



Mohawk Trail Regional School District District Review

Review conducted November 28–December 1, 2011



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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

The goal of district reviews conducted by the Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is to support districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness, efficiency, and integration of systemwide functions using ESE's six district standards: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management.**

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews 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 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3¹ (in school year 2011 or school year 2012) of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state's six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards (see above). 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. The district review team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards who review selected district documents and ESE data and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to various district schools. The team holds interviews and focus groups with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' union representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classes. The team then meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting the draft of their district review report to ESE.

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

Mohawk Trail Regional School District

The site visit to the Mohawk Trail Regional School District, conducted from November 28-December 1, 2011, included 26 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 85 members of the school system, ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' union representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with four elementary, seven middle school level, and nine high school level teachers. The team also conducted visits to the district's five schools: Mohawk Trail Regional High School/Middle School (grades 7-12); Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6); Sanderson Academy (kindergarten through grade 6); Colrain Central School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6), and Heath Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6). 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. Appendix C contains finding and recommendation statements.

Note that progress that has taken place since the time of the review is not reflected in this benchmarking report. Findings represent the conditions in place at the time of the site visit, and recommendations represent the team's suggestions to address the issues identified at that time.

District Profile²

Mohawk Trail is a regional school district serving Ashfield, Buckland, Colrain, Heath, Plainfield, and Shelburne from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The towns of Charlemont and Hawley are members of a regional elementary school district, Hawlemont (2011 enrollment of 98), but are also members of Mohawk Trail for grades 7-12. The town of Rowe has its own elementary school district (2011 enrollment of 66), but send its students to Mohawk Trail for grades 7-12 by tuition agreement. Although Hawlemont and Rowe are separate districts, they share the services of the Mohawk Trail superintendent and central office. The five schools in the Mohawk Trail Regional School District are Buckland-Shelburne Elementary (197 students in 2011), Colrain Central (108 students in 2011), Heath Elementary (83 students in 2011), Sanderson Academy (122 students in 2011), and Mohawk Trail Regional High School/ Middle School (566 students in 2011). According to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) data, enrollment in the district has decreased from 1,271 students in 2007 to 1,049 students in 2012, a decrease of 222 students or 17 percent. All schools have experienced a decline in enrollment from 2007 to 2012. From 2007 to 2012 the enrollment of Mohawk Trail Regional High School decreased from 688 students to 545 students. Table 1a below shows the 2010-2011 Mohawk Trail enrollment by race/ethnicity and selected populations, while Table 1b shows the same for 2011-2012.

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

**Table 1a: Mohawk Trail Regional School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010-2011**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	1,076	100.0	African-American/Black	9	0.8
First Language not English	5	0.5	Asian	14	1.3
Limited English Proficient*	4	0.4	Hispanic/Latino	38	3.5
Special Education**	218	20.1	White	986	91.6
Low-income	395	36.7	Native American	2	0.2
Free Lunch	308	28.6	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	87	8.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	27	2.5
<p>*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.”</p> <p>**Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements.</p> <p>Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data</p>					

**Table 1b: Mohawk Trail Regional School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011-2012**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	1,049	100.0	African-American/Black	10	1.0
First Language not English	5	0.5	Asian	12	1.1
Limited English Proficient*	4	0.4	Hispanic/Latino	36	3.4
Special Education**	219	20.6	White	965	92.0
Low-income	375	35.7	Native American	3	0.3
Free Lunch	300	28.6	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	75	7.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	23	2.2
*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.” **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data					

All nine towns in Franklin County that are represented in the district have a town meeting/board of selectmen form of government. The school committee that represents these towns consists of 16 members; it does a good amount of work in subcommittees. Because the district covers a territory of 252 square miles, school leaders are not close to one another, and the superintendent and administrative staff are required to travel long distances to visit schools. Although this distance provides challenges for all schools to be in synchrony with district goals, the district and its leaders are committed to working together.

Table 2 below shows Mohawk Trail's expenditures, Chapter 70 state aid, and net school spending during the three-year period from fiscal year 2010 through fiscal year 2012.

**Table 2: Mohawk Trail Regional School District
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010-2012**

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From school committee budget	16,294,882	29,449,199	16,449,552	17,164,468	15,863,529
From revolving funds and grants	---	2,335,429	---	2,352,233	---
Total expenditures	---	31,784,628 ¹	---	19,516,701	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	6,136,890	---	5,778,373	5,809,394
Required local contribution	---	5,820,331	---	5,807,577	5,977,059
Required net school spending**	---	11,957,221	---	11,585,950	11,786,453
Actual net school spending	---	14,870,605	15,097,460	14,623,586	14,529,205
Over/under required (\$)	---	2,913,384	---	3,037,636	---
Over/under required (%)	---	24.4	---	26.2	---
¹ The district retired \$12,201,000 of debt in FY10, which was not included in the estimated school committee budget. *Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations. **Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital. Sources: FY11 District End-of-Year Report; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website; retrieved May 29, 2012.					

Student Performance³

Table 3 below shows that overall Mohawk Trail's proficiency rates in ELA were nearly as high as those of the state over the three test administrations from 2009-2011, while its student growth percentiles were below the state, but always within the moderate range.

A breakdown of the various grade levels shows that the proficiency rate at grade 3 increased from 59 percent in 2009 to 70 percent in 2011. These proficiency rates exceeded the state in two of the three years, with 61 percent of the state's third graders at proficiency in 2011.

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

In 2011 the grade 4 proficiency rate for the district was lower than the state's proficiency rate, with 43 percent of the grade in the district attaining proficiency while 53 percent of the state's fourth graders achieved proficiency. In 2011 fourth grade ELA growth was in the low range, with a median SGP of 38.0. The ELA proficiency rate for 4th graders was the lowest among all grade levels in the district and showed the largest gap with the corresponding state proficiency rate (-10 percentage points). Noteworthy also is the fact that the proficiency rate of the 4th graders has been decreasing over the years, from 51 percent in 2009, to 46 percent in 2010, and the above-stated 43 percent in 2011.

The proficiency rates of district fifth grade students from 2009-2011 were comparable to state proficiency rates at this grade; median SGPs for these three years have been moderate to high.

Grade 6 proficiency rates for the district fluctuated from 2009-2011, with a high of 72 percent in 2010, but a decrease to 61 percent in 2011. Median SGPs for grade 6 were in the moderate range between 2009 and 2011.

Grade 7 proficiency rates also fluctuated over this time period, rising from 60 percent in 2009 to 79 percent in 2010 (passing the state's rate of 72 percent) and falling back to 70 percent in 2011. Similarly, median SGPs for the grade were in the moderate range in 2009 and 2011 and above the moderate range in 2010.

District students at grade 8 have increased their proficiency rate in 2011 (83 percent) over the previous years (69 percent in 2009 and 66 percent in 2010), while the state rates at this grade have remained flat at 78 percent in 2009, 78 percent in 2010, and 79 percent in 2011. In 2011 8th grade students had the highest proficiency rate in the district, 83 percent; like the proficiency rate for grade 3 students this rate exceeded the corresponding state proficiency rate.

At grade 10 the proficiency rates have increased in recent years with 68 percent proficient in 2009, 71 percent in 2010, and 75 percent in 2011. However, these scores were below the state rates for 10th graders: 81 percent in 2009, 78 percent in 2010, and 84 percent in 2011, though the gap with the state did decrease, from -13 percentage points in 2009 to -7 in 2010 and -9 in 2011.

Of most concern is the median SGP of 19.5 percent for the district's grade 10 students in 2011. 10th grade ELA median SGPs fluctuated from 23.0 in 2009, to 40.0 in 2010, to 19.5 in 2011.

**Table 3: Mohawk Trail Regional School District and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)⁴
2009-2011 English Language Arts**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	63	42	67	44	67	40
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
Grade 3—District	59	NA*	69	NA*	70	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	51	40.5	46	43.5	43	38
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
Grade 5—District	68	62	62	44	64	50
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
Grade 6—District	66	42	72	43	61	47
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
Grade 7—District	60	53	79	61	70	49.5
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
Grade 8—District	69	31	66	43	83	48.5
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
Grade 10—District	68	23	71	40	75	19.5
Grade 10—State	81	50	78	50	84	50
<p>Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.</p> <p>*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>						

Table 4 shows that math proficiency rates and median SGP's for all grades in the district were comparable with the state; in 2011 both the state and district had 58 percent of students at proficiency and the median SGP for the district was 48.0, compared to the state constant of 50.0.

⁴ "Student growth percentiles" are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student's MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see "MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide" and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

Grade 3 math proficiency rates were slightly above the state level in 2009, decreased in 2010, but then rose to 78 percent proficient in 2011, 12 percentage points higher than the state proficiency rate in math for grade 3. Proficiency rates for the state increased each year, rising from 60 percent in 2009 to 66 percent in 2011.

Grade 4 math proficiency rates were comparable to state rates in 2009 and 2011, dropping in the year in between, with district fourth graders achieving a proficiency rate of 46 percent in 2011, close to the state rate of 47 percent. Median SGPs have been in the moderate range in recent years.

Grade 5 math proficiency rates in the district were lower in 2011 than in 2009, and median SGPs decreased in each year of this period. In 2009 the proficiency rate was 67 percent; it then dropped to 51 percent in 2010 and in 2011 increased to 57 percent. Median SGPs declined from 55.5 in 2009 to 43.5 in 2011, always within the moderate growth range.

Grade 6 proficiency rates in mathematics for the district and state were both 58 percent in 2011. The district's median SGP at this grade was low to moderate in recent years: 44 in 2009, 38 in 2010, and 42 in 2011.

District grade 7 proficiency rates increased from 34 percent in 2009 to 58 percent in 2010, followed by a slight dip to 54 percent in 2011. Median SGP for district grade 7 jumped from 26.0 in 2009 to 62.0 in 2010 and was in the moderate range, 53.0, in 2011. The state proficiency rate for grade 7 did not show much improvement over these years, going from 49 percent in 2009 to 53 percent in 2010, to 51 percent in 2011.

Grade 8 district proficiency rates have steadily increased from 2009-2011, from 34 percent in 2009, to 43 percent in 2010, and up to 54 percent in 2011. Median SGPs for the grade have also risen, from 34.0 in 2009 to 43.0 in 2010 and 48.0 in 2011. The state proficiency level has also increased, but at a slower pace, with 48 percent proficient in 2009, 51 percent in 2010, and 52 percent in 2011. The gap between grade 8 in the district and grade 8 across the state accordingly diminished, and the district 8th graders overtook the state 8th graders in proficiency in 2011: the gap went from -14 percentage points in 2009 to -8 in 2010 to +2 in 2011.

