Comprehensive District Review Report

Gill-Montague Regional School District

Review conducted January 22–25, 2018

Office of District Reviews and Monitoring

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

Located along the Mohawk Trail, the Gill-Montague Regional School District serves 976 Pre-K–12 students[[1]](#footnote-1) from the town of Gill and the five villages of Montague in five schools: three elementary, one middle, and one high school.[[2]](#footnote-2) The district also enrolls middle and high school students from the neighboring town of Erving. The district’s student population presents opportunities and challenges to educators. In the 2017–2018 school year, 57.2 percent of students were part of the high-needs subgroup because they were in one or more of the following groups: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs) or former ELLs. In Gill-Montague, many students come to school each day with high programmatic and support needs. For example, students with disabilities in the district make up 22.4 percent of total student enrollment, compared with 17.7 percent of the state, and 45.5 percent of students come from economically disadvantaged households, compared with 32.0 percent across the state.

Student achievement indicators show that the district lags state averages in almost all indicators of academic progress. In 2014, Turners Falls High School was in the 29th percentile of high schools; in 2017, the high school was in the 11th percentile. The percentages of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2017 Next-Generation MCAS assessment in ELA and math for grades 3–8 were below state averages in each tested grade. The percentage of grade 10 students who achieved proficient or advanced on the 2017 MCAS assessment in ELA and math was also below state averages. On the 2017 MCAS assessment in science, although grade 8 students scored 9 percentage points above the state average, grade 10 students scored 6 percentage points below the state average. Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency fluctuated with an overall improvement.

District leaders are well aware of the challenges presented to educators to boost student achievement. Since 2013, under the leadership of the current superintendent, the district has become a more stable, trusting, and responsive school community.[[3]](#footnote-3) Leaders and teachers have initiated several ambitious and thoughtful initiatives to improve teaching and learning and to improve the district’s culture. The district has launched a number of programs, services, and learning experiences to support students’ social-emotional and behavioral wellbeing, believing these to be as important to students’ success in school as academic performance. In addition, the district has made progress in building a rich, standards-based curriculum aligned with the 2017 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics and the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Framework. At the time of the review in January 2018, only the elementary ELA curriculum was complete and fully aligned with state standards. Both leaders and teachers described curriculum development and alignment as “works in progress.”

The superintendent and the leadership team have identified clear criteria for excellence in teaching and prioritized them in the district’s planning documents. Continued work is required to ensure that all teachers share a common understanding of the district’s expectations for high-quality instruction and to strengthen implementation. In addition, the district should support and monitor the skills and practices of evaluators to ensure that the quality of oral and written feedback reflects high-quality instructional feedback that is timely, informative, instructive, and focused on professional growth and student achievement. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Between 2013 and 2018, enrollment in the district’s five schools decreased by seven percent partly because of fewer school-aged children in the towns and because of students choosing to attend charter schools, the regional vocational-technical school, and private schools as well as choicing out to other public school districts.

Until the 2017–2018 school year, the district’s leadership structure included a director of teaching and learning. The district eliminated the position at the end of the 2016–2017 school year. Consequently, the superintendent, central office administrative team, principals, and teacher-leaders share the 24 leadership responsibilities previously allocated to the director. In addition, the district recently eliminated a half-dozen other leadership and support positions that made an important contribution to improving teaching and learning. Budget projections for fiscal year 2019 indicate further staff reductions. Reflecting on these personnel losses, the superintendent said that the district was now without key positions dedicated to improvement. Community and district leaders are well aware of the pressure now placed on the district’s systems and are actively engaged in finding solutions to secure the district for the benefit of families and young people.

The district will have to reconcile how to move its 21st century learning and teaching aspirations forward given diminishing resources and fewer students. One opportunity stems from the district’s recent receipt of a $200,000 Barr Foundation grant to redesign the high-school experience. Preliminary ideas include competency-based education, experiential learning, and early college experiences. The district received a Massachusetts Department of Revenue grant of $110,000 to examine and implement new regionalization and efficiencies to foster long-term sustainability.

***Instruction***

The review team observed 62 classes throughout the district: [[5]](#footnote-5) 14 at the high school, 20 at the middle school, and 28 at the 3 elementary schools. The team observed 22 ELA classes, 20 mathematics classes, 6 science classes, and 14 classes in other subject areas. Among the classes observed were five special education classes. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members collected data using ESE’s Instructional Inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is presented in Appendix C.

In observed classrooms, review team members found a range of teaching quality, with stronger instruction at the elementary level for 11 of the 12 best practice characteristics included in ESE’s Instructional Inventory tool. The district has identified expectations for high-quality instruction and evaluators refer to them while supervising and evaluating teachers. However, in observed classrooms s, review team members found generally inconsistent implementation of these expectations, especially in grades 6–12, with several notable exceptions. For example, while in most observed Pre-K–5 lessons students were engaged in small groups working with a teacher, sharing ideas and building skills and understanding, review team members observed the use of appropriate strategies for engaging older students more actively in academic work in only a small percentage of secondary classes. Lessons at the elementary level often accommodated students’ varied learning needs, while in many secondary classes teachers often used a direct instruction whole-class model. At all levels, rigorous learning opportunities to develop students’ higher-order thinking skills were not consistently embedded in lessons; higher-order thinking was more frequently observed at the high school. Observed lessons also reflected uneven skills in teaching for understanding to reflect the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework used to design curriculum maps and units of study throughout the district.

***Strengths***

The district has created a transparent culture, focused operational leadership, and administrative stability—fostering confidence from teachers, parents, and the general public. In addition, the towns of Gill and Montague and the regional school district have a constructive civic relationship. District and municipal leaders have a positive working relationship with each other, which has contributed to a collaborative budget process and growth in net school spending. Since the last district review in 2010, district systems for the continuous collection, timely dissemination and use of assessment data and other information to plan instruction and inform decision-making have improved, particularly at the elementary schools. In addition, the district has implemented an educator evaluation system that is aligned with the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework. Finally, the district provides a wide range of practices, programs, and services that address students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

Improvement planning in the district is uneven and missing many required elements. District educators have not completely documented and fully aligned the ELA, math and science curricula with the current state frameworks. In addition, teachers do not share a common understanding of the district’s expectations for high-quality teaching and the goals to improve instruction in School Improvement Plans are not consistently aligned districtwide with the district’s instructional expectations.

The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system. In addition, the district has not taken action on the components of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework that require the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence. The district’s professional development plan is not collaboratively developed or aligned with the district’s strategic priorities. The district has not developed a consistent approach to providing academic supports at all levels in core content areas.

The district’s in-district per-pupil expenditure is above the state average and above that of similar districts, including districts in western Massachusetts with comparable community wealth. In addition, the district does not currently have a capital and improvement plan for the future status of its aging and underused buildings. Some buildings need maintenance, major repairs, and upgrades.

***Recommendations***

* The district should develop and implement an actionable and comprehensive district improvement plan (DIP) and aligned school improvement plans (SIP).
* The district should assign responsibility for districtwide curricular and instructional leadership; ensure that all curriculum materials are fully documented and aligned with state standards; and take steps to strengthen teachers’ understanding and implementation of high-quality instruction.
* The district should complete its assessments and curriculum units in a systematic way that is faithful to the Understanding by Design Framework.
* The district should promote the growth of educators by fully implementing all components of the educator evaluation system, including a concerted effort to collect student data and feedback to inform the evaluation process.
* The district should create a professional development committee and procedures to ensure adequate time and resources are allocated to providing a high-quality professional development program that has clear goals and objectives and is aligned with the district and school improvement goals.
* The district and school leaders should ensure that adequate resources are provided in all schools and at all levels to provide differentiated supports to help all students succeed.
* The district should review its spending to determine how it can more effectively support district priorities and get the value that it wants from its investment choices.
* The district should investigate the underutilization of buildings along with addressing the age and physical condition of the buildings.
* The district should develop public budget documents that provide a transparent, complete, and usable budget that is clearly aligned with the district’s goals.

Gill-Montague RSD Comprehensive District Review Overview

Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws, comprehensive district reviews support local school districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness of systemwide functions, with reference to the six district standards used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE): leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources and professional development, student support, and financial and asset management. Reviews identify systems and practices that may be impeding improvement as well as those most likely to be contributing to positive results. In addition to being a tool that districts can use to inform their own improvement efforts, review reports may be used by ESE to identify technical assistance and other resources to provide to the district.

Methodology

Reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards above. A district review team consisting of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards reviews documentation, data, and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to individual schools. The team conducts interviews and focus group sessions with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers’ association representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classroom instructional practice. Subsequent to the onsite review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE.

Site Visit

The site visit to the Gill-Montague Regional School District was conducted from January 22–25, 2018. The site visit included 33.25 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 98 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, students, and teachers’ association representatives. The review team conducted two teacher focus groups with three elementary-school teachers and five middle- and high-school teachers.

A list of review team members, information about review activities, and the site visit schedule are in Appendix A, and Appendix B provides information about enrollment, attendance, and expenditures. The team observed classroom instructional practice in 62 classrooms in 5 schools. The team collected data using ESE’s Instructional Inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is contained in Appendix C.

**District Profile**

Each community in the Gill-Montague Regional School District has a town manager form of government. The school committee consists of nine members: six residents of the Town of Montague and three residents of the Town of Gill. The voters of Gill and Montague elect the members. There is one student advisory representative. Since grade 7–12 students from Erving attend the district’s secondary schools, by agreement the Erving school committee can have three non-voting advisory members on the Gill-Montague school committee; at the time of the onsite in January 2018, there was only one. The school committee generally meets twice a month. The school committee elects the chair of the school committee.

The current superintendent has been in the position since July 1, 2013. The district leadership team includes the superintendent, the director of business operations, the pupil services director, the technology director, the data coordinator, and the four principals. Central office positions have been unstable in number, decreasing over the past four years. The district has four principals leading five schools; one principal serves both the middle and high schools. School staff include two assistant principals, seven adjustment counselors, and two guidance counselors. In the 2017–2018 school year, there were 92.3 teachers in the district.

In the 2017–2018 school year, 976 students were enrolled in the district’s 5 schools.

**Table 1: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**Schools, Type, Grades Served, and Enrollment\*, 2017–2018**

| **School** | **School Type** | **Grades Served** | **Enrollment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Hillcrest Elementary School | ES | Pre-K–1 | 162 |
| Sheffield Elementary School | ES | 2–5 | 216 |
| Gill Elementary School | ES | K–6 | 134 |
| Great Falls Middle School\*\* | MS | 6–8 | 245 |
| Turners Falls High School\*\* | HS | 9–12 | 219 |
| **Totals** | **5 schools** | **Pre-K–12** | **976** |
| \* As of October 1, 2017  \*\* Great Falls Middle School and Turners Falls High School are located in one building. | | | |

Between 2013 and 2018 overall student enrollment decreased by seven percent. According to ESE data, in fiscal year 2017, the district received 103.9 choice-in students and sent 221.1 students to schools in other communities. Enrollment figures by race/ethnicity and high needs populations (i.e., students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners (ELLs) and former ELLs) as compared with the state are provided in Tables B1a and B1b in Appendix B.

Total in-district per-pupil expenditures were higher than the median in-district per-pupil expenditures for 16 K–12 districts with less than 1,000 pupils in fiscal year 2016: $18,790 as compared with $17,551 (see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing and Finance](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dart/)). Actual net school spending has been well above what is required by the Chapter 70 state education aid program, as shown in Table B3 in Appendix B.

Student Performance

**Note:** The Next-Generation MCAS assessment is administered to grades 3–8 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics; it was administered for the first time in 2017. (For more information, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/parents/results-faq.html>.) The MCAS assessment is administered to grades 5 and 8 in science and to grade 10 in ELA, math, and science. Data from the two assessments are presented separately because the tests are different and cannot be compared.

**The average scaled score on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment for all students was below the state rate by 5.8 points in ELA and by 11.3 points in math.**

| **Table 2: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Average Scaled Score (SS) Grades 3–8, 2017** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA SS** | **State SS** | **N** | **Math SS** | **State SS** |
| High Needs | 276 | 487.8 | 488.5 | 276 | 480.6 | 488.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 214 | 489.4 | 489.2 | 214 | 482.0 | 488.1 |
| SWD | 115 | 479.0 | 480.0 | 115 | 472.4 | 479.8 |
| ELLs | 38 | 485.1 | 484.9 | 38 | 479.3 | 486.8 |
| All | 473 | 493.3 | 499.1 | 472 | 487.5 | 498.8 |
| Next Generation MCAS Achievement Levels: 440–470 Not Meeting Expectations; 470–500 Partially Meeting Expectations; 500–530 Meeting Expectations; 530–560 Exceeding Expectations | | | | | | |

**The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment in grades 3–8 was below the state rate by 14 percentage points in ELA (35 percent vs. 49 percent) and below the state rate by 21 percentage points in math (27 percent vs. 48 percent).**

* The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was below the state rate in ELA for high needs students and students with disabilities by 4 percentage points, and by 3 and 7 percentage points for economically disadvantaged students and English language learners, respectively.
* The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was below the state rate in math for high needs students and economically disadvantaged students by 12 percentage points, and by 6 and 8 percentage points for students with disabilities and English language learners, respectively.

| **Table 3: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding (M/E) Expectations Grades 3–8, 2017** | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA M/E** | **State M/E** | **Above/Below State** | **N** | **Math M/E** | **State M/E** | **Above/Below State** |
| High Needs | 276 | 23% | 27% | -4 | 276 | 15% | 27% | -12 |
| Econ. Dis. | 214 | 26% | 29% | -3 | 214 | 15% | 27% | -12 |
| SWD | 115 | 9% | 13% | -4 | 115 | 8% | 14% | -6 |
| ELLs | 38 | 16% | 23% | -7 | 38 | 18% | 26% | -8 |
| All | 473 | 35% | 49% | -14 | 472 | 27% | 48% | -21 |

**The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment in 10th grade was below the state rate by 11 percentage points in ELA and by 5 percentage points in the math.**

* In ELA, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was below the state rate by 11 to 24 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities.
* In math, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was below the state rate by 4 and 11 percentage points for high needs students and students with disabilities and above the state rate by 3 percentage points for economically disadvantaged students.

| **Table 4: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2017** | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA** | **State** | **Above/Below State** | **N** | **Math** | **State** | **Above/Below State** |
| High Needs | 28 | 61% | 79% | -18 | 28 | 54% | 58% | -4 |
| Econ. Dis. | 20 | 70% | 81% | -11 | 19 | 63% | 60% | 3 |
| SWD | 16 | 44% | 68% | -24 | 16 | 31% | 42% | -11 |
| ELLs | 4 | -- | 59% | -- | 5 | -- | 39% | -- |
| All | 54 | 80% | 91% | -11 | 54 | 74% | 79% | -5 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency for all students improved by 3 percentage points for all students and declined by 11 and 7 percentage points for high needs students and students with disabilities, respectively.**

| **Table 5: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grades 5, 8, and 10, 2014-2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 90 | 35% | 34% | 27% | 24% | -11 | 31% |
| Econ. Dis. | 65 | -- | 38% | 32% | 26% | -- | 32% |
| SWD | 40 | 17% | 13% | 12% | 10% | -7 | 21% |
| ELLs | 13 | -- | 36% | -- | 31% | -- | 20% |
| All | 193 | 44% | 52% | 38% | 47% | 3 | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 14 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3–8 as a whole, 9 and 4 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd and 7th grades, respectively, and 10 to 36 percentage points below the state rate in the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th grades.**

