



Massachusetts Department of  
**ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION**

**Fall River Public Schools  
DISTRICT LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT EVALUATION REPORT**

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This document was prepared on behalf of the  
Center for School and District Accountability of the  
**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.**  
**Commissioner**

by a consultant review team consisting of:

Linda L. Greyser, Ed.D., Team Leader  
Rose DiOrio  
Dolores Fitzgerald  
George Gearhart, Ed.D.  
John Kulevich, Ph.D.  
James McAuliffe, Ed.D.  
Patricia Williams

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Members**

Ms. Maura Banta, Chair, Melrose  
Ms. Harneen Chernow, Jamaica Plain  
Mr. Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge  
Mr. Andrew "AJ" Fajnzylber, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Brookline  
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Dr. Jeff Howard, Reading  
Ms. Ruth Kaplan, Brookline  
Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater  
Mr. Paul Reville, Secretary of Education, Worcester  
Dr. Sandra L. Stotsky, Brookline  
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner  
and Secretary to the Board

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906  
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  
[www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)



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## **Executive Summary**

The Fall River Public School system consists of ten elementary schools, four middle schools, a high school, and an alternative school for grades 6-12. In the 2008-2009 school year the district serves 9,985 students. The district's student population is largely low-income (72.2 percent) and white (69.5 percent). Hispanic students make up 15.4 percent of the district's student population, African-American students 7.6 percent, and Asian students 4.4 percent. Students with a first language other than English (FLNE) make up 26.4 percent of the student body, 7.1 percent of students are limited English proficient, and 17.5 percent qualify for special education services. Although the student population of Fall River is comparable to the state for most subgroups, the district has a considerably higher percentage of low-income students (the state rate is 30.7 percent) and FLNE students (the state rate is 15.4 percent).

The district of Fall River has a long history of poor student achievement and insufficient progress. The school system made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate only once from 2003 to 2008. Currently, the district is in corrective action for both English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Three districtwide reviews conducted by the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), in 2002, 2003, and 2006 found weaknesses in the areas of assessment and evaluation; curriculum and instruction; student academic support services; leadership and governance; and business and financial management. The district was on "Watch" status under the guidance of an EQA monitor from 2003 until released from this status in 2007. School-level accountability reviews conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) led to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's decision to declare two of the district's schools to be "chronically underperforming."

In January 2009, in light of the recent resignation of the Fall River superintendent of schools, Fall River Mayor Robert Correia and Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell D. Chester agreed to have ESE send a review team to the Fall River Public Schools to evaluate leadership and resource management in the district. The team reviewed student achievement data and documents provided by the district prior to conducting interviews and classroom observations in Fall River from January 12-15 and on January 21, 2009.

Although the team found that the district has made some progress in such areas as curriculum development and alignment, professional development, and student assessment, the review revealed six significant weaknesses in the Fall River Public Schools. In the area of leadership, the team found that inadequate delineation of roles and responsibilities between the superintendent and school committee is deterring effective district leadership and undermining community support; that principals receive insufficient support from the central office; that the failure of the district to evaluate its programs and services leaves it unable to improve them; and that the district's human resources department lacks professional leadership as well as effective systems, structures, and procedures. In the area of resource management, it found that the district lacks adequate financial systems and procedures; and that Fall River will not meet its Net School Spending requirement for fiscal year 2009, its school appropriation having declined between fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2009.

Other weaknesses in the district include deficiencies in the evaluation of staff, from the superintendent on down; lack of strategic alignment among school committee actions, the central

office's improvement plan, and schools' improvement plans; lack of effective leadership and adequate support for programs for English language learners and students with disabilities; lack of adequate and affordable transportation, especially for high school students; and the part-time status of the school department's chief financial officer.

These findings led to recommendations in four areas: school committee governance; strategic implementation of improvements to teaching and learning; human resource management; and financial management. Among them are recommendations that the school committee build its capacity to function as a responsible governance team; that the district develop a District Improvement Plan accepted by all members of the school community; that leadership identify, advocate for, and protect resources needed for improvement; that the district provide principals with the resources they need; that the district implement sound evaluation procedures; and that an external audit of the district's finances be conducted as soon as possible. The team recommended that ESE, while providing guidance and technical assistance, use its authority to monitor the district to ensure that it makes progress in the four areas covered by the recommendations.

## I. Background

The first districtwide state accountability review of the Fall River Public Schools was conducted by the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) in December 2002 and January 2003.<sup>1</sup> The cover letter to the subsequent March 2003 report noted that the review revealed “for the period under examination (1999-2002), that the District has not met the standards necessary to assure on-going and continued improvement of student achievement and success.” The cover letter also stated that in spite of some isolated examples of effective practice, “[t]he examination did not find evidence of a consistent, coordinated internal capacity that would be necessary to implement or sustain future improvement initiatives.”<sup>2</sup>

A review team visited the district a second time in December 2003, after the city of Fall River entered into an agreement that EQA would return to conduct a follow-up review for the years 2000-2003. EQA published the team’s report in March 2004.<sup>3</sup> The review team rated many indicators as “Poor” or “Unsatisfactory” in the areas of assessment and evaluation; curriculum and instruction; student academic support services; leadership and governance; and business and financial management. As a result of this review, the district was placed in “Watch” status and was provided a former superintendent as a monitor.

An EQA review team reexamined the school system in December 2006,<sup>4</sup> and found that although the district had addressed some weaknesses cited in the prior review, the district’s progress was insufficient to have an effect on student achievement.

Fall River Public Schools have also been targeted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) for school-level reviews. Every year school-level reviews were conducted, from 2000 to 2006, Fall River had one or two schools chosen for investigation because of insufficient gains in student achievement. These reviews, along with student performance data, led to the

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<sup>1</sup> Under an amendment to Mass. Gen. Laws c. 15, § 55A, that took effect in August 2008, accountability reviews have now become a function of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE).

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability. March 27, 2003. *School District Examination Report: Fall River School District Tier II*, <http://www.eqa.mass.edu/home/uploads/fallriver03.pdf>, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <http://www.eqa.mass.edu/home/uploads/fallriver04.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The report of this review is available at [http://www.eqa.mass.edu/home/uploads/TR\\_479\\_1.pdf](http://www.eqa.mass.edu/home/uploads/TR_479_1.pdf).

designation of Healy and Greene schools as “underperforming” and Lord and Kuss schools as “chronically underperforming.”

As a result of clear needs in the district ESE has provided it with intense technical assistance to support districtwide improvements, as well as funding to implement improvement initiatives in its low-performing schools.

In early January 2009, Fall River Mayor Robert Correia and Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester agreed that ESE would send a review team to Fall River to take stock of the school district in light of the recent resignation of the superintendent. The mayor and the commissioner shared a belief that a comprehensive outside review of district practices could yield findings and recommendations that would benefit the school system and the young people of Fall River.

The review team spent time in the district from January 12 to 15 and on January 21, 2009, to gain an understanding of the district’s capacity to make and sustain improvements in the school system. The review was conducted using a protocol that included document reviews as well as extensive individual interviews or focus groups with the superintendent, key central office staff, principals, teachers, members of the school committee, parents, municipal officials and community leaders. The review team also conducted classroom observations<sup>5</sup> at 10 of the district’s 15 schools. Evidence gained from documents, interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations informs the findings and judgments made in this report.

## **II. Methodology**

The review team reviewed documents provided by ESE and by the Fall River Public Schools in advance of the site visit and reviewed additional documents on site and after the site visit. Before the site visit, on January 8, 2009, the team conducted an interview with the former superintendent, Dr. Nicholas Fischer, at ESE. Several team members watched video recordings online of Fall River School Committee meetings held between June and November 2008. In addition, the team conducted a series of interviews and focus groups in Fall River on January 12, 13, 14, 15, and 21, 2009, using standardized questions for each category of interviewee, e.g., district leaders,

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<sup>5</sup> A description of those observations is provided in Appendix C; the protocol for classroom observation and the indicators used are provided in Appendices D and E.

principals, municipal officials, teachers, community leaders, parents. Four interviews were conducted by phone. A list of the documents reviewed is provided in Appendix A; the interview schedule is provided in Appendix B.

The review team conducted the interviews individually and in groups with the following 137 educators, government officials, and other citizens of Fall River:

- Former superintendent
- Acting superintendent<sup>6</sup>, former chief academic officer/assistant superintendent
- Director of instructional services
- Director of professional development
- Director of school improvement and leadership services
- Director of student assessment and technology
- Director of early childhood programs
- Director of special education and student services
- Title I director
- District math consultant
- Interim chief financial officer for the Fall River Public Schools, who also serves as director of the Office of Management and Budget for the city of Fall River
- Assistant business manager for Fall River Public Schools
- Former business manager (by phone)
- Former executive director of School Operations and Facilities (by phone)
- Director of human resources
- Administrative assistant to the former superintendent (by phone)
- Former city administrator who served as interim city administrator for part of 2008
- All seven school committee members including the mayor who serves as chair (in individual interviews)
- Principals of the district's nine elementary schools (in individual interviews)
- Principals of the district's four middle schools (in two interviews)

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<sup>6</sup>On February 9, 2009, after this review took place, the school committee appointed the acting superintendent, Margery Mayo-Brown, as superintendent. See Addendum to this report.

- Principal of the high school
- Supervisor of the alternative school
- Focus group of 21 elementary school teachers
- Focus group of 12 middle school teachers
- Focus group of 20 high school teachers and department heads
- President and secretary of Fall River Educators Association (FREA)
- Treasurer and CFO for the city of Fall River
- Assistant executive director of Community Development Agency
- City auditor
- Current city council president
- Former city council president
- Focus group of 22 elementary, middle, and high school parents
- Two parents from “Fall River Parents and Citizens for Change”
- One parent who requested a meeting with the review team
- Thirteen community leaders identified by the review team, the acting superintendent, the former superintendent, and the mayor. These included the former mayor, the president of Bristol Community College, the chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, the editor of the *Fall River Herald News*, the pastor *emeritus* of the First Congregational Church, the chairman of the board of the Fall River Chamber of Commerce, the executive director of the Fall River Boys and Girls Club, the director of the Katie Brown Foundation (by phone), the president of the Citizens Union Bank, a member of the Governor’s Council, a local CPA, a financial executive who served on the Board of the University of Massachusetts, and the director of SER – Jobs for Progress.

The review team acknowledges and appreciates the participation of all individuals and groups interviewed as well as the assistance provided by the acting superintendent, the mayor’s chief of staff, and the administrative assistant to the acting superintendent in helping to arrange the onsite interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations conducted by the review team.

### **III. District Profile and Context<sup>7</sup>**

#### The City of Fall River

The city of Fall River sits on a hill overlooking Mount Hope Bay at the mouth of the Taunton River. Located 46 miles south of Boston, 16 miles southeast of Providence, and 12 miles west of New Bedford, Fall River's destiny was shaped by its waterways and the intense development of its textile industry in the nineteenth century. At the peak of its prosperity, more than 100 cotton mills housed four million spindles, second in the world to Manchester, England. In 1920, Fall River's population reached 120,000. Even today, close to downtown, one finds monumental Victorian architecture that echoes the affluence the textile industry once bestowed on the city and its residents.

Fall River's fortunes declined throughout the twentieth century. The city declared bankruptcy during the 1930s and the state controlled its finances from 1931 to 1941. Today, Fall River is an old textile mill town without its mills – a few closed, some burned, and most moved south during the last century. Replacement industry and commercial redevelopment have yet to gain the traction needed to boost the economy or the population (now nearly 90,000) to the thriving conditions of a century ago.

Municipal, community, and educational leaders interviewed for this report noted how Fall River today confronts the same toxic challenges as other urban centers fallen on hard times: high rates of unemployment and poverty, a diminished tax base, empty and foreclosed homes, abandoned commercial space, an increasing immigrant population with limited English proficiency, an elevated high school dropout rate, drugs, gangs, single-parent families and zero-parent families. Municipal leaders expressed concern that the current national economic downturn would combine with predicted losses in state aid to exacerbate the city's already weakened financial condition. They were reluctant to raise taxes, noting that the city tax rate was already pushing the levy limit. Some parents of school-aged children, however, told the review team that increasing taxes would be acceptable if the increased funds could be earmarked for the school budget.

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<sup>7</sup> Background history on Fall River compiled from the websites of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, the American Local History Network – Bristol County, and Wikipedia.

In multiple settings, the review team was reminded that the north side of town, north of Interstate 195, is relatively prosperous and middle class while in neighborhoods south of the highway, families and children struggle against significant social and economic odds. Was it any wonder, we were asked, given the financial travails and social hardships, that many citizens see little reason to support education? Simultaneously, however, other community members insisted that supporting the schools, raising standards and expectations, and improving education represent the best hope for the city's young people.

Although the community's ethnic mix has changed over time, the immigrant legacy of those who came to work in the mills can still be found throughout the city. And, in recent years, new ethnic groups have arrived to create today's vibrant mix of cultures. In these rich and contrasting historical and community contexts, the school system has worked to improve education for the community's young people.

### The Fall River School District

The Fall River Public Schools have experienced a year of serious and unsteady upheaval. The following description consolidates the major educational and financial events and trends that have occurred in the district recently and briefly describes how each has had an impact on the process of educating the community's young people.

*Student Demographics.* Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) data for the 2007-2008 school year<sup>8</sup> (see Table 1) show that the percentages of Fall River students by race and ethnicity closely matched that of the state. Of the district's 10,108 then-enrolled students (see Table 2), 70.4 percent were white, 14.4 percent were Hispanic, 7.9 percent were African-American, 4.7 percent were Asian, and 2.6 percent represented other racial or ethnic groups. See Table 1.

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<sup>8</sup> Data from 2007-2008 rather than 2008-2009 are used in the report for comparison purposes with MCAS data from 2008, the last time the tests were administered.

**Table 1:  
Enrollment Demographics  
Fall River Compared to the State in 2007-2008**

<b>Enrollment Percentages</b>	<b>Fall River</b>	<b>State</b>
<b>African American</b>	7.9	8.1
<b>Asian</b>	4.7	4.9
<b>Hispanic</b>	14.4	13.9
<b>Native American</b>	0.1	0.1
<b>White</b>	70.4	70.8
<b>Low Income</b>	66.5	29.5
<b>First Language not English</b>	28.8	15.1
<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	6.4	5.8
<b>Special Education</b>	17.4	16.9
Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Profile Data		

Table 1 also shows notable gaps between Fall River’s percentages and state percentages for selected populations. The district had a higher percentage of students whose first language is not English (28.8 percent versus 15.1 percent) and more than twice the state percentage of students from low-income families (66.5 percent versus 29.5 percent).

ESE ten-year trend data indicate that from 1997 to 2007, the students’ race/ethnicity profile changed. As the percentage of white students decreased by 15.4 percentage points (from 85.8 percent of all pupils to 70.4 percent), the percentage of Hispanic and African-American students increased. In ten years, the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in Fall River more than tripled (from 4.1 percent of all pupils to 14.4 percent) and the percentage of African-American pupils showed a 3.3 percentage point increase (from 4.6 percent of all pupils to 7.9 percent). During that decade, Fall River’s total enrollment decreased by 17 percent and was down 18.5 percent from its highest level in fifteen years of 12,409 in the 1994-1995 school year, according to ESE data. See Table 2.

**Table 2:  
Enrollment Changes in Fall River Public Schools  
1997-1998 Compared to the 2007-2008 School Year**

	<b>1997-1998</b>	<b>2007-2008</b>
<b>Total Enrollment K-12</b>	12,175	10,108
<b>Enrollment Percentages</b>		
<b>African American</b>	4.6	7.9
<b>Asian</b>	5.1	4.7
<b>Hispanic</b>	4.1	14.4
<b>White</b>	85.8	70.4
<b>Low Income</b>	51.6	66.5
<b>First Language not English</b>	32.9	28.8
<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	4.7	6.4
<b>Special Education</b>	15.4	17.4
Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Profile Data		

The district’s selected populations show the most dramatic change in the percentage of students from low-income families. From 1997 to 2007, that percentage increased by very nearly 15 percentage points from just over half of all enrolled pupils (51.6 percent) to two-thirds (66.5 percent). In interviews parents, teachers, and school, community, and municipal leaders all consistently cited changes in the demographic profile of the community and the pupils in the school system as factors in the district’s underperformance.

Demographic changes typically influence how districts redesign programs and prioritize support services to provide appropriate levels of instruction and services to their pupils. And in some cases this is evident in Fall River. But recent budget cuts caused the elimination of the English language learner (ELL) coordinator position in June 2008. According to Margery Mayo-Brown, who served as acting superintendent at the time of the review, a committee was formed to provide guidance and support to the ELL program. However, the responsibility for ELL programs and services belongs to principals and content area teachers, even though many of these professionals are not yet fully trained to meet the needs of ELL students. Meanwhile, the numbers of Hispanic and limited English proficient students have been increasing.

*Student Achievement.*

The Fall River School District has underperformed the state and struggled to make progress in advancing achievement for all students over the past five years. Besides inadequate progress

according to No Child Left Behind guidelines, one of the district’s most notable weaknesses is low relative MCAS test performance in Mathematics for all grade levels and subgroups, especially special education. Relative to the state, the district’s attendance rate is low, and the rate of in-school and out-of-school suspensions is high. Fall River’s graduation rate is quite low, and the dropout rate is quite high, especially for limited English proficient students, special education students, and Hispanic students.

The school system made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate only once from 2003 to 2008. In 2007, the district made AYP in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math; the district has never made AYP for all subgroups. In 2008, the district was in corrective action for both ELA and Math. See Table 3. Performance in ELA was rated Moderate, but declined from 2007 to 2008. Performance in Math was rated Low, and the district improved below target. The district did not make sufficient aggregate progress in 2008 at the elementary, middle, or high school level in either ELA or Math. Only one subgroup (Asian) made AYP for either subject (Math). The year before, in 2007, grades 6 through 8 in the aggregate made AYP in ELA and grades 3 through 5 in the aggregate made AYP in Mathematics.

