



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education

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## District Leadership Evaluation Report

District Name: Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD)

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### **I. Background**

Massachusetts's school districts with persistently low student performance and/or improvement, based on Performance and Improvement Ratings and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Determinations, must undergo a Tier III Review by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA). In its School District Examination Review Report, EQA articulates findings in the domains of Assessment and Evaluation, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Academic Support Services, Leadership and Governance, and Business and Finance. If the findings warrant, EQA recommends to the Commissioner and State Board of Education (BOE) that the district be declared underperforming.

A district that is determined by the Board of Education to be underperforming is assigned a review team by the Commissioner. The review team spends time in the district to gain an understanding of the school district's capacity to make improvements and change the direction of the district's education system. The review is conducted using a protocol, and include extensive interviews with district leaders, such as the Superintendent, Key Central Office Staff, Principals, and School Committee, as well as teachers, parents, and others. Evidence gained during these interviews is summarized in Appendix A of this Report.

### **II. Profile of District**

The Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD) in Franklin County served 1,179 students in the 2006-2007 school year, according to Massachusetts Department of Education (MADOE) data: 89% White, 5% Hispanic, 2% African American/Black, and 1% Asian. The district has a high percentage of low-income students relative to districts statewide (43% compared to 29% statewide) and a somewhat higher percentage of Special Education students (19% compared to 17% statewide). Five percent of the district's students were categorized as First Language not English (FLNE), and 2% were categorized as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

District enrollment has declined by 29% over the past ten years from 1,598 in 1998 to its current enrollment of 1,142 students (as of September 29, 2007). These students attend six public schools in the district: four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The Great Falls Middle and Turners Falls High Schools are both located in a single new facility.

Gill Elementary School is located in Gill and has one classroom each for students in Kindergarten through Grade 6; it is the only elementary school that serves students in grade six. At the time of team’s visit, the school enrolled seven Grade 6 students who attended classes that combined fifth and sixth graders. The other three elementary schools are located in Montague and two of them, Sheffield Elementary School and Hillcrest Elementary School, are located adjacent to one another. Montague Center Elementary School has one classroom each for four grades, Kindergarten through Grade 3. Table 1 below shows the grade span and enrollment served at each school.

Table 1  
School Grades and Enrollment  
Gill-Montague Regional School District  
September 29, 2007

School	Grades	Enrollment
Turners Falls High	9 – 12	357
Great Falls Middle	6 - 8	273
Sheffield Elementary	3 – 5	152
Hillcrest Elementary	Pre-K – 2	185
Montague Center Elementary	K – 3	70
Gill Elementary	K - 6	105
District Total		1,142

Source: Gill-Montague Regional School District

According to data provided to the team by the Department, GMRSD employed 95 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) teachers in the 2006-2007 school year. Of these, 87.8% were licensed in their teaching assignment area. Eighty-nine percent of the 81 teachers in core academic areas met federal NCLB criteria for highly qualified.

### **III. Methodology**

The team reviewed documents provided by the Department of Education in advance of the site visit, reviewed additional documents onsite, and conducted a series of interviews in the GMRSD on September 27 and 28, and October 1, 2007. A list of the documents reviewed is presented in Appendix A and the onsite interview schedule is presented in Appendix B. The review team conducted a total of 28 interviews with the following 59 individuals:

- Interim Superintendent
- All nine School Committee members, excluding the non-voting Erving representative
- All four principals (each of the three elementary school principals serves in multiple roles in the district: one serves as principal at two schools, another also serves as the Director of Teaching and Learning - Pre-K-5, and another serves as the district’s Reading First and Title 1 Coordinator.)
- Director of Teaching and Learning, Grades 6-12
- Director of Special Education
- Director of Grants and Technology
- Group interviews with six middle school and high school teachers

- Group interviews with seven Pre-K-5 teachers
- President of the Gill-Montague Educational Association
- Director of Business Operations
- Group interviews with the three Gill selectmen and with the Gill Administrative Assistant
- Group interview with the three Montague selectmen with the Montague Town Administrator
- Separate interviews with the chairs of the Gill and Montague finance committees
- Group interview with parents of students in the schools
- Interviews with other stakeholders, including the Editor of the Montague Reporter, Turners Falls Fire Chief, Director of the Franklin County Mediation and Training Collaborative, and the Montague Children’s Librarian

In several instances, one person was interviewed multiple times, sometimes focusing on different roles associated with multiple positions in the district.

