

*How Is Your  
School District  
Performing?*



*A closer look at  
Acushnet Public  
Schools*

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 Acushnet Public Schools, Coral M Grout; the school department staff; and the town officials of Acushnet.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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

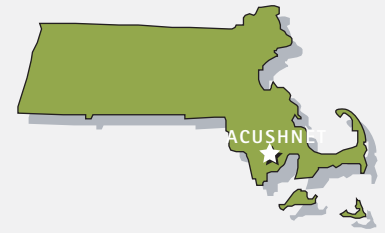
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected district's performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools,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

In October 2005, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Acushnet Public Schools 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 Acushnet 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 Acushnet Public Schools; 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

Acushnet, MA



## DISTRICT

*Population:* 10,161

*Median family income:* \$58,722

*Largest sources of employment:*

Educational, health, and social services and manufacturing

*Local government:* Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting

## SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

*School committee:* 5 members

*Number of schools:* 2 (preK–8)

*Student enrollment:*

Total: 1,089

White: 98.6 percent

Hispanic: 0.1 percent

African-American: 0.8 percent

Asian-American: 0.0 percent

Native American: 0.3 percent

Limited English Proficiency:

0.0 percent

Low income: 11.4 percent

Special education: 17.8 percent

*Sources:* 2000 U.S. Census and

Massachusetts Department of Education.

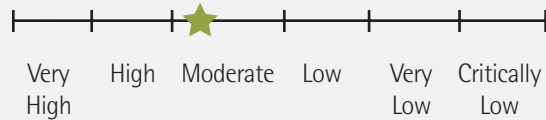
## EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council accepted its findings at its meeting on April 14, 2006.

## MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2005

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	78.5	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	86	83
Math Proficiency Index	71	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?

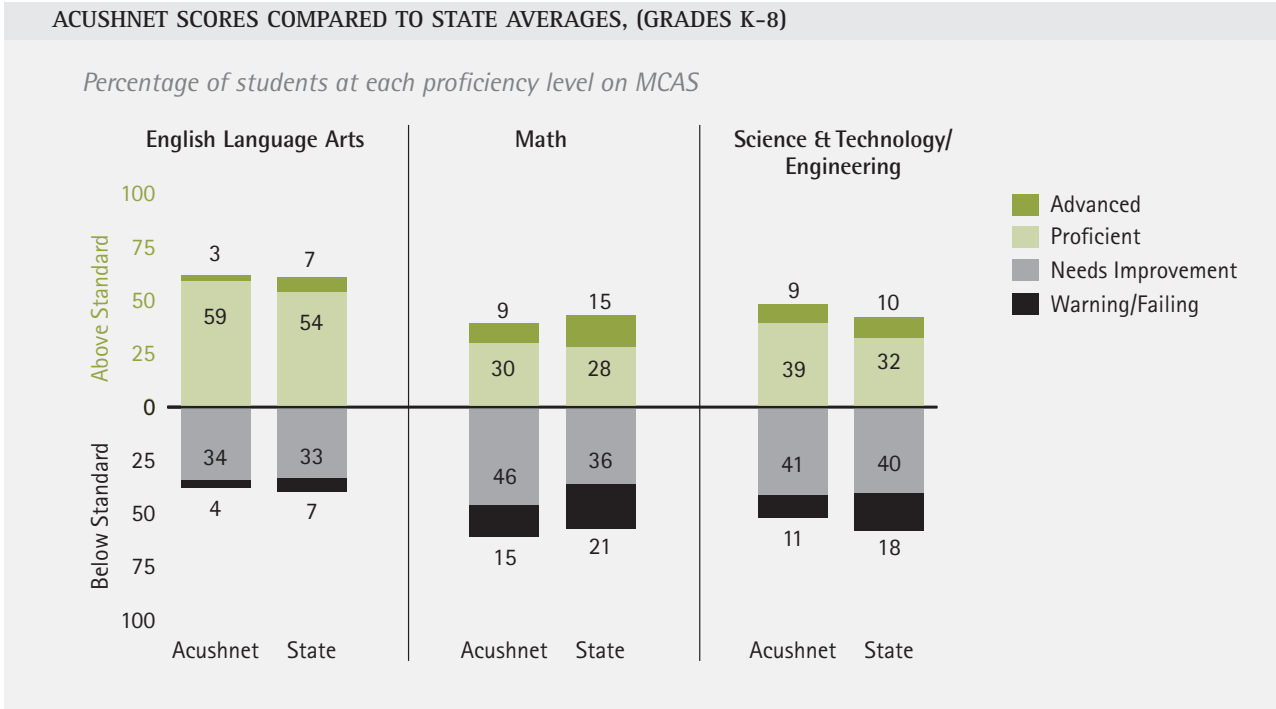
### Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

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 Acushnet.
- In Acushnet, the 99 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS ELA test was 4 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Acushnet, the 98 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS math test was 3 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.
- In Acushnet, the 98 percent student participation rate on the 2005 MCAS STE test was 3 percentage points higher than the state's 95 percent requirement.

