



**CTDOE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

## **New London Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**New London District**

**134 Williams Street  
New London  
Connecticut  
06320**

**Superintendent: Christopher Clouet  
Dates of review: November 13 – 16, 2007  
Reviewer: Michael Sutton**

**Cambridge Education (LLC)**



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## Part 1: The District Context

### Information about the district

New London Public Schools serves the city of New London in southeastern Connecticut. The district is small and has sole responsibility for seven schools. Four are elementary schools at Nathan Hale, Winthrop, Jennings and Harbor; Bennie Dover Jackson is the one middle school and there are two high schools, New London High and the Science and Technology Magnet School.

The district shares responsibility for two other schools. It runs the new dual language Arts Academy Middle School and The Friendship School in conjunction with Waterford District. For the Friendship School, Southeastern Connecticut's Regional Educational Service Center (LEARN), is its lead educational and fiscal agency. The district also provides the New London Clinical Day Program, which educates students who have particular health needs, from kindergarten through grade 12.

There are approximately 3,000 students enrolled at public schools in the district, representing 86 percent of the student population in New London. There has been a small decrease in this number during the past five years. Around half are in elementary schools and the rest enrolled broadly equal between the middle and high school grades. Some 250 New London students, aged three to five, are enrolled in the Friendship School alongside a similar number from Waterford District. The dual language Arts Academy is in its first year of opening and has one grade with equal, small numbers of students from New London and Waterford.

Around 46 percent of the students in New London district schools are Hispanic, 33 percent Black, 17 percent White, 2 percent Asian American and 2 percent American Indian. Twenty-five different languages are spoken, representing 40 different countries. The main language, other than English, is Spanish, although a significant minority speaks French Creole. There is considerable transience within the district and around 21 percent of students change school or move in or out of the district each year. This is twice as high as for the state and similar to the average for similar districts. The level of student entitlement to free or reduced cost meals is currently at around 66 percent, which is more than twice the state average.

Three hundred and ninety-one students are enrolled in special education programs across the district. This represents about 13 percent of the student population.

Class sizes are slightly larger, on average, than for similar districts or for the state overall. The experience of staff in New London schools, as indicated by their years of service, is higher than the state and comparable districts (the District Reference Group or DRG). The proportion of teachers with a post-graduate degree is slightly lower than the state and comparable districts.

The total financial expenditure per student is slightly lower than similar districts but above the average for the state. Twenty-one percent of the district's budget comes from local revenue, 72 percent from the state and 6 percent from federal funds. A very small amount comes from other sources.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the district does well

- The district is very well led and managed by the superintendent. He is very well supported by his assistant and a dedicated team of professionals at the district office.
- The district has developed a very clear strategic plan for future development. The leadership is innovative, imaginative and not afraid to take well-calculated risks to bring about the improvements urgently needed to increase students' achievements.
- The district is very well supported by a strong system of governance. The board of education works well with the district and keeps a close oversight on financial and educational developments.
- There are very robust systems to ensure that fiscal operations are clear, transparent and secure. The district uses its finances with utmost care to ensure that the state, city and schools get the best value from the budget.
- The district works very well with official and voluntary external agencies to promote the well-being and all-round development of young people in the city.
- Operational systems are good. The Child Nutrition Program, in particular, provides a good, wide-ranging service at no cost to the city taxpayers.

### What the district needs to improve

- Students' achievement has to rise faster and the district needs to continue its focus on accelerating progress in English language arts, mathematics and science through:
  - further precisely-targeted professional development for key leaders in schools;
  - continued development of the curriculum and related assessments;
  - further improvements to ensure strategic use of data by teachers; and
  - increased sharing of effective practice and particularly on using data to improve learning for students.
- The district needs to guard against initiative overload on teachers and other staff by:
  - reviewing and prioritizing the strategic timing of current initiatives;
  - ensuring sufficient time for new practices and for new requirements to become well-established in school routines;
  - ensuring teachers all receive sufficient professional development in strategies aimed at improving instruction;
  - setting out and publicizing clear timelines for future planned projects to ensure that everyone understands when key events are likely to have impact at school level and what that impact will mean for individual schools; and
  - expanding the pool of highly qualified teachers and substitutes teachers.
- Put in place at the planning stage for each new project or initiative, clear mechanisms and procedures for the regular and ongoing evaluation of the effect on students' achievements and progress. This action needs to be retrospective for those projects started recently.