**Table 3:  
Fall River Public Schools Adequate Yearly Progress History  
2000-2008**

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	NCLB Status
<b>ELA</b>	Aggregate	-	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Corrective Action
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	No	No	No	No	No	No	
<b>MATH</b>	Aggregate	-	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Corrective Action
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	No	No	No	No	No	No	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Profile Data

The district made attendance targets for AYP purposes at the elementary and middle school levels, but low attendance at the high school level (the high school attendance rate was 87.8 percent) contributed to a districtwide attendance rate of 91.6 percent, below the state rate of 94.7 percent.

Students also missed instructional time due to a high rate of out-of-school suspensions: 15.4 percent in the district compared to 5.8 percent across the state.<sup>9</sup>

On every grade level subject test, the district performed below the state by at least 8 composite performance index (CPI) points. The gap between district and state performance was wider in Math than in ELA at each grade level. The largest gap in Math was 16.3 CPI points in grade 7 (55.5 in the district compared to 71.8), followed by gaps of 15.6 CPI points for grades 8 and 10 (respectively, 56.4 compared to 72.0 points, and 71.1 compared to 86.7 points). District performance was mostly flat across grades, subjects and subgroups from 2003-2008. (See Appendix G).

Fall River students consistently scored below the state in the Advanced/Above Proficient/Proficient categories in both ELA and Math and consistently scored above the state in the Warning/Failing category. Of particular concern is the percent of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students whose MCAS Mathematics results fell in the Warning/Failing category (37 percent, 43 percent, and 42 percent respectively) although achievement levels showed slight improvement from previous years. See Table 4. Also of concern is the decline in MCAS scores for Reading for students in grade 3 and ELA for students in grade 4. See Tables 5 and 6.

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<sup>9</sup> These figures are from 2006-2007, the last year for which data are available.

**Table 4:  
Fall River Performance Compared to the State  
Percentages of Students in Each Performance Category by Grade  
2008 MCAS Test**

Grade and Subject	Advanced/ Above Proficient		Proficient		Needs Improvement		Warning/ Failing		Students Included	CPI
	District	State	District	State	District	State	District	State	District	
Grade 3 RDG	6	15	29	41	46	33	19	11	784	71.0
Grade 3 Math	12	25	28	36	34	25	26	14	791	69.0
Grade 4 ELA	4	8	25	41	49	39	22	13	784	65.9
Grade 4 Math	7	20	17	29	48	38	28	13	788	61.4
Grade 5 ELA	6	13	36	48	46	30	12	8	775	74.0
Grade 5 Math	10	22	21	30	37	30	31	17	775	61.5
Grade 6 ELA	3	15	39	52	42	24	16	8	772	73.6
Grade 6 Math	8	23	24	33	31	26	37	18	777	62.4
Grade 7 ELA	3	12	45	57	39	23	13	8	819	77.9
Grade 7 Math	4	15	19	32	34	29	43	24	830	55.5
Grade 8 ELA	2	12	53	63	31	18	13	7	805	80.6
Grade 8 Math	8	19	19	30	32	27	42	24	809	56.4
Grade 10 ELA	9	23	40	51	41	21	11	4	656	79.2
Grade 10 Math	18	43	25	29	35	19	22	9	636	71.1

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Profile Data  
Note: Other than in the last two columns, district and state figures are percentages.

**Table 5:  
Fall River Performance on the Grade 3 Reading MCAS Test  
2005-2008**

Performance Level	2005	2006	2007	2008
Above Proficient	NA	7	7	6
Proficient	48	33	38	29
Needs Improvement	40	48	44	46
Failing	11	13	11	19

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District MCAS Test Data

**Table 6:  
Fall River Performance on the Grade 4 ELA MCAS Test  
2005-2008**

<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Above Proficient</b>	4	2	4	4
<b>Proficient</b>	31	31	31	25
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	54	51	52	49
<b>Failing</b>	11	16	13	22
Source: ESE District MCAS Test Data				

In every grade, high percentages of Fall River special education students scored in the Warning/Failing category in both ELA and Math. And in every grade the percentage of Fall River special education students in this category was significantly higher than the percentage in this category of special education students statewide. See Table 7.

**Table 7:  
Special and General Education Performance on the 2008 MCAS Test  
Fall River Compared to the State**

<b>Grade and Subject</b>	<b>Percentages of Students in Warning/ Failing Category</b>			
	<b>Fall River</b>		<b>State</b>	
	<b>Special Education</b>	<b>General Education</b>	<b>Special Education</b>	<b>General Education</b>
<b>Grade 3 RDG</b>	38	19	36	11
<b>Grade 3 Math</b>	57	26	41	14
<b>Grade 4 ELA</b>	58	22	42	13
<b>Grade 4 Math</b>	55	28	39	13
<b>Grade 5 ELA</b>	37	12	30	8
<b>Grade 5 Math</b>	61	31	49	17
<b>Grade 6 ELA</b>	40	16	31	8
<b>Grade 6 Math</b>	73	37	53	18
<b>Grade 7 ELA</b>	46	13	29	8
<b>Grade 7 Math</b>	77	43	62	24
<b>Grade 8 ELA</b>	45	13	27	7
<b>Grade 8 Math</b>	81	42	63	24
<b>Grade 10 ELA</b>	48	11	20	4
<b>Grade 10 Math</b>	70	22	32	9
Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District MCAS Test Data				

The 2008 Fall River four-year graduation rate was only 56.0 percent, one of the five lowest district (non-charter) graduation rates in the state. Between grades 9 and 12, before their expected graduation, almost one-third (31.8 percent) of all Fall River students in the class of 2008 dropped out. Over four of every ten limited English proficient students, special education students, and Hispanic students dropped out of high school during the same period (these dropout rates were 42.2, 42.4 and 46.0 percent, respectively). Conversely, fewer than four of ten limited English proficient students, special education students, and Hispanic students graduated during that four-year period (these graduation rates were only 37.8, 37.1 and 39.0 percent, respectively). Thus, these Fall River students were more likely to drop out than to graduate from high school. See Table 8.

**Table 8:  
2008 Four-Year Percentages of Graduation and Dropout Rates  
Fall River Public Schools**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>No. in Cohort</b>	<b>Graduated</b>	<b>Still in School</b>	<b>NonGrad Completers</b>	<b>GED</b>	<b>Dropped Out</b>	<b>Excluded</b>
<b>All Students</b>	836	56.0	5.0	3.2	3.6	31.8	0.4
<b>Male</b>	419	50.6	6.4	4.1	4.3	34.1	0.5
<b>Female</b>	417	61.4	3.6	2.4	2.9	29.5	0.2
<b>LEP</b>	45	37.8	2.2	17.8	0.0	42.2	0.0
<b>SPED</b>	170	37.1	11.8	7.6	1.2	42.4	0.0
<b>Low Income</b>	478	45.8	6.5	3.8	4.0	39.5	0.4
<b>Afr. Amer.</b>	55	61.8	5.5	5.5	1.8	25.5	0.0
<b>Asian</b>	44	59.1	4.5	2.3	4.5	25.0	4.5
<b>Hispanic</b>	100	39.0	8.0	4.0	3.0	46.0	0.0
<b>White</b>	622	57.7	4.5	3.1	3.7	30.9	0.2
<b>Multi-race</b>	9	77.8	11.1	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Profile Data

To demonstrate the difference between state and district graduation and dropout rates, 2006-2007 data is provided. This is the most recent year comparable state data is available for all of the indicators in Table 9.

**Table 9: 2006-2007 Graduation and Dropout Rates  
Fall River Compared to the State**

<b>Four Year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>Fall River</b>	<b>State</b>
All students	54.1	80.9
General education	62.1	84.9
Special education	18.6	62.8
<b>One Year Drop Out Rate (Grades 9-12)</b>	<b>Fall River</b>	<b>State</b>
All students	9.8	3.9
General education	8.9	3.5
Special education	14.6	5.8
Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Data Note: 2006-2007 data was the most recent state data available for comparison purposes		

The district’s one-year grade 9 through 12 dropout rate for 2006-2007 was more than twice the state rate.

*Leadership and Governance.* During the past six months, key leaders have resigned from the district: the superintendent, the chief financial officer, and the director of school operations and facilities. Two directors of human resources have left the district in as many years. Already uneasy relations among the school committee, the last superintendent, and municipal officials grew more contentious over how funds from small grants from two private foundations had been allocated. This issue combined with other financial woes paralyzed the district’s leadership and governance during the latter part of 2008. Little other important school business occupied key school leaders for months, the team was told. As a result, community members, business leaders, and parents began to lose confidence in leadership at the highest levels in the schools and in the city. The work of district leaders, school administrators, and teachers was disrupted as morale dropped.

*Instruction, Curriculum, and Assessment.* District and school leaders and classroom teachers are working hard for the most part to set goals, implement curriculum, assess student progress, and support the teaching-learning process. But achievement still lags below aspirations in many cases. There are notable successes. The district has made considerable progress in recent years in aligning its curriculum to the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks* and in developing a standards-based instructional guide in English language arts (ELA) at the elementary level; it has

also developed assessments and begun to develop curriculum maps for elementary mathematics, to be followed by the development of a standards-based guide for mathematics. To support instruction and curriculum implementation, the district has made an investment in school-based ELA and mathematics coaches for all elementary and middle schools. At the high school, department heads function as teacher leaders and work with their content teachers to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The district leaders have also attempted to align additional professional development to improvement goals—with some success, although there is still much to accomplish in this area. Under the leadership of the former superintendent and the chief academic officer, the acting superintendent as of the time of the review, the district has turned its attention to creating new assessments, aligning assessments to curriculum goals, and using the analysis of assessment data to drive instruction and programmatic decision-making.

Benchmarks have begun to be used, and this year teachers and leaders have focused on the use of formative assessments in the elementary and middle schools while high school teachers have developed common quarterly exams in core academic subjects for the first time. These initiatives are still in the process of being perfected; proficiency in their use has yet to be secured in all grades in all schools; however, they have begun to make an impact on how principals lead, on how teachers teach, and on how students learn.

*School Finances and Resources.* We have already noted that the district is located in a community with a much larger percentage of low-income families and children than the state rate. The tax rate, although relatively low, is pushing against its levy limit, and so according to interviewees municipal leaders have little ability or desire to increase taxes. The school budget has operated in deficit for the past two fiscal years (2007 and 2008), and the district's budgeted Net School Spending for this fiscal year (2009) falls short of the Net School Spending requirement. Yet there are other complex and pressing financial problems confronting the district beyond the city's ability to raise enough revenue and allocate it to the schools. These involve systemic weaknesses in financial processes and structures, the loss of the district's business manager, and the city's temporary (at least for now) absorption of the oversight and management of school finances.

*School Building Program.* In 2000, the city engaged in an ambitious school building and renovation plan to move its school programs and facilities into the new century. The new physical plant, it was thought, could help improve the quality of its education system. Since 2002, the district has closed 24 small, antiquated neighborhood elementary schools, many built in the nineteenth century, and replaced them with larger, newer or updated facilities. In June 2008, faced with a budget shortfall for the 2008-2009 school year, the district decided to close 12—instead of 10—elementary schools and also redistributed the pupils from the two additional schools. In less than a decade, the district has consolidated from 32 schools to 15 and, according to the district’s preliminary data for 2008-2009, enrollment has fallen to 9986 pupils, down 18 percent from the 1997-8 school year. At the elementary level, in grades PreK through 5, 5129 pupils attend nine new or expanded elementary schools: Doran, Watson, Tansey, Spencer Borden, Greene, Silvia, Viveiros, Fonseca, and Letourneau. The four middle schools – Kuss, Lord, Talbot, and Morton – enroll 2356 pupils in grades 6 through 8. A new Kuss Middle School will open in September 2009 and a new Morton Middle School remains to be built. At B.M.C. Durfee High School, rebuilt and opened in 1978, there are 2330 students in grades 9 through 12. And, in a separate facility, 171 students attend Resiliency Preparatory School, an alternative secondary school with students in both middle and high school classrooms.

*Staffing.* Under the former superintendent’s leadership, the district hired a number of new principals and vice-principals as it closed older schools and opened new ones. He empowered principals to hire the most qualified teacher candidates. In addition, the former superintendent made progress in holding principals accountable for meeting student achievement goals. In fact, the former superintendent is credited by many in the community with raising expectations and creating a culture of accountability in the district. Evidence indicated that the school committee has been over-involved in hiring decisions and has not consistently adhered to the provisions of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The most recent financial difficulties in the district and in the city have meant layoffs for both professional and paraprofessional school staff, which in turn have meant an increase in class sizes.

## IV. Leadership Findings<sup>10</sup>

### A. Leadership Roles and Dynamics

**The school committee is involving itself in the management of the school district rather than focusing on making policy decisions. As a result, it is not effectively governing the school system or securing municipal and community support for the district. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

Information gathered from interviewees revealed that decisions made by school committee members are not always aligned with the requirements of the Education Reform Act of 1993. One school committee member stated that upon receiving a complaint from a parent, the member contacted the principal and investigated the complaint, at times even meeting with the complaining parent and the principal at the school to attempt to resolve the matter. In both instances, the school committee member circumvented the appropriate chain of communication, which begins with the superintendent. In another example, a school committee member's own statement indicated that the member had run for election to accomplish a personal goal that involved changing specific programs in the schools rather than supporting the broad educational needs of the district's students.

A frequent criticism of the school committee by community leaders, parents, and educators involved committee members' micromanaging, especially in budgetary matters. According to some interviewees, since the opening of school in September, almost all committee meeting time had focused on the minutiae of the budget, the lack of a system to manage grant funds, and issues pertaining to the former superintendent. Parents and community leaders told the review team that they were concerned that no other meaningful and appropriate committee business or policy had been addressed for months. Those interviewees noted improvement at the most recent school committee meeting.

In response to an inquiry about identifying three primary factors that have contributed to the underperformance of the district, key business and community leaders and parents identified the school committee as one of the primary factors, saying "[it] put personal agendas ahead of what is

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<sup>10</sup> A list of the findings and recommendations made in this report appears in Appendix H.

best for kids,” “they get caught up in micromanaging,” “Fall River is a patronage system,” “the school committee is seen as political—a starting point for becoming mayor, state rep., etc.,” “at school committee meetings, everyone is fighting everyone.” When interviewed by the review team the mayor, who serves as school committee chair, alluded to the “constant bickering between members” as a source of concern.

Some school committee members indicated in interviews with the review team that they do not fully understand their roles and responsibilities. Other interviewees were of the opinion that some school committee members understand their roles and responsibilities, but choose to ignore them. Since school committee members either lack an understanding of their roles and responsibilities under the Education Reform Act or ignore their roles and responsibilities, the result is a committee that does not function well and either cannot or will not deal effectively with the many important challenges before it. Parents and community and business leaders agreed that recent controversial conduct of the school committee has deepened an already negative view of the image of the school committee in the community.

Finally, only recently has the committee begun the process of establishing complete and coherent school committee policies, with the assistance of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.

In the opinion of the review team, a majority of school committee members do not clearly understand the nature of the committee’s specific governance role, their responsibilities, and their appropriate spheres of influence. As a result, the committee has not provided, at least recently, the leadership needed to successfully perform their role as trustees and stewards of the school district and meet their obligations under the Education Reform Act of 1993.

**The school committee has been inappropriately involved in personnel decisions.**

During interviews, district and school administrators told the review team that until the arrival of the former superintendent in 2005, the school system had historically been used as “an employment agency.” School committee members requested that appointments be made—and with an eye toward reelection rather than to improve the quality of the district. In fact, one

administrator said it was not uncommon to receive calls from officials requesting that friends be appointed to both professional and non-professional positions. The former superintendent was openly opposed to this practice and encouraged staff not to respond to requests for employment other than through appropriate and proper channels. While the practice was significantly reduced, some inappropriate activity on the part of school committee members continues. During the recent round of budget cuts for the fiscal year 2009 budget, some committee members asked who held specific positions before they would vote to eliminate or retain the position.

**The school committee has not used carefully planned and executed procedures to communicate expectations and evaluate the performance of the superintendent.**

By mutual agreement between the former superintendent and the school committee, once a year each committee member rated the superintendent's performance in seven broad areas: duties and responsibilities, relationship with the school committee, educational leadership, general management, budget management, personnel management, and communications/public relations. A number of expectations were listed under each area and committee members used a scale of 0 to 2 to rate the superintendent's performance for each one. A rating of 0 denoted "fails to meet expectations," 1 denoted "meets expectations," and 2 denoted "exceeds expectations." Committee members could include narrative comments under each rating and were required to include a comment for any rating of 0. The school committee's lawyer then consolidated individual evaluations into one format that showed average ratings for each item, an overall (averaged) numerical rating, and committee members' comments.

At the time of the review, there had been no evaluation of the former superintendent conducted for the 2007-2008 school year. When asked, school committee members expressed uncertainty about whether or not there were written or measurable goals for the former superintendent to meet. One committee member reported that "goals were set when the former superintendent was first hired, but that the committee did not always follow up on them."

Documents and interviews indicate that the procedure used by the school committee to evaluate the former superintendent was incomplete, untimely, and inconsistent with good evaluation practice. The procedure lacked written, measurable, mutually agreed-upon goals, goals that would

demonstrate the superintendent's role in achieving district and school improvement initiatives. The procedure also lacked indicators describing how these goals would be met and was not implemented in the most recent year. Accordingly, the procedure lacked effectiveness in terms of providing useful feedback and clear guidance to the former superintendent as he worked to improve the school system.

**The school committee lost confidence in the former superintendent over financial issues.**

**This ultimately led to the superintendent's resignation in December 2008.**

School committee members stated that they believed the former superintendent understood education well but did not exert adequate financial controls on the system. A specific instance occurred when the first school payroll that included all teachers for the 2008-2009 school year was generated in August 2008.<sup>11</sup> That payroll revealed that the school department had underestimated the amount of money needed to meet payroll projections and that there was a deficit of nearly four million dollars. The deficit was principally attributed to inaccurate personnel costs, the cost of health and other benefits, and underestimates for utility costs. It did not include a budget overrun of \$400,000 for the 2007-2008 school year. An investigation showed that the fiscal year 2009 school budget exceeded its FTEs by 16 positions even though 20 to 30 positions recorded on staff lists were still vacant. Because of the cumulative deficits, 93 teacher positions and 44 paraprofessional positions were eliminated from the school budget for fiscal year 2009.<sup>12</sup>

Lack of confidence in the superintendent's fiscal stewardship increased during school committee discussions about the handling of several small grants supporting the alternative school. There were questions about how the grant money appeared on the district books and about the legitimacy of several expenditures.

