

Program, Staff and Facilities Report
for the
Homer Central School District

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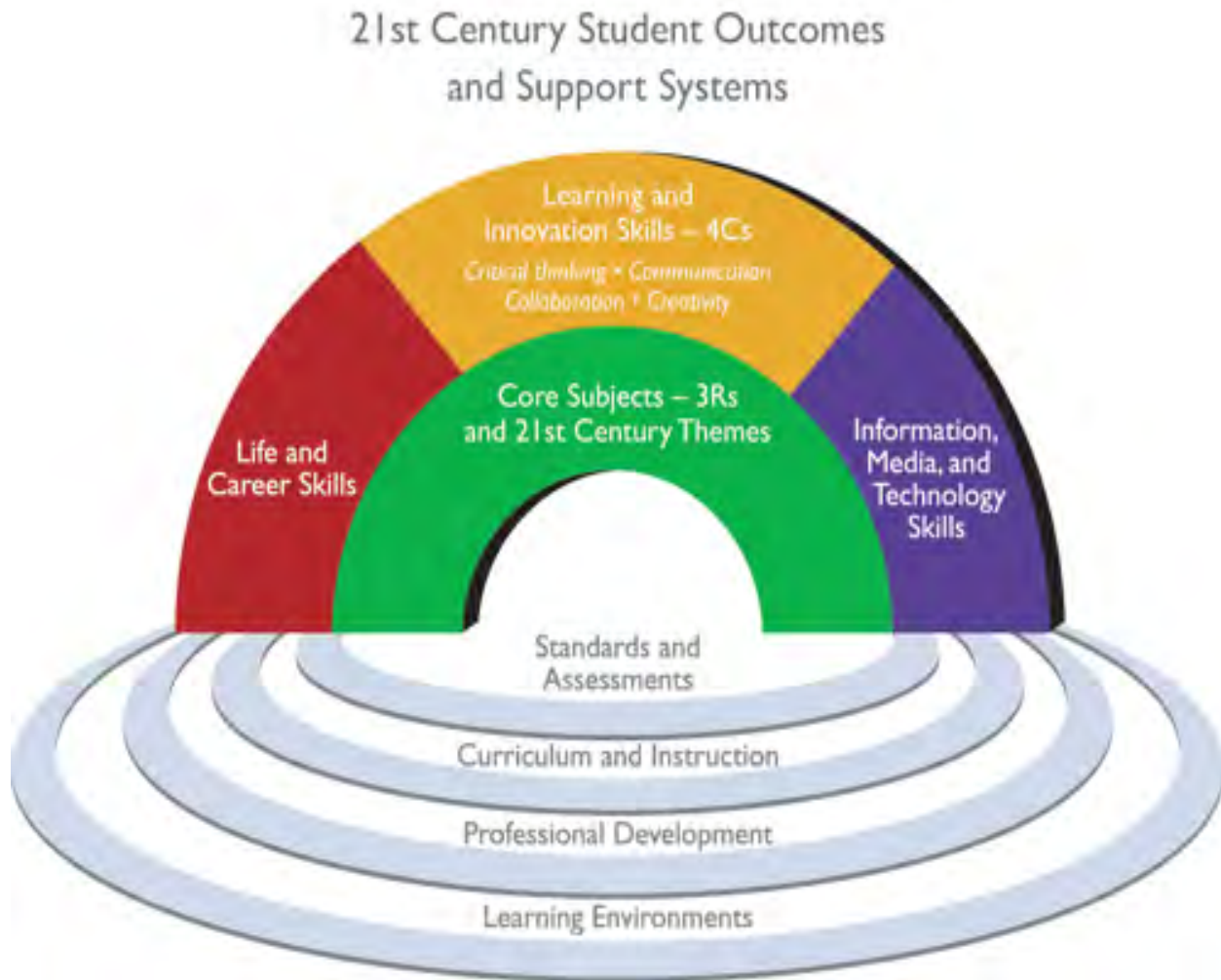
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Forward

Strategic Planning is about improvement. It is a disciplined approach to identifying the key decisions an organization must make to fulfill its vision and achieve its mission. The process requires deep thought about the future and complete honesty about the current state of affairs. The stakeholders of the Homer Central School District who participated in this process did so with integrity, sharing their pride in their schools as well as their concerns. As researchers, we approached our work with clear objectivity and report the facts and findings as we learned about the Homer educational community. Reading this report, one may focus only on the improvement opportunities without seeing the deep strengths of the Homer Central School District. That would be a mistake. Homer offers its students a high quality educational experience that draws on its unique nature. It features a safe and caring environment; compassionate, skilled faculty and staff; skilled leaders and committed governance. It offers well-maintained facilities. Parents should feel confident that their children are being well served in the Homer Central School District given current educational standards. Test scores are generally good. The decorum and culture of its schools is positive. The larger question, however, is more complex. The pace of change in society, the increasingly global nature of our daily lives and the multiple influences impacting our children, especially teens, all combine to create greater challenges for schools. What will be the requirement for Homer students to thrive in the future? We emphasize the word thrive. We assume that parents and teachers of Homer are not aiming to create a generation of students who can simply survive. We assume that the purpose of schooling is to create a base of knowledge, attitudes, skills and competencies that lead to successful life experiences for our students. We assume that this includes both academic and character development.

During periods of resource abundance, strategic planning tends to be about creating new programs on top of the existing educational system to serve the unique needs of every student. However, that is clearly not the case. The great economic recession that started in late 2007 is likely to affect public school financing for the foreseeable future. That creates an unprecedented challenge: create a public school system that will prepare students for a highly dynamic, globally competitive environment with decreasing financial support.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed a model of required student outcomes and the support systems schools must provide to meet those outcomes. We introduce it here in a preliminary way to highlight the gap that exists in most school systems between current education practice and the perceived needs of students as adults in the 21st Century.



Partnership for 21st Century Skills

If Homer existed in a static environment, if the children it educates needed no more to succeed in life as it was in the 20th Century, then rich content and caring compassionate adults would be enough. If that were the case, it might well be that the essential question of strategic planning would be quite simple. How do we continue to do what we are currently doing, only better? However, that is not the case. The more fundamental question concerns a shift in vision, to preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist, for social systems that are constantly in flux, for a global economy that is only

now developing. That is why strategic planning is so important for the future, and why schools must be engaged in ongoing discussions of how to best prepare students for a world in which change is constant.

This is the first of four reports, but by far the most comprehensive. It represents our “hard” research, or examination of the records and physical assets of the district. Our second report represents the perceptions we gleaned from interviews and focus groups involving over 200 Homer Central School District stakeholders. That is followed by the results of the community survey and finally, the results of a faculty and staff survey designed to validate the perception data.