- Improve further, the monitoring of school leadership and the quality of work in the classroom by:
  - focusing more on the quality of students' learning during visits by district staff to schools;
  - conducting regular paired walkthroughs with all principals;
  - providing more comprehensive feedback to teachers about their strengths and areas for development; and
  - seeking out further opportunities for professional development for all key school leaders to bring about improvements in students' learning.
  
- Further increase stakeholders' understanding and involvement in educational matters by:
  - more regular, systematic and formal consultations through survey and focus groups at city and school level;
  - prompt dissemination of the findings of surveys, together with proposed actions;
  - setting out clearly for the whole community, the planned educational developments and changes planned for the next few years; and
  - ensuring everyone in the community is aware of the range, status, leadership and governance arrangements, purposes and characteristics of the different types of public schools serving the district.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation: The district's overall performance

New London School District is in year four of needing improvement as defined under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation. Overall, it has failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) during this period. Within this broad picture, there is considerable variation, for example, the White group of students make AYP, but Black and Hispanic groups are significantly below this level of achievement. There has been little progress in recent years. Where there has been positive movement, it has not been sufficient to close the achievement gap with state or similar districts in a sustained fashion.

The arrival of the current superintendent four years ago saw a reappraisal of the situation and fresh consideration of the strategies for improvement. It was unlikely that the existing measures, alone, would bring about sufficient improvement. Schools needed an injection of funding at a level that the city council would be unlikely to afford. Decisions were taken to reorganize the schools using state and federal funding to create a number of 'magnet' schools. The district also entered into innovative initiatives with adjacent Waterford School District, to provide enhanced pre-school educational facilities for students, aged three to five and a bilingual school for older students. Further development and realignment of schools are on going to increase the number of magnet schools, to offer parents more options and to encourage a wider range of students into the New London public school system.

The initiatives have all received very thorough project planning with careful attention to financial and regulatory matters. However, planning has been given insufficient attention to evaluating the impact of the developments on students' progress, achievement and personal development. This is true, also, of other initiatives such as the introduction of uniforms in some schools and the pilot study of single gender classes at the middle school.

While the initiatives have taken time to plan and establish, the approach has been well thought through and affords the sort of reinvigoration that is needed to the district's education system. Improved liaison with the city council and a supportive and very well informed board of education (the board) has further laid the foundations for success. The next few years should see a transformation of the quality of educational buildings in New London at minimal cost to its taxpayers.

A collegial and hard-working team at the district office supports the superintendent well. Its relatively small size promotes good communications, but means that most people cover several roles. They do this well, but inevitably there are gaps that need to be plugged, particularly at curriculum level, in the middle and high schools. English is covered well with coaches in all elementary schools. Mathematics and science have much less support and some other subjects almost none. The district makes good use of the expertise available from within its schools, but this places substantial demands on teachers who already have full workloads. The district looks outside its own boundaries for specialist help and needs to continue to explore such support to afford its schools the broad range of advice necessary for continued development and to build capacity.

The curricula for literacy and science are clear and designed well. Teachers are starting to make good use of the new assessments and increasingly use data to evaluate their effectiveness and plan improvements. Much of this work is at an early stage and needs further development and time to create a sustained improvement in students' achievement. Currently, data tends to be better used for grouping students than for improving their learning.

There are clear lines of accountability. The board works well with the district, but still holds it accountable through regular scrutiny of plans and through active dialogue with key people. The district leaders also hold principals accountable, although more rigor is needed in this and in the evaluative support for teachers by their principals.

The district fulfills its responsibilities for financial integrity and accountability to taxpayers extremely well. It constructs its budget very carefully and is proactive in seeking external sources of funds. The Child Nutrition Program, through entrepreneurial activity and vigorous pursuit of grants, provides universal free breakfasts and lunches to students at zero cost to the New London city council. The district constantly seeks to be efficient in its operation and to obtain best value in its spending. It serves the city very well in this respect.

The district has a sufficiently responsive human resources department. Key policies and agreements are in place and the district works productively with the unions. More work is needed to raise the profile of the district in order to continue to attract teachers and particularly more good quality substitute teachers into the area.

Operational systems are secure. Buildings are well maintained and security is good. Information technology systems are robust and work well. As new systems are implemented and become functional, input from the district office needs to reduce proportionately as schools increasingly manage matters such as data collection and purchasing.