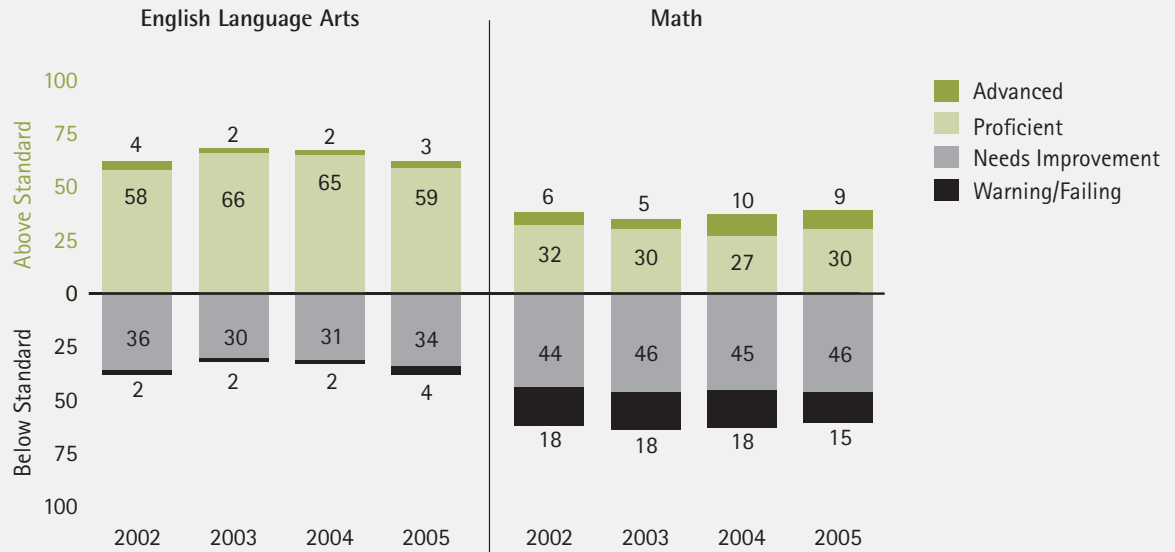


**2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?**

- Approximately half of all students in Acushnet attained proficiency on the 2004 and 2005 MCAS tests.
- Approximately two thirds of all students in Acushnet attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) tests, less than half attained proficiency on the math tests, and approximately half attained proficiency on the science and technology/engineering (STE) tests.
- Acushnet's proficiency gap in ELA was 14 PI points; in math, the proficiency gap was 29 PI points; and in STE, this gap was 23 PI points.
- The proficiency gaps in Grade 7 ELA and in Grade 5 STE were narrower than those statewide.

## ACUSHNET ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES, (GRADES K-8)

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



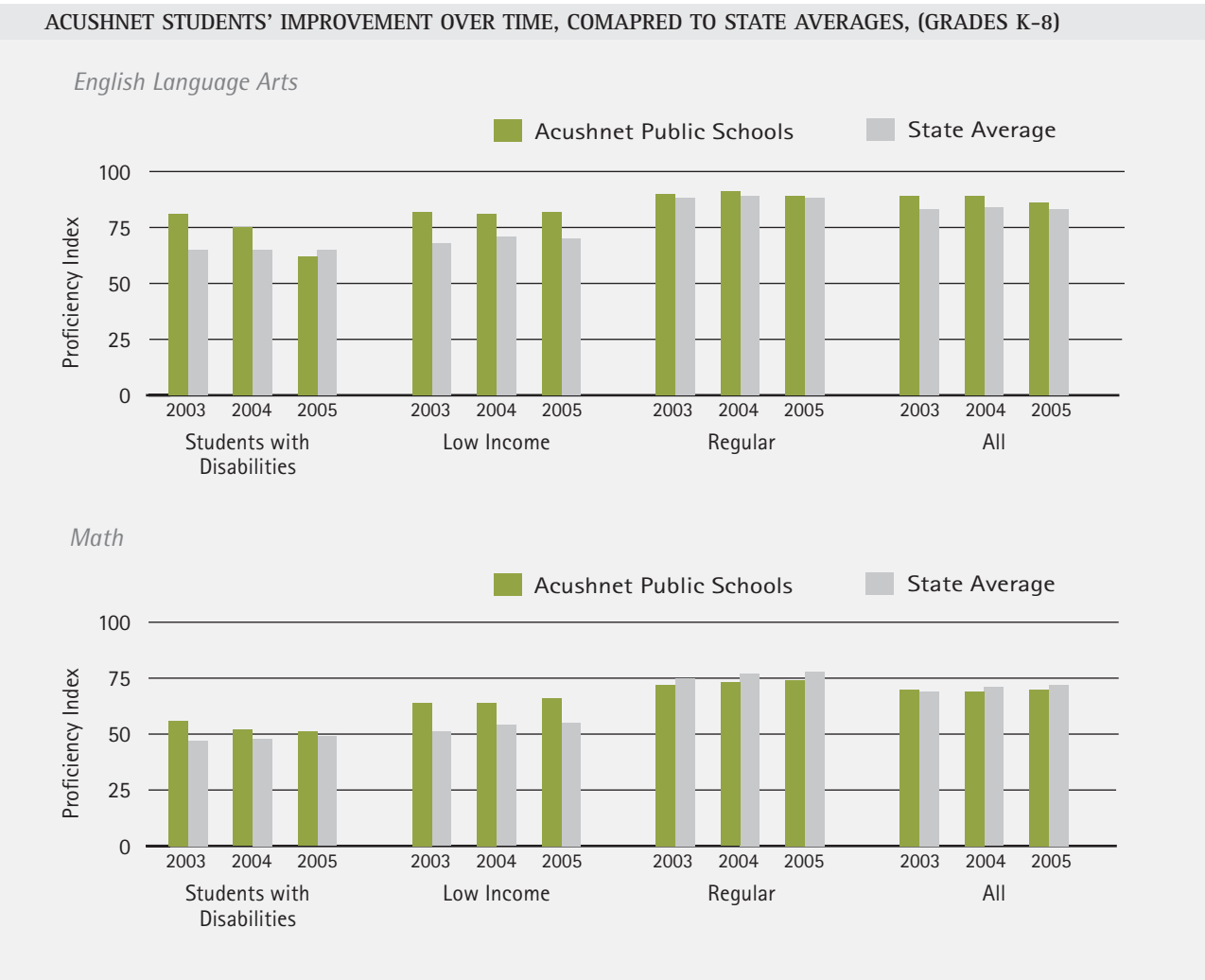
### 3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2002 and 2005:

- In ELA, the proficiency gap in Acushnet was 1 PI point wider in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of negative 14.2 percent.
- In math, the proficiency gap in Acushnet was 1 PI point narrower in 2005 than in 2002, for an improvement rate of 1.7 percent.
- The percentage of Acushnet students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing' category on the MCAS ELA tests was two percentage points higher in 2005 than in 2002.

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

- In 2005, Acushnet's performance gap in ELA was 32 PI points. In math, the performance gap was 28 points.
- For Acushnet's students with disabilities, the proficiency gaps in both ELA and in math were wider than those of all Acushnet students in 2005.
- Less than one third of students with disabilities in Acushnet attained proficiency on the 2005 MCAS tests, lower than that of regular education students in Acushnet.



- On the 2005 MCAS tests, 16 percent of the students with disabilities in Acushnet scored in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories, 40 percentage points lower than that of Acushnet's regular education students.

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

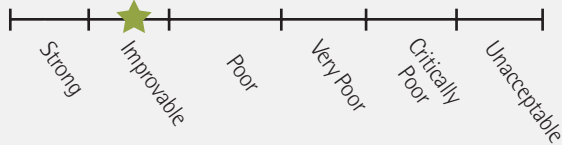
- For students with disabilities in Acushnet, the proficiency gap in ELA widened by 19 PI points between 2003 and 2005, for an improvement rate of negative 100.0 percent.
- For students not eligible for free or reduced cost lunch (FRL/N), the proficiency gap in ELA widened by 4 PI points between 2003 and 2005, for an improvement rate of negative 33.7 percent.

**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. Acushnet received the following rating:

**Performance Rating**



**WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?**

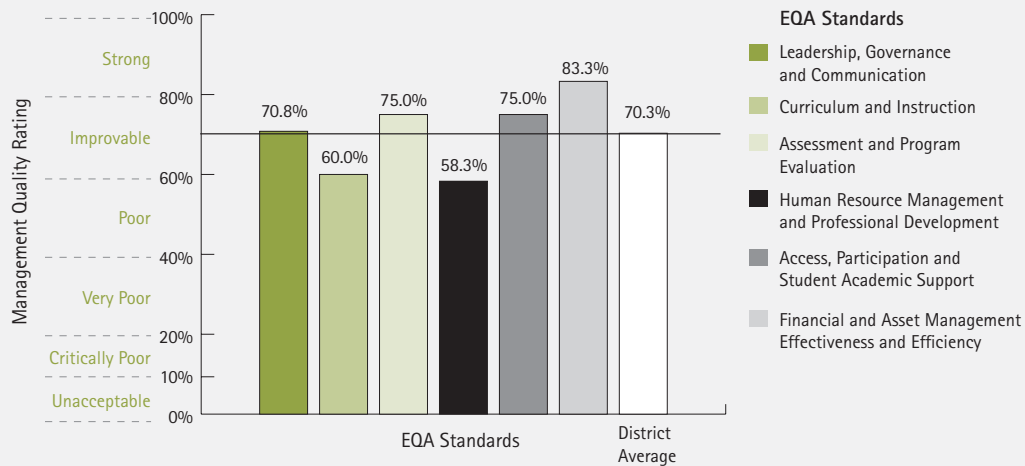
**Overall District Management**

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on MCAS, the EQA analyzes district performance on 64 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2005, Acushnet received an overall MQI score of Improvable (70.3 percent). The district performed best in the area of financial asset management, scoring at the Strong level. It was rated Poor in two areas, curriculum and instruction and human resource management. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on MCAS tests. However, it is not surprising that those scores have remained relatively steady and that the district has not made significant improvements in MCAS scores over the last three years. On the following pages, we take a closer look at district performance in each of the six areas.

