interviews with school leaders indicated that there is currently no established, documented process, other than the mapping process, for a systematic and regular review and revision of curricula. The recent selection of the new mathematics series at the elementary schools, for example, is the result of one principal's research and contact with another district in Texas where the series is in use. Though the high school subject specialist was consulted regarding alignment with the middle school, there was no other teacher involvement. Teachers at the elementary and middle school levels reported that they do not participate in formal curriculum reviews or textbook selection.

Teachers and students have benefited from the district's ambitious curriculum-mapping initiative. Students are now provided with content aligned to the state's frameworks and teachers have specific guidelines as to what to teach in their content areas. Completion of curriculum maps is adding to teachers' ability to consistently deliver and improve the curriculum. Principals and teachers expressed the view that the mapping project has also "empowered teachers" and enabled them to take on leadership roles, to feel valued, and to take ownership of the curriculum improvement process.

In the opinion of the review team, the Saugus Public Schools have taken a significant step toward providing a consistently delivered and continuously improving curriculum.

Instructional practices observed in Saugus consisted of a narrow range of strategies, with an insufficient number of explicit links to learning objectives or essential questions, and few formative assessments.

The review team observed 20-minute segments of 32 lessons at the elementary level, 15 lessons at the middle school, and 17 lessons at the high school, a total of 64 classroom observations. The team observed a wide variation in the quality of teaching; there was no clear district vision of what effective teaching practice should be. A clear example of this variation in effectiveness occurred when the team observed two different classes on Shakespeare. During the first class, the team saw students sitting in rows, the teacher lecturing about the monarchy, dictating words for students to copy and then to spell, and asking for one-word answers to factual questions. In the second class, the teacher shifted between the text and student discussions, asking the students to

compare and contrast major characters, discuss the problem of “evil urges,” and decide whether we also “are all in a constant battle.”

In the area of instructional methodology, the team observed a narrow range of teaching strategies in 20 of 32 elementary classrooms, 8 of 15 in the middle school, and 12 of 17 at the high school (40 of 64 classes). The predominant approach that teachers used at all levels was direct instruction, with the teacher talking while students listened. In many classrooms, teachers read to students, or had one student read while others listen, for extended periods of time. In one 4th grade classroom, the teacher read for 15 minutes without asking students (who did not have their own books) any questions to check on comprehension or knowledge of vocabulary. When one student began nodding off, the teacher said, “I hope I’m not keeping you from sleeping...” At the upper grades, the team observed variations of this style, with minimal questioning of students or use of strategies to engage them or spur them to think critically. There were some exceptions to this: a grade 2 teacher held a mathematics competition between two halves of her class; a middle school mathematics teacher grouped students and provided activities using dice to learn about probability; a grade 10 algebra teacher used his Smartboard to introduce new concepts and asked students to respond electronically to his questions. Most frequently, however, the team observed active teachers and passive learners.

At all levels, the team found evidence that teachers link academic concepts to students’ prior knowledge and experience (54 of 64 classrooms); yet links to the new posted learning objectives were less frequent (37 of 64 classrooms). While the curriculum documents explicitly list the objectives and essential questions and teachers write these on their boards, only a little more than half the time were teachers making the connection to them with students.

The team found that classroom management strategies were effective, with teachers and students displaying respectful behaviors, tone, and discourse in nearly all classrooms. Presentation of concepts was within the students’ English proficiency and developmental level, with appropriate curricular materials used. Pacing was appropriate although, as stated earlier, much student time was spent listening rather than doing. The extent to which technology was used varied; instruction using Smartboards occurred at every level, but students’ use of computers or Smartboards in the classroom was rarely observed.

The narrow range of teaching strategies, coupled with the infrequent use of formative assessments, results in few opportunities for teachers to monitor student understanding and revise their teaching. (On-the-spot formative assessments to inform instruction were solidly in place in only 8 of 32 elementary classrooms, 6 of 15 middle school classrooms, and 6 of 17 high school classrooms.) Teachers in interviews noted the introduction of TurningPoint “clickers” for students to use to indicate responses as a method of formative assessment. The choice of teacher-directed instruction as the main strategy makes an impact on the level of students’ engagement, preventing them from assuming increasing responsibility for their own learning, and prevents the use of differentiation to meet diverse learning needs.

It is the team’s judgment that while district and school personnel now have a common understanding of the features of high-quality curriculum, they have not yet developed an

effective understanding of high-quality instructional practice. The variation in quality of instructional practice indicates a system which is not yet unified in its vision of excellence in teaching. It points to a need for systemwide leadership for and focus on improving instructional practice so that it engages students, builds their capacity for independent learning, and sets expectations for rigorous thinking and problem-solving.

In the classroom, students do not sufficiently engage in challenging learning activities that require application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, nor are they required to take an active role in their learning.

The review team observed that teachers ask students questions that mainly require factual or easily apparent answers. Higher level questioning that requires students to use higher order thinking skills was absent or only partially evident in 19 of 32 elementary classes, 10 of 15 middle school classes, and 10 of 17 high school classes. As a result, in 50 of 64 classes observed the team observed few instances of students’ articulating their thinking and reasoning. For example, in a middle school ELA class with 23 students, all listened as one student after another read an essay aloud. The teacher asked the class if they heard “transition words.” The students were attentive and answered “Yes,” but did not otherwise participate. During this class during the time it was observed no opportunity was taken to evaluate the essays, for instance by using a rubric, or put students in small groups of three or four to increase participation, or provide constructive feedback for students to use in future writing.

In some classes there was evidence of stronger questioning techniques: a 5th grade teacher asked a student, “Why did you think that?” A middle school mathematics teacher was observed asking the class increasingly challenging questions to help students better understand the differences between supplementary and complementary angles. A high school teacher asked, “What might we conclude from the fact that she has set an early curfew?” (referring to *The Catcher in the Rye*). In these classes, teachers challenged students’ thinking and held them responsible for active listening throughout the class period. These teachers expected—and received—richer answers and more active participation in the classes.

The team also noted that although the content of some classes provides opportunities to challenge students, teachers do not seem to know how to take advantage of them. In a grade 11 and 12 science class examining discoveries over time and using interesting slides, the teacher posed factual questions but then analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated the information for the students rather than seeking analysis, synthesis, and evaluation from them. In a 2nd grade mathematics class on fractions the teacher noted the words “numerator” and “denominator” while also telling students, “We don’t use those words in 2nd grade; those are 5th grade words.” The teacher read the students’ worksheet questions aloud and worked them out on the whiteboard rather than challenging students to read them or asking students to come to the board.

As was also found in the 2007 Technical Report⁴ by the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), teachers and school leaders interviewed in the present review did not

⁴ School District Examination Report: Saugus Public Schools Technical Report, 2005-2007, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/reports/technical/07_0262.pdf.

articulate common, clear, specific ideas about high expectations for student work, nor about what a high-achieving student should know and be able to do. When asked by the team for examples of setting higher expectations for student learning, leaders talked about improving processes, for instance by engaging students more, or raising the mark required for passing a course. The impact on learning is that students are not highly engaged, nor are they given opportunities to become independent learners. In the judgment of the team, these factors have a negative impact on the amount students are able to learn and on their ability to develop the habits of mind of critical and creative thinkers and problem-solvers.

Assessment

District leaders and most school leaders collect and disseminate data in their work more systematically and consistently than at the time of the 2007 EQA review.

The new superintendent's Entry Plan includes action goals with respect to the collection and dissemination of data, the implementation of a comprehensive data management system, and the training of staff at all levels to use data. After less than two years, under the superintendent's guidance, central office directors and almost all school leaders now routinely collect and disseminate data as an integral part of their work and decision-making.

In 2008 the superintendent introduced the X2 data management system across the district and, as one interviewee described, it "moved us from the Flintstones to the Jetsons" in a very short time. With sufficient training, anyone can instantly retrieve district data and student data such as MCAS results and test item analyses from the Education Data Warehouse maintained by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). There is also access to school, classroom, and student records displaying grades, other assessment data, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Section 504 accommodations, attendance, and homework assignments. For some leaders, using X2 with ease is still a work-in-progress, especially for those at the elementary level, where it was introduced in the fall of 2009.

The superintendent considers and exhibits data as a part of almost every decision and plan. His budget presentation for fiscal year 2011 presented historical data trends showing local appropriations to the school budget as well as trends in the state's Chapter 70 school aid for Saugus. The data that drives principals' school improvement planning is student achievement data represented by MCAS results.

A part-time consultant to the superintendent, who performs many of the duties of an assistant superintendent, analyzes MCAS results and presents MCAS data and analyses to the school committee and to district and school leaders. In addition, either the consultant or the school principals present a similar analysis at faculty meetings, followed by a discussion of achievement data; such discussions are intended to be ongoing in grade-level, subject-level, faculty, and department meetings throughout the year. This year, the consultant has also reviewed student growth distribution models and proficiency indices with principals. Leaders and teachers

revealed in interviews that the frequency and intensity of these data-based conversations vary by school, partly due to lack of common meeting time and partly due to differences in expertise.

