

*How Is Your
School District
Performing?*



A look at
Groton-Dunstable
Regional School District

2005-2007

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

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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 (MCAS) tests.

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 Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, Alan Genovese; the school department staff; and the town officials of Groton and Dunstable.

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INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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 to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

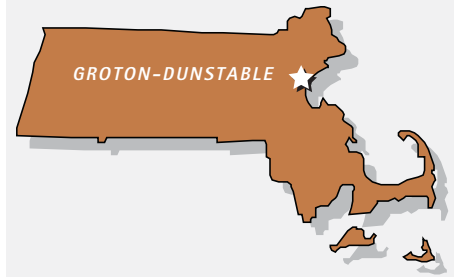
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools,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

In October 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District for the period of 2005-2007. The EQA analyzed Groton-Dunstable students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major 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.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2007. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Both family income and parental expectations for teaching and learning were high in Groton-Dunstable. The EQA review period included one year under the former and two years under the current superintendent. In fulfillment of a longstanding goal of the school committee, the new superintendent worked to increase communication and accessibility to improve trust and communication in the district. The superintendent's entry plan goals included improving the performance of the administrative team, mentoring an interim business manager, promoting the use of technology, and increasing safety.

Putting the Data in Perspective



DISTRICT

Population: 12,376
Median family income: \$92,270
Largest sources of employment: education, health, and social services
Local government: Groton - Board of Selectmen/Open Town Meeting/
 Administrative Assistant, Dunstable - Board of Selectmen/Open Town Meeting

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 7 members
Number of schools: 6
Student-teacher ratio: 15.0 to 1
Per pupil expenditures: \$9,645
Student enrollment:
 Total enrollment: 2,937
 White: 96.1 percent
 Asian: 2.7 percent
 Hispanic: 0.6 percent
 African-American: 0.2 percent
 Native American: 0.1 percent
 Multi-race, non-Hispanic: 0.2 percent
 Limited English proficient: (LEP) 0.2 percent
 Low income: 3.0 percent
 Special education: 11.0 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 March 7, 2008.

The school committee set a goal to strengthen "relationships with constituencies by clearly defining roles and, relationships, and expectations for community, municipal officials, administrative council members, staff, school councils, and each another." Accomplishment of this goal required some changes in assumptions and past practices that caused dissonance and dissention. Four long-term administrators left the district, raising concerns in the community about communication and trust.

The superintendent took steps to make the budget development process more transparent, increasing public trust and confidence in district financial operations. In accordance with a school committee goal to build a new system of leadership and governance, the superintendent clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of district administrators, and engaged a facilitator with expertise in teambuilding to improve the collaboration of the administrative team.

The district curriculum aligned with the state frameworks in core subjects and included most essential components such as benchmarks, pacing guides, resources, and assessments. Some domains were better developed than others were. The director of curriculum and staff development and the curriculum coaches provided professional development for teachers on the use of formative and summative assessments and other sources of data to inform instruction. When analysis of disaggregated student achievement data showed that special education students enrolled in regular education mathematics classes performed better than special education students enrolled in resource room mathematics classes, the district changed the service delivery model, increasing mainstreaming with support.

The district adopted a new mathematics program at the middle level, better aligned with the state framework, to increase student achievement, yet enrollment in grade 8 Algebra I declined. The same Algebra I course at the middle and high school levels differed in learning outcomes and outcome measures. The district was developing common benchmark and course assessments. Data management and collection were not yet consistent across the district.

The establishment of a cohesive administrative team with clear roles and responsibilities and a focus on goals improved district programs, services, curriculum, and instruction. The quality of instruction was high in the district, consistent with the perceptions of principals and other administrators. The district made evident progress on the accomplishment of its goals, except for increased and embedded use of updated technology in core subject areas. Budget reductions in technology reduced district capacity. Most classrooms had at least one up to date computer connected to the Internet, but computers were rarely used to enhance instruction. Except at the high school, the availability and use of other forms of technology such as calculators and probes were limited.

Recommendations

As a result of its examination, the EQA arrived at recommendations for the district, which were presented to the superintendent subsequent to the examination. They are as follows.

- Although the district has met its net school spending requirements, its per pupil expenditure during the period under review was below the state average. Reconsider budgetary decisions that might further reduce net school spending.
- Provide a viable plan and the necessary resources to facilitate integration of technology into instruction. The loss of key personnel in this area due to budget reductions has made this nearly impossible to accomplish.
- Develop and implement an effective system of professional staff supervision, and support staff improvement with well designed professional development. Little evidence existed that the district had used effective systems of supervision across the district, and this must become a top priority.

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 subgroups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2007 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Groton-Dunstable participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

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

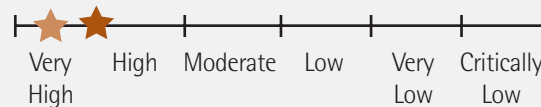
On average, more than four-fifths of the students in Groton-Dunstable Public Schools attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) on the 2007 MCAS tests, more than three-fourths of Groton-Dunstable students attained proficiency in math, and slightly more than two-thirds attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-nine percent of the Class of 2007 attained a Competency Determination.

