Educational Management Audit Council

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

2007 Annual Report

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By statute, the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) is required to report on the activities and findings of the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability each fiscal year. The following report discusses the operations of the EMAC and the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability for Fiscal Year 2007. The following three major recommendations are supported by the report that follows.

1. **It is time for the Legislature to revisit, update, and recalculate the components of the foundation budget and the resultant Chapter 70 aid formula.**
2. **The next frontier of reform is instruction. There is a great need for the state to examine the conditions of teaching and support effective instruction. Greater attention needs to be paid to the categorical funding of high quality professional development programs, initiatives for professional support, and capacity building for classroom teachers throughout the Commonwealth.**
3. **The state has too many school districts that lack the size, scale, and capacity to adequately address the requirements and expectations of Massachusetts' education reform. The Commonwealth must undertake a comprehensive effort to address the issue of viable size and appropriate scale to determine the best way to organize its public educational systems for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.**

What Is the EQA?

Test scores are the most widespread indicator the public uses to measure the performance of districts, schools, and students, but a variety of factors directly affect how students do on assessments. The framers of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993 considered accountability a crucial element of the reform equation, and placed it in the original legislation. Following implementation of the funding formula, the standards, and development of the state test for performance on those standards, the Massachusetts Legislature created the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) in July 2000 to examine a range of issues that have an impact on student achievement. The agency, which is governed by the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC), conducts independent audits of school districts across the Commonwealth to inform educational improvement efforts and to promote higher levels of academic achievement of students. The EQA also conducts renewal inspections of charter schools and examinations of underperforming schools on behalf of the Board of Education. The EQA uses its audits to:

- provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- publish annual reports on districts selected for review;
- monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- provide public information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

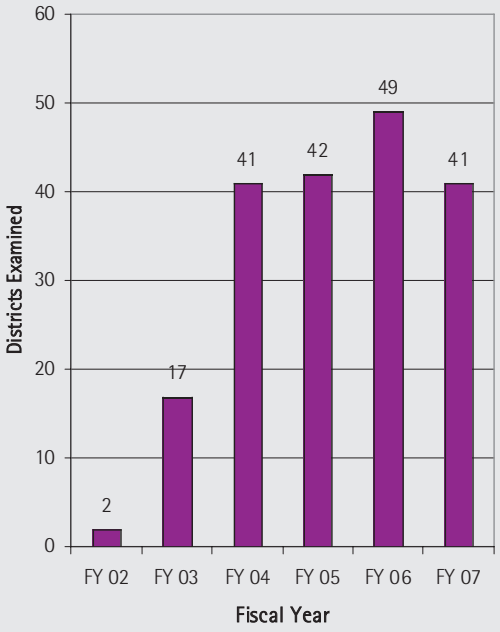
Through the educational audit and reporting process, the EMAC and EQA also help the state meet or exceed the expectations and requirements of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 and the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The EQA's model of accountability is nationally recognized, having been cited

by the U.S. Department of Education, *Education Week*, and the Fordham Foundation as one of the best accountability systems in the nation. The EQA audit and reporting process is considered productive, efficient, and cost-effective. The EQA is the accountability component of the Education Reform Act of 1993 and is the only entity in the state that examines entire school districts in terms of management, fiscal, and programmatic aspects.

FY 2007 EQA Activities

Since 2002, the EQA has examined more than 180 of the 328 school districts in the Commonwealth (some more than once), and has conducted 41 charter school renewal inspections and 33 underperforming school reviews. While there are 328 operating school districts in the Commonwealth, they are administered by 277 individual superintendents; aside from local and regional school districts, there are also Administrative Unions and Supervisory Administrative Districts that are comprised of two or more districts. To date, the EQA has reviewed all of the state's lowest-performing districts, as well as all of the Commonwealth's large city school systems. In consideration of EQA examinations, the Board of Education identified five districts as underperforming, and the EMAC placed 22 districts in 'Watch' status.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF EXAMINATIONS CONDUCTED BY EQA, FY 2002–FY 2007



In FY 2007, the EQA's staff of 13 full-time and one part-time employees and 48 part-time examiners conducted 41 examinations and reviewed 47 school districts, including reexaminations of eight districts in 'Watch' status and reviews of two underperforming districts on behalf of the Board of Education. Seven of the eight districts reexamined were removed from 'Watch' status. In addition to the district reviews, the EQA also conducted renewal inspections of nine charter schools and examined seven underperforming schools on behalf of the Board of Education. A complete listing of these districts and schools is presented beginning on page 20. The 47 districts reviewed received a total of $1,007,373,955 in state aid, which amounted to nearly 29 percent of total state aid, and enrolled 184,841 students, representing 19 percent of the state's total public school enrollment.

The EQA examination process has been under annual review and continuous improvement throughout the agency's six-year history. As a result of comments and feedback from the field, a series of modifications and changes were instituted in the process. The examination standards generally remained unchanged from FY 2006; however, three new indicators were added to address school safety. Additionally, the process gave greater attention to classroom instruction and the alignment of plans, processes, and practice within the district. In FY 2007, all districts received a visit and debriefing within three weeks of the examination visit to discuss the preliminary findings and the best ways to address them. Furthermore, EQA staff addressed school committees throughout the state on the findings of the EQA examination.

Changes in the EQA process instituted in FY 2007 include:

- converting the position of deputy director, a largely administrative role, to a position of deputy director of district services to provide assistance to districts examined by the EQA;
- adding three indicators concerning school safety;
- funding and publishing a research study, *Gaining Traction: Urban educators' perspectives on the critical factors influencing student achievement in high and low performing urban public schools*, conducted by the Donahue Institute at UMASS Amherst, which was released and well received at an EQA conference in April 2007;
- developing internal web-based applications to increase the efficiency of EQA's work;
- providing district leadership with feedback and support in dealing with the results of the examination process; and
- working with superintendents and school committees on the report findings.

The EQA Examination Process

The EQA's examinations are aimed at gleaning more information about how district policies, practices, and procedures affect student performance.

District selection

Each year, although statute requires a minimum of 25 districts, 40 to 50 districts in the state are selected for review. EMAC policy requires 60 percent of the districts selected to be 'low performing,' or below the state average performance level on the MCAS tests. Other districts that fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) criteria and identified by the state Department of Education (DOE) also are administered reviews, and the remainder of the districts are chosen randomly. A small number of districts have requested examination by the EQA.

Data examination

In the first stage of the examination, the EQA staff assesses each district's results on the MCAS tests to find out how students are performing. The data review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS tests?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required local and state assessments?