All but one school website displays a School Improvement Plan (SIP), where parents and others can see an analysis of the school's MCAS results and learn about school improvement priorities. The school committee receives copies of all SIPs: several committee members expressed familiarity with the schools' strengths, weaknesses, objectives for improvement, and MCAS data.

School websites also display a plethora of other information: e.g., school profiles that include a "snapshot" of the school's MCAS results, links to the district's MCAS results, calendars, key documents and information, curriculum maps, links to other school websites, district information, and information about community resources. If parents have the skill, they can log on to the X2 data management system and view their child's homework assignments, grades, and other relevant data. Finally, town government leaders such as the school committee and town administrators have access to displays of school data that allow them to better understand progress in achievement and the needs of the school system.

By collecting and disseminating data and other information and making it more transparent through technology, educational leaders can better understand strengths, weaknesses, and needs in the district and better communicate them to both internal and external audiences. By making data more accessible, district and school leaders can identify topics for curricular and instructional improvement to raise with teachers and with parents. Yet interviews, documents, and school websites revealed that the degree to which school leaders collect and disseminate data both internally and externally varies across schools.

In just a few years, the district has instilled a sense of urgency on the part of leaders to collect and disseminate data. In the judgment of the review team, sharing data is more widespread in the Saugus Public Schools than at the time of the 2007 EQA review and represents a core value in the district.

District and school leaders and teachers have made progress in using data in making decisions that affect student learning; more leadership, work, and time are needed to arrive at a point where all available data is used to improve teaching and learning in all areas and at all levels.

The superintendent alluded to student achievement as the rationale for almost all of his decisions. From interviews, it appeared that the expectation is that other leaders make this the rationale for their decisions, too. Data analysis now guides decisions on budgeting and resource allocation and often influences decisions on hiring needs and topics for professional development. Data analysis helps identify improvement objectives for School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and figures into monitoring how well improvement objectives are met at each school, although interviews and documentation revealed that one school had yet to have its SIP approved by the superintendent. The use of data-based decision-making varies, however, from school to school, grade to grade, and subject to subject.

Use of data in the elementary grades:

In summer 2009, teams of elementary teachers used templates previously developed at the high school and middle school to write curriculum maps and pacing guides in all core academic subjects. The curriculum specialists for grades 6 through 12 and the elementary curriculum leader who is also a full-time teacher assisted the elementary teachers in this effort. Achievement data largely drawn from MCAS results was used to guide curriculum mapping. The maps will be refined in summer 2010, drawing on the 2010 MCAS results.

Reading specialists work with teachers in grades K through 3 to review data drawn from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments, which are given three times a year. Teachers and principals reported that these assessments produce valuable diagnostic results, including specific benchmarks reached by each student, that are used to monitor language and reading fluency and to compose flexible reading groups—although reading groups remain fixed after the winter. A speech and language consultant from a consultancy group based at Massachusetts General Hospital has supported teachers and reading specialists to plot DIBELS scores and target instruction, but this support is not consistent across all elementary schools. Interviewees were not clear as to how the analysis of reading data translates into changed instructional practice other than being used for flexible grouping.

No common external assessments, such as DIBELS, are used for literacy screening in grades 4 and 5 other than for students with disabilities. Teachers in the upper elementary grades reported using chapter tests, unit tests, and eventually MCAS to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction for student learning. According to interviewees, apart from scheduled after-school faculty meetings, much of this type of collaborative work among teachers is informal and collegial rather than structured and systematic. At the three small elementary schools, there are usually two classes at each grade level, and the teachers of those classes typically have common planning time; however, interviewees reported only a voluntary and informal use of assessment data by teachers when they meet during common planning time. Guidance in data analysis varies across these elementary schools; when asked, teachers could not agree on who the instructional leader in their school was who would work with them on the analysis of student achievement data. Some said it was the teachers themselves, others pointed to the principal, others mentioned the curriculum specialist, and others said, “No one.” At the larger elementary school, Veterans Memorial, interviewees reported that the principal leads grade-level meetings every two to four weeks to discuss curriculum and instruction and to review student progress. Although leadership is needed to guide data analysis and prioritize and monitor instructional improvements, principals are effectively the only leaders with responsibility for curriculum and instruction in grades K through 5. As noted before, the full-time teaching responsibilities of the elementary curriculum specialist do not allow her to provide the needed support, monitoring, and supervision of the elementary curricular areas.

Elementary teachers reported that the new mathematics textbook series, *enVisions* (Scott-Foresman Addison Wesley 2009), sets high expectations for students. Common internal assessment data from classroom-based mathematics assessments, however, are not collected and

used, either at the grade, school, or district level. The new program has an assessment system; however, teachers did not report close grade-level or cross-school tracking of student achievement on quizzes and tests to learn more about how well students are achieving or how instruction using the new text is progressing. Interviewees agreed that this was a weakness. Elementary science classes and social studies classes are typically held only twice weekly; classroom teachers mentioned no significant efforts to use assessment data or monitor student progress in these areas across classrooms, grades, or schools.

Use of data at the middle school:

At the middle school, one improvement priority calls for using data to inform instruction and help the school make AYP. Under the leadership of the new principal, middle school leaders are currently introducing a new initiative for teachers, the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with a cycle of improvement planning and implementation that relies on using data, technology, and best practices. This kind of improvement planning and implementation is a new practice in the school. Eventually, the plan is for instructional teams working in PLCs to research and use MCAS results and classroom-based assessment data to identify student learning problems; understand their origins; develop and implement solutions grounded in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; monitor results; and then, renew the cycle. Middle school teachers now have no common meeting time during the school day and use after-school meetings to address improvement priorities. A new schedule proposed for 2010-2011 will, it is hoped, provide the common planning time needed for PLCs to function effectively, although carving out common meeting time may have financial implications.

Use of data at the high school:

At the high school, attention is paid to external and internal assessment data. High school teachers are conversant with MCAS results, and some interviewees noted using MCAS data in their planning decisions on topics to emphasize and reinforce. Grade 6-12 curriculum specialists in English, mathematics, science, and social studies have used MCAS results as well as scores from classroom-based assessments with teachers to make decisions about curriculum mapping and pacing. Teachers, curriculum specialists, and the world language team leader also described how they use classroom-based assessment data, as well as results from common mid-year and final exams, to adjust curriculum, fine-tune instruction, and revise exam questions. Responses in interviews and a review of documented mid-year exam analyses indicated that this use is more structured and comprehensive in some departments than in others and occurs irregularly, based on the time available. The specialists also review SAT and AP scores, but it is unclear that these results figure into any modification of instruction or curriculum as a practice. A number of secondary teachers who teach outside of the MCAS-tested subjects claimed that MCAS results interest them less than classroom-specific assessments and said that they do not focus on developing the knowledge and skills measured by MCAS. High school teachers lack in-depth knowledge of other kinds of student data than achievement data that could signal students' need of support, such as dropout or attendance data.

Use of MCAS data across the district:

MCAS results by grade level, often disaggregated by test item, are the focus of most school-based data discussions, which usually occur soon after results are released. Principals have also reviewed the new student growth distribution models by school, by grade, and by subgroup, and these have also been shown to teachers. One of the district's largest subgroups is of special education students; although other teachers expressed familiarity with students' accommodations, it is mainly the special education staff that uses this subgroup's MCAS results in their planning and decision-making.

Across the district, although inconsistencies exist, teachers did offer a number of examples of how their increasing ability to examine MCAS data has informed their practice. There were only a few examples, however, of analyses derived from classroom-generated data or data geared to individual students' work. Based on poor MCAS results, middle school mathematics teachers have revised the structure of the open-response questions used in class so that they are more "MCAS-like." English teachers have revised the teaching of poetry at the middle and high schools due to weak MCAS results. The high school biology curriculum is under review due to the number of students who pass the course but do not demonstrate proficiency on the MCAS test. Schedules have been redesigned to add a lab period in biology and additional time in chemistry. Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) are developed and monitored for students whose achievement data, particularly from MCAS, demonstrates that they are at risk of failing MCAS. A Success Block for students in grades 6 and 7 offers more than half the middle school students extra support in English and mathematics for half the year. A special MCAS mathematics prep class for students in grades 7 and 8 reinforces classroom learning and prepares students for MCAS testing.

Use of data from observations and use of data in evaluations, in order to improve instruction:

In terms of using data derived from observations of instruction to drive improvements to teaching, teachers reported that they hardly ever receive meaningful feedback, individually or collectively, after leaders spend a few minutes in their classrooms conducting walkthroughs. Teachers typically explained that leaders are "just getting a sense of what's happening, what I'm doing." Across all schools, walkthroughs lack protocols for monitoring and improving practice in a structured way. Data gleaned from observations could be looped back to teachers, for example, on how effective or ineffective questioning techniques are or how teachers offer feedback to students about their work. According to interviews with some teachers, several principals and vice-principals ask teachers to include data on student grades with the documents they submit to prepare for their summative evaluations; however, none of the teachers could say that the evaluator ever discussed student achievement or student progress with them during an evaluation conference.