- Groton-Dunstable's ELA proficiency index on the 2007 MCAS tests was 95 proficiency index (PI) points. This resulted in a proficiency gap, the difference between its proficiency index and the target of 100, of five PI points, nine points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of less than one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- In 2007, Groton-Dunstable's math proficiency index on the MCAS tests was 90 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 10 PI points, 14 points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than one PI point per year to achieve AYP.
- Groton-Dunstable's STE proficiency index in 2007 was 87 PI points, resulting in a proficiency gap of 13 PI points, 15 points narrower than that statewide.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2007

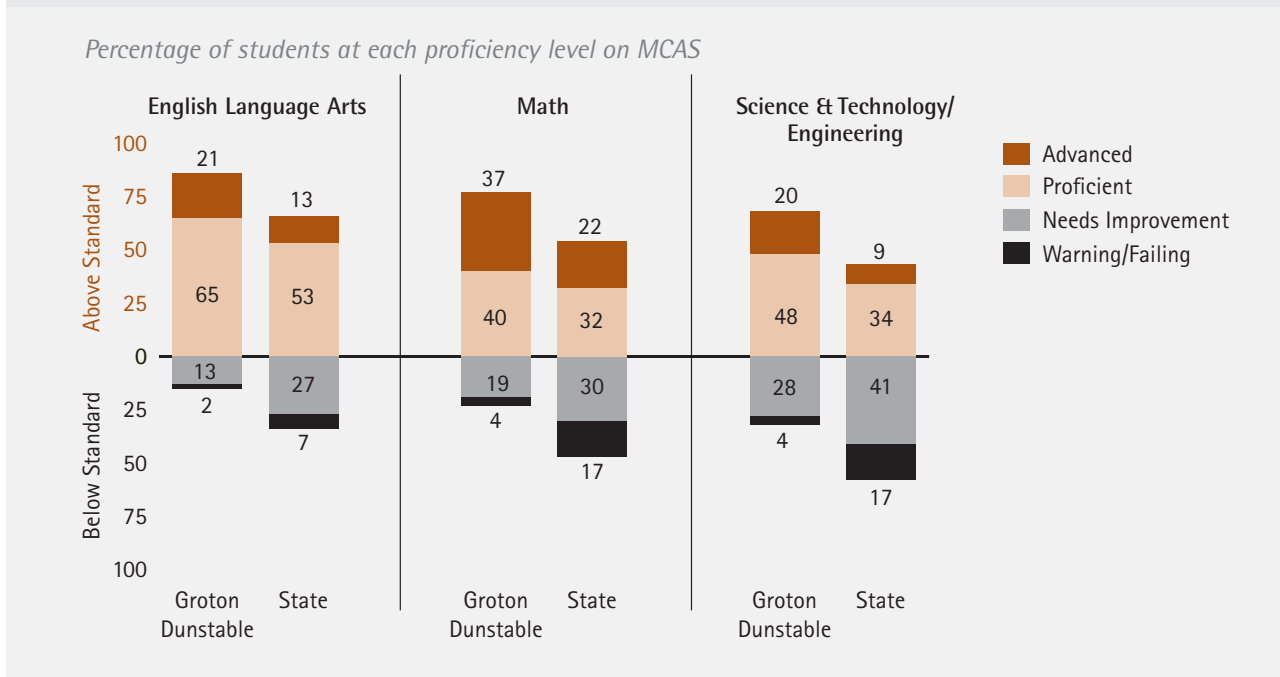
	DISTRICT	STATE
<i>English Language Arts Proficiency Index</i>	95	86
<i>Math Proficiency Index</i>	90	76

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. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2007



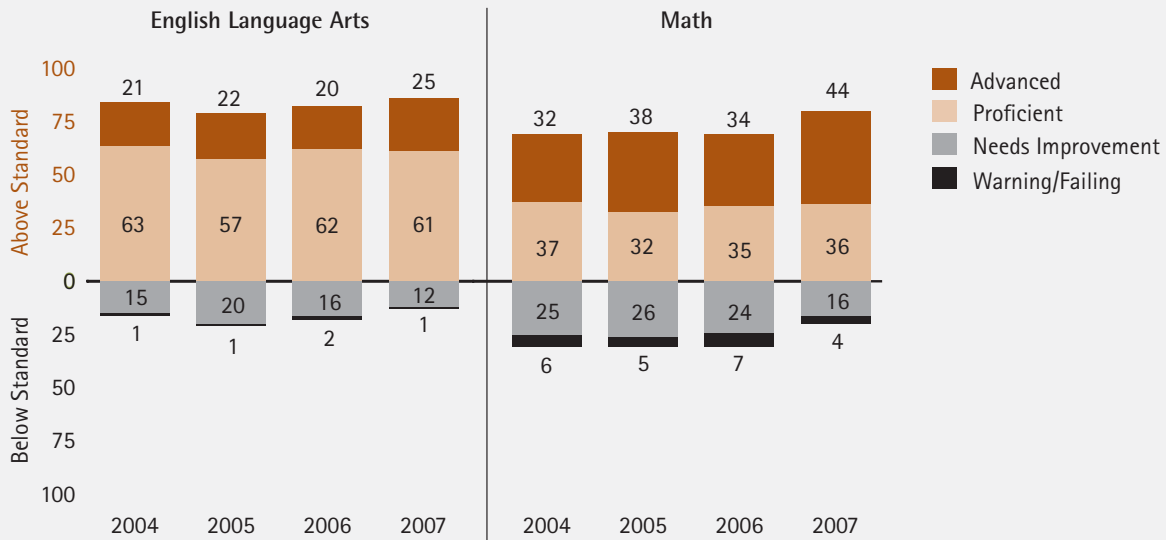
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2004 and 2007, Groton-Dunstable's MCAS performance showed slight improvement in English language arts, more improvement in math, and little change in science and technology/engineering.

- Over the three-year period 2004-2007, ELA performance in Groton-Dunstable improved slightly, by one PI point over the three-year period. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 18 percent, a rate lower than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in ELA increased from 84 percent in 2004 to 86 percent in 2007.
- Math performance in Groton-Dunstable showed more improvement over this period, at an average of close to two PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 38 percent, a rate higher than that required to achieve AYP. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in math rose from 69 percent in 2004 to 80 percent in 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Groton-Dunstable had little change in STE performance, declining by one-tenth PI point, which widened the proficiency gap by one percent. The percentage of students attaining proficiency in STE decreased from 71 percent in 2004 to 68 percent in 2007.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



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

MCAS performance in 2007 varied considerably among subgroups of Groton-Dunstable students. Of the four measurable subgroups in Groton-Dunstable, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA and 30 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