Standards-based review

In the second stage of the examination, an in-depth, standards-based review is conducted. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are applied at individual schools to assure fidelity of implementation. This stage of the examination focuses on a district's use of data to guide its improvement efforts.

The review analyzes district performance in six major areas or standards: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. In FY 2007, the EQA examined districts based on 67 indicators to assess whether or not they are meeting the standards, and provided a rating of Excellent, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory for each standard and indicator.

Site visit

As part of the audit process, the EQA sends a team of five to seven specially trained examiners, most of whom are former senior school and district administrators, into the district for a site visit, which typically lasts four days. Examiners undergo a rigorous two-week training provided by private consultants and EQA staff members. The training covers such topics as standards of conduct, observation techniques, review of the General Accounting Office (GAO) Gold Book standards, review of EQA's standards and ratings, and the agency's report development and writing process. Prior to and during the site visit, the EQA examiners conduct an extensive review of 12 documents provided by the district, including district and school improvement plans, curriculum guides, their grade level benchmarks, budget documents, financial statements, professional contracts, professional development plans, student handbooks, and external program evaluations, as well as documents and data provided by the Department of Education. During the site visit, the examiners interview the majority of a district's administrators, members of the school committee, municipal officials, groups of teachers, a representative of the local teachers' association, and parents on school councils. The examiners also conduct observations in randomly selected classrooms at all levels in the three tested subject areas of English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE).

EMAC Action

Based on the results of the EQA examination, the EMAC may take one of several actions. It can accept the report, with commendation or concern. If the EMAC has concerns, it may issue a management letter, place the district in 'Watch' status, or recommend a 'declaration of underperformance' to the state Board of Education. In April 2007, the EMAC eliminated 'Watch' status after consultations with the Commissioner and Department of Education, although districts in 'Watch' status at that time continue to be subject to reexamination.

Districts were placed in 'Watch' status if their examination revealed several critical areas of poor or unsatisfactory performance or their plans for improvement lacked an action component. Examples may include districts that had plans to address weaknesses but had not yet fully implemented those plans or that lacked correlation between district actions and student achievement. In addition, some districts were placed in 'Watch' status after they were referred to the Board of Education for a 'declaration of underperformance' but the board declined to make that determination. 'Watch' was a transitional response pending the development of a stronger targeted assistance and intervention component within the Department of Education.

Report publication

When the examination is concluded, a report is written. This report is given to the district for a factual review and then presented to the EMAC for its consideration and action. When accepted by the EMAC, the report is posted on the EQA website at www.eqa.mass.edu. Copies also are sent to the school district, the district's legislative delegation, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the State Auditor, and the Commissioner of Education.

Understanding MCAS Test Results

In Massachusetts, students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Students must pass the grade 10 ELA and math tests to graduate and those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

Based on students' performance, their results fall into one of four categories or performance levels: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, or Warning/Failing. The state also reports district and school MCAS test scores through a measure known as the Proficiency Index. The index is a measure of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, or meeting the state standard. The unit of measure is Proficiency Index (PI) points, and a score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient.

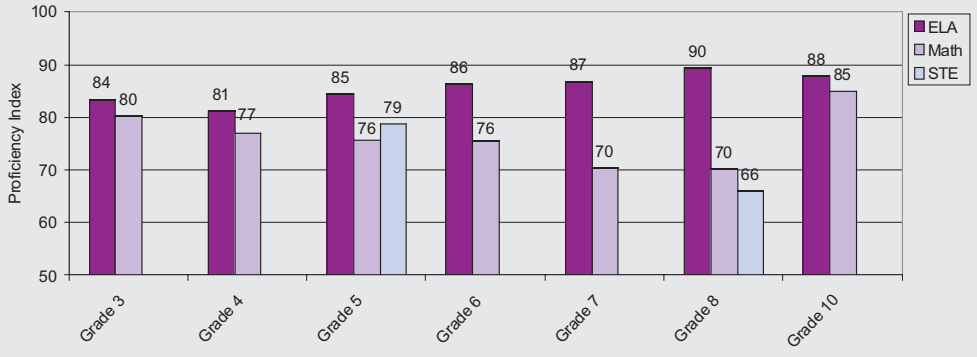
II. 2007 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts continues to be recognized as a leader in the nation in implementing standards-based education reform and helping students achieve at higher levels. The state improved its performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in reading and math and scored first in the nation (or tied for first) on the 2006 and 2007 national tests. Similar improvement was noted on the state tests. In spring 2007, 66 percent of students scored at the Proficient or Advanced levels on the MCAS tests in English language arts (ELA), 54 percent of students scored at these levels in math, and 43 percent did so in science and technology/engineering (STE). These figures compare to 64 percent in ELA, 47 percent in math, and 41 percent in STE in 2006. Ninety-five percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination. The Proficiency Index across all tested grades in 2007 was 86 PI points in ELA, 76 PI points in math, and 72 PI points in STE; the Proficiency Index overall was 81 PI points. Figure 2 shows the results by subject and grade. (Figures 2-6 provide statewide results.)

However, these positive results mask findings that were less positive. Achievement levels in math and science and technology continue to lag achievement levels in English language arts. The percentage of students who scored at the Warning/Failing level on the 2007 MCAS tests was 17 percent in both math and STE, compared to seven percent in ELA.

Figure 2 indicates the statewide Proficiency Index performance level for each grade and subject tested on the 2007 MCAS tests. In 2007, a total of 494,909 students participated in the tests in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 in English language arts and math. The test in science and technology/engineering was administered in grades 5 and 8. Generally, statewide student performance was highest and more consistent in ELA, with students in grade 8 recording the highest proficiency levels on average (90 PI points), and grade 4 students the lowest (81). Math performance was more variable. Statewide, students in grades 7 and 8 had the lowest levels of achievement (70) and students in grades 3 and 10 the highest performance (80 and 85, respectively). In science and technology/engineering, grade 8 students recorded the lowest statewide average performance (66).

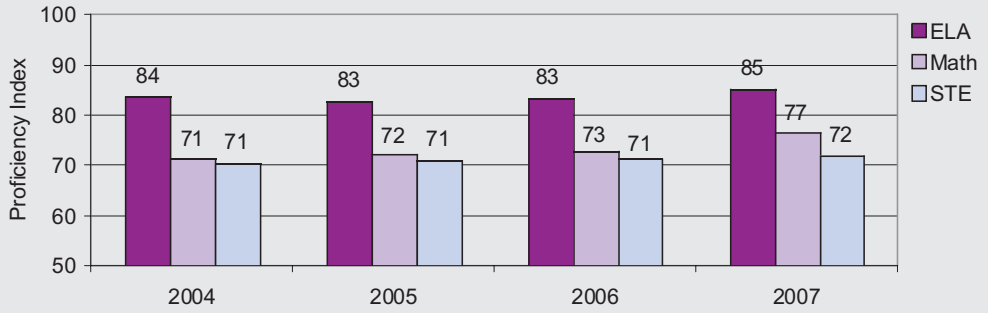
FIGURE 2: MCAS TEST PERFORMANCE BY SUBJECT AND GRADE, 2007



Note: No test was administered in grade 9.

