

*How Is Your  
School District  
Performing?*



*A closer look at*

*Seekonk  
Public 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 the Seekonk Public School District, Peter P. Andreozzi; the school department staff; and the town officials of Seekonk.*

## 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 districts' 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 February 2006, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Seekonk Public School District for the period of 2002–2005. This school district was selected for Tier I and Tier II reviews. In the Tier I review, the EQA analyzed Seekonk 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 the Seekonk Public School District; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's on-site visit; interviews with a representative from the school committee, 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. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

## Putting the Data in Perspective

Seekonk, MA



## DISTRICT

*Population:* 13,425

*Median family income:* \$62,361

*Largest sources of employment:*

Educational, health, and social services; and, manufacturing

*Local government:* Board of Selectmen, Representative Town Meeting

## SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

*School committee:* 5 members

*Number of schools:* 5

*Student enrollment:*

Total: 2,282

White: 94.5 percent

Hispanic: 1.6 percent

African-American: 1.0 percent

Asian-American: 1.3 percent

Native American: 0.3 percent

Limited English Proficiency:

0.5 percent

Low income: 8.9 percent

Special education: 10.6 percent

*Sources:* 2000 U.S. Census and

Massachusetts Department of Education.

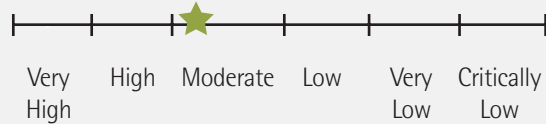
## EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

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

## MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2005

	DISTRICT	STATE
<i>Average Proficiency Index</i>	78.5	78
<i>English Language Arts Proficiency Index</i>	89	83
<i>Math Proficiency Index</i>	68	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?

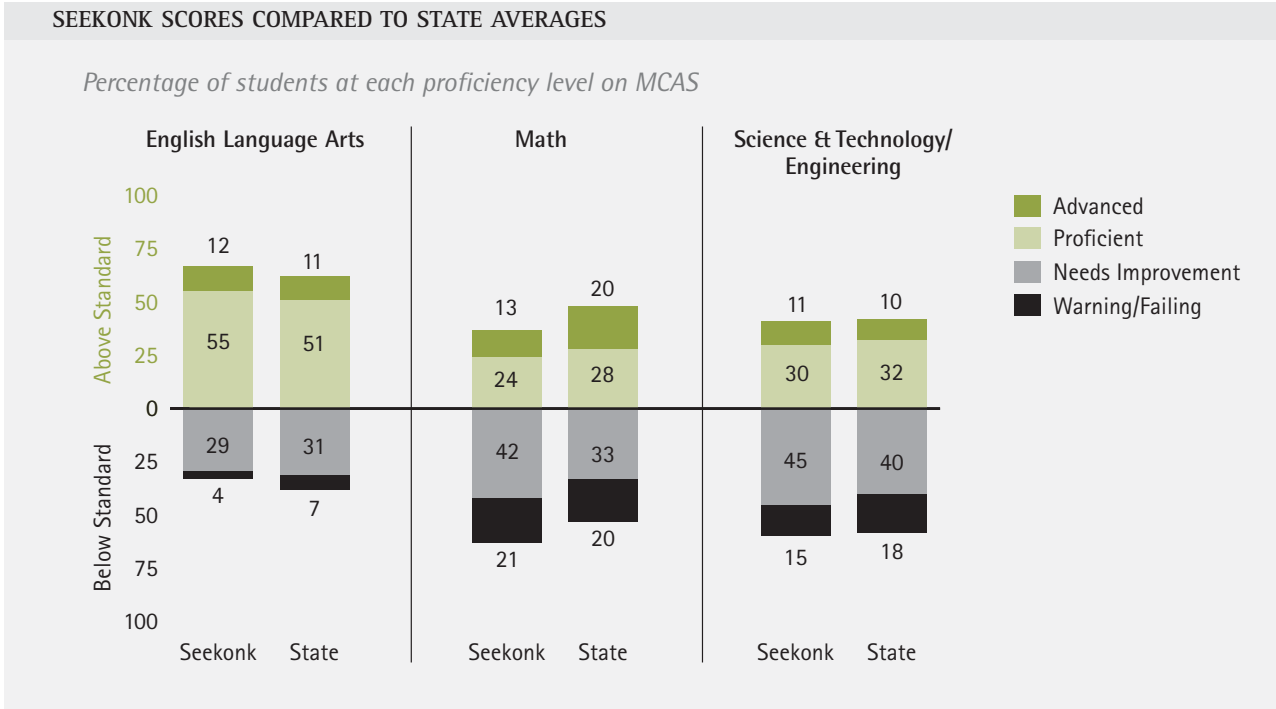
### Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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:

