

*How Is Your
School District
Performing?*



A closer look at
*Gill-Montague
Regional School District*

2002-2005

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EOA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EOA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of Gill-Montague Regional School District, Sue M. Gee; the school department staff; and the town officials of Gill and Montague.

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INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created by the state Legislature in July 2000 to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts in Massachusetts. The agency uses these audits to:

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

In December 2005, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Gill-Montague Regional School District for the period of 2002–2005. The Gill-Montague Regional School District is located in Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley, and serves students from the two member communities of Gill and Montague.

This school district was selected for Tier I and Tier II reviews. In the Tier I review, the EQA analyzed Gill-Montague students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test and identified areas where students were performing significantly better or worse than the state average. In Tier II, the EQA examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. The review was based on source documents supplied by the Massachusetts Department of Education and Gill-Montague; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's on-site visit; interviews with a representative from the school committees, the district leadership team, and school administrators; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or comments that may have been supplied after June 2005.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Gill and Montague, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 9,852
Median family income: \$45,520
Largest sources of employment: Educational, health, and social services; and, manufacturing
Local government: Board of Selectmen, Open Town Meeting

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 9 members
Number of schools: 6 (Grades PreK-12)
Student enrollment:
 Total: 1,218
 White: 90.2 percent
 Hispanic: 6.5 percent
 African-American: 1.8 percent
 Asian-American: 0.7 percent
 Native American: 0.7
 Limited English Proficiency: 2.3 percent
 Low income: 44.2 percent
 Special education: 20.3 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

Based on the findings contained herein, the Educational Management Audit Council voted to refer this district to the Board of Education for further action at their meeting of February 23, 2007.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2005

	DISTRICT	STATE
<i>Average Proficiency Index</i>	70	77.5
<i>English Language Arts Proficiency Index</i>	79	83
<i>Math Proficiency Index</i>	61	72

Performance Rating



The Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

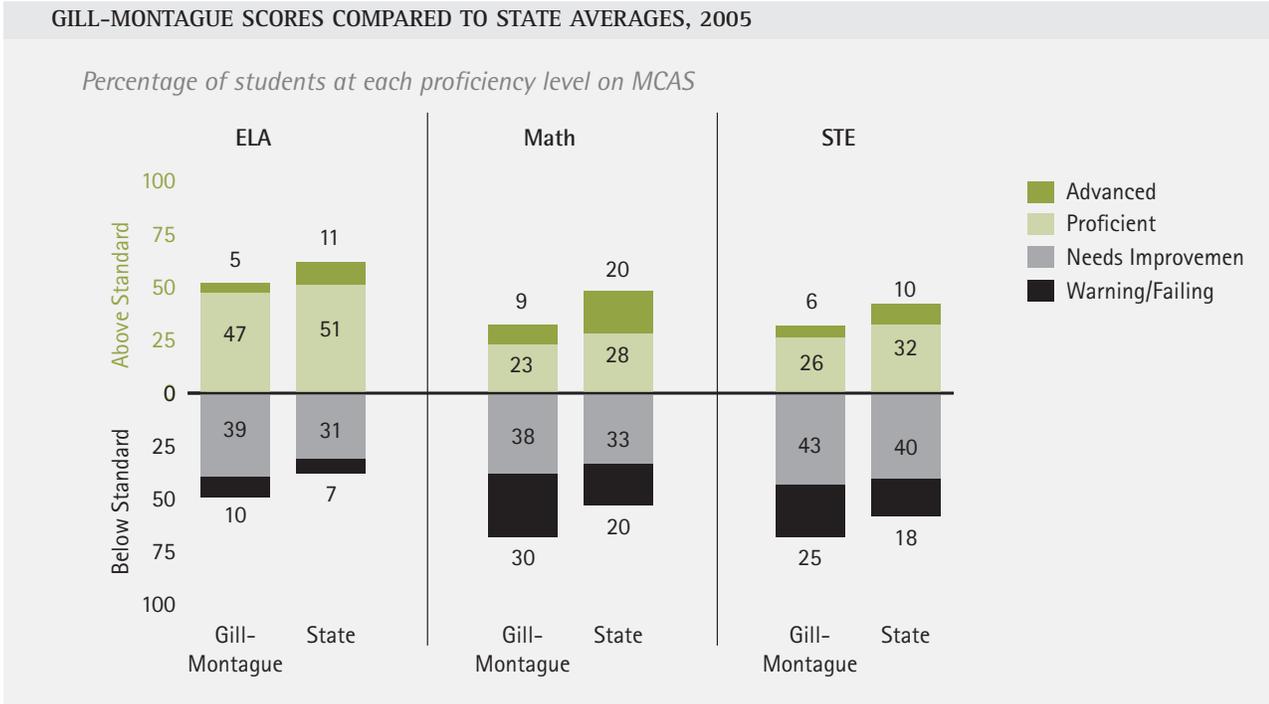
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 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). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the Grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and sub-groups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in all required programs and assessments?