Contents

Program	13
Question 1	23
Question 2	33
Question 3.....	37
Question 4.....	56
Staff	59
Question 1	60
Question 2	60
Question 3	70
Question 4	72
Question 5	72
Facilities (General Support)	75
Question 1	76
Question 2	89
Question 3	97
Question 4	112
Question 5.....	115
Question 6	117
Appendix A	119

List of Tables

Table 1: Comparison Districts	17
Table 2: District and Community Demographics	18
Table 3: Elementary Level Academic Programs	24
Table 4: Elementary Level Extracurricular Activities, Sports & Student Services	25
Table 5: Comparison District Middle School Level Academic Programs.....	26
Table 6: Middle School Level Extracurricular Activities, Sports & Student Services	26
Table 7: High School Level Academic Programs	28
Table 8: High School Level Extracurricular Activities, Sports & Student Services	30
Table 9: District-wide Programs and Services.....	32
Table 10: 2010 NYS Testing Program BOCES Rankings	38
Table 11: Student Achievement for Comparison Districts	40
Table 12: Special Education Results for Comparison Districts – Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2006-2008).....	43
Table 13: Free & Reduced Lunch Results for Comparison Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2007-2009).....	44
Table 14: District and Community Demographics	49

Table 15:	Student Achievement in Benchmark Districts (3 Years).....	50
Table 16:	Special Ed Results for Benchmark Districts Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2006-2008).....	54
Table 17:	Free & Reduced Lunch Results for Benchmark Districts Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2006-2008).....	55
Table 18a:	Graduation Rates, Comparison Districts (2007-2008).....	56
Table 18b:	Graduation Rates, Benchmark Districts (2007-2008)	56
Table 19a:	Postgraduate Intentions, Comparison Schools (2008 data).....	57
Table 19b:	Postgraduate Intentions, Benchmark Schools (2008 data)	58
Table 20:	Five-Year Cohort Survival Rates	61
Table 21:	Homer Five-Year Enrollment Projections with Live Births	62
Table 22:	Administrative Structure of Comparison District	73
Table 23:	District Wealth Comparisons, 2007-08	90
Table 24:	District Revenue Source of Comparison Districts, 2007-2008	91
Table 25:	Expenditure Comparisons 2007-08.....	94
Table 26:	NYSED Transportation Data	113
Table 27:	District Food Service Program Comparisons, current.....	116

Program, Staff and Facilities Report

The Program, Staff and Facilities Report (PSFR) is an integral part of the comprehensive planning process. Strategic planning implies a disciplined effort to move an organization to its desired future. Essential to that process is understanding the current position of the organization; its strengths and weaknesses, its capabilities and challenges, its key competencies and most critical opportunities for improvement. This report is a first step in determining the strategic issues the Homer Central School District faces in moving to its desired position.

As per the title, the report is divided into three sections. The section on program is focused on the primary mission of the Homer Central School District, the education of its students. In this section the Study Team examines the district's educational offerings, student outcomes, curriculum, and professional development as well as to make comparisons with similar districts and higher performing districts with whom Homer may want to compare. We are not providing an evaluation of the educational program in Homer. Rather we are providing data that will allow stakeholders in Homer to examine the educational program and to create a benchmark that can be used to determine strategic initiatives for continuous improvement.

In the second section, we provide an analysis of staffing. Approximately 75% of all school budgets are related to staff, including salaries and benefits of direct district employees, BOCES employees who perform contractual services for the district, and many other contractual arrangements. We begin this section with updated enrollment projections and extend those projections to staffing projections based on current assignments. We also examine the administrative structure, maintenance and operations staffing, and collective bargaining agreements.

We conclude with a section on general support services, which we label under the overall heading as facilities. In fact, the section includes a much more global view of the district's finances and capital assets including the district's current financial position, a review of progress on planned building maintenance, comments on the food service program, and student transportation.

We use data from many sources. Often we use data from the New York State Education Department that is available on their website. Sometimes the data represents different reporting years and thus may seem inconsistent. Our baseline data comes from the 2010 New York State School Report Card and 2011 Output Reports.

The PSFR is the first part of the study team's analysis supporting the strategic planning process in Homer. As this report is developed, study team members are also working to understand the perceptions and aspirations of key stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and community and staff surveys.

About the Homer Central School District:

The Homer Central School District includes all or parts of the towns of Cortlandville, Homer, Truxton, Scott, Preble, Cuyler and Solon in Cortland County, Spafford in Onondaga County and Groton in Tompkins County. The towns of Cortlandville and Homer comprise approximately 68% of the total valuation of the district. Those two towns plus Truxton, Scott and Spafford comprise nearly 90% of the districts total assessed valuation. The district is located between Syracuse, NY (32 miles) and Binghamton, NY (46 miles) just off of US 81. It is just a few miles from SUNY Cortland and Tompkins County Community College (TC3). Its location places it an hour or less from several other colleges and universities including Syracuse University, Cornell University, Colgate University, Ithaca College, SUNY Binghamton, Hamilton College as well as the community colleges in Onondaga and Broome counties. As Homer borders Cortland, NY it is influenced by the college environment. However, it would be erroneous to see the district as a "college town." At 164 square miles, it is among the largest districts in the state. Of the \$794,767,548 in total assessed valuation in the district, approximately 60% is residential, 15% agricultural, 15% commercial and 8% industrial. (2011 Official Statement) The vast majority of the land mass of the district is rural. The primary residential areas encompass the town and village of Homer and the town of Cortlandville, which surrounds the city of Cortland.

As is the case with many rural districts, the three largest taxpayers in the district are public utilities that either serve the district or run supply lines through the district. The largest employer is SUNY

Cortland followed by Pall Trinity Micro Corporation and the district itself, Tops Supermarkets and then the Onondaga, Cortland, Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services. (2011 Official Statement) Including district residents who work in higher education and K-12, it is possible that the education sector is the single largest employment sector in the area.

Public education in Homer can be traced to 1798 when the first appropriation of taxes was made to establish a common school. In 1819 the Board of Regents granted a charter for the Cortland Academy - Homer Academy. In 1824 females were admitted into the Academy. Homer became a union school in 1873 consolidating five (5) common districts into Union District 1 under a common board of education. The district was centralized in 1946, which was early in the NYS centralization process. (District website)

Homer has paid attention to issues of values, vision and mission. As per its website, they are listed as follows:

The Homer Central Community promotes “Blue Pride.”

Blue Pride is:

Passion for Learning, Respect for Others, Integrity, Devotion to Civility and Excellence of Instruction.

The District Mission Statement is “The Homer Central School District promotes excellence and PRIDE in education.”

The District Vision Statement is as follows:

“The Homer Central School District shall be an institution that provides a challenging and rewarding educational opportunity for the children of its district to become productive citizens in tomorrow's world. Instruction will be conducted in a manner to foster PRIDE among students and faculty. We will strive to incorporate modern technological advancements in instruction as well as administration of the district and to make financial resources available to maintain and improve buildings and grounds, which showcase the community's pride. We are committed to engage the public through communication to ensure that the needs of the community are being met.”