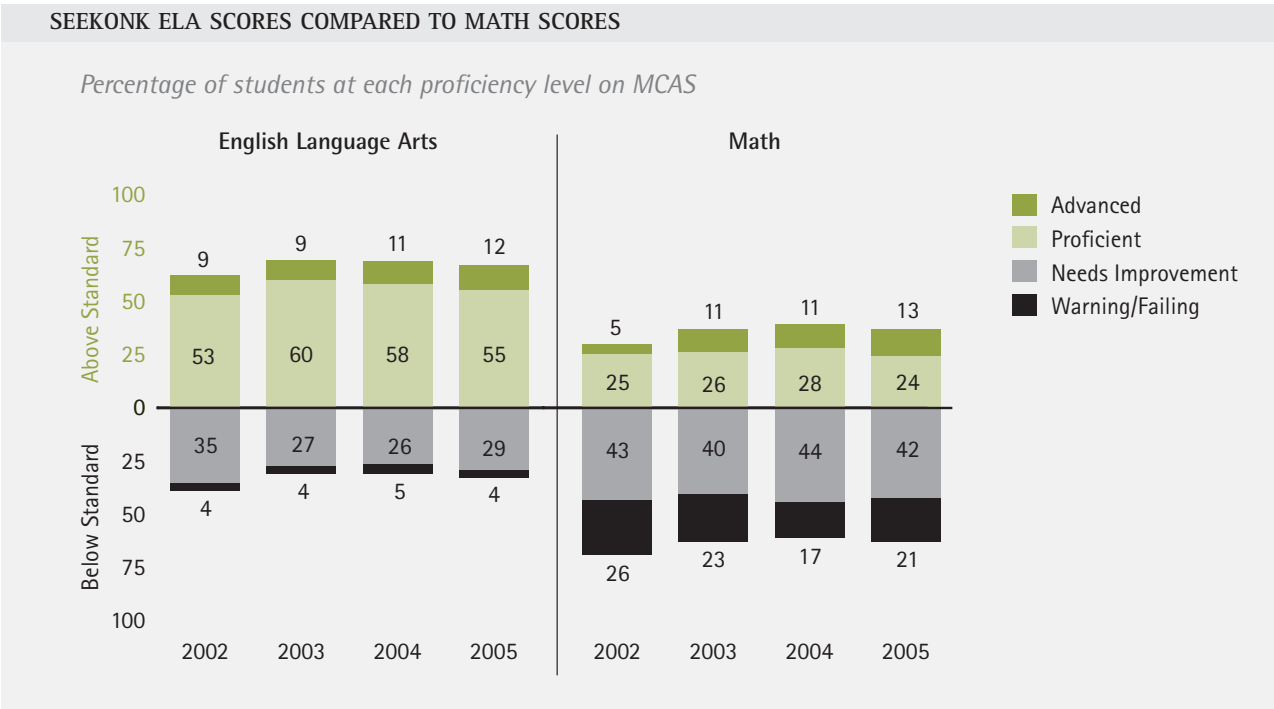
#### 1. Are all eligible students participating in all required programs and assessments?

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

- Approximately half of all students in Seekonk attained proficiency on the 2004 and 2005 MCAS tests.
- Approximately two thirds of all students in Seekonk attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) tests and more than one third attained proficiency on both the math and the science and technology/engineering (STE) tests.
- Less than one third of Seekonk students attained proficiency on the Grade 6 math test, lower than the percentage of all students in the state attaining proficiency on the Grade 6 math test.
- Seekonk's proficiency gap in ELA was 13 Proficiency Index (PI) points; in math, the proficiency gap was 32 PI points; and in STE, the proficiency gap was 28 PI points.
- The proficiency gap in Grade 6 math was wider than that of all students statewide in Grade 6 math.



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

Between 2002 and 2005:

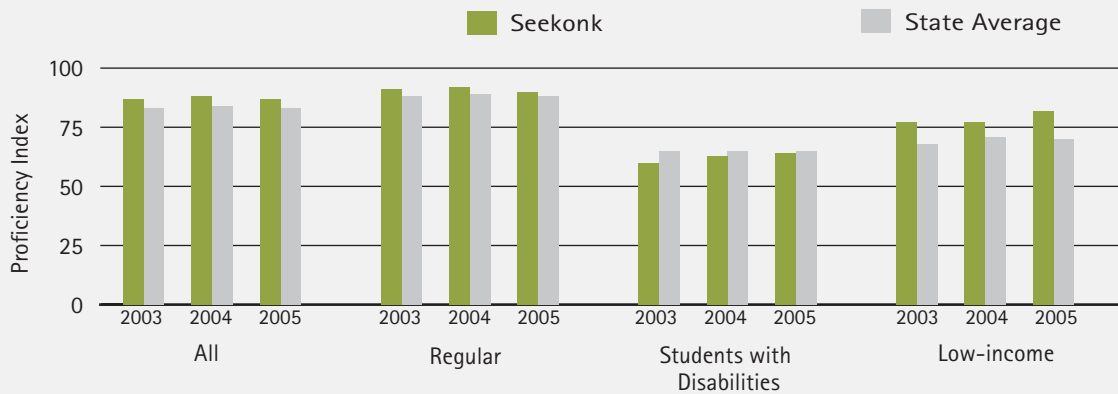
- The proficiency gap in ELA in Seekonk was 2 PI points narrower in 2005 as in 2002, for an improvement rate of 16.0 percent.
- The proficiency gap in math in Seekonk was 5 PI points narrower in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of 13.4 percent.

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

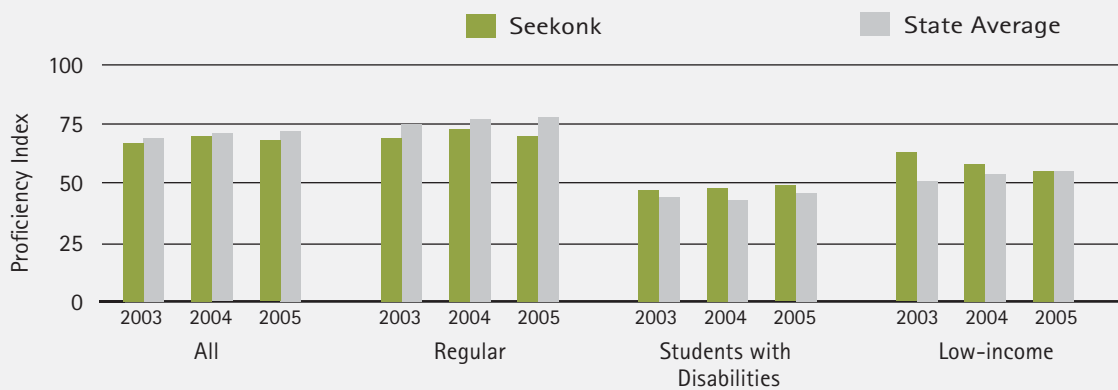
- Seekonk's performance gap in ELA was 31 PI points; in math, the performance gap was 32 PI points.
- For Seekonk's students with disabilities, the proficiency gaps in both ELA and in math were wider than those of all Seekonk students in 2005.
- For Seekonk's students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch (FRL/Y), the proficiency gaps in both ELA and in math were wider than those of all Seekonk students in 2005.
- Less than one third of students with disabilities in Seekonk attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS tests, lower than that of regular education students in Seekonk.