Communications are generally fair, but several areas merit further attention. The district has not put out sufficient information to the public about the range of schools it has and the differing arrangements for admission and governance. There are currently three different systems of governance and admission, depending on the status of the school. Some staff and parents are unclear about this. The role of leaders across the high school and science magnet school is quite unclear to parents and staff.

Some teachers are in danger of feeling overwhelmed by the perceived demands that new initiatives make. The district needs to review timelines, priorities and impact as well as disseminate this information more widely. More could be done to gather systematically the views of students, teachers and the public about the evolution of education in New London. Some good initial work with students about their own schools has provided valuable information but more regular and wider-ranging survey work is needed.

The district is extremely effective in garnering external funding and support. It is alert to opportunities provided by state and federal funding streams, securing funds from 62 different grants. It works extremely well with official and voluntary organizations. There is good liaison with health, police, social services and youth groups as well as with churches and philanthropic organizations. There are productive links with local employers and with institutes of higher education (IHEs).

## **Domain 1: Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment**

**This area of the district's work is at basic level and needs improvement.**

### **Attainment**

The students' achievement is low. The district has failed to make AYP in recent years across most measures. Only students' writing and high school graduation rates are consistently meeting its overall academic AYP indicators.

The proportions of students reaching the proficiency level and the state goal level, as shown by Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT), are substantially lower than for the state in grades 3 to 8 in reading, writing and mathematics. Although students make progress, it needs to be faster as the gap between the state and district averages is growing slowly each year. This gap tends to grow also for individual cohorts as they move through the system. At grade 10, the Connecticut Academic Performance Tests (CAPT) shows a similar pattern. Overall, the proportion of New London students reaching proficiency in reading in these tests is around 46 percent. It is slightly better in mathematics at about 55 percent. However, too many students leave school without sufficient basic skills.

Within this rather bleak picture, there is considerable variation and some schools do better than others in some content areas, but none are making AYP targets in all required areas. The district's results as a whole and those for most schools show a large variance in the performance of subgroups. The small White student population does well and broadly matches state figures for the proportion reaching proficiency in most grades and content areas. The Black, Hispanic and students with special education needs groups do not do as well, although in mathematics and science at grade 10, the Black group is much closer to the state average.

The proportion of English language learners (ELLs) reaching proficiency is low, but for the higher level of goal, the proportions are much closer to those of the state, suggesting that those students who make proficiency then make good growth. There is also good evidence to suggest that these students do well in acquiring spoken language skills. Female students do not do as well as males and the data suggests that this gender gap appears to widen with student age. The test data also suggests that individual cohorts make less progress as they move through the school system, but the high incidence of student movement in and out of the district complicates this analysis.

It was clear to the current district leadership that the district was struggling to deliver an adequate education for a raft of reasons. It went about improvement through radical thinking and a range of different initiatives. For example, new school structures were considered carefully and put in place. The partnership with Waterford has led to almost all pre-kindergarten students receiving full-time education at the Friendship School, many for up to three years before joining 1st grade in their district schools.

The new science and technology magnet school affords a different approach to the curriculum, but as the only operational magnet school currently in the district, its overall impact is yet to be seen. The 'Academia' for ELLs is another example of innovative cooperation with Waterford. The plan to enlarge this from the present single grade to three grades is bold, but the districts need to give close attention to implicit staffing issues for this and for their other district schools. They need to ensure that language expertise is not concentrated in one school at the expense of others that may need it.

The district has put in place other initiatives at individual school level, such as the new uniform policy at the middle and all elementary schools, and the pilot single gender classroom at the middle school. However, there was not sufficient planning as to how these initiatives would be evaluated to measure their success. For example, the district did not seek the students' initial views about the uniform or single gender classes to establish a baseline from which to gauge improvement in personal development. Nor has it determined what measures it will use as the key indicators of academic success, or when these will be gathered, evaluated and reported back to schools.

## **Provision of Curriculum and Instruction**

The district has also put in place new measures at the school level, to supplement its more wide-ranging developments. It is overhauling the curriculum and a new core reading strategy has been agreed upon and implemented. There are literacy coaches in all elementary schools. There are still issues related to struggling and reluctant readers to be addressed, particularly in the middle and high school grades. The district has also put in place a science curriculum for pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Arrangements are in hand to further develop the mathematics curriculum, which is currently more clearly in place in the younger-age grades than in the high school. Where it has put in place new curricula, the district has aligned them well with the state standards. However, most other curricular areas remain in need of development and revision. This is exacerbated by lack of specialists at district level for all content areas, which particularly affects the Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the high school. The district engages external consultants and uses its internal expertise as best it can and this approach needs to continue and where funding permits, to increase.