The strong emphasis on pride as a value and characteristic is somewhat unique. It is an underlying theme in the district's values, mission and vision.

The district had previously developed goals for all key areas of its operation. These are useful in the strategic planning process as they can serve as a benchmark for current progress. The goals follow. Specific objectives are included as an appendix.

Goal 1: Instruction

Provide a safe and supportive environment and quality learning opportunities that are designed to develop responsible citizens with abilities to effectively cope with change and, in particular, to solve problems individually and collaboratively by the use of creative, logical, compassionate, and ethical thinking.

Goal 2: Technology

Provide the technological resources to support its global mission of child development and the enabling of Learners to have the knowledge, behaviors, and skills to become lifelong learners, effective parents, productive workers, and concerned citizens.

Goal 3: Facilities

Provide an environment, through its buildings and grounds, which supports its global mission of child development and the enabling of Learners to have the knowledge, behaviors, and skills to become lifelong learners, effective parents, productive workers, and concerned citizens.

Goal 4: Communication

Foster parental/community support of its global mission of child development and the enabling of Learners to have the knowledge, behaviors, and skills to become lifelong learners, effective parents, productive workers, and concerned citizens.

Homer is a member of the School Alliance for Continuous Improvement (SACI), which is a group of districts that subscribe to an ongoing system of outside evaluation and assessment. SACI reviews have generated very specific subject area goals in mathematics and English language arts. These too are included as an appendix.

According to the New York State Education Department's 2010 School Report Card for Homer, the district has a student population of 2,139 with 21% of the student body eligible for free lunch and

7% eligible for reduced lunch. Those percentages have since increased. According to the NYSED Child and Nutrition Management System website, in May, 2011, 31.1% of Homer children were eligible for free and reduced lunch. This increase is probably a result of the ongoing recessionary pressures in the area, and not an influx of economically disadvantaged families. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in Cortland County peaked at 11.3% in January, 2010 and had declined to 8.3% in July, 2011. Unemployment rates do not fully account for some who have simply stopped looking for work or who are underemployed.

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of Homer students are classified as White. No other racial or ethnic group comprises more than 1% of the total student population. The district boasts a high annual attendance rate (95%) and a low student suspension rate (5%). There were 190 teachers and 27 other professional staff accounted for in the 2010 School Report Card. This number varies from 2007-08 School Report Card data which reported the district had 195 teachers and 23 other professional staff. The district offered a total of 471 core courses, down from 491 in 2008-09 (2010 SRC).

For the 2010-11 school year, Homer received \$14,679,260 in Formula Aid. That is \$3,446,214 less than the legislative formula aid would have generated (2010-11 Output Report). With Excess Cost Aid, BOCES and other categorical aids, the district received total aid of \$18,562,115 (District). According to NYSED, Homer received \$20,527,414 in 2009-10 (2009-10 Output Report). This represents a one-year aid loss of \$1,265,299. According to the final legislative budget, Homer is expected to see an additional aid loss of \$1,132,889 for 2011-12.

The 2011-12 Homer Central School District budget is \$39,311,025, which is a \$1,024,530 increase from the 2010-11. The actual tax levy increased by \$561,305 (3.92%).

Homer experienced staff cuts as part of the 2010-11 budget development process in addition to those realized in previous years.

Program

Introduction: There are certain fundamental questions to consider when examining the educational program of a public school district. We introduce this section by sharing the questions that guided us in our analysis and describing the specific methods we used in addressing these questions:

What are the district's educational offerings? How do these offerings compare with similar districts and benchmark districts?

We identify five upstate districts that have similarities with Homer. We then compare the educational program offerings in the similar districts. This is accomplished through a comprehensive program survey completed by district officials and, when necessary, a follow-up interview with a member of the study team. We refer to this group of districts as the *Comparison Group*.

How effective has the district been in creating curriculum? Is the curriculum aligned with state and national standards? Is it accessible to teachers? Is it supported by a comprehensive Professional Development Plan?

We review district curriculum looking for standards-based practice. We also interviewed teachers to ascertain its accessibility and use.

What has been the performance of district students on state assessments? How does that performance compare with other schools in the BOCES? How does that performance compare with similar schools? How does that performance compare against benchmark schools? What has been the performance of distinct subgroups within the district on state assessments?

We access trend data for grades 4 and 8 and in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies as well as all high school level Regents Examinations. We compare these results among the comparison districts for a single year and benchmark districts for three years. We

specifically examine results for subgroups of students including Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students.

What is the quality of the district's program for students with disabilities?

We review the program for students with disabilities against existing standards.

What is the district's graduation rate and how does it compare? Where do graduates plan to go after high school? How many plan to attend four-year schools?

Using state reported data, we present post high school intention information for the comparison districts and the benchmark districts.

How does the district support teachers through staff development? What is the perception of teachers of the district's Professional Development Program?

We examine the district's Professional Development Plan and interview teachers regarding its overall effectiveness.

Is there evidence that the district's educational program is aligned with the skills and knowledge base identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills?

We conduct an audit of current curriculum and ask key stakeholders about this issue.

Comparison Districts

A core methodology in this study is presenting comparisons between Homer and other school districts. We divide these districts into two types. The first is the “*Comparison Group*.” These are districts of similar size, wealth, and socio-economic character to Homer. The second is the “*Benchmark Group*.” These are districts that have important similarities to Homer, but may be different in several areas. Some would not want to benchmark Homer with an average wealth

suburb, such as Jamesville-Dewitt. We disagree. We have found some suburban schools have instituted research-based best practice that would apply in any school district.

For the *Comparison Group*, we sought comparison districts that have similar enrollment and wealth. The New York State Education Department (SED) uses a statistic called “Combined Wealth Ratio” (CWR) to measure district wealth. It is an index of the *total property wealth* and *total income wealth* behind each student. The average Combined Wealth Ratio throughout the state is 1.00. The Homer Central School District has a CWR of .504. This would suggest that Homer is a low-wealth district, similar to other upstate rural districts including Chenango Valley (.498), Chittenango (.506), Palmyra-Macedon (.447) and Alden (.534). To illustrate the variance in wealth statewide, Fayetteville-Manlius and Jamesville-Dewitt, two Onondaga County suburban districts, have CWRs of .952 and .928 respectively. Scarsdale, typically seen as a wealthy downstate district, has a CWR of 5.671. The Syracuse City School District has a CWR of .294.