Several school committee members interviewed told the review team that they believe that the former superintendent was not truthful and withheld financial information. They cited his

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<sup>11</sup> The fiscal year 2009 city budget had been prepared by the interim city administrator by cost centers, a novel idea for Fall River. Because the city would be up against the levy limit for the first time and the actual cost to run the city needed to be ascertained, health and retirement costs were transferred to individual department budgets. During the summer of 2008, the city administrator projected a shortfall and notified the school department of insufficient funds for employee health insurance in the school budget.

<sup>12</sup> Eight paraprofessional positions were later restored.

unilateral decision to change an outside audit's scope of services: instead of a financial audit, which he had claimed was necessary, it became a management audit. In addition, some school committee members questioned the ability of the former school business manager (CFO), as well as the former superintendent's judgment of her capability, in light of the inadequate and inaccurate information they believe they received about school finances. The former superintendent expressed support for the former CFO's job performance, but support by other district and school leaders for her effectiveness in managing the school's finances was mixed.

Interviewees, including the former superintendent, acknowledged that problematic communication with school committee members and lack of trust from them were key factors leading to his departure from the district.

**School committee members have often demonstrated a lack of civility and respect at school committee meetings.**

Videotapes of school committee meetings between June and December 2008 show a lack of civility and respect by school committee members at their meetings. Interviews with community leaders and parents emphasized that school committee members sometimes were disrespectful to each other, to administrators, and to other presenters who came to committee meetings. Interviewees stated that interactions during the public comment section of school committee meetings included instances of impatience with and disrespect to the public. In addition, the focus of the school committee took on the use of alternative grant funds that ultimately led to the former superintendent's resignation in December 2008 left many community leaders, parents, and educators added to the impression that the school committee lacks the professional conduct and policy orientation that characterizes a well-functioning board.

Good governance is a key responsibility and duty of elected school committee members. Without it, one can eventually predict an erosion of community support for the schools, diminished respect for committee leadership, little trust in its decision-making, and a hesitancy on the part of good candidates to get involved and stand for election to the committee. Unfortunately, several of these characteristics are already present in Fall River.

**Municipal and community leaders, as well as parents, are losing confidence in the school system due to financial turmoil, controversy over fiscal deficits and procedures, school committee behavior at meetings, and the circumstances surrounding the departure of the former superintendent.**

Municipal and community leaders interviewed by the review team noted that the recent events involving the school committee and the resignation of the former superintendent, the disrespectful behavior of the committee at publicly televised meetings, and the constant turmoil over budget deficits and weak financial systems have undermined their support and confidence in the school system.

The mayor stated that although he believes the community is responsive to the needs of the schools, “We like to talk about it, but not pay for it.” In his view, there is also a “lack of evidence to prove that the district is effective in allocating its resources.” A former municipal leader noted that the importance of education in relation to other community needs depends on whom you ask, stating that there is a “high priority for education but not by taxpayers who are more interested in safety issues.” One community leader summed up what the review team had learned from a number of interviewees, that “the internal financial control systems in the city are very weak and that spills over to the school department,” causing a lack of confidence that has resulted in a loss of community support for the school system.

Community and business leaders and parents appreciated the former superintendent’s outreach to the business community. However, some told the review team that they believe that the superintendent did not have the requisite political skills to bring diverse groups together in order to garner support for the schools. Although business leaders said that they were impressed by reports of new programs, some wanted to hear specific plans without educational jargon and accompanied by precise information about what the business leaders could do to support school improvement.

Several interviewees mentioned that the school committee needs to “work more cooperatively” with stakeholders to improve the educational system in Fall River.

The final word about municipal and community support for the schools came from a prominent citizen-leader who laid the responsibility on the community itself. This interviewee said that there is a lack of a mandate from the community for quality education and that many in the community have not demanded or insisted on better schools for the city's children, even though the former superintendent articulated high expectations and a vision for the schools. Leadership to support and improve the schools, the interviewee added, has to start with the school committee because no outside entity will fix the educational problems in Fall River.

**The former superintendent made a number of positive contributions to the Fall River Public Schools during the three-plus years of his superintendency.**

During Dr. Nicholas Fischer's three-plus years as superintendent, from September 2005 to December 2008, he undertook a number of initiatives to improve the school system and demonstrated considerable success. Interviewees credited Dr. Fischer with establishing a culture of accountability and professionalism in the district by hiring new principals and supporting all principals as educational leaders. He gave principals authority to hire competent staff and continued the district's participation in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) initiative.

The former superintendent also raised expectations in the schools by insisting on higher standards for leaders, teachers, and students and meeting with community leaders and parents to explain his vision of a world-class school system for Fall River. He formed a leadership team consisting of senior staff that developed a vision, mission, and strategic plan for the district. Another group, the instructional leadership team, used the strategic plan in developing the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The former superintendent insisted that School Improvement Plans focus on student proficiency goals. The district developed a standards-based instructional guide and linked professional development to improvement goals. Fall River made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate for English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2007 for the first time since 2002, although it did revert to corrective action status in 2008.

Dr. Fischer hired a new leadership team at the high school, which soon achieved reaccreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). In addition, the new team was

able to turn around the school's culture and transform the student experience. These actions established a more positive image of Durfee High School in the community. Dr. Fischer also appointed a new leader at the alternative school, Resiliency Prep, where programs were expanded and strengthened. The alternative school obtained outside foundation grants to support its activities and recently moved to its own facility in a closed elementary school.

In sum, in just over three years under the former superintendent, the district was strengthened in a number of important components: leadership capacity, staffing, instruction, planning, and school culture.

### **B. Leadership Support for Teaching and Learning**

**The lack of strategic alignment among school committee actions, the central office's improvement plan, and individual schools' improvement plans weakens the collective effort to improve student achievement.**

The District Improvement Plan (DIP) for 2007 to 2010 addresses the key issues of literacy, mathematics, and safety, but it does not guide the education of all students in the district since it exists in draft form at the central office and has not been widely circulated. District leaders presented only one section of the DIP, that on safety, to the school committee.<sup>13</sup> Some principals reported they had copies, but most, when interviewed, said the DIP was still under development and they had not seen it. Members of the central office professional staff, on the other hand, reported that they have copies and that the DIP drives their work. The document is an internal rather than an external one.

Since a District Improvement Plan has not been approved, the school committee lacks a guiding framework for its decisions. Furthermore, individual schools have developed School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that are not aligned with the draft DIP, since few have seen it in its entirety. Rather, individual schools have developed their goals independently, without an awareness of district priorities. The lack of strategic alignment weakens the collective effort to improve achievement.

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<sup>13</sup> See Addendum: at its February 9, 2009, meeting, the Fall River School Committee voted to adopt the District Improvement Plan.

**The district has only recently begun to develop a curriculum and align it with the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks*.**

According to the former assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, who served as the acting superintendent during the time of the review, the district did not have a curriculum in place before June 2008. Fall River Public Schools relied on packaged instructional program materials, “curriculum binders” consisting mostly of excerpted units from textbook companies.

To lead the district in the development of a standards-based district curriculum, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction proposed a literacy action plan to the school committee in February 2007. The proposal contained five recommendations, all of which were adopted by the school committee. One recommendation in the literacy action plan was to develop a standards-based instructional guide for pre-kindergarten to grade 5. The assistant superintendent, the director of professional development, and literacy coaches worked with a consultant through June 2008 to develop the guide. The standards-based instructional guide was introduced to teachers during two full-release professional development days in fall 2008. The district engaged in a reiterative process with teachers by introducing the guide one standard at a time, making adjustments in response to teacher feedback. District leadership indicated that the elementary level was the starting point for curriculum development because it had the greatest needs for curriculum alignment and for consistency in the use of effective instructional approaches in reading and writing. The standards-based instructional guide has shifted practice away from reliance on the basal reading program by incorporating instructional approaches similar to the America’s Choice Readers and Writers workshop model used by ELA teachers in grades 6-8.

The district presented a mathematics action plan to the school committee in spring 2008, and the school committee accepted the district’s recommendations. The district has begun to pilot math curriculum maps in kindergarten and grade 1 and is in the process of developing curriculum maps for grade 2. District leadership indicated that the plan is to continue to pilot curriculum maps as they are developed.

Although the district is now taking steps to develop an aligned curriculum, the failure to align the curriculum with the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks* in earlier years has clearly contributed

to the district's poor MCAS test performance and inadequate progress in improving student achievement..

**Professional development in Fall River is largely school-based, job-embedded, designed to help teachers meet students' instructional needs, and determined from an analysis of student performance assessments.**

The professional development program in Fall River addresses both district and individual teacher priorities. Central office administrators and principals told the team that the primary purpose of the program is to improve instruction in the domains addressed in the district and individual School Improvement Plans as well as to help teachers meet recertification requirements. Coaches and department heads help teachers understand and use the strategies and methods from professional development training sessions, and principals are increasingly responsible for holding teachers accountable for implementing them.

The professional development program is offered during three full professional development days each year—two before the opening of school and one at mid-year—and for two hours after school each month, amounting to 20 hours after school each year. At the high school, there are also two early release days each quarter. According to contract, teachers are obligated for the three full-day sessions and for the 20 hours after school, and high school teachers are obligated for the early release days. Teachers are compensated at the rate of 30 dollars per hour for voluntary additional sessions, including summer workshops. This professional development is in addition to the coaching by ELA and math coaches at all schools for grades PreK through 8.

In interviews, central office administrators told the review team that the district's instructional leadership team, consisting of the directors of school improvement and leadership services, instructional services, student assessment, and early childhood programs developed the training topics for the professional development program. They based their planning on an analysis of the results of state and local assessments, direct observations of the district's classrooms, and conversations with principals during school review visits. The administrators added that the district surveys teachers periodically to determine their recertification requirements and offers workshops and courses based on those needs.

Professional development in Fall River is largely school-based and job-embedded. The district's 32 coaches for grades K through 8 provide training during common planning time, after school, on professional development days, and during summer workshops. Coaches also teach demonstration lessons, observe teachers implementing strategies and methods, and provide feedback. At the elementary level, coaches help teachers implement the workshop model in reading and writing. At the middle school level, coaches work with content area teachers on implementing the curriculum. The district also requires principals to submit program plans for after-school and full professional days, including information on the relevancy of the topics to School Improvement Plan goals and the data substantiating the need.

At grades 9 through 12, the department heads are the teacher leaders. They provide content-based professional development during department meetings and help arrange for sessions on relevant topics by external experts on full professional development days. The high school is implementing newly developed quarterly common assessments for the first time in this 2008-2009 school year; teachers are reviewing the results with their department heads on the two early release days each quarter.

Both central office administrators and principals told the review team that job-embedded professional development has been effective in improving teachers' instructional practices. Elementary principals told the team that they expect teachers in their schools to employ the strategies from professional development, and look for evidence in walkthroughs and formal observations. They went on to say that while summer professional development workshops are paid but voluntary, teachers are held responsible for the content even if they did not attend. This was because the district believes that professional development is critical to improving teacher performance and student achievement.

However, central office administrators said that the numerous components of the professional development program have not been assessed either by teachers or by planners. Although teachers are sometimes requested to complete evaluation forms at the conclusion of a course or workshop,

the responses are not tabulated, and there is no system for developing findings and recommendations to improve professional development programs.

**The former superintendent gave principals leadership training and autonomy in hiring their own staff, and held principals accountable for results.**

Principals reported that the former superintendent held them responsible for improving the achievement of students in their buildings. In their twice-yearly meetings, referred to as the “grill and chill” meetings, he questioned them aggressively concerning areas in which their scores indicated a continuing need for improvement. His mantra was that all children can learn, and he emphasized with the principals that they were working in a “no excuses” environment. He continually emphasized the use of data to guide and monitor classroom instruction. During his superintendency, to enable them to become effective leaders, two cohorts of administrators and aspiring administrators received powerful and focused National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training. He also brought consultants into the district to train principals to write more descriptive teacher evaluations and meaningful improvement plans. In addition, the former superintendent allowed them to hire their own staff, a function previously denied them. He replaced principals unable to meet his expectations. In an important instance, he went outside the system to hire the high school principal and gave him the authority to bring order and stability to the school. Principals reported in interviews that they understand that they have the authority and responsibility to improve student achievement in their buildings. The former superintendent moved the system forward by redefining principals’ roles.

**Although principals have authority in their own buildings, school leaders receive insufficient mentoring and inadequate support from the central office in the critical areas of teacher hiring and evaluation, their school’s budget, and the acquisition of necessary instructional materials and supplies. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

New principals do not always have district-based mentors, and central office support is available upon request rather than as a built-in system. Also, as described later in this report, the district lacks an effective principal evaluation tool. Without such a tool, the principals’ work is not always focused on core district and school goals. Principals, in turn, needing to improve instruction in every classroom, lack an effective tool for teacher evaluations. Many teachers themselves referred

to the current tool as a “joke.” Principals also cited cumbersome human resources procedures that make the hiring of new teachers a complex process with little support from the central office.

Principals reported that they have no input into development of the budget for their schools and, once their school budget is established, have no information concerning where their budget stands. The district lacks efficient systems for processing purchase orders or seeing to the payment of outstanding bills: principals are called by vendors seeking payments, sometimes for invoices dated a year before. As a result, classrooms frequently lack instructional materials and supplies even if schools have attempted to place orders.

Because principals lack the tools and the ready access to central office supports that they need, their time and attention are diverted from school improvement efforts.

**The Fall River Educators Association (FREA) has constrained several educational initiatives in the district and has not taken enough steps to become a partner in educational improvement efforts.**

The FREA leaders mentioned that the expanded learning time grant and the ELA standards-based curriculum were two initiatives the association supported to improve student achievement.

However, educators, community leaders, and parents voiced concerns about the constraints the association has imposed on the district in recent years. According to information provided to the review team by the FREA, the teachers’ association has filed numerous (77) formal grievances since the 2005-2006 school year. Due to the time needed to address grievance issues, both principals and district administrators have had less time to devote to other pressing educational matters. Also, the grievances have distracted the association from playing a more positive role in improving teaching and learning. Interviewees cited the example of the newly developed teacher evaluation instrument that was piloted in the district for a year and a half, then placed “on hold” because the association had not yet voted on it. FREA leaders confirmed that the new teacher evaluation instrument is on hold as a result of the need to “clear up the grievances” before it can be addressed.

Interviewees raised concerns about the following provisions in the teachers’ contract:

- The amount of time teachers are required to be at school is 10 minutes before school and five minutes after the regular school day.
- Teachers cannot be required to include references to the state curriculum standards in their written lesson plans.
- Teachers can be required to attend faculty, curriculum or professional development meetings after school for only two hours per month; beyond those two hours teachers must receive financial compensation for attending.
- A seniority clause prevents the most capable teachers from keeping their jobs when positions are eliminated for financial reasons.

There was general agreement, especially on the part of parents, that the district and its students could benefit from the full participation of the association in support of improvement efforts.

### **C. Use of Assessment, Program Evaluation, and Student Support**

**The district has begun to develop a systematic student assessment program consisting of formative benchmark assessments and summative assessments. Although not yet proficient, principals and teachers are becoming more agile in the use and analysis of assessment data.**

According to the draft of the District Improvement Plan, “the strategic priority is to continue to develop and expand an assessment system to provide teachers with student performance data necessary to make instructional decisions for improved teaching and learning.” In interviews across the district the visiting team was told that there is a focus on developing formative assessments to inform instruction as a supplement to the district’s summative assessments. Those measures include the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) in grades K through 5 as well as the GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) in grades 1 through 5 and Math ADD vantage in grades K through 2. Assessments at the middle and high school, which are mostly locally developed, are not as uniform as assessments at the elementary schools, and middle school assessments are limited to end-of-chapter tests and some benchmarks. In 2007-2008 the high school developed common quarterly exams in all content areas that are being piloted during the 2008-2009 school year. However, according to interviewees the district is “not yet there with benchmarks.”

The district provided the visiting team with binders showing results of summative assessments such as the MCAS as well as an analysis of all the above mentioned assessments. The district has also provided TestWiz capability so that principals and coaches have the means to disaggregate data in order to identify what to address in order to improve student achievement. District administrators said that while teachers have “tons of data” they do not know how to use it well to plan for instruction.

Interviewees said that teachers are too focused on implementing programs and rely on assessments to see how well students meet grade level targets rather than using them to focus on the learning needs of individual students. For example, a district administrator noted the “huge” lack of formative assessment in math and said that although teachers can do pre- and post-tests, they are not considering what happens in the four to six weeks between the pre- and post-tests. A common theme throughout interviews was that “teachers need to get a feeling for where kids are in order to get instruction to where it should be.” Formative assessments could help teachers tailor instruction better, and the district has just begun to develop them.

In the elementary focus group, teachers said classes are large, they lack time, and they are not always able to plan instruction using the data available. But they did say that they maintain data binders that contain all the testing information on each child in the class. At the end of the year these binders are sent to the students’ next teacher. However, this year, a number of teachers lacked assessment information for their students since the school closing procedures in June did not provide for the transfer of student records to the new schools. Instead student personal files were sent to the Parent Center and some never reached the appropriate school. All schools but two have data rooms or “War Rooms” where MCAS data are posted. But, as administrators said, the data posted are only for those students in the Needs Improvement or Warning/Failing categories.

The district has made decisions and taken actions to ensure that a strong formative as well as summative assessment system will be in place, but at this point not all teachers are able to use assessments and assessment data effectively to plan instruction and meet the needs of each student.

**The failure of the district to evaluate its programs and services leaves it without sufficient knowledge to identify their weaknesses and remedy them, recognize redundancy in the curriculum, or determine which new research-based practices would be of most use to its students. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

The district does not conduct formal internal evaluations of programs and services except to comply with mandates for continuing receipt of federal and state grant funds such as Title I.

The district monitors ELA and mathematics only through review team visits to each school twice a year and by using the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process to collect and analyze student achievement data at individual schools. The former superintendent and each principal also held focused accountability discussions and made school visits twice yearly to assess progress in school improvement.