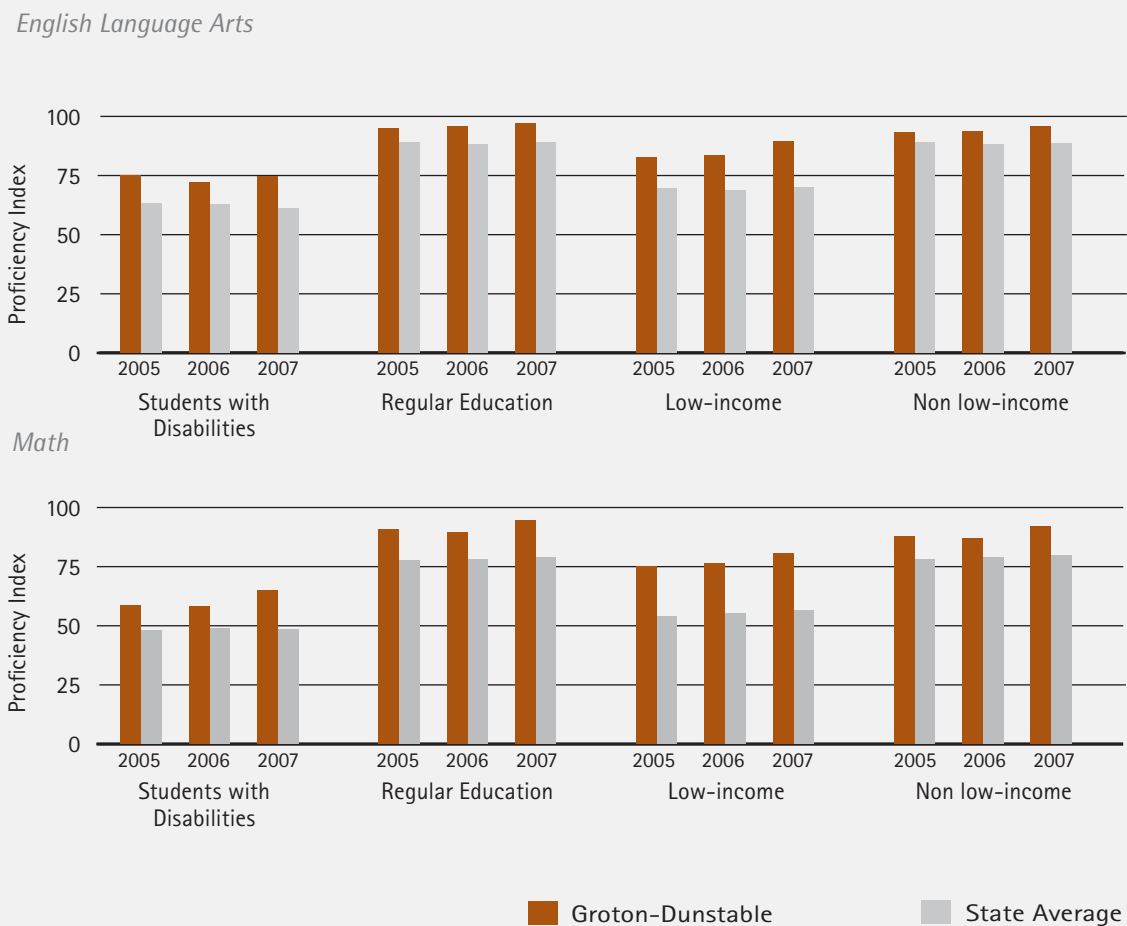
- The proficiency gaps in Groton-Dunstable in 2007 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program).
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students.

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

In Groton-Dunstable, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 19 PI points in 2004 to 23 PI points in 2007, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 32 to 29 PI points over this period.

- The regular education and non low-income student subgroups in Groton-Dunstable had improved performance in ELA between 2004 and 2007. The more improved subgroup in ELA was non low-income students.
- In math, the performance of all student subgroups in Groton-Dunstable improved between 2004 and 2007. The most improved subgroups in math were low-income students and students with disabilities.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Overall District Management

To understand better the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 72 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 2007, Groton-Dunstable received an overall MQI score of 'Strong' (92.3 percent), as well as a rating of 'Strong' on each of the six standards. The district performed best on the Assessment and Program Evaluation standard, and least well on the Human Resource Management and Professional Development standard. During the review period, student performance improved slightly in ELA and improved more in math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards, as well as the fidelity of implementation of the district's goals, plans, and expectations.

Fidelity of Implementation

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

The goals of the superintendent, the school committee, and those published in the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) all focused on communication and collaboration, increasing student achievement, especially in mathematics, retaining quality staff members, and increasing the use of up to date and embedded technology to improve student achievement. These goals were clear to all stakeholders, parents, and community members interviewed.

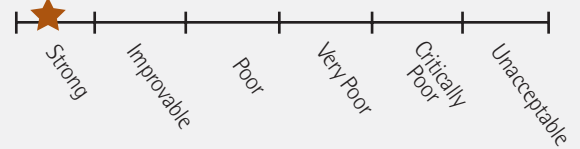
Principals and school councils developed their respective schools' SIPs, aligning the schools' academic goals with district priorities. Most SIPs focused on improvement of math achievement as well as improvement in the application of technology for instruction. Teachers interviewed articulated the schools' goal of improving math, and