The review team acknowledges and appreciates the participation of all the individuals interviewed, as well as the assistance provided by the Interim Superintendent in scheduling the interviews.

#### **IV. Findings by Area**

##### **A. Superintendent**

*An Interim Superintendent under contract through June 30, 2007, is serving the district. The Interim Superintendent is providing effective leadership to the district. The district’s longer-term needs for leadership have not yet been determined.*

Kenneth Rocke serves as the GMRSD Interim Superintendent. He started working part-time in the district in May 2007 and started full-time on June 1, 2007, just four months prior to the review team’s site visit. The review team found that most School Committee members, school leaders, teachers, and town officials regard the Interim Superintendent as a skillful and competent leader. A few individuals reported that the Interim Superintendent had not worked in the district for a long enough period to enable them to form firm opinions regarding his performance.

The Interim Superintendent told the team that when he was hired in May 2007, the district was in crisis due to its financial situation. Subsequently, he assessed the situation and identified the critical issues that required his attention. As discussed below, under the findings related to the School Committee, the School Committee did not establish specific goals for the Interim Superintendent when he was first appointed. The Interim Superintendent provided the review team with a list of the seven goals that he had initially established and the achievements related to each goal. The goals were:

1. Stabilize district finances
2. Resolve the elementary school configuration problem
3. Improve relationships with member towns

4. Cover district needs with reduced staffing
5. Reorganize the administrative team
6. Expand and support existing curriculum improvement efforts
7. Begin strategic planning focused on student achievement

The review team confirmed that the Interim Superintendent has actively pursued these goals. He is credited for his strong leadership in making progress on two significant and vexing issues: employee health care costs and elementary school closings.

With the leadership of the Interim Superintendent, the School Committee successfully negotiated with the teachers' union to enable the district to join the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) health insurance program. The projected net savings to the district are estimated by the Superintendent to be approximately \$172,000 in the first year and \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually in subsequent years. This achievement, which will make funds available to support educational initiatives in future district budgets, has been viewed by municipal leaders as a demonstration of responsible fiscal stewardship on the part of the Interim Superintendent.

As discussed below under findings related to the School Committee, the district's efforts to consolidate schools have been unsuccessful to date. Under the leadership of the Interim Superintendent, the School Committee has voted to amend the district agreement regarding the vote required to close a school. The proposed amendment would decrease the required vote from eight of nine School Committee members to six of nine members (two-thirds). By lowering the required vote threshold, the change may make it easier for the School Committee to obtain the necessary votes to move forward on this issue. The proposed amendment has been submitted for voter approval in Gill and in Montague.

Moreover, the Interim Superintendent has worked to meet the district's educational needs within its fiscal constraints. For example, he has worked to address the curricular needs of district schools, including curriculum coordination and teacher coaching and support.

The Interim Superintendent also identified nine next steps that he planned to undertake as of October 1, 2007:

1. Fiscal analysis and planning, including a five-year fiscal sustainability forecast and an allocation audit of actual operational costs for each elementary school.
2. Regional agreement and elementary configuration planning. This includes exploration of the option of placing the Montague Center School under the Pilot Schools Governance project and delegating fiscal and operational responsibility for the school to a separate entity, determining cost savings associated with each of the possible school closing options, and determining school closings (if any) for the 2008-2009 school year.
3. Strategic planning and goal setting with the School Committee, including development of a district strategic improvement plan for submission to the Department of Education.

4. Assessment of the optimal administrative team configuration for improving student achievement, including an assessment of Special Education administration and central office capacity for curriculum coordination.
5. Development of a staffing plan that restores necessary student services.
6. Delivery of appropriate faculty professional development.
7. Delivery of appropriate administrative professional development.
8. Improvement of instructional technology in the elementary schools.
9. Development of innovative high school programming for students who are at risk of dropping out.

Some individuals interviewed by the team expressed concern about turnover in the positions of the Superintendent and Principals (discussed further below) and the resulting lack of consistent district leadership. However, given that the district's last Superintendent reportedly served in the position for four years and that the last two Superintendents reportedly provided effective academic leadership, it is likely that this concern is a reflection of the temporary status of the current Interim Superintendent.

School Committee members reported to the review team that the School Committee is considering its options for meeting the district's need for a strong Superintendent over the longer term. The School Committee is reportedly considering the options for continuing the services of the Interim Superintendent, if possible, or recruiting a new individual to fill the position.