As we want to be able to compare district curricula and extra-curricular offerings, it is unreasonable to compare what Homer offers with an enrollment of approximately 2,139 students with offerings in larger districts. That is why, in the *Comparison Group*, we looked for districts with similar enrollment. Secondly, we looked at Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) Rates as the primary indicator of district need. This is a generally accepted approach in research, as FRL is an indicator of the wealth of a district’s students and families, not of the district in general. Some districts, such as Barker and Wayne have a higher CWR, while still serving a substantial portion of economically disadvantaged children. These districts have property wealth not reflected in its students and families. In both cases, this property wealth includes a large power plant as well as lakefront property. In the case of the Wayne Central School District, the R. E. Ginna Nuclear Power Plant is the longest running reactor in the United States, according to Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation. That power plant and lakefront property on Lake Ontario inflate the CWR for Wayne Central School.

There are real and substantial differences between public schools that are in upstate New York and public schools in downstate New York. School districts from Putman County to Suffolk County are more likely to be both property and income rich and spend substantially more per pupil than upstate

schools, especially those more than 100 miles from New York City. Curriculum offerings, therefore, are often broader in downstate schools. We tried to choose schools that were of a similar demographic profile. To that end, we chose five districts for the *Comparison Group* known to us in a number of ways to be similar to Homer. Unless otherwise noted, the comparison data used is from the 2010 NYSED School Report Cards as reported on the State Education Department website.

We focused on schools with a CWR of under .6 though we made an exception with Wayne, as its CWR is skewed, as noted, by the power plant and lakefront property values. Its FRL rate is 26%, only 2% lower than Homer. Again, using NYSED School Report Card data, Homer has an enrollment of 2,139 students, with a FRL rate of 28%. The CWR of the Homer Central School District is .504.

The comparison districts are as follows:

Alden Central School District: Erie County is one of the most diverse counties in New York. It contains the city of Buffalo, suburbs like Amherst and Williamsville and very rural areas such as Evans-Brant and North Collins. Alden is a largely rural area with a fair number of residents who commute to the greater Buffalo area for employment. It consistently ranks as one of the highest performing districts in Western New York in the *Buffalo Business First* analysis. Its CWR (.535) and FRL rate (28%) match up very well with Homer.

Chenango Valley Central School District: Chenango Valley is a centralized school district in Broome County just a few miles north of Binghamton. Like Homer, it benefits from its proximity to an institution of higher education. The CWR of the district is very similar to that of Homer (.498) while the FRL rate is slightly higher (31%). Its enrollment is a bit smaller, but it has enough students to generate a similar range of academic and extra-curricular offerings. Its geographic, wealth and size similarities make it a good comparison school. It is a relatively short drive from Homer.

Chittenango Central School District: Chittenango lies about 15 miles east of Syracuse, and, like Homer is a member of the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

The comparisons between Homer and Chittenango are particularly strong. CWR, FRL and enrollment are all very close. The proximity to Syracuse creates similar employment opportunities. Both are centralized schools around small villages.

Palmyra-Macedon Central School District: This district is the product of the centralization of school districts in Palmyra and Macedon, NY. The district is in Wayne County, but borders several Monroe County school districts. It is slightly less wealthy than Homer with a lower CWR and higher FRL rate, but the differences are small. The district’s enrollment is very close to that of Homer. It is about a half hour’s drive from downtown Palmyra to Rochester, NY, so proximity to an upstate city is similar.

Wayne Central School District: Wayne Central is the largest and wealthiest of the comparison districts. As noted earlier, part of that wealth comes from a power plant within district borders, while part comes from increased property values on Lake Ontario. But overall, the district is more similar than different from Homer. The CWR is about .134 higher and the FRL rate is just 2% lower. Both districts are rated “average need” by the New York State Education Department. We are aware that Wayne has instituted a number of innovations that could benefit Homer in a comparative study.

Table 1 – Overview of Comparison Group

District	CWR	Enrollment	FRL Rate (%)	Graduation Rate
Homer	.504	2139	28	82
Alden	.535	1811	28	91
Chenango Valley	.498	1821	31	91
Chittenango	.506	2228	29	83
Palmyra Macedon	.447	2037	30	87
Wayne	.638	2477	26	89

Source: NYSED School Report Cards and Output Reports

This group will be used in a variety of comparisons.

We also wanted to only compare Homer with higher performing schools. Thus, we sorted by Grade 4, 8 and 11 ELA and Mathematics test results and 2010 cohort graduation rates. According to the NYSED School Report Card, Homer has a FRL rate of 28%, and so we only considered schools with FRL within 3% of that rate.

The *Comparison Group* is used to compare program offerings as well as student outcomes and district operations. The *Benchmark Group* is only used to illustrate student outcomes with which the Homer Central School District may wish to benchmark for the purpose of setting achievement goals and examining best practices. Homer may wish to visit benchmark schools to consider best practices. It would be unfair for readers to assume that Homer should already meet and exceed the levels found in *Benchmark Groups*, as these are achievement targets for the future, not standards for today. It is reasonable to assume that Homer would achieve at levels similar to those found in the *Comparison Groups*. *Benchmark Groups* are presented after the analysis from the *Comparison Groups*. We also chose different benchmark schools for different purposes, which we will address in that section of the report.

Throughout this report we make comparisons using data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) website. This data often reflects different years, sometimes as a result of an audit process performed by NYSED. Therefore, certain key variables change. For example, in the following table, we use data from the current state output reports. Later we will provide comparison data which reflects a previous year, but fully audited data. As a result, there are slight variations in specific measures such as CWR. In Tables 2 and 3, we present comparisons using data from the 2009 census update estimates, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and NYSED.

Table 2 - District and Community Demographics

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
<i>District Demographics (NYSED)</i>						
BOCES	Erie 1	Broome-Tioga	MCO	WFL	WFL	OCM
Enrollment, 2010 SRC	1811	1821	2228	2037	2477	2139
Total district enrollment 2009 SRC	1838	1827	2263	2071	2525	2181
African American (%)	1	3	2	1	2	1
Hispanic or Latino (%)	1	1	2	1	1	1
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (%)	0	1	1	1	1	1
White (%)	97	95	96	95	96	97
Multiracial (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Free/Reduced Lunch (%)	28	31	29	30	26	28
Limited English Proficient (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attendance Rate (%)	96	95	95	96	96	95
Suspension Rate (%)	2	1	4	2	2	5
SWD (%) NYS SRC	12.17	13.25	11.68	11.83	9.54	14.8
Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) current	.535	.498	.506	.447	.638	.504
Property per pupil (Avg. per TWPU)	\$288,781	\$256,880	\$259,103	\$232,871	\$377,113	\$265,273
Income per pupil (Avg. per TWPU)	\$111,603	\$107,608	\$110,209	\$96,135	\$122,560	\$106,952
Pupil Need Index (PNI)	1.222	1.239	1.255	1.249	1.177	1.519
Graduation Rate (%)	91	91	83	87	89	82
Avg. Class Size Elem	22	25	21	20	18	19
Avg. Class Size Gr 8 ELA	19	25	17	14	18	17
Avg. Class Size Gr 10 ELA	23	19	18	22	17	18
Teacher Turnover Rate <5 yrs. exp. (%)	16/64	20/0	30/39	13/11	11/20	13/7
Teacher Turnover Rate Total (%)	12/21	15/10	15/12	11/22	10/13	12/10