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 21 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3–8 as a whole, by 6 percentage points below the state rate in the 8th grade, and 16 to 37 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd through 7th grades.**

| **Table 6: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding (M/E) Expectations in Grades 3–8, 2017** | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **N** | **ELA M/E** | **State ELA** | **Difference** | **N** | **Math M/E** | **State Math** | **Difference** |
| 3 | 77 | 38% | 47% | -9 | 77 | 30% | 49% | -19 |
| 4 | 65 | 12% | 48% | -36 | 65 | 12% | 49% | -37 |
| 5 | 72 | 39% | 49% | -10 | 72 | 21% | 46% | -25 |
| 6 | 96 | 36% | 51% | -15 | 96 | 26% | 50% | -24 |
| 7 | 85 | 46% | 50% | -4 | 85 | 31% | 47% | -16 |
| 8 | 78 | 35% | 49% | -14 | 77 | 42% | 48% | -6 |
| 3–8 | 473 | 35% | 49% | -14 | 472 | 27% | 48% | -21 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment improved by 3 percentage points for all students and by 13 and 14 percentage points in the 8th and 10th grades and declined by 17 percentage points in the 5th grade.**

| **Table 7: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grades 5, 8, and 10, 2014–2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 5 | 72 | 49% | 38% | 20% | 32% | -17 | 46% |
| 8 | 77 | 36% | 43% | 33% | 49% | 13 | 40% |
| 10 | 44 | 52% | 82% | 76% | 66% | 14 | 74% |
| All | 193 | 44% | 52% | 38% | 47% | 3 | 53% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in ELA the median student growth percentile (SGP) improved by 17 and 16 points in the 6th and 7th grades, respectively, and declined 11 points in the 10th grade.**

| **Table 8: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **ELA Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014-2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 59 | 36.0 | 23.0 | 42.0 | 32.0 | -4.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 66 | 59.5 | 40.0 | 37.0 | 67.0 | 7.5 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 87 | 43.0 | 28.0 | 30.0 | 60.0 | 17.0 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 78 | 57.0 | 45.0 | 62.0 | 73.0 | 16.0 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 71 | 45.0 | 30.0 | 39.0 | 48.0 | 3.0 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 45 | 48.0 | 33.0 | 35.0 | 37.0 | -11.0 | 50.0 |
| Changes in SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful. | | | | | | | |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in math the median SGP declined by 24 to 35.5 points in the 4th, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades.**

| **Table 9: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Math Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014-2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 60 | 49.0 | 37.0 | 46.0 | 25.0 | -24.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 66 | 67.0 | 60.0 | 55.0 | 31.5 | -35.5 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 87 | 44.5 | 41.0 | 23.0 | 40.0 | -4.5 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 78 | 80.0 | 58.0 | 70.0 | 71.0 | -9.0 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 70 | 80.0 | 42.0 | 57.0 | 49.5 | -30.5 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 46 | 49.0 | 39.0 | 48.5 | 22.0 | -27.0 | 50.0 |
| Changes in SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful. | | | | | | | |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 39 to 45 percent in the 3rd grade, from 11 to 19 percent in the 4th grade, from 36 to 50 percent in the 5th grade, and from 31 to 73 percent in the 6th grade. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was 46 percent and 35 percent in the 7th and 8th grades, respectively, at Great Falls Middle.**

| **Table 10: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS ELA Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade and School, 2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **3–8** |
| Hillcrest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Gill | 45% | 19% | 50% | 73% | -- | -- | 46% |
| Sheffield | 39% | 11% | 36% | -- | -- | -- | 30% |
| Great Falls | -- | -- | -- | 31% | 46% | 35% | 38% |
| District | 38% | 12% | 39% | 36% | 46% | 35% | 35% |
| State | 47% | 48% | 49% | 51% | 50% | 49% | 49% |

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 27 to 45 percent in the 3rd grade, from 11 to 19 percent in the 4th grade, from 18 to 31 percent in the 5th grade, and from 21 to 60 percent in the 6th grade. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was 32 percent and 41 percent in the 7th and 8th grades, respectively, at Great Falls Middle.**

| **Table 11: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade and School, 2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **3–8** |
| Hillcrest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Gill | 45% | 19% | 31% | 60% | -- | -- | 39% |
| Sheffield | 27% | 11% | 18% | -- | -- | -- | 19% |
| Great Falls | -- | -- | -- | 21% | 32% | 41% | 31% |
| District | 30% | 12% | 21% | 26% | 31% | 42% | 27% |
| State | 49% | 49% | 46% | 50% | 47% | 48% | 48% |

**On the MCAS assessment, in the 10th grade the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced at Turners Fall High was below the state rate by 8 percentage points in ELA and by 2 percentage points in math**.

| **Table 12: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2017** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **ELA** | **Math** |
| Turners Fall High | 83% | 77% |
| State | 91% | 79% |

**In science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment were 56 and 25 percent in the 5th grade in the district’s elementary schools with reportable data, and was 50 percent in the 8th grade at Great Falls Middle. Science proficiency was 66 percent in the 10th grade at Turners Fall High.**

| **Table 13: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade, 2017** | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **10** | **Total** |
| Hillcrest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Gill | -- | -- | 56% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 56% |
| Sheffield | -- | -- | 25% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 25% |
| Great Falls | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 50% | -- | 50% |
| Turners Fall High | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 66% | 66% |
| District | -- | -- | 32% | -- | -- | 49% | 66% | 47% |
| State | -- | -- | 46% | -- | -- | 40% | 74% | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment in the district’s elementary schools ranged from 30 to 46 percent and was 38 percent at Great Falls Middle.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 20 to 27 percent in the district’s elementary schools, and was 26 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 19 to 33 percent in the district’s elementary schools, and was 33 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations was 13 percent at Sheffield Elementary and 6 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations was 19 percent at Sheffield Elementary and 9 percent at Great Falls Middle.

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment in the district’s elementary schools ranged from 19 to 39 percent and was 31 percent at Great Falls Middle.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 14 to 15 percent in the district’s elementary schools and was 16 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 11 to 22 percent in the district’s elementary schools and was 19 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations was 13 percent at Sheffield Elementary and 6 percent at Great Falls Middle.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations was 19 percent at Sheffield Elementary and 18 percent at Great Falls Middle.

| **Table 14: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting and Exceeding Expectations by School, 2017** | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **ELA** | | | | | **Math** | | | | |
| **School** | **All** | **High Needs** | **Econ. Dis.** | **SWD** | **ELLs** | **All** | **High Needs** | **Econ. Dis.** | **SWD** | **ELLs** |
| Hillcrest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Gill | 46% | 27% | 33% | -- | -- | 39% | 15% | 22% | -- | -- |
| Sheffield | 30% | 20% | 19% | 13% | 19% | 19% | 14% | 11% | 13% | 19% |
| Great Falls | 38% | 26% | 33% | 6% | 9% | 31% | 16% | 19% | 6% | 18% |
| District | 35% | 23% | 26% | 9% | 16% | 27% | 15% | 15% | 8% | 18% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, ELA proficiency at Turners Fall High declined by 4 percentage points for all students and by 19 and 14 percentage points for high needs students and students with disabilities, respectively.**

**Between 2014 and 2017, math proficiency at Turners Fall High improved by 4 and 3 percentage points for all students and students with disabilities and declined by 8 percentage points for high needs students.**

| **Table 15: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2014-2017** | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **ELA** | | | | | **Math** | | | | |
| **School** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** |
| Turners Fall High | 87% | 93% | 91% | 83% | -4 | 73% | 78% | 84% | 77% | 4 |
| High Needs | 84% | 91% | 76% | 65% | -19 | 66% | 50% | 68% | 58% | -8 |
| Econ. Dis. | -- | 95% | 81% | 78% | -- | -- | 58% | 71% | 71% | -- |
| ELLs | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| SWD | 64% | -- | -- | 50% | -14 | 33% | -- | -- | 36% | 3 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment declined by 14 and 17 percentage points in the 2 elementary schools with reportable data, and improved by 12 and14 percentage points at Great Falls Middle and Turners Fall High, respectively.**

* Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency for high needs students declined by 21 percentage points at Sheffield Elementary, by 5 and 3 percentage points at Great Falls Middle and Turners Fall High, respectively.
* In 2017, science proficiency for economically disadvantaged students was 9 percent at Sheffield Elementary, and 31 and 45 percent at Greater Falls Middle and Turners Fall High, respectively.
* Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency for students with disabilities declined by 33 and 12 percentage points at Sheffield Elementary and Greater Falls Middle, , respectively, and improved by 18 percentage points at Turners Fall High.

| **Table 16: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Science by School and Subgroup, 2014–2017** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** |
| Hillcrest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Gill | 16 | 70% | 58% | 33% | 56% | -14 |
| High Needs | 4 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Econ. Dis. | 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| SWD | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| ELLs | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Sheffield | 55 | 42% | 35% | 15% | 25% | -17 |
| High Needs | 30 | 34% | 29% | 7% | 13% | -21 |
| Econ. Dis. | 23 | -- | 33% | 9% | 9% | -- |
| SWD | 11 | 33% | 7% | 0% | 0% | -33 |
| ELLs | 7 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Great Falls | 76 | 38% | 44% | 33% | 50% | 12 |
| High Needs | 35 | 31% | 25% | 24% | 26% | -5 |
| Econ. Dis. | 26 | -- | 26% | 28% | 31% | -- |
| SWD | 16 | 18% | 5% | 11% | 6% | -12 |
| ELLs | 2 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Turners Fall High | 44 | 52% | 82% | 81% | 66% | 14 |
| High Needs | 19 | 40% | 62% | 79% | 37% | -3 |
| Econ. Dis. | 11 | -- | 72% | 80% | 45% | -- |
| SWD | 11 | 9% | -- | -- | 27% | 18 |
| ELLs | 4 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

**Between 2014 and 2017, the district’s four-year cohort graduation rate improved by 3.5 percentage points for all students and improved by 3.1 to 5.8 percentage points for each subgroup with reportable data, except students with disabilities.**

| **Table 17: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2014–2017** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N**  **(2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High needs | 34 | 70.7% | 63.2% | 67.3% | 76.5% | 5.8 | 80.0% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 31 | 71.1% | 64.7% | 66.7% | 74.2% | 3.1 | 79.0% |
| ELLs | 4 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 63.4% |
| SWD | 7 | 50.0% | 46.2% | 52.4% | 42.9% | -7.1 | 72.8% |
| African American | 0 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 80.0% |
| Asian | 0 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 94.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 5 | -- | 71.4% | 75.0% | -- | -- | 74.4% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hisp./Lat. | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 85.2% |
| White | 54 | 82.0% | 84.4% | 73.6% | 87.0% | 5.0 | 92.6% |
| All | 60 | 81.5% | 78.9% | 72.7% | 85.0% | 3.5 | 88.3% |
| \* Four-year cohort graduation rate for students from low income families used for 2014, and 2015 rates. | | | | | | | |

**Between 2013 and 2016, the district’s five-year cohort graduation rate declined by 6.4 percentage points for all students, and declined by 5.4 to 8.6 percentage points for each subgroup with reportable data, except Hispanic or Latino students.**

| **Table 18: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2013–2016** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **N**  **(2016)** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2016)** |
| High needs | 52 | 78.5% | 75.6% | 65.8% | 73.1% | -5.4 | 82.9% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 48 | 79.6% | 76.3% | 67.6% | 72.9% | -6.7 | 82.1% |
| ELLs | 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 70.9% |
| SWD | 21 | 64.0% | 64.3% | 46.2% | 57.1% | -6.9 | 76.5% |
| African American/ | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 83.4% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 94.8% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 8 | 42.9% | -- | 71.4% | 75.0% | 32.1 | 76.8% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hisp./Lat. | 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 87.4% |
| White | 53 | 87.8% | 85.2% | 87.5% | 79.2% | -8.6 | 93.5% |
| All | 66 | 83.7% | 84.6% | 81.6% | 77.3% | -6.4 | 89.8% |
| \* Five-year cohort graduation rate for students from low-income families used for 2013 and 2014 rates. | | | | | | | |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in-school suspension rates declined by 3.5 percentage points for all students and by 3.1 to 6.6 percentage points for each subgroup with reportable data. In 2017, in-school suspension rates were below the state rate for each group with reportable data.**

| **Table 19: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **In-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 4.7% | 4.9% | 7.3% | 0.5% | -4.2 | 2.6% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 4.8% | 4.7% | 6.7% | 0.4% | -4.4 | 2.9% |
| ELLs | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1.7% |
| SWD | 7.5% | 7.7% | 13.2% | 0.9% | -6.6 | 3.1% |
| African American | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 3.3% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.5% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 6.6% | 5.3% | 4.1% | -- | -- | 2.5% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | -- | -- | 9.2% | -- | -- | 2.1% |
| White | 3.4% | 2.5% | 4.4% | 0.3% | -3.1 | 1.3% |
| All | 3.8% | 2.9% | 5.0% | 0.3% | -3.5 | 1.7% |

\*Suspension rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates.

**Between 2014 and 2017, out-of-school suspension rates declined by 2.8 percentage points for all students and by 2.5 to 6.3 percentage points for each subgroup with reportable data. In 2017, out-of-school suspension rates were below or equal to the state rate for each group with reportable data.**

| **Table 20: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Out-of-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 5.8% | 6.3% | 6.9% | 2.2% | -3.6 | 4.5% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 5.9% | 5.8% | 6.2% | 2.1% | -3.8 | 5.3% |
| ELLs | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 3.8% |
| SWD | 10.6% | 10.2% | 11.8% | 4.3% | -6.3 | 5.5% |
| African American | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 6.3% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.7% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 6.6% | 6.3% | 5.1% | -- | -- | 5.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | -- | -- | 5.3% | -- | -- | 3.1% |
| White | 4.1% | 4.0% | 3.7% | 1.6% | -2.5 | 1.6% |
| All | 4.5% | 4.6% | 4.3% | 1.7% | -2.8 | 2.8% |

\* Suspension rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates.

**In 2017, the district’s dropout rate was 3.1 for all students, above the 2017 state rate of 1.8 percent. The dropout rates for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities were all higher than the rates for their state peers.**

| **Table 21: Gill-Montague Regional School District**  **Dropout Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 0.0% | 16.5% | 11.5% | 6.0% | 6.0 | 3.5% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 0.0% | 7.9% | 11.1% | 5.1% | 5.1 | 3.6% |
| ELLs | 0.0% | 12.5% | 14.3% | 25.0% | 25.0 | 6.5% |
| SWD | 0.0% | 27.1% | 11.9% | 5.9% | 5.9 | 3.3% |
| African American | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 2.9% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.6% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 0.0% | 14.3% | 10.0% | 23.5% | 23.5 | 4.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | -- | 0.0% | 18.2% | 0.0% | -- | 1.7% |
| White | 0.4% | 7.3% | 4.1% | 1.0% | 0.6 | 1.1% |
| All | 1.2% | 7.9% | 5.6% | 3.1% | 1.9 | 1.8% |
| \*Drop-out rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates. | | | | | | |

Leadership and Governance

***Contextual Background***

At the time of the onsite in January 2018, the superintendent had been in his role for five years and represented the first stable leadership in this position for over a decade. He has made a strong commitment to the district and has indicated his willingness to stay as its leader. During his time in the district, the superintendent has improved trust and collaboration in the district. He has hired a team of energetic and talented young principals, who share his commitment to the district and its students. The superintendent fosters a cooperative, communicative, and transparent relationship with the school committee.