- On the 2005 ELA, math, and STE tests, eligible students participated at required levels in Gill-Montague.
- In Gill-Montague, the 98 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS ELA test was 3 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Gill-Montague, the 99 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS math test was 4 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Gill-Montague, the 99 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS STE test was 4 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.

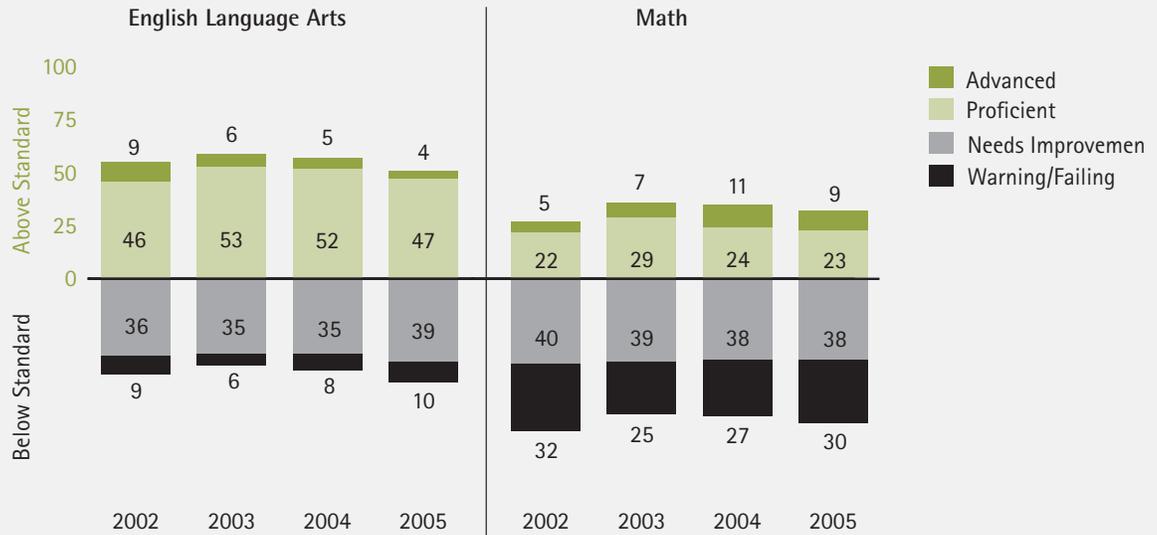


2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

- Less than half of all students in Gill-Montague attained proficiency on the 2004 and 2005 MCAS tests.
- Approximately half of all students in Gill-Montague attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) tests and approximately one third attained proficiency on the math and science and technology/engineering (STE) tests.
- Less than one third of all students in Gill-Montague attained proficiency on the 2005 Grade 8 math and STE tests, lower than the proportion of all students in the state on those tests.
- Gill-Montague's proficiency gap in ELA was 21 Proficiency Index (PI) points; in math, the proficiency gap was 39 PI points; and in STE, this gap was 36 PI points.
- The proficiency gap in math was wider than the proficiency gap statewide.
- The proficiency gaps in grades 4 and 7 ELA and in grades 4 and 8 math were wider than those statewide at those grade levels.
- The proficiency gap in Grade 10 ELA was narrower than the proficiency gap statewide in Grade 10 ELA.

GILL-MONTAGUE ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2002 and 2005:

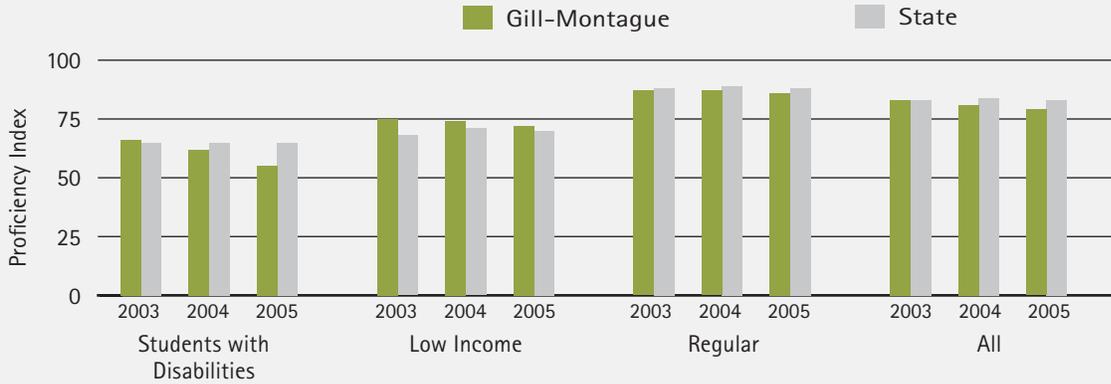
- In ELA, the proficiency gap was 1 PI point wider in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of negative 3.0 percent.
- In math, the proficiency gap was 1 PI point narrower in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of 4.2 percent.