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
<i>Community Demographics</i>						
Population, 2009 US Census Estimate	12,985	12,744	13,662	12,299	14,163	12,303
Population, 2000 Census	13,548	12,419	13,540	12,538	14,637	12,514
Total Square Miles	56	22	64	49	60	164
% owner Occupied Housing Units	85.84	84.36	79.07	72.98	87.09	79.6
Total Population 5-17	1,919	1,942	2,420	2,108	2,620	2,280
% Children age 5-17 in poverty	8.4	11.4	8.7	12.2	8.1	14.1
Children age 5-17 under poverty level	162	221	211	258	213	323
Adults w/B.A. degree or higher (%)	14.95	26.36	19.37	27.56	25.79	28.68
Per Capita Income (\$)	24,698	24,426	24,859	26,770	26,187	25,051

Source: 2000 US Census; 2005-2009 NCES School District Comparative Profiles; NYSED

Homer shares a number of key similarities with the comparison districts. They are all rural districts with small village centers. All of the districts are centralized. None has a substantial amount of diversity with between 95-97% of students identified as White. Free and Reduced Lunch percentage was one of the variables we used to select districts, and therefore the range is very close, from 26% in Wayne to 31% in Chenango Valley. Enrollment was also a filter, and as such, each district varies by no more than 16% from Homer.

Pupil Needs Index (PNI) is used in the calculation of Foundation Aid by the New York State Education Department. It is a measure of student need that includes poverty, Limited English Proficient percentage and scarcity, or pupils per mile. It ranges from a low of 1.0 to a high of 2.0. For example, the PNI for Pittsford is 1.037 while the PNI for the Rochester City School District is 1.846. The actual formula is available in the NYSED State Aid Handbook. Homer has the highest PNI in the sample. This is due to two significant factors, poverty and scarcity. With about the same enrollment and population of the other districts in the group, Homer has over 2.5 times as many

square miles as the next closest comparison district. Homer also has the highest number of children living in poverty, at 14.1% of the target age group. The average for the other five (5) districts is 9.76%.

While Homer has the largest percentage of children living in poverty, the percentage of adults with at least a bachelor's degree is also the highest of the group. Educational attainment is typically associated with income, and in fact, income per pupil, is in line with the rest of the group. Per capita income is about average for the group. This suggests a different population profile than that found in the rest of the *comparison group*. This is one of the issues in using FRL as a sole indicator of pupil economic need. There are clear differences in a district's FRL rate and poverty. Eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch implies that a family is economically disadvantaged, but not necessarily living under the Federal Poverty Guidelines. So, whereas, Homer appears to have a similar portion of its population that is economically disadvantaged, it has a larger portion of its population that is living under Federal Poverty Guidelines. However, overall district wealth, per capita income and educational attainment are similar to or higher than the rest of the group. This would suggest that there may be a larger number of middle and upper middle class families in Homer than the group as a whole.

Each of our comparison districts along with Homer contain an overwhelming majority of owner-occupied homes. This is very different from urban areas and some suburbs, but common in rural areas. There is no information readily available as to the specific characteristics of rental properties in each of the districts.

Overall, the most striking characteristic of the group is the similarity of the districts. This is borne out by a visit to each of the districts. Schools in rural America are often the center of community life; and, in each case, this appears to be true for our comparison districts.

QUESTION 1

What are the district’s educational offerings? How do these offerings compare with similar districts?

In this section of the report, our primary interest is the educational program offered in each of the districts. Quite naturally, school district stakeholders in any given community tend to assume that the educational program offered in the local schools is fairly standard for schools of similar size and wealth. To ascertain the educational program offerings, we administered a comprehensive program survey created by our colleague, Dr. Sherri Lauver. This survey was sent to the key instructional leader in each district. When necessary, one of our team members followed up with the district instructional leader. The focus of this analysis is quantitative, in other words, we are looking at the range, not the quality of the district program offerings. In subsequent sections, we look at qualitative data.

Table 3- Elementary Level Academic Programs

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
<i>Additional Academic Programs</i>						
Kindergarten	X	X	X	X	X	X
Full-day Kindergarten	X	X	X	X	X	X
Avg. Class size	23	21	21	18	18	20
Gifted and Talented/Enrichment				K only		
Gifted and talented in school or outside/at another school					X	
G&T students taken from their regular classes					X	
<i>Elementary Remedial Activities</i>						
Pull-out program in reading or English	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pull-out program in math	X	X	X	X		
Adult tutors work 1:1 with students in reading or English			X			X
Adult tutors work 1:1 with students in math			X			X
Peer-tutoring in any subject			X			
Extra subject period instead of elective or exploratory course		X				

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
After-school or Before-school classes Or Coaching classes		X				X
Extra work or Homework from classroom teacher		X	X			X
Saturday/school break classes						
Summer school		X	X	X	X	X
Mentoring program			X	X		X
Other (describe):						
Music Instruction						
Elementary Band	X	X	X(4)	X (Gd. 5)	X	X
Orchestra			X(4)			
Elementary Chorus	X	X	X(4)	X (Gd.4)	X	X

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

We always assume that when principals, teachers, parents, and others read these reports, they will immediately recognize something that is not correct, at least according to their own understanding. We only report what was reported to us, and so we are most anxious to receive any corrections. The school district will publish these reports mainly as a web-based document making ongoing changes easy.

Without exception, the Homer Central School District offers an elementary program similar to the comparison districts. Class sizes are about average in the group. The remedial program is particularly extensive. A weakness appears to be in Gifted and Talented classes.

Table 4 - Elementary Level Extra-curricular Activities, Sports and Student Services

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
# Full-time counselors (Elementary)	0	2	3	2	3	.5
Elementary load per counselor		400	300	1:450	300	
Math Olympics			X	X		
Art Club		X	X	X	X	
Chess Club		X	X			
Drama Club		X	X		X	X
Environmental club					X	
Fitness First		X				
Literary Club		X	X	X		
Newspaper		X				
Odyssey of the Mind		X				
School Ambassadors		X				

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Science Club		X		X	X	
Service Club		X				
Ski Club		X		X		
Storytelling		X				
Student Council		X	X			X
Talent Show		X	X			
Yearbook	X	X	X	X		X

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

In the area of student services, Homer provides a minimal counseling program for elementary children. In terms of extra-curricular activities, it is not common for an elementary school to offer more than a few clubs or activities. Often elementary children find their athletic interests met in the community. We only include elementary extra-curricular activities in the survey because sometimes we find schools with a variety of offerings. Chenango Valley appears to meet this criterion, as does, to a lesser extent, Chittenango.