A recent review of the science program by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the high school reaccreditation report by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and two district reviews conducted by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability have produced the only comprehensive reviews of district programs or services. The district has yet to assess the effectiveness of such initiatives as the Expanded Learning Time programs at three schools or the district's ELL programs. It has not evaluated the quality or efficiency of its guidance services, health and wellness programs, food services, or transportation services.

The failure of the district to evaluate its programs and services leaves it unable to identify their weaknesses and remedy them, to recognize redundancy in the curriculum, or to determine which new research-based practices would be of use for its students.

**The district lacks effective educational leadership and adequate support for the delivery of programs and services to English language learners and students with disabilities, needed to close achievement gaps.**

English language learners and special education students are not achieving standards and making Adequate Yearly Progress in Fall River. ELL and special education students made up 6.4 percent and 17.4 percent of the district's 10,108 students in 2007-2008. According to Margery Mayo-

Brown, who served as acting superintendent at the time of the review, after the district eliminated the director of English Language Learner services position in June 2008, a committee was formed to provide guidance and support to the ELL program. Principals, however, have primary responsibility for the ELL programs and services in their schools; some principals said that there are inconsistencies in ELL services from school to school and the program is not centrally organized.

In interviews, central office administrators and principals told the team that the district does not have sufficient licensed ELL personnel or enough teachers who have completed the required amount of sheltered content training. Aside from regular education program teachers with higher levels of sheltered content training, the ELL program staff consists only of two licensed English language development (ELD) teachers. To make the most efficient use of limited staff, Fall River concentrates ELL programs and services in two of the elementary and one of the middle schools. Fall River relies heavily on an inclusion model in special education, but does not sustain it with adequate support. According to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) data for 2006-2007, the district enrolled approximately 64 percent of its special education students in full inclusion programs, compared with approximately 56 percent statewide. Central office administrators and principals told the review team that classroom teachers have not been adequately trained to differentiate instruction. Most are only beginning to employ multiple methods and strategies under the guidance of district coaches. Recent budget reductions have decreased the availability of paraprofessionals providing classroom assistance, so that most teachers do not have their support to help them to accommodate a wide range of individual differences.

According to ESE data for 2006-2007, Fall River enrolled approximately 25 percent of its special education students in substantially separate programs, compared with the statewide rate of approximately 15 percent. Central office administrators and principals told the review team that lack of teacher training and classroom support has led to the placement of some special education students who had been included in regular education classrooms in the district's substantially separate programs. This is because the conditions for successful inclusion are not in place.

Before 2005, the supervision and evaluation of special educators was a central office responsibility; in interviews with the team, administrators stated that many special educators had not been formally evaluated before attaining professional teacher status. They went on to say that this was because district special education directors were responsible primarily for developing procedures to ensure that the district complies with regulations, leaving them little time to work with staff.

In 2005 the principals assumed responsibility for the evaluation of all of the staff in their schools under a site-based management model. In interviews, some principals told the team that certain special educators in their schools have low expectations for students and do not base their instruction on the state frameworks. Since many of these special educators have already attained professional teacher status, the principals went on to say that it has been difficult to help them improve their teaching practices, even with recourse to improvement plans under the teacher evaluation procedure.

Central office administrators and principals told the review team that the district has a co-teaching model in some schools. Under this model a regular educator and a special educator assume joint responsibility for a class consisting of both regular and special education students. The administrators added that the class sizes and composition of the co-taught classes are not ideal. For example, the classes at some elementary and middle schools consist of 30 students, at least half of whom are special education students. Central office administrators stated that the co-taught model is constrained by larger class sizes, a disproportionate enrollment of students with special needs, and a lack of paraprofessional services.

In the judgment of the review team, the district's level of services for ELL students and special education students does not support students from these populations at the level needed for them to succeed in school. One outcome is the low high school graduation rate for the district's special education students. In the 2006-2007 school year, the most recent year for which ESE data are available, Fall River's graduation rate for special education students was 18.6 percent, versus a state special education graduation rate of 62.8 percent.

**Parents, teachers, and principals identified the lack of adequate and affordable bus services, especially for high school students, as a major factor contributing to poor attendance. It is notable that in the class of 2008, more than 3 of 10 students dropped out and fewer than 6 of 10 students graduated.**

Parents, teachers, principals and school leaders pointed to options for transportation to school, especially for secondary school students, as inadequate, inaccessible, and unaffordable. The high school is located at the far eastern end of the city. High school teachers and leaders noted that every day many students do not come to school because they cannot afford to purchase bus passes from the SRTA public transportation system; this problem is exacerbated during severe weather.

Student passes for the SRTA public bus can cost more than five dollars per day with transfers. Although the high school has managed to obtain 500 free bus passes each month, they are swallowed up immediately; even that number does not meet the overwhelming need. Clearly, if students are not in school they cannot learn.

The district's attendance rate was 91.6 percent in 2008, below the state rate of 94.7 percent; its high school attendance rate was 87.8 percent. The 2008 four-year graduation rate was only 56.0 percent, considerably lower than the state graduation rate of 81.2 percent, and the 2006-2007<sup>14</sup> annual dropout rate (9.8 percent) was well over twice the state's (3.9 percent). Between grades 9 and 12, before their expected graduation, almost one-third (31.8 percent) of all Fall River students in the class of 2008 dropped out. Over four of every ten limited English proficient students, special education students, and Hispanic students dropped out of high school during the same period (these dropout rates were 42.2, 42.4 and 46.0, respectively). Conversely, fewer than four of ten limited English proficient students, special education students, and Hispanic students graduated during that four-year period (these graduation rates were only 37.8, 37.1 and 39.0, respectively). Thus, these Fall River students were more likely to drop out than to graduate from high school.

#### **D. Leadership Support for Effective Use of Human Resources**

**Central office professionals are not formally evaluated, and there have been no written evaluations of principals since the 2005-2006 school year.**

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<sup>14</sup> The last year for which complete data was available.

*Central Office Professionals.* There were no written evaluations in personnel files for central office professionals such as the chief academic officer, director of professional development, director of special education, executive director of operations and facilities, or business manager. When asked, district leaders commented that they are not done.

*Principals.* The principals' personnel files contained no performance evaluations that reflected a systematic and timely procedure to assess their performance in meeting mutually agreed-upon goals. According to the acting superintendent, no written evaluations of principals had been conducted during the last two academic years.

To gain knowledge of each principal's job performance, the former superintendent and chief academic officer used twice-a-year school improvement visits to evaluate progress in meeting school improvement goals. Transcripts of these discussions, data, and data analyses of each school's progress were kept in a notebook maintained by the superintendent and chief academic officer. These visits do not constitute adequate performance evaluations.

Steps were taken toward a climate of accountability by the former superintendent, but complete accountability has still not been attained in the district.

**The teacher evaluation tool is ineffective as implemented, and evaluations contain too little information to help teachers develop and improve.**

A number of teachers and principals interviewed commented to the review team that the current system of teacher evaluation is ineffective; some even said it is "a joke." There were a few exceptions to this judgment among participants in a high school focus group that included teachers and department heads responsible for high school teacher evaluations. The team learned in a review of 81 teacher evaluations that professional status teachers are not always evaluated in accordance with procedural timelines, and that the evaluations of both professional and non-professional status teachers too often contain few specific recommendations for improvement and continuing professional growth and development.

In accordance with statute, the Fall River teacher evaluation procedure requires annual evaluation of non-professional status teachers and biennial evaluation of professional status teachers. The procedure begins with two classroom observations each year. No later than two school days following an observation the teacher and evaluator have a conference to discuss findings. Within five days of the conference, the evaluator provides the teacher with a written report. The report consists of ratings of criteria in four domains: professional, instructional, teaching, and instructional management. The ratings are on a three-point continuum ranging from *exceeds standards* to *meets standards* to *does not meet standards*, and there is space at the end of each section for the evaluator's comments.

Fall River currently employs a staff of 818 teachers. Of these, 610 (75 percent) have attained professional teacher status, and 208 (25 percent) have not. The team reviewed a representative sample of 81 teacher evaluations for 60 professional status and 21 non-professional status teachers.

Only thirty-five percent (21) of the evaluations of professional status teachers reviewed by the team met timelines. While 77 percent (46) described teaching performance, only 25 percent (15) included specific recommendations for improvement. Ninety-two percent (55) of the evaluations were endorsed with signatures.

Eighty-six percent (18) of the evaluations of non-professional status teachers met timelines. While 90 percent (19) described teaching performance, only 57 percent (12) included specific recommendations for improvement. All of the evaluations were endorsed with signatures.

The review team determined that 85 percent (51) of the professional status teachers and all of the non-professional status teachers whose files were reviewed were appropriately certified.

According to district records provided to the team for the 2008-2009 school year, 68 of the 818 Fall River teachers (8 percent) lack appropriate licensure or certification. Of these teachers, 35 lack current certification, 27 are teaching on waivers, and seven are teaching outside of their grade level or subject area. The team determined that most of these teachers are within the special education department.

Two years ago, the district developed a new, comprehensive and more qualitative tool to evaluate teacher performance. The tool was piloted in the district during the 2007-2008 school year. However, the Fall River Educators Association has been reluctant to approve the document, claiming that there are problems with the tool and that some teachers see the tool as a way for administrators to terminate them. The association president said that until the large number (77) of grievances before the district could be resolved, attention would not be given to the new evaluation tool and that the tool “would not pass a vote at this time.” As a result, there has been increased tension between the district and the association over teacher evaluations and how to improve the process.

**The district’s human resources system lacks qualified, experienced executive leadership as well as effective administrative systems, structures, and procedures. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

In interviews, the review team learned that the district has a 20-year history of inattention to its management of human resources. School administrators said there have been few clear human resources practices or systems in place for many years, so that sometimes those in charge of schools do not know whom they should call for advice and answers to important personnel questions.

When the former superintendent was appointed in 2005, the department was fragmented and consisted only of three staff members. The superintendent created the position of director of human resources. During the past two years, two directors have resigned from the position. Most recently the former superintendent appointed a clerk in the department to the position of human resources manager. Because there was no job description with qualifications available for the review team to examine, questions regarding the duties of the position and the level of the appointment persist.

A review of the district’s personnel files revealed that there are no systematic guidelines for their maintenance: many items were not available, including job descriptions and evaluations. In interviews with individuals from within both the district and the community, all mentioned the issue of patronage that many believe has existed in the district for years. There was

acknowledgment that the former superintendent had appointed qualified new principals from outside the system but belief that the recruitment and selection of teachers still leans heavily on hiring candidates from within the community rather than seeking and hiring the most qualified candidates drawn from a larger area. Some administrators commented to the review team that it would take years for the district to change. In one interview, an administrator claimed that recently hired “outsiders” pushing for change are in conflict with “insiders” determined to resist change.

According to administrators, the lack of consistent planning practices for staff changes was responsible for the turmoil surrounding the closing of the 12 elementary schools at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Teacher assignments were governed by seniority clauses in the contract, but the district did not know how many teachers needed to be laid off. And while there was a committee in place with responsibility for the placement of staff, according to interviewees most of the work was done by the assistant to the superintendent rather than with professional guidance from Human Resources.

According to interviewees, the school department was recently informed that the mayor believes that the best interests of the district would be served if the responsibilities of the human resource department were shifted from the school department to the municipal government. District administrators do not view this change as an effective solution. But according to interviewees the city has explored the idea of sending representatives to other cities where this practice is already in place. In the opinion of the review team, a clear message has been sent that district leaders need to make decisions on how to keep the department viable and organized if they wish it to remain under the district’s leadership.

## **V. Resource Management Findings**

### **A. Financial Capacity and Management**

**The district lacks adequate financial systems and procedures for budgeting, procurement, hiring, financial management, planning, and reporting. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

*Budgeting.* School committee members and administrators reported that the superintendent generally presented three budget options to the committee: “bronze” (level-funded), “silver”

(providing for level services), and “gold.” For fiscal year 2009 he had prepared a proposed “gold” budget of 92 million dollars and worked with principals and administrators to prepare possible reductions. Near the end of May 2008 the city gave the schools a budget approximately ten million dollars less than the “gold” budget, and approximately three million dollars less than the fiscal year 2008 budget. Only a few days were available to administrators and the school committee to discuss and analyze the necessary three million dollar reduction. This may have led to frustration and inaccurate projections. According to interviewees there was insufficient time for consideration of student and school needs or input from stakeholders. To accommodate the financial pressure, the committee made the decision to close two additional elementary schools, among other cuts, and redistribute both students and senior teachers to other schools.

Subsequently, in August and September, it became apparent that the budget was still deficient by \$3.9 million. According to Margery Mayo-Brown approximately one-third of that deficiency had to do with inaccurate projections for health care costs: this was the first year that the school district was responsible for managing its own health care costs. Other causes for the deficit included inaccurate projections for personnel costs and underestimates for utility costs. The shortfall led to further cuts in the fall, including the reduction of more teaching and support personnel. The process forced the school committee to focus on finances for an extended period of time, leaving them no time for adequate educational planning.

*Procurement and Hiring.* Procurement procedures are unnecessarily complicated and inefficient and result in delays, which may sometimes lead to decisions being made on political grounds rather than fiscal or educational grounds. Administrators reported several problems.

- There are delays in receiving goods and services (for example, textbooks received in January) and delays of three or four months in paying bills.
- The procurement process is cumbersome: administrators complained of multiple administrative, school committee and city approvals. Procurement procedures are much more restrictive than required by Mass. Gen. Laws c. 30B.
- Certain procurements are not made in a cost-effective way—for example, multiple contracts for transportation services and tuition costs for special education students for services that could more efficiently be brought in-house.

- School committee members and municipal officials reported instances when administrators had circumvented policies by splitting contracts or procurement requests that otherwise would have required oversight by the committee. They also reported the appointment of personnel not in the budget and violations of Mass. Gen. Laws c. 30B.
- According to administrators, school committee approval is required to advertise or eliminate positions. Committee members request individuals' names before deciding to cut positions, leaving themselves open to suspicion of inappropriate favoritism.

*Financial Management.* The school committee has some financial policies in place, and a financial subcommittee, but no policy manual or coherent systems for budgeting, procurement, or financial reporting. In 2008 the mayor requested the Commonwealth's auditor to conduct an examination of the financial condition of the city. The auditor's report noted concerns about the city's financial management practices, many of which apply to the school department as well. City officials reported that they are working with the Department of Revenue (DOR) to address their financial management problems.

The agreement between the district and the city on the allocation of the school system's indirect costs is an Excel spreadsheet which is unsigned, although ESE recommends that both parties sign whatever accord they reach. City and school officials reported that neither party objected to the calculation in previous years.

*Planning.* The district had a school building plan prepared by a Master School Building Oversight Committee and has completed the construction of eight new schools over the last few years. The review team learned that new school construction is overseen by the city, not by the schools. However, the school department has no capital improvement or repair plan for the upkeep and improvement of all its schools, a deficiency also cited by the state auditor for the city as a whole.

*Reporting.* School committee members received financial reports monthly during fiscal year 2008. The reports included projected balances as well as expenditures, encumbrances, and current balances. However, members expressed dissatisfaction with the format and accuracy of the

reports. Grants and revolving funds were not included in these reports in part because they came under administrators other than the business manager.

At the time of the review, reports were still not accurate and up-to-date. According to administrators, the posting of financial data by the city as well as by school department staff is often delayed. Certain fiscal year 2008 expenditures were not yet settled in January 2009 (with implications for charges to both fiscal years), and budget adjustments voted in October were not yet posted. Since the school committee's finance subcommittee was still working on the format of its regular financial reports to the committee, they were still not being produced.

Principals reported that they rarely, if ever, receive budget reports, with the exception of a June report of how much their school is allocated for the following year. And reviewers found discrepancies in the district's financial End-of-Year Report, specifically in the reporting of professional development expenses and expenses by school.

Thus it is not clear to administrators or the school committee how much money is being spent or how much is left. Accurate reporting and forecasting by the district could have prevented the \$3.9 million in budget overruns, which were not foreseen until the first payroll for the 2008-2009 school year.

**The interim chief financial officer for the schools is part-time and also serves as the director of the city's Office of Management, Budget and Accountability. A part-time position is insufficient for a district with critical needs for advocacy, oversight, and support related to the school budget of over \$100 million.**

The mayor and school committee chair proposed and the school committee approved the appointment of the city's director of the Office of Management, Budget and Accountability to the position of interim chief financial officer (CFO) for the school department, to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of the school department's business manager at the end of July 2008.

The interim CFO had been previously employed by the school department as the account manager for grants and, at the request and recommendation of the city's independent auditor, had spent a couple of hours a week at City Hall at the end of 2007 training the city treasurer and the city

auditor on the use of the MUNIS accounting system. By agreement with the former superintendent her time and duties were divided, at that time, to three days a week at City Hall working with the interim city administrator on developing the fiscal year 2009 budget and two days a week at the school department's business office. When the mayor created, effective July 1, 2008, the city position of director of the Office of Management, Budget and Accountability to oversee all department budgets in the city and to have direct contact with all department heads for budget accountability, she was selected to fill the position.

Interviews with school committee members, the former and acting superintendents, the mayor, and municipal officials revealed different views on the role and term of the interim CFO. Municipal officials stated that the consolidation of fiscal functions would result in more consistent and streamlined operations. School administrators and several school committee members expressed the opinion that the appointment of the interim CFO was not to promote efficiency as claimed but rather an attempt to place more control of the school department's finances in the hands of municipal officials. Interviewees stated that the mayor was also investigating the possibility of consolidating the school building and facilities operations to the city side. School committee members stated that they believed that the dual role was to be only for fiscal year 2009. The mayor also stated that it was a temporary position.

Municipal officials acknowledged that the appointment of the interim CFO has led to confusion for school department employees: at some points they are not sure from whom to seek assistance. The city auditor stated that individuals at the school department responsible for grant management have sought guidance from his office.