Figure 3 depicts the four-year trend in performance for each of the MCAS tests administered from 2004 through 2007. The results are expressed in terms of the Proficiency Index (PI). After peaking in 2004 and remaining relatively flat through 2006, educational achievement, as measured by the state's MCAS tests in grades 3-10, improved in 2007 by four PI points in math, two PI points in ELA, and one PI point in STE. These trends in MCAS math and ELA results are consistent with trends in the state's NAEP math and reading results.

FIGURE 3: MCAS TEST PERFORMANCE BY SUBJECT, 2004–2007



Note: Trend data include grades at which testing was administered in each subject in all four years; therefore, the 2006 ELA and math data differ from those shown in Figure 7.

Figures 4 through 6 illustrate the percentage of students, statewide, at each of the performance levels on the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA (Figure 4), math (Figure 5), and STE (Figure 6), identified by subgroup membership. These three graphs also indicate the extent of the achievement gap between and among the state's subgroups in each subject area. As indicated in Figure 4, two of three students on average achieved proficiency in ELA on the 2007 tests, but subgroup performance was highly variable. The largest disparities in performance exist between: regular education students and students with limited English proficiency; non low-income and low-income students; and white and hispanic students.

As shown in Figure 5, over half of all students tested achieved proficiency in math, but socioeconomic, education category, and racial/ethnic performance was highly variable, with only one of five students with disabilities and one of four who were limited English proficient (LEP) achieving proficiency. On the other hand, seven of 10 non low-income and Asian students reached the 'Proficient' or 'Advanced' level on the math test.

Figure 6 indicates that of the 141,334 students who took the 2007 STE test, only two of five attained proficiency. The achievement gaps were also widest between regular education students, with almost 50 percent attaining proficiency, and students with disabilities and LEP students, with about one in 10 students achieving proficiency. Similar disparities existed between non low-income and low-income students, and between Asian and White students (about 50 percent 'Proficient' and 'Advanced') as compared with African-American and Hispanic students, with only 14 to 15 percent of the students tested achieving proficiency.

Achievement in science and technology has been poor in many districts across the state, particularly for the lower-performing student subgroups. This may be partially due to the focus on ELA and math as the only content areas for which schools and districts are currently held accountable. A great deal of work needs to be done in science and technology instruction in very little time, as this content area becomes a graduation requirement for the Class of 2010.

FIGURE 4: MCAS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEST PERFORMANCE BY STUDENT SUBGROUP, 2007

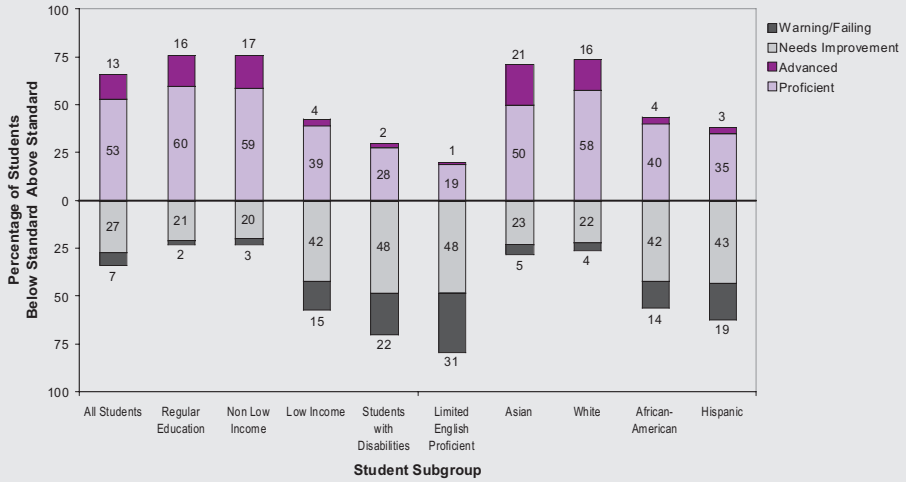


FIGURE 5: MCAS MATH TEST PERFORMANCE BY STUDENT SUBGROUP, 2007

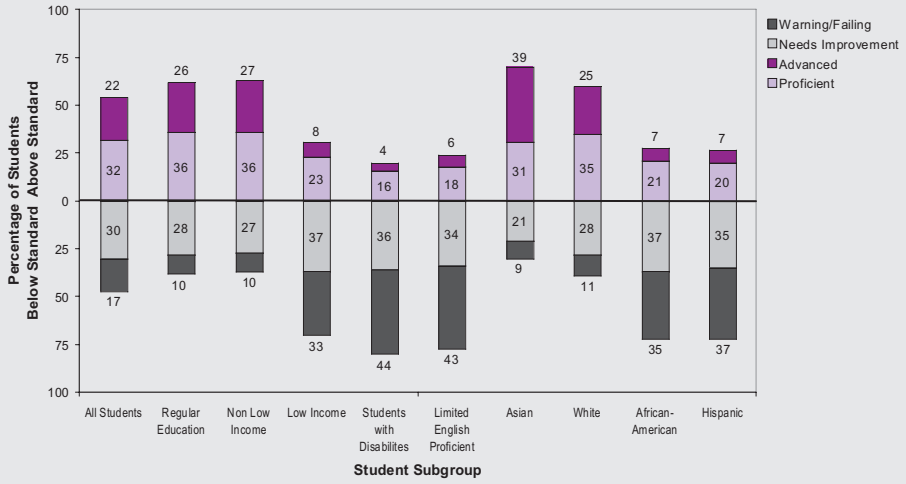
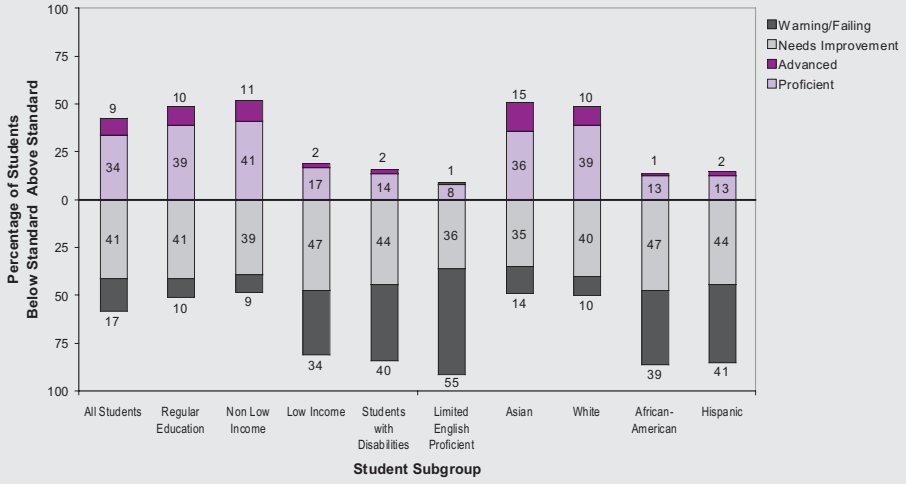