**A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY**

*Acushnet, 2002–2005*



## Leadership, Governance and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. Acushnet's performance rating was 'Moderate,' with 'High' performance in ELA and 'Moderate' in Math on the MCAS tests. During the review period, the district improved only marginally in math, and did not improve in ELA.

The leadership of the Acushnet Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the five-member school committee.

### 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.

In 2004-05, Acushnet developed a standards-based District Improvement Plan (DIP) focused on the analysis of student achievement data and aligned with the elementary and secondary School Improvement Plans (SIPs).

### Governance

During the review period, Acushnet's two-school K-8 district saw many changes in school and district leadership and employed five elementary principals, three middle school principals, and two superintendents. The district and school leadership was not held accountable in performance evaluations for implementing provisions of Massachusetts Education Reform and improving student achievement.

In the final year under review, Acushnet employed established procedures and practices in the use of data to inform decisions and to determine the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.

School committee members acknowledged that the lack of funding of school personnel requests led to unmet needs in staffing and instructional materials, including textbooks. School committee members also acknowledged the need to align the district's curriculum guides further with the state curricu-

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- Standards-based district and school improvement plans, which focused on data analysis, were developed in year four of the review period.
- The district developed a standards-based District Improvement Plan (DIP) focused on the analysis of student achievement data and aligned with the elementary and secondary School Improvement Plans (SIPs).

### Areas for Improvement

- High turnover of principals in the district's two schools resulted in inconsistent school leadership during the review period.
- Budget requests were based primarily on the availability of town funds and not on data analysis of students' test scores and district educational needs.
- The school committee did not advocate soliciting community support for educationally sound budgets to meet school and district needs.

lum frameworks and the need for a K-8 curriculum coordinator, to improve the “flat-line” performance of district MCAS test results.

The district’s stakeholders discussed the limitations imposed by budget restrictions on curriculum coordination, class size, textbooks, instructional materials and supplies, and competitive salary schedules. The availability of funds also affected staff salaries, which were lower than those of neighboring school systems. The district attributed the high turnover of principals to the lower salary schedule. The district described the per pupil cost for students as the second lowest in Massachusetts. The availability of town funds, as opposed to the analysis of student achievement data, determined school budgets.

### Communication

Acushnet School Committee members acknowledged that they had not advocated at the open town meeting for unmet budget needs because the finance committee and the board of selectmen had already determined the funds available for the school budget. In addition, for the first three years of the review period, the foundation of the school committee’s policy-making and decision-making was not informed by student achievement and other educationally relevant data. However, the district expedited budget allocations for the resources needed to improve instruction based on data analysis, in the fourth year of the review period.

## Curriculum and Instruction

The Acushnet Public Schools faced a number of challenges in the areas of curriculum coordination and classroom expectations – essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

### Aligned Curricula and Effective Instruction

During the first three years of the review period, the district had variable and inconsistent curriculum leadership and coordination, and the district curricula, though aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, lacked the essential components of measurable outcomes, instructional strategies, resources, and assessments.

There was little to no articulation among and across the grade levels for the district's curricula. During the last year and a half of the period under review, new district leadership undertook and facilitated curriculum initiatives to develop curriculum maps, establish grade level benchmarks, and write new curriculum guides with objectives, resources, activities, teaching strategies, assessments, and time frames. However, the maps varied in quality and in the specificity of resources, strategies, and assessments of the learning standards and objectives.

Until the last year of the period under review, the district and its teachers did not use student achievement data to inform instructional practices or set educational improvement goals. The high leadership turnover reduced teacher accountability for implementing district curricula and increased inconsistency in instructional practices and expectations.

The district increased instructional time in math and ELA; however, the performance of special education students showed a downward trend in both ELA and math from 2003 to 2005. In addition, the district's proficiency index

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- New district leadership undertook and facilitated curriculum initiatives to develop curriculum maps, establish grade level benchmarks, and write comprehensive curriculum guides.
- The district increased instructional time in math and ELA

### Areas for Improvement

- The performance of special education students showed a downward trend in both ELA and math from 2003 to 2005 and trend data for all students was flat in ELA and math.
- In classroom observations, the EQA examiners rarely saw examples of high expectations set for the quality and quantity of student work, saw few models of quality student work, and rarely observed challenging academic tasks.

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trend data for all students for the four years under review was flat and showed no improvement in ELA, moving downward from 87 points in 2002 to 86 points in 2005 and upward slightly in math from 70 points in 2002 to 71 points in 2005.

