

*How Is Your
School District
Performing?*



A closer look at
*Gateway Regional
School District*

2002-2005

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Robert B. Schwartz, Chairman

Maura Banta

Jeffrey P. Howard

Kathleen Madigan

Joseph B. Rappa, Executive Director, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

VISITING PANEL

James L. Hearn, Associate Coordinating Examiner

Wilfrid J. Savoie, Senior Examiner

Andrew Paquette, Examiner/Analyst

Herbert Baker, Examiner

Katherine Lopez Natale, Examiner

The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA 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 Gateway Regional School District, David Hopson; the school department staff; and the town officials of Blandford, Chester, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Russell, and Worthington.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?	
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results	3
WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?	
Overall District Management	7
Leadership, Governance and Communication	8
Curriculum and Instruction	10
Assessment and Program Evaluation	12
Human Resource Management and Professional Development	14
Access, Participation and Student Academic Support	16
Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency	18
CONCLUSION	20
APPENDIX A:	
EQA's District Examination Process	21
APPENDIX B:	
Glossary of Terms Used in EQA Technical Reports	23
APPENDIX C:	
State and Local Funding, 1997–2005	24

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 January 2006, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Gateway Regional School District for the period of 2002–2005. The Gateway Regional School District is located in Massachusetts' Hampshire and Hampden counties, and serves students from the following member communities: Blandford, Chester, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Russell, and Worthington.

This school district was selected for Tier I and Tier II reviews. In the Tier I review, the EQA analyzed Gateway 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 Gateway; 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.

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council accepted its findings at its meeting on December 1, 2006.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Huntington, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 8,819

Median family income: \$54,793

Largest sources of employment:

Educational, health, and social services; and, manufacturing

Local government: Board of Selectmen, Open Town Meeting

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 17 members

Number of schools: 7

Student enrollment:

Total: 1,391

White: 95.2 percent

Hispanic: 2.6 percent

African-American: 1.8 percent

Asian-American: 0.3 percent

Native American: 0.1

Limited English Proficiency:

0.5 percent

Low income: 25.9 percent

Special education: 16.9 percent

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

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2005

	DISTRICT	STATE
<i>Average Proficiency Index</i>	73.5	77.5
<i>English Language Arts Proficiency Index</i>	80	83
<i>Math Proficiency Index</i>	67	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?

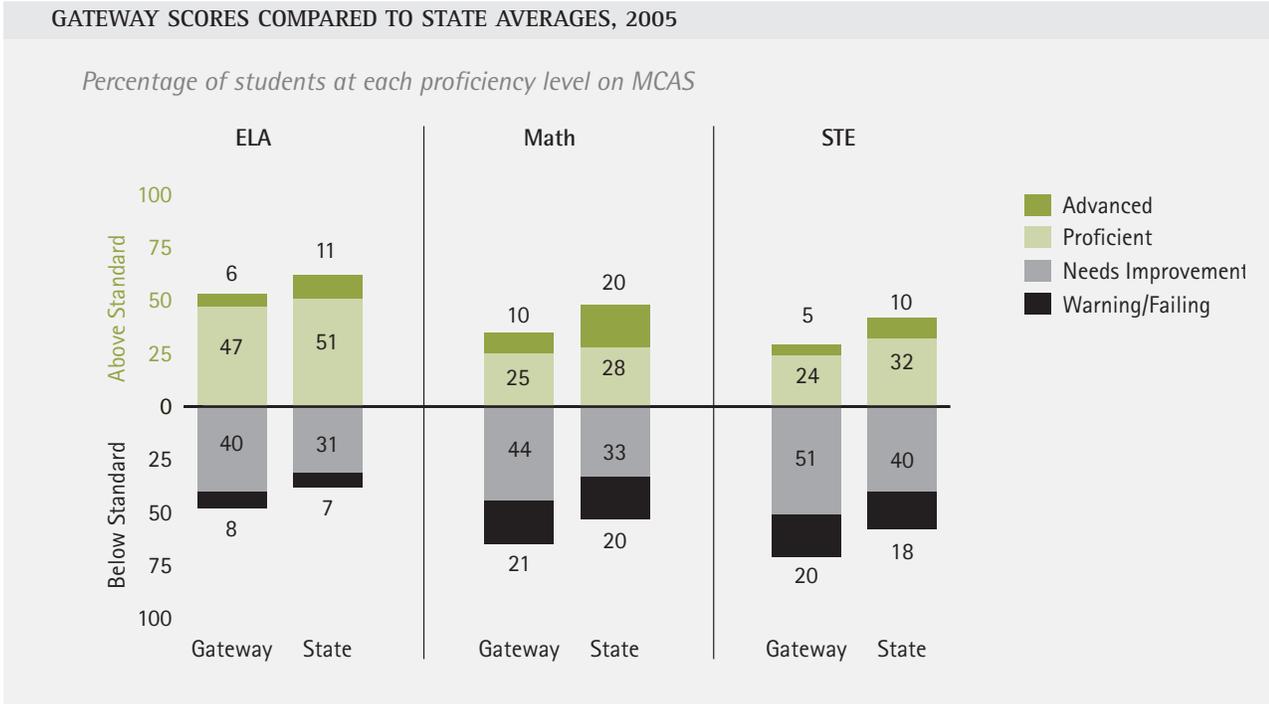
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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 Gateway.
- In Gateway, the 97 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS ELA test was 2 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Gateway, the 96 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS math test was 1 percentage point higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Gateway, the 98 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS STE test was 3 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.

