

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Educational Management Audit Council
and
Office of Educational Quality and
Accountability**

**Annual Report
for
Fiscal Year 2003**

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Educational Management Audit Council

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February 13, 2004

Commissioner David Driscoll
Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Commissioner Driscoll:

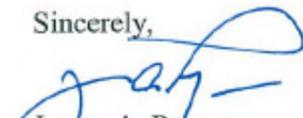
In accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15, section 55A we, the undersigned members of the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC), are please to submit the annual report for the Council and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), for the fiscal year ending June 31, 2003.

The five-member Council and its agency, the EQA, were established by the Legislature in July 2000, to perform examinations of public school districts in the Commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts at promoting higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test.

The following report is presented in two sections: 1) a summary of the EQA's process and findings for 2003, and 2) the activities of the EMAC and EQA for the year.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to demonstrate to you the work of this new public entity. Please do not hesitate to contact us, either individually or through the EQA at 617-727-2398 if you have any questions or we can be of further assistance.

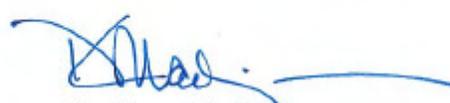
Sincerely,


James A. Peyser
Chairman, EMAC


Mark Roosevelt
Vice Chair


Maura Banta
Member


Jeffery Howard
Member


Kathleen Madigan
Member

Introduction

Fiscal Year 2003 represents the first full year of operation for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) and the second year for the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC). The major accomplishment of the agency during this period has been the development, field-testing, and refinement of an accountability system for public school districts and schools that has been recognized as one of the most effective in the nation.¹

Under the direction of the EMAC, which met 11 times in five regular sessions and in six special sessions, the EQA with a staff of four full-time employees and 21 part-time examiners conducted examinations and published reports on 17 public school districts in the Commonwealth. Of these districts, four were pilot districts involved in the field-testing of the accountability process and protocol. These districts were as follows: Attleboro, Assabet Valley Regional Vocational School, Northampton, and Westfield. (The other 13 districts are listed on page 10.)

The EQA's three-tier process was applied, tested, and refined during this period. The 17 school districts examined by the EQA in FY2003 received approximately \$1,538,783,934 in state Chapter 70 aid between FY1999 and FY2002 and had an aggregate enrollment of 299,718 school children for the same four-year period (representing an annual enrollment of approximately 75,000 students).

¹John Gehring, Education Week, "State of the States: Massachusetts", Volume XXII, January 9, 2003, p. 138-9.

The EQA and its District Examination Process

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability was created by the Legislature in July 2000, to perform independent audits of schools and districts in Massachusetts. The agency uses a three-tier process to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of each school district's administration in advancing student performance as measured by the MCAS test.

Purposes of the EQA's Framework for District Accountability: In accordance with its enabling legislation, the EQA process is designed to do the following:

1. Provide a comprehensive evaluation of a school district's performance.
2. Provide annual reports on each district's performance.
3. Monitor statewide public education performance and to inform policy decisions.
4. Provide the public access to information that helps it hold districts and schools, including charter schools accountable.

Tier I - Data-Driven Statewide Assessment: The EQA's staff conducts an annual comprehensive data analysis of MCAS test results of all public school districts, which is reported to each district, to the EMAC, and to other state agencies in relation to five essential questions.

1. How are students in this school district meeting the state's achievement expectations?
2. How are subgroups of students within the district meeting the state's achievement standards?
3. How are the district students improving at meeting the state's standards over time?
4. How are the district's subgroups improving at meeting the state's standards over time?
5. Are all students and staff participating in the state's assessment process?

Tier II - Standards-Based Examination: Districts are selected annually for further review based on the Tier I data analysis, input from EMAC, and random samples. Districts are selected that achieve within certain thresholds of performance, especially low and below average student performance. These districts undergo an analysis of district data, reports, and documents using relevant EQA Standards as focal points. In addition, the EQA Examiners conduct a focused-interview of the District Leadership Team. The EQA Framework for District Accountability is standards-based and addresses five administrative domains or areas of inquiry:

- Assessment and Evaluation
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Student Academic Support Services
- Leadership and Governance
- Business and Financial Management

Tier III - District Diagnostic (Fact-Finding) Review: Districts may be selected for an in-depth diagnostic assessment based upon the Tier II analysis of findings or a determination of ‘under-performance’ by the state Board of Education (BOE), in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 69, Section 1I through 1K, and attendant Department of Education (DOE) regulations (603 CMR 2.0-2.4). All 29 EQA standards may be considered during this comprehensive Tier III review. Quantitative and qualitative evidence from district data and documents, as well as observations and interviews provide the basis for determining school and district performance relative to the EQA Standards.²

² The EQA always considers a district’s schedule of external evaluations, reviews, and interventions when qualifying and selecting the district for a Tier II or Tier III Review.