Proficiency rates for grade 10 did not change much at either the district or state level from 2009-2011; the district's grade 10 proficiency rate rose by 4 percentage points, while the state's rose by 2. The district rate was 67 percent in 2009, 70 percent in 2010, and 71 percent in 2011. The rate for the state was 75 percent in 2009; 75 percent in 2010 and 77 percent in 2011. Median SGPs for the district rose from 35.5 in 2009 to 57.0 in 2010, dropping down to 40.5 in 2011, the lowest median SGP for any grade in the district in 2011.

**Table 4: Mohawk Trail Regional School District and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009-2011 Mathematics**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Grades—District	51	41	55	49	58	48
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 3—District	63	NA*	59	NA*	78	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	48	46	41	47.5	46	58
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
Grade 5—District	67	55.5	51	47	57	43.5
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
Grade 6—District	53	44	62	38	58	42
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 7—District	34	26	58	62	54	53
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
Grade 8—District	34	34	43	43	54	48
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
Grade 10—District	67	35.5	70	57	71	40.5
Grade 10—State	75	50	75	50	77	50
<p>Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.</p> <p>*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>						

Table 5 includes a comparison with respect to achievement and growth in ELA of selected subgroups at the district and state levels, as measured by Composite Performance Index (CPI) and median SGPs. For all students the district's CPI and the state CPI are almost identical with an 87.4 CPI at the district level and a state CPI of 87.2. There is a difference of 10 points in the median SGPs with the district at 40.0 and the state at its constant 50.0.

The district's special education subgroup, while comparable in ELA CPI at 69.0 to the state subgroup at 68.3, showed low growth in 2011 with a median SGP of 36.0, lower than the state median SGP for this subgroup, 42.0.

The CPI of low-income students in the district is higher than the state subgroup's (80.9 and 77.1 respectively). As with special education students, however, low-income students in the district showed relatively low growth in 2011, with a median SGP of 37.0, compared to the state subgroup's 46.0.

The CPI of the white subgroup in the district is slightly lower than that of the same subgroup across the state, with a CPI of 87.5 for the district subgroup and 90.9 for the state. White students showed moderate growth in 2011, with a median SGP of 40.0, compared to the state median SGP for white students, 51.0.

**Table 5: Mohawk Trail Regional School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

	Mohawk Trail			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	599	87.4	40	87.2	50
African-American/Black	11	88.6	---	77.4	47
Asian	8	---	---	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	20	91.3	---	74.2	46
White	543	87.5	40	90.9	51
ELL	2	---	---	59.4	48
FELL	1	---	---	81.7	54
Special Education	137	69	36	68.3	42
Low-Income	248	80.9	37	77.1	46
Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different. 2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students. 3. "ELL" students are English language learners. 4. "FELL" students are former ELLs. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website					

Table 6 includes a comparison with respect to achievement and growth in mathematics of selected subgroups at the district and state levels, as measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI) and median SGPs.

For all students, as was the case with English language arts, the district and the state CPIs are very close, with a district CPI of 80.8 and a state CPI of 79.9. The median SGPs are also similar, with the district having a median SGP of 48.0 and the state one of 50.0.

The district special education subgroup's math CPI of 59.0 is slightly higher than the state subgroup's CPI of 57.7, but as was the case in English language arts, the district lags in its median SGP for this subgroup: it is 34.0, compared to the state median of 43.0.

The low-income subgroup has a math CPI of 72.2, higher than the state subgroup's 67.3. But growth for the district subgroup is low, with a median SGP of 38.0 compared to the state median SGP of 46.0 for low-income students.

The CPI of white students in Mohawk Trail in mathematics is a few points lower than the CPI of white students statewide—81.2 compared to 84.3—while their median SGP is just two points lower (48.0 compared to 50.0).

**Table 6: Mohawk Trail Regional School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics**

	Mohawk Trail			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	601	80.8	48	79.9	50
African-American/Black	11	59.1	---	65	47
Asian	8	---	---	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	19	81.6	---	64.4	46
White	547	81.2	48	84.3	50
ELL	2	---	---	56.3	52
FELL	1	---	---	75.1	53
Special Education	136	59	34	57.7	43
Low-Income	250	72.2	38	67.3	46
<p>Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.</p> <p>2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.</p> <p>3. "ELL" students are English language learners.</p> <p>4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.</p> <p>Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>					

Findings

Leadership and Governance

The Mohawk Trail Regional School District (Mohawk Trail) experienced much administrative turnover in the past while the central office worked to create a leadership team with the capacity to support an improving educational system. This turnover has contributed to an inexperienced administration, insufficient supervision and evaluation, and staff frustration.

When the present superintendent assumed leadership in 2005, the district was close to bankruptcy with only \$23,000 in reserves. Although he had no experience as a superintendent, he immediately focused on improving the district's finances and building his leadership team. One year after the superintendent began to lead the district, he hired a business administrator and together they reviewed the budget process, identified inefficient areas, and made business improvements in health care. They also developed a separate capital plan, realigned funds, limited the budget for each school based upon projected funding, and put in controls for fiscal management. By focusing on the finances the superintendent was able to increase the cash reserves, according to members of the school committee, from \$23,000 in 2005 to approximately \$3 million in 2011.

The superintendent built his leadership team in several ways, including not renewing contracts with some administrators and creating new positions. He hired some staff from within the district. In addition to the business administrator, hired as described above in 2005, a new director of pupil personnel services was hired in 2007, a treasurer and bookkeeper were hired in 2008; and a facilities director and a technology director have also been hired. With the hiring of the director of curriculum and assessment K-8 in the summer of 2010, the leadership team was complete. The team includes the superintendent, the business administrator, the director of pupil personnel services, the principals of the five schools, the assistant principal of the high school; the director of technology, the director of facilities, and the director of curriculum and assessment K-8.

The superintendent's work to build his leadership team resulted in a great deal of turnover in the district. The director of curriculum position has undergone a series of leadership changes. Of the five schools in the district, three elementary schools (Heath, Colrain Central, and Buckland-Shelburne) have had three different principals from 2008–2011. The high school/middle school has had two principals in the same period. (The Sanderson Academy, on the other hand, has had the same administrator since 2007.) In some cases, the present principal was a former classroom teacher in the school who moved into the position without prior experience.

The Mohawk Trail Regional School District encompasses more than 250 square miles with small elementary schools scattered throughout many towns. At one point, part-time principals, who shared their responsibilities with other administrators, supervised most of the elementary schools. Part-time administrators did not have the time to ensure that teachers were teaching what they were supposed to be teaching. According to the business administrator and teacher

focus groups, funding was reallocated to support improved supervision in these schools by hiring full-time principals, purchasing new materials, and providing some professional development. Full-time principals have only recently led each school.

Several staff members summarized the impact of the high turnover by commenting that new principals bring great ideas, new materials, and hints about the direction the school will be taking, and “then they’re gone.” Other interviewees indicated that the departure of principals affected schools greatly, saying that the “ship had a great crew, but no rudder.”

Staff frustration with the high turnover was voiced on several fronts. Teacher focus groups indicated that the evaluation process has suffered. Different schools have had different evaluation and observation procedures. Neither administrative nor teacher evaluations included suggestions for improvement and professional development. Principals supported the staff claim that evaluations were sporadic, depending upon the principal and the amount of time he or she was in the school. School committee minutes reflect a parental/community complaint that some teachers had not been evaluated in 15 years. Focus group discussions and a review of evaluation records substantiated the claim; one teacher had been evaluated once in 29 years. A review of evaluations showed that 66.6 percent of staff had not been evaluated during the 2008–2010 school years.

Also, professional development has been fragmented. Some professional development has been provided as a result of grants that the district or school received. Other professional development has taken place at individual schools. Focus groups and administrators indicated that information about professional development was not shared between schools. Often, information from a conference or workshop was not even shared within the school. MCAS test results were used to plan some professional development activities. Interviews and professional development documents showed that approximately 60 percent of professional development was school-based. The director of curriculum and assessment K-8 has begun to work with the administrative council’s principals to develop a data-driven, districtwide professional development program.

In interviews, local officials said that the superintendent has made good leadership decisions about the business administrator, director of pupil personnel services, and principals. Local town officials spoke highly of the creation of a system of transparency as a result of the hiring of the business administrator. However, there is no structured mentoring program for new administrators; the administrative council provides the mentoring. Rather than meeting once a week to conduct business, the business meetings are now biweekly, with the remaining two meetings in the month devoted to mentoring topics. New principals bring topics to the council meeting and the team of administrators discusses them. In the early part of the 2011–2012 school year there had also been one training for mentors conducted by the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC).

Principals attend school committee meetings and report monthly on the progress being made in their schools. Information is included in meeting minutes. It was noted by several interviewees that when budgets have to be cut, school administrators meet without the central office administrators. Principals have the autonomy to operate their schools as they so desire. When

staff vacancies occur, principals arrange for candidates to be interviewed. Teachers are invited to participate in the process.

Teachers in focus groups said that the director of curriculum and assessment K-8 has provided many professional development opportunities about teaching and learning. Administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals described her as being the major source of information on teaching and learning. For example, a new mathematics program has been implemented at all elementary schools, replacing the assortment that existed previously. Teachers were involved in the selection of the mathematics program. At the high school level, the principal is responsible for curriculum; the high school used to have department chairs, but those positions have been cut.

The superintendent identified as one of his goals for fiscal year 2012 to visit schools more regularly. He visited all schools monthly during September and October of 2011. Each visit included a meeting with the principal and a brief walkthrough of classrooms.

The past absence of stability among the leadership of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District has resulted in inconsistent, sporadic supervision and evaluation of staff and fragmented professional development. The absence of stability has also created lack of continuity in leadership initiatives, frustration among staff, and concern among parents. And the turnover among administrators has also led to inexperience on the part of some, which has not been ameliorated by a structured program of mentoring.

With the incorporation of new administrators in new roles throughout the district, including curriculum coordination, business, and in school principalships, so that a key team member identified in each of these areas, the district is providing much-needed support at all levels of the organization. According to many, the district is now poised to address issues such as curriculum, assessment, professional development, and a review of the evaluation system and its current implementation, issues that are discussed in the findings that follow.

The sixteen-member school committee evaluates the superintendent annually and conducts much business through subcommittees, including taking an active role in the budget process through its budget subcommittee.

In interviews school committee members said that they generally understood their roles and responsibilities. Members indicated that much of their training is gained “on the job” through subcommittee membership. The school committee conducts a large amount of business through its six subcommittees: education, budget, policy, personnel, transportation, and building. These subcommittees report on their meetings at monthly school committee meetings.

No members belong to the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), which provides its members with opportunities to enhance their skills in such areas as strategic planning, negotiations, policy development, and evaluation. In interviews, the reason given for not holding membership was fiscal. The superintendent indicated that new members receive MASC training. He noted that the district frequently hosts the MASC orientations for school committee members in the area.