4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

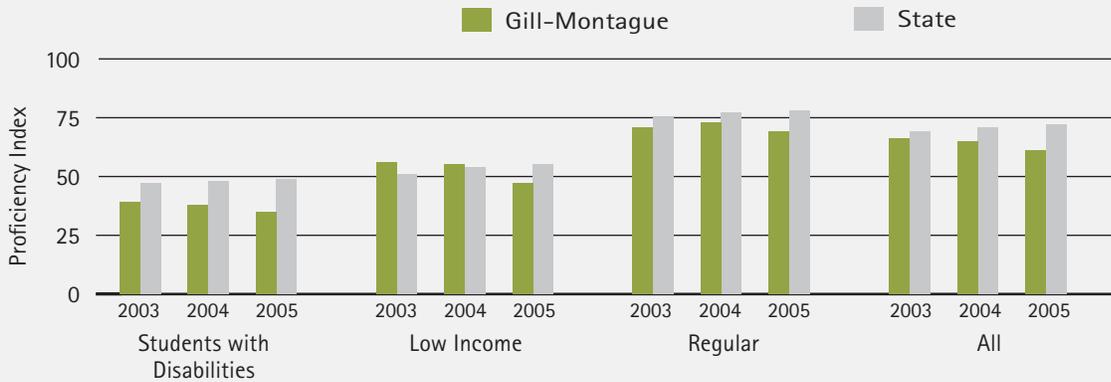
- Gill-Montague's performance gap in ELA was 39 PI points. In math, it was 48 PI points.
- For Gill-Montague's students with disabilities, the proficiency gaps in both ELA and math were wider than those of all Gill-Montague students.
- Less than one third of students with disabilities in Gill-Montague attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS tests, lower than that of regular education students and students not eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch (FRL/N) in Gill-Montague on those tests.
- For Gill-Montague's students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch (FRL/Y), the proficiency gaps in both ELA and math were wider than those of all Gill-Montague students.

GILL-MONTAGUE STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES

English Language Arts



Math



5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

- In Gill-Montague, the proficiency gap for students with disabilities in ELA was 11 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003, for an improvement rate of negative 33.6 percent.
- In Gill-Montague, the improvement gap in ELA was 15 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- The improvement gap in math was 13 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- In Gill-Montague, the performance gap in ELA was 11 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- The performance gap in math was 8 PI points wider in 2005 than it was in 2003.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 64 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Gill-Montague received the following rating:

Performance Rating



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Overall District Management

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on MCAS, the EQA analyzes district performance on 64 indicators in six areas: 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. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the

effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2005, Gill-Montague received an overall MQI score of Poor (51.6 percent). The district performed best in the areas of financial and asset management, scoring Improvable, but Poor in the remaining five standards. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on MCAS tests. Less than half of Gill-Montague's students have reached proficiency on the MCAS exam, and ELA scores have declined. Subgroup performance and improvement rates were even lower. On the following pages, we take a closer look at district performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Gill-Montague, 2002–2005



Leadership, Governance and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. Gill-Montague Regional School District is a 'Moderate' performing school district, with 'Moderate' performance in ELA and 'Low' in math. Since 2002, Gill-Montague's MCAS test scores have not improved.

Planning

Plans for improving student performance need to start with a clear vision and set of priorities backed by in-depth data to inform decision-making.

Gill-Montague's leadership consisted of the superintendent and the 9 school committee members. During the first year of the review period, the superintendent implemented a strategic plan that contained many important components, including the personnel responsible for goal action and resources needed for goal completion.

However, this plan was not standards-based; it did not require the use of aggregated and disaggregated student achievement data and lacked an evaluation component to assess goal attainment.

The district's School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were site-based and not clearly aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP). In addition, the SIPs were not based upon an analysis of student achievement data. The superintendent stated that the alignment of the DIP and SIPs had been undertaken as a task since her arrival in 2003.

Governance

In the minutes of the educational leadership team meeting, it was clear that discussion of student achievement was a regular topic on the agenda and that its monitoring was an integral part of the administrators' agenda.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 11 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The school committee regularly reviewed policies to ensure compliance with student achievement, legal, and educational changes in the district, the Commonwealth, and NCLB legislation.
- The previous superintendent had initiated the district's 2001-02 strategic plan (DIP) and had modified it twice. The current plan has 9 goals and places student achievement in first place, as the original DIP had.
- Collaboration within the district had increased during the period under review with the Fiscal Collaboration Committee and the continued use of 'interest-based' bargaining.