SEEKONK 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?

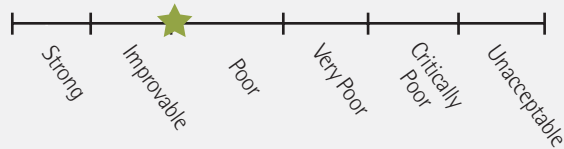
- The performance gap in ELA was 8 PI points narrower in 2005 than in 2003 in Seekonk. In math, the performance gap was 3 PI points wider in 2005 than it was in 2003.
- The improvement gap in ELA was 8 PI points narrower in 2005 than in 2003 in Seekonk. In math, the improvement gap was 2 PI points wider in 2005 than 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. Seekonk received the following rating:

Performance Rating



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Overall District Management

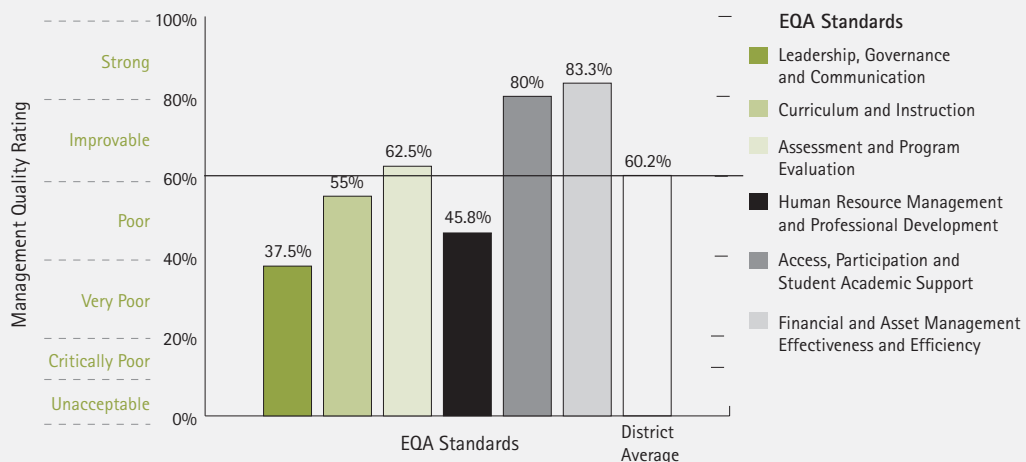
To better understand the factors affecting student scores on MCAS, the EQA analyzes district performance on 64 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, 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.

Seekonk received an overall MQI score of Improvable (60 percent). The district performed best in the areas of Financial and Asset Management and Effectiveness, and Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support. It performed worst in Leadership and Governance. Given these ratings, the district is performing slightly better than expected on MCAS tests. ELA performance has improved, while math performance has remained flat. The district has not narrowed the math performance gaps among its subgroup populations. On the following pages, we take a closer look at district performance in each of the six areas.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Seekonk, 2002–2005



## Leadership, Governance and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. The Seekonk Public School District was among the 'Moderate' performing school districts in the Commonwealth, with MCAS test scores that were 'High' in ELA and 'Low' in math.

### Governance

During the review period, the leadership of the Seekonk Public School District consisted of the superintendent and the five-member school committee.

The superintendent of schools completed twelve years of service on June 30, 2005, as the educational leader of the Seekonk Public Schools. He resigned on January 23, 2006, to become superintendent in an appreciably larger Massachusetts district. School committee members and teachers association leaders praised the former superintendent for his capacity to mobilize stakeholders. These stakeholders were successful in procuring additional funds for the schools at special town meetings.

For the period under review, the selectmen, finance committee, and school committee were not viewed as advocates for public education as stated by school employees in focus groups. Much of their official workload focused on the amount of money the schools would be allowed in a successor budget. An interview with three school committee members and an interview with school district leaders revealed that educationally sound budgets were presented at town meetings, but they had not been approved. The superintendent was quoted in the 2004 Town Report: "One of the grave concerns for the future is our financial status. For the third straight year, the district has had to go from limited spending to dramatic cuts."

From 2003 to 2005, the district saw a reduction of 14 professional positions and increased enrollment. Programs in PE, middle school foreign languages, high school shop, special education para-professionals, an elementary enrichment program, curriculum leadership, and custodial services

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The former superintendent employed a variety of strategies to mobilize stakeholders to vote for increased aid to education.

### Areas for Improvement

- The master plan (DIP) was not standards based and did not focus on the analysis of student achievement data.
- The school committee's evaluation of the superintendent's performance and the superintendent's evaluation of central office administrators and principals were not documented annually.
- The school committee did not incorporate student achievement results into its decision making process.
- Resources were not allocated equitably to students or schools with greatest needs.

were reduced. In addition, many classes at the secondary level have increased to 29-30, and fees for transportation, student activities, and athletics were imposed.