FIGURE 6: MCAS SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY/ENGINEERING TEST PERFORMANCE BY STUDENT SUBGROUP, 2007



III. FINDINGS

Factors and Practices That Improve Student Achievement

The analysis of the school districts examined by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, and the MCAS data for all the schools, charter schools, and districts in the state, have revealed several findings that warrant attention.

General Findings

Over the past four years, the EQA has conducted over 140 examinations involving over 162 individual districts. Furthermore, the agency has reviewed the achievement, demographic, and financial data for all 328 districts in the Commonwealth. Analysis of the data for all school districts and the site-based evidence gathered from the districts examined between FY 2004 and FY 2007 reveals general trends, ranging from changes in the general demographic composition of student populations in public schools, to the adequacy of financial support, to basic organizational and operational assumptions about schools themselves. These trends provide a context for the consideration of the more specific findings by standard that follow.

The state is segregating economically and racially. Demographic data clearly indicate that the state is segregating racially and economically, not just in urban areas, and the gulf between the haves and the have-nots exacerbates the severity of this issue. It is not surprising, then, that performance and achievement gaps persist between and among socioeconomic and racial groups in English language arts, in math, and, most recently, in science and technology/engineering. More needs to be done, especially in addressing issues of equity and achievement, such as better outreach and support programs and better engagement of parents of poor and minority children.

Financial constraints limit school systems' ability to respond to the demands of education reform. Over the past eight years Chapter 70 funding and net school spending have failed to keep pace with the costs associated with supporting local educational systems. As a result there has been a reduction in the resources to support curriculum and instruction. Although net school spending requirements have increased, there has been an overall disinvestment in basic educational services throughout the Commonwealth. Local systems that have managed to pass overrides have been able to stabilize and maintain services. In general, however, the vast majority of new funds and additional existing operating funds have been diverted to meet extraordinary increases in health insurance, energy, and other fixed structural costs in addition to structural salary increases associated with multi-celled pay scales. Special education costs have increased to such an extent that they have impinged upon districts' ability to maintain services. Increased competition at the municipal level has also resulted in less support for additional costs and funds for public education. Consequently, school-based services and programs, including professional development programs, have been eliminated in efforts to balance budgets, and the breadth and quality of many local educational programs are suffering.

Stability and persistence pay off. The recent lift in the 2007 MCAS results and the placement of Massachusetts at the top of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement for the second year in a row show that staying the course has had benefits for the state and its students. In part, the establishment of common goals in education reform and the resulting common curricula driven by the state standards have enabled this achievement. Furthermore, within the administrative levels of most districts is the emergence of a culture of data-driven decision-making. However, while data are enjoying wider use, they are not always well understood or available at the instructional levels.

Small school districts lack the adequate size, capacity, and staffing to address the demands of education reform. The Massachusetts public education system teaches close to one million students in 1,900 schools, organized into 328 different school districts, each under the control of a local school committee. Many of these districts are small, and because of their small size they often lack sufficient staffing, budgets, expertise, and capacity to provide all of the administrative and instructional support services and skills expected under the standards of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) and to provide support for all levels of the organization. In these districts, individual administrators frequently assume many different responsibilities and may be unable to do all of their jobs effectively. Furthermore, the levels of administrative costs for district operations, curriculum coordination, instructional and student support, and financial management are too high, when calculated on a per pupil basis. The Commonwealth must address the issue of viable size and appropriate scale to determine the best way to organize its schools systems for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Disconnected processes undermine improvement in performance. In the districts the EQA has examined, it has found that processes and practices in school systems are sometimes fragmented and lack systemic connections and impact. This has inhibited those systems from enjoying greater benefits from their reform efforts and plans. The EQA has found some districts struggling with implementing critical instructional and operational processes that support student achievement. The state has succeeded in creating a stronger framework to support student achievement and districts are getting better. For some districts, however, implementation of systemic planning remains a challenge. The task is to address the obstructed or missing connections and complete these processes and procedures in order to improve their efficiency and increase their overall effectiveness.

The next frontier of education reform is instruction. The conditions for teaching need to improve. The EQA's classroom observations indicated that more attention needs to be paid to fragmented use of time, limited access to learners, as well as limited access to resources. Where they occur, cluttered schedules, overly busy curricula, and ongoing, daily distractions make it difficult to present deep, detailed instructional programs that would promote higher-order thinking skills. Teachers are not always involved in or encouraged to be agents for educational change. The act of teaching can be overly scheduled, very busy, and fragmented. Most systems are not structured so that teachers have time to consult, observe, or reflect. Program adoption is not always strategic or well supported by appropriately funded professional development. Greater attention and investment needs to be made in high quality professional development and professional support programs such as coaching and mentoring and other programs that improve skills understanding and build capacity for teachers. Persistence has paid off and Massachusetts has much to be proud of, as evidenced by the NAEP scores. The next phase of education reform requires a major focus on supporting instructional improvement and the conditions for teaching and learning.

Findings by Standard

Based on the evidence gathered in the district examinations conducted in FY 2007 (see Figure 10 on page 20), the EQA has arrived at several more specific findings, organized by standard.

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Districts examined in 2006-2007 clearly indicate that the alignment of local leadership at the community, school committee, administrative, and school levels is an essential component of effective and improving school systems. The clarity of goals and purpose and strong communication processes promote such alignment. Systems without shared goals and consensus among the multiple levels of leadership do not enjoy such progress.

Mindful of the impact of sustained and persistent direction on educational improvement, the management of transitions in school and district leadership is not always carefully planned. Less than 30 percent of the districts examined enjoyed stable and long-term leadership by superintendents and principals, while most did not. In districts that experienced turnover of superintendents and principals, most did not use a process that addressed the organization's needs for orderly and thoughtful transition. When examining transitions of leadership, the EQA found few or no examples of requirements for the development of exit plans, transition plans, or entry plans by school or district leaders. Furthermore, only two of the systems examined engaged in a process of assessing past accomplishments, needs, strengths, and practices which should continue in determining the qualifications or capabilities of the new candidates. More attention needs to be given to communication patterns between outgoing and incoming leaders, at the school and district levels.