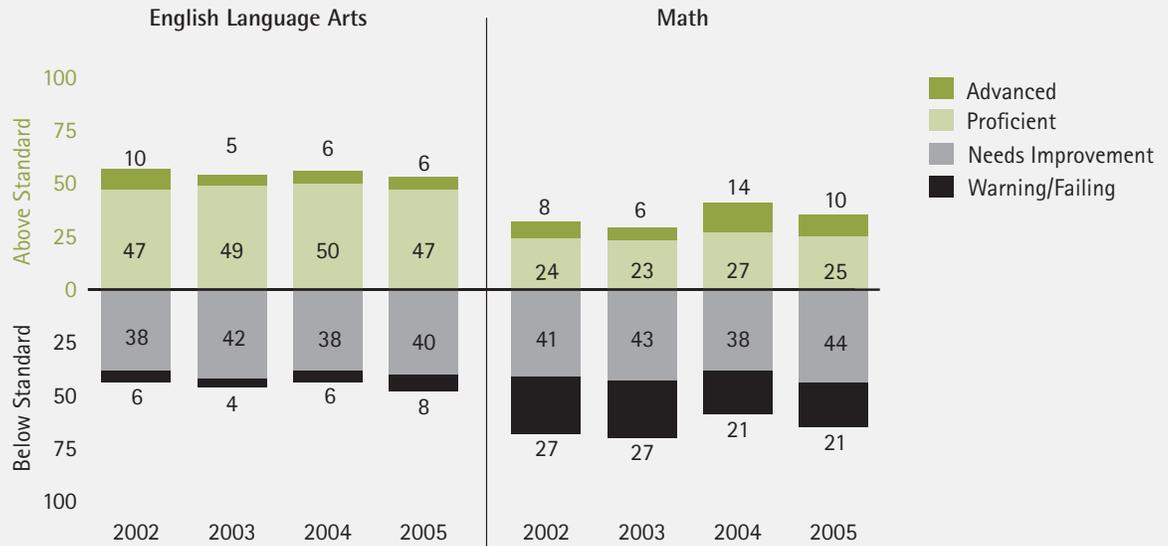


2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

- Approximately half of all students in Gateway attained proficiency on the 2004 MCAS tests and less than half attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS tests.
- Approximately half of all students in Gateway attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) tests, approximately one third attained proficiency on the math tests, and less than one third attained proficiency on the science and technology/engineering (STE) tests.
- Less than one third of all students in Gateway attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS Grade 8 math and STE tests, lower than those of all students statewide on those tests.
- Gateway's proficiency gap in ELA was 20 Proficiency Index (PI) points; in math, the proficiency gap was 33 PI points; and in STE, this gap was 34 PI points.
- The proficiency gaps in Grade 3 ELA, Grade 8 math, and Grade 5 STE were greater than statewide gaps at those grade levels.

GATEWAY ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



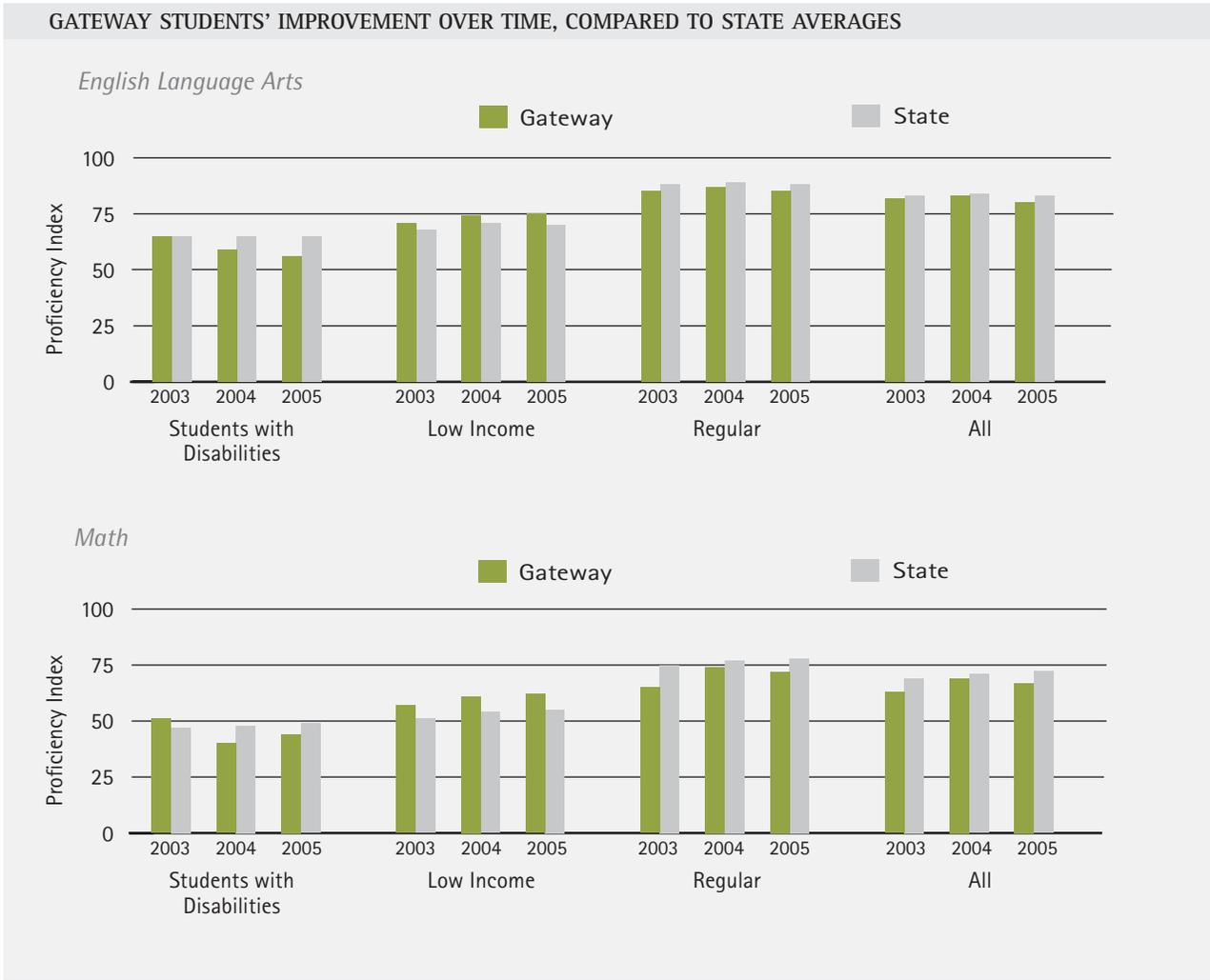
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2002 and 2005:

- In ELA, the proficiency gap was 3 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of negative 14.9 percent.
- In math, the proficiency gap was 4 PI points narrower in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of 10.6 percent.

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

- Gateway's performance gap in ELA was 34 PI points. In math, the performance gap was 33 PI points.
- For Gateway's students with disabilities, the proficiency gaps in both ELA and math were greater than gaps for all students in Gateway.
- Less than one third of Gateway's students with disabilities attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS tests, lower than that of Gateway's regular education students on those tests.



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

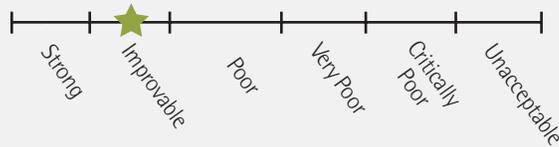
- In Gateway, the improvement gap in ELA was 8 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- The improvement gap in math was 12 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- In Gateway, the performance gap in ELA was 6 PI points wider in 2005 than in 2003.
- The performance gap in math was 16 PI points wider in 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. Gateway 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, Gateway received an overall MQI score of Improvable (70.7 percent). The district performed best in the areas of financial and asset management, and access, participation and student academic support, scoring Strong, but it scored Poor in leadership and governance. Given these ratings, the district is performing worse than expected on the MCAS tests. Less than half of Gateway's students reached proficiency on the 2005 administration of the MCAS exam, and ELA scores have declined. Subgroup performance was low, and the gap widened during the review period. On the following pages, we take a closer look at district performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Gateway, 2002–2005



Leadership, Governance and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. Gateway Regional School District is a 'Moderate' performing school district, 'High' in ELA and 'Low' in math.

Governance and Communication

The leadership of the Gateway Regional School District consisted of the superintendent and 17 school committee members. The relationship between the superintendent and the school committee created a culture of cooperation, respect, and trust with external stakeholders and administrative staff. Advocacy for the school budget included monthly school committee meetings that shifted for the first half of the school year to schools located in member towns. A broad array of information, including the report of the superintendent, high school graduates, financial information, and enrollment that made indirect reference to District Improvement Plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals, was presented by the district to stakeholders when advocating for the annual budget and reporting on district operations and accomplishments. The committee exhibited their knowledge of student achievement and other relevant data and also noted that they used this data as a foundation for policy and decision making during the review period. The school committee members also exhibited a detailed awareness of the district's statewide assessment results.

The superintendent effectively delegated the educational and operational leadership of schools to principals, with all administrative pay raises determined by a merit evaluation system. During the most recent years, the district's focus was on adequately staffing schools with inadequate budgets. The internal administration-faculty environment was strained by diminished resources and the lack of focus on teaching and learning. Interviews with principals indicated that they held responsibility for improving instruction and services. There was no compilation of the data district-wide or a district response to the principal's recommendations.

The superintendent, principals, and administrators were not consistently evaluated annually during the review

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The 2005-06 DIP indicated the district's movement toward the use of student achievement data.
- The district presented a broad array of information to stakeholders when advocating for the annual budget and reporting on district operations and accomplishments.