A review of the school committee policy book showed several gaps. For example, the policy book indicates that the superintendent's evaluation will be conducted in May each year. However, the committee and superintendent have agreed to an annual evaluation that is done in December. Administrative evaluation forms include a section that states that evaluations are conducted "in accordance with school committee policy." However, there is no such policy in the school committee policy book.

A review of personnel files showed that the school committee has evaluated the superintendent annually using an instrument that includes the superintendent's job specifications. A review of recent evaluations of the superintendent by the school committee indicates that the superintendent meets the expectations of the school committee. Town officials and school committee members interviewed by the review team concurred.

The budget subcommittee is responsible for working with the administration to develop the budget. The subcommittee meets weekly between October and December. The superintendent and business administrator also communicate frequently with the budget subcommittee throughout the budget development cycle. Committee members said that the policy and education subcommittees also meet regularly. The school committee chair assigns members to committees annually. The superintendent communicates with the school committee chair at least weekly, generally more often. In general, the committee appears to have a fairly good understanding of their responsibilities with respect to setting policy, overseeing the budget, and evaluating the superintendent.

Curriculum and Instruction

Documentation of curriculum in the district is varied in form and in many cases does not have the elements of a comprehensive curriculum: standards strands, instructional strategies, resources, pacing guides, and assessments. In addition, the absence of a system for curriculum review/revision limits the district's ability to inform teachers about what and how to teach and whether students are learning what is being taught.

The district does not have standard curriculum documents in many key content areas, including English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Several documents are missing key elements of a curriculum. The district presented no curriculum documents for either the middle school or the high school, and most of the other documents are not correlated to the state curriculum frameworks.

In a review of a variety of documents and curricula, review team members found that most elementary schools in the district have recently implemented the standards-based Houghton Mifflin basal series for reading, one school uses the guided reading approach instead, and two others are moving toward this approach. Most spelling is taught using the Houghton Mifflin series, but two schools use *Words Their Way*. For writing, some individual classrooms employ the Writers' Workshop model.

The ELA program, which is outlined in a catalogue, is aligned with the state curriculum standards but is missing components, including assessments. In three schools, there is a move toward implementing a guided reading program, which will require teachers to provide an assortment of leveled books to their students. This is being done while simultaneously using the basal reading anthologies purchased by the district.

In 2010 the district adopted the standards-based Houghton Mifflin *Math Expressions* for the core mathematics instruction for kindergarten through grade 5. Implementation is taking place in all schools. Both administrators and teachers noted that although neither the Houghton Mifflin mathematics program nor the Houghton Mifflin basal reading series is perfectly aligned with the new Massachusetts curriculum standards, the district is starting to correlate the mathematics program with the new standards.

The team reviewed grades 3-6 science units, which were teacher-developed and based on the Understanding by Design model. The units are more comprehensive than many other documents, but assessment protocols are generally a list of activities. In one interview, teachers complained that the kits, generated by the development of the units, are “missing things.” The district did not provide any documents for a kindergarten through grade 2 or grades 7-12 science curriculum.

As mentioned previously, the district did not provide the review team with any curriculum documents for the middle school. Teachers and administrators in the middle school grades stated that they use the standards-based McDougal Littell *Math Intervention* series in grades 6-8; classroom observations confirmed this. Leaders and teachers also told the review team that the middle school grades have developed an element of a project-based curriculum, and that literacy is based on independent reading as well as on the Writers’ Workshop model.

Documents at the high school level consist only of the Mohawk Trail Regional High School program of studies, which is a course requirement sequence, not a curriculum. This document includes information about MCAS requirements and MassCore.

During interviews with district administrators and principals, the review team was told that the district has “no timelines or curriculum mapping.” However, interviewees said that with new standards it is “a good time to look at pacing and sequencing” and that this would be “a good next step for us.”

One district administrator mentioned that there is “no ongoing, systemwide committee that reviews the ELA curriculum.” Interviewees also mentioned that mathematics alignment at the high school level is delivery driven, not based on assessment, with the comment, “We’re not there yet.”

In interviews, administrators and teachers stressed that the mathematics curriculum for kindergarten through grade 8 is aligned and that the mathematics curriculum for grades 6-8 was selected for its alignment with the kindergarten through grade 5 program. However, vertical alignment is not evident in some crucial junctures, between grades 8 and 9, for example. While administrators and teachers mentioned that grade 8 teachers are talking to high school level teachers about placement of students, and that grade-level teachers have opportunities to get

together with other grade levels at professional development meetings, there is no evidence of any meeting for the purpose of aligning curriculum, either vertically or across grades. The district has a new five-year curricular plan that includes a component for a review and evaluation of curriculum and frameworks development; it is scheduled to be implemented in 2012.

District administrators said that the district is in transition and that currently there are no strong structures for discussing possible changes. However, the New England Association of School Councils (NEASC) has been providing a self-study process that is a model or format for holding discussions on topics such as scheduling and achievement. The district does not have aligned, complete curriculum documentation. Without a complete documented curriculum that is aligned to the state standards, and includes instructional strategies, pacing charts/timelines, curriculum maps, recommendations for teacher resources, essential questions, and assessments, both formative and summative, it will be difficult for the district to address the academic needs of all students in the district and ensure that all students' learning is based on a consistent, locally developed, and evaluative teaching practice.

There is little evidence of a common understanding among teachers and district and school leaders about what constitutes best instructional practices, and the district does not have a system for monitoring instructional practice.

Familiarity with instructional best practices is limited in the district. In general, purchased mathematics and reading programs seem to provide the foundations of instructional practice. Two exceptions to this limited view of curriculum exist. One is the current movement recommended by the director of curriculum and assessment K-8 to establish benchmark assessments throughout the district's primary grades in English language arts (ELA). The other is the movement toward guided reading in three elementary schools. At the high school level when a review team member mentioned the term "common assessments," the query was met with statements about "common finals," indicating some misunderstanding about assessment at this level. At the middle school level, the administration has developed a project-based learning period, which may mark the beginning of teacher-developed, aligned curriculum and of sharing data.

When administrators and teachers were asked in interviews about the differentiation of instruction in the district, both groups mentioned that Houghton Mifflin *Math Expressions* includes differentiated activity cards. During classroom visits a few other examples of differentiation of instruction were observed, such as varying the level of reading materials or assigning different homework.

Tiered instruction exists predominantly as a pull-out service or small group intervention provided by special education teachers or paraprofessionals. The review team found few examples of classroom teachers providing tiered instruction.

There is little common understanding of evidence-based, high-quality instruction in the district and there is no system for monitoring instructional practice. However, there is interest in and willingness to move toward both of these, as shown by the recent move toward the use of benchmark assessments in ELA in the district. A few schools have learning walks or

walkthroughs, though no formal protocol is used. Except for use of the very new benchmark data, there are no protocols for data analysis, and data analysis is not used to inform teaching practice beyond the review of MCAS data by the principal of each school. A few schools have data teams. A review of documents indicated that there are six teachers in the district who have participated in Sheltered English Immersion training.

For Tier Two instruction, three elementary schools use Heinemann's Leveled Literacy Intervention program, while others use an eclectic approach that includes the Wilson Program, Great Leaps, and Read Naturally. One of the elementary schools has implemented a Response to Intervention (RTI) program. However, at another school, in response to an inquiry about this program a staff member stated, "We're not there yet." With a new RTI consultant, the district is providing some professional development in tiered instruction this year.

High school ELA and science teachers are providing RTI services in mathematics at the middle school, with small groups of students working with these teachers during a study period. Recently one of the special education teachers, working with all grade 7 classes, was able to assist teachers to move from homogeneous grouping to more mixed grouping; teachers believe this mixed grouping may have helped increase the grade 7 scores. Although currently three high school level teachers are involved in professional development for tiered instruction, agreement could not be reached as to its use at the school.

Grade 8 teachers talk to the high school level teachers about student placement, but no formal structure exists for conversations about curriculum alignment. Several grade levels meet during professional development sessions; however, the practice of having a formal structure is just emerging, as exemplified by the alignment between kindergarten through grade 5 and grades 6 through 8 mathematics curricula.

Classroom Observations

To collect information about instructional practice, review team members observed a total of 50 classrooms across the district: 25 classrooms in kindergarten through grade 6, 9 in grades 7 and 8, and 16 at the high school level. Observers used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning. The tool contains 35 characteristics within 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, higher-order thinking, pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of student assessments.

Review team members are asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form. When the observational records of elementary, middle, and high school level classrooms were combined, there was solid evidence of three categories of instructional characteristics, in a range of 55 to 76 percent of the classes observed:

- The overall observed incidence of the four characteristics of **classroom climate** was 76 percent. The review team found the climate to be respectful, with clear routines and adherence to classroom rules. Many observers noted that rules were posted on the walls, and often were signed by the students who developed them. However, one characteristic

in this category was relatively low; only 46 percent of the teachers in the 50 classrooms visited across the district were observed to set high expectations for learning and convey them to their students. For example, a reviewer noted that some students were taking notes from a text while the teacher was lecturing. Some teachers routinely accepted one-word explanations from students without probing. However, another reviewer saw a more positive interaction, and noted that the teacher “pushed her students for more complete answers.”

- Secondly, the overall observed incidence of the three characteristics related to teachers’ good **use of class time** was 62 percent—the review team found that the teachers were prepared, materials were ready, and routine transitions were quite smooth. In one classroom, the observer noted that the teacher had whiteboards ready for her students. But one characteristic in this category was observed in a relatively low percentage of classrooms across the district. In only 34 percent of the classrooms observed did the teachers explain task instructions and provide choices for when the students completed their assigned tasks. One reviewer noted that a teacher told her students which books they could read after they had finished their assigned worksheets.
- The overall observed incidence of good **instructional pacing** and use of wait time was 55 percent.

Following is a summary of the observations of the review team members with respect to the remaining seven categories of effective characteristics of classroom organization and instructional design and delivery.

The overall observed incidence of the three characteristics in the category of use of **learning objectives** (the objective is clearly posted, referred to, or explained; consists of an identified learning outcome, not a task or activity for the student; and drives the lesson) was 25 percent in the elementary level, 30 percent in the middle school level, and 40 percent in the high school classes visited. One reviewer found a good example of a learning objective that was not just a description of a task. It read, “Students will solve logarithmic equations; identify and apply properties of logarithms.” In other words, the teacher is describing what he wants the students to know or be able to do. This contrasts sharply with a mere description of an activity, such as, “Students will finish the essay from yesterday.”

The overall incidence of the seven characteristics in the category of use of **content learning** was observed to be 41 percent at the elementary, 33 percent at the middle school, and 47 percent at the high school level. In this category students use prior knowledge, engage with a variety of resources, and engage in the curriculum in a variety of instructional activities that accommodate their learning styles. Of particular concern in this category is a characteristic about students participating in different or tiered activities based on academic readiness. The team observed this participation in 20 percent of elementary, 22 percent of the middle school, and 13 percent of the high school classrooms visited. Several reviews noted, “All students on the same task.” In one exception to this, a reviewer noted, “The teacher generated choices for the students to devise their own categories in sorting and some had more or less sophisticated ones than others.”