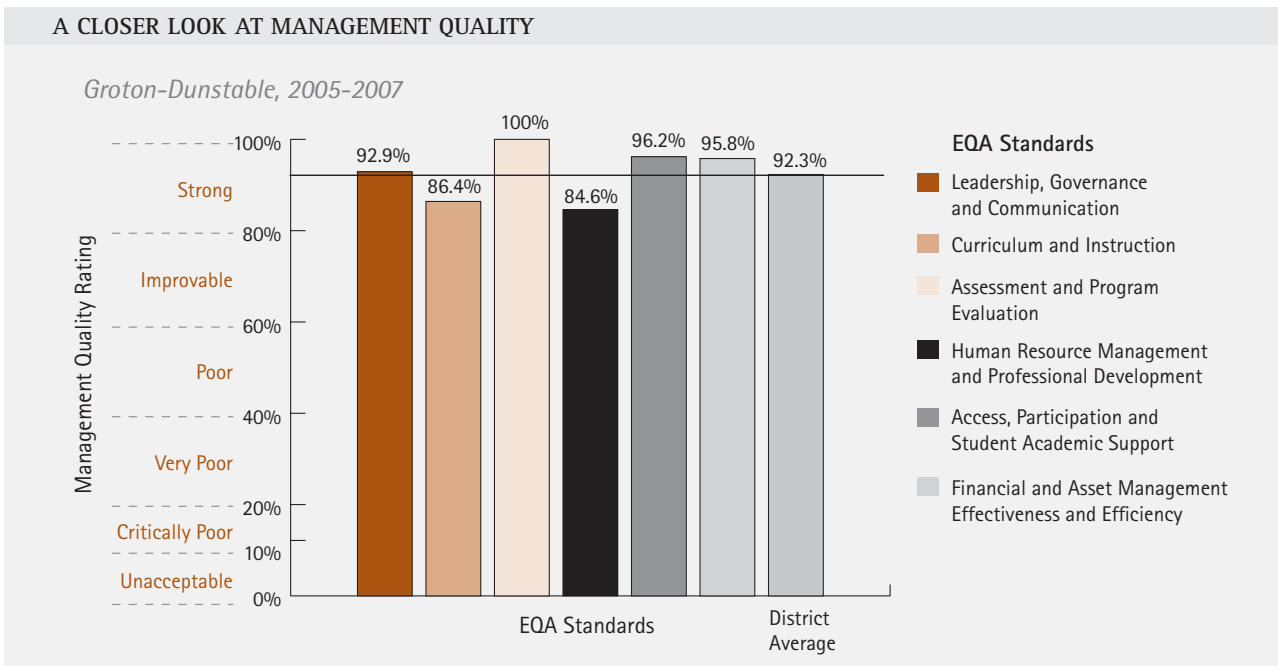
Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 72 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Groton-Dunstable received the following rating:

Performance Rating:





EQA examiners saw evidence of the implementation of this goal in the classrooms they observed. Teachers were receptive to the goals of the new principals and stated that they appreciated the fact that the new principals were frequently in classrooms and actively engaged in the schools.

The superintendent expected increased collaboration among all schools, especially at the elementary level and between the middle and high schools, leading to improvement in transitions, vertical alignment of policy and procedures, and the horizontal alignment of curriculum and instruction at the elementary level. Principals and schools improved communication with parents through the Connect-ED system, the district's website, school surveys, and personal communication with parents through open houses, various school venues, and coffee hours. Participation in common training and the expectation that principals become the instructional leaders enhanced collaboration.

The administration expected staff at all levels to use student achievement data, survey and statistical data, formative assessment such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), common benchmarks and exams at the middle and secondary levels, and the Looking at Student Work (LASW) protocol at the high school to help the administrative team make data-driven decisions. However, lack of access to the web-based version of TestWiz and training in its use was a barrier to the district's use of a Macintosh platform for examining MCAS data.

Generally, the fidelity of implementation of the district's goals gave the district potential for improvement by harnessing the district's leadership on improving math achievement in a systemic way. The administrators and teachers interviewed understood that improving math achievement and closing the achievement gap between student subgroups were the greatest areas of need in the district, and they knew what steps they had taken in central office and in each school to address the issues. Classroom observations revealed that the middle school prioritized making progress in math, which was reflected in the focus of professional development, changing the focus of Title I services to math, the implementation of a co-teaching model as a means to mainstream in special education, and concern about the access to the same curriculum and resources in all math programs. Examiners saw little evidence in their classroom visits that the budget supported improvement of technology, given the reduction in technology personnel, or that teachers and students used technology effectively in the classroom to improve teaching and learning.

Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. Groton-Dunstable Regional School District is marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in English language arts (ELA) and 'Very High' in math, based on 2007 MCAS test results.

Leadership and Communication

The Groton-Dunstable district mission statement was clear, commonly understood, and used to guide decision-making. The goals in individual School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP) goals and consistent with the mission statement. Each school presented its SIP for the next school year to the school committee and reported on progress toward the accomplishment of current SIP goals. During the period under review, the district established priorities to improve student achievement and increase communication with stakeholders.

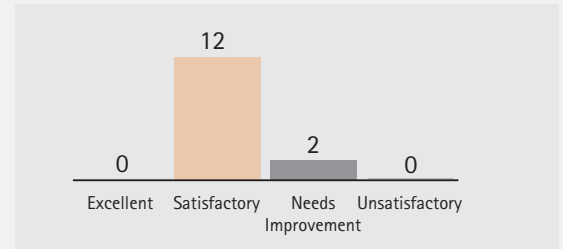
The school committee used student performance data and other documentation to develop the budget, form policy, and make decisions. During the period under review, the budgets recommended by the school committee were reduced by the towns. As a result, the district was unable to maintain technology both for data analysis and student learning and to furnish classrooms with multiple learning resources. Groton-Dunstable provided good educational facilities and a positive learning environment for students.

Groton-Dunstable made a conscious effort to increase stakeholder's understanding of its priorities and accomplishments. The superintendent and school committee met regularly with town officials and other interested parties. In addition, the school committee conducted surveys to improve communication and identify needs. School committee meetings were broadcast on the local cable channel and reported in the press.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 14 indicators. Groton-Dunstable received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Student performance and needs drove budget and program development in Groton-Dunstable.
- School Improvement Plans (SIPs) had a common format and SIP goals were explicitly aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP).
- During the period under review, the DIP focused on improving student achievement in English language arts and mathematics, and the district shifted resources to schools and students with greater needs.
- Student achievement was a component of administrative evaluations.
- The district made a deliberate effort to improve communication with stakeholders during the period under review.
- Teachers were expected to use aggregated and disaggregated student achievement data to improve instruction and monitor student progress.