## **Assessments Aligned with Curriculum and Instruction**

The district has improved technology for the collection, storage and analysis of data. It has introduced new formative assessments to help teachers and principals gauge students' progress through the year. These systems are new and many teachers are still coming to grips with how best to use them without feeling overwhelmed by the task. Administrators and grade or subject team leaders are at varying levels of expertise. In a minority of schools, assessment of student achievement and analysis of data is driving progress very strongly with clear evidence of accelerated improvements in students' reading. In most schools, data are used well to group students, but only in a minority of schools are data used to look critically at how they can improve the quality and success of students' learning. The very recent survey of students suggests that many do not know enough about what they need to improve most, or how to achieve it.

The district needs to build on its training for data teams and key leaders. It needs to increase the ways it shares examples of good practice, for example, through newsletters and improved use of teachers' space on the district website. It should also consult widely before introducing any further changes or developments in data matters. Teachers and administrators still need to secure fully their competence and confidence to manage existing systems and to use data to bring about improvements. The district wide data team (DELTA) has a key role to play in this.

The district sets itself overall improvement goals, which individual school's plans reflect. These are set at general levels across each content area and student subgroups and are not fully aligned with the individual differences between various grades at the end of each year.

## **Instructional Leadership and Capacity Building**

The district has a good understanding of where professional development is most needed. This is focused sharply on core skills and the use of data. Specific externally delivered courses enhance the professional development for teachers. The work of the superintendent and his assistant strongly adds to the development of new principals and those leading schools that are failing to make sufficient progress in reaching AYP. However, a significant proportion of school leaders are still in management mode and need to develop their strategic leadership roles more strongly.

The district leaders and their curriculum colleagues are frequent visitors to all schools and their profile is high. They operate an open door policy of communication, and in general, there is a good sharing of ideas and problems through verbal dialogue. Until recently, visits to classrooms were undocumented except for mandated observations. The system relied on verbal discussion and did not leave teachers with enough documented feedback on their strengths or how they might bring about further improvements. The new system is an improvement, but the agreed rubric still focuses largely on teacher inputs rather than students' learning. The forms in current use for teachers to record their learning from visits to each other's classrooms are not completed well. The district should closely review these to ensure that teachers have a much clearer and tighter focus for such visits and record more precisely what they have learned and how they will incorporate this into their work. This would also open the way for better links between the written feedback to teachers from walkthroughs and their opportunities to visit other classes and schools.

## **Domain 2: Leadership, Culture and Accountability**

**This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.**

### **Vision and action**

The district team has a very clear vision to bring about the urgently needed improvements. It has taken pragmatic steps to insure that important priorities are addressed in the short term as well as taking a

strategic approach to the district's longer term needs. They have focused on key priorities of reducing student suspension and expulsion rates and improving achievement in core content areas. The district has targeted resources well as, for example, with the introduction of Positive Behavior Strategies in the middle school.

The district has good systems for regular review of individual performance. It leads by example, with the superintendent and his assistant making regular visits to schools to check progress and review specific goals. The district does not establish procedures to review the results of initiatives against its overarching aim of raising achievement. The uniform policy, single-gender class pilots, the Bilingual Academia and the Friendship School are initiatives that have been rigorously planned in their inception and implementation, but have no clear criteria set out by which to determine the difference that they make to the outcomes for students.

The district has a clear, ethical approach to its work. It fully understands the range and depth of problems that beset sectors of its student population. It addresses the issues of racism in schools and the community through its 'courageous conversations' program. Overall, the district accepts that it can and must do better, but has a long way to go to raise achievement to the levels of which it knows its students to be capable. In particular, it needs to do more to close the achievement gap of Black and Hispanic students to that of their White peers.

## **Culture**

There is a strong, unified feel to the district team. All district staff see their work as bound up in one common purpose of improving students' achievement. Schools understand the district's mission and their role in achieving this. Individual school goals for raising achievement need to be tuned more finely to reflect performance to date. Improvement targets for a grade need to be based on the prior achievement of the incoming students to that grade and not on what the outgoing students achieved. The district's professional development, curriculum and assessment developments align with its development needs.