## **B. Leadership and Support of Curriculum and Instruction**

*Although the district has attempted to address its educational needs within the existing financial constraints, leadership discontinuity and staffing constraints have adversely affected the district's capacity to support curriculum and instruction in district schools. These problems have been exacerbated by the district's failure to consolidate elementary schools and to move Gill Elementary sixth graders to the middle school to join all other sixth graders in the district.*

Many dedicated teachers and administrators serve the GMRSD. The Interim Superintendent has taken a number of steps to meet district needs for academic leadership and support with available resources. As previously noted, he is developing plans for further improvements in the upcoming year. However, the review team noted a variety of leadership shortcomings affecting curriculum and instruction that need to be addressed in order for the district to support and improve its academic performance. These shortcomings are:

1. **Continuity in Leadership** - When asked to identify weaknesses in their schools and in the district, teachers at all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) expressed concern about the amount of turnover the schools have experienced in key positions, including the Superintendent, Principal, and Assistant Principal positions. They noted that there had, until recently, been little continuity in school leadership and, instead, frequent changes in direction.

2. **School Principals** - The district has four elementary schools served by three elementary principals. The responsibilities of each of the three principals are split between the elementary school(s) they serve and the district office as follows:
  - a. One elementary principal serves two separate schools in two separate locations, Gill Elementary and Montague Center Elementary.
  - b. A second principal serves as a one-half time Principal at Hillcrest Elementary while the other one-half of her time is devoted to serving as the district's Reading First and Title 1 Coordinator.
  - c. The third principal serves as one-half time Principal at Sheffield Elementary and one-half time Pre-K through 5 Director of Teaching and Learning.

As a consequence of these staffing arrangements, none of the schools has full-time leadership, and the district lacks full-time curricular and instructional support for the elementary grades. Elementary school teachers reported to the review team that having part-time principals negatively affects relationship building, information sharing, and communication.

The middle and high schools are housed in different wings of the same building and share one half-time Principal, who also serves as the district's Director of Secondary Education, Grades 6 - 12. The Principal is supported by two one-half time Assistant Principals, both of whom were appointed to their positions at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year. One of these Assistant Principals also serves one-half time as the Assistant Director of Secondary Education, Grades 6-12. The other also serves one-half time as the Director of Teaching and Learning, Grades 6-12. According to the Superintendent, this second individual spends all of her time on curriculum matters for grades 6-12 and will be involved with coaching, mentoring, and teacher evaluation.

Seven sixth grade students attend Gill Elementary School in combined classes of fifth and sixth graders, rather than attending the middle school with their peers. Consequently, the Director of Teaching and Learning, Grades 6-12, will have to oversee the offsite work of the teacher of these seven students.

The review team obtained copies of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each of the district's six schools. Of these, only the Sheffield Elementary School SIP was current, having been revised on September 11, 2007. Great Falls Middle School had a recent SIP (covering the three school years of 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007). The Montague Center Elementary School plan was undated. The SIPs for Gill Elementary School, Hillcrest Elementary School, and Turners Falls High School were all dated 2004-2005.

3. **Leadership and Staffing Support for Curriculum and Instruction** - As noted above, the review team found that district-level leadership support for curriculum and instruction is limited due to the assignment of multiple part-time responsibilities to the responsible individuals. Moreover, the review team identified the following staffing support limitations:

- a. English Language Arts (ELA)/Reading and Math Coaching

The district has one ELA coach for grades K-3 funded by a Reading First (RF) Grant. This is the final year of the grant. Also, there is a 1.5 FTE position providing reading support at one of the four elementary schools (Sheffield Elementary). There is no ELA Coach for grades 4 and 5, or a mathematics coach for grades K-5.

b. ELA and Reading Curriculum

The middle school is working with a consultant to assess current ELA materials and curriculum and to identify specific needs for a comprehensive ELA program.

Class schedules for grades K-5 provide sufficient daily class time for ELA and Reading. Students in grades 1-5 receive one uninterrupted block of 90 minutes daily for ELA. In Kindergarten, the 90-minute block is interrupted for specialists. Sheffield Elementary students in grades 3-5 are invited to a one-half hour before school reading for fluency program and an after-school reading intervention program as part of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant. Students in the middle school grades (6-8) have a 55-minute block for ELA and a 45-minute block for reading each day. High school students receive 90-minute blocks of instruction in ELA daily.

c. Mathematics Curriculum

Students in the elementary and middle school grades do not receive 90 minutes of daily instruction and support in mathematics, as recommended for students who are not yet proficient in mathematics. All students in grades 9-12 do receive 90-minute blocks of instruction in mathematics daily.