Areas for Improvement

- Teachers lacked training and tools for independent data analysis.
- During the period under review, the budgets recommended by the school committee were reduced by the towns, diminishing district programs and services and limiting instructional materials.

The district maintained a website with current and useful information, and issued regular newsletters and special reports to parents and the community addressing timely issues and concerns.

Planning and Governance

The school committee collaborated with town officials, parents, and school and community organizations to determine and realize the mission of the schools. The committee also helped to set long- and short-term goals and evaluate district progress toward their accomplishment. School committee members understood their roles and attended workshops sponsored by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to keep current. The superintendent provided orientation and training sessions for new members. The school committee participated in budget development sessions with town officials and joint workshops with the administrative council.

The district formed partnerships with community organizations and benefactors to augment educational and other services for students. District policy encouraged businesses and organizations to sponsor and support school programs.

The district had an approved school safety policy prior to the period under review, and developed a safety plan with uniform procedures and codes in cooperation with local public safety officials. The plan was reviewed annually.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District faced a number of challenges in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice—essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

Groton-Dunstable curriculum documents were aligned with the state frameworks. Standards were posted in the classrooms and used as a reference during instruction to promote student learning. The district's focus on standards-based instruction was supported by the adoption of programs aligned with the state frameworks and the content area standards developed by professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

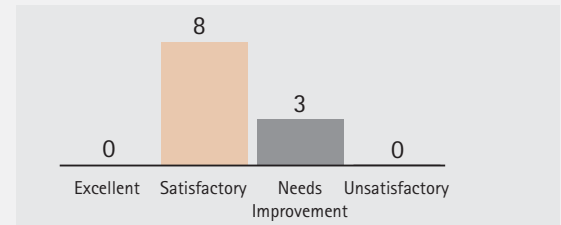
A curriculum council, headed by the district's director of curriculum and staff development, provided curriculum leadership in the district. At the high school, department leaders in ELA, math, science, and social studies who had part-time teaching responsibilities provided curriculum leadership in a part-time capacity. At the K-8 levels, two full-time curriculum coordinators provided curriculum leadership in ELA and math, while science and social studies teachers who taught full time provided curriculum leadership as time allowed. The district eliminated the curriculum leaders for fine arts, health, and foreign languages in 2007-2008 because of budget limitations, and the principals of the elementary and middle schools had to assume curriculum leadership in these areas.

Teachers developed an action plan for each curriculum area in grade-level and departmental teams. The district reviewed the action plans for completion annually. Curriculum issues were addressed during the development of the action plans and at other times as needs warranted it. The mathematics curriculum was aligned horizontally and vertically except in grades 3 and 4, which were just beginning implementation of the Investigations in Number, Data, and Space program. The district projected complete implementation by 2008-2009.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 11 indicators. Groton-Dunstable received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district process of aligning, reviewing, revising, and modifying the curriculum, supported by various curriculum leaders, resulted in a "living" document to guide instruction.
- Administrators and coordinators analyzed the results of summative and formative assessments, and teachers used the interpreted data to plan instruction.
- The district began to move from a pull-out model for special education students to an integrated model supported by learning centers in order to give special education students greater access to the regular education curriculum based on the state frameworks.
- Through meetings with teachers, both by and across grade levels and within departments, and mandated professional development sessions, administrators and coordinators designed, implemented, and reviewed the effectiveness of instructional practices and strategies.

Areas for Improvement

- Technology was most readily available at the high school, and least available at the elementary schools. The loss of the technology director and two technology integration specialists due to budget constraints impeded the integration of technology.
- The district had high expectations for effective instruction and provided teachers with high quality professional development, but school principals did not monitor teachers' instruction to ensure fidelity of implementation.

Effective Instruction

The district's instructional practice was characterized by cooperative and flexible grouping, inclusion with co-teaching or paraprofessional support, and use of data to inform planning. Displayed student work showed evidence of high expectations, care, complexity, and challenge.

The district used a top-down process for analysis and distribution of assessment data such as the MCAS data, since only curriculum coordinators and a few administrators were trained in data analysis. The district's Macintosh platform supported the web-based, but not the software version, of TestWiz. Lack of funds prevented district use of the web-based version. Administrators, the curriculum coordinator, and curriculum leaders prepared and furnished data to teachers. Teachers analyzed the data to identify curricular strengths and weaknesses and made revisions and modifications, such as adjusting the pacing guides for subjects and courses.

At the elementary level, teachers used formative data, such as those from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and district benchmarks and assessments built into the Investigations program and the Connected Mathematics Program (CMP) in grades K-8 to monitor student progress and inform instruction. Teachers also had an established protocol at the middle and high schools for Looking at Student Work (LASW). Teachers reviewed student work routinely at various team, grade-level, and department meetings throughout the year.

In most classes observed by the EQA examiners, students were active participants, answering questions that evoked broad involvement, and asking their own questions to increase their understanding. Teachers asked students to explain their thinking, and employed a variety of instructional strategies within a class. Students transitioned from one activity to another smoothly and with little teacher cueing, and routines for learning were automatic. Although the quality of instruction observed by examiners was high, this was more reflective of the district having hired effective teachers and providing them with ongoing high quality professional development, rather than providing an effective system of supervision.

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, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

Groton-Dunstable was a data-driven district. The district modified programs and services based on outcome measures. For each of the years under review, the leadership and staff of the district evaluated student MCAS test data in order to ensure alignment of the curriculum with state standards. The EQA team found that School Improvement Plans were aligned with the District Improvement Plan. District MCAS test scores were well above state averages, but an achievement gap existed in the district between the performance of regular and special education students.

The district hired qualified and experienced teachers and provided continuous professional development to assist them in delivering the curriculum. The curriculum was well aligned horizontally, and the district was working to improve vertical alignment, especially in mathematics. Toward this end, the elementary and middle schools recently adopted the Investigations in Number, Data, and Space program for grades K-5 and the Connected Mathematics Program for grades 6-8.