In summary:

Clearly, leaders at all levels are now using data to focus planning and decision-making about curriculum development and to improve teaching. Rarely, however, do leaders use data based on observations to guide instructional improvement, and classroom-based assessment data is not

used to the extent possible or in all subjects. In addition, the lack of expertise on the part of some school leaders, especially at the elementary level, and the lack of time, especially at the middle school level, mean that data use is inconsistent and lacks robustness.

As for teachers, they reported that they are conversant with MCAS results and understand the recent districtwide emphasis on the collection and dissemination of data and data-based decision-making. Many teachers have participated in professional development on using the X2 data management system, but many, especially at the elementary level, still have not. At the secondary level, teachers have more facility with X2, but several secondary school interviewees expressed surprise to hear their peers discuss the data and information they access and how they use data in their work. It was clear to the review team that teachers have increased their collection, analysis, and use of MCAS data. However, they inconsistently take advantage of other classroom data and other indicators to design better curriculum and instruction to promote gains and reduce gaps in student learning, and to tailor instruction to individual students' learning needs.

In the judgment of the review team, data-based decision-making by district and school leaders and teachers has reached a higher level since the 2007 EQA review, but more leadership, work, and time are needed for it to make a strong impact on teaching and learning in all areas and at all levels.

The district's assessment system lacks the breadth and balance to fully guide curriculum and instruction and sufficiently address students' remedial and enrichment requirements.

For the most part, teachers assess student achievement in each subject by administering quizzes and tests and evaluating projects, lab reports, and written assignments. At the high school and in grade 8, students take common mid-year and final exams in all academic subjects to enable teachers and students to assess learning at a fixed point in time. The DIBELS literacy assessment used in grades K through 3 represents the only external assessment in use, other than MCAS tests and the MEPA test taken by ELL students. Teachers in interviews described most student assessments as summative, whole-class, and single-instrument assessments.

The newly revised (September 2009) District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) lists a variety of assessment strategies such as "Looking at Student Work," formative assessments, and pre- and post-tests, among others. In interviews, teachers did not describe these assessment strategies as common practice. In fact, when asked about them, interviewees responded that these were assessment tools that needed more work. When asked about groups of teachers collaboratively "Looking at Student Work" to assess student learning and improve instruction, teachers responded that this is not done in any methodical way, if at all. Teachers did point to the use of new Turning Point software and "clickers" to quickly check students' understanding and responses in class, and review team members observed students using clickers. However, evidence from interviews and documents points to minimal systematic use of formative, authentic, and benchmark assessments.

When elementary teachers completed curriculum maps in the summer of 2009, the district concluded a multi-year effort to document curriculum and pacing guides for grades K through 12

using a standardized format. A section identified as “Evaluation/Activities” is incorporated in all curriculum maps to describe how students’ work and progress will be assessed. A review of curriculum maps for all grade levels and subjects revealed generic assessment descriptions that make it difficult to ascertain even the grade level or the subject when looking at the Evaluation/Activities in isolation. They typically read as follows:

Evaluation/Activities

Lecture/Demonstration: Each concept/topic will be introduced by the teacher using any resources that are available.

Class work: To be done on each topic/concept as needed for understanding.

Homework: To be given daily on each introduced topic as determined by the teacher.

Review: All weekly concepts will be reviewed and connections to concepts should be made by the students.

Quiz: Formal assessments will be given as warranted by the curriculum.

Test: Given at the end of Unit 1.

This format offers teachers and students no specific resources nor does it identify assessments to address the variety of student learning needs. There are neither resources nor extensions of class work nor assessment activities targeting remedial or enrichment needs of all or some students. There are no extensions of class work or assessments for gifted and talented students. No evaluation or assessment activities address the needs of students with learning disabilities or English language learners.

From interviews and documents, reviewers learned that teachers and teacher leaders have gained expertise in analyzing and sharing achievement data from the range of assessments they do administer. Questions teachers ask include, “How can we teach this better?” “Where is that topic best placed in the curriculum?” “How much more or less time do we need to teach this concept?” “What exam questions can we change this year to make the exam better?” In addition, the ability to ask these questions and to act upon them signals that a more collaborative and trusting culture has developed in the district.

These questions, however, shape the elementary stages of linking curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Interviews and documents do not indicate that the district has a comprehensive assessment plan in place, using multiple assessment formats that balance formative assessments (used for diagnostic purposes to adjust teaching and learning) with summative assessments (used for accountability purposes to measure what students know or do not know at a given point in time). Formative assessments such as pre-tests, student goal-setting, self-assessment, peer assessment, and portfolios or records of their work kept by students were not mentioned by teachers in interviews. The use of benchmarks as learning milestones and to tune instruction to student needs was not noted in interviews. A notable exception was the use of DIBELS in grades K through 3 to assess reading fluency and form flexible reading groups.

Teachers did not describe authentic assessments that require students to consolidate and apply knowledge and skills or use complex higher-order thinking skills or critical and creative thinking. Teachers referred very little to assessments figuring into decisions to differentiate instruction; review team members observed minimal differentiation during classroom visits. Teachers reported that steps have been taken in the district in recent years to help teachers learn to differentiate instruction.

Several rubrics are in use in Saugus, especially at the secondary level, as tools to promote transparency in the assessment of student work. Teachers use a Notebook Scoring Rubric, a Class Participation Rubric, and an Open Response Rubric in high school mathematics classes. Rubrics also exist at the high school for writing history essays and science lab reports. And, high school English has scoring rubrics along with minimally detailed performance rubrics for writing Pathway Papers, short essays, and research papers. These rubrics are helpful in clarifying expectations and setting standards for students. The result, however, is multiple rubrics and formats that describe how teachers will evaluate the written presentations of ideas. While different disciplines may stress different writing features, one standardized writing rubric to establish the qualities of strong student writing across grade levels and across the curriculum would help ensure that all student writing at the high school is held to the same high standards. Equally, there is no standardized writing rubric in the elementary and middle schools to use across grade levels and across the curriculum to ensure common and high standards for student writing. With the recent addition of the Collins Writing program in the lower grades, common writing standards would help support students' progress in writing.

The district still lacks a formal or systemic process to evaluate its programs, as found in the 2007 EQA review; some consider the review of curriculum maps to be a program review. The district does not engage in external program audits or program reviews other than those mandated by the state.

Teachers typically use summative assessments to evaluate student progress. The system thus limits itself and lacks the strengths presented in a more comprehensive and balanced approach that uses formative, benchmark, and authentic assessments. There have clearly been impressive advances made in the district in redefining curriculum (what to teach) and in using data to inform instruction (how to teach). In the review team's judgment, assessing students using only a limited range of assessments hinders the successful determination of students' learning, remedial, and enrichment requirements and prevents full recognition of the improvements that should be made to curriculum and instructional practice.

Human Resources and Professional Development

A new human resources department has developed needed internal information systems and has made an impact on recruitment and hiring in the district.

A new stand-alone human resource department staffed by an experienced human resource professional and clerical staff has been added to the district's management configuration since

the 2007 EQA review. In interviews, through observations, and in a review of records, the review team learned that this department has taken the initiative to develop fundamental internal information systems to support the district's need for timely and accurate personnel information. This information includes schedules of evaluations, historical files, and connections to payroll for changes in salary category based on qualifications, as well as other important information that teachers reported were essential to their pay and benefits. In interviews throughout the system, interviewees stated that this new department has broad support and cooperation.

The human resources department has developed a recruiting plan and has forecast its recruitment numbers for next year (2010-2011). Most new positions will occur because of retirements: 12 percent of the professional workforce is scheduled to retire this June (2010). In interviews, the review team learned that the district's recruiting plan is tied to local university career placement offices including those of Lesley University and Salem State College. It was emphasized in interviews and affirmed in records that the qualifications for teaching positions in Saugus are now tied to the NCLB highly qualified teacher criteria.

These steps forward in organized external recruiting stand in direct contrast to the 2007 EQA report, which noted concern about recruitment and about the qualifications of new hires. In interviews at all levels, the team heard strong support for the level of qualifications used in hiring since the new superintendent came on board and the new "culture of openness" with which the district is now managed. These changes have had a positive impact on staff, shown by the strong levels of support for the new district human resource department.

There has been a turnaround in the quality and timeliness of administrator evaluations since the 2007 EQA review; teacher evaluations, however, are not yet in compliance with regulations.

A review of all administrator evaluations by the superintendent in the human resource files revealed a dramatic turnaround in both quality and timeliness since the 2007 EQA review. These evaluations, of both district administrators and principals, are informative and instructive and are consistent with state regulations on how evaluations must be accomplished. With one exception, a missing 2008 evaluation for a veteran school administrator who is retiring this year, the personnel folders contained completed 2008, 2009, and 2010 evaluations of all administrators.