In January 2007, the district implemented Math Expressions in grades K-5, which means that elementary mathematics is taught in a one-hour block. Grades 6-8 are implementing the Connected Mathematics Program II (CMP II), where students receive 55 minutes of math each day. Moreover, students receive an additional 45 minutes of math during one semester per year. This mathematics class replaces one "Related Arts" class in a student's schedule.

The teacher at Gill Elementary School teaches a combined class of fifth and sixth graders using two curricula: Math Expressions for fifth graders and CMP II for sixth graders.

d. High School Curriculum Chairs

High school department heads serve as Curriculum Chairs. Their contract provides them with one hour after school per week for department meetings. This amount of time is insufficient given the need to work on standards-based curriculum and instruction in the high school.

**4. Professional Development and Common Planning Time.** The review team found that the district has implemented a number of initiatives in the area of professional development and common planning time that can help improve instruction in the district. In the elementary grades (K-5), the district has written and distributed a professional development plan focusing on writing across the curriculum. The Responsive Classroom Initiative emphasizes building-based collaborative lesson planning through examination of assessments, and "Power Standards" for math and ELA. Professional development is provided during the afternoon on 11 Fridays throughout the year. Staff meetings are used for ongoing dialogue about the implementation of the Houghton Mifflin Reading and the Math Expressions programs.

The Director of Teaching and Learning for Grades 6-12 told the review team that there is a plan for the 11 Friday professional development half-days at the middle and high school level; however, the plan has not yet been distributed to staff. Also, 1.5 hours per week of embedded professional development time is available for the middle school teachers, who reportedly use the time to collaborate with each other. All high school teachers have approximately 45 minutes of a 90-minute block each day for preparation time. Teachers are assigned two 30-minute duties per week during the other portion of the 90-minute block. High school teachers are also given 2.75 hours per week for collaborative work, although they reportedly have not used the time effectively.

Teachers reported to the review team that the current elementary school configuration serves to isolate teachers at Gill Elementary and Montague Center Elementary from others at the same grade level and in the same subject areas. This isolation impedes professional development, planning, and communication.

**5. Standards-based Teaching and Learning.** The district's schools are in the process of implementing standards-based teaching and learning. Grades K-5 began implementation of a standards-based mathematics program in January 2007 and the middle school is currently implementing standards-based instruction in mathematics.

The Director of Teaching and Learning for Grades 6-12 reported to the review team that she uses the MADOE Standards-Based Classroom Document as a walkthrough checklist in the middle school and that middle school teachers are required to have two characteristics of a standards-based classroom in their goals for the year. The Director of Teaching and Learning Grades 6-12 also reported that the high school teachers are at the beginning stages of understanding and implementing a standards-based approach to teaching and learning and that she is seeking an independent trainer to provide needed professional development this summer.

### **C. School Committee**

*The School Committee has not provided sufficient leadership to enable the district to make academic progress. The Committee's inability to effectively address and resolve issues related to grade configuration and elementary school building closings impedes the district's progress and undermines public confidence and support.*

School Committee members interviewed by the review team were generally aware of issues related to the district's academic performance, the 2002-2005 EQA report, and some of the major areas of focus in the District Improvement Plan. Some members noted that the district had already implemented changes before and after the EQA report was issued and that the district was continuing to improve its performance.

Asked to cite factors contributing to the district's poor performance in the past, the School Committee members reported that the district's principal problem was financial. They told the review team that in the wake of declining enrollments over time, reduced state assistance, and the impact of a net outflow of students due to school choice, the district had been forced to reduce its budgets, including funding for academic leadership and curriculum support.

Several School Committee members cited the district's elimination of a large number of positions in the 2003-2004 school year as a budgetary action that reduced or eliminated school programs and, consequently, exacerbated school choice problems. Some also cited increased financial needs arising from the population of children served. They noted that the district has in recent years enrolled larger numbers of low-income students and students with Special Education needs requiring additional financial support.