Curriculum and Instruction

Increased attention to the development of math curricula throughout the state has led to increasing improvement in student achievement in that subject area. However, teachers still view the textbook as the operational curriculum (the curriculum in use). In districts that have developed and provided curriculum assessment and pacing guides, the rate of improvement has been more pronounced. The examinations also revealed that different math curricula have different "gear up" or implementation times. The more involved the teaching staff are in the development and preparation of the district's curricula, the greater their understanding and consistent, faithful implementation of the curricula. Professional development is a critical and necessary element in creating effective instructional delivery programs.

Examinations in 2006-2007 revealed that districts with curriculum coordinators with supervisory authority have stronger systems of horizontal alignment, that is, consistency of program and instructional practice across all classrooms at a given grade level. Greatest implementation rates were found in systems that employed instructional coaches who had observational ability as well as demonstrative ability and could engage fully in all aspects of "coaching." Where used, such coaches enhanced the impact and effectiveness of curriculum coordinators or supervisors. Districts reviewed in 2006-2007 with curriculum supervisors, coordinators, and coaches were spending more time working on the issue of vertical preparation and alignment of curricula. This is an important element in dealing with grade level and school transitions for students.

Instructional implementation and change still lag behind the pace of curriculum adoption. While most systems examined had aligned their curricula in ELA and math, they had not implemented all the associated instructional supports

Fidelity of Implementation: A measure of alignment and the consistency of execution of plans and expectations

A characteristic of effective educational organizations (schools and districts) is the strong alignment of goals, plans, processes, and actions—from the policy makers to the classroom. Therefore, the EQA has developed a protocol for assessing the alignment of these elements. The ***fidelity of implementation*** is an indicator of the consistency of execution of a district's expectations: its stated goals, plans, curricula, and various processes, down to the level of instruction. When these various components are consistent and highly aligned, a high level of fidelity of implementation exists. When these are inconsistent and poorly aligned, a low or poor level of fidelity of implementation exists. The classroom observation protocol is designed to collect evidence of district and school goals, plans, and expectations in the instructional setting.

and strategies to assure a high rate of fidelity of implementation. The need for effective professional development and instructional support programs is essential and critical here.

EQA examiners observed over 2,100 classrooms in districts reviewed in 2006-2007. In general, they found that the quality of instruction overall was strongest at the elementary level and weakest at the high school level despite the high school classes having a lower average class size; examiners found evidence of the various attributes studied in 80 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, 70 percent at the middle school level, and 67 percent at the high school level. The quality of instruction was comparable in ELA and math. Examiners found instruction to be aligned with the state curriculum frameworks in over 90 percent of the classrooms observed, but that the teacher engaged in a variety of instructional techniques in only one-third of the observed classrooms overall and one-fourth at the high school level. Furthermore, there was a greater variation in questioning and instructional techniques in math classes observed. Examiners found high expectations in 73 percent of observed classrooms at the elementary level, 62 percent at the middle school level, and 58 percent at the high school level. Examiners found effective classroom management in close to 90 percent of the classrooms observed. They saw use of technology in less than one-fourth of the observed classrooms.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Most systems examined in 2006-2007 still rely on the MCAS tests as the primary common mechanism for assessing student progress. This is a summative assessment process. However, a growing number of districts (12 of 41) had or were in the process of applying systems of curriculum benchmarks and formative assessments. This trend was associated with higher levels of implementation of processes and practices designed to improve student achievement. The districts examined displayed a wide range of teacher involvement in assessment practices. A wider range of assessment tools and assessment systems were in use in these districts.

While the analysis and use of aggregate data has increased, the use of disaggregated data, particularly of subgroups, has lagged behind aggregate data use. Furthermore, data analysis is used less at the instructional level. This is due to the nature of most data on student achievement, which is summative and "after the fact." These data and their analysis provide a perspective on what has happened, but not on what is happening. It is understandable, therefore, that the use of these data decreases in most districts as one moves from the district's central office to the classroom. Some districts are using formative data, data services, and/or web-based and software supported programs for data analysis at all levels.

Program evaluation is not often practiced. The systematic review and evaluation of the programs, services, equipment, technology, or supplies purchased by school systems is in need of greater attention. In the vast majority of districts evaluated in 2006-2007 (37 of 41), the use of program evaluation was not evident. Purchases of programs and resource acquisitions are not evaluated for their impact and benefit. Considering the large amount of funds expended in these areas, and mindful of the growing competition for these funds and their effective and efficient use, the impact of better systems of program evaluation is evident and important.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

Examinations conducted in 2006-2007 revealed that greater attention is being paid to the recruitment and acquisition of talented new staff members, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science. In addition, more districts are using mentor and orientation programs for new staff members. These programs are tied to additional professional development opportunities for newer staff members. Some of the districts examined have even developed innovative staffing models and differentiated roles for teachers beyond the mentoring position. These systems can provide models for enriching the profession and providing more opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

Evaluation of staff, administrators, and particularly programs and services is varied, and approximately half the districts examined have adopted evaluation systems that are not in compliance with state law. Even when considering supervisory processes, observed practices were varied and uneven. As in previous years, evaluations, where they are conducted, are inconsistent and not highly instructive. Few systems link evaluation to the design and implementation of professional development services.

Professional development programs continue to be underutilized and underfunded in comparison to state guidelines. This is largely due to the tight fiscal environment. Where professional development exists, it is varied in terms of its focus and quality. Furthermore, more than half the professional development experiences are not connected to processes of supervision or district improvement processes based on student performance and achievement data. Evidence for the implementation of some of the more popular professional development activities, such as "differentiated instruction" and computer-assisted teaching, is lacking, despite the many offerings and investments in these programs and related hardware. Professional development programs involved in the adoption and use of new math and science curricula enjoy wider impact.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Examinations throughout 2006-2007 revealed the wide use of early intervention and early literacy programs such as Bay State Readers and Reading First. These programs, as part of their design, have given elementary teachers firsthand knowledge and use of formative assessments and data-based interventions. These programs have had the effect of promoting an appreciation for and use of formative student achievement data at the elementary level. Despite the persistence of performance gaps among subgroups, such early intervention programs, adopted by approximately half the districts examined, are increasing achievement of students in all subgroups. Similar approaches are needed at the middle school and high school levels.