District interviewees expressed the opinion that the Fall River Public Schools need a CFO whose role allows a primary focus on the financial management of the school department. They expressed two concerns. One was that district needs would not be prioritized with a CFO who has a dual role. At the time of the review, the interim CFO job description did not reflect a dual role. Secondly, interviewees expressed concern about potential problems if the interim CFO, having a dual role, has to handle differing district and city expectations concerning financial management. These interviewees cited disagreements concerning the management of the alternative school fund

as an example of how differences in expectations could lead to conflict. When the alternative school grant account became an issue, the interim CFO directed questions about the legitimacy of the expenditures and the procedures in approving expenditures to municipal officials rather than the former superintendent. Although the question could have simply led to a clarification of procedures, it contributed to the controversy that ended with the resignation of the former superintendent.

The interim CFO and the school department's assistant business manager said that they work as a team. The interim CFO stops at the school department business office in the morning for an hour or two before going to her office in City Hall. The day-to-day operations of the school department's business office are the responsibility of the assistant business manager, and the interim CFO oversees the budget. The assistant business manager attends school committee finance subcommittee meetings, and the interim CFO attends school committee meetings and city finance meetings.

The presence of the city's director of the Office of Management Budget, and Accountability as interim CFO leads to the question as to who has ultimate decision-making authority on the budget: is it the school department or the mayor's office? School committee members told the team that they have authority because the Education Reform Act allows the school committee to determine expenditures within the total appropriation voted.

## **B. Adequacy of Instructional Resources**

**In fiscal year 2009 Fall River will not meet its Net School Spending requirement by \$1.4 million. The school appropriation declined between fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2009 by \$2.5 million and serious personnel, programmatic, service, and facility reductions ensued. This is a significant weakness in the district.**

District documents show that the fiscal year 2009 school appropriation was \$2.5 million less than the year before, resulting in two rounds of painful staff and program reductions noted earlier. As a result of the reductions, the 2008 End-of-Year Report (which city officials noted has not been finalized or certified) indicates that in fiscal year 2009, for the first time, the district will fall short

of the state’s Net School Spending (NSS) requirement, by \$1.4 million. Actual NSS exceeded the requirement by \$9.6 million in fiscal year 2007 and by \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2008.

**Table 10:  
School Appropriations, Chapter 70 Aid and Net School Spending  
Comparison of Fiscal Years 2007, 2008, and 2009**

	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
<b>School Appropriation</b>	85,032,833	86,128,594	83,647,764
<b>Chapter 70 Aid</b>	90,065,583	91,119,662	93,641,102
<b>Required NSS</b>	104,912,599	106,632,868	110,221,509
<b>Actual NSS</b>	114,475,063	108,142,581	108,826,507*
Sources: FY 2008 End-of-Year Report and ESE Chapter 70 Report *Note: the Fiscal Year 2009 data reflects the budgeted amount			

Table 10, above, compares school appropriations, Chapter 70 School Aid, and Net School Spending amounts for the Fall River Public Schools for the last three fiscal years. The table illustrates weakening financial support for education in the community from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2009.

According to municipal officials there were several reasons the city was unable to fund the schools adequately: increases in costs for benefits, utilities, transportation, and Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) were all high; the city needed to address its unfunded liability for health insurance and retirements; one-time appropriations for school textbooks and materials had been made for the previous two years but could not be repeated in fiscal year 2009; and the city was nearly at its levy limit<sup>15</sup>.

The fiscal year 2009 budget cuts drastically reduced the resources available for learning and teaching and dramatically disrupted the district. To accommodate funding shortfalls, the district unexpectedly closed two additional schools in June 2008, reducing the number of elementary schools from 21 to 9 in one year. According to administrators, the priorities of the district were to keep the number of teachers necessary for reasonable class sizes and maintain needed professional development. When school opened:

- The district had cut 93 teachers and 44 paraprofessionals.

<sup>15</sup> Although the city was nearing its levy limit, it did have excess capacity of \$1.6 million, which would have allowed it to raise taxes in 2008 and therefore be able to reach required Net School Spending in FY09.

- Class sizes increased, making differentiated and individualized instruction more difficult. Class size reports show that 13 percent of elementary classes had 30 or more students and 65 percent had 25 or more students.
- Principals described behind-the-scenes chaos in moving supplies and furniture, reassigning pupils and staff, and redistributing student records.
- Programs and services were cut back; for example, the high school Business Education Department was eliminated and transportation services were reduced.
- New schools opened with empty classrooms (in addition to larger class sizes) because the district could not afford to maintain the teachers to teach in them.
- New schools opened without librarians. Libraries remained dark and mostly unused.
- Teachers and principals reported that support staff was needed, including psychologists, English language learner (ELL) and inclusion staff, mentors, paraprofessionals to assist with instruction in inclusion classes, staff for after-school programs, and other intervention program staff.
- The elimination of transportation for high school students required many to pay more for municipal bus service than they could afford (up to five dollars per day). This exacerbated problems of attendance at the high school.
- Maintenance was inadequate.
- A budget freeze prevented the making of repairs (such as elevator and bathroom repairs), and orders for teaching supplies were only partially filled.

### **C. Use of Resources to Support Student Achievement**

**Hurried adjustments to respond to budget reductions exacerbated the negative impact of the budget shortfall on the educational experience of students.**

The district's decision in June 2008 to address a budget shortfall by closing 12 rather than 10 elementary schools increased negative impacts to the students' educational experience. School staffs were reconstituted during the summer to redistribute senior staff members from the two additional closed schools. With little time for notice and transition planning, students, parents, and teachers had to adjust to the disruption created by unanticipated changes to teaching and learning environments.

In fall 2008, the district made additional budget cuts and lost more teacher and support positions. Schools had to function with several empty classrooms and closed libraries. Student records, including legally binding Individualized Education Programs, did not always accompany students to their new schools in a timely manner. And resources such as furniture, instructional materials, and supplies were not adequate for the increased student populations.

Across the district, class sizes increased so that 65 percent (120 of 187) of the district's elementary school regular classes had enrollments of 25 or more students, 35 percent (65 of 187) had enrollments of 28 or more students, and 13 percent (24 of 187) had 30 or more students. With larger elementary class sizes, the district had an insufficient number of teachers and support staff to effectively implement its elementary reading, language arts, and mathematics programs, which require lower student-to-teacher ratios for individualized instruction, discovery learning, teacher-student conferences, and formative student assessment.

Central office administrators and principals told the review team that the current elementary class sizes are disadvantageous for conducting the district's workshop model of reading and writing instruction. This model requires teachers to conference with individual students during reading and writing time, and to make periodic formative assessments of each student's progress. They went on to say that teachers have been forced to make compromises under the circumstances. For example, they are now conferencing with groups of students rather than individuals. Principals stated that this is a less reliable manner of determining students' strengths and needs.

In interviews with the team, elementary principals described how larger class sizes constrain fluid grouping practices and student movement during transitions. Since most classrooms are at capacity, it is a challenge to use the limited space flexibly. For example, teachers compose and disband groups of students with common needs as part of reading, writing and mathematics instruction, but it is difficult to accommodate multiple small groups given the number of students. According to the principals, instructional time is lost because it is difficult for teachers to manage the distribution and collection of manipulatives such as Unifix cubes and counters for discovery learning in mathematics. Some classrooms lack a sufficient supply of mathematics manipulatives.

In addition, student movement from one activity to another during transitions takes more time because chairs, desks, and tables are in such close proximity.

Between June and September 2008, the school committee voted to eliminate 93 teacher positions and 44 paraprofessional positions. Interviewees agreed that the district lacks sufficient support personnel and intervention program staff to implement its three-tier reading instructional model. Under this model, students are to receive small group instruction proportionate to their needs. Those with the highest order of need are eligible for enrollment in an intervention group taught by a reading specialist. However, in the absence of district reading specialists, teachers are now responsible for instructing all three groups within their classrooms, often without the assistance of a paraprofessional. This compromises the quality of instruction for the neediest students at a critical juncture.

In the face of the expedited transitions, the team did not find evidence that the district adequately assessed the impacts to teaching and learning and made the necessary adjustments to protect the integrity of the academic program. In sum, the team did not find evidence that the district's preparation for the last-minute transitions adequately protected the quality of the educational experience and academic program for all students.

**Kuss and Lord middle schools have benefited from ESE support and grants for chronically underperforming schools.**

The Support for Underperforming Districts grant from ESE for \$299,536 for the Kuss and Lord schools, which included incentives for improving student achievement, has enabled them to do more for their teachers, students, and programs.

The Lord and Kuss middle school principals were hired in the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, respectively, because they were highly experienced and deemed capable of leading the two district schools identified as underperforming by ESE in 2005. In addition to programmatic supports provided by ESE, the two schools have benefited from an ESE-assigned monitor for support in improving student achievement. Also, principals of underperforming schools are able to

exercise more autonomy in decision-making, particularly in the area of hiring and retaining qualified staff, than other principals in the district.

According to the principals, professional development and curriculum development have benefited in particular. Both schools chose the America’s Choice school improvement design as the model to improve student performance, although the Lord principal reported that she no longer uses it. The model has also been adopted by the Talbot and Morton middle schools.

The district’s funding for these schools was equitable compared to funding for other middle schools; grant money did not supplant district funding. On a per-pupil basis the school budget expenditures in fiscal year 2008 for the Kuss and Lord middle schools were about the same as for the other two middle schools, according to the fiscal year 2008 End-of-Year Report and as shown in Table 11, below. Class sizes at the Kuss and Lord schools were also within range. However, the Kuss and Lord middle schools expended fewer funds from the fiscal year 2008 budget for supplies (primarily technology).

**Table 11:  
Enrollment, Class Size, and School Budget Expenditures  
Comparison of Fall River Middle Schools in Fiscal Year 2008**

	<b>Kuss</b>	<b>Lord</b>	<b>Morton</b>	<b>Talbot</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	530	628	638	598
<b>Average Class Size</b>	20.5	17.3	20.3	18.7
<b>Per pupil Expenditure</b>	\$5,885	\$5,887	\$5,711	\$6,023
<b>Total Supplies</b>	\$9,000	\$9,886	\$11,500	\$17,794
Sources: Fiscal year 2008 End-of-Year Report, District Class Size Report				

As measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI) both the Kuss and Lord middle schools have shown improvement in student achievement over the past three years, particularly in Mathematics, and the Lord Middle School made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the MCAS exams for the first time in 2008. The challenge to the district is to learn and profit from improved practices brought about through the Support for Underperforming Districts grant and transfer initiatives and conditions for learning to other schools in the district.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Please see Appendix F for a response to the district’s proposal to amend its Support for Underperforming Districts grant, as well as its Title I grant.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The review team determined that there has been some progress made in the district, especially in regard to initiatives to raise expectations, emphasize professional accountability at all levels, align curriculum, use data and data analyses to plan for instruction, plan meaningful professional development, create new assessment initiatives, and improve the climate at the high school and the culture of the district as a whole. When the final stages of the district's ambitious school building and renovation/expansion program are completed in two years, the district's physical plant will be poised to meet the potentially exciting challenges of educating the next generations of Fall River's young people.

There remain, however, serious impediments to the district's ability to move forward forcefully. Apart from the normal programmatic and instructional priorities, the district educates a student population with a high level of needs. There are increasing numbers of immigrant and limited English proficient students, a high proportion of students who come from low-income families, and large numbers of special needs students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Although the high school graduation rate is gradually improving, too many young people in regular education programs also leave school before completing their secondary education. To meet a higher level of student needs, the district requires a comparably higher level of resources in terms of staffing, class sizes, programs, materials, and support to ensure that all of its students meet their potential for success. With the limited resources available to the community and, therefore, to the schools, and even more funding losses with the recent decreases in state aid, most efforts will assuredly be hampered. The district must find a way to secure added resources if it is to succeed in meeting all student needs. That is its mission. Although an override is likely an unpopular idea in the community, perhaps this is the hour to plant that seed. Parent, community, and business leaders stated that additional taxes earmarked for education would not be unacceptable.

But added resources alone will not resolve the district's problems. The school committee must be focused on and responsive to the needs of students and must serve as advocates for student learning in communication with the community and local and state authorities. Unfortunately, the school committee has not focused on making informed policy decisions and advocating for the

school department. Rather, the committee has been distracted by contention concerning leadership and management issues. Furthermore, the district has had four superintendents in eight years, the most recent for just over three years. This lack of stability and discontinuity in leadership, if allowed to continue, could further hold the system back from meeting the pressing, diverse, and critical educational needs of its nearly 10,000 students.

The school committee and its chair must find ways to build bridges to the superintendency and work together cooperatively and productively with a new superintendent to move the district forward. The committee must also build bridges to the community, where many have lost faith in its ability to govern the system in the manner it deserves and requires during these difficult times.

A new superintendent must work to restructure and implement a host of important systems, roles, processes, and procedures to put the district's financial and personnel functions in solid working order. The district must ensure that professional leadership capable of managing these complex and diverse financial and human resource systems and procedures is in place. The municipal side of government and the school department must find ways to work in partnership to support the education agenda of the community and secure the resources needed for the schools to function well. It is the view of the review team that the takeover of the school department's several management and financial responsibilities by municipal departments would further weaken the school system and its ability to improve education for the community's young people. Students need advocates whose primary responsibility is to them and to them alone. After all is said and done, students under the age of 18 do not vote.

Although clearly there are no simple solutions to putting Fall River's educational house in good order, there is no doubt on the part of the review team that it can be done. Interviewees from every constituency in the city—educators, parents, municipal leaders, community leaders, and business leaders—all voiced support and concern for the school system and the welfare of the community's young people. With the appropriate support and assistance of internal as well as external expertise and the good will that already exists in the minds and hearts of the community and its leaders, Fall River can create the world-class school system envisioned by its most recent superintendent. It will take hard work, compromise, innovation, and resourcefulness, but it can be done.

## **VII. Recommendations**

*The team recommends that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education use its authority to monitor the Fall River Public School system, while providing guidance and technical assistance, to ensure that the district makes progress in four key areas: school committee governance, strategic implementation of improvements to teaching and learning, human resource management, and financial management.*

### **A. SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE**

**To build public confidence, the school committee needs to establish a thorough and clearly defined process for the selection of a new superintendent.**

The school committee should engage the participation of staff, parents, students, and the community at large in a meaningful process for the selection of a new superintendent. The process should include identifying the qualities of the desired candidate; assessing the acting superintendent according to that standard; determining whether to engage in a search process or to appoint the acting superintendent; and moving the district forward. Once the committee hires a new superintendent, it should work with the new hire to establish clear goals, and allow the superintendent to lead and manage the school system without micromanagement from school committee members.<sup>17</sup>

**To exercise effective governance of the school system, the school committee needs to build its capacity to function as a responsible governance team and ensure continuity of that capacity in future school committees.**

With the guidance of external expertise, the school committee and the superintendent need to define, agree on, and understand their distinct roles and responsibilities and adhere to them as they work together to improve the school system. The review team also recommends that the committee receive training in the procedures for conducting a public meeting according to *Robert's Rules of Order* and strategies to use to interface effectively and respectfully with the public.

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<sup>17</sup> See Addendum to this report: on February 9, 2009, after this review took place, the school committee appointed Acting Superintendent Margery Mayo-Brown as superintendent.

The school committee should prepare, with outside assistance, a school committee handbook with a description of roles and responsibilities, including the school committee's role in budgeting and hiring; guidelines for setting policy; typical district documents; contracts; and other materials. The district's policy manual should include the district's revised policies, administrative procedures, forms, and job descriptions for the various positions in the district. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents can help with these efforts.

The school committee and the new superintendent, with support from outside expertise, should review and revise the current procedure used to evaluate the superintendent's performance. The procedure must set clear expectations and include mutually agreed-upon goals that illuminate the superintendent's role in meeting broad district and school improvement priorities. The procedure should also include indicators to assess the superintendent's leadership skills and the accomplishment of those goals. Finally, the procedure should provide mechanisms for constructive feedback and guidance relative to decisions on the superintendent's compensation and continued employment.

Monitoring and parliamentary support are needed until the school committee demonstrates the capacity, practices, and conduct needed to lead the district and to gain the confidence of the community.

## **B. STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENTS TO TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**The district needs guidance in the refinement and alignment of its Strategic Plan, District Improvement Plan, and School Improvement Plans that all members of the school community can accept and implement. To ensure widespread support and alignment, representative members of all school communities need to participate in their further development.**

An effective District Improvement Plan (DIP) engages all members of the school community in its development and becomes the visible core of all improvement efforts. Strong DIPs promote the

alignment of School Improvement Plans and underscore a unity of purpose in the district. It is a document that needs measurable goals and manageable targets to guide all district actions taken on behalf of students. Fall River must develop such a document, as well as clarify and communicate the district's strategy to move the school system towards realizing these goals and targets. Once the district has received guidance to ensure that it has developed an effective DIP through a constructive process, as described above, the DIP should be adopted by the school committee and must provide the focus of the district's efforts and the foundation of its decision-making.<sup>18</sup>

**Fall River should move beyond compliance and provide educational leadership for its programs for English language learners and students with special needs, ensuring student access to appropriate services, high quality teaching, and effective training for all teachers serving these students. The district needs to integrate this work within its District Improvement Plan and strategy.**

When Fall River eliminated the ELL coordinator position in June 2008 due to budget reductions, the district convened an English Language learner sub-committee to provide guidance and support for the ELL program. Although a committee was formed to provide guidance and support to the ELL program, the responsibility for ELL programs and services belongs to principals and content area teachers, who are not all fully trained to meet the needs of ELL students. Additionally, inconsistencies in the program exist from school to school. The district should restore the coordinator position to ensure the quality and consistency of programs and services, as well as compliance with regulations, especially given the multi-year trend of an increase in limited English proficient students.

Over the last three years, Fall River has increased training opportunities for content teachers of ELL students, but few teachers have completed all of the required training. The district must provide the required training for all content teachers of district ELL students with the expectation that these teachers will progress at the rate of one category each year. The district should also train content teachers of ELL students to use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) for lesson planning. The components of this model include explicit content and language objectives

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<sup>18</sup> See Addendum to this report: at its February 9, 2009, meeting, the Fall River School Committee voted to adopt the District Improvement Plan.

and key content and academic vocabulary. The language development emphasis of this protocol helps content teachers ensure that ELL students benefit from instruction.

Given the district's low graduation rate for special education students (18.6 percent in 2006-2007 and 37.1 percent in 2007-2008), Fall River would benefit from a review of its special education programs that examines how the district works with and supports middle and high school students with IEPs to enable them to stay in school and eventually graduate from high school.