Some School Committee members interviewed by the review team also noted that issues concerning the possible consolidation and closing of Montague elementary school buildings and elementary school grade configurations have consumed substantial district time and attention over the past years. The review team's review of School Committee minutes for the period of July 11, 2006 through September 11, 2007 confirmed that the above-cited issues were discussed, often extensively, at almost every meeting during the 14-month period. Documents provided to the review team indicate that the School Committee considered information on four options, three of which would have required the closure of Montague Center Elementary, the district's smallest school, which enrolls 70 students in grades K-3.

On December 19, 2006, the School Committee voted to change the grade configurations at the Montague elementary schools without closing any of the buildings. Specifically, they voted to operate only a Pre-K program at Hillcrest Elementary and to operate grades K-5, or grades K-6, depending upon a separate decision to be made about whether or not to move sixth graders to the Great Falls Middle School, at both Montague Center Elementary and Sheffield Elementary. Subsequently, however, the School Committee voted on February 13, 2007 to rescind its prior vote on this matter.

On January 23, 2007, the School Committee voted to change the grade configuration of the Montague Center and Sheffield Elementary Schools from K-6 to K-5, thereby moving Montague sixth graders to the middle school. They did not vote to move Gill sixth graders from Gill Elementary School to the middle school; however, the School Committee voted at the same meeting to amend the regional school district agreement to allow intra-district school choice, which effectively provided the parents/guardians of Gill sixth graders the choice of sending their children to the middle school. The amendment, subsequently approved by voters in the two towns, resulted in the following addition to the agreement: "Should parents/guardians of children [in] grades kindergarten through six wish to send their children to schools not in their town of residence (but within the District), intra-district choice may be made available, contingent upon and consistent with District Policy."

The School Committee was planning to hold a retreat on October 16, 2007 for the purpose of setting goals and making progress toward a decision on the issue of elementary school consolidation. The retreat was to be facilitated by an independent consultant. (Refer to the section of this report entitled, "Note regarding results of School Committee goal-setting workshop").

The School Committee's inability to resolve these issues reduces its capacity to devote time and attention to other issues that are central to improving school performance and undermines the confidence of municipal leaders in the School Committee's effectiveness and fiscal stewardship, as discussed later in this report.

The School Committee members told the review team that the towns of Montague and Gill are supportive of the school district and acknowledged that the support of district and municipal services creates significant fiscal pressures for these towns. They noted that the School Committee's practice of holding regular meetings with town officials through a fiscal collaboration committee has enabled all participants to understand both school needs and municipal constraints.

As previously discussed, the School Committee did not provide specific goals for the Interim Superintendent when he was hired last spring. The Interim Superintendent, in close consultation with the school committee and budget chairs, pursued goals that they had identified in response to the most pressing district needs. According to the School Committee Chairperson, the School Committee does have a formal annual goal setting and evaluation process for the Superintendent, which the Chairperson described as follows:

The Superintendent develops goals and indicators for the upcoming year in consultation with the school committee chair and presents them to the Board's Personnel Subcommittee in October; the goals are subsequently approved and monitored by the School Committee; toward the end of the school year, the Chairperson distributes Superintendent evaluation forms to School Committee members; the Chairperson then receives, summarizes, and presents the results to the School Committee and Superintendent. The Chairperson told the review team that the School Committee planned to undertake the goal setting process with the Interim Superintendent in October 2007.

#### **D. Municipal Leadership and Its Support for Education**

*Town officials are generally supportive of education in the district; however, they reported that their towns were experiencing a significant level of financial stress. They view the School Committee as hard working but ineffective.*

The review team interviewed the three Gill selectmen, along with the Gill Administrative Assistant, the three Montague selectmen with the Montague Town Administrator, and the chairs of the each town's finance committee. The town officials interviewed by the review team were generally knowledgeable about the district and major issues confronting the district. Some indicated that they had seen the District Improvement Plan and the 2002-2005 EQA report, although they did not recall the details of these documents. Asked about the significant performance issues confronting the district, the town officials cited insufficient state and federal funding, declining enrollments, student population characteristics, including the percentage of students from low-income homes and high enrollment of Special Education students, and the negative financial impact on the district of school choice.

The town officials expressed their communities' support for education and, at the same time, indicated that their towns are experiencing significant budgetary pressures and that meeting school budget requirements, without sufficient state and federal support, constituted a major source of financial stress for their towns. They noted that their communities have exceeded the required level of net school spending, a fact confirmed by data provided to the review team by the MADOE. Moreover, they reported, as did the district's Director of Business and Operations, that when the district returned approximately \$958,000 to the towns at the end of the 2004-2005 school year, the towns made much of the returned funding available to the district.