The districts examined in 2006-2007 showed that, while subgroup data are still not well understood, the importance of attendance and limited, controlled transitions is receiving increased care and attention. Greater attention is also being given to data on grade level cohorts, and the real impact of the dropout rate, particularly in urban areas. The majority of districts were using MCAS data in identifying student performance and needs, for all students, as they progress from one level within the system to another. More attention is being paid to issues of fragmentation of support efforts and vertical alignment, and greater sensitivity is being shown to the disadvantages of social promotion versus promotion based on the achievement of standards.

Less than 10 percent of the districts examined took a proactive approach to encourage subgroup and minority participation in high level quality programs. The movement to higher level, more rigorous course offerings is resulting in the exclusion of minority and subgroup students in districts that do not use assessment data and objective measures to make such determinations. In districts that do not employ the use of assessment data but use subjective measures such as teacher recommendations and parental requests, and without the addition of academic support and coaching to encourage participation, subgroup enrollments in such courses have not increased. Due to a lack of adequate funding, districts continue to rely too heavily on grant funding rather than budget appropriation for academic support programs.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

As stated above, the foundation budget and the Chapter 70 funding formula need to be reexamined and recalculated to address original inequities and to take new fiscal realities into account, including those that have emerged over the past 15 years. Minimum net school spending requirements and the foundation budget are inadequate, primarily due to the impact of increasing health insurance, fuel, and retiree benefit costs, which have increased at super-inflationary rates over the past seven years. In addition, costs associated with special populations have also increased. This disparity has become the sharpest in the old mill towns, marginal industrial centers, and the smaller rural centers of the western part of the Commonwealth.

The system of indirect charges has created many instances of incorrect and unjustified claims against local school budgets. While regional districts are immune from this phenomenon, most others are not. This situation has worsened with the passage of the Municipal Relief Act, M.G.L. Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2003, which has removed the separation between and the natural checks and balances from the educational and municipal systems. Furthermore, the relatively higher rate of turnover in school and district leadership compared to the municipal level leads to instances in which new superintendents are unaware of the basis for many of the charges and do not wish to alienate important local actors by challenging their assessments. The system should be replaced by a warrant-type system, which must meet the standard of all other charges against the school department budget. The current system puts too much pressure on one person, the superintendent, for the veracity of the chargebacks.

School Safety and School Safety Plans

All school districts reviewed had safety and crisis plans that had been developed with community agencies. Larger districts were more likely to have plans developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. Not all plans had been recently revised and very few districts had an established and regular protocol for update and revision. School committees in 11 of the districts still failed to acknowledge the potential danger in having school buildings with unlocked and unsupervised doors that are open to the public while school is in session. Safety remains a controversial issue especially where financial resources are limited. All schools practiced fire drills; some districts had their children participate in bus evacuation drills and a smaller number (approximately one-fifth) practiced lockdown drills.

Safety and crisis plans varied widely from district to district and often there was no consistent protocol from school to school. Rarely have schools developed highly structured protocols that require teachers while exiting the building to grab an emergency bag that contains students' names, family contact information, emergency numbers, and action steps to be taken in a variety of emergency situations. This, combined with teachers often lacking a means to communicate with the office, make the existence of a crisis team even more essential in each school.

A Look at District Performance

Research shows that high-performing and rapidly improving districts have solid management. To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzed district performance on 67 indicators in six areas or standards: leadership, governance, and communication (I); curriculum and instruction (II); assessment and program evaluation (III); human resource management and professional development (IV); access, participation, and student academic support (V); and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency (VI). Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness—or quality—of a district's management system.

The districts examined by the EQA in FY 2007 were rated on each of the 67 indicators comprising the six EQA standards. The potential ratings were 'Excellent,' 'Satisfactory,' 'Needs Improvement,' and 'Unsatisfactory.' Each rating was assigned points as follows: 'Excellent' and 'Satisfactory' = 4 points; 'Needs Improvement' = 2 points; and 'Unsatisfactory' = 0 points. A score for each standard was computed by dividing the sum of the points received for the applicable indicators in that standard by the total possible points for the standard. The standard scores were assigned a management quality level as follows: 81 to 100 percent = 'Strong'; 61 to 80 percent = 'Improvable'; 41 to 60 percent = 'Poor'; 21 to 40 percent = 'Very Poor'; 11 to 20 percent = 'Critically Poor'; and 0 to 10 percent = 'Unacceptable.' A standard score of 100 percent means that the district performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators in the standard, although it does not necessarily mean that the district was perfect. The Management Quality Index (MQI) is an average of the standard scores and is an overall measure of the quality of a district's management.

Figure 7 shows the standard scores for the 31 districts examined by the EQA in FY 2007. (Because districts in 'Watch' status are not reexamined on all indicators, MQI scores are not computed for them, or for underperforming school districts.) Figure 7 also shows the Proficiency Index, explained on page 7 above, and Comparable Value scores for English language arts and math on the 2006 MCAS tests.

Comparable Value Analysis (CVA) is a statistical technique developed by the EQA that compares the performance of a district's (or school's) individual students on the MCAS tests to their statewide demographic peers' performance on a student by student basis. The result is a positive value if the particular in-district student performed at a higher rate than the statewide demographic peer group, or a negative value if the student achieved at a lower level. These data are then aggregated for the district's students. Each CVA point represents one scaled score point on the MCAS tests. For example, a positive 3.25 would mean that, on average, the district's students achieved 3.25 scaled score points higher than their peer comparison group. Standard scores that are greater than one standard deviation (equal to 3.17) above or below the state average (equal to 0) are highlighted in green and red, respectively. Figure 8 provides a general illustration of the 2007 achievement levels of the various comparison groups statewide. Each subpopulation is further divided by income level and mastery of American English.

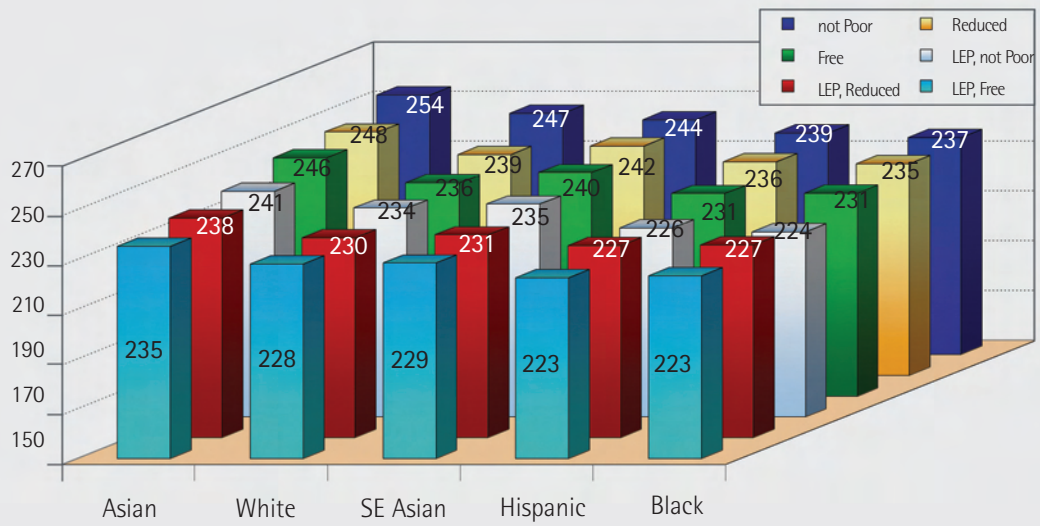
FIGURE 7: MANAGEMENT QUALITY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF DISTRICTS EXAMINED BY EQA IN FY 2007