Collaborative planning is established well. Meetings are purposeful and businesslike; although team leaders need to keep more detailed minutes. From existing documentation, it is not always clear what has been agreed or decided upon and there are no actions listed by which to ensure that individuals know what to do and for which they can be held fully accountable.

## **Strategic and Action Planning**

This aspect of the district's work is very strong. It has engaged with a wide range of professional, statutory, philanthropic and voluntary organizations in its quest for improvement. It is open about its purpose and transparent about its dealings and particularly its financial arrangements with other organizations. It needs to do more to gather views systematically and particularly from those outside its immediate audience to ensure a wide-ranging public understanding of the issues and the ways forward. For example, there is little available to the public to explain the differences between the types of school they can select as preferences for their children.

The superintendent, upon taking office, reviewed and revised the long-term plan for development. The district now has a detailed plan for improvement in the core areas set out across the next three years. Other plans are equally detailed, especially those for construction of new schools. There is a plan for reducing suspensions and expulsions and for improving inclusion and support for students with disabilities. Each initiative has a plan, but nowhere are they summarized in a fashion that enables schools and district leaders to see where and when different plans will make impact on each other or on other services. The district might consider drawing up a succinct schematic overview of all the developments and associated timelines.

There is sufficient monitoring by the district and the board of the outcomes for students from statutory assessments and increasingly from the new common formative assessments. These are adequately

disaggregated by subgroups, but there are areas where the district and schools can probe deeper. For example, none of the schools have probed deeply enough in their data on student exclusions to determine if there are patterns that relate to the day of the week, the time of the day or particular lessons or subjects. The approach to improvement is general rather than targeted precisely.

## **Governance**

The combined leadership of the superintendent, his team and the board is strong. The board has a good handle on what is happening and what needs to happen next. It makes good use of its structure of subcommittees to support and challenge appropriately. It does not simply accept what it is given but actively seeks for evidence. It gets this through scrutiny of documentation and presentation from key district and school personnel. However, the board needs to ensure that all projects, developments and initiatives have a planning strand that constantly focuses on evaluating outcomes for students. The board is acutely aware of the demographics and social circumstances across the city. It has good ideas to broaden its impact, such as through the suggestion that new teachers should have local input into their professional orientation.

The board has good oversight of the budget. This is presented clearly and transparently and individuals from the district regularly attend meetings to answer questions and explain aspects. In all its work, the board is open and transparent as for example, in ensuring that its meeting dates and minutes are published on the district website.

The board is highly committed to all the students who receive a public education in the district. It makes very good use of its numerous formal and informal contacts to help bring about improvements in funding and material support. It is alert to opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones. It works well in collaboration with Waterford over specific schools and their governance, funding and admission arrangements. It also works well with the city council and the local police department.

## **Site Management and Coherence**

School leaders have a clear focus on raising students' achievement. Distributed leadership is encouraged through grade level teams, data teams and the district has provided appropriate professional development in this. The senior district leaders make regular visits to schools to review progress against the current priorities. Statutory annual evaluations are in place. The district leaders have a good overview of the quality of leadership at each of its schools and make their visits proportionate to the need of each. There is sufficient management expertise in the district to cover the range of particular circumstances for each school, for example of the bilingual school, the Friendship School or the Magnet school, to ensure a good understanding of its work.

## **Accountability**

Through regular visits to schools, the superintendent ensures a high profile and accessibility to students, staff and principals. He and his assistant have a good picture of what is happening at the school level, as do other district colleagues, who may visit for other purposes. All statutory evaluations are in place and adequately documented.

The district leadership has shown that it is prepared to address rigorously any issues of under-performance. It has agreements with the unions on new systems to help staff review their own performance, such as the rubric for classroom visits. However, there is room for still more rigor in leadership visits to schools. For example, there is inconsistent practice about paired walkthroughs. These need to be a substantive part of the district's regular liaison with principals and schools to provide principals with ongoing professional development and to ensure consistency of evaluations across the school and district.

The district does not have a sufficiently robust system to monitor the impact on student achievement of all its policies. It has better mechanisms to check on matters, such as attendance and suspension or expulsion rates. Protocols are clearer and more consistently applied in this.