## 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. The Seekonk district leadership prepared and documented a master plan for the years 2002–2007. The plan included a vision and mission statements, as well as a common core of beliefs. It also incorporated a "curriculum wheel" and a list of thirteen designated activities, though the activities were not measurable and standards based. The superintendent presented the plan to the school committee and principals. It was designed principally by central office administrators, was not standards based, and did not document references to student achievement data. The superintendent stated that input was accessed from students in grades 6–12 and from parents at various forums. Teachers interviewed stated that they were not given an opportunity to contribute.

Examiners found no indication that activities were prioritized; there was no evaluation component; and there were no provisions for interim status reports. An analysis of the master plan revealed no indication that student achievement data guided the development, implementation, and modification of educational programs. The superintendent did indicate, however, that two AP courses had been added to the high school program of studies, a documented curriculum was in place, a coordinated mathematics program had been adopted for the elementary schools, block scheduling had been refined at the high school, and a new mathematics program had been implemented at the middle school.

An interview with school leaders revealed that the school committee exhibited no interest in approving School Improvement Plans (SIPs) during the period under review. As of January 2005, school committees were no longer obligated to approve SIPs. A review of all five SIPs indicated a lack of consistency in development, documentation, and evaluation procedures. Although the principals welcomed a site-based management strategy and its accompanying autonomy, there was no direction from central office to ensure that the SIPs, for example, included achievement benchmarks for English/Language Arts and math. Principals agreed that there was no alignment due to the fact that they had not been so directed. The references and the design of the DIP typically took place in the spring while the SIPs were developed in the succeeding fall. There were MCAS plans for each of the schools in a separate document. Due to the absence of a template, comprehensiveness and relevant components greatly varied among the schools. The superintendent admitted that alignment of the DIP with the SIPs was not a priority and therefore "not done very well." Principals and school councils focused on their own goals and pursued their independent educational directions.

## Curriculum and Instruction

The Seekonk Public School District 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

In the last year of the period under review, Seekonk had implemented curricula in the tested core content areas. The curricula were developed by grade level teams under the direction of the district's principals who served in curriculum leadership and oversight roles. While the overall format of the documents was similar, the included components varied among the content areas and in some instances among grade levels. During the period under review, the district had not yet developed common assessments with which to measure student achievement of or progress toward the curriculum goals. The district's curriculum documents did not include instructional strategies to guide effective implementation.

The curriculum documents were not adequately vertically aligned because of the lack of overall district coordination. Before the curriculum documents were written, the elementary schools used different textbooks and materials for reading and mathematics. Administrators and teachers reported that groups of teachers wrote curricula within the elementary, middle school and high school levels under the direction of the principals, but did not meet with teachers from levels outside the grade span of their schools (K-5, 6-8, 9-12). After the curricula were written, principals provided time for alignment issues and discussion during faculty or department meetings. During the period under review, the district did not allocate funds, time, or a coordinator, as requested by the principals, to facilitate the curriculum development process and alignment. School leaders said that the school committee stated that there was "enough local talent to do the work." In interviews, administrators agreed that staff were able to accomplish the task, but they needed someone to "tie

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- During the period under review, the Grade 10 mathematics scores showed improvement.
- The district provided its schools with appropriate educational technology and staffing support, to facilitate the integration of technology.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district had no curriculum coordinator, department heads or curriculum specialists. District principals held those responsibilities, and focused insufficiently on the quality of classroom instructional strategies and methodology.
- District improvement efforts did not specifically target the needs of the district's subgroups, such as special education and free and reduced lunch.

things together." Principals noted that their requests for support in curriculum development and vertical alignment were not budgeted until the 2005-06 school year, with the hire of a math consultant charged with delivering a vertically aligned K-12 math curriculum including instructional strategies and assessments by June 2006.

In addition to their curriculum development responsibility, principals oversaw the implementation of the curricula through observation, walk-throughs, faculty meetings and the teacher evaluation process. Some principals had begun to look at samples of student work and interview students about their understanding of the concepts being taught. Principals were of the opinion that curriculum content and alignment needed to be solidly established before teachers were held accountable for implementation, use of effective instructional activities, and student performance results. Principals' curriculum oversight practices focused on if and how teachers used the documents rather than the impact of curriculum delivery on student achievement.

While the district had an established schedule for review of curriculum materials and textbooks, it did not have established processes or guidelines for the review and evaluation of curriculum objectives and methodology which focused on improved achievement.

Based on student achievement data, the district increased instructional time allocations in math and ELA for all students and for at-risk students. During the period under review, the high school proficiency rates improved in math and ELA. Administrators noted perceived discrepancies between student academic grades on report cards and achievement on standardized tests such as the SAT and MCAS, citing that the district needed to set higher expectations for student performance levels in the classroom. In observations of randomly selected classrooms, EQA examiners noted fewer instances of indicators that reflected high expectations than other categories such as classroom management or climate.

In supervision, principals were reluctant to hold teachers accountable for high levels of instructional quality, curriculum delivery, and performance results because there had not been sufficient coordinated professional development, nor classroom supports such as coaches or content specialists, nor centralized curriculum coordination, nor articulated district implementation goals.

Random observations of classrooms revealed a high frequency of behaviors and interactions that reflected positive classroom management and climate. Examiners observed some indicators of effective instructional practices in two of every three classes visited.

## 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

During interviews district and school administrators said that some administrators attended workshops that focused on the analysis of data and that the district had made progress over the years in looking at data. In focus groups, teachers said that while they had not received any formal training in the analysis of data, through staff and team meetings, they had become more proficient in data analysis.