The overall observed incidence of the four characteristics in the category of **instructional techniques**—direct, whole group instruction, (lecture, Q&A, and modeling); guided practice; small group/pair learning; and independent practice—was 57 percent in the elementary classes, 36 percent in the middle school classes, and 44 percent in the high school classes visited. Of particular note is the fact that in 72 percent of all classrooms visited (76 percent of elementary, 56 percent of middle school, and 75 percent of high school classrooms), the review team observed whole group instruction via the lecture method and Q & A. Guided practice was observed in only 46 percent of the districts’ classrooms, while small groups/pair share was observed in 36 percent of all classrooms. Independent practice, in which a student has full responsibility to complete a task, was noted in 42 percent of all classrooms observed. In many cases, then, teachers have not branched out to incorporate methods of delivery other than whole group instruction into their regular practice.

The overall percentage of observed incidence of the four characteristics in the use of **higher-order thinking**, in which students are asked to examine, analyze, or interpret information; form predictions, develop arguments, or evaluate information; evaluate or reflect on their own thinking, progress, and approach; or generate clarifying or new questions related to the lesson goal, was 31 percent in elementary classrooms, 22 percent in middle school level classes, and 34 percent in high school classrooms visited. A reviewer noted that a teacher who was asking students about the weather in summer, accepted the response “It’s hotter,” and then moved on without a follow-up question. She could have posed a question such as “Why does it get hotter?” or “Tell me how else you know it’s summer?” In contrast, a reviewer noticed a teacher who asked students to generate graphs based on information that she had given them on bridge spans, and then to predict which style of bridge would be the strongest and why. Another good example of higher-order thinking was a teacher who asked, after a student’s response in a mathematics class, “Will it work for all numbers?” Also, some mathematics teachers were heard using the simple word, “Why?”

The overall observed incidence of the two characteristics in the category of **student thinking**, (students are engaged in structures such as “think-pair-share” or “turn-and-talk”; and use various means, orally or in writing, to represent their thinking and ideas) was 34 percent at the elementary level, 22 percent at the middle school level, and 19 percent at the high school level. In a positive finding, a reviewer noted that students “were ‘turn-and-talking’ to determine the choice of an upcoming project, which they could then work on together or alone.” Overall, the team observed a limited number of opportunities for students to share their work or their thinking.

The overall observed incidence for the two characteristics in the category of **student groups**, in which students inquire, explore, or solve problems together, and in which they are held accountable for their contributions to the group, was very low across the district: the incidence was observed to be 10 percent at the elementary level, 22 percent at the middle school level, and 16 percent at the high school level. As mentioned before, this low incidence correlates with the preference for whole-class presentations.

The review team looked at **student assessment**, in which a teacher uses at least one informal assessment (e.g., thumbs up, ticket to leave) to check for student understanding, allowing a teacher to adjust teaching in light of this on-the-spot informal or formal assessment and to give feedback to the student, and allowing students to revise their work. The overall observed incidence of the four characteristics in this category was only 20 percent districtwide—23 percent at the elementary level, 11 percent at the middle school level, and 19 percent at the high school level. Insufficient use of such assessments lessens the amount of feedback students receive, reducing the number of opportunities they have to improve their work.

One reviewer saw a positive example of on-the-spot student assessment when one teacher was observed “moving up and down the class, asking questions and observing work” and changing the format of a lesson because some students were not getting the idea of the lesson. Another teacher gave a quick quiz to find out where her students were in relation to the lesson goal. Overall, the review team observed few teachers gathering brief, formative data on student understanding of the lesson, such as can be gathered with a thumbs-up format.

The team’s observations in the classrooms visited in Mohawk Trail, a district in transition, showed that the incidence of effective instructional practices was low in several areas and that there is a clear need for improvement in instruction at all school levels. In general, the district has little familiarity with many of the effective instructional practices inventoried, a finding that accords with the curriculum documents having few instructional suggestions. An inconsistent evaluation program and the absence of walkthroughs or an observation protocol show that there have been significant missed opportunities to advance effective practices.

At the district level it appears that the conversations about best practices are emerging. One administrator stated (and others nodded in agreement), “We haven’t identified what best practices are, I believe I know what they are but it is a conversation that is waiting to happen.” Without new, vastly improved curriculum documentation, professional development tied to the curriculum needs, consistent observation and evaluation, and consistent application of evidenced-based instructional strategies that support student learning in every school, the district will find it difficult to move student achievement forward.

Assessment

All the schools in the Mohawk Trail Regional School District, with the exception of the high school, have recently introduced benchmark assessments in key subject areas (ELA and mathematics in the elementary schools, mathematics in the middle school) with each school analyzing its own data throughout the school year. The data from these assessments is principally used to tailor specific interventions for individual students and, in some cases, to inform the design of schoolwide initiatives.

During the 2010-2011 school year, the Mohawk Trail Regional School District introduced a set of benchmark assessments to the elementary schools and the middle school within the district, under the leadership of the newly hired director of curriculum and assessment K-8. Up to that

point, the district had relied on MCAS data when using student achievement data to make any changes, according to interviews with teachers in kindergarten through grade 12. Teachers and principals in kindergarten through grade 8 reported that before the introduction of benchmark testing in kindergarten through grade 8 reviews on student progress were not based on the timely analysis of student achievement data during the school year, as there was no systematic process for gathering and analyzing such data. On the high school level, most of the analyses of MCAS data were done at the end of the school year, according to interviews with high school staff.

Data provided by the district and corroborated in teacher and administrative interviews indicates that the elementary schools now regularly administer and review benchmark assessment data from Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) testing, unit tests provided by the new basal reading series that the majority of elementary schools in the district have adopted, and mathematics benchmark assessments.. The Northwest Evaluation System (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), a system of benchmark assessments, is now used in the middle school to track student achievement in mathematics. The district plans to administer these assessments in kindergarten through grade 8, depending on their utility, between one and three times a year; at the end of the 2011-2012 school year each school will have completed a full cycle of such assessments.

According to group and individual interviews with district teachers and administrators, in instituting such a system, the district is in the elementary stages of using student achievement data generated during the school year to make changes in a timely fashion, when they can have the strongest impact on student achievement. Elementary school schedules have been modified in some schools to provide for common planning time so that teachers in each school can begin to look at their own data. The director of curriculum and assessment K-8 has arranged a series of professional development workshops led by an expert on data analysis so that teachers can become more comfortable with and adept at using these assessments fully. These sessions began in 2010-2011 and have continued into the fall of 2011-2012, with other sessions scheduled for the remainder of the 2011-2012 school year.

Administrators are receiving their own professional development in this area, starting with gaining technical expertise in using ESE's Education Data Warehouse. Interviews with district administrators and minutes of elementary school faculty meetings confirm that principals are beginning to use faculty meetings to discuss the implications of the data about each school and to initiate discussions with their staff that are centered on teaching and learning and especially on improving student achievement.

In interviews, teachers and administrators discussed the impact of the first round of the benchmark assessments. They highlighted two major ways in which these assessments are being used: to tailor interventions to meet the needs of individual students who are not making timely progress as revealed by their test scores and, to a lesser degree, to inform the design of schoolwide initiatives. First, elementary school staff develop school schedules to ensure that students are placed in appropriate small groups and, when needed, have access to support staff such as special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialists in mathematics and other

subjects. Second, interviewees reported planning to use the results of the benchmark assessments given later in the year to change individual students' schedules or those of the grade or school. According to meeting minutes, special education teachers and the director of special education are integrally involved in these discussions and in some schools are the key personnel of the data team. This planning has also taken place on the high school level on a limited basis.

A review of individual School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and the District Improvement Plan (DIP) indicates that the systematic collection and analysis of formative and summative data from a variety of sources is just beginning to be used to inform these improvement plans and in particular, to decide the goals in these plans. A number of the key goals in the SIPs and the DIP do not have data to support their prominence in the plan or the choice of particular strategies that the school or district has made to achieve these goals. In the cases in which data is cited, only one set of data is commonly used. Few examples are seen in these plans of triangulating data from various types of tests, observations, or analyses of student work to ensure that the strategy chosen has a reasonable expectation to achieve the stated goal.

Hiring a full-time director of curriculum and assessment, although only for kindergarten through grade 8, has been critical step in the work of fully developing a system of using assessments to improve student achievement. Even though the elementary and middle schools have recently adopted the use of benchmarks and have provided common planning for teachers, over the years the absence of focus on student assessment data and its analysis has prevented teaching staff from using such data to improve student achievement. And the fact that the high school does not have benchmarks, relying on a few assessments such as end-of-year exams and MCAS, remains a problem. Without districtwide established benchmarks and the collection, analysis, and monitoring of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data, it will be difficult for the district to get a substantive and accurate picture of individual students, classes, and teaching strategies and to achieve the goals in the DIP and the SIPs that focus on increasing student achievement.

The teaching approaches and strategies used in the district are not informed by the systematic analysis of data from formative and summative assessments of student achievement, either standardized or developed by teachers.

A number of teachers reported in interviews that they regularly analyze formative data from their own classroom tests and formal tests administered by the district to determine whether the teaching strategies they are using are effective and whether they need to change or modify their instructional practice. In general, individuals and small groups of teachers initiate these analyses. These analyses have led to some significant changes in instruction and curriculum in at least one grade level within the district. In contrast, gathering and analyzing data on student achievement to determine whether particular teaching practices raise student achievement is not a regular practice in the district or in individual schools. In interviews, district administrators and teachers said that the administrators of individual schools and the district as a whole do not discuss the link between student achievement data and teaching practices in any regularly scheduled meetings.

Interviews with administrators confirm that this practice may be quite difficult to do in the district because there is no common understanding of the best instructional practices to strengthen the achievement of all students. District administrators also reported that there are no discussions during their team meetings about the link between the use of effective instructional practices and student achievement data. Finally, because many teachers have not been evaluated in a timely fashion, there is little discussion of such issues in teacher evaluations. Furthermore, an emphasis on using best instructional practices is not included in most of the staff evaluations that have been conducted within the past few years, with the exception of recent evaluations conducted on the high school level.

Minutes of the data team meetings and faculty meetings suggest that teachers and administrators have focused their attention on deficits in student achievement and on the support that the schools should provide to students who are not achieving on grade level. While this support is a critical step in improving student achievement, it has not been accompanied by an examination of whether current teaching practices used in the schools advance student learning or might be contributing to problems in it.