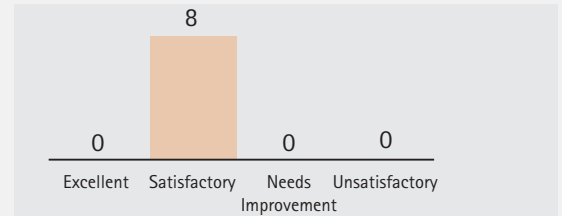
Administrators analyzed MCAS test data when they became available from the central office, and brought the data to teacher action teams, curriculum coordinators, and other curriculum leaders. Teachers discussed the aggregated and disaggregated results and an item analysis after school and during district in-service days.

The district effectively reported MCAS test data as well as other standardized assessment scores to parents and the community through a continuously updated website, televised school committee meetings, community newspapers, and e-mail. Report cards and progress reports were issued to parents regularly.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



Areas of Strength

- The administration and staff consistently collected and analyzed student data in order to improve the curriculum. The district modified some programs as a result of the analysis of student achievement data.
- The curriculum director and curriculum coordinators were trained in the use of TestWiz. Each year, principals and teachers received an analysis of MCAS scores and worked at grade levels and in department content areas to make appropriate changes in curriculum and instruction.
- The district effectively communicated and reported student achievement through e-mail, parent-teacher conferences, progress reports, and report cards. All schools used a software program to communicate with parents.
- The district used a number of assessment tools in addition to the MCAS tests, and developed local benchmarks, core assignments, schoolwide rubrics, and teacher-developed tests and quizzes.
- The district instituted learning centers and co-taught classes at the middle school and high school to replace a separate resource room model. These changes addressed learning style differences and provided support for students under special educational management.
- The district used internal and external audits to assess the effectiveness of its programs and services and acted upon the findings and recommendations.

Program Evaluation

The guidance department and content area specialists analyzed SAT and Advanced Placement examination results. Groton-Dunstable consistently scored above state averages on both of these measures. The district used the Looking at Student Work (LASW) action plan to evaluate programs. At the high school, this process was used to assess knowledge across the curriculum in English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Teachers in each subject area developed common core assessments and rubrics. They administered these assessments twice in each course and used the results to compare the achievement of students at the same grade level and at different grades within each school. The results were also used to compare the achievement of students in the three elementary schools.

Middle school teachers administered mini-benchmark tests in the four content areas six to eight times during the year to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum. At the high school, the EQA team found little consistency in the administration of common midterm and final examinations. Most quizzes, tests, and final examinations were designed and administered by individual teachers, although some departments had begun to develop standardized final examinations.

During the period under review, the district participated in several internal and external audits, reviewed the findings and recommendations, and made changes in programs and services to improve teaching and learning.

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

Groton-Dunstable had consistent procedures for hiring personnel, checking references, requesting Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) background checks, and monitoring certification renewal. Responsibilities were clear and understood. The district widely advertised vacancies with an intent to engage the most qualified teachers and administrators. The superintendent interviewed each candidate recommended by the principals following school-based team interviews. The superintendent required and reviewed notes from the interview process and reference checks. The human resource director made the CORI background requests and verified years of experience. The superintendent interviewed the recommended candidates, and made the final decision on employment and placement on the salary scale.

Professional Development

Groton-Dunstable offered professional development before and after school, on weekends, in the evenings, and during the summer. In-service sessions were both districtwide and school-specific. Programs were offered within the district by district staff members or consultants and offsite under district sponsorship. The joint administrative and curriculum leadership teams created the professional development plan and ensured that it was consistent with the district's strategic plan, the District Improvement Plan, and the School Improvement Plans. The director of curriculum and staff development scheduled all of the activities. The school committee reimbursed teachers for courses approved in advance by the superintendent.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 indicators. Groton-Dunstable received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district hired and retained effective, experienced, certified teachers, and provided them opportunities for leadership and recognition.
- In 2006-2007, the district began implementing CMP with a new series of professional development to support all teachers of math, including special education and Title I teachers for the first time.
- The district had a longstanding well developed mentor program, directed by a mentor teacher at each level and supervised by the director of curriculum and staff development. The program was consistent across the district.
- Groton-Dunstable funded professional development adequately and used data to determine professional development needs and priorities.
- The district attempted to close the achievement gap between regular and special education students, especially in mathematics, through teacher coaching and professional development, among other actions.

Areas for Improvement

- The district teacher evaluation procedure did not meet the requirements of the Education Reform Act. The procedure was last negotiated in 1997-1998 and consisted of a four-year cycle, with classroom observations every three years.
- There was little evidence that the district used effective strategies for active supervision and effective evaluation of staff members, and the new superintendent cited revision of the system of evaluation and increasing accountability as district priorities.

The district had a well developed, documented, and well supervised mentor program. Teacher leaders directed the program under the supervision of the director of curriculum and staff development.

Evaluation

The Groton-Dunstable teacher evaluation procedure was negotiated in 1997-1998, following passage of the Education Reform Act, but the process did not comply with statute. The evaluation of professional status teachers was not timely, since summative evaluations based on classroom observations did not occur in alternating years. Additionally, the format did not include all of the categories in the Principles of Effective Teaching.

Principals observed non-professional status teachers two times a year for the first three years, and completed a narrative summative evaluation at the end of the year. Summative evaluations were brief and informative but not instructive or growth oriented. Many were missing, and there was no indication when the district granted professional status to one teacher whose file was reviewed.

Although administrators were supposed to be evaluated annually according to the procedure, the former superintendent completed very few evaluations. The evaluation criteria included some but not all of the categories in the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. The current superintendent completed evaluations of principals and other administrators. These evaluations were thorough and made reference to student achievement data.

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

Groton-Dunstable's schools provided a range of educational services and supplemental programs designed to meet diverse student learning needs and improve academic achievement. A variety of early intervention services and remedial and support programs in regular and special education had been implemented or expanded during the period under review. The increased use of formative assessments and summative data helped identify students performing below grade-level expectations, and contributed to an overall improvement in student achievement.