School plans reflect the district-wide improvement plan in design and content. More specificity is needed over improvement targets to reflect individual circumstances. For example, improvement targets for individual grades should reflect each grade's achievement to date and not those for the previous cohort.

There are sufficiently robust systems for collecting and evaluating data at district level. Information technology systems are new in most schools and staff confidence in using it is fragile in a few places.

### **Domain 3: Management of Human and Fiscal resources**

**This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.**

#### **Human Resources**

The human resources department has a balance of strengths and areas to improve. There are proper arrangements with unions for negotiation over routine matters and annual contracts. There are reasonable working relationships over issues of individual performance. Agreements have been reached over improvements to systems for supporting classroom teachers through walkthroughs and feedback.

The district has improved to fair, from an unsatisfactory position, the process for ensuring an adequate supply of teachers. The district accepts that it has to be constantly 'ahead of the game' in attracting new teachers to the area and more work is needed to improve still further the ethnic balance of its workforce. There are good arrangements for interviewing prospective candidates into a 'pool' of teachers from which they can be assigned to specific schools. The principals have adequate input into this. The district staff, with responsibility for planning recruitment, need to construct a more district specific set of information for prospective applicants and for new staff. It could also broaden its range of advertisements to include minority group newspapers, for example. The board also has good ideas to help orientate new staff to the city and its issues.

There are sound arrangements for the ongoing professional development of teachers. Although most of this occurs at local or school level, the district is prepared to make funds available for out of district courses, where justified. The system encourages and celebrates individual achievement at the student level particularly, but more could be done, especially through the website, to encourage more discussion and sharing of success at grade or subject level.

#### **Fiscal Resources**

The district's fiscal systems and procedures are very strong. There is very secure and efficient management of finances. All aspects of the process, from budget setting to monitoring of expenditure, are clear, open and transparent. The district works well with the city council to establish a budget, although this year the final budget went to referendum, causing a delay to the district and its schools receiving firm budgets.

The board is well involved in the budget planning process. It receives good information from the district and its subcommittee has the necessary detail to scrutinize and review all areas of expenditure. The district strikes a good balance between maintaining current school development in line with its improvement plan and developing its long-term plans. It has rightly taken a long-term view of the changes needed to bring about the necessary improvements in students' achievements. Where there are joint financial responsibilities, such as with Waterford District, there is good financial liaison and communication to ensure equity and probity.

The district pursues with utmost rigor, issues of value for money with contractors, service suppliers and vendors. For example, bulk contracts over photocopiers are reviewed regularly against usage patterns to

ensure the most appropriate machines are supplied. This maintains financial efficiency and good customer service to schools and departments.

The district is also alert to every opportunity to secure mandated and discretionary grants. It accesses funds from around 60 such sources each year. These sources are used to provide schools, students and teachers with additional funding for specific projects or initiatives. The district has been very proactive in accessing funding from state and federal funds specifically for the development of magnet schools.

There are regular financial audits and these indicate no fundamental or significant flaws in the district's processes. It has good controls in place at every stage of financial proceedings. The only area for further work is on financial reconciliation between district and city council accounts, where different information technology (IT) systems hinder the process. This is being addressed. The district also continually seeks to make improvements and efficiencies to its own operational systems. For example, it has introduced new IT based ordering systems in schools and actions have been taken to move to an electronic system with school bus contractors.

The district focuses on key priorities. For example, the district's higher than average proportion of students with special education needs is reflected in the allocation of budget to support students with special education needs. This constitutes almost 24 percent of the total education budget compared to the state average of 20 percent. However, the cost of agency placements out of district, over which the board has no control, is higher than for similar districts. The district has a strong inclusion strategy and wherever possible, seeks to bring students back from out of district placements.

The special education budget is clear and transparent. It is easy to see exactly how much is spent on the range of related services in each school and how this relates to need. Specific grant income is clear and used effectively to support students with special education needs. In line with district priorities, the grant to improve student behavior funds psychologists and social workers who target students with challenging behavior. It also funds a transition coordinator or job coach, who facilitates an innovative program for students at the high school. This is a successful program and enables students with special education needs to leave with a certificate of completion and to secure meaningful employment.

The district identifies gifted and talented students as a focused priority in its elementary schools and middle school. It funds a grade 4 and 5 enrichment program and a further initiative at the middle school. The students greatly appreciate these innovative programs and enjoy the opportunities afforded across diverse subjects such as astronomy and oceanography. The district has not identified with sufficient clarity, how it intends to measure the success of this input.