	Standard Score							Proficiency Index 2006		Comparable Value 2006	
District	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	MQI	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Avon	80.8	85.0	93.8	84.6	75.0	88.5	84.3	85.4	66.6	-0.85	-3.14
Bridgewater-Raynham	73.1	70.0	62.5	69.2	70.0	79.2	71.2	88.8	75.1	1.02	-1.73
Chelsea	84.6	65.0	81.3	69.2	55.0	100	76.9	69.8	57.6	1.65	4.07
Chicopee	73.1	60.0	87.5	73.1	50.0	84.6	71.6	73.6	60.8	-2.59	-3.35
East Longmeadow	96.2	60.0	68.8	76.9	95.0	100	85.1	92.0	81.4	2.27	-0.47
Easton	96.2	80.0	100	92.3	85.0	96.2	91.8	90.0	82.3	-0.30	0.13
Erving School Union #28	69.2	65.0	62.5	76.9	87.5	76.9	73.1	79.7	75.2	n/a	n/a
Falmouth	80.8	55.0	87.5	65.4	85.0	88.5	76.9	88.7	82.3	1.82	5.02
Foxborough	50.0	80.0	87.5	84.6	95.0	80.8	78.4	93.3	83.0	0.73	-0.14
Franklin	80.8	95.0	100	88.5	85.0	88.5	88.8	92.5	86.7	1.77	3.84
Franklin County RVT	50.0	25.0	50.0	53.8	33.3	66.7	47.7	83.5	78.8	1.83	-0.21
Gloucester	96.2	80.0	87.5	80.8	75.0	76.9	82.8	83.1	68.2	-0.88	-3.91
Grafton	96.2	85.0	100.0	84.6	75.0	88.5	88.1	90.8	84.4	0.23	1.44
Littleton	88.5	45.0	81.3	61.5	90.0	46.2	67.9	89.1	80.8	0.14	0.85
Marshfield	84.6	70.0	81.3	88.5	85.0	84.6	82.8	93.5	82.4	2.03	1.63
Maynard	84.6	75.0	93.8	84.6	90.0	57.7	79.9	86.4	74.2	-1.79	-0.57
Minuteman RVT	54.2	70.0	68.8	65.4	83.3	45.8	63.3	85.4	77.9	4.43	1.06
Nahant	72.7	60.0	56.3	63.6	100	57.7	67.2	78.4	83.0	-1.39	-6.84
New Bedford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	72.5	57.5	-1.90	-1.49
Newburyport	42.3	50.0	50.0	69.2	45.0	61.5	53.7	90.3	75.5	-1.28	-6.41
North Andover	26.9	45.0	43.8	46.2	50.0	61.5	45.5	90.6	82.0	-0.34	-0.60
Northampton	76.9	75.0	62.5	57.7	95.0	80.8	74.6	84.7	72.6	0.50	-0.88
Northbridge	57.7	55.0	81.3	73.1	75.0	80.8	70.1	85.1	75.1	0.38	-0.53
Northern Berkshire RVT	41.7	60.0	50.0	73.1	72.2	79.2	63.3	80.3	76.6	0.27	0.20
Pentucket Regional	34.6	35.0	50.0	50.0	55.0	41.7	43.9	91.2	81.7	0.76	0.67
Pittsfield	61.5	50.0	56.3	65.4	65.0	84.6	64.9	76.8	65.9	-1.54	-1.53
Plymouth	92.3	70.0	81.3	88.5	85.0	84.6	84.3	87.5	75.1	1.32	0.50
Randolph	34.6	35.0	62.5	53.8	45.0	46.2	45.5	73.7	61.1	-2.69	-3.82
Salem	92.3	70.0	75.0	80.8	70.0	73.1	77.6	78.7	65.3	-0.45	-0.52
Tewksbury	84.6	60.0	68.8	80.8	80.0	84.6	77.6	85.2	75.5	-2.34	-2.57
Waltham	88.5	100.0	100.0	84.6	85.0	84.6	89.6	86.6	72.6	2.72	-1.13
State average								85.1	75.3	0.00	0.00

Note: The districts above enrolled 61,996 students in grades 3-8 and 10 in FY 2007, representing 12.2 percent of the 510,080 students enrolled statewide in these grades.

Using federal guidelines, four racial/ethnic groups are generally represented in the state: White (Euro-caucasian), Hispanic (Latino), African-American, and Asian. Southeast Asians have been subdivided from the Asian population based on their concentration in the state, and their different achievement level from the rest of the Asian population (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, and Indian).

FIGURE 8: AVERAGE SCALED SCORE, BY RACE, POVERTY, AND LEP STATUS, COMBINED MATH AND READING SCORE, 2007



The data above show that while achievement gaps do exist between racial/ethnic populations, achievement levels are more affected by poverty and mastery of the English language.

School districts can learn from one another by sharing best practices. Figure 9 shows the districts examined by the EQA in FY 2007 that received indicator ratings of 'Excellent.' An indicator rating of 'Excellent' means that the practice examined has been in place in the district consistently during the examination period, has resulted in improved student achievement, is broadly disseminated throughout the district, and is replicable and not dependent on particular individuals.