A companion review of teacher evaluation files showed some progress since the 2007 EQA review, but the evaluation procedure is yet to be in full compliance with 603 CMR 35.00. Only half of the randomly selected teacher files contained timely evaluations, and those evaluations were not instructive as to how the evaluated teacher might improve his or her professional practice. None of the 34 teacher evaluation files reviewed by the team contained recommendations for formal professional development. No teacher evaluation files read by the team yielded any reference to previous evaluations or to the effects of either district-led or teacher-selected professional development activities.

In the judgment of the review team, the district has implemented a fine process for evaluating and developing growth in its leaders under the guidance of the new superintendent. Principals

and others charged with supervising or evaluating teachers can use the administrator model as a guide to improving how teachers are supervised and evaluated.

Professional development in the district is only partially connected to the improvement priorities outlined in the superintendent’s entry plan and in individual school improvement plans.

The district offers a panoply of unconnected professional development opportunities, although most recently the district has taken steps, by means of the superintendent’s “white board” initiatives, to be more deliberate in planning for professional development that is aligned to improvement priorities. The district offers three full days of mandatory professional development for teachers linked to district priorities. It also offers tuition reimbursement for course work selected by teachers and authorized by administrators, financial support for workshops, and salary increases for academic credit or a newly-earned degree. The district has budgeted up to \$60,000 for tuition reimbursement for the term of the collective bargaining contract, but has no measurement plan in place to assess the impact of that investment on classroom instruction or other performance. No teacher evaluations reviewed by the team contained any references to professional development activities, nor to any effects of workshops or coursework on performance. Detailed training records were provided to the review team that showed training themes and materials for middle school and high school teachers during regularly scheduled mandatory training sessions. At the middle school, these topics included a day of internal work on “Scheduling,” “Using Data to Inform Instruction,” “Using Professional Learning Communities and Data to Drive Decision Making,” “Implementing Technology,” and “Refining School Policies.” Several of these are closely linked to district priorities related to using data and gaining expertise in the use of technology. However, no follow-up data was available in the professional development materials provided by the district that would indicate progress by staff in gaining the needed expertise, nor did the materials show consideration of how new skills might be used to move to the next level. Summer workshops on creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at the middle school were referred to in documents and described in interviews, but the review team frequently heard in interviews that no time is scheduled during the school day for middle school teachers to meet for debriefing or working on the workshop topics. Teachers indicated that they meet before and after school, and occasionally during a common lunch time or during other casual opportunities, to talk about common issues about students and instruction.

Formal professional development sessions at the high school level include offerings based on standardized materials that are often presented by external consultants or make use of internal expertise. At the elementary level, pre-scheduled mandatory professional development days provide the only common time for district-controlled training. There was evidence that experienced staff are now being used for *ad hoc* job-embedded professional development, but teaching time limits training time. Teachers cited the district mentoring program as very supportive and helpful—all new teachers have mentors for at least one year—and professional support developed during mentoring often continues for new teachers after the first two years. Interviewees noted that curriculum specialists for the core academic subjects for grades 6-12 are

informed and supportive, but their availability to support teachers below grade 9 is limited. As previously noted, there is no leadership for curriculum and instruction below grade 6 other than principals.

Individual teachers complete Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs), and principals approve them. In a random review of personnel files and in interviews, the review team learned that newly selected coursework for relicensing contained in these plans is often in line with district and school improvement goals, but that this depends on the school. Evidence of this was found in the few plans available in personnel files. Since not all IPDPs are located in personnel files, it is unknown how many of the IPDPs are in alignment with district and school improvement priorities.

A new districtwide professional development committee, chaired by the superintendent, and a new professional development plan have been created. The committee's work, which includes the alignment of professional development with district priorities, reflects both the urgency of the main district goals and a new spirit of collaboration that is now influencing instruction and curriculum mapping. It is a voluntary committee, created at the invitation of the superintendent, that meets regularly and keeps detailed minutes of progress.

The superintendent's priorities are clear and widely known in the district. There is evidence that the human resource function has provided support for these priorities by establishing high quality hiring standards and developing internal data systems for decision-making. While some alignment of professional development has taken place, and interviews showed excitement among teachers about unifying professional development with the instructional challenges they face in the classroom, the full array of professional development offerings in the district has not yet been organized as a uniform system to provide support for district priorities. Without such organization, the attainment of district and school improvement goals will be hindered.

Student Support

Since the EQA review of 2007, the Saugus Public Schools have created and developed programs and added staff at all three levels to support at-risk students and students who are not performing at grade level, resulting in an improved academic culture.

Interviews with central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and school committee members showed that since the EQA review of 2007 the district has taken positive steps forward at many levels in both staffing and programs to support the academic and other needs of students. The hiring of a new director of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) in 2008 added the leadership needed to serve the academic and emotional needs of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The director's creation of a comprehensive teacher- and parent-friendly *PPS Procedures Manual* was the first step in the transformation of special education services. A new streamlined referral system put in place in 2009 not only assists staff members in the referral process but also has dramatically reduced the number of referrals, to a workable number.

Another important decision taken by the district was to move to an all-inclusion model of instruction for special education students (whenever possible) at all levels. The four elementary schools adopted the model at the beginning of the 2009 school year and the middle school began an all-inclusion model in September of 2009. The plan is for the high school to adopt the model in the next school year (2010-2011). The district has added the necessary staff to make this model workable.

Support programs for at-risk students and students not performing at grade level who are not identified as students with special needs have also been greatly enhanced since the 2007 report. When asked to identify these programs, principals at all three levels quickly furnished a description of a full array of programs and services available to support students academically. When asked the same question in their respective focus groups, teachers at all three levels confirmed that things have changed dramatically in this regard since 2008. At the elementary level, administration of the DIBELS assessment has been expanded to include all students through the 3rd grade. Students doing poorly in the DIBELS assessments in grades K to 3 and the MCAS tests in grades 4 and 5 receive supplemental assistance in mathematics and reading from specialists and/or Title I teachers. Several after-school tutorial programs are also offered, in both mathematics and literacy. At the middle school, a Title I mathematics “coach” was added to the staff in 2009 to work with at-risk grade 6 and 7 students. Middle school teachers now regularly give remediation to at-risk students during directed study periods for the subject(s) in which they are struggling. The addition of a full-time adjustment counselor at the middle school has also helped these at-risk students. At the high school, a number of supplemental programs have been initiated since 2007 including during- and after-school tutorial sessions conducted by staff members or National Honor Society members, all geared to assist at-risk students with academics. In addition, the high school has created a Team Sachem to cluster about a dozen at-risk 9th graders with a team of teachers who work more intensively with these students in order to keep them in school and help them succeed academically.

Administrators and teachers alike expressed the view that because of these additions and changes to programs and personnel, the academic culture in the district has changed in the last two years to a much more positive and professional one.

The introduction of the comprehensive X2 data management system at the high school in 2008 and at the middle school in 2009 has improved how students’ records are kept and how parents are notified about their children’s absences, discipline problems, and grades.

During interviews, both principals and teachers at the high school and middle school expressed the opinion that the addition of the X2 system in 2008 has changed dramatically the way the schools are operated. Not only are attendance and discipline records kept up-to-date, but also the system allows for a number of innovative ways to perform school functions that help in the administration of the school. Parents can be and are notified immediately of a child’s absence or discipline problem. All grades are kept electronically in “real time” in all subjects; parents and students, through a password system, have 24-hour access to all relevant information through the Internet. Additionally, teachers are required to post homework assignments regularly for all

classes, so there is never a need for students, particularly absentees, to miss any assignments. In focus groups teachers did state that not all of their colleagues have had an opportunity to be properly trained in all facets of the new system. However, the district is making every effort in this regard by offering X2 training sessions regularly during professional development days.

The four elementary schools are using the X2 system only in their grade reporting at the present time; however, plans are to have these schools all “up and running” in various aspects of the X2 system by the fall of 2010.

The X2 system allows a student’s entire school profile to be brought to an administrator’s computer screen with the push of a button: attendance data by day and class, discipline record (including teacher referral forms), warning notes, up-to-the-minute grades, any school activity the student is involved with (sports, band, drama, etc.), and parent contact and notification information. Secondary administrators indicated that the addition of the X2 system with all of its positive features, especially its instantaneous parental notification process, has been one of the main factors contributing to the increase in high school attendance during the past two years: the attendance rate at Saugus High School rose from 92.5 percent in 2007 to 92.8 percent in 2008 and to 93.2 percent in 2009

A recently instituted dropout prevention plan has reduced the dropout rate at Saugus High school to below the state rate.

The 2007 EQA report stated that the district “lacked formal dropout prevention and recovery policies and procedures” (p. 144). It also reported that the (2006) dropout rate for the high school was more than double the state rate (7.0 percent versus 3.3 percent) and that the district “had no plans to address the issue in any systematic manner” (p. 145).