For example, Montague used \$300,000 for capital repairs to elementary schools and placed \$200,000 in an education stabilization fund, which the district has used to meet a variety of needs, such as new school textbooks and other one-time expenses.

The two towns rejected the budget for the 2007-2008 school year and a budget was subsequently approved in a district-wide vote. Gill town officials told the review team that the town has placed an override on the town ballot to pay for its increased assessment. Montague town officials indicated that the town would be able to meet the assessment this year; however, they are concerned about their ability to meet future increases.

The town officials told the review team that the problem has not been with the leadership of the district's Superintendents and that they regarded the past two Superintendents as competent and described the current Interim Superintendent as a particularly effective leader.

However, the town officials expressed the view that the School Committee, although hardworking, is ineffective and incapable of reaching consensus on important issues. As an example, they cited the School Committee's failure to close elementary schools and the resulting high capital and operating costs borne by their towns as a consequence of this failure.

The town officials indicated appreciation for and support of the fiscal collaboration between the district and their towns, noting that this collaboration has promoted an understanding of the issues on the parts of both district and town officials. However, several town officials noted that most recently the district has presented budget information and requirements to the towns and that, in their view, there has been no real give-and-take in the joint discussions of the district budget.

## **V. Conclusion**

The review team was tasked with determining whether the GMRSD has the necessary governance and leadership capacity to make required improvements to the district's education system. During the course of this review, the team interviewed district and school leaders, municipal leaders, and other stakeholders. The team appreciates the access and cooperation provided by all of those interviewed during the course of this review.

The interviews conducted by the review team revealed general agreement that the GMRSD has talented and dedicated teachers and that the recent district superintendents have provided effective academic leadership. At the same time, those interviewed recognized that the district faces some substantial challenges, including the district's high percentage of low-income students and students with special needs requiring additional services. The need for additional services, combined with a number of other factors, including declining enrollments, reduced state assistance, and the impact of a net outflow of students due to school choice, has placed great financial pressure on the district and the communities that support it. In the face of these pressures; however, the district has made progress in improving academic performance of students.

The review team found that the GMRSD has made some improvements despite the challenges; however, the district still faces substantial challenges that, if not effectively addressed, could impede further progress and lead to a decline in the district's performance.

As reported above, the review team's major findings are:

### **A. Superintendent**

*An Interim Superintendent, under contract through June 30, 2008, is serving the district. The Interim Superintendent is providing effective leadership to the district. The district's longer-term needs for leadership have not yet been determined.*

### **B. Leadership and Support of Curriculum and Instruction**

*Although the district has attempted to address its educational needs within the existing financial constraints, leadership discontinuity and staffing constraints have adversely affected the district's capacity to support curriculum and instruction in district schools.*

*These problems have been exacerbated by the district's failure to consolidate elementary schools and to move Gill Elementary sixth graders to the middle school to join all other sixth graders in the district.*

### **C. School Committee**

*The School Committee has not provided sufficient leadership to enable the district to make academic progress. The Committee's inability to effectively address and resolve issues related to grade configuration and elementary school building closings impedes the district's progress and undermines public confidence and support.*

### **D. Municipal Leadership and Its Support for Education**

*Town officials are generally supportive of education in the district, but they reported that their towns were experiencing a significant level of financial stress. They view the School Committee as hard working but ineffective.*

## **VI. Recommendations**

Based on the information obtained through interviews and review of documents, the review team offers the following recommendations to GMRSD to improve education for the children served by the district:

1. The GMRSD Committee must take prompt action to address two major issues:
  - a. The School Committee must identify its short-term and long-term needs for district leadership by a superintendent and work toward meeting those needs.

The Interim Superintendent is providing effective leadership to the GMRSD; however, he is under contract for only one year, and reportedly may be willing and eligible to service the district for only one or two additional years. The School Committee must identify the skills and abilities that are required in the GMRSD in upcoming years, and ensure that the district has effective and stable leadership. The School Committee will then be required to develop and implement a plan to recruit an effective administrative and academic leader for the district.

If the School Committee determines that the Interim Superintendent has the necessary leadership qualities to lead the district in the short-term and decides to pursue an agreement with the Interim Superintendent, the School Committee should develop and implement a plan to recruit an effective leader when needed in the future.

b. The School Committee must expeditiously and effectively address the issue of elementary school configuration.