The district uses its Title III funds, supplemented by a state bilingual grant and a significant allocation of board funding, to support over 650 ELLs from pre-school through grade 12. The dual language model is used. Last year, 70 percent of these students made good progress in language acquisition as measured by the Language Assessment Scales. The proportion achieving proficiency in spoken language exceeded the state target. This achievement is better than for similar districts.

## **Domain 4: Operational Systems**

**This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.**

### **IT & Data Support**

The district has good IT systems and makes the best use of its budget for this. There are modern computer links to schools, which have sufficient capacity for efficient electronic transmission. There is a Strategic Information Technology Plan and software and hardware policies to support continuity in the curriculum across schools. The IT support for the curriculum is well developed in some areas, such as Waterford's

Early Reading Program and the 'Pods of 4' to support reading and mathematics in the elementary schools. The roll out of interactive whiteboards to support instructional practice across the district's schools is at an early stage of development and it is too early to evaluate its impact.

The IT systems for office and data also work well, but staff at some schools need time to adjust to new procedures and ongoing training is a necessity. The new data system for schools to place orders for materials was introduced to improve efficiencies. There have been some initial problems, which are being resolved. The district has rightly kept a tight overview of this new development in its initial phase. As the system becomes fully functional and reliability is assured, there needs to be a withdrawal of office oversight proportionate to each school's confidence and competence in managing its own orders. The district supports schools through a system that enables them to monitor student attendance, behavior data, health records and to record family addresses. It is at a much earlier stage of development in supporting its schools in the development of IT to track students' progress over time.

Building administrators and faculty are supported well in overcoming any snags they have with the district's IT system. A help desk is in place to enable central office staff to respond rapidly. Systems are maintained and serviced well and there has been very little downtime in recent years. IT is used well to support adult learners. The district's flagship is the Channel 21 Cable TV and it is very interactive and appreciated by students and their families. The district has responded well to the needs of students, who do not have ready access to computers at home. It has channeled significant local donations of computers to schools for them to distribute where they are most needed and will do most good.

## **Communication**

The district has well functioning systems for communication. Internal communication is largely through meetings and by e-mail. It liaises well with the city council over routine management and financial matters. A significant feature of the work of the superintendent has been his energy and immense hard work in communicating informally with a wide range of organizations and individuals. This has been a key aspect in raising the profile of education and its needs locally. The result is that there are strong and productive links with the police, social services and health authorities, with their input sought at every opportunity. More work is still needed however, in particular to communicate effectively with those citizens who may not be as closely connected with the public education system.

The district tracks key school data well. It regularly collects and records information on student attendance and suspensions. These form the basis for the regular discussions with individual principals and feed into the ongoing evaluation of each school's progress. It tracks other particular issues carefully, such as the requirement for students with special education needs to be educated alongside their peers. It has a good overview of annual performance data from the state tests. The new formative assessment tests are still being established at school level and it is too early to see the impact of regular monitoring and feedback to schools on these.

## **Operations**

The district has good systems for safety and security and is constantly seeking to update these in line with the capacities of modern technology. Custodians support the district well in keeping buildings clean, secure and safe. Within its financial capacity, the district and city have looked after its building stock. They have not neglected the building fabric even though some buildings are approaching the end of their current usage. Most, however, are now in need of extensive modernization to bring their educational functionality in line with that expected for the twenty-first century. The new building program goes a long way to meeting this development need.

The budget setting process takes close account of service delivery. The district knows what it can and cannot afford to do and seeks alternatives, where necessary. It works extremely well with other

organizations, such as the city council and the Waterford Public School District, to ensure that all measures that will directly lead to improved outcomes for students are considered and enacted.

The Child Nutrition Program is exceptional and the food and nutrition manager has transformed the district's meals service. Faced with the divisive situation of three quarters of the students with entitlement to free or reduced cost meals and the rest not, she adopted an imaginative and innovative approach. This was to provide universal free breakfast and lunches to all students at the lowest possible cost. Some astute business arrangements were entered into, such as providing chargeable meals services to staff and to events, such as professional development meetings. Grants were sought from whatever source could be found. The number of students who start the day with a healthy breakfast and who take lunch has now increased significantly. The focus on providing a range of ethnic foods has gone over well with students, as has the increased choice and number of points of delivery in the high school. The overall result is an increase from 200 to 700 in the numbers of students taking lunch and a six-fold increase in those taking breakfast during the last three years. The district provides a meals service that delivers what it promised and at zero cost to the local taxpayer.