Also, in classroom observations the EQA examiners noted fewer indicators in expectations than in climate and classroom management. The EQA examiners rarely saw examples of high expectations set for the quality and quantity of student work, saw few models of quality student work, and rarely observed challenging academic tasks in the classrooms 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

In the first years of the review period, the district had looked at student results, but informally. During the 2002-2004 period, the district was involved in the building construction program and student data had not been the most important issue driving the schools.

The staff said that they felt that the community was pleased with the district's MCAS test results, and the district's MCAS test participation rate exceeded 98 percent. Student achievement data had not been systemically analyzed until the 2004-2005 school year when the superintendent prepared and presented a lengthy report about district MCAS test results to the school committee in the fall of 2004.

The district did not have formal practices in place for the evaluation of programs, but interviewees said that student assessment data were used in an informal way to measure the effectiveness of programs.

Generally staffing changes were not initiated as a result of student assessment data. The district and its schools did not regularly engage in internal and external audits. District and school staff emphasized that the goals in the DIP and SIPs had become much more focused as a result of the district's attention to data analysis starting in 2004-2005.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- The superintendent prepared and presented a lengthy report for the school committee focusing on MCAS test data in the fall of 2004.
- The district's MCAS participation rate exceeded 98 percent, above the state's requirement of 95 percent participation.
- Interviewees said that student assessment data was used in an informal way to measure the effectiveness of programs.

### Areas for Improvement

- MCAS test data in the district was not formally analyzed until the 2004-2005 school year.
- The district did not have benchmarks and other assessments in place during the period under review.
- Interviewees said that, generally, staff changes were not initiated as a result of student assessment data.

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The district had no benchmarks and few other assessments in place during the time under review. During the 2004-05 school year, ELA and math benchmarks were developed and were implemented during the 2005-2006 school year.

However, benchmarks for ELA and math were not aligned from grade to grade and were not complete. The superintendent said that benchmarks were an “area of concern” and were being reworked. The district had also worked on curriculum mapping starting in the spring 2004. While the maps were in teachers’ rooms and being at least partially implemented, the process had been “nailed down” during the 2004-2005 school year.

## 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

Acushnet had a 40 percent turnover of professional staff during the period under review and had eight different principals in the district's two schools during the review period, five elementary principals and three middle school principals. The high rate of administrative turnover resulted in a disconnected pattern of the hiring process for professional staff and inconsistent supervision of instruction.

### Professional Development

The district had policies which promoted professional growth and for retaining effective staff. However, professional development in the district was not directed by evaluations and was largely self-selected by teachers who were focused on re-licensure and not on improving instruction.

Three full and several release time days were provided for professional development, and the district provided \$600.00 per teacher per year for tuition reimbursement. The lack of direction in professional development offerings led to inconsistent instructional patterns and varied approaches to curriculum introduction and application in the district.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- Interviews with principals and the superintendent revealed that hiring practices were consistent with education reform requirements.

### Areas for Improvement

- There was a 40 percent turnover of professional staff during the period under review.
- Heavy turnover of principals resulted in inconsistent management of performance evaluations and supervision of instruction.
- The district's performance appraisal system did not meet the CMR.35.00 time requirements for the evaluation of administrators and non-professional status teachers annually and of professional status teachers every other year.

## Evaluation

Heavy turnover of principals in the district resulted in uneven quality in performance evaluations and reduced the district's ability to identify effective professional staff. Observations of professional status teachers were required every fourth year rather than every other year as required by law. Only a third of the teacher evaluations were instructive and provided guidance to improve instruction.

The performance management system showed that all teachers scored 'Satisfactory' in their professional roles; however, the district did not have clear performance standards set for rating teachers. During the review period, the district had only informal measures to assess the effectiveness of their staff, and eight different principals had used these measures. No performance evaluation document reviewed by examiners included recommendations for professional development workshops or courses.

## 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.

In the final year under review, Acushnet began to make use of MCAS test data to adjust instruction and to identify students performing below expectations. Prior to 2004, the district did not systematically use aggregate and disaggregated MCAS test data to adjust instruction. Although MCAS and other testing data were disaggregated and disseminated, it did not result in changes in curriculum or instructional programs for at-risk or other students. Other formal assessments were used inconsistently.

During the period under review the district's formal procedures to identify and remediate students with poor MCAS test scores were ineffective; aggregate MCAS test scores did not improve and special education scores declined. Other than MCAS test data, the district had not made significant use of formal assessments during the period under review to identify students not meeting expectations.

### Support Services

Several supplementary and remedial programs were provided to help students not meeting expectations. Teachers at all grade levels required children not meeting expectations to attend tutoring before or after school. The selection of students for these programs was generally based on teachers' assessments and occasionally on formal testing. Principals and town officials reported that regular education paraprofessionals provided important instructional support in the classroom to help students working below expectations prior to 2003; however, in that year 18 paraprofessionals had been laid off because of budget constraints.