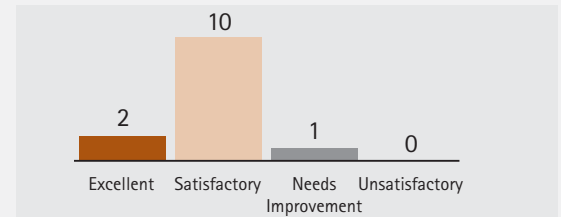
Although the district's English language learner (ELL), transient, and homeless populations were small, appropriate written policies and formal procedures were in place to ensure that these student populations were eligible for and received a full range of timely services and targeted assistance. In 2007-2008, the district provided faculty members with sheltered English immersion (SEI) training through the Merrimack Education Center (MEC).

With the exception of students in the special education subgroup, the district conducted very little regular or systematic analysis of disaggregated performance data. As a result, administrators and staff members could not accurately describe whether subgroup enrollment and achievement rates in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) programs were proportionate to their representation in the overall student population. Although students who did not meet qualifying criteria and academic prerequisites could petition for admission through a waiver process, a review of the data revealed that relatively few of them did. The number of grade 7 and 8 students allowed to enroll in the middle school pre-algebra/algebra program declined substantially in 2007, as a result of the implementation of more stringent prerequisites. Enrollments in high school AP courses remained relatively low and flat throughout the review period as well.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 indicators. Groton-Dunstable received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district made increasing use of data to assess student participation and achievement.
- The district used aggregated data to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction. The use of disaggregated data was limited to the special education subgroup.
- The district had begun to implement special education programs fostering the inclusion of all students within regular education classrooms, reducing reliance on pull-out programs and services.
- Throughout the period under review, the dropout, absenteeism, in- and out-of-school suspension, and retention rates for every school in the district, including the high school, were significantly better than the statewide averages.
- High performance expectations and a culture of professionalism contributed to instructional staff attendance rates that were uniformly good in each of the district's schools.

Areas for Improvement

- Although the high school's AP scores were good, the total number of students participating remained generally flat, with an average of only 10 percent of all juniors and seniors enrolled in AP courses during the review period. Subgroup representation in higher level courses was minimal and there was little evidence of a narrowing of the achievement gap.

Through the implementation of a more inclusionary, co-taught instructional model, increasing numbers of special education students had more direct access to the full academic curriculum in the regular education classroom.

Attendance

Clear and detailed student attendance policies were developed and published in all of Groton-Dunstable's schools. These policies included specific notification and enforcement practices and consequences when students exceeded attendance limits. Administrators and staff members described an extensive set of proactive procedures employed by the schools to support and consistently enforce their student attendance and punctuality policies and expectations, including frequent letters, phone calls, and parent conferences. In 2007, the district's daily student attendance rate was 96.1 percent, compared to the state rate of 94.5 percent. Analysis of data revealed uniformly positive attendance rates and patterns in each of the district's schools, including the high school.

Discipline and Dropout Prevention

The number of disciplinary infractions, suspensions, and dropouts remained well below state averages throughout the review period. Between 2004 and 2007, rates of both in- and out-of-school suspensions in all the district's schools averaged less than half those for the state. In addition, during this same time period, student retention rates at all grade levels also remained significantly below state averages. Groton-Dunstable's dropout rate averaged 1.4 percent, compared with the state rate of 3.5 percent during this same three-year period. Administrators and staff members attributed these positive indicators to fair and consistent enforcement of the district's disciplinary and attendance policies, and continuing and constructive communication between school and home.

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

During the period under review, the district appointed a new superintendent who developed the 2006-2007 budget. The budget development process under the new superintendent was open and participatory. The district allocated its resources based primarily on reviews of MCAS test results. During budget development, district administrators and directors reviewed student achievement data and allocated resources based on the needs of students. Principals and program directors submitted staffing requests, generated in part by input from teachers and school councils. Principals and administrators identified levels of staffing and support necessary to maintain the current level of service in the subsequent fiscal year. They also identified known costs as well as expenses based on compliance with mandates and regulations and student enrollments. The district allocated funds to each school on a per pupil basis to be used at the principal's discretion for expenses related to professional development, supplies, computers, and the library.

The period under review included a time of budget restrictions on local, state, and federal levels. The superintendent and the administrative council, school committee, and town officials held continuous budget sessions. The superintendent provided detailed budget documents to the school committee. The superintendent disseminated information throughout the budget development process prior to the budget being presented at the annual town meeting for voter approval.

Financial Support

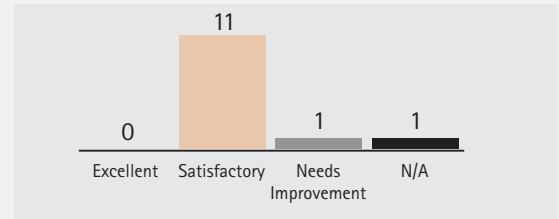
The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District exceeded its net school spending (NSS) requirement for each of the years in the period under review, but the per pupil expenditure fell below the state average. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending remained at 41 percent over this period.

The culture of the towns valued education, and voters historically had supported the district's operational budget and capital improvement projects. Although the district had provided adequate resources based on net school spending during the period under review, declining operating funds resulted in a lack of adequate technology, reduced staffing, and increased class sizes in 2007-2008.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 indicators. Groton-Dunstable received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The budget documents were clear, and the budget development process was open and participatory.
- District financial reports and records were accurate and timely, and the district acted upon recommendations in auditor's reports.
- Budgets were based on the needs of students as determined from an analysis of student performance data.
- The culture of the communities valued education, and voters historically had supported and approved the district budget at annual town meetings.

Areas for Improvement

- The district schools were not locked during the school day and therefore not secure.

Based on the perceived wealth of the towns and the recalculated Chapter 70 formula, the state shifted the cost burden to the towns of Groton and Dunstable. Due to the state's recalculation of the Chapter 70 formula, town and school officials projected a reduction of Chapter 70 funds, which would impact programs and services provided by the district. Declining state and local revenues challenged the school district and town officials to maintain the high performance status of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District.