Findings and Recommendations

Because this annual report is the agency's first and is based on a small sample of the state's school districts, it would be unfair and misleading to generalize about these findings and propose policy recommendations based on this small sample. However, the following preliminary findings are significant in themselves and deserve further investigation and verification in future district examinations.

- **Teacher Attendance** - Chief among these preliminary findings is the importance and necessity of maintaining better records on teacher attendance and the availability to provide instruction during the general 180-day academic year. Currently, there is no statewide mechanism to collect and manage data on teacher attendance or instructional time. The educational and economic importance of this issue requires careful and prompt attention.

- **Distracting Grants** - Grants constitute an important, supplemental part of a district's fiscal portfolio. Several of the EQA's examinations have documented that some grants distract or deter school systems from the important process of addressing state standards and improving student achievement for all students. The Commonwealth needs to improve and coordinate grant opportunities and focus to complement the goals of education reform and student performance.

- **Municipal Indirect Charges to Local Education Agencies** - The mechanisms and practices associated with the calculations and determinations of indirect municipal charges that are taken from school department budgets and counted toward net school spending need to be reexamined. Many of the EQA's examinations indicated excessive, inaccurate, and inappropriate charges in this area, which limit and undermine the impact of education funding.

- **Fixed Enrollment Versus Average Daily Attendance (ADA)** - Currently, school enrollment, as determined by the October 1 enrollment report, determines the

calculation of full time equivalents (FTE's) and funding of local school districts. The impact of a funding formula that is based on a fixed date enrollment determination rather than the calculation of average daily attendance is profound. Many other states have gone to calculations of ADA to determine educational funding. The economic and practical impact of the current system of fixed enrollment, both as an incentive for inflated calculations of enrollment and a disincentive to aggressively promoting student attendance throughout the school year should be given full and careful consideration.

- **Special Education Classification and Delivery** - Examinations conducted during the year revealed inconsistencies in the ways in which districts identify, classify, and provide services to students for special education. Furthermore, the higher the special education population in grade K-12 districts, the higher their subgroup's performance levels on the MCAS test. This suggests possible inclusion of students in that population who are not academically disabled. This is an area, which will require further study, as well as a study to identify effective practices for this subgroup population.
- **Educational Spending Indicators** - The calculation of a figure or indicator that is more precise and better aligned with the actual spending on student learning and instruction may be necessary to help determine the Commonwealth's and local communities' support for school districts. The current use of average per pupil expenditure, net school spending, or per pupil spending as a result of total school spending divided by enrollment, exclusive of grants or supplemental funds does not provide a precise and clear indicator of spending at the local level.
- **Governance Boards and School Committees** - The role and responsibilities of governance boards appear to be poorly and inconsistently understood. This level of misunderstanding may have a far-reaching impact on the ability of school districts to meet the expectations and standards of education reform. Mandated professional development and training for school committees could be useful in Massachusetts.

- **Improved Management Information Systems** - Comprehensive information on school districts practices, schedules, staffing patterns, benefit structures, and collective bargaining agreements is not available on a formal, statewide basis. School administrators and school committees often lack information on contract language, practices and approaches to education reform and achievement programs that would improve district and student performance.
- **Small and Rural School Districts** - The small and rural school systems seem to lack the skills, expertise, and capacity to deal with the multiple levels of reporting, analysis, improvement, and implementation required by state and federal education reform. These small and rural systems are overburdened and under-staffed to provide the direction and support for local educators and students to meet high performance standards.
- **A Lack of Local Assessment and Evaluation Programs** - Almost universally, the district examinations found a serious lack of staff and program evaluations. In addition, most districts lack coordinated, comprehensive, periodic, and formative assessment programs that supplement MCAS test information on student achievement and progress. There is little use of norm-reference tests or criteria reference tests to guide educators in providing high quality programs to advance student learning.

The future annual reports from this agency will address these and other findings, issues, and recommendations based on a larger and richer sample of school district examinations and reports.

Summary of the EQA's Activities in FY2003

In FY2003, with a staff of five full-time employees and 21 part-time contractors, the EQA conducted examinations and wrote reports on 17 school districts in Massachusetts, which included four pilot districts.³ The EQA received data and documents supplied by the Massachusetts Department of Education, data analysis provided through a contract with the Merrimack Educational Collaborative (MEC), and training and monitoring of field operations provided by a contract with an educational consultant, ClassMeasures.