Areas for Improvement

- The turnover of leadership in the district led to inconsistencies in follow-through in policy and practices.
- The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were not all in alignment with the DIP and all the SIPs did not have measurable goals or action plans related to student achievement.

EQA examiners did not find evidence that the goals of the DIP and SIPs were connected to the discussion. Even when programs, policies, and services were added or modified, EQA team members found no correlation between the changes and changes in the goals within the schools' and district's plans.

Administrators were not always evaluated annually. The superintendent was evaluated twice in the four years of the review period, although the majority of principals had annual evaluation. However, administrator evaluations were not connected to student achievement, and to attainment of district (DIP) or school (SIP) goals.

Communication

The atmosphere of collaboration was well established in the Gill-Montague Regional School District. The negotiations have taken place in a positive tone in the district for more than 10 years. The district Communication Task Force, the Gill-Montague Education Fund, the monthly meetings of superintendent and teachers' association president, and the Fiscal Collaborative Committee are examples of the district's recognition of the need to include all stakeholders in the process.

Curriculum and Instruction

Gill-Montague faced a number of challenges in the area of effective curriculum development and instructional practices – essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula and Effective Instruction

For the review period, the district lacked current, coherent, systemic written curricula in the core tested areas. This inhibited the district's ability to ensure that all of the components of the current state frameworks were being addressed in their schools.

The lack of central office oversight of curriculum and instruction and the delegation of these responsibilities to building principals contributed to disparity in content, materials, and methodology across the district's schools and contributed to a lack of vertical alignment of curricula.

The district did not have a formal plan for the regular review and revision of curricula during the review period. Further, the district did not engage in the regular systemic use of formative and summative assessments of student progress to make decisions about instruction, professional development, or materials.

The district valued creating safe supportive settings for the district's students and several schools added programs focused on behavior to the regular school day, in some cases totaling nearly three hours per week. In addition, the district made some additions to instructional time in two of the core tested areas.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district made some additions to instructional time in the core tested areas during the period under review.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not engage in the regular and systemic use of formative and summative assessments of student achievement to drive decisions about instruction, professional development or materials acquisition.
- The district's recent investment in instructional technology had not reached its full potential in some schools and elementary schools lacked useful technology.
- There was a great disparity with regard to the regularity of formal and informal classroom observation and teacher evaluation.

The district's contract, policy manual, and expectations for building principals supported the active monitoring of instruction for adherence to the Principals of Effective Instruction. However, a review of personnel files and interviews with instructional staff indicated that the regularity of formal and informal classroom observations and teacher evaluations varied among the schools.

The district had invested in improving its facilities and upgrading the quantity and quality of its instructional technology at the middle and high school. They created positions to support the use and integration of technology into instruction. However, interviews with teachers and technology personnel and observations by EQA examiners revealed that this investment in materials and personnel had not yet reached its full potential. The elementary schools were limited in the availability of useful technology.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, which provides valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Improving Student Achievement

Not until the summer of 2005 did the principals have coordinated training in data analysis offered by the school district. The lack of systemic training for principals and teachers limited professional growth in this area which was seen by the current principal as a critical need of the district.

Although participation in assessments was high in the aggregate and for subgroups, performance and improvement were not. Interviewees recognized that the curriculum was not completely aligned with the state frameworks, and realized that the curricula were more complete and updated in some subject areas than others.

During the period under review, there was no systemic process for the revision and updating of curriculum, either horizontally or vertically. Interviewees stated that they recognized there were gaps and overlaps in the curriculum, and that it needed work.

Benchmarks had not been created at the end of each grade at the elementary level or at the end of each course at the secondary level, grade level. Although report cards had been revised at some grade levels, all schools did not consistently use the same report card at each grade level across the entire school district. Furthermore, report cards were not linked to grade level benchmarks and grade level benchmarks were not clearly stated, but were often vague.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Participation rates in assessments for all subgroups were satisfactory.

Areas for Improvement

- Lack of ongoing training in data analysis impeded the ability of principals to lead their respective faculties to a deeper understanding of student and instructional needs.
- With the exception of the primary grades, the district did not use formative and summative assessments, which limited the decision-making capacity of teachers to adjust teaching strategies and curricular choices.
- The district lacked clear, system-wide grade level benchmarks linked to report cards.

Training in data analysis had just begun in the final year during the period under review. As a result, during the review period, with the exception of isolated areas such as the primary grades, the use of data analysis did little to inform the district's decision-making, policy development, implementation, instructional programs, assessment practices and procedures, and supervision of staff.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

Multiple school committee policies and practices were in place in Gill-Montague for the identification, recruitment, and selection of staff. Interviewees indicated that transfers of teachers within the district were not precluded by any contract rules and school committee policy noted that current employees could apply for any position for which they were licensed.