Areas for Improvement

- Documentation revealed significant budget cuts that began in FY04, resulting in the loss of thirty staff positions, and limiting the district's provision of resources to students with greater needs.
- District and school leaders did not report on the progress of DIP and SIP goals or monitor student achievement data connected to the goals.
- Administrators were not consistently evaluated annually and their performance evaluation was not linked to achievement data or the attainment of DIP and SIP goals.

period. The annual administrative evaluation process evolved over the review period and included the selection of three to five goals from six areas of The Principles of Effective Administrator Leadership. In addition, the superintendent's evaluation addressed school committee and superintendent relations. During the school year, ongoing communications and at least one observation took place, constituents were surveyed, and a portfolio of supportive documentation was compiled followed by a summary report. A review and revision of the administrator's professional development plan completed the process. All administrators were assessed on a merit system that determined salary increases based on a point system which measured goal attainment. MCAS test results and other student achievement data were not a basis for administrator evaluations, nor were the attainment of DIP and SIP goals; however, improvement plans could be used as support documentation for goal attainment.

A culture of collaboration and teamwork had not been established between the administration and faculty. Teachers and union representatives discussed a lack of a team spirit between the administration and faculty, caused by the district's lack of focus on teaching and learning, and the diminished resources needed to support the improvement of student achievement. The emphasis on technology, reduction in professional development, and the absence of the superintendent in the team building process were cited as the primary causes.

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. During the review period, the District Improvement Plan evolved into a more focused planning document that reflected the district's vision and mission statements and addressed curriculum, instruction and learning, assessment, and organizational management. The development process included the use of stakeholder surveys and a movement toward the use of student achievement data in the establishment and measurement of goal attainment. The document did not indicate the person responsible for attainment of goals, resources, or assessment of the results. The existing School Improvement Plans exhibited some alignment with the DIP. District leaders revealed that the district's focus was on the use of MCAS test item analysis in order to look at each individual student and to determine the needed changes. This process was not clearly or systemically defined and had not been implemented throughout all schools. District and school goals were measured only minimally in terms of student achievement data and were not reported or monitored. The district had a limited data gathering capability and a fragmented data use system that did not result in system-wide, data-driven, decision making. Student achievement data were not used in the evaluation of administrators to determine successful performance.

Curriculum and Instruction

Effective curriculum development and instructional practices are essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

Significant budget cuts that began in FY04 had a negative impact on the curriculum infrastructure in the Gateway Regional School District. Curriculum articulation lacked appropriate assessments, benchmarks, documented lessons, and a cyclical process to monitor student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

During the review period, curriculum documents in the tested core content areas of ELA, math, and science consisted of the state framework for each content area. The state frameworks were given to each teacher in the district, and a K-12 curriculum outline consisting of mastery standards and grade level objectives was provided for staff in grades K-12. The course outlines lacked instructional strategies, formative and summative assessments, and, in grades K-8, lacked timelines or pacing guides. In addition, the curriculum outlines lacked any specific documented curriculum that would be used to satisfy the requirements of the frameworks. The five-year cycle for curriculum review was discontinued after the 2002-2003 academic year due to budgetary constraints. During the latter part of the review period, a decentralized, informal plan characterized curriculum review in the district.

A lack of centralized curriculum leadership produced inconsistent vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum, and a fragmented perception of the district needs. The school instructional leadership consisted of the principals and assistant principals; the district lacked a curriculum coordinator and department chairs. The middle school had implemented grade-level lead teachers during the review period. There was little collaboration among the five elementary schools in the district

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- Collegiality among the teaching staff was in evidence, and teachers were eager to support and contribute to proposed district policies in the areas of curriculum and instruction.
- Technology instruction and training was in evidence, with state-of-the-art hardware and training programs present at all schools.
- The EQA examiners agreed that classroom management was good and instructional methodology was traditional.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not have a comprehensive K-12 curriculum in the tested core content areas, and it did not have a formal cyclical process for curriculum revision.
- The district did not use formative or summative student assessments to monitor the effectiveness of teacher instruction.
- Horizontal and vertical articulation of the curriculum was inconsistent.

on grade-level curriculum issues. At the middle school, horizontal alignment coordination was accomplished through faculty meeting and late start days. At the high school, a mapping document developed in 2003–2004 clearly indicated the curricula expectations for each grade. A curriculum handbook specified the requirements of each course and types of assessments. The mid-year and final examinations were given school-wide, although they were not common for each discipline.

Vertical alignment was evident within the schools. The larger issue with vertical alignment resulted when students transitioned to a new school, specifically in grades 5 and 9. Administrators indicated that they were in the process of developing written guidelines for future curriculum documents and they felt that a lack of funding for professional development greatly hindered efforts of aligning curricula with the state frameworks. During the early part of the review period, each principal was assigned a core curriculum area to administer for grades K–12. Professional development funds were used to support curriculum and improve teaching strategies. Each content area was on a five-year review cycle and the membership of the curriculum teams were provided with a stipend that originated in the professional development budget. In the 2003–04 budgets, professional development funding was significantly reduced. As a result, the existing structure for curriculum support was eliminated along with most professional development. There was a lack of trained personnel in data analysis skills and as a result, teachers were handed assessment results and expected to make modifications with little or no training. Teachers used the item analysis provided by the district to modify instruction and content.