**The district needs to continue to strengthen the ability of school-level educators to analyze and use assessments and assessment data to improve instruction. Again, it needs to integrate this work within its District Improvement Plan and strategy.**

The district has made a good beginning in equipping principals with the knowledge and skills to use assessment data to support instructional decisions in their schools. Continued support and training are needed for classroom teachers to strengthen their capacity to work with student assessment data. The district has also made strides in using benchmarks and formative assessments along with summative assessments to track and inform instruction. These efforts, too, need to continue.

**The district needs to systematically review its programs and services as an integral part of its strategy to make necessary changes to meet improvement plan goals.**

The district needs to design and implement a procedure to regularly and systematically evaluate its core academic programs, support services, and professional development programs and take the actions needed to address programmatic shortcomings and service deficiencies.

The district generally lacks a number of accountability mechanisms that could ensure that all academic and support programs are operating at highly effective and efficient levels. It would benefit from a regular and systematic process to assess the effectiveness of core academic programs vertically throughout the district and horizontally across grades or grade clusters. Program reviews can also ensure that transitions from elementary to middle to high school optimize learning and eliminate redundancy in the curriculum. Instituting a regular program review process would allow leaders and content specialists to measure district programs against best

practices in the field. Teachers and leaders could plan for instructional innovations as well as introduce relevant new content and teaching tools.

The professional development program should be evaluated and its impact on classroom practice should be tracked. The district should also examine the efficacy of specialized academic services such as ELL programs and the new Expanded Learning Time programs to deepen the district's understanding of each program's strengths, weaknesses, and needs and clarify how it should modify programs if they are to expand to other school sites. In addition, the district must continually review services such as food services and, especially, transportation to guarantee to the community not only that resources are well spent, but also that student needs are being met.

**Leadership in Fall River needs to identify, advocate for, and protect resources needed to enable its improvement efforts. The District Improvement Plan and aligned School Improvement Plans should identify professional development, curriculum, and other resources needed to implement their goals, and be reflected in future budget proposals.**

The district should consider decreasing class sizes, facilitating implementation of the workshop model at the elementary level, restoring literacy specialists to provide the needed safety net for students at risk, and expanding access to free transportation to school.

When the 2008-2009 school year began, Fall River had eliminated 93 teacher positions and 44 paraprofessional positions from the district budget because of a shortage of funds. Elementary class sizes are at 28 or more students in 35 percent of elementary classes, and at 30 or more students in 13 percent of elementary classes. The district must restore positions needed for the core instructional program and improvement goals. According to interviewees and observations by the review team, it is difficult for elementary teachers to employ the district's workshop model of reading and writing instruction with the larger class sizes, especially without the assistance of paraprofessionals. Individual teacher and student conferences and frequent assessments of student progress are significant components of the workshop model.

The district has adopted the three-tier model of reading instruction but lacks support staff and specialists to provide for students most at risk. In most elementary classrooms, the teacher is

attempting to address the needs of all three groups, including the intervention group. Although there was measurable growth in student achievement in the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, the continuation of this progress is jeopardized by inadequate numbers of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialists. There is valid concern over the decline of third and fourth grade students' performance on the reading and written language portions of the 2008 MCAS tests following two years of growth.

The district should address the issue of student transportation; a comprehensive analysis of the problem can be a starting point. The issue of all students having access to school is an important one. Student absenteeism caused by fewer school bus routes and a lack of affordable ways to get to school, particularly at the high school, recurred as a theme during interviews with teachers and school leaders. Students cannot learn if they are not in class. Given the district's high dropout rate and a graduation rate that is considerably lower than the state's, it is important, as a means of keeping students in school, to find ways to ensure that they come to school. Until the district fully analyzes the transportation problem, looks at potential alternatives, and finds remedies, it will continue to be an obstacle to student success.

### **C. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

**The district needs experienced executive leadership to serve the human resource needs of all school personnel, as well as assistance to establish a well-functioning human resources department.**

Over the years, the lack of leadership in the human resources department has contributed to a lack of consistent practices and procedures. The department and its leadership should be responsible for the creation and management of all personnel procedures and functions. These should include procedures for the maintenance of personnel records, so that information regarding payroll, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation is available. The department should also implement procedures for recruitment, hiring, and contract administration, and monitor practices in these areas. In addition, department leadership must be knowledgeable about school law, school collective bargaining, the development of educational job descriptions, the use of administrator and teacher performance assessments, and the development of school personnel policy. These are just a few of the complex systems that are managed by a professional human resources department

in a school system. Given the turnover and loss of professional human resources staff over recent years, the district needs to rebuild its capacity to manage human resources for a school enterprise of over 1000 employees. Because of the education-specific nature of many of the school department's human resources needs, the district must carefully consider any decision to move that function to the municipal side of government.<sup>19</sup>

**The district needs to provide principals with the resources they need to support effective instruction: regular monitoring, mentoring, and support from the central office, as well as the staff and resources required to put sound educational systems in place and sustain them.**

Improving student achievement is the important work of the Fall River Public Schools. The groundwork has been laid for this to occur with the hiring of a number of new principals and the mandate from the district leadership that they be responsible for improving teaching and learning in their schools. To accomplish its mission, however, the district must find ways to address the loss of teaching and support positions, the lack of instructional materials, and the time it takes the district to respond to supply needs. In addition, principals must have support in supervising and evaluating teachers to ensure that the promise of excellence in classroom practice becomes a reality. Finally, the district must continue to support principals with initiatives such as National Institute of School Leadership training and other professional development opportunities that promote their growth.

**The district needs to develop and use sound evaluation procedures to evaluate central office professionals and principals each year.**

No written evaluation procedure is in use for the district's most senior leaders. A procedure needs to be developed and should include clear, relevant performance criteria and written, measurable, achievable, and mutually agreed-upon goals. Goals will need to include indicators to demonstrate how well they have been met. All evaluations of senior school leaders must be done yearly, in writing, and signed copies must be maintained in their personnel folders. In this way, the district and the community can hold district and school leaders accountable for their job performance, and

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<sup>19</sup> After the review, the district reorganized its administrative structure (see Addendum to this report). The position of human resources director was eliminated and a new assistant superintendent was appointed whose role includes the oversight not only of human resources, but also of many other areas, including professional development, assessment, and instructional services.

their work can be focused on the specific needs of their schools as well as on district priorities and their own professional growth and development.

**The district and the Fall River Educators Association need to resolve the current stalemate regarding the new teacher evaluation tool and implement a thoughtful and manageable tool that school leaders can use to evaluate the performance of the teaching staff.**

The inconsistent implementation of evaluation procedures and the lack of a comprehensive and thoughtful evaluation tool mean that the district cannot maximize opportunities to use evaluation to improve and strengthen teaching, learning, and teacher-leadership. Although the review team often heard in interviews that the former superintendent had created a climate of accountability and a sense of urgency in the district, without sound, thoughtful, and consistent evaluations of the district's teachers, it is difficult for teachers and other classroom professionals to grow and develop.

#### **D. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

**The district needs an external audit of the district's finances as soon as possible. The audit should include recommendations to the district on streamlining purchasing and hiring procedures, developing financial management policies, preparing reports, and aligning its spending with its mission. Technical assistance should follow the audit to help implement new strategies and procedures as well as train staff.**

This recommendation follows up on the recommendation made by the state auditor's office in 2008 that the city consider "the development and implementation of a comprehensive internal control plan; revenue and expenditure budgeting and forecasting; financial reporting policies, procedures, and monitoring of all financial activities and funds; an updated capital improvement plan." The auditor's report has already resulted in technical assistance from the Department of Revenue (DOR) to the city. It is essential that this assistance from DOR continue and lead to comprehensive policy and procedure revisions in the school department. These revisions must include a monitoring component to ensure that the proposed policies and procedures are properly implemented. Some other specific components to consider include:

- An adequate staffing structure with clear roles and responsibilities for financial management.

- School department purchasing procedures based on M.G.L. Chapter 30B to make purchases more efficient and ensure that decisions are not political.
- Attention to cost-effectiveness and the identification of savings.
- Clear and published policies on financial controls to ensure proper handling of outside funds and cash as well as expenditures from all funds.

Other financial recommendations include:

- To improve the accuracy of reports and increase efficiencies in posting data and preparing reports, district staff should be thoroughly trained, as needed, in the use of the MUNIS accounting system. Emphasis should be on the use of MUNIS as a management tool as opposed to solely an accounting tool and on the use of financial data to generate requested reports.
- MUNIS training should also be provided to all school cost centers in order to enable principals and directors to understand and use the system.
- Principals and directors should be able to access and understand their budgets.

**The school district should receive guidance from ESE in selecting and hiring its own fulltime chief financial officer who is responsible for the financial operations of the school department.**

The school committee should approve the appointment of a chief financial officer who is responsible only for the financial operations of the school department and who functions as an advocate for the school budget. The chief financial officer should report to the superintendent of schools and be located in the central office in order to be immediately available to the superintendent and the school committee when issues requiring financial information need to be addressed.

The amount budgeted by the school district this year for Net School Spending exceeds \$108,000,000; state and federal grants to the district in fiscal year 2008 totaled \$14,865,712. The district now operates 15 school buildings housing approximately 10,000 students and more than 1,000 employees. Fall River Public Schools cannot best be served by a chief financial officer based at City Hall, with insufficient hours devoted to district financial management, who does not

report primarily to the superintendent and who is not immediately accessible to the superintendent and others who have fiduciary responsibility for the school system.<sup>20</sup>

**Consolidation of municipal and school department administrative functions should be considered only through an informed, well-planned, and agreed-upon process, and with guidance from ESE.**

School administrators and school committee members acknowledged that cost-effectiveness and efficiency could result from a consolidation of school and municipal administrative services.

The mayor has stated that the appointment of the director of the city's Office of Management, Budget and Accountability as interim chief financial officer for the school department is temporary. At the same time, municipal officials indicated that they will continue to explore combining administrative functions and plan to visit other cities where consolidations have occurred. Before a permanent decision is made, the school department leadership and municipal officials should jointly explore the feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency of combining human resources departments and building and facilities operations. This decision needs to be reached through district and city collaboration, through a mutually agreed upon process, under the guidance of the Department.

**Fall River needs to fund the school district at the required Net School Spending level and needs to consider the needs of the district along with the capacity of the city to fund the schools when setting future budgets. To avoid future funding crises, the school committee and municipal leadership need guidance in collaboratively developing and implementing a strategy to ensure adequate financial support for the schools.**

In the short term, the city has an obligation to fund the district at the level required by the state, which provides 85 percent of the required funding for schools. In the long term, budgeting for the schools needs to be more collaborative. Administrators, city officials, and school committee members all reported that the mayor and other city officials have in the past given the committee its budget figure without enough discussion with the district about its needs. Reviewers

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<sup>20</sup>After the review, the district reorganized its administrative structure (see Addendum to this report). The new administrative structure includes a chief operating officer who will oversee the fiscal, technological, and operations divisions within the school department; however, the position of chief financial officer remains an interim part-time position filled by the director of the city's Office of Management, Budget, and Accountability.

interviewed parents and business leaders who expressed support for additional taxes if they are earmarked for the schools. A collaborative process should include the superintendent, school committee members, and city officials in order to balance school district needs with other needs when determining school funding allocations. Such collaboration would relieve tensions over these allocations.

**The district, in collaboration with the city, should prepare a long-range capital improvement plan for school buildings and school properties.**

The city and the state have invested heavily in eight new school buildings since 2000; two more are to be opened soon. A long range plan for replacement of boilers, roofs, vehicles, and other capital items at both the new and older schools would enable the city to spread out capital expenses in a reasonable way and keep these new buildings and others well maintained, clean, and safe.

**The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should continue its support and technical assistance to chronically underperforming schools in the district.**

The Department has given financial support and technical assistance to the Kuss and Lord middle schools. Principals have used grant funds effectively to improve professional development programs and programs for students. These supports, along with the efforts of the staff, have led to improvements in student achievement, especially in mathematics. Sustained efforts will help the schools reach their goals.

### **Addendum (post-review)<sup>21</sup>**

At its monthly meeting on February 9, 2009, after the conclusion of the review, the Fall River School Committee voted to appoint acting superintendent Margery Mayo-Brown to the position of superintendent.

At the same meeting the committee approved a plan to reorganize the school district's administrative structure, reducing the number of senior-level administrative positions from eight to four and creating the new position of Chief Operating Officer (COO). The COO will be responsible for overseeing the fiscal, technological, and operational divisions of the system; the position of chief financial officer for the schools remains an interim part-time position filled by the director of the city's Office of Management, Budget, and Accountability. The director of human resources position has been eliminated. The person in the role of chief academic officer/assistant superintendent will oversee human resources and all academic functions, including professional development, assessment, and instructional services, among others, and will assist the superintendent in the supervision of school principals.

Also at its February 9, 2009, meeting, the school committee voted to accept the District Improvement Plan for 2008-2010.

In a February 17, 2009, letter to Fall River Mayor Robert Correia, Bristol County District Attorney C. Samuel Sutter described his office's investigation of the Durfee High School Educational Enrichment Fund (referenced in the report), a fund consisting of grant money to support Fall River's alternative school. In the letter the district attorney stated that he and his staff "wholeheartedly concur" with the assessment made by lawyers for the City of Fall River Law Department that there was no "criminal wrongdoing on the part of any of the individuals involved in the management of the Enrichment Fund."

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<sup>21</sup>Superintendent Mayo-Brown supplied information in this Addendum about actions taken by the school committee at its February 9, 2009, meeting. Information about the district attorney's letter comes from a copy of the letter that was supplied to ESE.

**Appendix A**  
**Documents Reviewed**  
**Fall River Public Schools**  
**Leadership and Resource Management Evaluation Review**  
**January 2009**

A. Teaching and Learning

- Curriculum guides for grades 2 through 10
  - Math
  - ELA
  - Science/Technology
- High School Program of Studies
- Copies or descriptions of grade level benchmarks
- List and samples of key assessments
- ESE and district data
  - student demographics, current and ten-year trend data
  - enrollment and performance by school, MCAS results, AYP Reports, 2006-2008
  - Composite Performance Index (CPI) Trends, 2003-2008
  - District's MCAS presentation to the school committee
- Class size data
- Power Point presentation on mathematics instruction, February 13, 2006

B. Leadership and School Improvement

- District Improvement Plans, 2004-2007, 2007-2010 draft
- School Improvement Plans, 2008-2009
- District Professional Development Plan 2008-2009
- External program evaluation of science program done by ESE, 2008
- Final Report of Fall River Master School Building Oversight Committee
- Organizational Charts of Fall River Public Schools
- District Strategic Plan Overview, August 28, 2006
- EQA School District Reexamination Report, 2004-2006
- Fall River School Building Changes, 2002-2009

C. Leadership and Human Resources Management

- Professional Contracts and Job Descriptions
  - Superintendent
  - Principals
  - Administrators (Unit "B")
- Teachers Contract
- Performance Evaluation Protocols
  - Superintendent
  - Administrators (none)
  - Teachers

- Power Point presentation describing pilot tool for teacher evaluation
  - Certified summary attendance data for students and teachers 2007-2008, 2008-2009
- D. Financial Resources
- Budget documents and back-up material, FY08, FY09
  - Audit Management, Single Audits, End-of-Year Compliance Review, Audited Financial Statements, List of Revolving Funds and Grant information (most recent for all)
  - End-of-Year Financial Statement and Amendments
  - Excel Spreadsheet indicating allocation of indirect costs (no written agreement in district)
  - Proposed Option #1, FY09 Budget Reductions
- E. Leadership and Governance
- School committee minutes for 2007-2008 and 2008-2009
  - Excerpts of videotapes of school committee meetings, June – December 2008
  - Print media from September 3, 2008-January 5, 2009
- F. Human Resources Management
- Administrator evaluations (only the superintendents)
  - Teacher evaluations (81 randomly selected samples)
  - Numbered list and percentage of
    - all professional status teachers
    - all non-professional status teachers
    - all teachers on waivers
    - all teachers teaching outside their subject or grade level certification area
- G. Background Information on Fall River
- MASS online website, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
  - American Local History Network, Bristol County website

**Appendix B**  
**Leadership and Resource Management Evaluation Interview Schedule**  
**Fall River Public Schools**  
**January 12-21, 2009**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interviewer/Scribe</b>
<b>Monday, January 12, 2009</b>			
8:30 – 10:15	Margery Mayo Brown	Acting Superintendent	Kulevich, Greyser
8:30 – 10:15	Victor Capellan	Dir. of School Improvement	McAuliffe, Williams
	Meg Crist	Dir. of Instructional Serv.	
	Martha Dorney	Dir. of Professional Dev.	
	Fatima Silvia	Dir. of Student Assessment.	
	Fran Roy	Math Consultant	
8:30 – 10:15	Raquel Pellerin	Dir. City OMB, interim CFO for school dept.	Gearhart, DiOrio
	Maureen Cote	Asst. Business Manager	
10:30 – 12:00	Joyce Blackburn	Dir. of Special Education	McAuliffe, Fitzgerald
	Donna Viera	Title I Director	
	Barbara Allard	Dir. of Early Childhood Prog.	
	Jeanne Pratt	Dir. of Human Resources	
10:30 – 12:00	Ralph Olsen	Principal, Durfee High School	Williams, Greyser
10:30 – 12:00	Daniel Patten	City Treasurer and CFO	DiOrio, Gearhart
	Michael Dion	Asst. Dir. Comm. Dev.	
	Kevin Almeida	Auditor	
1:00 – 2:30	Robert Correia	Mayor, School Comm Chair	Greyser, Kulevich
1:00 – 1:45	John Almeida	CPA	Fitzgerald,, Gearhart
	Carole Fiola	Governor’s Council	McAuliffe, DiOrio
	Lisa Stratton	Editor, Fall River Herald	Williams
1:45 – 2:30	Paula Raposa	Dir. SER Jobs for Progress	McAuliffe
	Peter McCarthy	Dir. Boys and Girls Club	Williams
	Rev. Robert Lawrence	Pastor <i>emeritus</i> , First Congregational Church	Fitzgerald, DiOrio
1:45 – 2:30	John Correia	Former Pres., City Council	Gearhart
2:45 – 4:00	Nick Christ	President Cit. Union Bank	Greyser, Williams
2:45 – 4:00	Tom Kozak	President, City Council	Gearhart
2:45 – 4:00	Ed Lambert	Former Mayor	McAuliffe, Fitzgerald