### **Service Culture**

Other systems such as the transportation department work effectively. The very young students from the Friendship School have adult monitors to ensure their safety and well-being on their journeys. Other bus journeys work reasonably well and the introduction of cameras on buses has helped keep unruly behavior in check. The district has started a training course in behavior management for drivers to help them maintain continuity with the schools' approach to classroom behavior. This needs rolling out to all drivers and their emergency replacements to support a concerted approach to managing students' behavior.

## **Criterion 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction**

**This area of the district's work exceeds minimum requirements.**

### **Internal Stakeholder Communications and Satisfaction**

The approach of the superintendent and his team is of collegiality and openness. There is a preparedness to engage in dialogue, but at the same time, it is clear where decisions are made. There are satisfactory arrangements for including teachers' and principals' input into such matters as new curriculum design, for example. The board is regularly consulted about developments and initiatives. The superintendent has built improved links to the city council and to other organizations throughout the area. This action has sought views through many informal means but is less systematic at gathering views on a broader more formal front, particularly from the public and from students. Two examples illustrate this, one related to new schools and one to reducing suspensions.

The two new schools and the proposals for further developments have received wide internal consultation and discussion. Careful attention has been given to all aspects of planning, but the views of the public have not been considered and opportunities to enhance public relations and greater public understanding of local education have been missed. It is anticipated that there will be opportunities for a public forum through local cable television in the near future, which may do much, to disseminate information but in a post hoc, explanatory way rather than consultative or opinion seeking.

The district has a very clear overview of suspension numbers and knows that these have been running too high. The district and its schools all have clear plans to address this. However, almost all the school plans take no account of what students think on the matter. Most of the plans are predicated on what staff believe to be the best way forward. The 'student voice' is insufficiently sought through regular surveys, focus groups or student councils in order to help address the problem. A very recent general survey of students has

provisional early data, which shows they have clear, thoughtful views to express. Further such surveys are needed, focusing on specific issues or problems.

### **External Stakeholder Engagement**

The district works very well with other agencies involved with children, such as School Readiness providers, Headstart, Play Troupes and Family Resource Centers. All New London students are members of the city library. The district works collaboratively with social and health services particularly over the needs of pre-school children. The Friendship School is an excellent bridge for those children who need particular support and help and for students with special education needs. Although the proportion of these students at the Friendship School is higher than the average within general education classes, the numbers are reasonable and these students get very good opportunities to maximize their talents and skills.

The district works extremely well with other statutory authorities as well as charitable and philanthropic organizations. It uses these links in a strategic and coordinated way. One very good example is the strong collaboration with the local police department. The New London Police Department assigns two officers, one to the middle school and one to the high school, to support the staff by ensuring that students understand and obey the law. However, these officers make important contributions to the development of young students in other ways. The high school officer is on the board of education and brings a strong community dimension to its work. The officer at the middle school contributes to students' education through various talks, which he delivers on issues of importance to young people. There is good documented evidence to show the impact of his presence, with crime figures on that school's premises successively cut from 112 per year to less than 10 per year in four years. The officer also wanted to start a martial arts club and received excellent support from the district, which obtained grants to support the project, and secured the offer of free accommodation for the club from the local branch of The Elks. The city has every right to be proud of this successful liaison between the education district and local police department.

### **Political and Policy Alignment and Engagement**

The district, largely through the work of superintendent and board, is very closely in tune with local political imperatives. The superintendent has worked tirelessly as an advocate for public education and improved educational facilities. He has not simply relied on support from state and city to fund developments, but has been proactive in seeking other sources and ensuring maximum efficiency with those at his disposal. Through astute negotiation and the help of the state, some 95 percent of the capital costs of the planned new school developments will fall outside of the city's responsibility.

The board too has played its part. Through membership of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), it ensures up-to-date training and development for its members. It is knowledgeable about its function and differentiates between its administrative roles and policy-development roles. It brings a wide range of local community knowledge as well as financial and commercial expertise. It works closely with the district to plan, cross check and scrutinize proposals, both educational and strategic. The one omission to its work is that of constantly asking how new initiatives and developments will be evaluated against the over-arching need of raising students' achievements.