The EQA's two full-time field program coordinators and the part-time contractors conducted educational, programmatic, and fiscal examinations of 17 school districts in the Commonwealth. The EQA's technical writer then accumulated the MCAS test data provided by MEC and the examiner's reports and notes in order to write and assemble the reports, which were on average 85 pages each.

Districts Examined in FY2003 (17)

Assabet Valley RVT (pilot district)	Northampton (pilot district)
Attleboro (pilot district)	Pittsfield
Chelsea	Southbridge
Chicopee	South Middlesex RVT
Fall River	Webster
Fitchburg	Westfield (pilot district)
Greater Lawrence RVT	Whittier RVT
Holyoke	Winchendon
North Adams	

Reports written, acted upon by the EMAC, and Published in FY2003 (10)

³ Originally six districts were involved in the pilot development of the EQA process: Lowell, Methuen, Assabet Valley RVTS, Northampton, Attleboro and Westfield.

Lowell, September, 2002-accepted	Holyoke, April, 2003-referred to BOE
Methuen, September, 2002-accepted	Chicopee, May, 2003-revisit in FY2004
Attleboro, December, 2002-accepted	Westfield, May, 2003-accepted
Assabet RVTS, Mar., 2003- accepted	Northampton, June, 2003-accepted
Fall River, March, 2003-revisit in FY2004	Southbridge, June, 2003-revisit in FY2004

When accepted by the EMAC, the EQA's reports were posted on the web at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/eqa/default.html>. In addition, copies were sent to the respective school districts, the districts' legislative delegation, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the State Auditor, and the Commissioner of Education, in accordance with the enabling legislation.

The EMAC and the EQA's Budget and Funding

In FY2003, the EMAC and EQA confronted the fiscal realities that were present across state government and the Commonwealth. In FY2003, the EMAC and EQA's budget was \$2,480,958, which was \$223,858 higher than the FY2002 budget figure. In September 2002, the EQA's executive director informed the EMAC that Governor Swift would be exercising a 9C reduction in the budget representing a reduction of 3.4% or \$81,872 (\$45,000 from the DOE and \$36,872 from the EQA) of the total EQA budget. As part of these 9C cuts, and in accordance with an executive directive, the EQA's executive director had the EQA's five full-time employees take five full days of furlough time throughout FY2003.

The FY2003 operating budget of the EQA included three inter-agency service agreements (ISA's) totaling \$1,314,943 to support: accountability activities within the Department of Education (DOE) \$1,249,527; agency support from the Central Business Office (CBO) of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance (ANF) \$22,416; and a position within the Office of Workforce and Labor Development (DLWD) \$43,000. The operating budget for the EQA's operations, after allocations, was \$1,084,143.

The EMAC's Membership

James A. Peyser, Chairman
Mark Roosevelt, Vice-Chairman
Maura Banta
Jeffrey P. Howard
Kathleen Madigan
Dr. Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director of the EQA (staff to the Council)

The EQA's Full-Time Staff (5) in FY2003

Dr. Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director
Sheila Engle, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
James T. Gass, Technical Writer
David Lockwood, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
Alyssa Pacy, Administrative Assistant

Part-Time Examiners and Associate Examiners (21) in FY2003

Francis J. Antonelli, Associate Field Program Specialist
Robert J. Berardi, Senior Associate Field Program Specialist
Denise Bisailon, Associate Field Program Specialist
Linda Broughton, Associate Field Program Specialist
Sally E. Burry, Associate Field Program Specialist
Philip F. Devaux, Associate Field Program Specialist
Rose DiOrio, Associate Field Program Specialist
Stratos G. Dukakis, Senior Associate Field Program Specialist
Dolores Fitzgerald, Associate Field Program Specialist
Linda Gale, Associate Field Program Specialist
Michael E. George, Associate Field Program Specialist
Kevin J. Harrington, Associate Field Program Specialist
Davida E. Irving, Associate Field Program Specialist
Robert Martin, Associate Field Program Specialist
Joseph P. Nigro, Associate Field Program Specialist
Andrew Paquette, Associate Field Business Specialist
Louis P. Perullo, Senior Associate Field Program Specialist
Wilfrid J. Savoie, Senior Associate Field Program Specialist
Rena G. Shea, Senior Associate Field Program Specialist

Kemon Taschioglou, Associate Field Examiner
Robin D. Wilkins, Associate Field Program Specialist

Investigations of the MCAS Test Administration

A part of the responsibilities assigned to the EQA is to “investigate allegations of any breach of academic integrity in the administration of any assessments administered by the department of education.” Over the year, these 82 issues occurring in 67 different school districts were referred to the Department of Education that had conducted such work through its Student Assessment Services unit. A summary of the investigations that were conducted in FY2003 is on file within and Department of Education and in the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability.