<b>Time</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interviewer/Scribe</b>
<b>Tuesday, January 13, 2009</b>			
8:30 – 10:15	Deb DeCarlo	Principal, Lord Middle	Greyser, Williams
	Nancy Mullen	Principal, Kuss Middle.	
8:30 – 10:15	Elizabeth Coogan	Principal, Talbot Middle	Kulevich, Fitzgerald
	Karlene Ross	Principal, Morton Middle	
8:30 – 10:15	Josie Woollam	Principal, Spencer-Borden	McAuliffe, Gearhart
10:30 – 12:15	Omari Walker	Supervisor, Alternative School	Fitzgerald, Greyser
10:30 – 12:15	Maria Pontes	Principal, Doral Elementary	Williams, McAuliffe
10:30 – 12:15	Vivian Kuss	Greene Elementary	Kulevich, DiOrio
1:15 – 2:45	Kim Sefrino	Principal, Letourneau Elem.	McAuliffe, Gearhart
1:15 – 2:45	Denise Ward	Principal, Silvia Elementary	DiOrio, Fitzgerald
1:15 – 2:45	Elizabeth Almeida	Principal, Tansey Elementary	Williams, Kulevich
1:15 – 2:25	Kevin Aguiar	School Committee member	Greyser
3:00 – 4:30	Alan Silva (by phone)	Former City Administrator	Gearhart, DiOrio
3:00 – 3:45	Jean MacCormack	Chancellor, UMASS Dart.	McAuliffe, Fitzgerald
	Robert Karam	Pres., Karam Financial	Kulevich, Williams
3:45 – 4:30	Tom Lyons	Chair, Chamber of Commerce	Kulevich
	John Sbrega	Pres., Bristol Com College	Williams, McAuliffe

<b>Time</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interviewer/Scribe</b>
<b>Wednesday, January 14, 2009</b>			
7:30 – 8:15	C.F. Perry	Parent	Greyser, Williams
8:30 – 10:15	Nancy Martin-Bernier	Principal, Watson Elementary.	Williams, DiOrio
	Elaine Sabra	Principal, Fonseca Elementary	Fitzgerald, Greyser
	Kristen Farias	Principal, Viveiros Elementary	McAuliffe, Gearhart
10:30 – 12:00	Joseph Martins	School Committee member	Greyser, Fitzgerald
	Sharron Machamer	President, FREA	Kulevich, DiOrio
	Brian Bennett	Secretary, FREA	
	Cindy Keene (by phone)	Admin Asst to former Super	McAuliffe, Gearhart
1:00 – 2:30	Mark Costa	School Committee member	Gearhart, DiOrio
	Timothy McCoy	School Committee member	Fitzgerald, Williams
	Deanne Orabana Angel Burge	“Fall River Parents and Citizens for Change”	Greyser, Kulevich
4:00 – 5:30	Marilyn Roderick	School Committee member	Kulevich, Gearhart
	Shawn Cadine	School Committee member	Williams, Fitzgerald
	Parent Focus Group		DiOrio, McAuliffe
	Dennis Sullivan (phone)	Former Dir. of Operations and Facilities	Greyser

<b>Time</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interviewer/Scribe</b>
<b>Thursday, January 15, 2009 (schools closed- extreme temperatures)</b>			
Team met to discuss preliminary findings and conducted one follow-up interview			
10:30 – 11:30	Martha Dorney	Director of Professional Dev	Team
<b>Saturday, January 17, 2009</b>			
	Kathy Macedo (phone)	Former Business Manager	Gearhart
<b>Sunday, January 18, 2009</b>			
4:00 – 5:00	Jay Schachne (phone)	Dir. Katie Brown Foundation	Greyser
<b>Wednesday, January 21, 2009</b>			
<b>Teacher Focus Groups</b>			
3:00 – 4:00	Elementary Teachers		Fitzgerald
	Middle School Teachers		Kulevich, Gearhart
	High School Teachers		Williams, Greyser

## **Appendix C**

### **Classroom Observations**

Due to extreme winter temperatures, the Fall River Public Schools were closed on the day the review team had scheduled to observe classrooms. The observation day was rescheduled to the next week on a previously unscheduled day and only five of the seven team members could participate. As a result, the number of classrooms observed was too small (60) to draw broad inferences about classroom characteristics in the district as a whole. The analysis and descriptions below inform the reader about classroom characteristics in the 60 observed classrooms. Overall, reviewers rated elementary and middle school classrooms higher than high school classrooms on almost all indicators.

Sixty randomly observed ELA, mathematics and science classrooms at the elementary (31), middle (11), and high school (18) school levels revealed positive indicators of educational practice approximately 60 percent of the time. However, the team saw wide variations in the quality of educational practice within and across schools. As a result, the observations presented here represent a range of ratings within areas.

Observations were made in the areas of Classroom Management, Instructional Practice, Expectations, Student Activity and Behavior, and Climate. Overall, observers found positive indicators in observed elementary and middle school classrooms approximately two-thirds of the time (65.8 percent elementary, 64.3 percent middle), and at the high school slightly less than half of the time (49 percent).

For the elementary and middle level classrooms, ratings were notably strong, (85.5 percent elementary and 75 percent middle) in Classroom Management. Good classroom management is evident when classrooms have order and structure, there are established rules and routines, and students take responsibility for their work without teacher direction. The high school received 62.5 percent positive ratings for its observed classrooms for Classroom Management.

Reviewers rated the observed elementary and middle school classrooms at 81.7 percent and 72.7 percent positive for Climate while those observed at the high school rated positively 46.3 percent

of the time. Positive climate is evident when all students are accepted and included and the space accommodates a range of learning activities. It is also evident when teachers use positive reinforcement to enhance students' self esteem and self-confidence and appeal to students' curiosity to motivate them. At the high school, one comment noted "some short-lived anti-social behavior" and another, "the teacher continues to present and question even though almost all students are talking to one another and not paying attention."

Observers found positive indicators for Expectations half the time in observed elementary classrooms (50.8 percent), 59 percent of the time in those observed at the middle level, and 44.4 percent of the time in those observed at the high school level. This category has to do with teachers' insisting on high levels of quality for both student work and behavior. It would also include models and rubrics for high quality classroom work as well as exhibitions and celebrations of excellence in student work. Comments regarding Expectations included, "writing rubric posted, nice!" and "teacher conferences with students and other students are all on task" in an elementary classroom. In another elementary classroom, an observer noted "a rubric at each child's desk, writing workshop, modeled reading, challenging work for students writing on Wampanoags." However, in another, reviewers noted a crowded classroom with too many children and a teacher trying to manage the distribution and monitoring of students reading lots of leveled books. At the high school, a teacher was "trying; pushing them to think" while in another, "the tone and pace is so boring, even though the teacher is kind and competent with subject. Class was 'lackluster,' students were asked to do the minimum and the teacher did all the work."

In the area of Instructional Practice, positive indicators of educational practice were seen roughly two-thirds of the time in elementary and middle school classrooms (67 percent, 62.6 percent) and less than half the time in those observed at the high school (49.4 percent). Effective instructional practice is evident when teachers implement strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities and make learning goals clear, and when students understand their relevance. In addition, instructional practice is rated highly when the teacher raises the level of students' learning by using a variety of instructional techniques and the pace is appropriate to students' varied learning rates. Reviewers' comments included, "each student is reading a different book" during Readers' Workshop at the elementary level and "several classrooms were using literature circles very

effectively” in one middle school, while at another, “a teacher-dominated lesson; some students were restless and inattentive.” At the high school, a reviewer noted, “this topic could have wonderful visuals, but there is only a list on an overhead displayed to the class.” In another high school class, the comment was, “the students make it through because they are smart and this is an advanced class.”

For Student Activity and Behavior, reviewers look for students who actively engage in the learning process, show an understanding of lesson objectives, and demonstrate ownership of learning by asking their own questions. Positive indicators are present when students recall information, make connections to prior learning, and make appropriate use of technology. Other positive qualities include purposeful and productive student-to-student interactions as well as student-to-teacher interactions. These characteristics were observed 53.7 percent of the time in observed elementary classrooms, 59 percent of the time in those observed at the middle school level, and 45.3 percent of the time in those observed at the high school level. Comments from reviewers included, “ideal opportunity, students should be working in groups,” and “in a co-teaching classroom the [special education] group goes with the co-teacher,” while in another co-teaching classroom, “the co-teacher put a geometry proof in the board and worked with the class while the classroom teacher worked with individual students.” In another class, an adult “sat in the back of the room during the whole period and when asked at the end of class if she was a paraprofessional or a co-teacher, she explained that she was a paraprofessional and her student was absent that day so there was nothing for her to do.”

There were some relatively high overall ratings, and a number of individual classrooms were rated highly in multiple indicators. These ratings indicate that districtwide initiatives to train and support teachers as they implement best classroom practice seem to be taking hold. However, at the same time, the observations indicate, overall, only a modest incidence of good educational practice. For example, if at the middle school, high expectations for student work were observed 59 percent of the time, this meant that in 41 percent of instances high expectations were not observed. So a large number of students were in classroom settings with low expectations for their learning. At the high school, in four out of five areas observed, half or more of the observations noted an absence of indicators of quality educational practice. In only one area, Classroom

Management, did observers note positive indicators in the high school classrooms more than half the time. That was in 62.5 percent of observed classrooms. So, based on this random sample it appears that for many students classroom practice in Fall River does not yet provide adequate opportunities to learn.

## Appendix D

### Classroom Observation Protocol

1. **Classrooms are randomly selected for observations.** Classrooms are not selected in advance and are not pre-announced. On the morning of the first day of the site visit, districts typically provide classroom schedules, driving directions, building maps, and special instructions for parking, entry, and security.
2. **Observers have all had public school experience as certified teachers and have been CORI-checked.**
3. **The team focuses on ELA, Math, and STE regular education classrooms in tested grades.** Other classrooms may be observed for evidence of the implementation of curriculum and special education access to the curriculum. Building principals typically provide the team with a list of special education and inclusion classrooms prior to the observations.
4. **The purpose of classroom observations is to survey instructional practices across the district.** The team is seeking evidence of district-wide implementation of the curriculum and instructional strategies. The team is also seeking to triangulate evidence collected in interviews and documents.
5. **Examiners do not evaluate individual teachers in the classroom observations.** Team members do not share notes from classroom observations or give feedback about individual teacher performance to school or district staff.
6. **The team does not observe classrooms led by substitutes and student-teachers.** Building principals typically provide the team with a list of classrooms with substitutes and student teachers on the day of the school visit.
7. **Teachers should continue instruction as normal during the week of the site visit.** Teachers do not need to explain the lesson, provide lesson plans, or prepare special lessons. Teachers do not need to introduce the examiner to students, but teachers may inform students in advance that an observer may visit during the week of the site visit.
8. **Observations are approximately 20 minutes in length.**
9. **Observers will attempt to minimize disruption to instruction as they enter, observe, and exit the classroom.**
10. **Observers may sit or move around the classroom.** Examiners may sit at an available seat in the classroom, walk around the room, and view materials displayed or shelved such as student work or portfolios.
11. **Observers will take handwritten notes during the classroom observation.** Examiners record times, grade level, content area, number of students and teachers, gender of students, number of computers, part of the lesson, and attributes of effective teaching observed. Observers will not use electronic devices such as laptops or recorders.
12. **Observers may ask adults brief questions.** Usually this occurs upon entering or leaving the classroom (to clarify staff roles, for example). Questions will be asked only if necessary and only if doing so will not disrupt instruction. Observers may also speak briefly to teachers if invited to do so during the observation.
13. **Observers may ask students brief questions.** Questions will be asked only if necessary and only if doing so will not disrupt learning.
14. **Examiners also visit schools to conduct facility checks and interviews with school principals.**
15. **Examiners will adhere to the highest professional conduct and carry out the observation with dignity and competence.** Examiners will not display opinions or provide feedback to staff or students.

## **Appendix E**

### **Evidence from Classroom Observations**

#### **Classroom Management**

1. Students take responsibility for their work with or without teacher direction.
  - Students work at assigned tasks independently
  - Students work with varying degrees of independence.
  - Students are observed to be “on task.”
  
2. Classroom rules and routines are established, internalized in the service of learning.
  - Rules make sense and consequences are fair.
  - Students are assigned roles to ensure coordination of activity.
  - When questioned, students know classroom expectations.
  - Students follow rules automatically.
  - Routines are established for activities such as; class opening and dismissal, turning in and recording homework, and collecting missed work.
  
3. Transitions from one activity to another maximize instructional time.
  - Routines are in place for distribution and collection of materials.
  - Student management is orderly and purposeful.
  - The teacher uses signals to gain students’ attention.
  - The teacher foreshadows things to come.
  
4. The teacher models and promotes respectful behavior and maintains safety.
  - The teacher praises and reinforces positive behavior.
  - The teacher reminds students of expectations.
  - The teacher refers to students by name.
  - The teacher intervenes and redirects when student behavior is negative.
  - The teacher anticipates situations by rehearsing safe behavior.
  
5. Additional teachers, aides, and assistants have an instructional role in the classroom and are actively involved in the learning process.
  - The teachers have co-equal roles.
  - Aides or assistants are purposefully involved in the delivery of instruction.
  - The teacher aides provide direct assistance to students.

#### **Instructional Practice**

6. The teacher uses a variety of questioning techniques including those that encourage elaboration, thought, and broad involvement.
  - The teacher uses ‘wait time’ effectively.
  - The teacher calls on many students.
  - The teacher asks questions requiring analysis, prediction, and interpretation.
  - The teacher’s questions keep students ‘open and thinking.’

7. The teacher allocates and uses instructional time effectively.
  - Allocated time is proportionate to the instructional goal.
  - Teacher communicates the importance of using time effectively.
  - Teacher interacts with students for majority of allocated academic time.
  
8. The teacher matches the pace of instruction to students' rates of learning while fulfilling benchmark expectations.
  - The teacher re-explains and re-teaches when needed.
  - The teacher accelerates when mastery learning is apparent.
  - The teacher pauses to take advantage of 'teachable' moments.
  - The teacher continues to hold to the goal of the lesson.
  
9. The teacher incorporates ELA language acquisition and ELA language development in subject area instruction.
  - The teacher defines core vocabulary and idioms.
  - A language objective is included with the content objective.
  
10. The teacher provides clear and explicit directions that are understood by students.
  - The teacher includes necessary directions.
  - The teacher translates into simpler language.
  - The teacher uses models.
  - The teacher highlights important information.
  
11. The teacher checks for understanding and corrects misunderstandings.
  - The teacher anticipates confusion.
  - The teacher reads cues.
  - The teacher 'dipsticks' for understanding.
  - The teacher unscrambles confusion.
  
12. The teacher makes learning goals clear to the students and students understand their relevance.
  - The teacher communicates what students will know and be able to do at end of upcoming instruction.
  - The teacher lists or articulates the learning goal.
  - The teacher references goal in the lesson.
  - The teacher gives students the list of the activity.
  - Teacher or student summarizes what was learned.
  - The teacher stresses real-life application of the goal.
  
13. The teacher increases the level of learning by using a variety of instructional techniques.
  - Instruction includes various modalities to address different learning styles.
  - Instruction may include may include: problem-solving, cooperative learning, scaffolding, and other strategies to increase student engagement.
  - The teacher uses principles of learning such as: modeling, teaching for transfer, breaking down complex tasks, practice, or cumulative review.

- Instruction is child-centered with the students doing most of the activity.
  - Teacher directed instruction is only one of many strategies used by the teacher.
14. The teacher implements instructional strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities.
- The teacher is observed implementing instructional strategies that reflect school and/or district priorities.
15. The teacher elicits student contributions and questions.
- The teacher encourages student participation.
  - Student participation is frequent.
  - Reluctant students are encouraged to participate.
16. The teacher uses technology appropriately to deliver instruction.
- Technology is used to enhance and expand learning.
  - Technology in use may include simulations, probes, graphing calculators, assistive devices.
  - Technology is used to re-teach, review, and accelerate learning for handicapped students.

### **Expectations**

17. The teacher communicates and enforces standards, expectations, and guidelines for student work and interpersonal behavior.
- Classroom rules are posted and enforced.
  - Teacher encourages students to evaluate their own work and behavior.
  - Teacher offers prompt and specific feedback.
  - Teacher recognizes superior performance.
18. Instructional time is focused on helping students produce high quality work based on the state curriculum standards.
- The majority of class time is used for instruction rather than organization and management.
  - Students who finish quickly have work that expands or advances the lesson.
19. The teacher provides models and/or rubrics to exemplify high quality student work.
- Instructional models and or rubrics are posted and referenced.
  - Student notebooks contain rubrics.
  - Students can explain the use of rubrics on their work and in the classroom.
  - Rubrics are posted and in observed to be in use.
20. The teacher encourages students and expresses confidence in their ability to do challenging work.
- The teacher offers appropriate praise and reinforcement.
  - The teacher communicates the following: THIS IS IMPORTANT-YOU CAN DO IT- I WON'T GIVE UP ON YOU!

21. Student work of high quality is valued through activities such as: celebration, exhibition, publication, and collection.

- Student work is available for examination.
- Student work is evident on bulletin boards, displays, in journals, and in portfolios.

### **Student Activity, Work, and Behavior**

22. The students show an understanding of the learning goals.

- When questioned, students know what they are doing and why.
- Student work products demonstrate an understanding of what has been taught.

23. Students are actively engaged in learning and observed to be purposeful and productive.

- Students are engaged in learning and considered to be ‘on-task.’
- Students persevere with challenging tasks.

24. Students recall important items or learning moments from this or prior lessons and use this information to increase understanding.

- Students activate current knowledge about a new concept.
- Students make connections between what they learned in the past and what they are learning now.
- Students construct meaning to increase understanding.

25. Students demonstrate ownership of learning by asking their own questions.

- Students use personal experiences to develop questions.
- Students make connections and apply the learning.