School principals said that they received MCAS data from the central office and that they presented this data to teachers at staff and team meetings. Teachers said that while they were not presented data according to subgroups, such as special education, they were aware of the achievement of their individual special education students.

The district's only standardized assessments included the MCAS at specific grade levels, the DRA which was administered to students in Grade 1 who were being considered for Reading Recovery, and to students in grades 1-2 who were recommended for testing by Teacher Support Teams.

The district prepared a document, the Annual Report of the Seekonk School Committee. This became part of the Town Report that was distributed to all members of the community. It included MCAS data for each grade in Seekonk as well as the state average. The report did not contain MCAS achievement by subgroups. Further, there was no mention of Adequate Yearly Progress. In 2005, the district did not make AYP in math for the aggregate, and also did not make AYP for the special education subgroups in both ELA and math for the

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- MCAS participation was high and was never below 97%.
- The district reported MCAS achievement scores to parents through the town's Annual Report.
- Principals used MCAS data to revise math and ELA programs in the district.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district did not have a policy for assessments and administered few local or standardized tests other than the MCAS.
- Teachers did not receive formal training in the analysis of data.
- The teacher contract did not allow for the reassignment of staff.
- Despite its program evaluation policy, the district did not conduct regular evaluations of its programs.
- The district's elementary report card was in need of revision, and the letter grades did not reflect the district's plan for the use of rubrics.

years 2004 and 2005.

The district was in the process of developing local benchmarks and it was acknowledged by district staff that they were a "work in progress." In interviews, school administrators and teachers expressed a need for more assessments. During the period under review, the local assessments consisted of end-of-unit tests provided through the Investigations math program at the elementary level as well as the use of Running Records in reading. At the middle school, unit tests from the middle school math textbook were used as assessments. And according to the middle school principal during the last two years, all Grade 6 teachers had developed a math assessment that was administered in that grade. No assessment was provided to determine eligibility for pre-algebra with placement determined by teacher recommendation.

At the high school, there were no common exams for the content areas, and this was attributed to the fact that there had not been any department heads during the past seven or eight years. Any analysis of data obtained as a result of using the assessments described above was limited to individual teachers either analyzing the data for their own use, or sharing it with other members of their grade level team. And according to one school administrator, there was no coordinated effort by the district to promote the analysis of assessment data; any analysis was always initiated by the schools.

During the period under review, the district formed a Curriculum and Assessment Committee to work on developing a new report card, but school administrators said it was difficult to equate letter grades with rubrics and that this new process would confuse parents.

In interviews, school administrators said it was difficult to make changes in reassigning staff as the teacher contract did not provide flexibility in this area. A math consultant was hired by the district to provide support in implementing the new Investigations math program at the elementary level.

While the School Committee had a policy regarding the evaluation of programs, in interviews, the EQA team learned that there were no practices in place to evaluate programs.

## 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

The Seekonk Public School District had policies and practices to identify, recruit, and select staff. The school committee's policy, Professional Staff Hiring, indicated that all professional staff members should be hired in conformity with Chapter 71 of the Education Reform Act. Interviewees indicated that the hiring procedures were similar for the elementary, middle and high schools. In FY05, the district reduced staff by approximately 18 due to budget restrictions, including 8 professional staff and approximately 9 support and system staff.

A review of teacher licensure information for school year 2004-2005 indicated that 163 out of 179 teachers were licensed. The district reported that all paraprofessionals met the highly qualified No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standard. Teacher certification data provided to the EQA showed that 16 teachers were not licensed.

No formal mentoring plan was in place in the district. According to interviewees, lack of funding was one reason. Some teachers received formal mentor training, according to interviewees. Interviewees described a system of support for new teachers that was provided by colleagues and school administrators. There was limited professional development related to data analysis skills and the use of item analysis and disaggregated data to address student achievement, although some requests related to MCAS testing were observed, such as MCAS test administration workshops and MCAS testing of ESL students.

Teachers were attracted to the district for a number of reasons including its reputation, a strong salary structure, which carried a master's increment policy, support for professional development, including paying for teachers to present at conferences, top-notch health care benefits, excellent facilities, and a high quality sick leave buy-back policy.

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



#### Areas of Strength

- Teachers were attracted to the district for a number of reasons including its reputation, a strong salary structure, its master's increment policy, support for professional development, health care benefits, and other attributes.

#### Areas for Improvement

- There was no professional development plan in the district as required by Chapter 71, Section 38Q; professional development was site-based, and not informed by a district-wide process.
- Teachers and administrators were not held accountable for student achievement in their evaluations, which were not in compliance with Chapter 71, section 38.
- In school year 2004-2005, approximately 9 percent of the teachers were not licensed and few waivers were sought.

## Professional Development

A review of the staff and professional development structures in place in the district during the period under review showed that linkage of the processes was inconsistent and fragmented, mostly due to budget restrictions, staff reductions, the lack of a professional development plan, and a site-based management model.

Professional development activities were primarily site-based, directed by principals, and informed mostly by teacher surveys, the particular needs of a school, and teachers identifying needs through formative and summative evaluations, according to interviewees. There was no systemic institutionalized process to determine what professional development was needed district-wide.

## Evaluation

The EQA team reviewed evaluations included in the personnel files of nine current and past administrators employed in the district during the review period. One principal had no evaluation for three years. A number of the evaluations observed for the period July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005 had been signed by the past superintendent in February 2006, subsequent to the departure of the superintendent from the district. Administrators indicated, however, that they met with the superintendent during this past fall to discuss the evaluations. Administrator evaluations were informative, in that they generally stated accomplishments and activity; however, recommendations were limited. Evaluations were not linked to student achievement and were not performed annually.