The district reviewed all teacher applications and screened them for outstanding candidates before sending them to the principals; however, this gate-keeping procedure by the superintendent was ad hoc and had no foundation in policy.

Also, during the period under review, due to budget restrictions and seniority requirements, teachers with K-8 licensure replaced less senior teachers at the middle school as allowed by the teacher contract. During the period under review, due to budget restrictions, funding was reduced for professional development, teaching staff, instructional services, and administrator services.

A review of teacher licensure information for school year 2004-2005 provided to the EQA showed that 94 out of 102 teachers were licensed and 8 out of 9 administrators were licensed. The district did not have a formal mentoring program for new or non-licensed teachers, although evidence provided to the EQA examiners indicated a new teacher orientation program was provided.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 12 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- A school committee policy entitled the Philosophy of Staff Development encouraged staff to participate in activities which would increase competencies, and administrators made efforts, such as approving long-term leaves of absence, to keep teachers in the district.

Areas for Improvement

- Although required by Chapter 71, Section 38Q, during the period under review, the district did not have a professional development plan.
- During the period under review, the district did not provide a formal mentoring program and all teachers were not licensed.

Professional Development

The district did not have a professional development plan during the period under review as required by Chapter 71, section 38Q. Professional development programs were not informed by a systemic, coordinated, and institutionalized process across the district. Professional development was oriented toward individual schools and directed by the principals; however, during the period under review the superintendent piloted a district-wide professional development initiative called Whole Faculty Study Groups. During the period under review, professional development time for teachers increased from 6 half-days to 12 half-days. Although no professional development plan was in place in the district during the period under review, the EQA team observed programs and practices that were changed or implemented and professional development that was offered because of new or changed programs or practices.

Evaluation

According to documents provided to the EQA examiners, professional growth was an integral part of the teacher evaluation process. Three categories of teachers were established in the teachers' contract during the latter part of the period under review: 'Strong Support/Nonprofessional' status teacher (NPTS), 'Growth', and 'At Risk'. Teachers in the Strong Support/NPTS had their professional development needs determined by the principal; teachers in the 'Growth' category worked collaboratively with the principal to determine professional development needs; and teachers in the 'At Risk' category were professional status teachers who failed to meet at least one of the teacher proficiency standards. The growth of the teachers in the 'At Risk' category was monitored through multiple observations and remained at a salary level with no longevity pay.

The EQA team reviewed evaluations in the personnel files of eleven administrators and thirty-two teachers. Teacher evaluations during the period under review consisted mostly of classroom observations and were not compliant with law or regulation. Neither teachers nor administrators were held accountable for student achievement in their evaluations.

Access, Participation and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

The district's use of assessment data to identify students who did not meet expectations was inconsistent. Elementary school staff used various curriculum materials and other instruments to assess student progress. Each school's faculty engaged in some data analysis, but teachers had not been trained in TestWiz. Principals, trained in data analysis and TestWiz, were responsible for dissemination of assessment data. The use of formative assessment in classrooms by teachers was inconsistent. School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals were weighted toward affective and behavioral issues rather than toward academic achievement. The document submitted as the District Improvement Plan (DIP) contained strategy or program headings or titles but did not contain instructional or intervention strategies.

Services

Primary education literacy programs did not stem the decline in grade 4 ELA achievement from 2003 to 2005.

The district did not offer sufficient transition services. Many entering ninth graders were disoriented by the differences in behavioral, classroom, attendance, and other expectations encountered at the high school. Ninth graders' Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) were not transmitted to the high school.

Attendance

District student attendance for 2001-2004 hovered at 93.4 to 93.7, just below the state average. District efforts did not result in improvement in attendance rates during the review period.

The high rate of teacher absence from schools for all reasons remained high for 2005 as it had in previous years.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Support programs were operated in schools during the school day, before and after school, and in the summer.

Areas for Improvement

- Primary education literacy programs did not stem the decline in grade 4 ELA achievement from 2003 to 2005.
- The high rate of teacher absence from schools for all reasons remained high for 2005 as it had in previous years.
- Suspension rates remained at very high levels at the middle and high schools. Programs intended to provide alternatives to external and internal suspension from school had not been effective during the review period.

Discipline

Suspension rates remained at very high levels at the middle and high schools. Programs intended to provide alternatives to external and internal suspension from school had not been effective during the review period.

Subgroup Participation

No specific program was in place for the purpose of closing the achievement gap for subgroup populations; interviewees could not verify that students belonging to subgroup populations were represented in honors/AP classes, as they existed in the district population.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The Gill-Montague Regional School District and its two member towns enjoyed an open, collaborative relationship regarding the district's budget process, but there was little evidence that student achievement data played a significant role in that process.