Table 5 – Comparison District Middle (JHS) Level Academic Programs

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
<i>Other Academic Programs</i>						
#Languages offered to MS	2	2	2	2	3	2
French	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spanish	X	X	X	X	X	X
German					X	
Latin						
Italian						
ASL						
Gifted and Talented/Enrichment	NA	NA	NO	No	Yes	No

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

New York State is very prescriptive at the middle level. Many schools, especially smaller schools, find it a struggle to meet all the state requirements, at which point, there is usually very little left for a local school district. The exceptions are programs for gifted children and foreign language. We found the offerings at Homer Junior High School consistent with those offered in the comparison

districts. Homer offers two foreign languages and no formal gifted and talented or enrichment program.

Table 6 - Middle Level (JHS) Extracurricular Activities, Sports and Student Services

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs, or Boy Scouts/Girls Scouts		X				
Academic honor societies	X			X	X	
Band	X	X	X	X	X	X
Book club		X	X	X	X	
Business or entrepreneurship club						
Career club		x				
Chess club		X	X			
Chorus or choir	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community service club		X		X		
Computer clubs						
Conservation, recycling, or environmental group such as the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy		X				X
Creative writing or literary magazine	X	X	X	X	X	
Drama club		X	X	X	X	
Educational clubs (Odyssey of the Mind, etc.)		X	X	X	X	
Foreign language club		X	X	X	X	
Jazz Band		X	X	X		X
Orchestra			X			
Other subject matter clubs (art)	X	X		X	X	X
Science club		X	X		X	X
Science fair/Science Olympics		X	X		X	
Student council	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student newspaper		X		X	X	
Student yearbook	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theatre (e.g. school plays or musicals)	X	X		X	X	X
Interscholastic sports	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intramural sports		X	X	X	X	
Vocational education clubs			X	X		
<i>Sports available for MS (Boys/Girls)</i>						
Baseball/softball	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Basketball	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Cheerleading or dance					B	
Football	B	B	B	B	B	B
Golf		B/G	B/G	B/G		
Gymnastics						
Soccer	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Swimming		B/G		B/G		
Tennis		B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	
Track	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Volleyball	B/G	B/G	B/G	G	B/G	B/G
Wrestling	B	B	B	B	B	B

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Cross country		B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Lacrosse		B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Bowling		B/G	B/G			
Support Services						
Alternative/Stay-in/Dropout Prevention programs for MS	X	X		X		X
After-school program for MS	X					
Block Scheduling					X	
# of full time counselors (MS)	1	1	2	2	3	1
MS load per counselor	300	370:1	265	1:200	180	380
Project Lead the Way	X					

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

Homer offers a comprehensive list of athletics and clubs to its junior high school students. There are some opportunities available in the other schools that are not available in Homer. Overall, however, Homer students have many extra-curricular and athletic choices at the junior high school level.

Table 7 - High School Level Academic Programs

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Elective courses for HS						
Art	X	X	X	X	X	X
Business	X	X	X	X	X	
Family & Consumer Science		X		X		
Music		X	X	X	X	X
Technology	X	X	X	X	X	X
SAT or ACT preparation		X		X		
Other Academic Programs						
#AP courses for college credit	2	13	8	5	10	7
AP English Lit & Composition	X	X	X		X	X
AP English Lang. & Comp.		X	X	X	X	
AP American History	X	X	X	X	X	X
AP World History		X				
AP European History		X			X	X
AP Economics		X				
AP Gov./Politics/US		X				X
AP Studio Art/Drawing		X			X	
AP Statistics		X		X	X	
AP Calculus AB		X	X		X	
AP Chemistry		X	X		X	
AP Biology		X	X	X	X	X
AP Physics B			X		X	
AP Psychology						
AP Art History						

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
AP Music Theory				X		X
AP Foreign Language		X				
AP Environmental Science			X			
AP Computer Science						
AP Accounting						
AP Health						
SUPA/CLEP			X			X
Community College			X	X	X	X
#Languages offered to HS		3	2	2	3	3
French	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spanish	X	X	X	X	X	X
German					X	X
Latin		X				
Italian						
ASL						
Gifted and Talented/Enrichment					X	
Gifted and talented in school or outside/at another school			X		X	

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

The Homer Central School District offers the foundational New York State high school curriculum along with non-mandated programs and both basic and advanced electives. There are electives in art, music and technology. There does not appear to be a program in business education or family and consumer science.

In addition to traditional electives, Homer offers a number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in English, mathematics, science, social studies and music. Homer offers fewer AP classes than does Wayne, but more than others. In addition to AP and IB classes, each of the districts, including Homer offer courses in cooperation with the local community college, in this case, Tompkins County Community College. Homer also offers courses through Syracuse University Project Advance. We also inquired as to whether schools had special program-wide initiatives. Wayne Central has a growing International Baccalaureate program. With just 21 students in 2009-10, the program has 84 students today. Palmyra-Macedon also has the International Baccalaureate program.

Table 8 - High School Level Extra-curricular Activities, Sports and Student Services

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs, or Boy Scouts/Girls Scouts						FFA
Academic honor societies	X	X	X	X	X	X
Band	X	X	X	X	X	X
Book Club		X	X		X	
Business or Entrepreneurship Club	X	X	X	X	X	
Career Club		X				
Chess Club		X			X	X
Chorus or Choir	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Service Club	X	X	X	X		X
Computer Clubs		X				
Conservation, recycling, or environmental group such as the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy	X	X	X			X
Creative Writing or Literary Magazine	X	X	X	X	X	X
Debate or Speech Team					X	
Drama Club	X	X	X	X	X	X
Educational clubs (Odyssey of the Mind, etc.)		X	X	X		
Foreign Language Club		X	X	X	X	X
Future Educators Club						
History Club		X				
Lifesmarts Club						
Math Club		X		X	X	
Model UN Club			X	X		
Orchestra			X			
Other subject matter clubs (Art)		X	MOCK TRIAL	X	X	
Photography Club		X				
Political Club		X				X
Science Club (Please specify if there is a specific focus such as astronomy, robotics, Project Lead the Way)		X (STEM)	SCIENCE OLYMPIAD	X	PLTW, Science Olympiad	
Science Fair/Science Olympics		X	X	X	X	
Ski Club		X	X		X	X
Student Council	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Newspaper	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Yearbook	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theatre (e.g. school plays or musicals)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Religious Organizations		X				X
Interscholastic Sports	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intramural Sports		X		X	X	X
Vocational Education Clubs			X	X		X
Sports available for HS (Boys/Girls)						
Baseball/Softball	X	B/G	B G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Basketball	X	B/G	B G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Cheerleading or Dance	X	G	G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Field Hockey						G
Football	X	B	B	B	B	B
Golf	X	B/G	B G	B/G	B/G	B/G