The school committee consists of nine members, three from Montague and six from Gill. Although there is provision for three non-voting members from Erving,[[6]](#footnote-6) currently there is one. There is also a student advisory member of the committee. Members have all received trained through the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). They request and receive appropriate data from the superintendent and have a methodical and productive budget process. In recent years, school committee members have been involved in many difficult decisions related to the school budget and cuts in services and personnel.

Enrollment has declined in the district because of lower student population in the towns, and because of students choicing out to other public school districts (221.1 students in 2017) and choosing to attend the regional vocational-technical school (86 students in 2017) , charter schools (69.5 students in 2017), and private schools. The superintendent told the review team that the district did not do a lot of marketing to highlight the academic, social, and athletic successes of the district’s students. Staff stated that there was some activity on social media, noting that it was uneven. The district hired a public relations company in the past, but this has been lost to budget cuts. Parents said that the charter schools and the local technical school did public relations work, but the district did not.

Budgetary issues have resulted in staff cuts in recent years. The district has cut positions including the director of teaching and learning, the ELL director, the math director, an academic coach, and a behavioral coach, as well as classroom teachers.

The district currently has a positive relationship with the two towns and town leaders speak well of the district and support it financially at a level well above required net school spending. Even with the high level of financial resources, the superintendent has been particularly proactive recently in communicating to town leaders how the decline in enrollment and fiscal stress make an impact on the district and its ability to provide the kind of academic programs and support services needed by students.

**Strength Finding**

**1. The superintendent, the school committee and school leaders have created a culture of transparency, focused operational leadership, and administrative stability that help to foster confidence in the district from teaching staff, parents, civic leaders, and the general public.**

* 1. The superintendent actively espouses and practices transparency and trust building in the way he shares information and in his accessibility.
     1. The superintendent stated that the first thing he addressed when he arrived in the district was an absence of trust between stakeholders in the educational community.
     2. School committee members stated that the superintendent was always accessible. They stated that the relationship between the school committee and the superintendent was “really great.”
     3. The district circulated a comprehensive survey to students and families in Gill and Montague who have chosen to send their children to schools outside the district. District leaders said that the survey results were posted on the district’s website and were used to help formulate the district’s current improvement strategy.
     4. The superintendent accompanies all principals on classroom mini-observations at each school every three weeks. The superintendent and the principals said that this practice made the superintendent more visible in the schools and showed his support for his administrators.
  2. The superintendent has proactively increased communication with the civic leadership of both towns through the creation of a series of civic leaders’ meetings, which began in August 2017.
     1. School committee members stated that the relationship between the district and the towns had been contentious, but this was no longer the case.
     2. The superintendent initiated the meetings in order to increase transparency when questions emerged between the Gill finance committee and the school committee, with the goal of keeping all stakeholders up to date on the fiscal and educational issues the district was facing.
     3. Civic leaders stated that things have “turned the corner” from what was previously an acrimonious relationship between the district and the town. A civic leader stated that there was now an “unexpected degree of transparency” between the town and the district.
     4. A civic leader stated, “There is no town or school, just us.”

1. The superintendent has created administrative stability through his own tenure in the district and through the hiring of a skilled and committed team of school administrators.
   * 1. Over his five year tenure the superintendent has provided stability at the superintendent level.
        1. The superintendent stated that the district had had five superintendents in five years before his hiring in 2013. School committee members stated that this had a negative impact on teaching and learning in the district.
        2. At the time of the onsite in January 2018, the superintendent was in the process of renegotiating his contract to stay with the district.
     2. The superintendent’s hiring of a skilled, committed team of school administrators has created stability in the schools.
        1. One elementary teacher stated that she had worked with 14 principals in 32 years.
        2. The current principals have been in their role for two to four years. Elementary teachers stated that their principal was committed and wanted to stay.
        3. District and School Accountability and Assistance (DSAC) representatives said that the principals had indicated that they were here for the long term.

**Impact**: A district leader’s strong degree of transparency and collaboration helps to foster public confidence and builds trust among all stakeholders in the educational community. When the superintendent builds a strong team of committed school administrators, the district is then poised to achieve gains in student achievement. A strong level of trust between the superintendent and the community can lead to increased and sustained support for the district.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**2. The district’s planning documents do not provide a clearly defined vision for improvement for the district as a whole and for each school individually.**

**A.** The Gill-Montague Regional School District Strategy 2017–2019 describes the 3 Rs: Relationships, Rigor and Relevance. These are broad goals, which all in the district are expected to address. The strategic plan does not include SMART goals.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. The district strategy does not include the vision, mission, and core values of the district.
2. The district does not have an action plan that includes a timetable, benchmarks to measure progress, or resources needed.

**B.** The superintendent’s theory of action pertaining to strategic improvement refers to multiple sources that inform the district’s strategy, including “standardized test scores and reading scores.” However, the theory of action does not contain analysis of the test scores and no quantitative targets for improvements in the test scores.

**C.** A document review indicated that the school improvement plans in the district generally did not set student achievement targets, did not represent meaningful input from stakeholders, and were not aligned with the district’s strategic plan.

Because of the difficulty of getting volunteers for school councils, input into the plans was limited and with the exception of the secondary school, there was little teacher input into the assessment of the schools’ needs.

Of the four SIPs reviewed, only one included a goal related to student achievement. The majority of goals reflected goals about documents and curricula that would be developed and were not linked to measurable student academic improvement.

The organizational principle of the district strategy is relationships, rigor, and relevance. Only one SIP is structured around this framework.

**Impact**: Without a strategic plan with data-based SMART goals and SIPs with SMART goals aligned with those in the strategic plan, stakeholders do not know the direction in which the district is heading, the plans to achieve goals, or the extent to which progress is being made.

***Recommendation***

**The district should develop and implement an actionable and comprehensive district improvement plan (DIP) and aligned school improvement plans (SIPs).**

1. The district’s goals should be written as SMART goals and should be based on an analysis of data from multiple sources (e.g., student achievement data, parent and student surveys, input from staff, etc.).

1. The goals should include key activities, personnel responsible, resources needed, timelines, implementation benchmarks and measurable outcomes.

2. Professional development planning should be linked to the goals in the DIP.

1. SIPs should be aligned with the new DIP.

1. SIPs should include attention to improving student achievement, opportunities, and outcomes.

2. Progress towards the completion of strategic initiatives in the SIP should be shared with staff on a regular basis.

3. Where possible, the SIPs should note the specific resources necessary to achieve goals.

4. The superintendent’s professional practice goals should be linked to the DIP and the principals’ professional practice goals should be linked to the SIP. The superintendent’s and principals’ goals should relate to student achievement, opportunities, and outcomes.

1. The DIP should be continuously monitored. The superintendent should periodically report on progress toward DIP goals to the school committee, staff and the community.

A process should be in place to review the plan annually. Adjustments should be made to the plan when necessary to reflect the needs of the district as reflected in an analysis of pertinent data and as objectives are reached.

**Benefits**: In a small district with limited resources, the absence of coordinated effort and initiatives can lead to limited progress on important priorities. The development of an actionable district improvement plan based on the analysis of data from multiple sources will allow the schools to prioritize and sequence their own goals in a focused manner. A district that has aligned goals can make progress by targeting resources and focusing on goals that have been identified across the district as having the highest priority.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *Planning for Success* tools (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>) support the improvement planning process by spotlighting practices, characteristics, and behaviors that support effective planning and implementation and meet existing state requirements for improvement planning.
  + - *District Accelerated Improvement Planning - Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/level-4-guiding-principles-effective-benchmarks.pdf>) provides information about different types of benchmarks to guide and measure district improvement efforts.
* *What Makes a Goal Smarter?* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/presentations/SMARTGoals/Handout5.pdf>) is a description of SMART goals with accompanying examples. The handout was designed to support educators in developing goals as part of the educator evaluation system, but could also be a useful reference for the district as it develops or refines its DIP and SIPs.
* The *Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness* (<http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>) is a set of learning competencies, intellectual capacities and experiences essential for all students to become lifelong learners; positive contributors to their families, workplaces and communities; and successfully engaged citizens of a global 21st century. This could be a helpful resource as the district articulates its vision and goals.
* *Massachusetts Transfer Goals* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/MATransferGoals.pdf>) are long-range goals that students should work toward over the course of their PK-12 academic experience. They were written to provide an explicit connection between the standards-based Model Curriculum Units and Massachusetts’ definition of College and Career Readiness. They are not recommended for use as a checklist, evaluation tool, or as an assessment tool, but they could be a helpful resource for the district as it articulates a vision and engages in long-term planning.
* The *Turnaround Practices Field Guide* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/howitworks/turnaround-practices-field-guide.pdf>) provides educators with examples of school specific practices, in authentic school contexts, which have contributed to turnaround success, so that those engaged in turnaround can apply these practices in their own schools and accelerate turnaround efforts. These practices might be useful to consider as the district revisits its goals and benchmarks.
  + - The *Turnaround Practices in Achievement Gain Schools Video Series* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/howitworks/achievement-gains.html> ) highlights the work of Achievement Gain schools referenced in the Turnaround Practices Field Guide. In these videos, the school staff and leadership tell their unique turnaround story through the lens of the four high leverage turnaround practices (leadership, intentional practices, student specific support, and climate and culture). Each video has an accompanying Viewing Guide.

Curriculum and Instruction

***Contextual Background***

Until the 2017–2018 school year, the district’s structure for curricular and instructional leadership provided a director of teaching and learning to coordinate with principals and teacher-leaders; to ensure coherency, alignment, and effective delivery of curricula; to provide leadership for instructional improvement; and to coordinate professional development. Because of budget limitations, at the end of the 2016–2017 school year the district eliminated the position. As a result, the superintendent, administrative team, principals, teacher-leaders, and other staff are sharing the leadership responsibilities allocated to the director. In addition, over the past several years budget cuts have led the district to eliminate the data analyst, the elementary literacy coach, the elementary behavior coach, the ELL director, and the math director. Reflecting on the loss of these positions, the superintendent said that the district was now without key positions dedicated to improvement.

The district has made modest progress in implementing high-quality, standards-aligned practices for curriculum design and instruction. District leaders have developed thoughtful documents to establish a vision and guiding principles for learning and teaching supported by two complementary frameworks to set expectations for high-quality teaching. However, teachers do not have a shared understanding of instructional priorities*.*  In addition, teachers have been working to create richly detailed units for ELA, math, and science using the Understanding by Design framework; however, only the elementary ELA curriculum units are complete and aligned with current state frameworks.Other ELA/English, math, and science curricula are works in progress. The district does not have a curriculum map to help pace the teaching of specific standards.

Student achievement is a concern. Student attainment of “meeting or exceeding expectations” on the Next Generation MCAS assessment (grades 3–8) and “proficient or advanced” on the MCAS assessment (grade 10) is well below state averages. In all but one instance (grade 8 science), at every grade level and in every content area, Gill-Montague students performed between 4 and 37 percentage points below the state averages.

The elementary schools have recently adopted a guided reading approach to literacy. The Hillcrest Elementary School (Pre-K–1) uses *Fundations* for ELA and *Tools of the Mind* for ELA and math. At the Gill (K–6) and Sheffield (grades 2–5) elementary schools, teachers use *Houghton Mifflin Reading* and are building classroom libraries of leveled books. A two-year grant-funded opportunity for Sheffield staff to work with an outside consultant is building leaders’ and teachers’ data analysis skills. To teach writing, elementary teachers use the Lucy Calkins Writing Workshop (*Units of Study in Primary Writing:* Heinemann). Without district-developed Pre-K–5 curriculum maps and units for math, the text *Math Expressions* (Houghton Mifflin) guides instruction; however, as an older edition, the text is not aligned with the 2017 state framework. To ensure that math instruction is aligned with current state standards, some grade-level teachers have aligned math assessments with the 2017 Massachusetts Math Curriculum Framework and use them to guide lesson design.

At the secondary level, ELA courses are resourced with teacher-selected readings in multiple genres, some derived online. Pearson programs guide math courses from grade 6 though Algebra II: *Connected Mathematic Project 3* through grade 8 and *Algebra I Common Core, Geometry Common Core, and Algebra II Common Core*.

Pre-K–5 science curricula are incomplete and teachers select and share their own resources. At the secondary level, units vary in thoroughness and alignment with state standards. Work is ongoing to align units with the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/ Engineering Framework by the 2018–2019 school year. For the secondary science program, teachers use research-based programs. Among these are *Biology* (Prentice Hall), *The World of Chemistry* (McDougal Littell), and *Principles and Problems* (Glencoe) for physics.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**1. The district does not have fully documented curricula well aligned with the 2017 Massachusetts ELA/Literacy and Math Curriculum Frameworks and the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/ Engineering Framework.**

**A.** The district does not have a director of teaching and learning to provide direction and oversight to curriculum and instruction.

1. The superintendent said that without a director internal capacity for curricular and instructional leadership was limited, making the “pace to improve teaching and learning significantly harder and slower.”

2. A district leader stated that without a dedicated director, the district no longer had strong accountability for the development of curriculum, even though the principals were strong instructional leaders.

**B.** At each elementary school, one teacher per grade level is appointed annually to serve as team leader. Team leaders provide leadership and coordination to collaboratively plan and improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This mainly takes place during weekly team meetings, on several monthly in-service release days, and sometimes during the summer.

1. The review team was told that there was limited “buy-in” for elementary teachers to write curriculum in the summer.

2. There is limited coordination to ensure horizontal alignment across elementary schools.

**C.** Interviews and a review of elementary curriculum maps and units on the district’s Rubicon Atlas site indicated that not all elementary maps were complete, with the exception of the ELA maps.

1. Principals stated that teachers wrote the ELA maps during the summer of 2017 and the principals provided feedback on alignment with the 2017 standards. They added that ELA was the only subject that had maps.

2. The elementary ELA maps posted on Rubicon Atlas appeared complete.

3. The team did not find curriculum maps for elementary math on the Rubicon Atlas site. Without maps, teachers follow the *Math Expressions* program. However, the text is an older version and is not aligned with current Massachusetts standards. To ensure that teaching is aligned with current standards, teachers at some grade levels have rewritten math assessments to align with the 2017 Massachusetts Math Curriculum Frameworks.

A review of elementary science maps indicated that they were incomplete for grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 with no maps for kindergarten and grades 3 and 6. Pre-K–1 teachers have identified science power standards to teach.

Elementary teachers confirmed that considerable curriculum alignment was taking place and said that only in the past few years have teachers aligned their work with standards.

**D.** At the secondary level, the district annually appoints curriculum coordinators in grades 6–12 for each content area to coordinate and support teacher-colleagues in developing and improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment and to facilitate department meetings.

1. The review team was told that the curriculum coordinators see themselves as peer facilitators. They carry a full-time teaching load and do not have formal supervisory or evaluative roles.

2. Collaborative curriculum work typically takes place at selected monthly department meetings, at several in-service early-release days during the school year, and at curricular area meetings held once a month for an hour. Interviewees noted that this was not ample time for the task and often four weeks lapsed before departments continued their work.