As reported above, the current elementary school configuration, including the number of small schools and the existence of one small sixth grade class outside the Middle School, impedes the effective and efficient delivery of education to children of the Gill-Montague RSD. Moreover, the School Committee's failure to effectively address the issue has undermined the public perception of the School Committee's competence and financial stewardship.

2. The Interim Superintendent, in concert with the School Committee and in consultation with appropriate district stakeholders, must develop and implement an organizational and operational plan and budget to meet the academic leadership, curriculum and instruction needs of the GMRSD. The plan and budget should provide for the following:

- Stable, focused, and effective administrative and academic leadership in schools;
- Focused effort and resources in the central office to support curriculum and instruction throughout the district;
- Complete development and implementation of curricula for all subjects and grade levels;
- Provision of ELA and math coaches;
- Provision for sufficient time for teachers to collaborate on curriculum;
- Full implementation of standards-based teaching and learning;
- Full implementation of timely, written performance evaluations of all district staff, including frequent classroom observations of teachers; and
- Development and implementation of a professional development plan for all district staff based on identified district, school, curricula, and individual developmental needs.

The review team recommends that the Board of Education require the GMRSD to develop a detailed action plan and timetable for implementation of these recommendations. The review team also recommends that the Department of Education monitor the district's progress in implementing the action plan.

**Note regarding reported results of School Committee goal-setting workshop**

*Subsequent to the review team's work in the GMRSD, the School Committee conducted a retreat workshop, facilitated by an independent consultant on October 16, 2007, to establish School Committee goals. The Superintendent subsequently provided the list of goals developed by the School Committee to the review team. The list, provided in Appendix C, includes the following three priority goals:*

- 1. Restore public trust, confidence and respect in the school committee by reaching a decision on the elementary configuration question that puts the needs of students first and enjoys broad public support*
- 2. Develop a sustainable budget that restores needed educational services, provides funds for new program development, and has the full support of the school committee*
- 3. Create a top leadership team, retain effective teachers, and support professional development*

*The review team believes that expeditious implementation of these priorities by the School Committee will help strengthen the district's capacity to improve the academic performance of GMRSD students.*

## **Appendix A Materials Reviewed**

*Anonymous Teacher Survey – Gill-Montague School District, MA Department of Education, September 2007*

*Anonymous Administrator Survey – Gill-Montague District, MA Department of Education, September 2007*

*District Infrastructure Survey, MA Department of Education, September 2007*

*How Is Your School District Performing? A Closer Look at the Gill-Montague Regional School District 2002-2005, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA)*

*Mid-cycle Coordinated Program Review Report, MA Department of Education, March 7, 2007*

*Great Falls Middle School, Gill-Montague Regional School District, District Plan for School Intervention, November 2006*

*School Panel Review Report, Great Falls Middle School, Gill-Montague Public Schools, MA Department of Education, November 8 & 9, 2005*

*Agreement between the Towns of Montague and Gill with Respect to the Formation of a Regional School District*

Gill-Montague Regional School District Professional Development Plan 2007-2008

School Committee meeting minutes for the period of July 11, 2006 – September 11, 2007

Presentation: Gill-Montague Regional School District, State Board of Education, June 26, 2007

Presentation: Fiscal Year 2008 Preliminary, as of January 23, 2007, Tentative Operating and Maintenance Budget

School Improvement Plans:

- C. Sheffield Elementary School, Revised, Plan, September 11, 2007
- D. Gill Elementary 2004-2005
- E. Montague Center School Improvement Plan (undated)
- F. Hillcrest Elementary School Improvement Plan 2004-2005
- G. Great Falls Middle School 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007
- H. Turners Falls High School 2004-2005

Reports of the Gill-Montague Regional School District's independent auditors for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2005 and June 30, 2006

*Summary Report Presentation and Comments, Elementary Buildings and Configuration Public Forums, November 13, 2006*

Information considered by the School Committee on options for elementary school reconfiguration including:

- A description and summary of options
- Site analyses
- Enrollment statistics
- Fiscal year 2008 budget gap projection
- Proposed transition plan timeline