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Gymnastics						
Ice Hockey					Club	B
Soccer	X	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Swimming	X	B/G		B/G		
Tennis	X	B/G	B /G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Track	X	B/G	B /G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Volleyball	X	G	B/ G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Wrestling	X	B	B	B	B	B
Cross Country	X	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Lacrosse		B	B /G	B/G	B/G	B/G
Ski/Snowboard			B/ G	B/G	B/G	
Bowling	X	B/G	B/ G		B/G	B/G
HS career/planning services						
Help with filling out college/vocational/technical school applications	X	X	X	X	X	X
Help with filling out financial aid forms	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assistance in writing essays for college applications		X	X	X	X	X
Days off from school to visit college or vocational/technical schools		X	X	X	X	X
Career placement counseling		X	X	X		X
Practice interviews		X	X		X	X
Other:						X
Dual Credit for HS and College		X	X	X	X	X
Alternative/Stay-in/Dropout Prevention Programs for HS		X	X	X		X
Regents Alternative Program				X		
Block Scheduling	X			X	X	
Career & Technical Courses		X	X	X	X	X
Specialized Career Academy						
Work-based Internships	X		X	X	X	
New Visions Program		X	X	X	X	X
GED Program		X	X	X	X	X
# of full time counselors (HS)	2	3	4 (1 ADAPEP)	3	4	3
HS load per counselor		200	175	325	210	238
Transition Services		X	X	X		X
Career Pathways		X	X			
Continuing Education		X		X		
Project "Lead the Way"				X	X	

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

An analysis of the high school offerings of the comparison districts suggests that Homer High School offers as broad a program of extra-curricular and athletic activities to its students as most of

the comparison districts. The exception is Chenango Valley which appears to have the most extensive extra-curricular offerings.

Table 9 - Districtwide Programs and Services

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Universal Pre-Kindergarten	X	X	X	X	X	
Student Support Team	X	X	X	X	X	X
Before or After-school Day Care	X		X			X
Career-Planning Services	X	X	X			X
State certified Library Media Specialists	X	X	X	X	Cut at HS	X
Partnership with outside organizations (e.g., businesses) to provide services to students	X		X	X	X	X
Health and Safety Coordinator	X	X		X	X	X
FT Nurse	X	X	X	X	X	X
HIV, STD, or Teen Pregnancy Prevention		X	X	X		X
Physical Activity	X			X	X	X
Nutrition and Healthy Eating	X	X	X	X	X	X
Character Education (Programs for social, emotional, & ethical dev.)	X	X		X		X
Bullying and/or Violence Prevention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tobacco-Use prevention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Alcohol-Use Prevention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drug Prevention	X	X	4 (1 ADAPEP)	X	X	X
Block Scheduling	X		175	X		
Foreign Language begins grade	7	7	8	7	5	7
6-1-1 option for Special Ed	X		X	X		
12-1-1 option for Special Ed	X	X	X	X	X	
English Language Proficiency requirement for LEP students	X			X	X	X
Regular English language assessments at least once/year for LEP students	X		X	X	X	X
Grades subdivided into teams/houses/family groupings	Sp Ed (K-3, 5-7, 9-12) and 5/6 wing, and 7/8 wing		X	6-8	Sp Ed (K-3, 5-7, 9-12) and 5/6 wing, and 7/8 wing	X JH AND INT
Programs with special instructional approaches (i.e., Montessori)				multiage	Aventa On-line learning, MS Reading Program	X Multiage

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Grade students can start music instruments	4	4	4	4	4	4
Distance Learning	X			X	X	X
In-school suspension programs		X		X		X
Extended day program for students needing assistance	X			X	X Grades 3 & 4 Before School	X
Summer school for students needing assistance		X	X	X		X
Looping	X		SS/ELA 7-8			
Co-Teaching	X	X	X	X	X	X
Resource Room Support	X		X	X	X	X
Continuing Education						

Source: Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey, 2011-12

We also asked questions about district-wide programs (Table 9). These are programs that may be instructional, support-based or notable features of the district. Homer features most of the district-wide services found in the comparison districts. We were surprised to see no 6:1:1 option within the district, as a school this size usually has the student base to offer that program.

QUESTION 2

How effective has the district been in creating curriculum? Is the curriculum aligned with state and national standards? Is it accessible to teachers? Is it supported by a comprehensive Professional Development Plan?

To examine this question, the study team reviewed both the process for creating curriculum and samples of actual curriculum products. In addition, teachers and school leaders were interviewed to ascertain their sense of the effectiveness of the curriculum products as well as their accessibility to teachers.

In its most advanced form, curriculum should guide instruction and classroom outcomes and learning. Curriculum maps serve as the basis for instruction in the classroom; therefore, they should represent both horizontal and vertical development. They should be dynamic and be specific so that

trained educators can understand and employ them. These maps must show links to the state and national standards, paying particular attention to common core standards and 21st Century skills. An examination of the Homer Central School Professional Development Plan for 2009 – 2011, reveals that three of the four goals include a focus on curriculum development in three central areas: literacy, improving instructional technology and coordination of curriculum across grade and content. These areas were prioritized based on staff survey, the NYS Learning Standards and student achievement results as indicated by the School Report Card.

Common core guides for K – 6 illustrate an understanding of the new common core and are well-aligned with state standards. There is, however, wide variance in the depth and development of the maps. Though there is an appropriate common template available, not all grade or content areas employ it and among those who do use it, there is variation in the quality of the maps with key elements sometimes incomplete. Some content/grade areas appear to create a concept map for key units, while others have a bulleted guide of teaching activities.

Our analysis suggests that the district is clearly in the early stages of creating a well-defined curriculum. In a high performing school district, the curriculum is one of the foundational academic strengths of all that occurs in a school district. We were not able to discern a formal system of curriculum development, review and update that would ensure that all curricula are aligned with college and career readiness goals. Such a system will require ongoing focus and supervision. Consideration of the following should be given in creating such a curriculum system:

- Develop a step-by-step process of curriculum development and review featuring an ongoing curriculum review cycle of no more than five (5) years with each subject/content area entering into a defined cycle of development.
- We suggest an immediate focus Grade 3 – 8 ELA and math. These curricula should be aligned with common core standards.

- Review the current curriculum map format to ensure that all are able to effectively use the map. Adopt a format for the creation of curriculum maps including a common, consistent format.
- Existing maps must be revised to infuse 21st Century skills, cognitive engagement and constructivism, the basis for the new common core standards. The infusion of these areas increases the development of higher order thinking.
- Curriculum must be developed in a manner that allows horizontal and vertical alignment. As we move towards integrated learning and focused areas of understanding where students are required to think deeply not broadly, the teachers must work together in developing curriculum.
- Provide professional development focused on effective and efficient curriculum analysis and development practice.
- Ensure the end product curriculum is holistic, integrated and inclusive.