3. Leaders and teachers stated that secondary teachers are aligning the curriculum maps for grades 6–12 with the 2017 Massachusetts ELA/Literacy and Math Curriculum Frameworks and with the 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering Framework. Interviewees described the alignment as “a work in progress.”

**Impact**: Without dedicated districtwide leadership for curricular and instructional development, the district cannot ensure effective communication, coherence, and alignment of programs, practices, and professional development. Without curricula that reflect current state standards, the district cannot ensure that the district’s students have equitable opportunities to learn high-quality, rigorous, and relevant content and skills and are well prepared for college, careers, and civic opportunities.

**2. District administrators and teachers do not share a common understanding of the district’s expectations for effective instruction.**

**A.** Two documents provided to the review team frame the district’s instructional expectations.

1. The Gill-Montague Regional School District Strategy 2017–2019 describes the 3 Rs: Relationships, Rigor and Relevance. These are broad goals, which all are expected to address.

2. Principals identified the 3 Rs as the district’s expectations for high-quality teaching.

3. The Fundamental Instructional Practices (FIPs) document outlines 15 instructional expectations and links them to relevant educator evaluation elements.

**B.** Interviews and a document review indicated that the goals to improve instruction in School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and schools’ professional development (PD) plans are not consistently aligned districtwide with the 3 Rs or the FIPs document.

1. Principals noted that the FIPs document had been consistently implemented, but some teachers did not find it useful. Principals said that the document was used to provide feedback to teachers after mini-observations of lessons or for coaching teachers but components of the FIPs document were not included in planning instructional improvement in SIPs.

2. Only the Hillcrest Elementary SIP has emphasized the use of the FIPs document to improve instruction. A review of the school’s SIP indicated that the principal introduced the FIPs document to staff in August 2017 and noted that FIPs would guide improvement conversations at monthly staff meetings, grade-level team meetings, and post-observation feedback meetings.

a. Principals said that PD to improve instruction was planned for two PD sessions and was focused on higher-order thinking, not on components of the FIPs document.

4. Improving the use of higher-order thinking in lessons was the focus of two PD in-service sessions at Sheffield Elementary School. A Sheffield SIP goal aims to “increase teacher use of a shared set of instructional best practices.” The review team was told that the FIPs document had been shared with teachers, but the emphasis had now shifted to lesson planning “but not using the FIPs [document].”

5. The Gill Elementary School’s SIP goals and PD plan goals are not aligned with the 3 Rs or the FIPs. The school is embarking on implementing project-based learning.

6. At the secondary level, the 3 Rs shape three of five improvement goals in the secondary school SIP. However, increasing teachers’ capacity to teach with increased rigor and relevance is the focus of only one secondary department’s PD plans for 2017–2018. Other departments’ PD topics do not explicitly address the 3 Rs or the FIPs document.

**C.** Teachers expressed differing views of the district’s expectations for high-quality instruction.

1. In one interview, teachers stated that everyone must address three goals—rigor, relevance, and relationships—and identified them as their SMART goals.

2. In another interview, teachers said that they were aware of the 3 Rs, but said the common expectations for effective teaching were school-based.

3. In a third interview, when asked about expectations for high-quality teaching, teachers identified student-centered discussions, students collaboratively working together rather than taking notes, encouraging risk taking, and creating an environment safe for asking questions.

4. At the same interview, an interviewee noted that teachers and administrators had done some work to align educators’ professional practice goals with district improvement goals, particularly to improve how teachers engaged students to use higher-order thinking skills and that principals used the FIPs document to provide feedback after mini-observations.

**D.** The team found limitedevidence of the use of teaching strategies that promote understanding to implement curriculum units designed using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework.

1. The review team was told that the district had provided two days of PD for teachers to understand and learn UbD strategies and that the principals had researched UbD on their own.

2. The review team noted that approximately half of observed lessons provided evidence of teaching characteristics associated with UbD such as student engagement, active learning, higher-order thinking, rigor, application of concepts and ideas to the real world, and differentiated instruction.

3. The superintendent told the review team that the district had only focused on UbD Stages I and 2 and had not incorporated Stage 3, which includes learning plans, differentiation, and instructional strategies.

**E.** The superintendent stated that teachers’ understanding of the expectations for high-quality teaching were “a work in progress” and that “the FIPs document was just a beginning.”

**Impact**: The absence of a common understanding of the district’s instructional priorities and incomplete alignment of instructional expectations with improvement goals and plans hampers the district’s efforts to provide consistently rigorous, relevant, and high-quality teaching and learning in the district. Without emphasizing strategies that can ensure deeper understanding and application of knowledge and skills, curriculum units designed using UbD will be less effective.

**3. In observed classrooms, the quality of instruction was inconsistent.**

**A. Focus Area #1: Lesson Objectives & Expectations** The quality of observed instruction in pre-kindergarten through grade 8 was meaningfully stronger than in grades 9–12 for the four characteristics in Focus Area #1. Teachers in pre-kindergarten through grade 8 often provided clear learning objectives and engaged students in appropriate activities linked to those objectives. Student learning at the elementary and middle schools benefitted from frequent checks for understanding, although feedback was often missing.

1. The review team observed sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers demonstrated knowledge of subject matter by explaining lesson content and responding to students’ questions or misconceptions (characteristic # 1) in 78 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 75 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 57 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a middle-school ELA writing lesson, the teacher explained a well-developed rubric for students to assess writing and conferenced with them one-on-one at eye level.

b. In contrast, a high-school math lesson began without clear explanation or contextualizing of content to a unit of study or “big idea.”

2. Observers saw sufficient or compelling evidence that students understood what they should be learning and why (characteristic # 2) in 79 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 70 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 57 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a middle-school science lesson, students clearly understood the objectives, instructions and the grading rubric for a project after the teacher took the time to explain them and clarify questions.

b. An example of a lesson without a clear learning objective took place in a high-school math class where students were working independently at their desks on worksheets. When an observer asked students what they were doing and why, they said that they did not know. One student responded that he was doing what the teacher said to do.

3. There was sufficient or compelling evidence that classroom activities were well matched to learning objectives in both content and cognitive demand (characteristic # 3) in 75 percent of observed elementary and middle-school lessons and in only 43 percent of observed high-school lessons.

a. The team observed a strong example of activities well matched to learning objectives in a middle-school ELA class where the objective was for students to do peer counseling on their writing. Although students had all read the same novel, they chose different writing topics to explore.

b. Observers noted a missed opportunity to match activities to the learning objective in a grade 3 ELA lesson in which the objective was to read for understanding. When students encountered a difficult vocabulary word, the teacher told students the meaning rather than ask them to use context or other strategies to determine the meaning.

4. Review team members observed sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers frequently checked for understanding, provided feedback, and adjusted teaching strategies (characteristic # 4) in 82 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 78 percent of middle-school lessons, and in only 43 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a kindergarten lesson, the teacher consistently and deliberately made mistakes by writing letters backwards or not using uppercase letters correctly. Not only did she respond to the students’ animated corrections to her writing, but she also told students, “Everyone makes mistakes.”

b. In contrast, in a grade 4 math lesson, the teacher checked that students had the correct answer but did not check for understanding.

**B. Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** This focus area emphasizes two district priorities—rigor and relevance. At the elementary level, the review team found slightly stronger practices such as students engaged in useful tasks or content relevant to their lives or the real world. At the middle school level, the team found limited evidence that students had opportunities to engage meaningfully with tasks connected to their lives or with the larger world. At all levels, higher-order thinking was not consistently embedded in lessons, although it was more frequently observed at the high school.

1. In observed lessons, review team members found sufficient or compelling evidence that students engaged in lessons, participated willingly in activities, and had multiple opportunities to do the thinking in the classroom (characteristic # 5) in 85 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 60 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 50 percent of high-school lessons.

a. A strong example of engagement was observed in a grade 2 ELA class when students were asked to “turn-and-talk” about pictures in a story. They predicted multiple views of what would happen next using the pictures as guides.

b. In a less effective example of student engagement in challenging tasks, in a high-school class students in small groups worked for an excessively long time to define one word.

2. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that students were engaged in higher-order thinking such as analysis, synthesis, problem solving, evaluation, or the application of new knowledge (characteristic # 6) in 50 percent of observed elementary lessons, in only 45 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 57 percent of high-school lessons.

a. An example of tasks that require higher-order thinking took place in a middle-school math lesson where groups of students designed tests to check their work to ensure their answers were correct.

b. Team members observed a missed opportunity for lively discussion and higher-order thinking in a high-school social studies class.

3. Observers found sufficient and compelling evidence that students meaningfully communicated ideas to each other (characteristic # 7) in 64 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 45 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 43 percent of high-school lessons.

a. Students in a grade 4 math lesson shared other approaches to solving real-world math problems with each other using appropriate math vocabulary.

b. In a less effective example, observers noted “social chatter” throughout the observation in a grade 7 art lesson, and said that students were not communicating their ideas and thinking with each other as they.

4. The review team found sufficient or compelling evidence that students had opportunities to engage meaningfully with tasks connected to their lives or with the larger world (characteristic # 8) in 64 percent of observed elementary lessons, in just 35 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 57 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a high school geometry lesson, students worked in groups to analyze geometric shapes and relate them to shapes in the real world.

b. In a grade 2 math lesson on measurements, students discussed how measurements applied to real-world situations.

**C. Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** Observers found stronger practices in pre-kindergarten through grade 5 for how well lessons used multiple strategies to promote equitable opportunities to learn and challenged all students regardless of learning needs. In addition, observed elementary lessons more effectively demonstrated positive routines, rituals, and student-teacher relationships and a classroom climate conducive to learning.

1. Observers found sufficient and compelling evidence that lessons were designed to support and challenge all students, regardless of learning needs (characteristic # 9) in 75 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 50 percent of middle-school lessons, and in only 21 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a kindergarten ELA lesson, the teacher took advantage of multiple entry points to engage students in a review of the four layers of the rain forest: visual, kinesthetic, listening, and sharing information with partners and the class.

b. In contrast, only 3 of 14 observed high-school lessons addressed students varied learning needs by providing differentiated tasks, group work, or targeted support.

2. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers used a variety of instructional strategies (characteristic # 10) in 61 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 40 percent of middle- school lessons, and in 36 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In a grade 9 science lesson on scientific research methods, students watched a podcast, listened attentively to a short lecture by the teacher, and then worked diligently and collaboratively with a partner discussing worksheet items.

b. The majority of observed secondary lessons relied on one approach, usually direct instruction.

3. Observers noted sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom routines and positive supports were consistently and effectively in place (characteristic # 11) in 86 percent of observed elementary lessons, in 70 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 64 percent of high-school lessons. Similarly, observers found sufficient and compelling evidence of classroom climate conducive to learning in 96 percent of elementary lessons, in 70 percent of middle-school lessons, and in 64 percent of high-school lessons.

a. In several elementary lessons, teachers demonstrated effective classroom management skills. For example, a middle-school teacher used chimes to signal the end of small-group discussions.

b. At the high school, while most teachers used sufficient routines and strategies to ensure that students were on task and refocused the group when and if needed. In many observed high-school lessons classroom routines and positive supports were not consistently and effectively in place. In one observed lesson, students were generally inattentive, two students were using phones for purposes unrelated to the lesson, and several students chatted while the teacher introduced the lesson. Review team members found limited evidence that teachers positively redirected students.

**Impact**: Without consistent, supportive learning environments, students face obstacles to developing the habits of mind that produce successful learners. Effective instruction requires teachers and other supportive adults in the classroom to understand students’ strengths and challenges and provide the specific and varied strategies and techniques to maximize students’ learning opportunities and prepare them for college, career, and civic responsibility in the 21st century.

***Recommendation***

**1. The district should assign responsibility for districtwide curricular and instructional leadership; ensure that all curricular materials are fully documented and aligned with state standards; and take steps to strengthen teachers’ understanding and implementation of effective instruction.**

**A.** The district should take steps to clarify roles and responsibilities related to curricular and instructional leadership.

1. One possible approach would be to clarify specific districtwide goals and benchmarks related to curriculum and instruction, and to assign responsibility to particular individuals for attaining these.

2. Another approach would be for the district to revisit its decision to eliminate the previously existing district leadership position.

**B.** The district should ensure that, as soon as possible, all curriculum is completely documented and aligned to the 2017 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in ELA/literacy and math and the 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework.

1. District leaders in collaboration with teachers and the association should adhere to the district’s planned timeline, specific work sessions, resources and incentives to complete the required curriculum alignment for the beginning of the 2019 school year.

2. The district should ensure that all teachers have access to high-quality, standards-aligned curricular materials and the support they need to use those materials consistently and skillfully.

3. The curricular materials should align vertically, with coherent student learning progressions, and should support teachers to engage and meet the needs of all students.

**C.** District and school leaders and teachers should identify the specific skills and information that teachers need in order to improve their instructional practice, and determine whether the 3R’s and the FIPs provide the appropriate guidance.

1. A well-developed model to implement FIPs already exists at the Hillcrest Elementary School and is outlined in its SIP. This could be used to begin a more districtwide discussion. Each school should ensure alignment with district goals and expectations but customize its approach based on teachers’ skills and students’ needs.

2. Whatever the approach, it should include clearly communicated expectations, regular opportunities for teachers to discuss, explore, and share content-specific best practices at a portion of every team meeting as well as at whole faculty meetings.

The district and each school should provide support, follow-up, and professional development and ensure that teachers have ample and regular opportunities to work collaboratively to align and improve their implementation of curriculum.

The district should ensure that supervisory and evaluation procedures facilitate monitoring and providing essential informative and instructive feedback so that teachers will have continued guidance to reach proficient and exemplary status.

1. The district should provide new professional development on the UbD framework to foster more skillful and consistent implementation.

**Benefits:** Implementing this recommendation will help to ensure that teachers and students have access to an updated, rigorous, and relevant curriculum that prepares students for success throughout and beyond high school.

**Recommended resources:**

* + - DESE’s Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks web page [(http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/) provides information about the 2017 ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Frameworks, including grade-by-grade comparisons between the 2010 and 2017 Frameworks and a slide deck supporting implementation of the 2017 Frameworks.
* DESE’s STEM home page ([www.doe.mass.edu/stem/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/)) provides the 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering Framework and resources supporting its implementation.
  + - DESE’s Instructional Materials and Professional Development page ([www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/)) provides resources for improving and collaborating on curriculum, including quick reference guides and maps designed to facilitate cross-district communication about curriculum.
* *Quick Reference Guide: Establishing an Effective Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Program* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/ste/STEprogram.docx> ): ESE has identified five components districts should attend to when designing a rigorous, coherent and relevant pre-K-12 STE education program. Educators, administrators and curriculum designers can refer to this guide for brief descriptions and resources for each component.
  + - * *Time for Deeper Learning: Lessons from Five High Schools* (<http://www.timeandlearning.org/publications/time-deeper-learning>) from Mass2020, examines how schools that prioritize deeper learning are using whatever time they have available—whether through an expanded day or during a traditional school schedule—to reach their educational goals.
    - *Time for Teachers:* *Leveraging Time to Strengthen Instruction & Empower Teachers* (<http://www.timeandlearning.org/sites/default/files/resources/timeforteachers.pdf>) describes the systems and practices implemented at 17 schools to provide students with more time for learning and teachers with more time to collaborate, reflect, and plan.
    - EdReports.org (<http://www.edreports.org/>) provides free, independent reviews of K-12 education materials. The reviews focus on alignment to college- and career-ready standards and other indicators of high quality as recommended by educators.
    - *Quick Reference Guide: Aligning Curriculum to Massachusetts Standards* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/qrg-aligning-curriculum.pdf>) is designed to support teachers, coaches, administrators, and curriculum developers in the work of considering the ways in which

Assessment

***Contextual Background***

Without a complete, aligned, and documented curriculum, it is difficult for the district to have an entirely aligned and developed assessment system. However, with the district’s recent focus on improving elementary literacy, the ELA curriculum maps, units, and assessments for pre-kindergarten through grade 5 are now complete and aligned with the 2017 Massachusetts ELA/ Literacy Curriculum Framework. Although the district is systematically revising and aligning other ELA, math, and science curricula and assessments with the current state frameworks, this work is incomplete. A review of curriculum on the district’s Rubicon Atlas site showed many well-developed units with multi-genre writing assessments and references to formative, summative, and authentic assessments using the Understanding by Design format, all aligned with state frameworks. However, most elementary grades in math and science and a number of specific secondary courses in English, math, and science do not have maps, units, or assessments.