The district's teacher evaluation system consisted of a four-year cycle. Year 1 included a formal summative evaluation and classroom observations. Year 2 included the professional growth activity of observation of the teacher, which could include video observations, feedback from students, or a combination of observational activities. Year 3 was a collaboration year where professional growth was carried out through various activities, such as a study group, committee work, a department project, or joint planning of lessons. Year 4 was used by the teacher to reflect on professional growth or perform more activities. A review of the evaluations of a random sample of 42 professional and non-professional status teachers indicated that most were not aligned with M. G. L. Chapter 71, section 38, in that a summative evaluation was not performed every two years for a teacher with professional status or every year for a teacher with non-professional status. A number of personnel files included no summative evaluations; however, formative evaluations were observed. Teacher evaluations were not linked to student achievement.

All of the evaluations reviewed were signed; however, many were not aligned with CMR 603 35.00, in that the evaluator did not follow the Principles of Effective Teaching. The EQA team observed evaluations from one school that followed the Principles, but in most cases, the wording was identical from teacher to teacher throughout the evaluation, including some recommendations.

## 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

Administrators in the Seekonk Public School District reviewed TestWiz data on student achievement, but staff relied on principals and special education staff to share results of subgroups. While the schools used some informal assessments, they did not use formative data to improve student achievement and assessments were not in place at each grade level. The district had some early intervention and support programs, but not all students were reading at the proficiency level by Grade 4.

At the elementary level, lower performing schools did not receive more support services than higher performing schools; the district's philosophy was equality versus equity. In addition, there was little evidence of rigorous programs for high performing students other than advanced placement courses at the high school and enrollment in those courses was disproportionate to regular education student participation.

According to the assistant superintendent, there was an increase in the number of special programs and support services at the high school during the review period, such as BEST, a special education program, and additional guidance personnel had been added to counsel students. The behavior program was also a way to support students for whom the "academics are irrelevant," according to the school psychologist.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The district's rates of attendance, suspension, retention, and exclusion were below those of the state.
- The district had adequate transitioning activities in place to help students move from one building to another.
- Administrators and staff were supportive of the students and believed the district was performing well.

### Areas for Improvement

- There was disproportionate subgroup representation in advanced level courses, and the district had no plans to increase subgroup participation.
- Although the district used MCAS data, it did not use a variety of other formative and summative assessments to measure student performance.

## Attendance

The Seekonk Public School District successfully encouraged its students to attend school, and the 96 percent participation rate exceeded that of the state's required 93 percent. Although EQA examiners did not see evidence of written policies for transitions from one building to another, the district had activities and practices in place, such as informational meetings, tours of the schools, and meetings with administrators, special education personnel, and staff from the guidance department.

In interviews, district and school administrators told examiners that staff absenteeism was not a problem in the district for the period under review. A Report of Instructional Staff Attendance submitted to EQA by the district showed that for the 2004-2005 school year, teachers were absent for an average of 6.7 days excluding long term illnesses and professional development.

## Discipline

The district's rates for suspension, retention, and expulsion were lower than the state. There was also a policy regarding homeless students and the assistant principal at the high school was appointed as the coordinator of the program. Although the dropout rate was also lower than the state's, the district did not have a plan to recover students who left school.

An elementary school principal stated that Second Step, a violence prevention program, was used in the elementary schools. The assistant principal was responsible for discipline at the middle school. The process required that teachers complete a referral form for each infraction prior to the administrator meeting with the student. The principal told examiners that even if the student was not sent to the office, teachers completed forms for future reference and background information. Teachers in the secondary focus group also stated that they used functional behavior forms "when major discipline incidents occurred, especially for special education students."

A review of documents and interviews explained the behavior intervention room at the middle school that was staffed by core subject teachers on a rotating two-week cycle during the time set aside for team planning. Teachers completed a discipline referral form when they sent students to this room. According to the principal, a student was there for a period or less and the administration dealt with the issue. Additionally, students serving in-house suspension spent the day in this room.

## 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 development of the Seekonk Public School District's budget during the period under review was based on input from administrators, staff, parents, students and the School Committee, Finance Committee and Selectmen. The resulting document outlining the superintendent's proposed budget was clear and comprehensive, including detailed administrators' proposals, complete staffing information, and historical trends of enrollment and budgets as well as current and proposed budget data in both summary and detailed form. However, student achievement data was not a major factor in the preparation of budget proposals until 2004 and 2005 when funds were approved to improve mathematics achievement.

Reports for the school appropriation, grants, and revolving funds specified budgets and remaining balances and were given to the School Committee and appropriate administrators monthly. Financial reports to the state were filed on time and were amended as needed to ensure accuracy. Administrators used appropriate accounting technology to monitor, control and forecast payroll and operations expenditures for all funds.

The procurement officer for the district was the assistant superintendent, who held MCPPO and school business manager certifications. The business office and administrators solicited quotes for most purchases, and followed Chapter 30B bidding requirements. The Town auditor was R.E. Brown & Co. throughout the review period, and the most recent Town audit is for FY04; the same firm audited the district's End of Year reports. Audit recommendations affecting the school department have been implemented with the exception of a recommendation for the Town to discontinue "batch processing" of school accounts payable expenses and to include all transactions in detail. Student activity accounts were also audited annual-

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



#### Areas of Strength

- The budget document was clear and comprehensive, including summaries, line-item information on current and proposed budgets, administrators' detailed proposals, complete staffing projections, and budget and enrollment history.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Per pupil funding declined from \$8,414 (above average) to \$7,690 (8 percent below average) in FY05, resulting in program cuts, the institution of fees, and failure to develop new programs.
- The district and the town did not have a written agreement detailing the manner of calculating indirect charges by the town, although both parties agreed the charges were reasonable.

ly, as required by state law.