Budget Process and Financial Support

Although the district's budget was developed through an open, participatory process, it did not contain or use supplementary fund information such as grants or revolving funds. School principals were responsible for educational input into the budget after conferring with curriculum directors and other staff. Because of fiscal constraints during the review period, the district cut over 25 percent of its staff that had not been fully restored as of the EQA team visit in 2005.

Examiners were told by administrators and school committee members that student achievement was considered during budget development, but school committee meeting minutes did not show evidence of this topic. Specific examples of the use of student achievement data for text purchases that changed curriculum were given to examiners; however, no regular, systematic analysis of aggregated and disaggregated student achievement data was used in the development of the district's budget.

Although the communities were expending 50 percent and 60 percent of their total revenues on the district's educational program, and both communities were at their levy limit, the funds were not sufficient to ensure educationally sound programs to meet the needs of all students. During the review period, the district evaluated its special education program for cost effectiveness, reviewed busing, and explored the feasibility of closing one elementary school: however, the district did not have an evaluation process to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of all of its programs and activities.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 12 performance indicators. Gill-Montague received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- A change in administrators ensured that all financial reports to the school committee, administrators, and the communities became regular, clear, and timely. State and federal required reports were accurate and filed on time.
- The district received and successfully implemented \$5,572,241 in federal, state, and competitive private grants.

Areas for Improvement

- No administrator or purchasing agent in the district had MCPPO credentials.
- The district had not fully implemented modern accounting technology that would allow use of budget forecasting methods.

The district exceeded the requirements for Net School Spending (NSS) for each of the years of the period under review, although the percentage of the budget that went into classroom instruction fell from 56 percent to 50 percent of the total budget during this period.

During the second year of the period under review, a change in administrators resulted in a change in financial reporting, and all financial reports to the school committee, administrators, and the communities became regular, clear, and timely. State and federal required reports were accurate and filed on time.

The accounting system used during the review period was DOS-based, and did not allow for forecasting and accurate encumbrance of all line items. Funds were made available to replace this system during the last year of the period under review; however, the system had not been fully implemented during this period.

The district had a grant administrator, and during the period under review the district successfully pursued competitive, entitlement, and private grants. These grants were monitored and reported on without audit problems. The district received and successfully implemented \$5,572,241 in federal, state, and competitive private grants.

No administrator or purchasing agent in the district had MCPPO credentials during the period under review. The district had not gone out for bid or changed its auditing firm during this period.

Facilities

The district maintenance plan combined with the maintenance plans of the two communities, because of the leasing of school buildings, had resulted in safe, clean buildings conducive to a good learning environment.

The district had a five year capital plan that was reviewed every year by the administrative team in conjunction with school committee members and community officials and citizens.

CONCLUSION

The EQA examination found the Gill-Montague Regional School District to be a 'Moderate' performing district, marked by student achievement that is 'Moderate' in ELA and 'Low' in math on the MCAS tests. Less than half of all Gill-Montague students scored above standard on the 2005 administration of the MCAS test. The district's scores declined in ELA and remained steadily low in math. The district did not appear to be closing gaps in subgroup student performance. The EQA examination found that Gill-Montague performed adequately only in the area of financial and asset management, and performed poorly in the other five areas.

Though the district's member communities were expending 50 and 60 percent of their total revenues on the district's educational program, and both communities were at their levy limit, the funds were insufficient to ensure educationally sound programs to meet the needs of all students. Due to budget constraints, the district cut 25% of its staff, and reduced funding for professional development, instructional services, and administrator services.

Beyond the fiscal constraints, the Gill-Montague Regional School District leadership did not implement the programs, practices and policies required to ensure that all administrators and faculty had the resources to focus on improving student achievement. Student achievement was a regular agenda item of the educational leadership team meetings, but it was not addressed effectively throughout the district. Leadership turnover led to inconsistencies in follow-through in policy and practices. The lack of central office oversight of curriculum and instruction and the delegation of these responsibilities to building principals contributed to disparity in content, materials, and methodology across the district's schools and contributed to a lack of vertical alignment of curricula. Interviewees recognized that the curriculum was not completely aligned with the state frameworks, and that the curricula were more complete and updated in some subject areas than others.

The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were not all in alignment with the DIP and all the SIPs did not have measurable goals or action plans related to student achievement. The district did not engage in the regular and systemic use of formative and summative assessments of student achievement to drive decisions about instruction, professional development or materials acquisition. Lack of ongoing training in data analysis impeded the ability of principals to lead their respective faculties to a deeper understanding of student and instructional needs. Although student participation in assessments was high in the aggregate and for subgroups, performance and improvement were not. Neither teachers nor administrators were held accountable for student achievement in their evaluations; teacher evaluations consisted mostly of classroom observations, and were not compliant with regulation.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's three-tier examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive a Tier I review annually, but they do not all receive the full three-tier review every year.

Based on the Tier I results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a more in-depth Tier II review. Still other districts – those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education – received an enhanced Tier II or even more detailed Tier III review.