Principals, elementary grade-level team leaders, and secondary curriculum coordinators in grades 6–12 provide teachers with some support and guidance to complete revisions and alignment of curricula and corresponding assessments. Leaders have identified specific time during weekly or monthly team meetings and early-release days for teachers’ collaborative work on these tasks. However, progress is limited by a full agenda of other activities and professional development designated for some of this time. Summer curriculum/assessment development is also uneven because of the district’s difficulty in enlisting many teachers to allocate vacation time for program development. According to the district’s self-assessment submitted before the onsite, leaders and teachers recognize that the district should pay more attention to improving assessment throughout the curriculum.

To develop greater proficiency in data collection, analysis, and use, leaders and teachers at the Sheffield Elementary School (grades 2–5) are currently working with an outside consultant, supported by a two-year state-funded grant. Newly gained skills have helped educators better understand students’ progress, group students for differentiated reading instruction, and plan interventions. In addition, District and School Accountability Assistance (DSAC) staff coach K–1 teachers at Hillcrest Elementary School and two teachers at Sheffield Elementary School in the use of math assessment data to group students as well as plan lessons and interventions.

In most subjects at the secondary level, teachers do consider assessment data, particularly MCAS assessment results, as they analyze student achievement, plan teaching strategies and review, revise, and align curriculum and assessments. However, given the large number of singleton classes at the middle and high schools, data analysis is often a teacher’s solitary pursuit. The middle and high schools have not developed a system for sustained, rich, data-based conversations to guide broader decisions about how to improve teaching using the analysis of assessment data and other student information. The superintendent told the team that there was “no strong accountability piece in the development of curriculum” and, by implication, assessments, especially now that the district was without a director of teaching and learning. In addition, the secondary school curriculum coordinators teach full time, so they mainly facilitate monthly department meetings and professional development days.

***Strength Finding***

1. **Elementary teachers and school leaders are making progress in the continuous collection, timely dissemination, and use of assessment data and other information to plan instruction and inform decisions about student grouping and curriculum development.**

**A.** With literacy a priority in the elementary grades, teachers have access to multiple sets of formative and summative data.

1. Interviews and a document review indicated that elementary teachers use *Fundations* unit tests, DIBELS (**Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills)**, running records, teacher-developed reading unit tests, writing assessments based on the Lucy Calkins Writers Workshop, as well as MCAS assessment results to assess students’ progress in reading and writing. At the time of the onsite in January 2018, the district was introducing I-Ready diagnostic reading assessments.

2. Teachers administer DIBELS three times a year to place students in guided reading groups and weekly to track struggling students for targeted support.

3. Many teachers use Edwin Analytics to view and analyze students’ MCAS assessment results.

**B.** Weekly grade-level team time at the elementary schools enables teachers to meet regularly to discuss literacy data and determine how to use data effectively to plan for and group students for instruction.

Teachers and leaders at all three elementary schools know each student well through their literacy data profiles.

At Sheffield Elementary School, in addition to Tier 1 instruction in teacher-guided reading groups, two dedicated reading teachers support struggling readers using both “push-in” and “pull-out” strategies, based on analyzing DIBELS and i-Ready data, and consultations with teachers.

At the Gill Elementary School, struggling readers receive Tier 2 support for literacy needs identified by the teacher, DIBELS assessment results, and the school’s interventionist.

At Hillcrest Elementary School, the reading specialist and the principal frequently sit in on grade-level team meetings when teachers discuss literacy data.

Some teachers have had professional development opportunities with the University of Hartford to improve data-driven guided reading strategies.

**C.** The Sheffield Elementary School benefits from a grant-funded partnership with an outside consultant that is helping teachers and school leaders learn to collect and use data for instructional and program improvement.

1. The consultant meets with teachers and school leaders twice a month to support efforts to collect and analyze data, mainly from DIBELS and i-Ready assessments. The consultant sits in on grade-level meetings and meets with the principal at each visit.

2. The consultant is helping teachers use data analyses to design differentiated instruction for small groups in Tier 1, and discuss and target interventions to strengthen literacy skills for students in Tiers 2 and 3.

**D.** Elementary teachers are also making progress in collecting, analyzing, and using math assessment data.

1. Teachers in grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 have taken the initiative to rewrite and align math unit tests with the 2017 Massachusetts Math Curriculum Framework.

a. Two teachers from grades 4 and 5 at Sheffield are also using i-Ready math assessments. The district plans to have i-Ready math assessments implemented in all elementary schools for the 2018–2019 school year.

2. DSAC (District and School Assistance Center) consultants are working with Hillcrest teachers and two teachers from Sheffield Elementary School on using math unit-test data and *Add+Vantage Math Recovery* (AVMR) formative assessment data to develop math centers and differentiate instruction.

3. Teachers told the team that participation in ESE’s academy for Massachusetts Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) helped staff understand the utility of various assessments and other data such as school climate and attendance.

4. Using a “train-the-trainer” model, teachers are sharing their knowledge with colleagues.

**E.** The principal at the Sheffield Elementary School has used a recent Safe Schools grant to implement an incentive program to improve student attendance.

1. The Sheffield School recognizes students and classrooms for regular attendance. Staff track attendance data and display it in school hallways, and classrooms compete to improve student attendance.

**Impact:** By using data thoughtfully at the elementary level to plan instruction, to place students in appropriate learning groups, and to design strategies to address challenges that interfere with learning such as absence from school, the district likely improves instruction and raises student achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

***Contextual Background***

The district has systems in place to evaluate staff, including a recently developed list of fundamental instructional practices (FIPs) that serves as a focus for principals during mini-observations. Although the district has made progress in implementing the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework, the overall quality of the formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations for both teachers and administrators is inconsistent. A review of evaluation documents showed that most teachers include goals and evidence related to student learning; however, summative evaluations contain limited information about what teachers are doing to improve student learning. In addition, evaluators’ feedback to educators often does not include comments intended to improve instruction. Principals’ evaluation goals are not fully aligned with the district’s strategy focused on rigor, relevance, and relationships, or aligned with the School Improvement Plans. As a result, the effectiveness of the educator evaluation process to improve instruction, expand practice, and contribute to professional growth is limited.

The district has a two-year mentoring program for teachers new to teaching and a one-year mentoring program for experienced teachers. Trained mentors meet regularly with assigned mentees to provide coaching, participate in peer observations, and to strengthen a culture that supports teachers and administrators across the district. Routines, procedures, and supports are in place to assist teachers new to the district in maximizing the impact of their instruction on student achievement and to ensure stability by retaining high-quality educators in the district.

In the 2017–2018 school year, scheduled professional development (PD) for teachers consists of eight half days at the elementary level and nine half days at the secondary level distributed throughout the school year. PD opportunities are also available during scheduled faculty and grade-level meetings and common planning time. Because the district no longer has a director of teaching and learning to guide and plan PD, the superintendent and principals have assumed the responsibility and leadership to organize PD opportunities for staff. At the time of the review in January 2018, the district was without a PD committee to assist in the planning and coordination of the PD program.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**1. The district has not achieved consistency in implementing its educator evaluation system. The district has not taken action on the components of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework that require the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence.**

1. The team reviewed evaluation documentation of 33 teachers and 9 principals and central office administrators randomly selected from across the district in TeachPoint, the district’s educator evaluation management system.

1. Although teachers’ evaluations were informative, they were missing instructive and growth-oriented feedback.[[8]](#footnote-8)

a. Evaluations generally included detailed comments about what teachers said and did during mini-observations, but did not include substantive recommendations to promote teachers’ professional growth or to improve instruction.

2. The document review showed that the principals’ evaluation goals were not fully aligned with the district’s strategy focused on rigor, relevance, and relationships, or aligned with School Improvement Plans.

3. Teachers noted inconsistency in how administrators at the various schools evaluated teachers and provided feedback.

4. Principals reported that they had limited time after observations or formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations for face-to-face discussions.

5. The principals said that they did not always meet the district’s required number of observations: five for teachers with professional status and eight for teachers without professional status.

6. Many of the professional practice goals in the evaluative documentation reviewed were not SMART goals.[[9]](#footnote-9)

7. While the superintendent completed all but one administrator’s evaluation, the assessments/ evaluations provided little qualitative or instructive feedback to contribute to professional growth.

1. As of the 2015–2016 school year, state educator evaluation regulations (603 CMR 35.07) call for all districts collect and use student feedback as evidence in the teacher evaluation process and staff feedback in the administrator evaluation process.[[10]](#footnote-10)
   * + 1. The team did not find that student or staff feedback from the results of the district’s comprehensive survey were reflected in the evaluation process.

**Impact:** Without implementing the components of the Educator Evaluation Framework that call for the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence, the district cannot strengthen educators’ ability to improve professional practice or raise student achievement.

**2. The district does not have a long-term professional development plan that is collaboratively developed and aligned with the district’s strategic priorities.**

**A.** A review of 2017–2018 the professional development (PD) calendar showed that the district provides eight half days at the elementary level and nine half days at the secondary level for PD.

**B**. The district does not have a PD committee to oversee and coordinate districtwide PD offerings.

1. Teachers and administrators said that in previous years the district had had a PD committee, but it no longer existed.

**C.** Principals now plan PD and the superintendent secures outside consultants to conduct PD.

1. Although a PD survey is available on the district’s website to evaluate the effectiveness of PD offerings, teachers were unclear how the district used survey results to fund or plan PD.

**D.** Interviews and a document review indicated that the district did not have a long-range PD program that is aligned with the district’s strategic priorities.

1. Elementary teachers said that many new initiatives have been brought into the district with little oversight of or consistency in training or in evaluating PD.[[11]](#footnote-11)

2. School leaders expressed the view that the PD calendar does not include ample time to provide high-quality PD in all the requisite initiatives.

**E.** In 2017–2018, the district did not fill the position of director of teaching and learning because of budget reductions.

1. District leaders told the review team that the district also eliminated the funds to provide ongoing PD, particularly in the area of technology.

**Impact:** The absence of a system of sustained PD that is targeted to district priorities limits the professional growth of teachers and administrators and hinders the district’s ability to make effective progress toward its goals and to improve academic achievement for all students.

***Recommendations***

* + 1. **The district should promote educators’ growth by fully implementing all components of the educator evaluation system, including a concerted effort to collect and analyze student data and feedback to inform the evaluation process.**

**A.** The district should support and monitor the skills and practices of evaluators to ensure that the quality of oral and written feedback reflects high-quality instructional feedback that is timely, informative, instructive, and focused on professional growth and student achievement.

1. Evaluators should participate in calibration training and activities to ensure quality and accuracy and reflect fairness and consistency in the evaluation process and documentation.

2. The district should put policies and procedures in place to ensure that observations and formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations comply with ESE’s Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice. Evaluators should provide feedback that is timely, informative, and instructive to enhance professional growth and student achievement.

3. The superintendent should thoroughly complete all administrators’ and support staff’s evaluations in a timely manner in an effort to model effective written feedback for administrators and to meet the requirements of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework.

* 1. The district is urged to implement the state educator evaluation regulations (603 CMR 35.07) requiring all Massachusetts school districts to use student feedback as evidence in the teacher evaluation process and staff feedback in the administrator evaluation process.
     1. The district should develop a procedure to ensure student and staff feedback is collected and used as evidence in teachers’ and administrators’ evaluations.

**Benefits:** The district’s educator evaluation system will improve if procedures are in place to include student and staff feedback as part of the evaluation process. Evidence-based information will assist in identifying strengths and challenges for improvement. Improving the quality of supervisory practices will strengthen educators’ practice and expand professional skills and competencies. A fully implemented educator evaluation system will result in enriched learning opportunities and gains in student achievement.

**Recommended resources:**

* *ESE’s Quick Reference Guide: Student and Staff Feedback* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-Feedback.pdf>) provides guidance on the incorporation of student and staff feedback into the evaluation process and includes a set of valid and reliable student and staff surveys aligned to the Massachusetts Standards of Effective Practice.
* *ESE’s Online Calibration Tool Training* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/calibration/tool/>) uses videos of classroom instructions from ESE’s Calibration Video Library to stimulate brief, unannounced observations. Group of educators, such as a district leadership team, watch a video together and then individually assess the educator’s practice related to specific elements from the Model Classroom Teacher Rubric and provide the educator with written feedback. Through real-time data displays, the group members can then see how their conclusions compare to each other, as well as educators throughout the state.
* ESE’s *Calibration Video Library* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/calibration/>) is a collection of professionally created videos of classroom instruction produced by the School Improvement Network. These videos depict a range of practice to support within-in district calibration activities that promote a shared understanding of instructional quality and rigor.

**2. The district should create a professional development committee and procedures to ensure that adequate time and resources are allocated to providing a high-quality professional development program that has clear goals and objectives and is aligned with the district and school improvement goals.**

**A**. The professional development committee should be established to develop a long-range professional development (PD) plan.

1. The committee should meet regularly and be comprised of varied stakeholders (including teachers, specialists, and administrators).

2. The committee should develop and oversee a PD plan, including establishing clear, aligned goals and measuring the impact of PD on instruction and student performance.

**B.** Objectives/goals for the district’s professional development plan should intentionally be aligned to the district and school priorities.

1. The plan should address specific PD needs and determine how they should be met.

2. The plan should address needs identified by student performance data and instructional competencies identified in teacher evaluations.

3. The committee should work with others in the district to ensure alignment between the district and school improvement plans and the PD plan.

4. The district should consider allocating additional resources (funding, personnel, and time) to support its professional development needs.

**Benefits**: The development of a coordinated and aligned professional development plan will ensure that the necessary resources, time, and support to implement district initiatives are in place. The collaboration of teachers and administrators who are invested in the district’s professional development process will likely contribute to a culture of a shared leadership and continuous improvement.

**Recommended resources:**

* *The Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.pdf>) describe, identify, and characterize what high quality learning experiences should look like for educators.
* Professional development case studies (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/CaseStudies/>) highlight districts implementing meaningful professional development programs that support educators throughout the entire career continuum. Watch examples of PD programs that are job-embedded, teacher-led, data-driven, and aligned to educator and district needs.
* *Identifying Meaningful Professional Development* (<https://youtu.be/zhuFioO8GbQ>) is a video in which educators from three Massachusetts districts discuss the importance of targeted, meaningful professional development and the ways districts can use the evaluation process to identify the most effective PD supports for all educators.