In spite of Reading Recovery in Grade 1, Title I in grades K-2, and Kindergarten screening, MCAS test scores for grades 3 and 4 did not improve for the review period. In 2005, 35 percent of Grade 3 students did not achieve

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



#### Areas of Strength

- In 2004 the district began to make use of MCAS test data, both aggregate and disaggregated, to adjust instruction and to identify students working below expectations.
- Attendance and discipline policies were effective in keeping absence and suspension rates below the state average. No exclusions or dropouts were reported.

#### Areas for Improvement

- The district's formal procedures to identify and remediate students with poor MCAS test scores were ineffective, as indicated by a lack of improvement in MCAS test scores and declining special education scores.

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scores in the 'Proficient' category in ELA and 71 percent of Grade 4 students did not achieve scores in the 'Proficient' category in math.

### **Discipline and Retention**

During the period under review both schools had a student/parent handbook which clearly explained policies for discipline, suspension, exclusion, and retention. Statistics for retentions and suspensions had been consistently below the state average, and no exclusions were reported.

Also, during the period under review anti-bullying and drug/alcohol programs were instituted in both schools, and the district reported a reduction in those problems. The elementary school tried to avoid retention whenever possible; last year, for example, only two students were retained, both of whom received a failing grade on the Grade 3 MCAS.

## Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The Acushnet Public Schools filed accurate financial reports, and its audits contained no specific school-related issues. However, the district did not begin basing budget decisions on student needs until late in the review period. Also, the town limited the public's input into the school district budget development process, resulting in reductions in personnel and supplies early in the review period. Overall, the district's facilities were well-maintained, despite the lack of long-term capital planning.

### Budget Process and Financial Support

For the period under review, the budget development process was an open practice within the Acushnet school district. Final decisions on the budget were made at joint meetings of the school committee and town finance committee; however, the town had limited public discussion of the school budget at annual town meetings.

Student achievement data and needs were not the primary focus on budget decisions in the budget development process for the first three years under review. Overall, for the entire review period, budget decisions were made based on town directives about the amount of money the town was willing to commit to the school district.

The fiscal year 2003 budget was a level service budget that preserved programming and current services, but reduced spending on supplies and materials. The fiscal year 2004 budget was a reduced service budget in which the school committee eliminated all regular education paraprofessionals. Fiscal year 2005 was the first year that student achievement data were used in the budget development. The budget funded increased time in Grade 8 math by adding a new math teacher at the middle school and the district funded a new Grade 1 teacher to maintain class sizes. The school district had antiquated textbooks that would be replaced in fiscal year 2006.

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

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



### Areas of Strength

- In 2005, the new administration began to use student data in its budget development decisions.
- The budget development process was open within the school district and final decisions on the budget were made at joint meetings of the school committee and town finance committee.
- Reports were accurate and audits were clean, and contained no specific school-related findings in the management letters or issues of non-compliance for the End of Year review.

### Areas for Improvement

- Overall, budget decisions were based on the amount of money the town would commit to the school district, rather than on student needs.

Based on DOE data, the Acushnet Public Schools exceeded the Net School Spending requirement in fiscal year 2002. In fiscal year 2003, the school district reported \$38,409 less than the Net School Spending requirement and in fiscal year 2004, \$148,698 less than the Net School Spending requirement. According to district administration, the reporting of allowable prepayment of special education tuitions for the subsequent fiscal years was the reason for the reported amount of funds less than Net School Spending. In fiscal year 2005, the district's budgeted spending exceeded the Net School Spending requirement by \$205, 698.

Town philosophy about the completion of annual audits resulted in delayed reporting to the state, however reports were accurate, and audits were clean with no specific school related findings in the management letters and no issues of non-compliance for the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report review.

### Facilities

The district lacked a long-term capital plan for the schools. Despite this, the EQA team found that the buildings were clean, safe, well lit, well maintained and conducive to promoting student learning and achievement.

## CONCLUSION

The EQA examination found the Acushnet Public Schools, a two-school K-8 district, to be 'Moderate' performing, marked by student achievement that is 'High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math on the MCAS tests. During the review period, district students' MCAS test results remained flat in both ELA and math. Approximately half of all Acushnet students scored above standard on the 2005 administration of the MCAS test, though less than one-third of students with disabilities attained proficiency.

In terms of management quality, the district performed best in the area of Financial Asset Management, and worst in the areas of Curriculum and Instruction, and Human Resources and Professional Development. During the review period, Acushnet saw 40% turnover in school and district leadership, employing five elementary principals, three middle school principals, and two superintendents. The high leadership turnover reduced teacher accountability for implementing district curricula and increased inconsistency in instructional practices and expectations. The lack of direction in professional development offerings led to inconsistent instructional patterns and varied approaches to curriculum introduction and application in the district. In classroom observations, the EQA examiners rarely saw examples of high expectations set for the quality and quantity of student work, saw few models of quality student work, and rarely observed challenging academic tasks. The district increased instructional time in math and ELA; still, the performance of special education students showed a downward trend in both ELA and math from 2003 to 2005.