Tier I: Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. The Tier I review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficient levels on MCAS?
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 all required programs and assessments?

Tier II: Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a Tier II review. 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 implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 64 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

Tier III: District Diagnostic (Fact-Finding) Review

While the Tier II review looks at how district policies are implemented at the building level, the Tier III review goes a level deeper and looks at what is happening in the classroom and how that affects school performance.

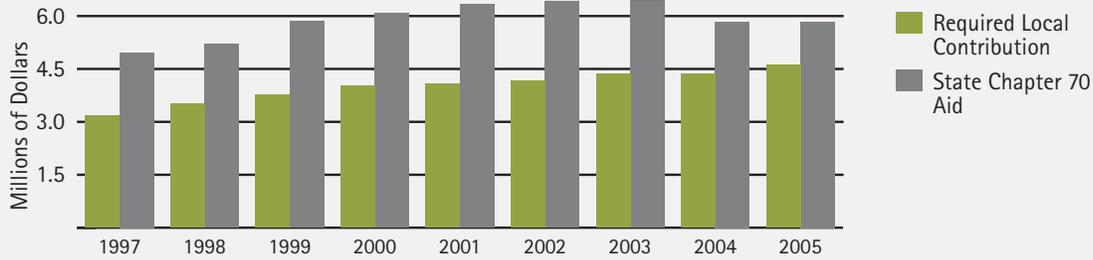
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN EQA TECHNICAL REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis	FTE: Full-Time Equivalent	MQI: Management Quality Index – an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district’s management system
ADA: Average Daily Attendance	FY: Fiscal Year	MUNIS: Municipal Information System
ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment	Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency	NAYEC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
API: Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)	GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board	NCLB: No Child Left Behind
ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance	GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges
AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress	GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	NRT: Norm-Referenced Test
CAP: Corrective Action Plan	GRADU: The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry	NSBA: National School Boards Association
CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures	IEP: Individualized Education Program	NSS: Net School Spending
CD: Competency Determination – the state’s interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates	Improvement Gap: A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups’ performance over time	Performance Gap: A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup’s Proficiency Index and another subgroup’s in a given district
CMP: Connected Math Program	IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan	PI: Proficiency Index – a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency
CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information	IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan	PIM: Performance Improvement Management
CPI: Composite Proficiency Index – a 100-point index combining students’ scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)	ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan	POA: Program Quality Assurance – a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process
CPR: Coordinated Program Review – conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE	LASW: Looking at Student Work	Proficiency Gap: A measure of a district or subgroup’s Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency
CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test	LEP: Limited English Proficient	QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory
CSR: Comprehensive School Reform	MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials	Rate of Improvement: The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap
DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan	MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees	SAT: Scholastic Achievement Test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders
DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills	MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents	SEI: Sheltered English Immersion
DIP: District Improvement Plan	MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators	SIMS: Student Information Management System
DOE: Department of Education	MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System	SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
DPDP: District Professional Development Plan	MCAS-Alt: Alternative Assessment – a portfolio option for special-needs students to demonstrate proficiency	SIP: School Improvement Plan
DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment	MCPPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official	SPED: Special Education
ELA: English Language Arts	MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral	STE: Science Technology Engineering
ELL: English Language Learners	MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment	TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill
EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index	MPI: Math Proficiency Index	
ESL: English as a Second Language		
FLNE: First Language Not English		
FRL/N: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No		
FRL/Y: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes		

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1997-2005

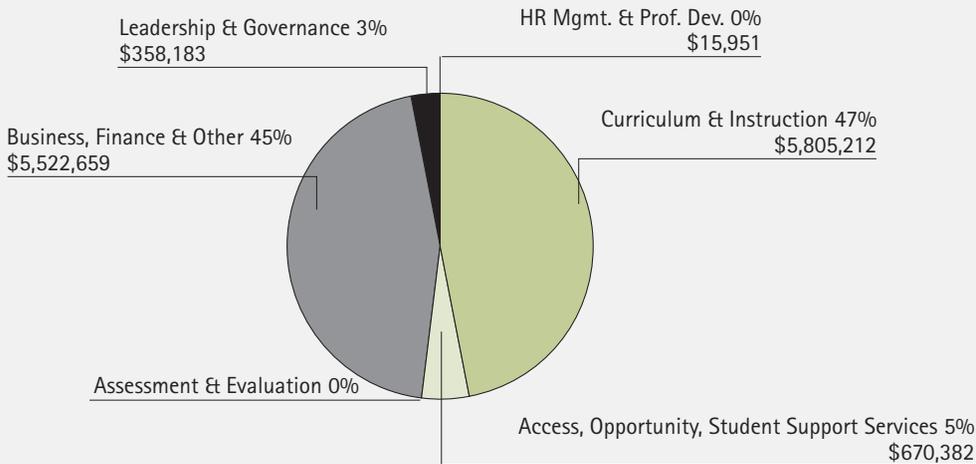
The vast majority of a school district's funding is determined by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to providing state aid to support school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Gill-Montague's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. For the nine-year period, FY1997 to FY2005, Gill-Montague met the state-mandated Net School Spending Requirement. For the period between FY1997 and FY2005, Chapter 70 Aid to Gill-Montague increased 17.6 percent (from \$4,962,336 to \$5,837,026). Gill-Montague's Required Local Contribution increased 44.7 percent (from \$3,182,653 to \$4,605,983). Since FY1997, Gill-Montague received a total of \$52,972,519 in Chapter 70 Aid and was required to raise locally \$36,046,101.