There has been significant movement on the part of the high school administration in the past two years to address this problem. There is now a dropout prevention plan that includes offering at-risk students the opportunity to make up lost credits through an online credit recovery program called NovaNET. Interviewees stated that during the 2008 and 2009 school years, 30 seniors took the opportunity to make up credits that they had lost during their tenure at the school. The dropout rate for grades 9-12 fell to 3.0 percent in 2008 and 2.5 percent in 2009, both rates lower than the state rates for those years of 3.4 percent and 2.9 percent. Meanwhile, the four-year graduation rate rose from 74.4 percent in 2007 to 79.8 percent in 2008 and to 81.7 percent in 2009. (See Table 3 in the Student Performance section above.) More than 10 students were enrolled in the program as of the first of February in this school year.

Perhaps an even more significant development in this regard is the creation in the fall of 2009 of the program called Team Sachem, mentioned above. During the summer of 2009, the high school administration with the assistance of the middle school guidance counselors identified the 12 rising freshmen most at risk of dropping out and scheduled them separately in the Team Sachem program. The instructional team comprises a group of hand-picked teachers who have the responsibility to teach Team Sachem students in core subjects throughout the year and closely monitor their academic progress. Their efforts are backed up by an adjustment counselor assigned these students who meets with them regularly. This new dropout prevention program

emphasizes teachers' mentoring and monitoring of at-risk students and the immediate report of any problems, academic or otherwise, to guidance counselors and administrators. As of February 2010, the time of the review, the review team learned that all students in the program were progressing well, were not in danger of failing, and, more importantly, were not in danger of dropping out of school.

It appears that the NovaNET program has been a factor in reducing the high school's dropout rate. It is the hope of the high school administration that closer monitoring of students' attendance, discipline problems, and academic achievement by a combination of intervention programs and the use of the X2 data management system will continue to decrease the dropout rate.

The district has restored only a few of the gifted and talented programs at the elementary level and higher level courses at the secondary level eliminated due to fiscal constraints in the past few years.

The 2007 EQA report indicated that the gifted and talented programs in the elementary schools had been eliminated and the honors level courses in the middle school had been reduced due to cuts in the budget. Those reductions had adversely affected access to higher level courses for all students in the district. According to interviews with administrators and teachers, the high school had also been affected in that the number of honors courses was decreased and Advanced Placement (AP) courses could only be offered if 20 or more students signed up for them.

In interviews with principals and teachers, the review team learned that only a few of those programs had been restored by the time of the team's visit in February 2010. During interviews, two principals stated that it was their opinion that the lack of gifted and talented programs and higher-level courses at the secondary level has contributed to the significant proportion of Saugus parents who choose not to send their children to the town's public schools. In the 2008-2009 school year, more than 750 of Saugus' nearly 3800 school-age children attended parochial or private schools—about one in five.

Both administrators and teachers indicated their belief that the restoration of the gifted and talented programs at the elementary level and the higher level and honors courses at the secondary level, along with the use of more differentiated instruction in the district's classrooms, would go a long way toward attaining the goal of having substantially more school-aged Saugus children attend the district's schools.

The number of homeless students, which includes many LEP students, has increased in the last two school years and is not well served because of the lack of trained personnel and programs to meet their academic and emotional needs.

When the state again began to place homeless families in motels in 2007, Saugus was directly affected because of the many motels located on the section of Route 1 within town borders. The number of homeless students has increased in the last one and one-half years from a few more than 20 to 69 students at the time of the review. This increase has also increased the number of

LEP students in the district. In 2003-2004 the district's students were 0.0 percent LEP; in 2005-2006, 0.2 percent, and in 2009-2010, 2.4 percent.

All of the elementary age students housed in motels along Route 1, as well as a number of LEP students living principally in a nearby housing complex, attend the Oaklandvale Elementary School. The principal related to review team members that the personnel and resources at the school have been stretched to their limits trying to meet the academic and emotional needs of these students. Although the Coordinated Program Review conducted in Saugus by the Department in January 2006 found that "the district does not have a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program at any level . . . and none of the teaching staff has participated in the minimum number of hours of sustained and intense professional development required to provide Sheltered English Immersion,"⁵ the review team in the current review did not learn of any staff members in the district who have been trained in SEI teaching strategies to facilitate appropriate and high quality content instruction for English language learners. And although the school has the services of a certified ESL teacher, those services are not sufficient to meet its students' needs for ESL instruction, given the number of LEP students in the school. The superintendent's Entry Plan does include steps to accomplish SEI training and to increase the amount of ESL instruction, but those steps have not been taken. As for the emotional needs of the Oaklandvale students, the school has a part-time adjustment counselor; however, the amount of time this counselor works at the school is, again, not enough to meet the students' needs.

The review team agrees with the interviewees at both the central office and school level who stated that they had no doubt that the district does not currently have the resources and personnel in place to sufficiently serve all the academic and emotional needs of its homeless students and LEP students.

Financial and Asset Management

The school budget has difficulty meeting current and emerging programmatic, service, and staffing needs due to decreases in local appropriations during three of the last seven fiscal years and decreases in state aid during two of them.

In fiscal year 2009, the local appropriation for the school budget was increased by 11 percent, which brought the fiscal year 2009 budget close to its fiscal year 2002 level. In fiscal year 2010, there was a 2.3 percent increase in local appropriations. These increases came at the end of a period of seven fiscal years during which the local appropriation for the school budget decreased three different times (FY04, FY05, and FY08), and Chapter 70 aid from the state to the community for schools was reduced twice (FY04—a 20 percent reduction—and FY09). Due to inflation as well as multiple years of appropriation decreases and state aid losses, the schools experienced significant cuts and reductions in staffing, instructional programs, and student services. Administrators and teachers told review team members during interviews that class

⁵ Saugus Public Schools Coordinated Program Review Report, June 1, 2006, p. 93, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2006/0262.doc>.

sizes are now larger at all levels, many in the high 20s and the 30s, as positions and section numbers have been reduced. The district lost programs in music, art, and physical education, health classes, advanced classes at the middle and high school, and support services for students. Some of these are now gradually being restored. The middle school library was closed for a year and reopened this year. Most Advanced Placement classes were cut and have only begun to be reinstated during the current fiscal year.

Under the new superintendent, the budget process is collaborative and transparent within the school system. Principals now base their budget needs and projections on their School Improvement Plans and are aware of the improvement needs of the other schools. They understand decisions made when financial priorities are set and realize that under the current financial conditions, not all schools' needs can be met. However, there is no negotiation between the town and the school system regarding the school budget. The town manager considers requests from all departments and then recommends the bottom line amount for each department to the selectmen. The town manager stated that since he has no authority over line items, he focuses only on his bottom line authority and has no time to be more engaged. Members of the finance committee also view the bottom line as their main interest as they consider the competing needs of all town departments. The school committee understands and exercises its role in the budget process according to the Education Reform Act of 1993.

The town describes itself as fiscally conservative; two attempts to raise the property tax levy beyond the allowed 2.5 percent increase by overrides have failed, the last one just two years ago. Town appropriations are sometimes augmented during the year by unexpected sources of revenue such as grants, fees, donations, or unanticipated increases in hotel and restaurant sales taxes. Interviewees agreed that the schools do the best they can with the resources they receive, but that those resources have not recently been adequate to meet the need to provide effective instruction and adequate operational resources, although the school budget meets Net School Spending (NSS) requirements.

Without adequate and predictable funding, the schools cannot meet the increasingly diverse educational needs of all students. In addition to enduring significant appropriation and state aid reductions over the last seven fiscal years, the district is affected by a less-than-open financial mindset on the part of the town with respect to its financial decision-making. The school district is faced with the need to recover lost revenues that forced reductions in staff, programs, and services while simultaneously confronting the need to plan for future costs related to new and expanding educational needs of the town's children, as well as facilities needs. One need is to provide programs and services for the district's ELL population. While this is a relatively small group, it is growing, and the district currently has little expertise in providing programs and instruction for English language learners and hardly any teachers have been trained to do so. Another unmet need is for expert leadership in grades K through 12 for curriculum and instruction, the key educational function of the school system. A number of school buildings are in need of significant renovation and upgrading, or even replacement. Other parts of this report point to other needs for district resources, such as the need to develop a more comprehensive assessment system, the need to train staff further on the use of data, and (see below) the need to

update the school system's financial software and computer hardware. In the judgment of the review team, without adequate sustainable resources that will meet educational needs over time, it will be difficult to maintain a meaningful improvement effort in the district.

The district has taken steps to correct financial management and controls since the time of the 2007 EQA review.

An executive director of finance and operations was hired in January 2010 and given a directive by the superintendent to put the district's financial house in order. The executive director stated that all management of grants is now centralized and that the district's fiscal management is now centralized in the district's central office, with some systemic improvements in place. However, the review team noted that the auditing company appointed by the town has audited financial records for all town departments, including the school department, for seven years and that the town has not solicited alternative bids during that time. While expertise in the financial management of the school system does make a difference in creating and implementing more transparent and sustainable financial systems, the schools' finances are nested within a larger financial system managed by the town. Good financial practice in the public sector recommends regularly opening contracts to bid and advises a change in financial auditing providers every five years.

The town and the school department have yet to reach an agreement on municipal expenditures in support of schools, covering the town's indirect charges to the school budget.