However, in the final year and a half of the review period, new district leadership undertook and facilitated curriculum initiatives to develop curriculum maps, establish grade level benchmarks, and write new curriculum guides with objectives, resources, activities, teaching strategies, assessments, and time frames. District and school staff emphasized that the goals in the DIP and SIPs had become much more focused as a result of the district's attention to data analysis starting in 2004-05. The superintendent prepared and presented a lengthy report about district MCAS test results to the school committee in the fall of 2004.

School committee members acknowledged that the lack of funding of school personnel requests, including the lay-off of 18 paraprofessionals in one year, led to unmet needs in staffing and instructional materials. School committee members also acknowledged the need to align the district's curriculum guides further with the state curriculum frameworks and the need for a K-8 curriculum coordinator, to improve the "flat-line" performance of district MCAS test results. Interviewees indicated that the availability of town funds, as opposed to the analysis of student achievement data, had determined school budgets. However, in the final year of the review period, the district expedited budget allocations for the resources needed to improve instruction based on data analysis.

## 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*

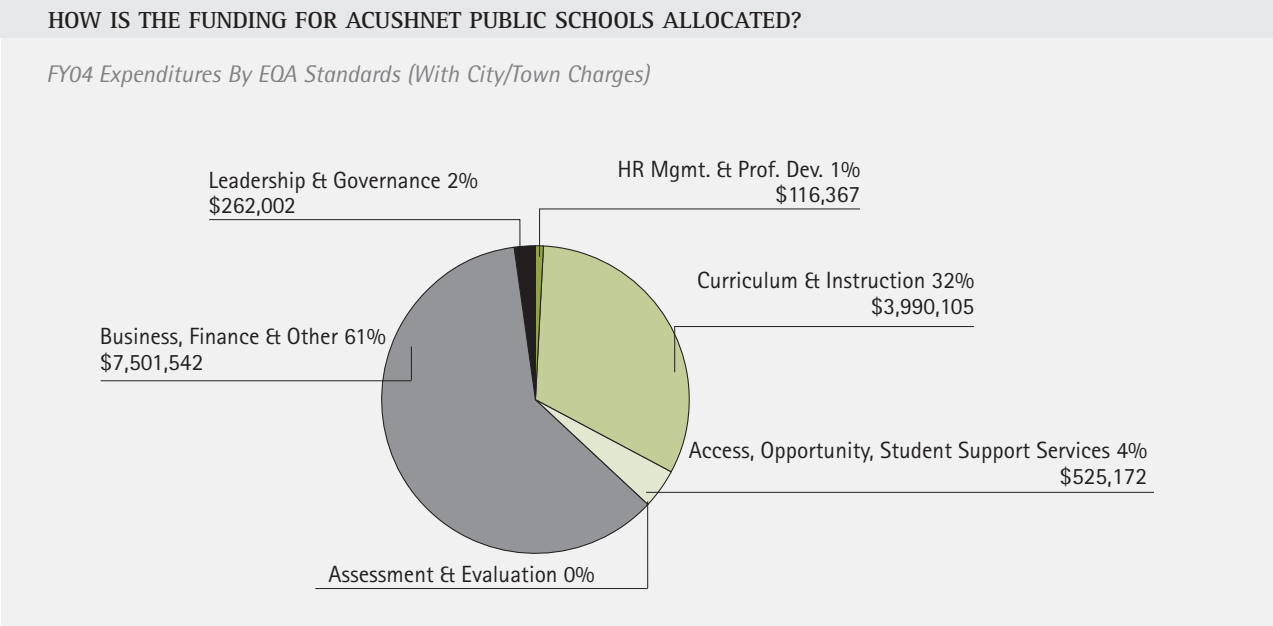
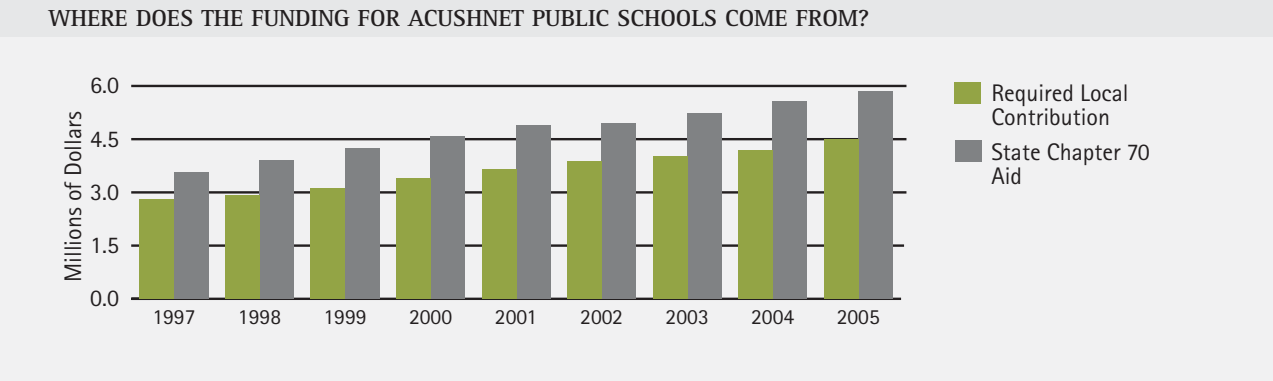
While the Tier II review looks at how district policies are implemented at the building level, the Tier III review goes a level deeper and looks at what is happening in the classroom and how that affects school performance.