### Financial Support

Town funding of the school budget was above the state average until 2003, but it declined from \$8,273 per pupil in FY03 to \$7,690 in FY05. The resulting cuts in programs and imposition of fees made it virtually impossible for the district to implement new programs to improve student achievement until 2005 when a proposal to add a math consultant and to improve instructional strategies was approved for FY06. The district annually reviewed programs to improve cost effectiveness, most notably outsourcing the school lunch program and negotiating with unions to reduce health insurance costs for FY06. Other savings were achieved in energy efficiency measures, collaborative purchasing of natural gas, and special education programs to control tuition costs.

The district and the Town have established mutually acceptable procedures for the calculation of indirect costs, but no written agreement existed during the period under review. Funding for the schools met state Net School Spending requirements during the period under review, but Net School Spending declined from 2003 to 2005 while enrollments increased.

The district pursued and acquired several private grants and donations as well as state and federal grants, totaling \$891,888 for FY05, and revolving funds for fees and other revenues totaled \$1,138,787. Grants and revolving funds were managed by appropriate administrators who kept them within budgeted limits and spent them effectively.

### Facilities

The district used a work order system for maintenance needs and computer software for work orders and routine preventative maintenance to track them efficiently. All schools were renovated between 1993 and 2002, and examiners found them to be clean, safe, brightly lit and well maintained. The Town's Capital Plan for 2002-06 included bus replacements and building needs for the schools, but was not funded from 2003-06; however, five buses were replaced on a lease purchase plan. The Town has been preparing a revised Capital Plan for Town Meeting approval in 2006.

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## CONCLUSION

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

The Seekonk Public School District faced a number of challenges in the areas of leadership, curriculum, and human resource management. The long-serving superintendent retired, and the school committee and town officials were not viewed as advocates for public education. Student achievement data was not a major factor in the preparation of budget proposals until 2004 and 2005 when funds were approved to improve math performance. Town funding of the school budget was above the state average until 2003, but it declined from \$8,273 per pupil in FY03 to \$7,690 in FY05. The resulting cuts in programs and imposition of fees made it virtually impossible for the district to implement new programs to improve student achievement until 2005 when a proposal to add a math consultant and to improve instructional strategies was approved for FY06. Between 2003-05, the district saw a reduction of 14 professional positions and increased enrollment. Programs in PE, middle school foreign languages, high school shop, special education paraprofessionals, an elementary enrichment program, curriculum leadership, and custodial services were reduced. In addition, many classes at the secondary level have increased to 29-30 students, and fees for transportation, student activities, and athletics were imposed.

The district's master plan (DIP) for 2002-07 was not standards-based and did not focus on the analysis of student achievement data. During the period under review, the district had no curriculum coordinator, department heads or curriculum specialists. District principals held those responsibilities, and while they reviewed work weekly, and provided professional development in math, they focused insufficiently on the quality of classroom instructional strategies and methodology. The district's curriculum documents did not include instructional strategies to guide effective implementation, and were not adequately vertically aligned. The district had not yet developed common assessments with which to measure student achievement of or progress toward the curriculum goals. The superintendent indicated that two AP courses had been added to the high school program of studies, a documented curriculum was in place, a coordinated math program had been adopted for the elementary schools, block scheduling had been refined at the high school, and a new math program had been implemented at the middle school. However, district improvement efforts did not specifically target the needs of the district's subgroups, such as special education and low-income students.

The school committee's evaluation of the superintendent's performance and the superintendent's evaluation of central office administrators and principals were not documented annually. Additionally, principals were reluctant to hold teachers accountable for high levels of instructional quality, curriculum delivery, and performance results because there had not been sufficient coordinated professional development, classroom supports such as coaches or content specialists, centralized curriculum coordination, or articulated district implementation goals.

## 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.

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*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.

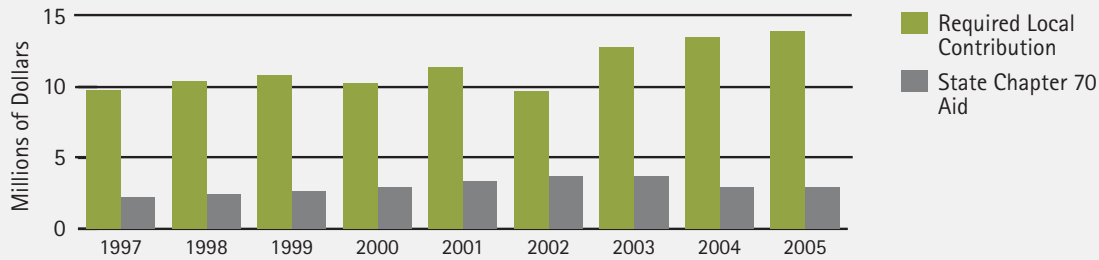
## APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN EQA TECHNICAL REPORTS