The superintendent and the executive director of finance reported that the town manager determines the indirect costs to be charged to the school system and includes them in a document for the school committee's signature, and that the school committee has refused to sign this document because of disagreement with the charges. This was supported by statements given to review team members by a former longstanding school committee member. A copy of the document was provided to the review team showing that it was not signed by the school committee. In connection with 603 CMR 10.00, the town and the school department should enter into a signed, written agreement on municipal expenditures in support of schools that details the manner for calculating and the amounts to be used in calculating the indirect charges the town levies on the school budget. The EQA review of 2007 also found that there had been no such signed agreement.

Without a signed, written agreement, there is a lack of clear budgetary history, showing trends, that can help support and inform the budget process and ensure the appropriate and predictable allocation of these funds and charges to the schools as well as to the town.

The school district uses financial software that is incompatible with the software used by the town. In both cases the software is run on antiquated computers.

During a meeting with the school district's business office staff, interviewees noted that the school system and the town use incompatible software to manage financial data for purchase orders, payroll, and accounts receivable, as well as data for attendance. Data and reports must be

printed first in the school business office and then hand-carried to the town office. At the town office, the data is re-entered into the town's computers, printed out again and carried back to the school district's office to be acted on and re-entered into the school district's computers. Interviewees noted that fulfillment of purchase orders is often two months behind. This cumbersome procedure has not changed since the EQA review of 2007.

The town manager noted that there are three different accounting systems in use by the town and the school district. Also, the town and school system computers used to record and analyze financial data are of a 1980s vintage, making them less adaptable to the analytic capacity and display of updated software.

The present system is inefficient in its use of time and personnel and with respect to the cost of service. It is also ineffective since it lacks clarity and transparency.

The district and the town have no written preventive maintenance plan or long-range capital improvement plan in place to maximize and prolong the effective use of the school district's capital and major facility assets.

The maintenance of school district property is controlled through the town with the head of maintenance reporting directly to the town manager. In an interview, the town manager noted that except for some contracted services such as boiler maintenance during the summer, the town reacts to maintenance on a case-by-case basis, when an urgent need or emergency appears.

The superintendent has noted in his Entry Plan that "there is no system in place to communicate and/or track preventive maintenance projects and capital improvement plans for review and assessment of progress."

When visiting schools, the review team noted that although the buildings appear clean, most date from the middle of the last century and most, especially the middle school, have not been updated in any meaningful way in the recent past. The school department has made inquiries with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to determine whether or not the middle school could receive state funds to renovate and update its facilities or should instead build anew. At the time of the site visit, one of the elementary schools had been closed due to a reoccurring pest infestation and its classes had been temporarily relocated to a wing of the high school. While the district is to be commended for the ease and efficiency in which this shift took place, it was clearly disruptive to both the elementary school and the high school to change classrooms and move equipment in only a few days' time. A preventive building maintenance plan might prevent other such disruptions in the future.

The school buildings and their equipment are the largest publicly-owned assets in most communities. Without a preventive maintenance plan, the building infrastructure of the schools can be left to deteriorate to a point that endangers safety and security. Lack of proper and timely maintenance can lead to even more expensive repairs and replacement. Without a capital improvement plan, the schools cannot meet state-of-the-art standards for the use of educational space and cannot provide for updating expensive equipment such as science labs, language labs, and computer labs. Without systematic facilities planning, maintenance and capital

improvements are likely to be haphazardly addressed or even postponed indefinitely until a fund surplus or a donation is available to pay for them. In sum, in the absence of carefully developed and implemented short-term maintenance and long-term capital improvement plans, the school buildings cannot serve the town well in terms of building longevity and use or serve the town's children well in terms of meeting educational needs.

Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

The school committee must vigorously advocate for an equitable and adequate portion of the town's resources to support student achievement, by actively engaging town officials using detailed data of town revenues and expenditures and a revised district strategic plan that reflects current district and school improvement needs.

In recent years, losses of programs, services, and personnel due to reductions in both revenue derived from Chapter 70 school aid and appropriations to the school budget have left the schools in a perpetual "catch-up" mode. This mode endures while new educational and facilities needs emerge in the district.

Documentation and interviews with school committee members confirmed the efforts of the superintendent to reach out to town officials through clear and informative budget presentations to the annual town meeting and the finance committee as well as to the board of selectmen, town meeting members, and the town manager. These efforts should continue in order to ensure an informed community.

Data set forth in the document "School Finance & Budget," dated December 8, 2009, prepared by the district finance director, describes the town's financial capacity. A detailed analysis of this data with comparisons to like communities, made as part of the superintendent's budget presentation, would provide a mutual understanding of town and school department financial capabilities, responsibilities, and needs. A revised district strategic plan developed using a participatory process that includes internal and external stakeholders and using the superintendent's updated Entry Plan as its foundation would provide a new District Improvement Plan that should be made accessible to all stakeholders in the community.

An expanded understanding of the town's financial capacity and a clear district direction would enable the school committee and the superintendent to be effective advocates for the children of the community.

Curriculum and Instruction

With appropriate districtwide leadership, continue to use, evaluate, and develop curriculum maps so that curricula for grades K through 12:

- **improve consistently and continuously,**
- **transition smoothly across grades and between levels,**
- **challenge students with higher-order thinking skills,**
- **contain effective and comprehensive assessment strategies, and**
- **guide teachers in differentiating their instruction.**

Teachers and leaders are in agreement about the importance of the process of developing and using the curriculum maps. They are invested in a process which they say has recognized and validated their professional skills, engaged them in school improvement, and produced a tool that is used and accepted throughout the district. Teachers and leaders also agree that two areas need further attention: transitions between schools and levels and the development of a K to 12 system of classroom-based assessments for learning. At the time of the review there were no specific plans to address these areas and no curriculum and instruction specialist for grades K through 12 to guide the process.

Saugus students are respectful and follow teachers' directions; however, too few are sufficiently challenged in their classrooms by thought-provoking questions and few are asked to apply new knowledge in different situations, articulate their thinking and reasoning, or problem-solve with peers.

Teachers present curricular content with minimal differentiation. With whole-class teacher-directed instruction, there are few opportunities to adapt to the faster and slower learners, address the needs of English language learners, and make modifications for other learning strengths and weaknesses.

In the first year of the implementation of curriculum mapping, Saugus teachers and leaders have taken an impressive step in documenting and aligning the curriculum. Providing appropriate leadership K to 12 in maintaining enthusiasm and focus for this multi-year task is critical to improving student learning and performance.

Provide strong districtwide instructional leadership and support to improve classroom instruction across the district.

The team's observations of 64 classrooms showed a wide variation in teaching style and skills. Adherence to the curriculum maps and good pacing were observed, but teacher-directed, whole-class instruction was the norm. While students were compliant and well-behaved, the predominant skill that students exhibited was listening to teachers talking. Enthusiasm and excitement about discovery, finding meaning, or solving a challenging problem were found in some classes, but these do not characterize the typical Saugus student at any grade.

At the elementary level, classroom teachers depend upon thinly-stretched principals for feedback about their teaching; at the middle school, time is rare for teachers to meet and engage in professional discussions about teaching. Walkthroughs are done by administrators at all levels, but these are without protocols, not targeted to instructional improvement, and result in little or no written or oral feedback to teachers. There is no single leader charged with instructional practice and curriculum implementation K to 12. Responsibilities have been delegated to the six principals, assisted by core subject specialists from the high school who cover grades 6 through 12. The curriculum specialist for grades K through 5 can no longer meaningfully carry out her responsibilities since her teaching load has increased to full-time.

Without districtwide leadership, the district is unlikely to build capacity to improve or make sustained progress. Teachers have taken on the task of ongoing review of curriculum maps, to

their credit. Yet without a clear vision of high level learning matched to effective teaching strategies, the impact of their work is lessened. Having the leadership to identify best practices within and outside of the district, help all teachers to broaden their skills to reach all learners, and institute system-wide planning to improve instruction will continue the road to success.

Assessment

Continue to build capacity to collect, disseminate, and use data for the purposes of planning, accountability, and the improvement of curriculum and instruction.

- **by continuing training on the use of the X2 data system to make decisions about teaching and the curriculum; and**
- **by better tracking data on student achievement and teacher performance and ensuring its consistent use.**
- **by making sure that staff at all levels have structured time and appropriate leadership for the use of data to improve curriculum and instruction.**

Training in the use of the X2 data system:

The district has taken some steps in the process of understanding how to collect, share, and use data for administrative purposes and to improve curriculum and instruction. Most leaders and a good number of teachers have gained the expertise to access the new X2 data management system and use its resources to plan and improve their practice.

To access and use data more consistently across schools at the elementary level, additional teachers need support in learning to use X2 to make decisions about teaching and the curriculum. Access to student achievement data has already helped a number of teachers better understand student progress. By extending these skills deeper into the teacher ranks, more teachers will be equipped to use these powerful tools to support student learning and to inform revisions to instruction and curriculum.