FIGURE 9: DISTRICTS WITH INDICATOR RATINGS OF 'EXCELLENT' IN FY 2007

District	Standard	Indicator
Waltham	Leadership, Governance, and Communication	The district and school leaders had a clearly understood vision and/or mission, goals, and priorities included in the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The standards-based plan and the analysis of student achievement data drove the development, implementation, and modification of educational programs.
Plymouth	Leadership, Governance, and Communication	School committee members were informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities under the Education Reform Act, and relied on student achievement data and other educationally relevant data as the foundation of their policy-making and decision-making.
Easton Grafton	Leadership, Governance, and Communication	The school committee and superintendent created a culture of collaboration and developed contracts and agreements, which encouraged all stakeholders to work together to support and sustain improved student achievement.
Gloucester Marshfield	Leadership, Governance, and Communication	The superintendent created and disseminated a comprehensive safety plan in collaboration with the community and plans were reviewed annually with the police and fire departments prior to each school year. School and district safety plans were aligned.
Grafton	Curriculum and Instruction	The district had an established, documented process for the regular and timely review and revision of curricula that was based on valid research, the analysis of the MCAS test results, and other assessments, and focused on improved achievement for all subgroups.
East Longmeadow	Assessment and Program Evaluation	District and school leadership required all students to participate in all appropriate assessments. In addition to the MCAS tests, the district adopted a series of formative benchmarks that assessed all students in all grades at regular intervals during the school year.
Falmouth	Assessment and Program Evaluation	The district and school leadership regularly engaged in internal and external audits or assessments to inform the effectiveness of its program implementation and service delivery systems. The data from these assessments were provided to all appropriate staff.
East Longmeadow	Human Resource Management and Professional Development	All professional staff members had appropriate Massachusetts licensure, and were certified in appropriate subject areas in the middle level grades (5-8).
East Longmeadow	Human Resource Management and Professional Development	In the event of unfilled positions, the district hired professional staff on waivers and provided them with mentoring and support to attain the standard of substantial annual progress toward appropriate licensure.
Easton Plymouth	Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency	The district's budget was developed through an open, participatory process, and the resulting document was clear, comprehensive, complete, current, and understandable. The budget also provided accurate information on all fund sources, as well as budgetary history and trends.

IV. DISTRICT REVIEWS AND ACTIONS

The EQA conducted 41 school district examinations in Massachusetts in FY 2007 using data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education; data analysis by Merrimack Educational Collaborative (MEC); documents provided by the districts; site visits in the districts; and field operations training by ClassMeasures, an educational consultant.

FIGURE 10: EXAMINATIONS CONDUCTED BY EQA IN FY 2007

District	Date of EMAC Action	EMAC Action
Avon	August 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Bridgewater-Raynham	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Chelsea	April 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Chicopee	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
East Longmeadow	November 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Easton	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Erving School Union #28: Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Shutesbury, Wendell	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Falmouth	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Foxborough	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Franklin County RVT	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Franklin	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Gloucester	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern.
Grafton	August 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Littleton	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern.

(continued on next page)

FIGURE 10: EXAMINATIONS CONDUCTED BY EQA IN FY 2007 (continued)

District	Date of EMAC Action	EMAC Action
Marshfield	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Maynard	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Minuteman RVT	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Nahant	No action	No action.
New Bedford	No action	Instructional Audit was presented to the district administration.
Newburyport	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Northern Berkshire RVT	August 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
North Andover	February 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Northampton	August 2007	Report accepted, with management letter and commendations.
Northbridge	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Pentucket Regional: Groveland, Merrimac, West Newbury	August 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Pittsfield	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.
Plymouth	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Randolph	October 2007	Referred to the Board of Education for further action.
Salem	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Tewksbury	October 2007	Report accepted, with management letter.
Waltham	March 2007	Report accepted, with management letter of concern and commendations.

FIGURE 11: DISTRICTS IN 'WATCH' STATUS REEXAMINED BY EQA IN FY 2007

District	Date of EMAC Action	EMAC Action
Berkley	October 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter of concern and commendations.
Brockton	October 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter and commendations.
Fall River	April 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter.
Greater Fall River RVT	October 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter.
Greater New Bedford RVT	March 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter and commendations.
Greenfield	August 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter.
Southeastern RVT	October 2007	Kept on Watch, report accepted with management letter of concern and commendations.
Springfield	October 2007	Removed from Watch, report accepted with management letter and commendations.

Underperforming School Districts Examined by EQA in FY 2007

Holyoke
Winchendon

Underperforming Schools Examined by EQA in FY 2007

Greenwood Elementary School, Boston; Perkins Elementary School, Boston; Sullivan Elementary School, Lowell; Homer Street Elementary School, Springfield; Kiley Middle School, Springfield; Washington Elementary School, Springfield; White Street Elementary School, Springfield

Charter School Renewal Inspections Conducted by EQA in FY 2007

Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School, Boston; Edward Brooke Charter School, Boston; Uphams Corner Charter School, Boston; North Central Charter School, Fitchburg; Foxborough Charter School, Foxborough; Christa McAuliffe Regional Charter School, Framingham; Sturgis Charter School, Hyannis; Mystic Valley Charter School, Malden; Abbey Kelley Charter School, Worcester

V. BUDGET AND EMAC

In FY 2007, the EMAC and EQA budget was $3,430,618, which was level funded from the FY 2006 budget. The operating budget was $2,887,188; of this amount, more than $382,959 was spent on renewal inspections of nine charter schools, and seven follow-up reviews of under-performing public schools. The 41 district examinations conducted in FY 2007 cost an average of *$31,200* each.

INTERAGENCY SERVICE AGREEMENT ALLOCATION	
Accountability activities with the state Department of Education	$300,000
Support for the Office of the Governor's Special Advisor for Education	$80,000
Agency support from the Central Business Office of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance	$29,430
Appropriation by the state Legislature for a study of effective education practices in urban districts	$134,000
Total	$543,430
Operating Budget of the Office	**$2,887,188**
TOTAL	**$3,430,618**

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Irwin Blumer, August 2007 –
Ethan d'Ablemont Burnes, August 2007 –
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Alison L. Fraser, January 2007 –
Kathleen Madigan, March 2001 – April 2007
Robert Schwartz, Chair, July 2005 – September 2006

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY STAFF

Full Time

Dr. Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director (staff to the council)

Dr. Albert Argenziano, Deputy Director of District Services (part-time)
Steven Chrostowski, Senior Technical Writer
Paula Hutton, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
David Lockwood, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
Eva Mitchell, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
Dr. John Roper, Examiner/Field Program Coordinator
Michael George, Research Analyst
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Jeannette Lowe, Technical Writer
Althea Hudson, Administrative Assistant
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Charles Martin, Senior Field Examiner
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Walter McClennan, Field Examiner
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Rena Shea, Senior Field Examiner
John Sheehan, Field Examiner
Charles Tetrault, Field Examiner
Stephen Theall, Senior Field Examiner
Bernard Tuttle, Field Examiner
Charles Valera, Senior Field Examiner
William Wassel, Field Examiner
Fred Wetzel, Field Examiner
Robert White, Field Examiner
Patricia Williams, Field Examiner
William Wolf, Field Examiner/Monitor

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

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