On the middle school level, each grade-level team, led by a teacher on the team with experience in conducting data analyses, uses its meetings during middle school teachers' regular common planning time and during lunch to carefully examine the benchmark assessment data item by item. The analysis conducted by the grade 7 team, for example, has led to the introduction of a fifth academic course, in project-based learning, that matches the mathematics skills and concepts taught in the mathematics classes to projects in the "real world."

The high school, as discussed above, has not instituted a system of benchmark assessments to provide information on student achievement during the school year. Teachers noted in interviews and in a report prepared for this review that they rely on final exams in most subjects and on MCAS data. Staff said in interviews that the teachers focus on covering the content of the courses in the high school rather than focusing on student understanding or mastery. Interviewees also noted that teaching in the high school is focused on delivery rather than on student learning.

Classes in the high school are also constructed in a way that makes it difficult to compare the use of effective teaching practices to improve student achievement, particularly in the absence of benchmark assessments. Most teachers are the only ones teaching a particular course within the school, just as most teachers in the elementary schools and the middle school are also the only teachers within their schools teaching a particular grade level or grade level and subject. In interviews teachers in the high school reported that they have used MCAS data at the end of the school year as well as end-of-chapter or end-of-course tests to assess student progress. However, they also reported that in past years the analyses of such data were rarely discussed in department meetings and were not reviewed with the entire staff. Former department chairs reported that they had not received professional development as a group to help them hold such discussions. In addition, unlike the middle school teachers, high school teachers currently do not have designated common planning time needed to have such discussions. Middle school teachers

reported using this time to analyze data to improve student achievement and to link it to a discussion of teaching practices, the only group of teachers to report on such linked discussions. In any case, interviews with members of the teachers' association, teachers in focus groups, and district administrators indicated that the end of the system of department chairs at the high school and the stalling of negotiations over a new collective bargaining agreement for teachers have led to uncertainty about who should or would lead discussions on the analysis and use of data.

As mentioned under the second Leadership and Governance finding above, data from benchmark assessments and MCAS tests on student achievement is also not the starting point for creating the major goals in the District Improvement Plan (DIP) or the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), as a review of the DIP and the SIPs indicates. In addition, many of the action steps listed in these plans do not require systematic data collection from a variety of sources to determine whether a particular strategy should be continued, modified, or discontinued in future improvement plans.

The introduction of benchmark assessments on the elementary and middle school levels is encouraging new types of conversations and new initiatives focused on student achievement within these grades. At the same time, there is a strong pull to maintain such discussions within the individual schools, with the possibility that the momentum and focus initiated by the district can be slowed or lost. Parents, administrators, town officials, and teachers spoke with warmth about the loyalty and respect they felt for the educational experience provided by their particular school. Interviewees made clear that the unique quality of each elementary school, in particular, embodies a value highly prized in the district, and for many, a major strength. In particular, many people want to ensure that the particular culture of each school and the community that it serves is honored and are not sure how the movement to standardize assessments throughout the district will affect these cultures.

With the hiring of a full time director of curriculum and assessment, although only for kindergarten through grade 8, the district is in the elementary stages of the work that is necessary to fully use assessment as a critical means of improving student achievement. Without strong leadership to extend and strengthen this work districtwide, it will be difficult for the district to continue this momentum and move student achievement forward.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district has made a commitment to creating and sustaining professional development opportunities for instructional staff. However, the district has not established a cohesive and systematic process for planning its professional development program and has not ensured a consistent pattern of conducting teacher performance evaluations to inform the professional development program.

Before the 2009–2010 school year, when a full-time curriculum director position was established, part-time personnel were responsible for professional development at the district level. The current director of curriculum and assessment K-8 was hired during the summer of 2010; a job description provided by the district indicates that the responsibilities of this position

include curriculum, assessment, and professional development. Some of the professional development duties include the advancement of programs and services based on district priorities, information about staff needs, some student achievement data, and assessments of instructional practices and programs at each school. In interviews the team was told that the high school principal, in cooperation with the director of curriculum and assessment K-8, is the curriculum and assessment leader for grades 9-12, with responsibility for professional development. The employment contract and job description for the high school-middle school principal does indicate responsibility for curriculum development; however, assessment and professional development responsibilities are not identified.

According to the Department's *District Analysis and Review Tool (DART): Staffing and Finance*, in 2010 the district spent \$174 per pupil for professional development, compared to the per pupil state expenditure of \$226. A review of spending in comparable districts shows that Avon spent \$115 per pupil, Holbrook spent \$124, and Hull spent \$89 dollars. Typically the largest expenditure included in these figures is salaries for professional days.

A review of district documents and interviews with district leaders revealed that the district does not have a document that describes the professional development planning process. There is also no policy that delineates the professional development process. The collective bargaining agreement between the Mohawk Trail Regional District School Committee and the Mohawk District Education Association, Article VIII.C.1, provides for a curriculum and staff development committee. The agreement calls for representatives from each school, elected by their respective faculties, and the school principals to meet with and advise the superintendent or his designee about the planning and scheduling of in-district professional development days. In interviews, a central office administrator, school principals, and teachers' association members said that they did not remember a recent meeting of this committee.

A review of documents and interviews with central office administrators, principals, teachers' association representatives, and teachers reveal that the professional development planning process has multiple sources. The professional development planning process relies on school-based information from staff to principals, online surveys, state mandates such as the Common Core "Mass 2011 Curriculum," the Mohawk Trail Regional School District 5-Year Curriculum Plan, MCAS data, District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) support to Buckland-Shelburne Regional (a Level 3 school), meetings with teachers' association representatives, and grade-level meetings in the elementary schools. A review of administrative council notes for the 2010–2011 school year indicates significant discussion about professional development. The planning process has resulted most recently in expansive opportunities as exhibited in the 2011–2012 Professional Development Calendar and the Professional Development Day Workshops: October–November 2011; however, interviewees gave mixed reviews to the professional development planning process and ownership in the final product.

In interviews, central office administrators said that the professional development process has only recently begun and needs more time to develop. Also, the only classroom observations that have informed the professional development process were those made informally by the DSAC

at the Buckland-Shelburne Regional School, at the request of the district. Principals expressed a conflict between meeting the needs of the district and meeting the needs of their school; 40 to 50 percent of all professional development is school based. Teachers spoke of the professional development not reflecting what is happening in the classroom because of few observations and little input. Representatives of the Mohawk District Education Association expressed concern that the curriculum and staff development committee, as specified in the collective bargaining agreement, is not functioning.

The responsiveness of the professional development program to the needs of classroom instruction is limited by the district's inconsistent pattern of conducting teacher performance evaluations. The team reviewed 29 randomly selected teacher files to determine the quality of the teacher performance evaluation system. It found that teacher performance evaluations were not being carried out in a consistent manner that would provide instructional details and comments intended to improve instruction. Only 10 percent of the teacher evaluations in the random sample had been conducted in a timely manner. Only 10 percent of the evaluations reviewed were aligned to the "Principles of Effective Teaching" accompanying 603 CMR 35.00.⁵ Only 34 percent of the evaluations contained informative, factual, instructional detail and 28 percent contained instructive comments about improvement. One evaluation (3.4 percent of the sample) recommended specific professional development.

A review of the current four-year cycle for the evaluation and supervision of teachers reveals procedures and criteria intended to affect both evaluation and professional development. Year one is a comprehensive evaluation to assess the skills of the teacher on all "Principles of Effective Teaching." Years two and four are intended to enable teachers to evaluate their performance and set professional development goals in consultation with the supervisor. Year three focuses on particular "Principles of Effective Teaching" determined by the teacher and the supervisor.

Interviews about the teacher evaluation process were conducted with the superintendent, principals, teachers, and representatives of the teachers' association. Administrators describe the evaluative instrument as difficult to use procedurally and teachers describe the procedure as difficult to interpret because of the uncertainty of how and when the instrument is being used. Principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels have recently begun to perform evaluations with a focus on teachers without professional status. Principals have also found it difficult to use and to interpret the evaluation instrument; however, they have also begun to realize the benefit of classroom observations to improve instruction.

The establishment of a full-time position to address professional development needs in kindergarten through grade 8 and funding for these activities have demonstrated the district's commitment to professional development opportunities for instructional staff. However, the absence of a representative districtwide committee to develop a district professional development

⁵ As these regulations stood before June 28, 2011, when the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to replace them with new regulations on the Evaluation of Educators.

plan has diminished commitment to the program. The district has not established a documented, consistent schedule of stakeholder meetings to provide a structured process to develop ownership of the professional development program. In addition, the absence of teachers' performance evaluations to inform the professional development process has limited the alignment of professional development to improved teacher effectiveness and student learning. Without responsiveness of the professional development program to the needs of classroom instruction, it will be difficult for staff to improve their professional practice and the impact of the program on students' achievement will be diminished.

Student Support

The district has established a number of supports for students from the preschool through the high school level, but not all levels have fully implemented Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies. The support system has a planned reliance on the use of paraprofessionals at all grade levels.

The district's Early Childhood Coordinator (ECC) works closely with early intervention REACH, a community organization that provides special services to children between birth and the age of three. The district's ECC screens those children entering the district's pre-school who have not been previously screened. In addition, there is outreach to families in the district's nine towns that includes story hours, workshops, and family events three times each year. Flyers in all the schools and town halls inform parents about these services, but interviewees said that the families that the district wishes to help most are the hardest to find. The review team was also told that preschool teachers make home visits before school begins to get to know parents and students.

Another support is the Child Study Team in each elementary school. These teams, which meet regularly, are concerned with students in both regular and special education. Teams are made up of classroom teachers, administrators, and support staff. The initial meeting might not include a parent but a follow-up meeting would. Teachers bring all pertinent academic data and social information to these meetings and develop plans for students who are at risk socially or academically.

Teachers in all focus groups said that students in special education receive instruction in inclusive classrooms but that there is some pull-out of students if there is space in the school and if the teachers prefer to work with small groups in a quiet area. Teachers said that students grow more in inclusion and that this model has really helped differentiation in the classroom. ESE data shows that although the district has a smaller proportion of students with disabilities in substantially separate settings or separate schools and facilities (9.5 percent and 4.7 percent compared with state rates of 15.4 and 6.7 percent), the proportion of students in partial inclusion is higher than the state proportion (47.4 percent compared with 20.8 percent), and the proportion of students in full inclusion is lower (38.4 percent compared with 57.0 percent) and lower than

the state target (56.8 percent).⁶ According to a district administrator, while 20 percent of the district's students receive special education services, the proportion of special education students among the district's school choice students was 33 percent.

The team was told that the district has many adults who take in foster children and that these children sometimes have specific social and academic needs. The district has only six English language learners but has a full-time teacher to provide instruction for these students. These students receive instruction using push-in-and-pull-out models. A review of documentation detailing the number of teachers who have received training in sheltered English immersion revealed that one teacher had training in category 1; one teacher in category 2; no teachers in category 3, and five teachers in Category 4.