Effective Instruction

The teacher evaluation process was not in compliance with state regulations and was not linked to student performance. Teachers were not required to link Individualized Professional Development Plans to student achievement or personal educational goals. During the period under review, the district did not use formative or summative student assessments to monitor the effectiveness of teacher instruction. In grades K–6, the DIBELS, the DRA, and the MCAS test were used for placement purposes and for the modification of content areas.

EQA examiners observed a random sampling of 21 classrooms within the district, including 12 elementary classes, 3 middle school classes, and 6 high school classes. Examiners reported that positive classroom management, including orderly classrooms and student initiative, was observed in 85 percent of the classrooms; a balanced methodology consisting of cognitive and affective strategies was observed in 65 percent; and, high expectations including rigor were observed in 59 percent. Student activity and behavior which included use of technology and students' contributions was observed 68 percent of the time. Positive classroom climate consisting of active listening, multiple resources, and a positive learning environment was observed in 80 percent of the classrooms.

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

There was evidence of the analysis and use of student achievement data in the schools, but the analysis was not systematic. The district had limited system-wide data gathering capacity and the school-based data limited the data driven decision-making across the district during the review period. Although the district collected and analyzed data for dissemination to the community, only to a limited degree did the district evaluate or modify programs based on this data. The district engaged in required external audits but few internal audits. Internal audits were primarily informal, consisting of parent and staff surveys. Responsibilities for the initiation of programs or courses, instructional changes, and the adoption of new materials were delegated to principals. The MCAS test item analysis reports served as the primary vehicle for determining program gaps and student needs.

Subgroup performance was not examined by the district. Although the district saw that the data indicated a need for improvement in the math program, these initiatives were left to the schools. Every school required more math time for students, but the district did not oversee the vertical alignment of instruction to ensure that math topics were covered and time was allotted appropriately. The district-wide initiative of the DIBELS adoption grew from the Coordinated Program Review.

The district did not have benchmarks that indicated what students should know and be able to do at each level of instruction. The existing curricula, curriculum maps, and science "benchmarks" did not specify these standards. There were no local common examinations administered across a department or across grade levels that were tied to benchmarks and that could provide

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The MCAS test participation rate remained high during the review period, ranging from 97 to 100 percent, except at the high school in 2005 when the rate was 93 percent.
- Individual schools showed evidence of the analysis and use of data.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not have benchmarks in tested core content areas to measure student achievement.
- The district did not provide professional development for staff in the area of assessment.
- A regular system of program evaluation was not in place in the district. The implementation of new programs depended on the availability of funds and the principal's ability to redistribute available funds and resources, including staff.

comparable objective data on performance and effectiveness.

The communication between the district, schools, parents, and community was facilitated by an active superintendent, and the willingness to survey staff and parents to evaluate and modify programs. In this environment, information about MCAS test scores and other assessment data reached the public.

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 Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

In FY04, the Gateway Regional School District experienced significant budget reductions. Thirty-eight positions were eliminated district-wide and direct instructional expenditures were reduced. The district hiring process was viewed as a fair and open process, and qualified individuals were selected for positions. Most professional staff had appropriate Massachusetts licensure and the district placed a high priority on retaining effective staff. A mentoring program was in place in the district. Despite budget cutbacks, human resources was managed effectively with several positions responsible for tracking different areas such as certification and recertification, salary and degree advancement, and mentoring. Of the 113 teachers, 111 had appropriate licensure and two teachers did not have Massachusetts licensure or waivers. In addition, of the ten administrators in the district, the one administrator without licensure held an appropriate waiver.

Professional Development

The budget reductions limited program implementation and change, particularly in the area of professional development. According to interviewees, teacher evaluations did not inform professional development. Professional development was informed by instructional needs; for example, the district chose math instruction as a K-12 concern and approximately half of professional development time was devoted to math issues on the MCAS test. Principals used faculty meetings for the purpose of grade level or team meetings that focused on curricular concerns. Teachers could attend outside workshops at their own expense and the district would pay for a substitute

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The district hiring process was viewed as a fair and open process that resulted in a qualified teaching staff.
- The district placed a high priority on retaining effective professional staff.
- A mentoring program was in place in the district to support teachers new to the district.

Areas for Improvement

- The budget cutbacks in fiscal year 2004 resulted in a reduction in the professional development committee's responsibilities and professional development became building-based with some district focus, and no focus on data analysis.
- Administrators and teachers were not held explicitly accountable in their evaluations for improving student achievement.

teacher. According to the district's end of year pupil and financial report, local spending for professional development totaled \$209,724 for 2002, \$78,366 for 2003, zero dollars for 2004, and \$5,452 for 2005. With budget reductions, professional development became building-based with some district focus. Some district-wide professional development was offered. The EQA team observed a significant use of technology in the district. Interviewees indicated that the present and past superintendents strengthened technology in the district during the period under review. The district provided professional development opportunities during one full day at the beginning of the year, two-half days during the year, and six two-hour late start days during the year.

According to district administration and teachers, analysis of student achievement data was not a focus in professional development, although instances of professional development related to data analysis were provided. The district did not have a policy that required all staff to use student assessment data regularly to improve instructional programs and services.