The district requested an override for the 2007-2008 budget because of insufficient Chapter 70 aid from the state. The operational override failed in May 2007 when voters in both Groton and Dunstable voted by a 2-to-1 margin against it. Among the reasons cited for the failure of the override were numerous changes in the amount requested, lack of clarity about whether reductions in staff meant personnel cuts or reduction/reassignment of responsibilities, the perception of community members that district salaries were too high, and concern about the departure of several veteran administrators. In addition, prior to the vote the school committee approved an early extension of the superintendent's contract with a 14-percent salary increase to take effect July 2009, which added to the opposition to the override request, although the superintendent would not have had a salary increase from July 2005 to July 2009.

Facilities and Safety

The district's facilities were clean, well lit, and well maintained by custodians and maintenance workers supervised by a director of buildings and grounds. The district had a written school preventive maintenance schedule and contracted outside vendors each year for preventive maintenance. During the period under review, the district undertook extensive maintenance and renovation projects to address the air quality issue at the Prescott Elementary School.

The schools in the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District were not secure. The district security protocol for its schools included the locking of all doors except front doors. All schools had signs on the front doors instructing visitors to log in with the main office and identify the reason for their visits. Visitors were expected to wear identification badges, but with the exception of one school, staff members were not required to wear badges.

The district funded a pilot project to install a security system at the Boutwell Early Childhood Center, where all doors were locked and a security system was in place. At the Florence Roche Elementary School, the principal implemented increased safety measures, including locking all doors except the front door, and implemented a new parent pick up sign out procedure. At the two middle schools, students traveled between buildings daily, and according to school personnel the front doors needed to remain unlocked. During the period under review, the district installed security cameras both inside and outside the high school.

The director of buildings and grounds developed a long-term capital plan yearly for each building in the district. A facilities task force, acting in an advisory capacity, reviewed enrollment projections, determined facility capacity, and identified available space.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

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

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. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency 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 required state assessments?

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 site 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 program 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 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

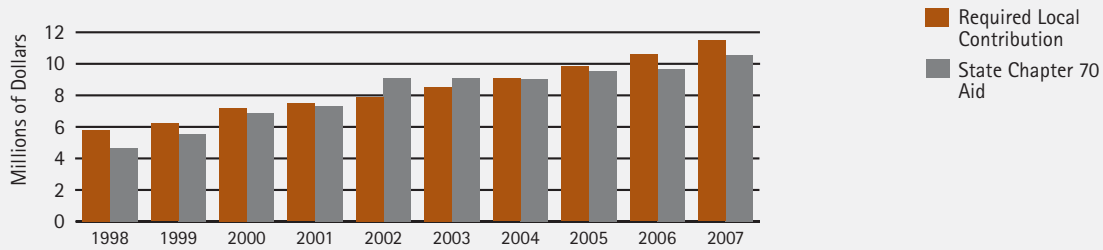
ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis	FTE: Full-Time Equivalent	MQI: Management Quality Index – an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district’s management system
ADA: Average Daily Attendance	FY: Fiscal Year	MUNIS: Municipal Information System
ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment	Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency	NAEYC: 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: A 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	MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official	SPED: Special Education
ELA: English Language Arts	MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral	STE: Science and 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, 1998-2007

A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Groton-Dunstable's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute.

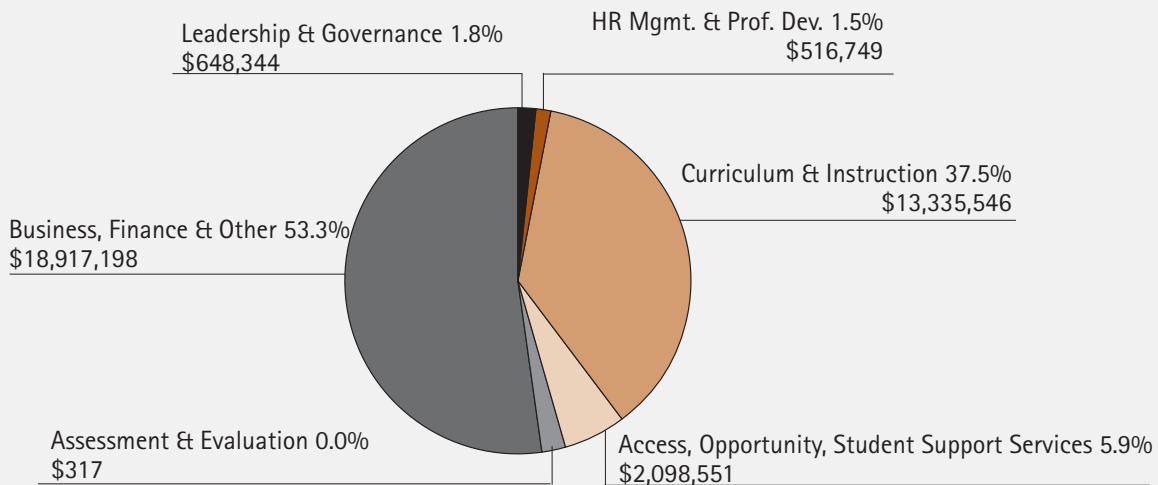
In FY 2007, Groton-Dunstable's per pupil expenditure (preliminary), based on appropriations from all funds, was \$10,284, compared to \$11,789 statewide, ranking it 200 out of the 302 of 328 school districts reporting data. The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2005 to FY 2007, net school spending increased from \$23,387,749 to \$26,126,887; Chapter 70 aid increased from \$9,547,245 to \$10,590,960; the required local contribution increased from \$9,817,152 to \$11,478,206; and the foundation enrollment increased from 2,858 to 2,909. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending remained at 41 percent. From FY 2005 to FY 2006, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 61 to 60 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT ALLOCATED?

FY06 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)





EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
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