Three of the district's elementary schools are Title I schools and students at these schools receive mathematics or reading support from Title I staff. The fourth elementary school is not a Title I school; the district has provided support to this elementary school by assigning a mathematics support teacher and a reading specialist. The use of Response to Intervention (RTI) varies from level to level. RTI has been established at the non-Title-I elementary school since 2007 and its data team, composed of the reading specialist, the special education teacher, the principal, and a classroom teacher, meets regularly. According to interviewees, the reading specialist has RTI experience and the non-Title-I school is ahead of the others in using RTI. School leaders said that professional development in RTI was offered to middle and high school teachers in June and August 2011; while attendance was not mandated, the turnout was excellent. Interviewees also noted that a district administrator had provided a consultant to work with teachers during the school year in developing an RTI model. RTI was started at the middle school in 2010-2011 in grade 7 and became available in grade 8 also in 2011-2012. Students were slotted into four-week groups based on their test results in both mathematics and ELA.

Team members were able to view a project-based learning class that is required for all grade 7 and grade 8 students. Students in this class receive support in mathematics by working on mathematics projects throughout the year. School leaders said project-based learning has become the key to a different kind of learning at the middle school level. One elementary school also provides enrichment groups for advanced students. According to data provided by ESE, in 2011 only 5 percent of Mohawk Trail juniors and seniors were enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses compared to 22 percent of state juniors and seniors.⁷ According to school leaders, the English department alternates between AP language and literature. An AP class is offered currently in environmental science, but the high school is working toward offering AP biology. AP calculus is given each fall to seven or eight students. This year, for the first time, AP history was not offered because only 11 students signed up it. According to interviewees, the prerequisites for admission to AP courses are loose but for a lot of students, participation is a "stretch."

⁶ See Indicator 5 in the special education data in School/District Profiles at http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/gis/sped_map.aspx?orgcode=07170000&.

⁷ See the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment tab of the District Analysis and Review Tool for Districts for Mohawk Trail, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ap/dart/>.

There are few before- and after-school programs that provide support for students. The expectation is that students will stay and work with teachers if their grades fall below a certain point. Grade 8 teachers require students needing support to remain inside during break. Some students at the middle school level also receive literacy support in small groups, but the time provided for this means that they are pulled out of physical education or electives such as music. At the high school the only official after-school program is the mathematics program in which math teachers remain after school on a rotating basis to help students. During the day the high school has an academic support center where a special education teacher and three paraprofessionals provide support. During the summer of 2011 the district sponsored a literacy camp for incoming kindergarten as well as grade 1 and 2 students. The district provided transportation to the 29 students who attended; according to the pre- and post data the district provided to the review team, the program was a success.

A district administrator said that a large number of paraprofessionals work in libraries and classrooms across the district and provide services that would be provided by professionals in other districts, though they also have duties such as monitoring lunch room and recess, duties which are not performed by teachers in the district. According to this administrator the Mohawk Trail district has a diverse population and a number of students who need paraprofessional support. Another administrator said that paraprofessionals are asked to “do significant responsibilities.” This administrator added that one of the district’s most gifted mathematics teachers is a paraprofessional who works in the academic support center.

Teachers said that paraprofessionals work with all students in the classrooms. In some cases, teachers develop curriculum plans with the paraprofessionals that allow them more easily to step in to provide instruction. Meetings between teachers and paraprofessionals can take place on a weekly basis and according to teachers paraprofessionals use their time well. Para-professionals are paid to attend meetings. In a focus group they said that they work with all students—special education as well as regular education—and that they believe their work is valued and that they are important in providing instruction to students at all district schools.

The district receives community support from the Mary Lyon Foundation. According to an interview with its executive director, the foundation is committed to supporting quality education in all the district’s towns. The foundation provides a number of workshops and conferences for teachers about a variety of topics, including an annual, two-day special education conference. The foundation’s Community Spelling Bee, an annual event, is open to all students in the district.

The district has provided a number of supports to provide students with assistance, including the significant role that paraprofessionals have throughout the school system. But though the district has provided some professional development on RTI and a consultant to assist in developing an RTI model, this work has not been enough to enable the district to implement a Response to Intervention (RTI) model throughout the district. In the absence of a fully implemented RTI model, it is clear (see above finding on instruction based on classroom observations) that not all students are receiving the tiered instruction that is crucial to teaching and learning.

The district is committed to providing a safe environment in all its schools so that the teaching and learning process will be conducted in optimal conditions.

The first goal and objective of the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and all School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are concerned with the provision of a learning environment that will be safe, respectful, and healthy, so that students can thrive and be successful. The plans detail the necessary steps that must be taken for the goal to be accomplished.

School leaders said peer learning is emphasized at the high school and that a teacher has developed a peer leadership course. The course is quite popular and two sessions are being held this year. Review team members were able to visit the classroom and found students eager to discuss the goals of the course and their role in disseminating information to peers. Team members also noticed many posters throughout the high school that displayed information about the goals of peer leadership. School leaders said that the goal of the course is to have students become more self-reflecting participants in their communities.

The review team was told that the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is being implemented for the first time in 2011-2012 at the middle and high school. Its implementation was said to be very good at the middle school and fair at the high school. High school leaders said they are committed to the plan and will continue to implement all its components.

In interviews the team was also told that there is a culture club at the high school that currently has four girls as members. Members are concerned with diversity and discuss feeling safe in the school environment.

The Responsive Classroom has been implemented at the elementary level for more than ten years, and much of the teaching staff has received the Responsive Classroom training. One of the district's elementary schools is fortunate to have one of the program's developers on its staff. One elementary school also has trained student mediators who are available weekly to meet with students and work at solving peer issues.

The district has taken significant steps in providing a safe and respectful learning environment for all its students and appears committed to continuing to take the necessary steps to ensure that students and staff are in an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and results in increased student achievement.

Financial and Asset Management

The district has adequate financial resources to meet educational needs.

In fiscal years 2010 and 2011 the district's actual net school spending was 24.4 percent and 26.2 percent over required net school spending (see Table 2 in the District Profile section above). Per pupil spending reported for fiscal year 2010 was \$16,215, higher than for comparable districts⁸

⁸ Avon: \$12, 747; Holbrook, \$12, 873; Hull, \$13, 009; Pioneer Valley, \$13, 078; Quaboag Regional, \$10, 765; Palmer, \$12, 054; and Narragansett, \$11, 439.

and higher than the state average of \$13,047. The students per teacher ratio as reported for fiscal year 2010 was 10.8:1, lower than the ratio for comparable districts⁹ and the state ratio (13.7:1).

Member communities regularly approve the school budget at Town Meeting and pay their assessments.* Separate funding for major roofing improvements was recently approved by member communities.

The district has financial reserves set aside for unforeseen and unexpected circumstances, primarily in the excess and deficiency (E&D), school choice, and circuit breaker accounts. As described in the first Leadership and Governance finding above, it is in much better financial condition than when the superintendent assumed his position.

Two key internal financial controls are not consistently implemented: monthly reconciliation of cash and school committee authorization for paying bill schedules.

A previous review by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in 2005 found that there was an inadequate system of internal controls for financial management and that data analysis practices are established but are not consistently implemented.

End of Year Audit Reports prepared by the auditing firm engaged by the district identified areas in which internal controls needed to be improved. In 2009 the audit report cited the need to reconcile payroll withholding accounts, to improve athletic department receipt procedures, and to improve cash reconciliation procedures. In 2010 the audit report cited the need to reconcile payroll withholding accounts and to improve controls over departmental turnovers (verification and controls processes).

The following internal controls were evident during the onsite accountability visit. Principals have access to the financial system, and can check balances and details of school accounts. Principals initiate purchase orders for their own schools, but cannot create a purchase order that brings the account into a deficit balance. Principals may request a budget transfer between accounts subject to the approval of the school business official. All purchases have to be approved by the school business official. Purchasing outside the purchase order system is discouraged. Before invoices are paid, the principal must provide an approval signature. The treasurer reviews the bill schedules before payments are made. The treasurer maintains and reconciles the check register.

There are two internal controls that were found to be inconsistently practiced: 1) monthly reconciliation of cash to the school fund balances, and 2) obtaining written school committee authorization of bill schedules.

Monthly reconciliation of cash to school funds verifies the amount of cash on hand for each fund. It is a necessary activity that must be accomplished in a timely manner each month as identified in the Mohawk Trail Policy Book under file code DI. However, the reconciliation had not taken place this fiscal year to date (July–October 2011).

⁹ Avon, 12.2:1; Holbrook, 14.7:1; Hull, 13.2:1; Pioneer Valley, 12.6:1; Quaboag Regional, 14.6:1; Palmer, 12.7:1; and Narragansett: 13.7:1.

Authorization by a regional district school committee of bill schedules is required by statute (G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16A) and is one of the legal responsibilities of the committee. The district's standard operating practice is to send an electronic copy of the bill schedule to the budget subcommittee for review and approval for payment. Under G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16A, a regional district school committee may appoint a subcommittee for the purpose of signing payroll warrants and accounts payable warrants. However, the review team was told that there are instances in which the budget subcommittee does not sign the bill schedule authorizing the payments and the payments are made anyway. Without well-documented, consistently implemented internal financial controls, there is a risk of financial problems that cause a loss of confidence by community members and elected officials and the needs of the district might not be met.

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

An essential component of effective district management is a well-conceived school maintenance and capital improvement plan that guides decision-making about facilities throughout the district. It provides concrete documentation of the needs and intentions of the district, and formally communicates the district's priorities to funding authorities and other approving organizations. Short- and long-term objectives, budgets, and timelines demonstrate organizational commitment to maintenance and capital planning. Effective planning requires that planners evaluate the overarching goals along with day-to-day details needed to meet the future needs of the district. The district's current capital plan is a multi-year laundry list of items that need to be done. It does not describe future needs of the district, nor does it involve all stakeholders of the school system in review and updates. A formal audit of the buildings has not been done, and the condition of major systems and subsystems is not documented.

The district uses a paper work-order system to manage the repair needs of the schools. While this enables tasks to be identified and completed, the system does not allow such reports as the average amount of time to complete work orders or the type of work that is performed, and the system does not provide information for data-driven decision making. Good data is necessary to inform good decision making. Maintenance plans need to be based on a foundation of accurate, comprehensive and easily-accessed data about all schools.

Preventive maintenance activities are listed in a spreadsheet. While activities are identified, the specific tasks needed for preventive maintenance are not delineated, and the completion of tasks is not tracked.

There is no formal orientation program for new maintenance employees, and consequently new employees learn about their jobs from other staff. Professional development for maintenance staff is primarily limited to information about asbestos, and vendors demonstrating how to use products. There are no staff and community surveys and therefore no formal means of obtaining feedback that could be used for continuous improvement.