Consistent tracking and use of data:

More work is also needed in consistently tracking student achievement data and data from teacher performance trends and using these sources of information consistently to drive improvement efforts.

At the elementary level, external literacy assessments such as DIBELS are not used beyond grade 3 except for students with disabilities, and interviewees were not clear as to how the analysis of reading data translates into changed instructional practice other than being used for flexible grouping. The new elementary mathematics program, *enVisions*, has an assessment system; however, teachers did not report close grade-level or cross-school tracking of student achievement on quizzes and tests to learn more about how well students are achieving or how instruction using the new text is progressing. Interviewees agreed that this was a weakness.

Classroom teachers also reported no significant efforts to use assessment data or monitor student progress in social studies or science.

At the high school, although teachers, curriculum specialists, and the world language team leader described how they use classroom-based assessment data, as well as results from common mid-year and final exams, to adjust curriculum, fine-tune instruction, and revise exam questions, interviews and documentation indicated that this use is more structured and comprehensive in some departments than in others. It is unclear whether review of SAT and AP scores figures into any modification of instruction or curriculum. And high school teachers lack in-depth knowledge of other kinds of student data than achievement data that could signal students' need of support, such as dropout or attendance data.

Across the district, although inconsistencies exist, teachers offered a number of examples of how their increasing ability to examine MCAS data has informed their practice. There were only a few examples, however, of analyses derived from classroom-generated data or data geared to individual students' work. Information derived from observations of teachers' practice is hardly ever used to give teachers feedback, and, according to interviews with teachers, student achievement and student progress are not discussed during their evaluation conferences.

Access to data makes needs related to student achievement and other needs more transparent in the school system as a whole, to parents, to town government leaders, and to the community. By displaying student achievement data and analyzing its implication for teaching and learning, the schools can more clearly identify areas in need of improvement and in need of community support for that improvement.

Ensuring structured time and appropriate leadership for the use of data:

According to interviews with elementary teachers, apart from scheduled after-school faculty meetings, much of the collaborative work of using assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction for student learning is informal and collegial rather than structured and systematic. At the three small elementary schools, interviewees reported only a voluntary and informal use of assessment data by teachers when they meet during common planning time. Guidance in data analysis varies across these elementary schools; when asked, teachers could not agree on who the instructional leader in their school was who would work with them on the analysis of student achievement data. At Veterans Memorial interviewees reported that the principal leads grade-level meetings every two to four weeks to discuss curriculum and instruction and to review student progress. Although leadership is needed to guide data analysis and prioritize and monitor instructional improvements, because of the full-time teaching responsibilities of the elementary curriculum specialist, principals are effectively the only leaders with responsibility for curriculum and instruction in grades K through 5.

Under the leadership of the new principal, middle school leaders are currently introducing a new initiative for teachers, the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with a cycle of improvement planning and implementation that relies on using data (including results from MCAS and classroom-based assessments), technology, and best practices. Middle school teachers now have no common meeting time during the school day and use after-school meetings

to address improvement priorities. A new schedule proposed for 2010-2011 will, it is hoped, provide the common planning time needed for PLCs to function effectively.

At the high school, use of internal assessment data to fine-tune instruction and revise exam questions occurs irregularly across departments, based on the time available.

Identifying leadership for the improvement of curriculum and instruction at each of the elementary schools and instituting in each a structured and systematic approach to using assessments for this improvement; following through on plans for a new middle school schedule to provide the common planning time needed for PLCs; and identifying time for high school departments to consistently use assessment data to improve teaching and learning will allow the district to realize the full potential of the analysis and use of data for increasing teacher effectiveness and raising student achievement.

Develop a more comprehensive and balanced assessment system in all subjects for grades K through 12, including formative, benchmark, and authentic assessments as well as summative assessments.

Currently, students mainly show knowledge gains and gaps at end points in learning, for instance on a written quiz, a chapter or unit test, or an assigned paper. Students typically take tests or hand in the papers, projects, or lab reports at the same time for a particular class.

Where more authentic assessments are used, student work is paced by progress made and individual learning needs either for individual students or for small groups of students, whether they are in regular or special education. Instruction is differentiated and tailored to the needs of individual students or groups of students. Students are more aware of and more reflective about their achievement and their needs, and they engage more in their learning. In a framework of assessments using multiple measures, students are asked to generate work or products or performances as well as demonstrate proficiency in summative assessments. When a more comprehensive assessment system is linked to improving curriculum and instruction, students can develop higher-order thinking skills and become more powerful, engaged, and independent learners.

Developing and implementing a more comprehensive assessment system, by adding formative and benchmark assessments as well as more authentic assessments to instructional practice, will help professional staff further improve curriculum and instruction and tailor lessons to meet students' remedial and enrichment requirements. Having well-designed multiple assessment measures can help ensure that all students can demonstrate what they know and can do, thus indicating what additional support they need to succeed.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The superintendent should work with the principals and department heads to develop stronger teacher evaluation skills so that teacher evaluations comply with regulations—in

particular, by being informative and instructive and making recommendations for professional development.

Only half of the 34 randomly selected teacher evaluation files provided to the review team contained timely evaluations. The evaluations were not instructive as to how the teacher might improve his or her professional practice, and none of them contained recommendations for formal professional development or referred to previous evaluations or the effects of previous professional development.

Without consistent and coherent reviews of teacher performance that adhere to regulations under the Education Reform Act of 1993 (603 CMR 35.00), the district has no way to ensure that all teaching staff reach and maintain a standard of excellence in instructional practice. Administrators support teacher growth and development when they include informative and instructive narratives in evaluations and when they can point to useful or needed professional development that links to individual needs or school improvement goals.

By fully linking the human resources component of teacher evaluation with targeted professional development, the district would have an opportunity to develop the capacity to implement best instructional practices. Not to do so means a lost opportunity to maximize the teaching and administrative talent that the internal systems developed by the new human resources department are designed to create.

The district's recruitment, hiring, and professional development should all be informed by district and school priorities.

Recruitment and hiring:

In interviews and classroom visits, the team saw a variety of classroom strategies, mostly teacher-directed, and wide variations in classroom approaches to implementing curriculum frameworks. In addition, the team often saw assessment as a localized classroom preference.

Twelve percent of the professional workforce is scheduled to retire this June (2010).

To make the most of this opportunity to bring new staff to the professional ranks, in addition to requiring all new teachers to meet Highly Qualified Teacher criteria, the district should ensure that district priorities inform the district's recruiting plan so that the staff hired can bring proven strengths and attitudes that will help accomplish district priorities. Hiring new teachers who fulfill district priorities by their strong content backgrounds and command of research-based best practices can accelerate the improvement of student learning.

Professional development:

While some alignment of professional development has taken place, the full array of professional development offerings in the district has not yet been organized as a uniform system to provide support for district priorities, and it was unclear to the review team how many of teachers' Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) were in alignment with district and school improvement priorities. Also, the district has no measurement plan to assess the impact of its investment in professional development on classroom instruction or other performance.

The district should use its new professional development committee and professional development plan to ensure that all professional development offered supports district and school priorities; it should ensure that all IPDPs are in alignment with those priorities; and it should have a plan for following up on its professional development by measuring its effectiveness. All of these measures will facilitate the attainment of district and school improvement goals.

Student Support

Expand the diverse programs and initiatives the district has begun since the EQA review of 2007 to support students with diverse learning needs, with the aim in particular of challenging high-achieving students and supporting the district's growing homeless and ELL population.

- The district has taken many positive steps at all levels of its schools since the EQA review of 2007 in both staffing and initiating programs supporting students with diverse learning needs; however, it has replaced only a few of the gifted and talented programs at the elementary level and higher level courses at the secondary level previously eliminated due to fiscal constraints. At the same time, the choice of teacher-directed instruction as the main instructional strategy in the district makes an impact on the level of students' engagement, preventing them from assuming increasing responsibility for their own learning, and prevents the use of differentiation to meet diverse learning needs. Higher level questioning that requires students to use higher order thinking skills was absent or only partially evident in the majority of classes observed, with the result that in 50 of 64 classes the team observed few instances of students' articulating their thinking and reasoning. Furthermore, teachers and school leaders interviewed did not articulate common, clear, specific ideas about high expectations for student work, or about what a high-achieving student should know and be able to do. The district should ensure that students at all levels of achievement are engaged and challenged, by such means as using a variety of instructional techniques, differentiating instruction, allowing students to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning, employing higher level questioning that requires students to use higher order thinking skills and to articulate their thinking and reasoning, and arriving at a common understanding of high expectations for students. The strong districtwide instructional leadership recommended by the Department above, working with principals and specialists, will be essential in this undertaking; this leader can also guide an evaluation of the eliminated programs and courses for high-achieving students in the context of engaging and challenging all students, determining whether these programs and courses for high-achieving students should be restored, whether differently constituted programs and courses should be instituted, or whether at some levels the improvement of instruction is sufficient. Providing a challenging education to all students will raise all students'

achievement and may be the means of attracting more families to the Saugus Public Schools.