Evaluation

Teacher evaluations followed the Principles of Effective Teaching, were informative, but did not include specific recommendations linked to improving teaching techniques or linked to student achievement and were not timely for professional status teachers. Evaluations of administrators were not timely, but followed the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership and included recommendations. Administrators were not held explicitly accountable for student achievement results.

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.

Services

The Gateway Regional School District had support systems in place for students at risk. The district used limited formative assessments to identify students who did not meet grade level expectations. The practice of analyzing and adjusting instruction and providing academic support services was a building-based effort, organized and monitored by principals, and restricted by budget reductions. These efforts were further restricted by a dearth of standardized tests and decreased staffing during the period. Support systems were in place for students at risk, including special education services, paraprofessionals, Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs) for students who scored in the 'Warning/Failing' category on the MCAS test, Title I services, homework support in grades 5–8, alternative programs at the high school, academic support grants, ELL services, MCAS preparatory classes, an advisor/advisee program at the high school, and teacher consultation teams. Although the district provided supplemental services to students who needed assistance, the district did not meet AYP in ELA or math in 2005 in the aggregate or for the special education subgroup. In addition, the district did not meet AYP for the special education subgroup in 2004 in ELA or for the low-income subgroup in ELA in 2003.

A review of documents and interviews with administrators and teachers indicated that early intervention literacy programs to ensure that all students were reading at the 'Proficient' level on the MCAS test by the end of Grade 4 were limited in the district during the period under review. Interviewees stated the district provided the following examples of early intervention literacy programs, services, or assessments at the primary education level during parts of the period under review: Title I services, small group instruction, the

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The district had policies and procedures in place related to discipline and behavior; and practices for transient, mobile, and transitioning students.
- Policies related to student attendance were found in both the school committee policy manual and student/parent handbooks.

Areas for Improvement

- A review of documents provided to the district and information obtained from interviewees indicated that when students transitioned to the middle school 35 percent had not been performing at grade level for ten years.
- A limited number of early intervention programs were in place to improve literacy, and district MCAS scores in Grade 3 reading, and Grade 4 ELA decreased during the review period.

diagnostic reading and DIBELS assessments, teachers trained in Wilson and Orton Gillingham reading methods, paraprofessionals, inclusion services, reading specialists, guided reading, pre-Kindergarten classes, and Reading Recovery. The percentage of Grade 4 students who scored in the 'Proficient' or 'Advanced' category decreased from 40, to 36, 28, and 28 between 2002 and 2005. The percentage of Grade 3 students who scored in the 'Proficient' category also decreased from 56 in 2002 to 47, 55, and 48, in 2003, 2004, and 2005 respectively.

Attendance

Attendance policies were observed in the school committee policy manual and student and parent handbooks. Practices were in place to ensure staff attendance and to provide a continuity of instruction.

Discipline

A review of school committee policies showed that the district had policies in place during the period under review on student bus conduct, student discipline including expulsions and suspensions, discipline of special needs students, and a serious offense policy. Transitioning practices and procedures were also in place during the review period. Practices for preventing or minimizing dropouts were in place according to interviewees.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well-maintained.

Budget Process

The Gateway Regional School District had a participatory and open budget development process that improved each year under review. The current administration had several venues to communicate budget information and to receive budget suggestions from all stakeholders. The compilation of this information and the communication of the budget and resulting assessments were effective. Stakeholders were able to understand the impact of assessments based on the detail provided. In fiscal year 2004, the district experienced significant financial reductions.

Student achievement data were not used to develop the budget during the period under review because the focus was on reducing the impact on core curricula and safety of the schools. According to interviews with administrators and staff, for the period from fiscal year 2003 to fiscal year 2004, the district did not use student achievement data as the primary factor in its budget development process, due to limited financial resources. The focus of the budget was on maintaining staff and programs. Building based operational budgets were allocated using a per pupil cost of \$55 per elementary student, \$60 per middle school student, and \$65 per high school student. The district experienced reductions in state aid and resources that resulted in the elimination of thirty-eight positions district wide.

The district's financial management systems were effective. Reporting of budget information to the school committee occurred regularly, including budget status as well as projected and actual revenues. Audits were timely

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 12 indicators. Gateway received the following ratings (with 1 n/a rating):



Areas of Strength

- The district's budget booklet was detailed, complete, comprehensive, and accurate.
- The member communities contributed above the minimum required local contribution, and invested heavily in capital assets, specifically technology and newly constructed and renovated buildings in all communities.

Areas for Improvement

- The FY04 budget reductions impacted the district's ability to address student needs beyond core offerings and mandated services.
- The budget and supplemental sources were not adequate during the review period. The district reduced positions, eliminated programs, and increased fees charged to students.

and recommendations were implemented accordingly, including the development of an accounting policies and procedures manual in the business office. Internal control systems were effective for processing payroll and for purchasing goods and services.