There is no documented energy management plan. Without such a plan, the district does not have the information necessary to reduce energy consumption, minimize energy costs, and potentially reallocate funds to instructional programs.

The goal of building maintenance and capital planning is to ensure that the schools and the grounds are in adequate condition to support the district's mission. Day-to-day maintenance activities should be guided by a school maintenance plan that is informed by, and aligned with a larger organization plan. Without a coordinated plan, it is impossible to know whether day-to-day maintenance operations support current and future priorities.

Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

The Mohawk Trail Regional School District should build upon the current efforts to improve education by developing a comprehensive plan that provides specific direction for the district in the areas of governance, supervision and evaluation, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and facilities management.

Although the district has made a commitment to creating and sustaining professional development for instructional staff and has introduced benchmark assessments in the elementary and middle school grades, it does not have the systems needed to improve supervision and evaluation, curriculum and instruction, professional development, facilities management, and assessment.

Supervision and Evaluation

The turnover of principals and the past practice of having part-time principals may have added to the historical culture of ineffective and untimely administrative and staff evaluations and supervision practices. Full-time principals are in a better position to address evaluation and supervision procedures. However, the majority of administrators, including some in the central office, do not have much experience as administrators. Although some elementary principals spoke to the support from the biweekly administrative council and the information provided through DSAC, the district does not have a structured mentoring program for new administrators.

In June 2011 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new evaluation regulations to replace the previous regulations on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and accompanying Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00. As the district brings its evaluation system into alignment with the new state educator evaluation model, it must ensure that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback; that professional development for educators is aligned with the evaluation system; and that evaluators have professional development.

Professional Development

Professional development often takes place at individual schools and is not shared with other schools. Each school is not a separate district. There are five schools in this district and all schools may share many of the same issues. Professional development can and should include the following: data-driven instructional and curricular offerings, opportunities to share among grade levels and subject areas district wide, and opportunities to observe the best practices of teachers in other districts. The district should gather data to assist it in providing comprehensive professional development aimed at improving student instruction.

Facilities Planning

Facilities planning is also needed; it will allow the district to allocate funding on a cycle, maintain more accurate records, and could result in savings. An energy audit, for example, could allow the district to reallocate funding to support instructional program needs.

In General

It is critical that the district use data to drive its decision-making; comprehensive planning will bring stability to the district by providing the systems necessary to provide the leadership with direction and accountability. Thorough needs assessment and data analysis will drive the District Improvement Plan (DIP) to create a hierarchy of priorities, to be considered by the schools as they develop their SIPs to align with the DIP. The DIP and the individual SIPs should delineate the specific actions including timelines and responsibilities that each school needs to take to implement improvements. The district's systems can then be embedded at all levels to ensure consistent policies and procedures.

As the school district engages in this planning, the school committee should consider membership in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). Such membership would provide all sixteen school committee members with opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in such areas as strategic planning, negotiations, policy development, and superintendent evaluation.

Comprehensive planning will assist the district in focusing more fully on what is needed to advance teaching and learning and to prioritize those needs to make the best use of the district's funding sources. It has the potential to drive enhancement of all needed systems in the district and should be used to accomplish this. Critical to improving student achievement are regular and purposeful evaluations of administrators and teachers in accordance with the new state model, and professional development linked to district priorities identified in the DIP and the SIPs. Comprehensive planning will also provide the basis necessary for curriculum development, assessment, systematic data analysis, and instructional improvement.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should develop comprehensive, standards-based curricula in the core subjects.

The review team found that the curriculum documents provided by the district were uneven in scope; some were severely limited in their ability to affect or to connect to teaching and learning. Some grade levels had no curriculum documentation.

The transition to the new Massachusetts curriculum standards is presenting districts with opportunities to update their curriculum and ensure alignment to state standards. However, in Mohawk Trail most documents are missing one or more crucial pieces, such as alignment to state framework strands, performance-level descriptions, resources for teachers, curriculum maps, pacing charts, overarching essential questions, learner outcomes, assessments, and instructional strategies. Much more than updating is necessary for several documents. The district should develop comprehensive, standards-based curriculum in the core subjects. Once the district has a

well-developed, documented core curriculum, it will help teachers develop lessons; plan how what they teach builds on or relates in content to other grades or subjects; plan and determine instructional strategies; determine the sequencing and pace of their teaching; discuss student learning in the grade levels; evaluate and assess student progress based on a common understanding of what mastery looks like; and revise and refine the curricula.

The district should develop professional activities that will provide teachers and administrators with a solid understanding and working knowledge of “best practices” upon which to develop the instructional strategies that will improve achievement for all students.

The review team did not find common understanding in the district about instructional best practices. The term “best practices” has come to encompass the component parts, or indicators, of high-quality, standards-based instruction. Such indicators are divided here into two main structures: (1) classroom organization and (2) instructional design and delivery. Observations by the review team indicated some success in classroom organization, but a challenge for the district in the area of curriculum design and delivery. Observations showed insufficient familiarity with the components and implementation of best practices.

Though the observations by the review team represent only a “snapshot” in time, some “best practices” were not sufficiently evident in classrooms throughout the district. Team observations indicate that in the following categories performance was low: expectations for student learning, higher-order thinking, student grouping, student assessment (formative), and students sharing their thinking. The district should move its administrators and teachers into a deeper understanding of instructional best practices to provide strong instructional practices in all district classrooms.

Assessment

The district should continue to expand the use of data-based decision making as the foundation for determining critical needs, setting goals, and writing District and School Improvement Plans. This type of decision-making should include the collection, analysis, and monitoring of a range of qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources—teacher-developed as well as standardized tests—to inform the development of such plans, particularly the development of goals that focus on increasing student achievement.

As noted in the findings, the district has begun to introduce the use of benchmark assessments in kindergarten through grade 8. Teachers and administrators on the elementary and middle school levels have received professional development in using this data. In addition, the district has introduced new English language arts and mathematics textbooks in the elementary schools. These are two big steps, and the district has wisely chosen not to introduce other textbooks and tests in kindergarten through grade 8 at the same time, because it takes time and practice to learn how to use these textbooks and assessments wisely and well.

At this point, the assessments primarily concentrate on one type of data—quantitative data from benchmark assessments and end-of-year student achievement tests. However, such data is not, by itself, sufficient to determine interventions or make other important decisions related to student

achievement. Relying on only one type of data can lead to poor choices in many different areas, from choosing an intervention for a particular child or class to deciding on an entire school's schedule. At best, such data establishes correlation, but it cannot determine causation. Many other factors may be at play in determining student achievement, either of individual students or across the district or school. Other significant data, including peer observations of classrooms to determine how current teaching strategies support student achievement, looking at individual and classwide student work, examining projects that require critical or creative thinking, administering student and parent surveys, to name but a few examples, provides a more substantive and accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, classes, and teaching strategies than relying only on benchmark assessments. The district is encouraged to develop its expertise in using these multifaceted forms of data collection in all grade levels and provide teachers with the common planning time to use the data. Once the data has been analyzed, appropriate changes can be made.

Such a robust system of data collection and analysis would also address an important consideration brought up by parents, teachers, and administrators—the need to respect the unique culture of each school. Assessment, if done carefully and powerfully, is a powerful tool that ensures that every student in the district receives the education that enables that student to achieve at the highest levels possible. Once best teaching practices, clear learning objectives, and consistent expectations for student work are agreed upon, teachers and schools will have wide latitude to tailor their instruction and their assessments to meet students' needs.

In addition, introducing the use of formative, just in time classroom assessments will allow teachers to adjust their instruction at the moment when instruction takes place in the classroom as well as throughout the course. The use of such assessments will also allow students to revise their work based on the teacher's immediate feedback.

In such ways, a districtwide culture of data-based decision making that is uniform on student achievement and expectations for student work while tailored to the particular culture of each school will be maintained.

Finally, the district should include such data gathering such as the use of best teaching practices in teacher evaluations and analyze data from these evaluations to determine and monitor district wide goals and priorities.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should consider establishing a systematic and cohesive process for planning its professional development program that will represent all stakeholders and be linked to educator evaluations.

The establishment of a full-time position to provide professional development and oversight of curriculum and assessment in kindergarten through grade 8, complemented with a respectable program funding level, has demonstrated the commitment of the district to creating and sustaining professional development opportunities for instructional staff.

The district does not have a policy or other document that describes the professional development planning process. The collective bargaining agreement between the Mohawk Trail Regional District School Committee and the Mohawk District Education Association does provide for a curriculum and staff development committee, though administrators and teachers' association members said at the time of the review that they did not remember a recent meeting of this committee.

The professional development planning process currently has multiple inputs including school-based information provided by staff to principals, online surveys, state mandates, district planning documents, MCAS data, District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) support to Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School (Level 3 School), meetings with teachers' association representatives, and grade-level meetings in the elementary schools. Discussion about professional development also regularly takes place at the administrative council meetings. The planning process had resulted at the time of the review in expansive opportunities as exhibited in the 2011–2012 Professional Development Calendar and the Professional Development Day Workshops: October–November 2011; however, mixed reviews were given to the professional development planning process and ownership in the final product.

The professional development process had only recently begun at the time of the review. Principals expressed a conflict between meeting the needs of the district and meeting the needs of their schools. Teachers spoke of the professional development not reflecting what is happening in the classroom due to few observations and little input. At the time of the review, the teachers' association representatives expressed concern that the curriculum and staff development committee, as specified in the collective bargaining agreement, was not being implemented. In addition, formal classroom observations by school principals did not inform the professional development process because they were rarely conducted and not instructive.

A representative planning committee should be formed to address the issues and concerns expressed by stakeholders about the professional development process and to foster ownership in the professional development program. The review team suggests the director of curriculum and assessment K-8 as the chairperson of the committee because of the job responsibilities and available time. Representation of central office administration, principals, teachers, and the teachers' association on the committee should be determined by the superintendent or his designee. Representatives from the teachers' association could be selected by using the method specified in the collective bargaining agreement. The committee should develop the professional development plan using a documented schedule with specific timelines for meetings and agenda to ensure a clear and transparent process. The agenda should include the aim of the plan and be aligned with a district vision and district improvement goals. This would provide a focused effort on the established district priorities and an orderly professional development process with clear expectations. The plan should articulate the relationship between professional development and assessment, curriculum, and instruction with the intent to provide support to these three areas. A feedback process should be developed to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness and outcomes of professional development activities, with the findings communicated to participants and the school community. And as mentioned in the first recommendation above, professional

development should be aligned with the educator evaluation system. When professional development has a meaningful impact on staff and students, staff will have a greater investment in and commitment to it.

Student Support

The district should increase the supports available for students, including increasing the implementation of Response to Intervention strategies at all levels.

The district has established supports from preschool to high school. These supports include Title I services available at three of the district's elementary schools and the services of a reading specialist and a mathematics coach at the district's non-Title I elementary school. The district also uses paraprofessional support at all levels and has an unusually large proportion of paraprofessionals.