Preliminary 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Information

2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam results

**Appendix B**  
**Leadership Evaluation Interview Schedule**  
**September 27 - October 1, 2007**

<b>Thursday, September 27, 2007</b>					
<b>Time</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>		
9:30 - 10:15	Ken Rocke	Superintendent	MG	N	D
10:30 - 11:15	Pat Allen, Patricia Pruitt, Al Ross, Frank Abbondanzio	Montague Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	MG	N	D
11:30 - 12:15	Lynn Bassett	Director of Business Operations	MG	N	D
Lunch					
1:00 - 1:45 p.m.	Leland Stevens, Ann Banash, Nancy Griswold, Tracy Rogers	Gill Board of Selectmen, Administrative Assistant	MG	N	D
2:15 - 3:00	Mary Kociela	Chair, School Committee	MG	N	D
3:00 - 3:30	Paul Nowill	Chair, Gill Finance Committee	MG	N	D
3:30 - 4:00	Jeff Singleton	Chair, Montague Finance Committee	MG		D
	Cynthia Joyce	Director of Special Education		N	
<b>Friday, September 28, 2007</b>					
9:30 - 10:15 a.m.	Chip Wood, Chris Jutres, Bill McDonald	Elementary Principals		N	
	Nancy Daniel-Green	GMEA Association President			D
10:30 - 11:15	Ted Castro-Santos	School Committee member		N	
	Sandy Brown	School Committee member			D
11:30 - 12:15	Kris Boyle	School Committee member		N	
	Joyce Phillips	School Committee member			D
Lunch					
1:00 - 1:45 p.m.	Mike Langknecht	School Committee member	M		
	Linda Kuklewicz	School Committee member		N	
	Terri Lapachinski	School Committee member			D
2:00 - 2:45	Jeff Kenney	MS / HS Principal	M		
	Marty Espinola	Grants & Technology		N	
	Ray Godin, Cheryl Fox, Linda Hickman	Turners Falls Fire Chief, Director Franklin County Mediation and Training Collaborative, Town Librarian			D
3:00 - 3:45	David Detmold	Editor, Montague Reporter	M		
	Anna-Stina Ohlson	6-12 Director Teaching & Learning		N	
	Valeria Smith	School Committee member			D
4:00 - 4:45	Group of parents	Two parents from each school	M	N	
<b>Monday, October 1, 2007</b>					
9:30 - 10:15 a.m.	various	Elementary teachers	M	N	D
10:30 - 11:15	various	Middle & High School Teachers	M	N	D
11:15 - 12 noon	Chip Wood	K-5 Director of Teaching and Learning	M	N	D
Closing meeting	Kenneth Rocke	Superintendent	M	N	D

**Appendix C**  
**Gill-Montague RSD**  
**Prioritized Goals Developed in October 16, 2007 Workshop**

**Prioritized goals from summary list**

1. Restore public trust, confidence and respect in the school committee by reaching a decision on the elementary configuration question that puts the needs of students first, and enjoys broad public support
2. Develop a sustainable budget that restores needed educational services, provides funds for new program development, and has the full support of the school committee
3. Create a top leadership team, retain effective teachers, and support professional development

**Summarized goals from workshop list (below)**

1. Create a culture of professionalism on the school committee
2. Restore public trust, confidence and respect in the school committee by reaching a decision on the elementary configuration question that puts the needs of students first, and enjoys broad public support
3. Support an education model that serves the full spectrum of students
4. Develop a sustainable budget that restores needed educational services, provides funds for new program development, and has the full support of the school committee
5. Develop a vision for excellent education and a plan for achieving that vision
6. Create a top leadership team, retain effective teachers, and support professional development

**Goals identified by leadership team in workshop**

1. Decision on elementary schools
2. Approve a sustainable budget for FY09
3. Implement the district's Equity Policy
4. Restore public trust in the school committee
5. Make an elementary school decision that will be supported by a unified public
6. Build respect for the school committee
7. Board development (so that citizens will want to serve on the school committee)
8. Support new programs, not cut them (e.g. science & technology, Project Lead the Way)
9. Create pride in serving on the school committee
10. Appreciate teachers and administrators, and provide appropriate professional development for them
11. Support an educational model based on what is best for kids
12. Establish K-12 goals and a plan for how to achieve them
13. Develop an educational vision, pK-12, for future success
14. Maintain local control of schools
15. Create a stable and sustainable administrative leadership team
16. Aim for excellence in our schools
17. Increase parent involvement in schools; create a welcoming atmosphere
18. Support non-traditional students and reduce dropout rate
19. Focus on gifted students
20. Develop a five-year fiscal plan
21. Establish a strategy to interact with the state
22. Retain highly effective teachers and administrators