Financial Support

According to teachers and administrators, the budget was not adequate for materials, supplies, and especially textbooks during the review period. Personnel reductions occurred from fiscal year 2002 to 2004. In fiscal year 2005, the district began to replace some of these positions. Professional development services and programs were also limited to contractual offerings. According to the school district's end of year pupil and financial report on staffing data by major program area, for the period from fiscal year 2003 to 2005, the district experienced a reduction of regular education teachers and specialists from 98.7 FTEs in fiscal year 2003, to 73.7 FTEs in fiscal year 2004, to 80 FTEs in fiscal year 2005; a reduction of 19 percent during the period under review. Special education teachers made up 15.3 FTEs in fiscal year 2003, 13.8 FTEs in fiscal year 2004, and 10 FTEs in fiscal year 2005. According to the district's end of year pupil and financial report, local spending for professional development for fiscal years 2002 to 2005 totaled \$209,724, \$78,366, zero dollars, and \$5,452 respectively.

The district implemented a cost effectiveness analysis for programs, initiatives and activities in developing the fiscal year 2005 budget. The primary analysis was carried out on the possibility of closing two elementary schools. Due to the lack of funds for professional development, the district trained staff to become trainers and used them as internal experts. The district analyzed school lunch fees, athletic fees, parking fees, and building use fees. Each of the member communities exceeded the minimum required local contribution for the fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2005 period.

Facilities

The member communities invested heavily in capital assets, specifically technology and newly constructed and renovated buildings in all communities. The buildings were clean, safe, well lit, and well maintained. A walkthrough by the EQA examiners of the school buildings found them all to be recently renovated and in excellent condition. The district's custodial staff had a preventive maintenance plan that was detailed in describing the duties to be completed weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and annually. Safety audits were conducted two times per year for each building and a district-wide safety audit was conducted once every three years.

CONCLUSION

The EQA examination found the Gateway Regional School District to be a 'Moderate' performing district, marked by student achievement that is 'High' in ELA and 'Low' in math on the MCAS tests. Less than half of all Gateway students scored above standard on the 2005 administration of the MCAS test.

The Gateway Regional School District enjoyed a culture of collaboration and teamwork among the superintendent and school committee, but not between the administration and faculty. Teachers and union representatives attributed this discrepancy to the district's lack of focus on teaching and learning, and the diminished resources to support the improvement of student achievement. The emphasis on technology, reduction in professional development, and the superintendent's absence from the team building process were cited as the primary causes.

The member communities invested heavily in capital assets, specifically technology and newly constructed and renovated buildings in all communities. However, reductions in state aid and resources to the Gateway Regional School District resulted in the elimination of thirty-eight positions district wide from fiscal year 2002 to 2004. In fiscal year 2005, the district began to replace some of these positions. According to teachers and administrators, the budget was not adequate for materials, supplies, and especially textbooks during the review period. The district did not meet AYP in ELA or math in 2005 in the aggregate or for the special education subgroup. In addition, the district did not meet AYP for the special education subgroup in 2004 in ELA or for the low-income subgroup in ELA in 2003. District MCAS scores in Grade 3 reading and Grade 4 ELA decreased during the review period.

The superintendent effectively delegated the educational and operational leadership of schools to principals, but did not provide the district-level oversight and support needed in such areas as the collection and analysis of student achievement data, professional development programs, curriculum articulation, alignment, and review, and academic support services. The practice of analyzing and adjusting instruction and providing academic support services was a building-based effort, organized and monitored by principals, and impeded by budget reductions, a dearth of standardized tests, and the decreased staffing. Toward the end of the review period, Gateway's leadership worked to transform the District Improvement Plan into a more focused planning tool that reflected the district's vision and mission statements and addressed curriculum, instruction and learning, assessment, organizational management, and a shift toward the use of student achievement data in the establishment and measurement of goal attainment.

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.

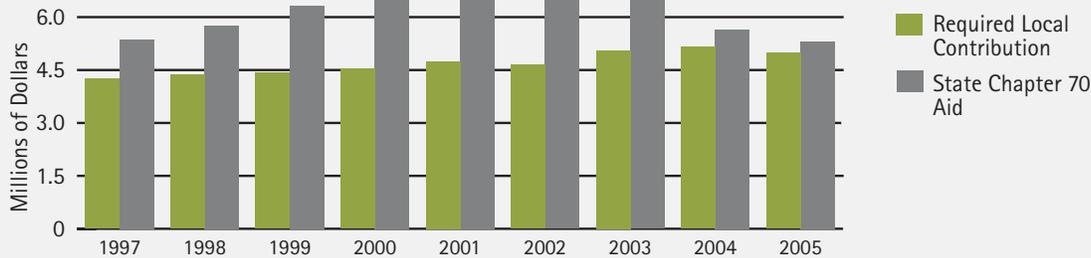
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN EQA TECHNICAL REPORTS

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-AIt: 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