In addition, the district does not have the resources or personnel in place to sufficiently serve the academic and emotional needs of its growing homeless and ELL population, most of whom attend the Oaklandvale Elementary School. Few or none of the district's teachers have received the required SEI training, and the amount of qualified ESL instruction available to the district's LEP students is inadequate. The part-time services of the adjustment counselor who works at the Oaklandvale School are insufficient to meet students' needs for such services. According to the principal, the personnel and resources at the school have been stretched to their limits trying to meet the academic and emotional needs of the students.

The district should institute much-needed supports for its ELL and homeless students.

- It should immediately take steps to train all teachers of LEP students as soon as possible in the four categories of skills and knowledge they are required to have. See attachment 1 to the commissioner of education's memorandum of June 15, 2004, entitled "Updated Guidance on Qualifications for Teachers in Sheltered English Immersion Classrooms," available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/sei/qualifications.pdf>.
- It should immediately take steps to increase the amount of ESL instruction by a teacher with an ESL license to meet the number of hours of such instruction required for each of the district's LEP students.
- It should ensure, especially in connection with recruiting and hiring for 2010-2011, that the district has staff with the requisite expertise to supervise the institution of supports for its ELL students and to direct the completion of an ESL curriculum for all grade levels.
- It should ensure that it has sufficient qualified staffing available to meet the needs of the district's homeless students for emotional assistance.
- It should consider providing additional structure for elementary-age homeless students by starting an after-school program at the Oaklandvale School for all its students. This program might combine academics—for instance, support for homework—and recreation. At the same time, the district might consider starting an after-school ESL program at the school for LEP parents, so that the school will become a resource center and community center for them.

The institution of these supports will not only, in some cases, bring the district into compliance with the law, but will also result in increased student well-being and increased student achievement. Students cannot learn if their emotional and language needs are not met.

Financial and Asset Management

For the benefit of the town’s children, the school district and the town should agree on productive ways to share information with each other and communicate more frequently and openly; they should also reach agreement on how indirect costs will be managed and financed and sign a written agreement on municipal expenditures in support of schools—or, if they cannot reach agreement, they should notify the Department pursuant to regulation.

The lack of dialogue in town decision-making about the sharing of financial resources has fostered an atmosphere of tension and mistrust between the schools and the town, and there is a stalemate in agreeing how the town will apportion indirect charges to the schools.

The friction between the town and the school department regarding educational funding has intensified as the superintendent and the town manager strongly advocate for their respective areas of responsibility. The engagement of the school committee, as the political body charged with responsibility for oversight of the school department and advocacy for it, can help defuse this tension. More open and frequent communication between the superintendent and town manager would lead to a better mutual understanding of the needs of the schools and of the town. To ensure transparency and a good process, the parties must agree on how to share information with each other in such a way as to ensure a productive exchange of ideas.

The town and the school department should also complete a written and signed agreement on municipal expenditures in support of schools. Such a signed agreement, delineating cost-sharing policies and procedures, will support and inform the budget process and ensure the appropriate and predictable allocation of these charges to the schools as well as to the town. Without a unified and focused collaborative effort on the part of the schools *and* the town, the community’s responsibility to provide a quality education for all of its children will likely be compromised.

If the town and the school department are unable to reach such an agreement, they should notify the Department in accordance with 603 CMR 10.04(3), and the commissioner will appoint a designee to conduct an informal hearing to encourage the parties to reach an agreement and make a final determination on the issues in dispute if no agreement is reached within a reasonable time period.

The town and school system must collaborate to update computer hardware and procure new financial management software for use by both, to support shared financial management and accounting systems.

The financial software for the school system is incompatible with the financial software used by the town; both are run on outdated computers. As a result, time and resources are expended inefficiently and ineffectively by both the town and the school district, since so many data entries must be made to communicate and process financial data from town to school and school to town. New financial management software and new computer hardware that support a single financial management system shared by the school department and the town offices and other

departments would streamline accounting and also help make all transactions and record keeping more transparent.

Develop a preventive maintenance plan and a long-range capital improvement plan for the school district.

Many of the school system's buildings date from the middle of the last century and are in need of renovation or replacement. Collectively, the six school buildings in use and several closed school buildings under the town's oversight and dedicated to other uses constitute the largest set of physical assets in the community. The town deals with school building maintenance problems on an *ad hoc* basis with no systematic preventive maintenance planning, other than summer work on school boilers. Equally, there is no capital improvement plan to coherently oversee planning for future capital needs with respect to school facilities and equipment. Meeting needs for major educational initiatives such as school renovations, a computer lab, a language lab, or a major textbook purchase is now left to the chance availability of surplus cash, increases in fees, added revenues from hotel or meals taxes, or donations.

The realities of current budget shortfalls on the state and local level have fostered a belief that nothing can be done in Saugus to improve school buildings with the monies available, a belief that may be true at the present time. However, the district has requested the MSBA to determine whether or not the middle school could receive state funds to renovate and update its facilities or should instead build anew. Without a process of comprehensive planning, the school system will not be ready to take advantage of times when monies do become available so as to receive the needed state support to upgrade its school facilities. To meet students' educational needs in terms of infrastructure, the school system, with the collaboration of the town, needs to project and plan thoughtfully and systematically for all of its assets.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Saugus Public Schools was conducted from February 8-11, 2010, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Wilfred J. Savoie, Leadership and Governance

Christine Brandt, Curriculum and Instruction

Linda L. Greyser, Ed.D., Assessment

Tom Johnson, Ed.D., Human Resources and Professional Development

William Wassel, CAGS, Student Support

Charles F. Valera, Ph.D., Financial and Asset Management

Linda L. Greyser also served as the review team coordinator.

Richard K. Fields, Ed.D., of the Center for Targeted Assistance, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, observed the review.

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Level 3 Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Saugus financial personnel: executive director of finance and operations for the school district, principal financial clerk and administrative assistant, school payroll clerk, town manager.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Saugus School Committee: four sitting school committee members (as well as one former school committee member).
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Saugus Teachers Association: president and three vice-presidents.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Saugus Public Schools' central office administration: superintendent, executive director of finance and operations, director of human resources, director of pupil personnel services.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Saugus Public Schools: : Lynnhurst Elementary School, K-5; Oaklandvale Elementary School, grades K-5; Veterans Memorial Elementary School, grades K-5; Waybright Elementary School, K-5, then housed at Saugus High School because of pest infestation at the school site; Belmonte Middle School, grades 6-8; Saugus High School, grades 9-12.
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with all six school principals and with representative groups of teachers at all three levels.
 - The review team conducted 64 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the six schools visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data
 - District Analysis and Review Tool
 - Coordinated Program Review Report, 2006
 - Mid-cycle Review Report, 2009
 - Educational Quality and Accountability Technical Report, 2007
 - Employment contracts for central office leaders
 - Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
 - Long-term enrollment trends

- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2009
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels :
 - Organization chart
 - District Strategic Plan, 2004-2009, extended to 2011
 - Five School Improvement Plans
 - School committee policy manual
 - Sample Superintendent's Report to the School Committee
 - Superintendent's Meeting Schedule
 - Curriculum maps and pacing guides for all subjects for grades K-12
 - District Curriculum Accommodation Plan, revised September 2009
 - District analysis and presentation of MCAS results
 - Power Point presentation of MCAS results
 - District presentation of AYP status
 - Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Growth Models for Saugus Public Schools
 - High school program of studies
 - District and individual school websites
 - Superintendent's Entry Plan, November 2008
 - School budget Power Point presentation to selectmen for fiscal year 2011
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Human Resources Procedural Manual
 - Student and family handbooks
 - Faculty Handbook
 - Professional Development Plan and program/schedule/courses/sample agendas
 - Expanded Learning Time grant application
 - Town document describing indirect cost sharing, unsigned by school committee
 - Teacher meeting schedules

- Teacher evaluation tool
- Job descriptions for central office directors and school administrators
- Principals' performance evaluations
- Evaluations for central office directors
- 34 randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Assorted lesson plans, rubrics, and assessment analyses

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Level 3 review of the Saugus Public Schools, conducted from February 8-11, 2010.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p><u>February 8</u></p> <p>Introductory meeting with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals; interview with town government personnel; review of documents and review of personnel files</p>	<p><u>February 9</u></p> <p>Interviews with district staff and principals; interview with teachers association representatives; school visits (Lynnhurst Elementary School, Saugus High School); classroom observations; focus group with school council parent members; interviews with school committee members; review of personnel files</p>	<p><u>February 10</u></p> <p>School visits and classroom observations (Veterans Memorial Elementary School, Saugus High School); interviews with school leaders; teacher team meetings</p> <p>Early dismissal because of snow storm</p>	<p><u>February 11</u></p> <p>School visits and classroom observations: (Oaklandvale Elementary School, Waybright Elementary School, Belmonte Middle School, Saugus High School); interviews with district and school leaders; follow-up interviews; teacher focus groups; team meeting; meeting with Greater Boston Region DSAC team; closing meeting with district leaders</p>