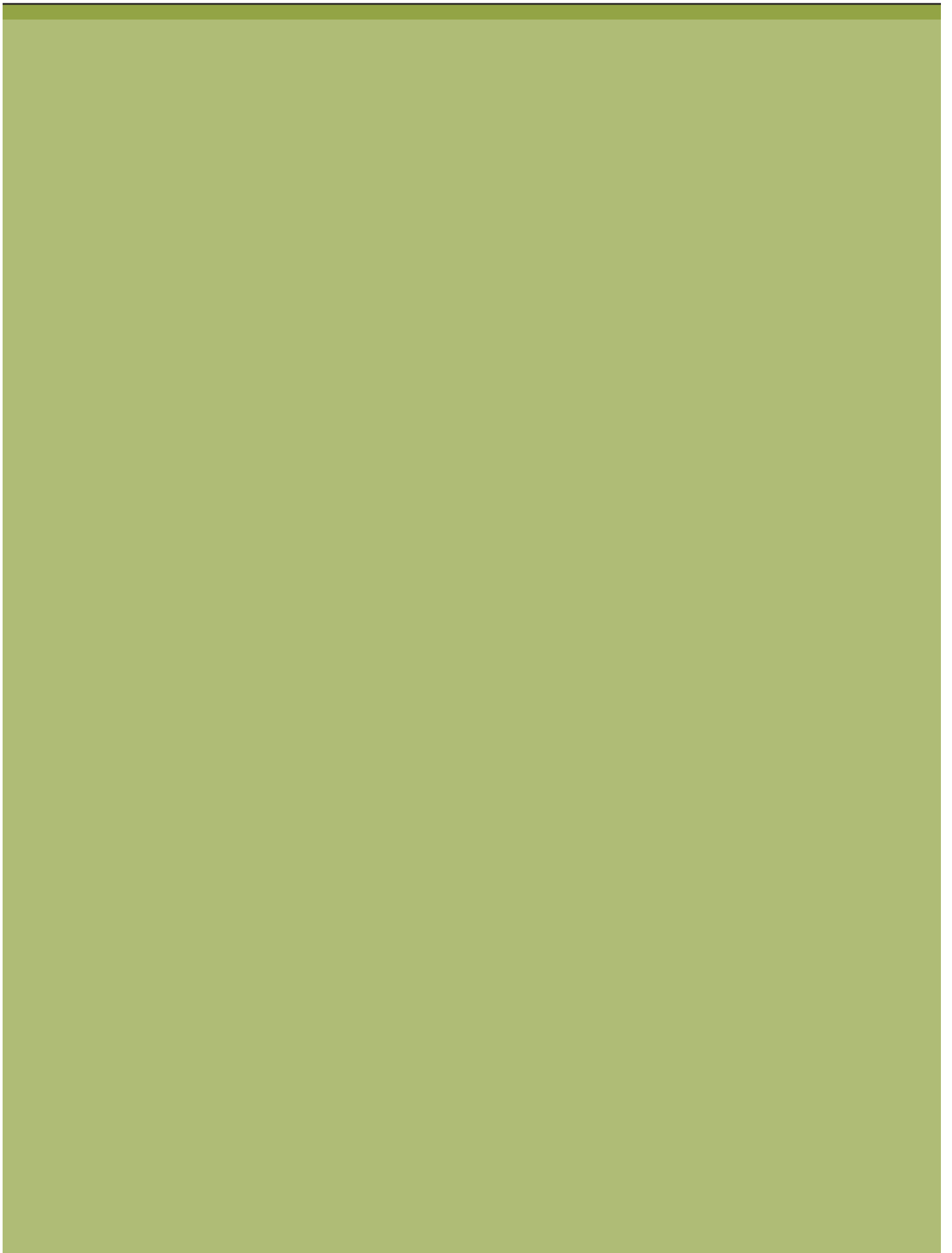
## APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN EQA TECHNICAL REPORTS

<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. The following chart shows the amount of Acushnet Public Schools' funding derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. For the nine-year period, FY97 to FY05, Acushnet met the state-mandated Net School Spending Requirement. For the period between FY97 and FY05, Chapter 70 Aid to Acushnet increased 63.8 percent, and its Required Local Contribution increased 59.9 percent. Since FY97, Acushnet received a total of \$42,796,688 in Chapter 70 Aid and was required to raise locally \$32,460,956.





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