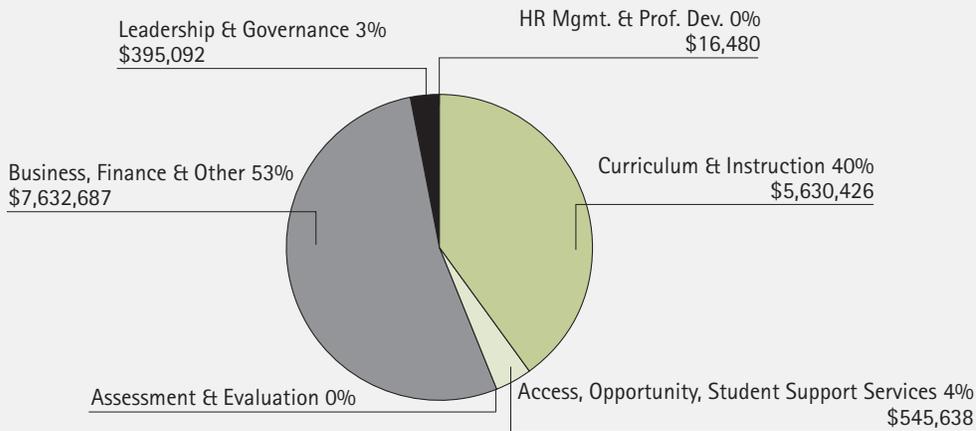
The vast majority of a school district's funding is determined by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to providing state aid to support school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Gateway's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. For the period between FY1997 and FY2005, Chapter 70 Aid to Gateway decreased 1.0 percent (from \$5,358,781 to \$5,307,852). Gateway's Required Local Contribution increased 17.4 percent during this time (from \$4,251,527 to \$4,989,204). Since FY1997, Gateway received a total of \$55,736,500 in Chapter 70 Aid and was required to raise locally \$42,141,529.

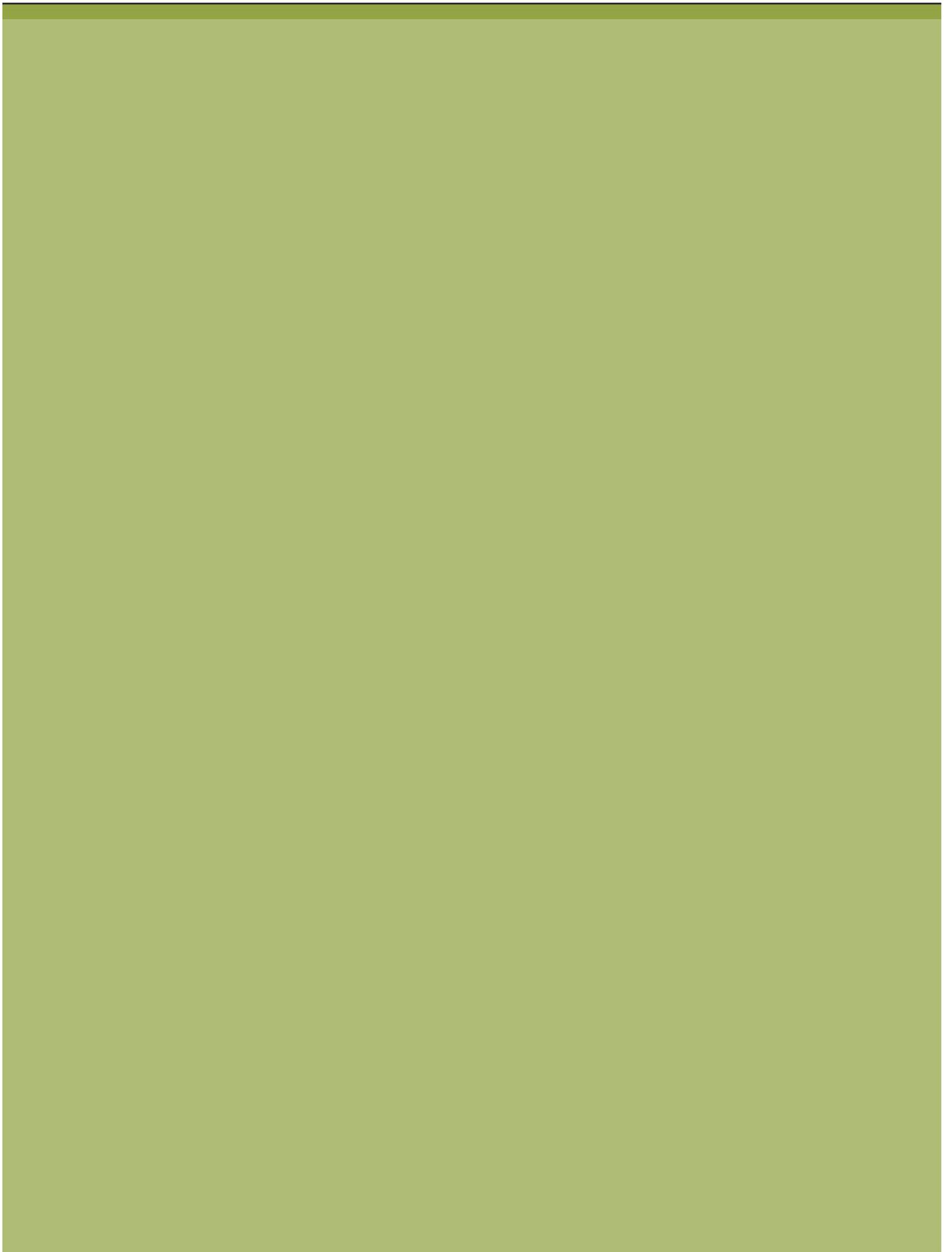
WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR GATEWAY COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR GATEWAY ALLOCATED?

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





EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

One Ashburton Place, Room 1403, Boston, MA 02108 ■ (617) 727-2398 ■ Fax: (617) 727-0049