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

### APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1997–2005

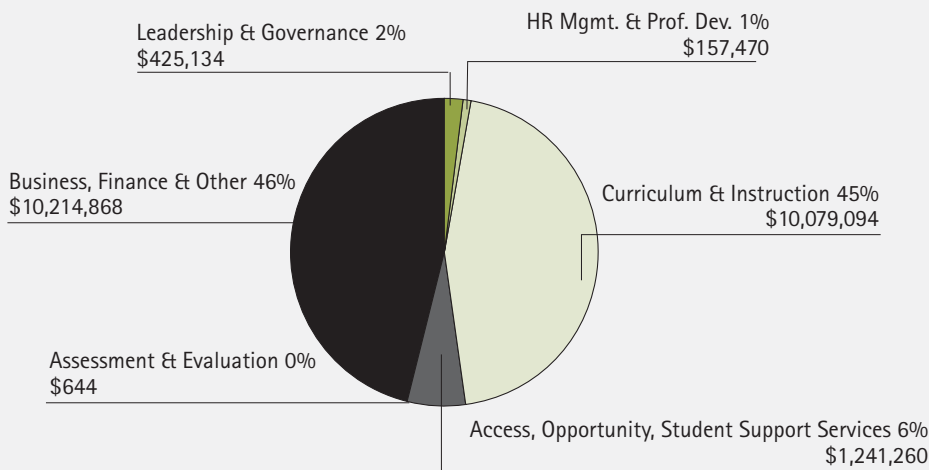
The vast majority of a school district's funding is determined by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to providing state aid to support school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. For the nine-year period, FY1997 to FY2005, Seekonk met the state-mandated Net School Spending Requirement; Chapter 70 Aid to Seekonk increased 30.7 percent (from \$2,243,817 to \$2,931,775); and Seekonk's Required Local Contribution increased 42.2 percent (from \$9,789,155 to \$13,922,841). Since FY1997, Seekonk received a total of \$26,734,773 in Chapter 70 Aid and was required to raise locally \$102,562,810.

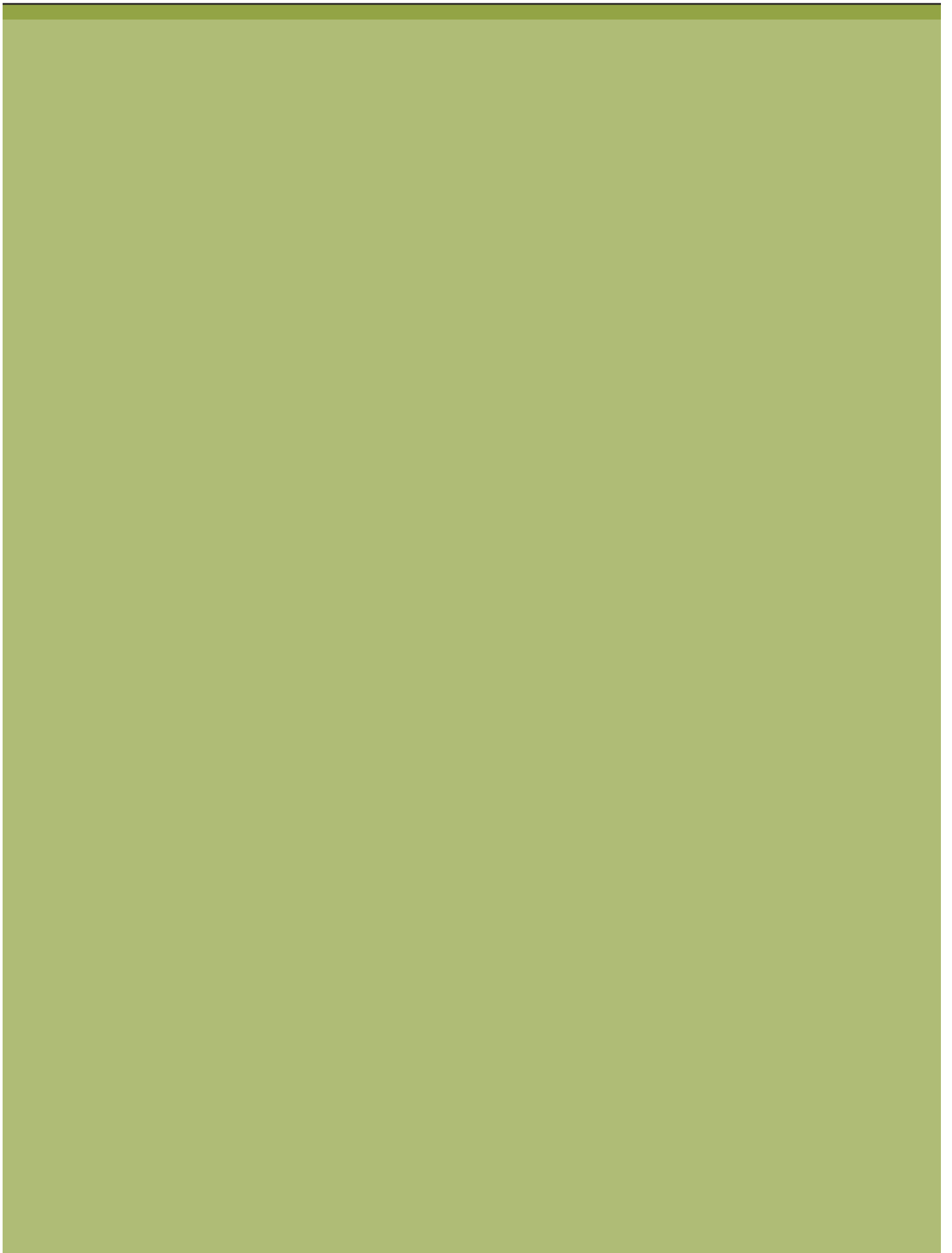
#### WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR SEEKONK PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



#### HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR SEEKONK PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

*FY04 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges), based on the district's submission to the DOE at the time of the EQA's on-site review.*





EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL  
*Office of Educational Quality and Accountability*

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