Student Support

***Contextual Background***

Student services in the district under the direction of a pupil services director include support services in general education, special education, and English language learner education from preschool through grade 12. Integrated preschool classes for students from both Gill and Montague are housed in the Hillcrest Elementary School along with Montague’s students in kindergarten and grade 1. Sheffield Elementary School enrolls Montague’s students in grades 2 to 5 while Gill Elementary School has one grade-level classroom for kindergarten through grade 6. The district provides special education services at all schools. The Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary schools and the middle and high schools each have therapeutic classes for students with social-emotional and/or behavioral needs. An elementary life-skills class is located at Sheffield Elementary and a combination middle-high life-skills class is located at the high school.

English language learner classes are located at the Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary schools and at the middle and high schools. A bilingual paraprofessional/Spanish parent liaison is also assigned to Hillcrest. Gill Elementary School does not have any specialized special education, Title I, or English language learner programs. The district has 3 preschool teachers, 4 therapeutic teachers, 2 life-skills teachers, 11 grade-level special education teachers, and 49 paraprofessionals. Title I reading services are provided at Hillcrest Elementary School (one teacher) and Sheffield Elementary School (two teachers). The district provides a dedicated school nurse and counseling services at all schools.

Encouraged by the superintendent, the district has made supporting the social-emotional health of its students a districtwide priority. In addition to the therapeutic classes for students with disabilities, the district provides programs, services, and learning experiences to support students’ social-emotional health throughout the schools and grade levels. From peer mediation, “fuss busters,” and a climbing wall at Gill Elementary School, to snack bunches, shared news, and the Second Step at Hillcrest Elementary School, and responsive classrooms, a positive attendance wall, and a walking school bus at Sheffield Elementary School, the elementary schools all have targeted initiatives to support students’ social-emotional health. The middle and high schools have implemented trauma-informed teaching, restorative justice practices, the resilient school initiative, peer mediation, and a Justice Center. One of the main staircases at the middle school is devoted to a “Kindness Wall” highlighting individual students’ responses to the school’s Kindness Campaign.

The district has partnered with multiple community agencies that provide counseling and therapeutic mentors, including Clinical & Support Options, Service Net, Behavioral Health Network, and the Department of Children and Families. The district also works with MassRehab, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and the Department of Mental Health to ensure that students with disabilities receive wrap-around support when necessary. Additional supports include early college and dropout prevention programs at Greenfield Community College, in-school mediation and youth programs at Community Action, and support for homeless youth through Dial Self.

***Strength Finding***

**1. The district provides a wide range of practices, programs, and services that address students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs.**

**A.** District leaders recognize the positive impact of a supportive environment on student learning and have made social-emotional learning a priority in planning.

1. In the document, “Affective Learning Considerations,” the superintendent describes affective learning, including social-emotional learning, multi-cultural education, citizenship education, and social justice education.

a. The superintendent details affective learning programs in the district by level: Tools of the Mind (Pre-K–K), Responsive Classroom (elementary), Developmental Designs (middle school), and Advisory Program (high school).

2. In “A Theory of Action Pertaining to Strategic Improvement,” the superintendent identified Relationships as one of the district’s three R priorities for schoolwide, team, and individual goals. The district’s 3 R’s were identified as Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships.

3. Each School Improvement Plan includes a social-emotional or behavioral goal.

4. In observed classrooms, the team found sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom routines and positive supports are in place to ensure that students behave appropriately (characteristic #11) in 86 percent of elementary classrooms, in 70 percent of middle-school classrooms, and in 64 percent of high-school classrooms.

**B.** The district has school adjustment counselors in all schools and partners with multiple community agencies and schools to provide student support.

1. The district assigns school adjustment counselors to all schools and the high school has a guidance counselor.

a. High-school students said that although they only had one guidance counselor, they felt that they always had someone to turn to. They stated, “It helps that the class sizes are small, because you can really get to know your teacher.”

2. The high school and the middle school also benefit from two to three counseling interns from Smith College each year.

3. The district has partnered with multiple community agencies that provide counseling and therapeutic mentors, including Clinical & Support Options, Service Net, Behavioral Health Network, and the Department of Children and Families.

4. The district works with MassRehab, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and the Department of Mental Health to ensure that students with disabilities receive wrap-around support when necessary.

5. Additional supports include early college and dropout prevention programs at Greenfield Community College, in-school mediation and youth programs at Community Action, and support for homeless youth through Dial Self.

**C.** The district provides specialized classes at all levels to meet the needs of students needing social, emotional, and behavioral supports imbedded into their academic classes.

1. The district offers therapeutic classes at all levels that provide students with a combination of direct instruction in the therapeutic classroom and inclusion from the therapeutic class into the general education classroom with support. One interviewee stated that this helped students learn to “live in the community.”

2. Life-skills classes at all levels provide for the integration of severely disabled students into the general education population with support.

3. Preschool classes provide socialization and skill development in a fully integrated setting.

* 1. The district provides training and professional development for faculty to prepare them to effectively address behavioral issues in their classrooms.

1. The Sheffield Elementary School held a book study group on students’ behavior in 2016–2017. Interviewees said that the activity helped teachers view students as “troubled, not bad.”

2. The district provided an after-school Responsive Classroom course for new staff and staff who had received this training more than three years ago.

* + 1. The middle and high schools offered Restorative Practices training.
    2. Administrators received social justice training at the summer retreat.
  1. Programmatic and procedural changes to address students’ misbehavior have contributed to a more positive school climate.

1. A high-school student attributed the reduction of suspensions[[12]](#footnote-12) to an administrative change in addressing misbehavior stating. “The environment got better. This year [2017–2018] is better.”
2. Elementary parents described social-emotional support as especially strong.
3. One middle-school parent said that he/she initially had concern about the middle school, but was very happy once his/her child began school.
4. Parents overall said that they believed that the administrative stability was a good thing and that administrators had set clear expectations about behavior and consistent consequences.
5. Faculty and school administrators told the team that school climate data indicated that “kids are more comfortable at Turners Falls High School than at other schools in the region.”

**Impact**: Having a wide range of support and services and a continuum of programs and practices for students with social, emotional and behavioral needs has contributed to lower suspension rates and a better learning environment for all students.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**2. The district does not have a consistent approach to providing support in core content areas at all levels.**

**A.** The district provides support services in general education primarily in reading and literacy at the elementary level.

1. The district provides Title I reading support at the Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary schools.

2. Math Academy is planned for 2018–2019 at Sheffield.

3. At the high school, a 30-minute period devoted to guided academic support meets at the same time as student activities. Students must choose between participating in student activities and receiving extra help.

**B.** The middle and high schools have not developed a system for sustained, rich, data-based conversations to guide broader decisions about how to improve teaching using the analysis of assessment data and other student information.

**C.** There is limited use of the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) in the district.

1. Teachers said that teachers were not consistently using strategies in the DCAP at the secondary level.

2. Teachers at the elementary level said that they were not “aware” of the DCAP.

**D.** Interviews and a document review indicated that Response to Intervention (RtI) was not consistently implemented throughout the district.

1. Faculty stated that RtI has been implemented at the elementary level and was planned for the middle school, noting that there was “nothing at the high school.”

**E.** Review team members noted that observed lessons at the elementary level often accommodated students’ varied learning needs, while in many secondary classes teachers often used a direct-instruction, whole-class model.

**Impact**: The absence of a consistent approach to academic support in core content areas districtwide leaves some students without the specific academic support they need to be successful.

***Recommendation***

**The district and school leaders should take steps to ensure that adequate resources are provided in all schools and at all levels to provide support that meets all students’ academic needs.**

**A**. The district should develop a balanced and comprehensive assessment system in all core academic subjects that provides school leaders and teachers with the data needed to determine students’ unique strengths and needs.

1. The district should provide instructional and support strategies for all students (“tier 1” instruction) that accommodate individual learning differences.

2. The district should continue to develop teachers’ abilities to meet students’ academic needs in the general education classroom through differentiating instruction and the use of strategies outlined in the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan.

**B.** The district should implement the planned Response to Intervention (RtI) at all levels, providing professional development as needed

1. The district should implement systems to ensure that student data is used to identify particular academic, supports that are appropriate for groups and for individual students (“tier 2” focused interventions and “tier 3” intensive supports).

**C.** Building on the lessons learned from its emphasis on reading and literacy at the elementary level, the district should provide professional development and teaching supports in math to increase educators’’ capacity and improve instruction.

* + 1. The district should consider reinstituting the positions of math and reading coaches to provide consultation, model lessons, and professional development in these areas.
    2. The district should provide opportunities for skill and content professional development in all core content areas.

**D.** The high school administration should consider ways in which it can modify schedules to reduce the potential conflict between participating in student activities and receiving academic support.

**Benefits:** Implementing this recommendation will provide students with the academic support they need to be successful.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *Early Warning Indicator System* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/ewis.html> ) is a tool to provide information to districts about the likelihood that their students will reach key academic goals. Districts can use the tool in conjunction with other data and sources of information to better target student supports and interventions and to examine school-level patterns over time in order to address systemic issues that may impede students’ ability to meet academic goals.
* The *Early Warning Implementation Guide* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/implementation-guide.pdf>) provides information on how to use early warning data, including the Massachusetts Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS), to identify, diagnose, support and monitor students in grades 1-12. It offers educators an overview of EWIS and how to effectively use these data in conjunction with local data by following a six-step implementation cycle.
* The *Massachusetts Systems for Student Success (SfSS)* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/) is a blueprint for school improvement that focuses on systems, structures and supports across the district, school, and classroom to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students. The MTSS website includes links to a self-assessment and a variety of helpful resources.
  + - The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is a student-directed, multi-year, dynamic tool that maps academic plans, personal/social growth, and career development activities while taking into account the student’s unique, self-defined interests, needs, and goals for the attainment of postsecondary success. The *Massachusetts Guide for Implementing Individual Learning Plans* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/initiatives/>) describes the ILP tool and provides guidance related to the ILP process.

Financial and Asset Management

***Contextual Background***

The district has a collaborative budget process and transparent presentations on district finances at a series of civic leaders’ meetings, but the budget document does not contain historical data, summary narratives, and a clear link to strategic goals. As a first step in making its budget document complete, usable, and transparent, the district should incorporate the business office’s excellent detailed records into the public budget to enhance the document’s transparency.

The towns’ financial support of the schools has enabled the district to consistently exceed the required net school spending level. In fiscal year 2017, actual net school spending was 36.5 per cent above what is required by the Chapter 70 state education aid program. Out-of-district per-pupil spending is relatively low because of a large number of choice-out and charter school students. [[13]](#footnote-13) The towns ordinarily set the budget level, allocating 48.5 per cent of available funding to the regional district assessment.

The district’s in-district per-pupil spending is above state spending and that of similar districts, including districts in western Massachusetts with comparable community wealth. Staffing ratios indicate that district staffing for educators in proportion to students is rising faster than state averages.

The district has five schools serving pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The three elementary schools are all 60 years old or older, and 2 are rated level 3, fair to poor condition, in the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s Buildings Needs Survey Report. The report rates three of the district’s five buildings as underused. All five are rated Level 1 or “good” for teaching and learning environment. The district has a long-term capital maintenance plan, but does not have a plan for renovating, replacing, or closing any buildings and redistricting students.

***Strength Findings***

**1. The towns of Gill and Montague and the regional school district have a constructive relationship. District and municipal leaders have a positive working relationship that has contributed to a collaborative budget process and growth in net school spending.**

**A.** The relationship between town and district officials is professional and collaborative.

1. Town officials spoke highly of school administrators.

* + - 1. A town official stated that there was an “unexpected degree of transparency with the school district.” The town “has not seen unreasonable [budget] demands by the schools.”
      2. Town officials told the review team, “There is no town and school, there is just us.”
      3. The superintendent meets regularly with civic leaders to ensure collaboration.

**B.** The towns and the district work together to achieve a budget that is satisfactory to the schools and affordable for the towns.

1. After several difficult budget years, the town of Montague employed a group of technical advisers to determine what would be an affordable assessment from the regional school district.

a. The affordable assessment was determined to be 48.5 percent of the available town revenue for the upcoming fiscal year.

b. The town of Gill generally accepts the 48.5 percent assessment rate.

c. The towns of Gill and Montague occasionally provide additional funds for capital improvements to school buildings.

2. In preparing its budget, the district uses the towns’ affordable assessment levels.

a. The district adds the affordable assessment numbers to other anticipated district revenues to determine a target for a balanced budget.

b. The district attempts to prepare a budget for the upcoming year that matches anticipated revenues.

c. The district generally supports the affordable assessment method but occasionally submits a budget in excess of the affordable assessment.

* 1. The towns and the district are aware that the current system is not sustainable without change. They need new approaches to declining enrollments and limited funding.

1. The towns and the district have ongoing meetings to address these concerns.

2. Town officials told the team that the towns, the district, and other neighboring towns and school districts would work together to explore new regionalization options.

3. The district has recently received a competitive $200,000 grant from the Barr Foundation to re-examine and transform the high-school experience. It has also recently received a $100,000 Massachusetts Department of Revenue grant to explore expanding regionalization to ensure sustainability.

**D.** The district’s actual net school spending (NSS) has increased over the past 10 years and has consistently exceeded the requirement.

1. The district’s actual NSS has increased from $14,005,936 in fiscal year 2007 to $16,658,142 in fiscal year 2017.

2. The district’s actual net school spending exceeded the net school spending requirement by 23.2 percent in fiscal year 2007. That excess percentage has fluctuated in the past 10 years with the fiscal year 2017 actual net school spending exceeding the requirement by 36.5 percent.

**Impact**: Because the town and district officials communicate and work collaboratively, they likely can use resources effectively and address areas of concern quickly.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**2. The district’s in-district per-pupil spending is above the state average and above that of similar districts, including districts in western Massachusetts with comparable community wealth. The district has not allocated resources effectively to support its efforts to improve student outcomes.**

1. According to ESE data, the district’s 2017 in-district per-pupil expenditures are 25 percent higher than the state average and the highest of some comparable districts.
2. In 2017, Gill-Montague spent $18,314 per-in-district pupil, compared with the state average of $15,453. More relevant is the fact that the median expenditure per in-district pupil for the 16 K–12 districts with fewer than 1,000 students was $17,614, and the median expenditure per in-district pupil for the 50 K–12 districts with 1,000–1,999 students was $14,233. (This highlights the high cost of running very small districts.[[14]](#footnote-14))
3. The superintendent told the review team that state averages were not appropriate comparisons for small regional school districts in western Massachusetts, and suggested a comparison list of Southern Berkshire, Pioneer Valley, Berkshire Hills, Gateway, Mohawk Trail, Central Berkshire, Southwick-Tolland-Granville, Athol-Royalston, Narragansett, and Quaboag.
4. According to ESE’s s RADAR Benchmarking[[15]](#footnote-15) based on the superintendent’s list of districts, Gill-Montague is the fourth highest spending. However, three are not appropriate comparisons for several reasons. First, Southern Berkshire and Berkshire Hills have much greater community wealth as indicated in their capacity effort yield (154 percent and 140 percent, compared with Gill-Montague at 53 percent).[[16]](#footnote-16) Second, Pioneer Valley’s 2017 spending includes a serious deficit, but in the previous year Pioneer spent $1,000 less per in-district pupil than Gill-Montague.
5. For the rest of this analysis, data is used from the comparison districts ranked from –5 to 11 in spending (between $12,460 and $17,614 per in-district student), with Gill-Montague spending more than each comparison district (see Table 22).[[17]](#footnote-17) The top three spenders (Southern Berkshire, Pioneer Valley, and Berkshire Hills) have been removed from the comparison.