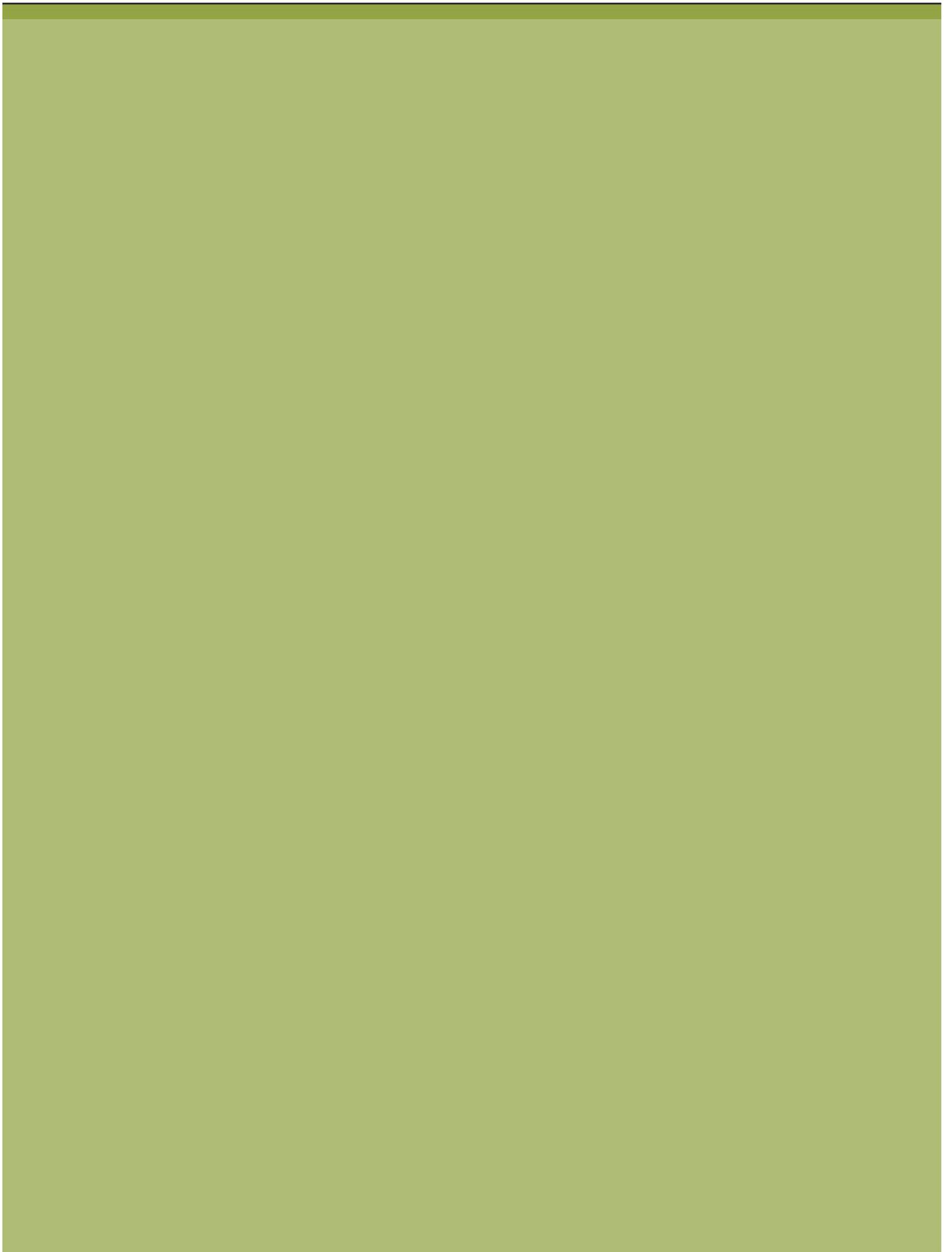
WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR GILL-MONTAGUE COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR GILL-MONTAGUE ALLOCATED?

FY04 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)





EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
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