The district provides few before- and after-school programs but did sponsor a summer literacy camp that was open to all incoming kindergarten students and students in grades 1 and 2. Transportation was provided and 29 students attended the camp in 2011. An academic support center at the high school offers assistance daily to students with and without disabilities. And mathematics support is provided by high school level teachers on a rotating basis after school. The middle school grades provide literacy support in small groups during the day, but to receive this support, students must absent themselves from electives and physical education and music classes.

The district recently hired a consultant to provide workshops to train teachers in Response to Intervention Strategies; while attendance was excellent, attendance was not required. According to interviewees the implementation of RTI strategies was mixed throughout the levels. Some intervention took place in 2010-2011 and again in 2011-2012 at the middle school level, and one of the elementary schools has been implementing RTI over a period of four years.

The district should develop a plan that includes training for all its teachers in RTI and a timeline for implementation at all levels in order for students with varying learning needs to receive appropriate instruction and the interventions necessary for them to succeed.

Financial and Asset Management

The regional school district should conduct a review of standard practices with respect to internal financial controls and develop a monitoring system to ensure the controls are consistently implemented.

During the onsite review, two internal financial controls were found to be inconsistently implemented: monthly reconciliation of cash to the school fund balances, and written school committee authorization of bill schedules. Internal financial controls are designed to promote orderly, efficient and effective operations; safeguard resources against loss due to mismanagement, errors and fraud; ensure adherence to statutes and regulations; and provide reliable financial data in a timely manner.

Therefore, it is important that the Mohawk Trail Regional School District identify a comprehensive set of key internal financial controls. The school committee could engage an independent auditing firm familiar with regional schools for consultation. The district could also consult with other regional school districts and state professional associations to more fully understand and implement best practices that will strengthen internal financial controls.

It is suggested that additional activities that need to take place be identified, and current standard operating procedures be expanded to include them, with details such as who is responsible and how these activities will take place. To ensure that the internal controls are being implemented consistently, it is recommended that a monitoring system be put in place, including but not limited to establishing monthly reporting expectations.

Lastly, it is recommended that business office staff participate in the process of identifying the internal controls, creating the operating practices, and contributing to the monitoring system. This involvement will help everyone understand the importance of such controls and the expectations of the district.

The district should develop a formal building maintenance/capital improvement plan.

Mohawk Trail Regional School District does not have a building maintenance and capital improvement plan. Building maintenance affects student achievement/safety, protects the capital investment of the community, impacts the credibility of the district, helps to manage costs, influences staff morale, and helps to avoid equipment failure.

In developing a formal building maintenance/capital improvement plan the district should consider the following.

- Identify stakeholders who will participate in developing a unified organizational vision for building maintenance and capital planning, developing a sense of ownership of the final plan.
- Establish an accurate and comprehensive data collection process that will support good decision making and enable planners to consider the district's projected needs.
- Conduct an audit of all buildings to develop a comprehensive inventory that will be the foundation of facilities management.
- Establish an environmental safety program to ensure safe buildings. This would include identifying potential safety hazards and creating a comprehensive and documented inspection and response system.
- Focus on preventive maintenance. Regularly scheduled equipment maintenance will help to prevent sudden and unexpected equipment failure and also reduce the life-cycle cost of the building.
- Develop and implement an energy management plan. The cost of energy is a major budget item that is within the district's control. The review team suggests that the energy management plan include an energy policy, identify an energy manager, and monitor energy consumption with a view to decreasing the amount of energy consumed.

- Establish a comprehensive new employee orientation and professional development program for maintenance employees. This will help new employees understand expectations and enable existing employees to develop their skills.
- Evaluate building maintenance efforts. Program evaluation will enable district leaders to see which initiatives are working, which are not working, and which strategies to reconsider.

The plan is the blueprint for daily maintenance management, and provides concrete documentation of the district's needs. It is a formal way of communicating the district's priorities and establishes the necessary documentation for funding authorities and other approving organizations.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District was conducted from November 28–December 1, 2011 by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Coral Grout, Leadership and Governance

Ms. Mary Eirich, Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Sara Freedman, Assessment

Dr. Wilfrid Savoie, Human Resources and Professional Development

Ms. Dolores Fitzgerald, Student Support, review team coordinator

Mr. Roger Young, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following: selectman, Charlemont
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District. School committee: chairman and three other members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Mohawk District Education Association, Inc.: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, negotiations team member, building representative.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the central office administration of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District: superintendent, business administrator, director of pupil personnel services, director of curriculum and assessment K-8, director of facilities, director of technology. Focus groups with elementary, middle, and high school level teachers were also conducted. By request of the district administration the review team also conducted a focus group with a representative group of the district's paraprofessionals.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Mohawk Trail Regional School District: Mohawk Trail Regional High School (grades 7-12), Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 6), Sanderson Academy (kindergarten through grade 6), Colrain Central School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6) and Heath Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6).
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with two school principals.
 - The review team conducted 50 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects.
- The review team reviewed the following data and documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data
 - District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)
 - Data from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
 - Latest Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report and any follow-up Mid-cycle Report
 - Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report

- Any District or School Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) or ESE in the past three years
- Teachers' bargaining agreement, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial reports for the district for 2010 and 2011
- List of the district's federal and state grants
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools): Organization chart
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School improvement plans
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation and most recently approved budget
 - Curriculum guide overview
 - Kindergarten through grade 12 English language arts, mathematics, and science curriculum documents
 - High school program of studies
 - Matrix of assessments administered in the district
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in the schools
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Student and family handbooks
 - Faculty Handbook
 - Professional development plan and current program/schedule/courses
 - Teacher certification and qualification information
 - Teacher planning time schedules
 - Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
 - Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
 - Teacher attendance data
 - All administrator evaluations and certifications

- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Administrative Council Minutes (9/2009-6/2010)
- Educational Leadership Team Minutes 2010–2011
- Mohawk Trail Regional School District Early Literacy Plan, August 2011
- Pre- and post- test data results from summer reading camp, grade 2, July 2011
- Four attendance letters for different levels of consequences (no date)
- Overview of the Community Conversation Process Used in Developing the Foundational Commitments (no date)

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Mohawk Trail Regional School District, conducted from November 28, 2011 to December 1, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
November 28, 2011	November 29, 2011	November 30, 2011	December 1, 2011
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff:	HR & PD Interview	Interview with Director of Curriculum and Assessment K-8	Interview with High School Principal
Leadership with superintendent	Curriculum and Instruction Interview	Classroom visits :	Classroom visits:
Curriculum with Curriculum staff Assessment	Interview with district principals	Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School	Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School
HR &PD Finance with district staff	Finance Interview	Colrain Elementary School Heath Elementary School	Sanderson Elementary School
Student Support Teachers' Association	Student Support Interview	Mohawk Trail Regional High School	Mohawk Trail Regional High School
Review of documents	Finance Interview with Town Selectman	Interview with High School principal	Superintendent Briefing to discuss Emerging Themes
Review of personnel files	School Council Parent Focus Group	Student Support Interview	Emerging Themes Meeting with District Leaders and Principals
	Teachers' Association Interview	Curriculum Interview	
	On site interview with Sanderson Elementary School Principal and	Assessment Interview	
	Classroom visits to Sanderson Elementary School	Leadership Interview with Finance	
	Classroom visits to Mohawk Trail High School Review of personnel files; Review of Documents	School Committee Interview	
		Review of Personnel Files	

Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The Mohawk Trail Regional School District (Mohawk Trail) experienced much administrative turnover in the past while the central office worked to create a leadership team with the capacity to support an improving educational system. This turnover has contributed to an inexperienced administration, insufficient supervision and evaluation, and staff frustration.
2. The sixteen-member school committee evaluates the superintendent annually and conducts much business through subcommittees, including taking an active role in the budget process through its budget subcommittee.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Documentation of curriculum in the district is varied in form and in many cases does not have the elements of a comprehensive curriculum: standards strands, instructional strategies, resources, pacing guides, and assessments. In addition, the absence of a system for curriculum review/revision limits the district's ability to inform teachers about what and how to teach and whether students are learning what is being taught.
4. There is little evidence of a common understanding among teachers and district and school leaders about what constitutes best instructional practices, and the district does not have a system for monitoring instructional practice.

Assessment

5. All the schools in the Mohawk Trail Regional School District, with the exception of the high school, have recently introduced benchmark assessments in key subject areas (ELA and mathematics in the elementary schools, mathematics in the middle school) with each school analyzing its own data throughout the school year. The data from these assessments is principally used to tailor specific interventions for individual students and, in some cases, to inform the design of schoolwide initiatives.
6. The teaching approaches and strategies used in the district are not informed by the systematic analysis of data from formative and summative assessments of student achievement, either standardized or developed by teachers.

Human Resources and Professional Development

7. The district has made a commitment to creating and sustaining professional development opportunities for instructional staff. However, the district has not established a cohesive

and systematic process for planning its professional development program and has not ensured a consistent pattern of conducting teacher performance evaluations to inform the professional development program.

Student Support

8. The district has established a number of supports for students from the preschool through the high school level, but not all levels have fully implemented Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies. The support system has a planned reliance on the use of paraprofessionals at all grade levels.
9. The district is committed to providing a safe environment in all its schools so that the teaching and learning process will be conducted in optimal conditions.

Financial and Asset Management

10. The district has adequate financial resources to meet educational needs.
11. Two key internal financial controls are not consistently implemented: monthly reconciliation of cash and school committee authorization for paying bill schedules.
12. The district does not have a formal school maintenance and capital improvement plan to maximize and prolong the effective use of buildings.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The Mohawk Trail Regional School District should build upon the current efforts to improve education by developing a comprehensive plan that provides specific direction for the district in the areas of governance, supervision and evaluation, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and facilities management.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The district should develop comprehensive, standards-based curricula in the core subjects.
3. The district should develop professional activities that will provide teachers and administrators with a solid understanding and working knowledge of “best practices” upon which to develop the instructional strategies that will improve achievement for all students.

Assessment

4. The district should continue to expand the use of data-based decision making as the foundation for determining critical needs, setting goals, and writing District and School Improvement Plans. This type of decision-making should include the collection, analysis, and monitoring of a range of qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources—teacher-developed as well as standardized tests—to inform the development of such plans, particularly the development of goals that focus on increasing student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. The district should consider establishing a systematic and cohesive process for planning its professional development program that will represent all stakeholders and be linked to educator evaluations.

Student Support

6. The district should increase the supports available for students, including increasing the implementation of Response to Intervention strategies at all levels.

Financial and Asset Management

7. The regional school district should conduct a review of standard practices with respect to internal financial controls and develop a monitoring system to ensure the controls are consistently implemented.
8. The district should develop a formal building maintenance/capital improvement plan.