**Table 22: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**2017 RADAR Benchmarking-Home Page (Selected Data)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| District | Enrollment | CEY %[[18]](#footnote-18) | $ Per In-district Pupil | Spending Rank |
| Southern Berkshire\* | 725 | 154% | $22,780 | 1 |
| Pioneer Valley\* | 867 | 64% | $20,753 | 2 |
| Berkshire Hills\* | 1,286 | 140% | $19,592 | 3 |
| **Gill-Montague** | **951** | **53%** | **$18,314** | **4** |
| Gateway | 841 | 59% | $17,614 | 5 |
| Mohawk Trail | 965 | 69% | $17,147 | 6 |
| Central Berkshire | 1,620 | 68% | $16,373 | 7 |
| Southwick-Tolland-Granville | 1,549 | 66% | $14,702 | 8 |
| Athol-Royalston | 1,466 | 32% | $14,671 | 9 |
| Narragansett | 1,391 | 42% | $12,804 | 10 |
| Quaboag | 1,400 | 39% | $12,460 | 11 |

\* Southern Berkshire, Pioneer Valley, and Berkshire Hills are excluded from the analysis below.

**B.** Although the district’s total in-district per-pupil spending is higher than other small regional districts in western Massachusetts used in this analysis, it is not always the highest spender across functional areas (see Table 23).

1. Among the seven comparison districts in RADAR Benchmarking, Gill-Montague is the highest spending in benefits and fixed costs; instructional materials; and guidance and psychology. Instructional materials and guidance and psychology are small spending categories.
2. Gill-Montague is the second or third highest spending in administration/instructional leaders, teachers, other teaching services, and operations and maintenance. However, the net result is that Gill-Montague has the highest total spending.

**Table 23: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**2017 RADAR Benchmarking on**

**In-District Per-Pupil Spending\***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **Admin/ Instr'l Ldrs** | **Teachers** | **Other Teaching Services** | **P D** | **Instr'l Materials** | **Guidance & Psych** | **Pupil Services** | **Operation/ Maint’nce** | **Benefits and Fixed Costs** | **Total** |
| **Gill-Montague** | 2,115 | 5,670 | 1,650 | 172 | **606** | **617** | 1,811 | 1,412 | **4,262** | **18,314** |
| Gateway | **2,159** | 5,785 | 1,530 | 26 | 293 | 607 | **2,546** | 1,279 | 3,388 | 17,614 |
| Mohawk Trail | 2,015 | 5,205 | **2,074** | 77 | 254 | 524 | 1,761 | **1,506** | 3,731 | 17,147 |
| Central Berkshire | 1,592 | 5,526 | 1,253 | **294** | 267 | 503 | 1,795 | 1,247 | 3,895 | 16,373 |
| Southwick-Tolland-Granville | 1,703 | **5,945** | 1,069 | 276 | 246 | 587 | 1,817 | 1,209 | 1,850 | 14,702 |
| Athol-Royalston | 1,408 | 4,858 | 1,372 | 158 | 249 | 512 | 1,854 | 1,142 | 3,117 | 14,671 |
| Narragansett | 1,279 | 5,059 | 1,006 | 283 | 221 | 394 | 1,423 | 979 | 2,161 | 12,804 |
| Quaboag | 1,310 | 4,596 | 1,082 | 193 | 152 | 398 | 1,833 | 791 | 2,106 | 12,460 |

\*Boldface type indicates the highest spending for each functional area.

**C.** In recent years,budgetary issues have resulted in staff cuts. The district has cut positions including the director of teaching and learning, the ELL director, the math director, an academic coach, and a behavioral coach, as well as classroom teachers. Reflecting on these personnel losses, the superintendent said that the district was now without key positions dedicated to improvement.

**D.** All the comparison districts in this analysis except Athol-Royalston are higher performing overall than Gill-Montague.

**E.** Because enrollment is declining[[19]](#footnote-19) while educator staffing is not, staffing and spending in proportion to students is rising faster than the state average. Table 24 shows five-year trends in key parameters of enrollment, staffing, and spending in the district, compared with the state.

**Table 24: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**RADAR Benchmarking: Change over Five Years 2013–2017**

| Parameter | Gill-Montague | State |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Enrollment | -9% | 0% |
| District and school leadership FTEs | -12% | +5% |
| Teacher FTEs | +1% | +2% |
| Teacher FTEs per 100 students | +11% | +2% |
| Paraprofessional FTEs | +9% | +7% |
| Paraprofessional FTEs per 100 students | +21% | +8% |
| Expenditures from all funding sources *(excluding debt and capital)* | +8% | N/A |
| Expenditures per in-district pupil | +17% | +10% |
| Average teacher salary | +1% | +2% |

**Impact:** Declining enrollment in the district continues to put pressure on planning and budgeting. Because this trend is not likely to change, the district cannot maintain its current allocation of resources and achieve its goal of teaching and learning excellence. Moreover, some of the district’s allocation choices, such as the elimination of key positions focused on student learning and support, are not aligned with its priorities and goals.

**3. The district does not have a capital and Improvement plan for the future status of its aging and underused buildings. Some buildings need maintenance, major repairs, and upgrades.**

**A.** Some school buildings are underused.

1. A 2016 School Survey Report by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) stated that Sheffield Elementary and the middle school and high school, which share a building, are underused.
2. The report also stated that while having average utilization, Gill, Hillcrest, and Sheffield elementary schools have over 300 square feet per student, compared to a national median of 188 square feet per student.

**B.** A document review indicated that the district did not have a long-term capital plan to address this underuse.

1. The district has a schedule of needed repairs and facility upgrades.

2. The 2016 MSBA Survey Report indicated that Gill-Montague did not have a master plan for the district’s school buildings.

3. The closing of Gill Elementary has been considered in the past, but at the time of the onsite in January 2018 was not being considered. The closing requires a change to the regional agreement.

4. School committee members told the review team that a vote to move Gill’s sixth graders to the middle school failed.

5. The superintendent told the team that the district hoped that the new regionalization study would address the underuse.

**C.** The MSBA report rates the Gill and Hillcrest elementary schools as being in fair to poor condition. The MSBA report rates Sheffield and the middle school and high school as being in good condition.

The Gill Elementary School, built in 1955, has several scheduled maintenance projects.

An upgrade to the electrical system is planned and funded for summer 2018.

At the time of the onsite in January 2018, the water system had been shut down because of chemicals in the well water. A solution was pending. All water for cooking and drinking had to be brought into the school.

The building also needs a new roof. It is hoped that an MSBA project will fund the roof.

The district has long-term, unfunded plans to replace the original floor tiles, upgrade the entryway, and add an emergency generator.

The review team observed that because one all-purpose room was used as a gym, cafeteria, and auditorium, students sometimes had to eat lunch in classrooms while the all-purpose room was being used as a gym.

The review team also observed an absence of student lockers and of boxes on desks to hold students’ books as well as used household furniture in classrooms and a sub-standard security system.

The Hillcrest Elementary School was built in 1958 and has several scheduled maintenance projects.

An upgrade to the electrical system is planned and funded for summer 2018.

Unfunded projects include security upgrades, tile replacement, an intercom system, ceiling replacement, and plumbing upgrades.

The Sheffield Elementary School was built in 1922 and has been renovated with sections replaced on several occasions since then. The latest renovation was done in 1988 after a fire.

The hot water heaters are being replaced in the summer of 2018.

The district is applying for Green Communities funding for several utility projects.

A new intercom system is planned.

In 2004, the middle school was built as an addition to the high school and the high school was completely renovated.

An HVAC upgrade is planned.

**D.** All district schools received a general environment rating of 1 in the 2016 MSBA Survey Report.

1. The general environment rating of 1 means that schools provide an adequate physical environment in which to teach and learn. Schools that receive a general environment rating of 1 have: access to daylight in most or all of their classes; adequately-sized classrooms; and appropriate core spaces for the enrollment, proper maintenance, access to technology, and few physical barriers for individuals with physical disabilities.

**Impact**: The underuse of buildings has a negative impact on the budget and hinders effective resource allocation to teaching and learning. Inadequate buildings are not conducive to teaching and learning and in the long-term drain resources from the budget.

**4. The budget document does not contain trend data or a summary or narrative highlighting district goals or priorities.**

**A.**  The budget document is an eight-page spreadsheet without narratives or programmatic summaries.

1. The budget document shows the planned budget for the upcoming year. The document does not include an actual expenditure history. The document lists line items.

2. The budget document does not have full-time equivalent (FTE) data in the personnel sections. The document does not have an FTE history.

**B.** A PowerPoint presentation provides some narrative about the budget process.

**C.** The budget document does not contain clear connections to district and school goals. The budget document does not include a narrative that demonstrates how budget allocations are linked to strategic goals.

1. Interviewees told the review team that the needed funding for meeting school and district goals was discussed in administrative team budget meetings. These discussions determine the line item account levels.

2. While it appears that budget discussions consider the funds needed for district and school goals, the budget document does not have a clear connection to the goals.

**Impact:**  Without including historical data, summary narratives, and a clear link to strategic goals in the budget document, the district cannot ensure a transparent budget process and effective allocation of funds to meet the needs of students and make ongoing improvement.

***Recommendations***

**1. The district should review its spending to determine how it can more effectively support district priorities and get the value it wants from its investment choices.**

**A.** The district should use ESE’s tools such as RADAR and Edwin Analytics to further analyze student performance and its allocation of resources.

**B.** The district should consider the most effective way to spend money on educators and how best to deploy these critical staff.

1. The district should consider restoring leadership and support positions, which are key to improved teaching and learning.

2. The district might review spending on teachers, FTEs, salary levels, benefit levels, and teacher turnover.

3. The district should analyze its spending and deployment for paraprofessionals.

**C.** The district should review expenses for facilities such as underused schools, utility costs, and custodian staffing.

**Benefits**: Implementing this recommendation will allow district leaders to more effectively align district resources with district goals and its efforts to improve student outcomes, within the restrictions of continually declining enrollment and financial constraints.

**Recommended resources:**

* *Shifting Resources Strategically to Fund District Priorities* (<https://dmgroupk12.com/solutions/strategic-budgeting>) describes how to reallocate existing funds to support key strategic efforts in three key areas: general education staffing levels, special education services, and federal funds such as Title I, II, and III. It also lists “Ten Mistakes to Avoid” and a list of reflection questions to guide districts’ reallocation.
* *Transforming School Funding: A Guide to Implementing Student-Based Budgeting* (<https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/2752-student-based-budgeting-guide.pdf>), from Education Resource Strategies, describes a process to help districts tie funding to specific student needs.
* In *Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets* (<https://dmgroupk12.com/> ; scroll down to Research & Publications section), authors Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan identify and discuss the top ten opportunities for districts to realign resources and free up funds to support strategic priorities. Drawing on the wisdom of leading thinkers, district leaders, and education researchers from across the country, the authors gathered a long list of opportunities for resource reallocation. To distill these down to the ten most high-impact opportunities, each opportunity was assessed based on its financial benefit, its impact on student achievement, its political feasibility, and its likelihood of success relative to the complexity of implementation.
* *Smarter School Spending for Student Success* (<http://smarterschoolspending.org/>) provides free processes and tools to help districts use their resources to improve student achievement.
  + 1. **The district should investigate the underutilization of buildings along with addressing the age and physical condition of the buildings.**

**A.** The district should develop a long-term building utilization plan as a part of the five-year capital maintenance plan.

The plan should analyze the costs and feasibility of maintaining the buildings long term versus any ability to consolidate space.

The plan should explore the long-term need to replace or renovate the older buildings.

The district might consider the possibility of moving the elementary schools into the high school-middle school building. That building is in the best and most updated condition of all district buildings and has a capacity of more than twice its current enrollment of less than 500 students.

**B.** A major part of the new regionalization study should be improving building utilization.

1. Since the other districts involved may also have underutilized schools, there may be opportunities for consolidation and redistribution.

**Benefits:** Proper utilization of buildings is likely to yield budget savings that could be redirected to support teaching and learning.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *School Building Issues* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/sbuilding/>) includes funding opportunities, guidelines, and resources related to school buildings.
* *Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003347>), from the National Center for Education Statistics, is intended to help school districts plan for efficient and effective operations. It addresses various topics, including conducting a facilities audit, planning and evaluating maintenance, and managing staff and contractors.
* *The Massachusetts School Checklist* (<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/environmental-health/exposure-topics/iaq/iaq-methods/the-mass-school-checklist.html>) is a list of the most important environmental health and safety issues for schools to address. It includes regulations and industry standards/guidelines related to elements on the checklist, as well as additional resources.
* MassEnergyInsight (<https://www.massenergyinsight.net/home>) is a free, web-based tool made available by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources as part of the Massachusetts Green Communities Program. The tool is designed to help communities learn about and monitor energy use and related costs, plan energy efficiency programs, and communicate this information.

**3. The district should develop public budget documents that provide a transparent, complete, and usable budget that is clearly aligned with the district’s goals.**

* 1. Funding for the district’s improvement goals should be transparently linked to the budget.

The SIPs and the district strategy goals should be monetized. The budget narratives and supporting materials should connect the SIP and DIP budget needs to the actual budget.

The district could consider showing the requests of principals and department heads for additional transparency.

1. The public budget should be expanded, adding historical data so that it includes trend information for several years. The business office has excellent detailed records; these should be incorporated into the public budget to enhance the document’s transparency.

The public budget should show actual line item expenditures for the previous completed school year at minimum. Previous year’s expenditures or current year to date expenditures could also be considered.

The payroll line items should show staffing levels, in full time equivalents, for the previous, current, and projected year at minimum.

1. Budget presentation materials should contain narratives about key priorities and how they are supported financially. Budget items addressed in the narratives should be monetized and explained.

1. Staff changes should be monetized and explained.

2. Budgetary changes linked to SIPs and district strategy should be monetized and explained.

3. The district’s School Committee Budget Process document is an excellent starting point to organize these materials.

**Benefits:** A transparent and complete budget presentation will help the public understand the context of the district’s budget and ensure that the district’s funds are being effectively used to support the needs of the district’s students.

**Recommended resources:**

* *Transforming School Funding: A Guide to Implementing Student-Based Budgeting* (<https://www.erstrategies.org/library/implementing_student-based_budgeting>), from Education Resource Strategies, describes a process to help districts tie funding to specific student needs.
* The Rennie Center’s *Smart* *School Budgeting* (<http://www.renniecenter.org/research/reports/smart-school-budgeting-resources-districts>) is a summary of existing resources on school finance, budgeting, and real­location.
* *Best Practices in School District Budgeting* (<http://www.gfoa.org/best-practices-school-district-budgeting>) outlines steps to developing a budget that best aligns resources with student achievement goals. Each step includes a link to a specific resource document with relevant principles and policies to consider.

Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Schedule, Site Visit

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from January 22–25, 2018, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. John Retchless, Leadership and Governance
2. Linda L. Greyser, Ed. D., Curriculum and Instruction, *review team coordinator*
3. Alison Fraser, Assessment
4. Marianne O’Connor, Human Resources and Professional Development
5. Marta Montleon, Student Support
6. David A. King, Financial and Asset Management

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted during the review:

The team conducted interviews with the following financial personnel: the business and operations director, the business office manager, the regional district treasurer, a member of the Gill finance committee, a member of the Montague finance committee, the Gill treasurer, and the collector of taxes/member of the finance committee.

The team conducted interviews with the six members of the school committee including the chair.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers’ association: the president, the vice-president, the treasurer, the secretary, the officer at large, the chief negotiator Unit C, and building representatives from each of the district’s five schools.

The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: the superintendent, the director of pupil services, the tech and data director, and the business and operations director.

The team visited the following schools: Hillcrest Elementary School (Pre-K–1), Sheffield Elementary School (grades 2–5), Gill Elementary School (K–6), Great Falls Middle School (grades 6–8), and Turners Falls High School (grades 9–12).

The team conducted focus groups with three elementary school teachers and seven secondary school teachers.

The team observed 62 classes in the district: 14 at the high school, 20 at the middle school, and 28 at the 3 elementary schools.

The review team analyzed multiple data sets and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:

* + Student and school performance data, including achievement and growth, enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
  + Data on the district’s staffing and finances.
  + Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).
  + District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks, school schedules, and the district’s end-of-year financial reports.
  + All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Monday**  January 22, 2018 | **Tuesday**  January 23, 2018 | **Wednesday**  January 24, 2018 | **Thursday**  January 25, 2018 |
| Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; interview with an outside consultant; document reviews; interview with teachers’ association representatives. | Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; student focus group; parent focus group; interview with DSAC team leader. | Interviews with town or city personnel; interview with finance personnel and regional district treasurer; interviews with school leaders; interviews with school committee members; visits to Turners Falls High School, Great Falls Middle School, Hillcrest Elementary School, Gill Elementary School, and Sheffield Elementary School for classroom observations. | Interviews with school leaders; follow-up interview with the superintendent; district review team meeting; visits to Turners Falls High School, Great Falls Middle School, Hillcrest Elementary School, Gill Elementary School, and Sheffield Elementary School for classroom observations; review team’s wrap-up meeting with the superintendent. |

Appendix B: Enrollment, Attendance, Expenditures

**Table B1a: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**2017–2018 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

| **Group** | **District** | **Percent**  **of Total** | **State** | **Percent of**  **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| African-American | 10 | 1.0% | 86,305 | 9.0% |
| Asian | 3 | 0.3% | 65,667 | 6.9% |
| Hispanic | 107 | 11.0% | 191,201 | 20.0% |
| Native American | 2 | 0.2% | 2,103 | 0.2% |
| White | 787 | 80.6% | 573,335 | 60.1% |
| Native Hawaiian | 2 | 0.2% | 818 | 0.1% |
| Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic | 65 | 6.7% | 34,605 | 3.6% |
| All | 976 | 100.0% | 954,034 | 100.0% |
| Note: As of October 1, 2017 | | | | |

**Table B1b: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**2017–2018 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

| **Group** | **District** | | | **State** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **N** | **Percent of High Needs** | **Percent of District** | **N** | **Percent of High Needs** | **Percent of State** |
| Students w/ disabilities | 220 | 39.1% | 22.4% | 171,061 | 38.0% | 17.7% |
| Econ. Dis. | 444 | 79.0% | 45.5% | 305,203 | 67.9% | 32.0% |
| ELLs and Former ELLs | 65 | 11.6% | 6.7% | 97,334 | 21.6% | 10.2% |
| All high needs students | 562 | 100.0% | 57.2% | 449,584 | 100.0% | 46.6% |
| Notes: As of October 1, 2017. District and state numbers and percentages for students with disabilities and high needs students are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Total district enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 983; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 964,806. | | | | | | |

**Table B2: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**Attendance Rates, 2014–2017**

| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Needs | 561 | 92.9 | 93.1 | 93.3 | 92.6 | -0.3 | 93.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 430 | -- | 92.6 | 92.9 | 92.3 | -- | 92.6 |
| ELLs | 73 | 94.7 | 93.0 | 93.9 | 93.3 | -1.4 | 93.5 |
| SWD | 241 | 91.4 | 91.7 | 93.4 | 92.2 | 0.8 | 93.0 |
| African-American | 14 | 92.4 | 92.6 | 95.3 | 96.3 | 3.9 | 94.0 |
| Asian | 4 | 95.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | -95.6 | 96.3 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 111 | 92.1 | 92.3 | 93.0 | 92.2 | 0.1 | 92.8 |
| Multi-Race | 73 | 91.4 | 93.8 | 92.7 | 93.5 | 2.1 | 94.5 |
| White | 804 | 94.6 | 94.5 | 94.9 | 94.2 | -0.4 | 95.1 |
| All | 1,010 | 94.2 | 94.2 | 94.6 | 94.0 | -0.2 | 94.6 |
| Notes: The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of days students attended school by the total number of days students were enrolled in a particular school year. A student’s attendance rate is counted toward any district the student attended. In addition, district attendance rates included students who were out placed in public collaborative or private alternative schools/programs at public expense. Attendance rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers. | | | | | | | |

**Table B3: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending Fiscal Years 2015–2017**

|  | **FY15** | | | **FY16** | | | **FY17** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Estimated** | | **Actual** | **Estimated** | **Actual** | | **Estimated** | | **Actual** | |
| Expenditures | | | | | | | | | | |
| From local appropriations for schools: |  | | | | | | | | | |
| By school committee | $17,488,823 | $17,717,964 | | $18,347,689 | | $18,265,004 | | $18,762,924 | | $19,185,238 |
| From revolving funds and grants | -- | $2,613,418 | | -- | | $2,520,752 | | -- | | $2,668,559 |
| Total expenditures | -- | $20,331,382 | | -- | | $20,785,756 | | -- | | $21,853,797 |
| Chapter 70 aid to education program | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chapter 70 state aid\* | -- | $6,065,444 | | -- | | $6,092,669 | | -- | | $6,152,674 |
| Required local contribution | -- | $5,825,645 | | -- | | $6,028,359 | | -- | | $6,051,487 |
| Required net school spending\*\* | -- | $11,891,089 | | -- | | $12,121,028 | | -- | | $12,204,161 |
| Actual net school spending | -- | $15,816,055 | | -- | | $16,502,627 | | -- | | $16,658,142 |
| Over/under required ($) | -- | $3,924,966 | | -- | | $4,381,599 | | -- | | $4,453,981 |
| Over/under required (%) | -- | 33.0% | | -- | | 36.1% | | -- | | 36.5% |
| \*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.  \*\*Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.  Sources: FY15, FY16, and FY17 District End-of-Year Reports, Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website  Data retrieved 12/13/17 and 5/25/18 | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table B4: Gill-Montague Regional School District**

**Expenditures Per In-District Pupil**

**Fiscal Years 2014–2016**

| **Expenditure Category** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Administration | $477 | $577 | $727 |
| Instructional leadership (district and school) | $1,436 | $1,362 | $1,644 |
| Teachers | $5,138 | $5,542 | $5,647 |
| Other teaching services | $1,632 | $1,560 | $1,803 |
| Professional development | $171 | $175 | $149 |
| Instructional materials, equipment and technology | $552 | $414 | $528 |
| Guidance, counseling and testing services | $649 | $682 | $530 |
| Pupil services | $1,878 | $1,950 | $1,983 |
| Operations and maintenance | $1,607 | $1,544 | $1,513 |
| Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs | $3,681 | $3,913 | $4,265 |
| Total expenditures per in-district pupil | $17,221 | $17,720 | $18,790 |
| Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/ppx.html)  Note: Any discrepancy between expenditures and total is because of rounding. | | | |

Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

| **Focus Area #1: Learning Objectives & Expectations** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Average  Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 1. The teacher demonstrates knowledge of the subject matter. | **ES** | 4% | 18% | 71% | 7% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 10% | 15% | 50% | 25% | 2.9 |
| **HS** | 14% | 29% | 36% | 21% | 2.6 |
| **Total #** | 5 | 12 | 35 | 10 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 8% | 19% | 56% | 16% |  |
| 2. The teacher ensures that students understand what they should be learning in the lesson and why. | **ES** | 0% | 21% | 79% | 0% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 15% | 15% | 65% | 5% | 2.6 |
| **HS** | 7% | 36% | 43% | 14% | 2.6 |
| **Total #** | 4 | 14 | 41 | 3 | 2.7 |
| **Total %** | 6% | 23% | 66% | 5% |  |
| 3. The teacher uses appropriate classroom activities well matched to the learning objective(s). | **ES** | 0% | 25% | 57% | 18% | 2.9 |
| **MS** | 10% | 15% | 60% | 15% | 2.8 |
| **HS** | 0% | 57% | 43% | 0% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 2 | 18 | 34 | 8 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 3% | 29% | 55% | 13% |  |
| 4. The teacher conducts frequent checks for student understanding, provides feedback, and adjusts instruction. | **ES** | 0% | 18% | 64% | 18% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 5% | 25% | 50% | 20% | 2.9 |
| **HS** | 14% | 43% | 36% | 7% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 3 | 16 | 33 | 10 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 5% | 26% | 53% | 16% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #1** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | **11.5** |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | **11.2** |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | **10.1** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | **11.1** |

| **Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Average Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 5. Students assume responsibility to learn and are engaged in the lesson. | **ES** | 0% | 14% | 71% | 14% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 5% | 35% | 55% | 5% | 2.6 |
| **HS** | 21% | 29% | 43% | 7% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 4 | 15 | 37 | 6 | 2.7 |
| **Total %** | 6% | 24% | 60% | 10% |  |
| 6. Students engage in higher-order thinking. | **ES** | 4% | 46% | 32% | 18% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 25% | 30% | 45% | 0% | 2.2 |
| **HS** | 21% | 21% | 43% | 14% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 9 | 22 | 24 | 7 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 15% | 35% | 39% | 11% |  |
| 7. Students communicate their ideas and thinking with each other. | **ES** | 7% | 29% | 57% | 7% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 20% | 35% | 45% | 0% | 2.3 |
| **HS** | 29% | 29% | 43% | 0% | 2.1 |
| **Total #** | 10 | 19 | 31 | 2 | 2.4 |
| **Total %** | 16% | 31% | 50% | 3% |  |
| 8. Students engage with meaningful, real-world tasks. | **ES** | 0% | 36% | 46% | 18% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 20% | 45% | 25% | 10% | 2.3 |
| **HS** | 29% | 14% | 57% | 0% | 2.3 |
| **Total #** | 8 | 21 | 26 | 7 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 13% | 34% | 42% | 11% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #2** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | **11.1** |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | **9.3** |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | **9.3** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | **10.1** |

| **Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Average Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 9. The teacher ensures that students are engaging in challenging tasks regardless of learning needs. | **ES** | 0% | 25% | 64% | 11% | 2.9 |
| **MS** | 25% | 25% | 35% | 15% | 2.4 |
| **HS** | 36% | 43% | 7% | 14% | 2.0 |
| **Total #** | 10 | 18 | 26 | 8 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 16% | 29% | 42% | 13% |  |
| 10. The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies. | **ES** | 0% | 39% | 57% | 4% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 10% | 50% | 35% | 5% | 2.4 |
| **HS** | 21% | 43% | 36% | 0% | 2.1 |
| **Total #** | 5 | 27 | 28 | 2 | 2.4 |
| **Total %** | 8% | 44% | 45% | 3% |  |
| 11. Classroom routines and positive supports are in place to ensure that students behave appropriately. | **ES** | 0% | 14% | 43% | 43% | 3.3 |
| **MS** | 15% | 15% | 45% | 25% | 2.8 |
| **HS** | 14% | 21% | 43% | 21% | 2.7 |
| **Total #** | 5 | 10 | 27 | 20 | 3.0 |
| **Total %** | 8% | 16% | 44% | 32% |  |
| 12. The classroom climate is conducive to teaching and learning. | **ES** | 0% | 4% | 71% | 25% | 3.2 |
| **MS** | 20% | 10% | 25% | 45% | 3.0 |
| **HS** | 14% | 21% | 57% | 7% | 2.6 |
| **Total #** | 6 | 6 | 33 | 17 | 3.0 |
| **Total %** | 10% | 10% | 53% | 27% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #3** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | **12.1** |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | **10.5** |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | **9.4** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | **10.9** |

1. In the 2017–2018 school year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The middle and high schools share a building. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Before the superintendent’s arrival in July 2013, the district experienced an unstable period caused by multiple changes in district and school leadership, financial issues, and hard feelings about the closing of an elementary school. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. An informative evaluation is factual and cites instructional details such as methodology, pedagogy, Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice or instruction of subject-based knowledge that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. It does not commit to improvement strategies. An instructive evaluation includes comments intended to improve instruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Because of a two-hour delayed start to school on January 23, 2018, two blocks of classroom observations at the secondary school were eliminated to accommodate interviews with district staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Middle- and high-school students from the neighboring town of Erving attend Great Falls Middle School and Turners Falls High School. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. SMART goals are Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results Focused; and Time and Tracked. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. An informative evaluation is factual and cites instructional details such as methodology, pedagogy, Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice or instruction of subject-based knowledge that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. It does not commit to improvement strategies. An instructive evaluation includes comments intended to improve instruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. SMART goals are specific and strategic; measureable; action-oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results- focused; and timed and tracked. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On Tuesday, February 28, 2017, after collecting public comment since November 2016, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted 9-1 to amend the educator evaluation regulations. The most significant change in the regulations is the elimination of a separate student impact rating. Under the [amended regulations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/), evaluators do not have to make a separate judgment about an educator’s impact on student learning. Instead, student learning is embedded as an indicator within one of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework’s four standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Initiatives include Hill/Literacy, DSAC, data analysis, Lucy Cawkins, Keys to Literacy, Keys to Comprehension, Fundations, Tools of the Mind, Project Based Learning, Making Thinking Visible, Restorative Practices, Resilient Schools, RBT/OAT course, Ribas, Social Justice, and the Responsive Classroom. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. According to ESE data, between 2014 and 2017 the district’s in-school suspension rate fluctuated with an overall decline, from 3.8 percent in 2014 to 0.3 percent in 2017. Between 2014 and 2016, the district’s out-of-school suspension rate hovered around 4.5 percent; in 2017, the rate declined to 1.7 percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. According to ESE data, in fiscal year 2017, the district received 103.9 choice-in students and sent 221.1 students to schools in other communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. These in-district expenditures are independent of out-of-district tuitions for special education programs, charter schools, and school choice, which may have varying impacts on total budget requirements particular to each district and its towns. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. RADAR stands for Resource Allocation and District Action Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Table 22 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. There are many aspects of comparison that could be used in addition to those in Table 22, such as student outcomes and the proportion of economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. This analysis focuses on the demographics in Table 22 and some related financial data. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Capacity is Combined Effort Yield (CEY), a measure used in the Chapter 70 program taking into account local income and property value as a percentage of the local foundation budget. A higher percentage indicates greater community wealth. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Enrollment includes residents, choice-in, and tuition-in students. Since 2013 enrollment has fluctuated with an overall decline, from 1,050 in 2013 to 1,010 in 2014 to 1,000 in 2015 to 947 in 2016 to 951 in 2017 and to 976 in 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)