26. The interaction between students is respectful and productive.

- Students are able to assume another’s point of view.
- Students treat each other as equals.
- Students work cooperatively.

27. Students appropriately use available technology.

- Students demonstrate understanding of how to use technology for learning.
- Students demonstrate skills in using technology as a tool for learning.

28. Students’ work reflects quality, complexity, and care.

- Student work shows evidence of revision and is in final form.
- Student work reflects appropriate standards.
- Student work requires skills such as: application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

### **Classroom Climate for Learning**

29. The teacher creates an inclusive environment in which all students belong.

- The teacher recognizes worth and capability of every student.
- The teacher conveys the message: “You Can Do It-I Won’t Give Up On You.!”
- The teacher treats students equitably.

30. Space is used flexibly to accommodate a range of learning activities.
- Classroom space is orderly and uncluttered.
  - Classroom space is flexible to accommodate various configurations.
  - Class seating is flexible enough to facilitate student collaboration in learning.
  - The teacher positions students advantageously for learning.
31. The teacher uses positive reinforcement to enhance students' self-esteem and self-confidence.
- The teacher uses praise rather than criticism.
  - The teacher gives genuine and positive feedback.
  - The teacher refrains from using negative comments or sarcasm.
32. The classroom has multiple resources which address diverse learning styles.
- Classroom materials address needs of auditory, visual, and tactile-kinesthetic learners.
  - Resources are adequate to support instruction.
33. The teacher appeals to interests or curiosity of students in order to motivate them.
- The teacher uses discovery learning and investigation.
  - The teacher uses a constructivist approach.
  - Independent projects are evident.

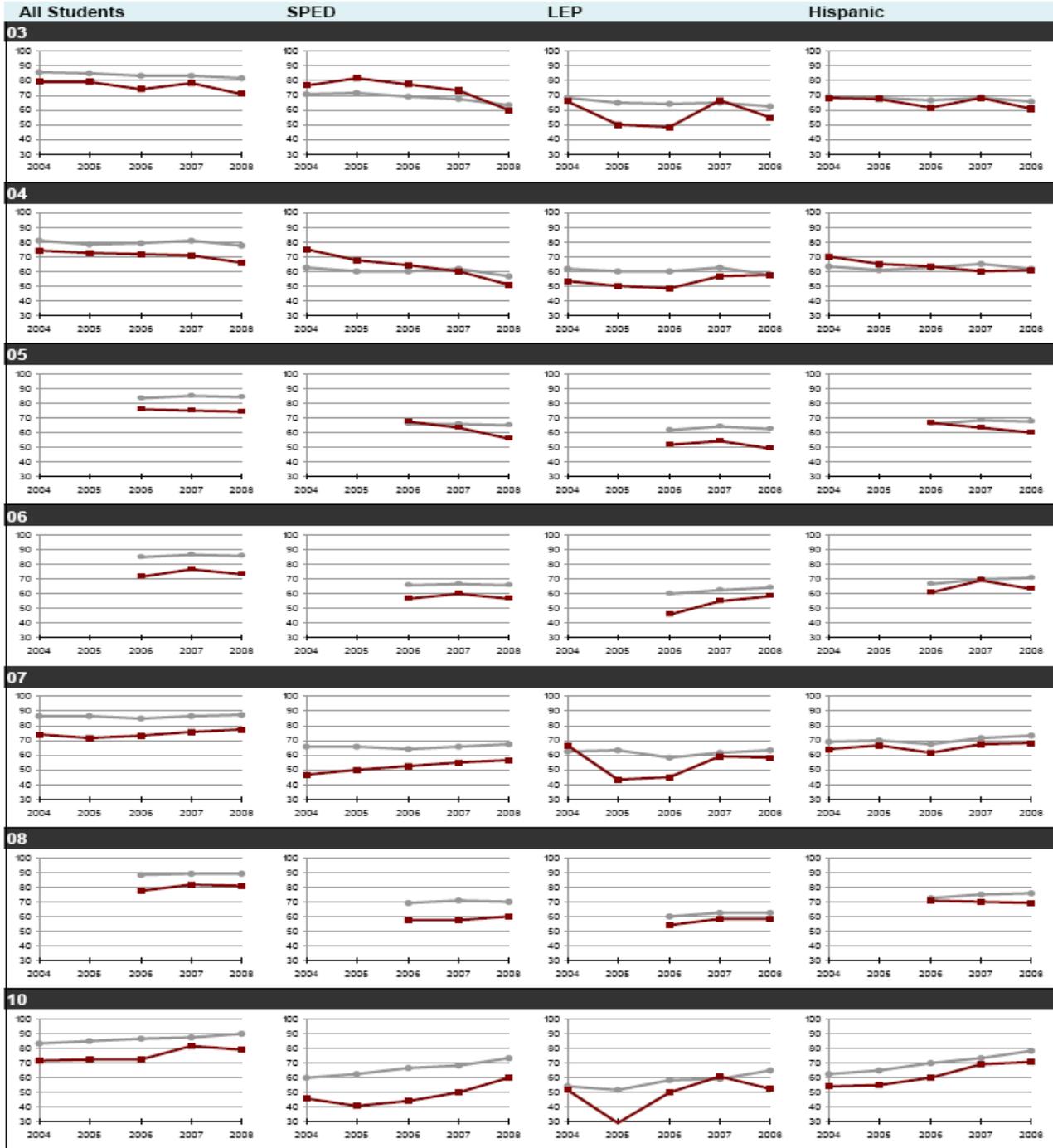
**Appendix F**  
**Response to Request for Amendments to Grants**

**Amendments recently proposed by the district to ESE for its Title I and Support for Underperforming Districts grants would supplant local funding.**

As part of its budget reduction plan for the 2008-2009 school year, the district has proposed amendments to use funds from the Title I grant and the Support for Underperforming Districts grant to fund professional positions. ESE has already submitted to the district a legal opinion that the proposed Title I amendment would supplant positions previously funded by the district by rehiring employees whose positions were eliminated from the local budget (and whose duties have not substantially changed). The amendment to the Support for Underperforming Districts grant would use the grant to fund the teacher coaches at the Kuss and Lord middle schools, previously funded by the school budget at all middle and elementary schools. The coaching positions would continue to be funded by the school budget at the other schools. Funds from the city to fulfill its Net School Spending obligation could more than cover the services described in those amendments.

## Appendix G: Fall River Compared to the State, Grades 3 - 10

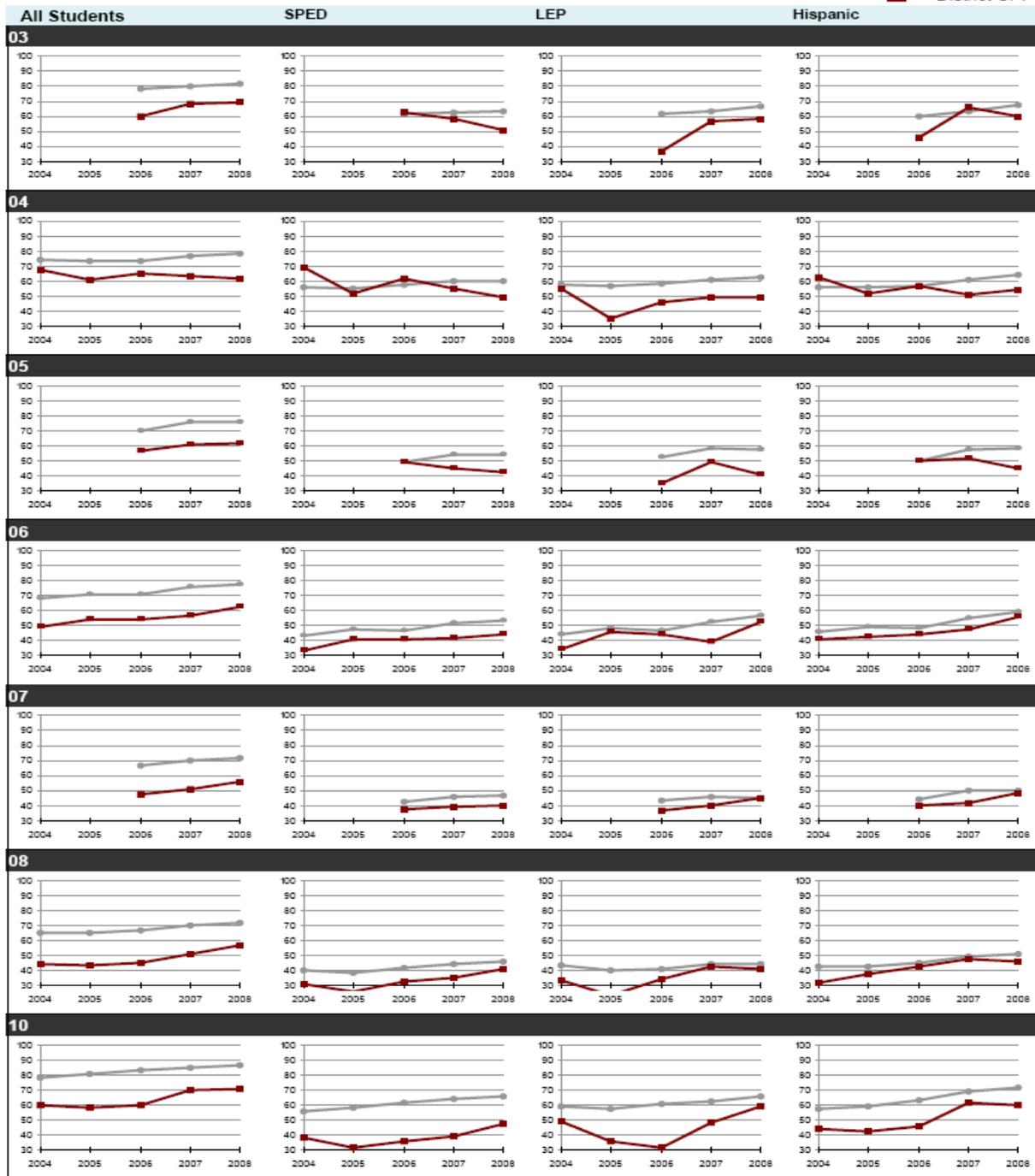
### Composite Performance Index (CPI) Trends - 2004 to 2008 (ELA)



Composite Performance Index (CPI): The CPI is a measure of the extent to which students in a group are progressing toward proficiency (a CPI of 100) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. CPIs are generated separately by subject area and at all levels - state, district, school, and student subgroup.

## Composite Performance Index (CPI) Trends - 2004 to 2008 (Math)

● State CPI  
■ District CPI



Composite Performance Index (CPI): The CPI is a measure of the extent to which students in a group are progressing toward proficiency (a CPI of 100) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. CPIs are generated separately by subject area and at all levels - state, district, school, and student subgroup.

## Appendix H

### List of Findings and Recommendations Made in this Report

#### Leadership Findings

##### **A. Leadership Roles and Dynamics**

- The school committee is involving itself in the management of the school district rather than focusing on making policy decisions. As a result, it is not effectively governing the school system or securing municipal and community support for the district. This is a significant weakness in the district.
- The school committee has been inappropriately involved in personnel decisions.
- The school committee has not used carefully planned and executed procedures to communicate expectations and evaluate the performance of the superintendent.
- The school committee lost confidence in the former superintendent over financial issues. This ultimately led to the superintendent's resignation in December 2008.
- School committee members have often demonstrated a lack of civility and respect at school committee meetings.
- Municipal and community leaders, as well as parents, are losing confidence in the school system due to financial turmoil, controversy over fiscal deficits and procedures, school committee behavior at meetings, and the circumstances surrounding the departure of the former superintendent.
- The former superintendent made a number of positive contributions to the Fall River Public Schools during the three-plus years of his superintendency.

##### **B. Leadership Support for Teaching and Learning**

- The lack of strategic alignment among school committee actions, the central office's improvement plan, and individual schools' improvement plans weakens the collective effort to improve student achievement.
- The district has only recently begun to develop a curriculum and align it with the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks*.
- Professional development in Fall River is largely school-based, job-embedded, designed to help teachers meet students' instructional needs, and determined from an analysis of student performance assessments.
- The former superintendent gave principals leadership training and autonomy in hiring their own staff, and held principals accountable for results.
- Although principals have authority in their own buildings, school leaders receive insufficient mentoring and inadequate support from the central office in the critical areas of teacher hiring and evaluation, their school's budget, and the acquisition of necessary instructional materials and supplies. This is a significant weakness in the district.
- The Fall River Educators Association (FREA) has constrained several educational initiatives in the district and has not taken enough steps to become a partner in educational improvement efforts.

##### **C. Use of Assessment, Program Evaluation, and Student Support**

- The district has begun to develop a systematic student assessment program consisting of formative benchmark assessments and summative assessments. Although not yet proficient, principals and teachers are becoming more agile in the use and analysis of assessment data.

- The failure of the district to evaluate its programs and services leaves it without sufficient knowledge to identify their weaknesses and remedy them, recognize redundancy in the curriculum, or determine which new research-based practices would be of most use to its students. This is a significant weakness in the district.
- The district lacks effective educational leadership and adequate support for the delivery of programs and services to English language learners and students with disabilities, needed to close achievement gaps.
- Parents, teachers, and principals identified the lack of adequate and affordable bus services, especially for high school students, as a major factor contributing to poor attendance. It is notable that in the class of 2008, more than 3 of 10 students dropped out and fewer than 6 of 10 students graduated.

#### **D. Leadership Support for Effective Use of Human Resources**

- Central office professionals are not formally evaluated, and there have been no written evaluations of principals since the 2005-2006 school year.
- The teacher evaluation tool is ineffective as implemented, and evaluations contain too little information to help teachers develop and improve.
- The district's human resources system lacks qualified, experienced executive leadership as well as effective administrative systems, structures, and procedures. This is a significant weakness in the district.

### **Resource Management Findings**

#### **A. Financial Capacity and Management**

- The district lacks adequate financial systems and procedures for budgeting, procurement, hiring, financial management, planning, and reporting. This is a significant weakness in the district.
- The interim chief financial officer for the schools is part-time and also serves as the director of the city's Office of Management, Budget and Accountability. A part-time position is insufficient for a district with critical needs for advocacy, oversight, and support related to the school budget of over \$100 million.

#### **B. Adequacy of Instructional Resources**

- In fiscal year 2009 Fall River will not meet its Net School Spending requirement by \$1.4 million. The school appropriation declined between fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2009 by \$2.5 million and serious personnel, programmatic, service, and facility reductions ensued. This is a significant weakness in the district.

#### **C. Use of Resources to Support Student Achievement**

- Hurried adjustments to respond to budget reductions exacerbated the negative impact of the budget shortfall on the educational experience of students.
- Kuss and Lord middle schools have benefited from ESE support and grants for chronically underperforming schools.

## **Recommendations**

*The team recommends that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education use its authority to monitor the Fall River Public School system, while providing guidance and technical assistance, to ensure that the district makes progress in four key areas: school committee governance, strategic implementation of improvements to teaching and learning, human resource management, and financial management.*

### **A. School Committee Governance**

- To build public confidence, the school committee needs to establish a thorough and clearly defined process for the selection of a new superintendent.<sup>22</sup>
- To exercise effective governance of the school system, the school committee needs to build its capacity to function as a responsible governance team and ensure continuity of that capacity in future school committees.

### **B. Strategic Implementation of Improvements to Teaching and Learning**

- The district needs guidance in the refinement and alignment of its Strategic Plan, District Improvement Plan, and School Improvement Plans that all members of the school community can accept and implement. To ensure widespread support and alignment, representative members of all school communities need to participate in their further development.
- Fall River should move beyond compliance and provide educational leadership for its programs for English language learners and students with special needs, ensuring student access to appropriate services, high quality teaching, and effective training for all teachers serving these students. The district needs to integrate this work within its District Improvement Plan and strategy.
- The district needs to continue to strengthen the ability of school-level educators to analyze and use assessments and assessment data to improve instruction. Again, it needs to integrate this work within its District Improvement Plan and strategy.
- The district needs to systematically review its programs and services as an integral part of its strategy to make necessary changes to meet improvement plan goals.
- Leadership in Fall River needs to identify, advocate for, and protect resources needed to enable its improvement efforts. The District Improvement Plan and aligned School Improvement Plans should identify professional development, curriculum, and other resources needed to implement their goals, and be reflected in future budget proposals.

### **C. Human Resource Management**

- The district needs experienced executive leadership to serve the human resource needs of all school personnel, as well as assistance to establish a well-functioning human resources department.
- The district needs to provide principals with the resources they need to support effective instruction: regular monitoring, mentoring, and support from the central office, as well as the staff and resources required to put sound educational systems in place and sustain them.
- The district needs to develop and use sound evaluation procedures to evaluate central office professionals and principals each year.

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<sup>22</sup> After these recommendations were made, the Fall River School Committee appointed Acting Superintendent Margery Mayo-Brown as permanent superintendent. Events since the review was conducted are described in the Addendum to the report.

- The district and the Fall River Educators Association need to resolve the current stalemate regarding the new teacher evaluation tool and implement a thoughtful and manageable tool that school leaders can use to evaluate the performance of the teaching staff.

#### **D. Financial Management**

- The district needs an external audit of the district's finances as soon as possible. The audit should include recommendations to the district on streamlining purchasing and hiring procedures, developing financial management policies, preparing reports, and aligning its spending with its mission. Technical assistance should follow the audit to help implement new strategies and procedures as well as train staff.
- The school district should receive guidance from ESE in selecting and hiring its own fulltime chief financial officer who is responsible for the financial operations of the school department.
- Consolidation of municipal and school department administrative functions should be considered only through an informed, well-planned, and agreed-upon process, and with guidance from ESE.
- Fall River needs to fund the school district at the required Net School Spending level and needs to consider the needs of the district along with the capacity of the city to fund the schools when setting future budgets. To avoid future funding crises, the school committee and municipal leadership need guidance in collaboratively developing and implementing a strategy to ensure adequate financial support for the schools.
- The district, in collaboration with the city, should prepare a long-range capital improvement plan for school buildings and school properties.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should continue its support and technical assistance to chronically underperforming schools in the district.