As the district enters into a complete revision of the curriculum development process, it is essential that the teaching staff be given the professional development that is both practical and theoretical. Only when teachers understand the relationship between curriculum development and student achievement will the process be fully embraced. There is significant research supporting the relevancy and rigor of curriculum as a major factor in student achievement. We believe this is an opportunity for the Homer Central School District.

Professional Development Plan

The Homer Central School District has a basic Professional Development Plan as required by CR 100.2. It represents the district vision and goals. The plan also includes information on the professional development planning team goals and membership. The plan was developed as a result of a needs assessment using a variety of appropriate tools. Four key areas were prioritized and

addressed in the plan. These four areas are literacy, improving instructional techniques, coordination of curriculum across grade and content area and technology. The plan includes details of the focus elements including activities, designated responsibility, timeframe and the evaluation measure. A focus on the new staff mentoring program illustrates the district's belief in supporting new teacher professional development and the link between teacher proficiency and student achievement. A basic evaluation process is also included.

The NYS Professional Standards and Practices Board have developed standards for professional development for teachers. Research is clear that teacher quality is the single most powerful influence on improved student achievement. It is therefore essential that teachers are provided with ongoing, high quality professional development to sustain and enhance their practice (NYSED Professional Development Standards). An effective professional development plan will include staff development opportunities that define expectations while recognizing the need for a dynamic plan aligned with New York State learning standards. Key elements of such a plan include continuous improvement, improving the learning of all students, research-based expectations, professional learning communities, collaborative leadership and job embedded opportunities for growth.

We suggest that the Homer Central School District consider the following:

- Clearly indicating the roles of the Professional Development Committee (PDC). It is essential that all stakeholder groups are represented in a partnership to develop and deliver a robust professional development plan. Key membership must include teachers at all levels, paraprofessionals, administration, and parents.
- The work of the PDC must be closely aligned with curriculum development. In a district the size of Homer, it is suggested that curriculum development and professional development be subgroups of a larger Teaching and Learning Committee.
- We suggest that the focus on new teacher professional development be expanded to the first three years of a new teacher's career. A well-defined annual plan should be developed with specific expectations for each year. Included in this plan should be an evaluation

mechanism, making new teacher training dynamic vs. static. It is suggested that the PDC examine the NYS Standards for Professional Development in this area.

- There is a need to better define the four themes in the current plan and add explicit action steps for implementation.
- Provide a better defined evaluation mechanism.
- Include a plan to provide the required 175 hours of professional development for teachers every five (5) years and professional development focused on the responsibilities of teaching assistants and substitute teachers must also be outlined.

How effective has the district been in providing programs for students with disabilities?

We conducted a review of the district's programs for students with disabilities (SWD). One of our team members with a specialization in inclusion education spent two days in district reviewing documents and interviewing key stakeholders. We present this analysis in terms of strengths and challenges.

Inclusion and access: First and foremost, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each student be provided with a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This equates to all students having access to high standards and a unified curriculum in an inclusive standards. The district has committed significant organizational resources to the goal of high levels of academic achievement for all students. For example, senior administration includes the position of director of instruction and evaluation. Additionally, the district provides a half-time curriculum coordinator for grades K-6, who also serves as the principal at Hartnett Elementary. At the secondary level, the traditional department chair position in grades 9-12 has been reorganized as curriculum area lead teachers for grades 7-12, to align curriculum, instruction and assessment and will be charged as teacher leaders to support strategies to accelerate achievement for all students.

There are many examples of the district moving to address the needs of all learners, including SWD. A departmentalized team of grade 4-6 teachers at Hartnett has infused math instruction throughout

the day for all students. Results for students with disabilities have soared, from 0% at Levels 3-4 in 2005-06 on Grade 6 math (the highest grade level in the building) to 75% in 2007-08 and 100% in 2009-10. No SWD has scored a Level 1 on Grade 6 math since 2008, although many other districts see Grade 6 math proficiency as unattainable for SWDs. Under the leadership of the coordinator of K-6 curriculum, teams composed of teachers across buildings identified instructional changes required by the Common Core Standards. The director of curriculum and evaluation analyzed data and took specific, immediate steps to address the systemic issue of high failure rates of 8th grade students with disabilities on the district foreign language proficiency exam. At the junior high school, a veteran reading teacher and new English teacher co-teach a 7th and 8th grade English class. They developed highly engaging lessons modeling effective differentiated instruction. High school special education teachers met this summer to adjust their schedules to be in at least one “consultant teaching” class in a core curriculum area. A special education teacher is now in one section of English 9 and Algebra 1, English 10, Biology, Participation in Government 12, and English 12.

This is not to suggest that all of the gains are the result of recent activities. For example, the Life Skills teacher at the high school is assigned eight students for four to seven years focusing on functional academics, use of technology, community independence and career readiness with the goal that all will have competitive employment by the time they leave school.

The greatest challenges appear to be foundational, and we note concerns with the program offerings and the spirit and letter of IDEA. Homer has a longstanding tradition of offering “basic” classes composed of only students with individualized education plans in the Regent’s core curriculum. These classes offer a diluted curriculum while other Regents classes maintained the standard Regents curriculum. We note that the curriculum was diluted as opposed to differentiated. In the latter, the curriculum is aligned to the same standards and ultimately the same assessment. A diluted curriculum is exactly that, a thinning of the standards and curriculum, which may not be aligned to the standards or the assessments. There is no dilution of the state assessment and student achievement and therefore student opportunity is impacted. The practice of “basic classes” is not aligned with the intent of IDEA, and was partially ended this year.

At the high school, we see the program for SWD as somewhat supplemental, even an afterthought. For example, the English department's summer curriculum project did not involve special education teachers who would be consultant teachers in two of those teachers' classrooms. The high school has the lowest proportionate share of special education teachers per IEP student (0.05, versus the high of 0.12 at the elementary school). The high school master schedule is built in fall and winter; students with disabilities are assigned in spring to core courses based on what is available; special education teachers developed their schedules in July, picking one or two class periods during which they could be "consultant teachers." Resource rooms have enrollment of 1-5 students (the maximum allowed) each period due to the assumption that these were the primary assignment type for special education teachers; most high school SWD receive the Regents curriculum with no direct or indirect support to the Regents teacher. As a result, three of the seven special education teachers assigned to the high school work with about 28 of the 129 special education students, while the other four are responsible for 101 students with IEPs and "support" 28 students with 504 plans. Despite that fact that special education teachers have advocated for differentiated resources, including purchasing such resources with their own funds, many classes have not incorporated differentiated texts into their programs. The end result seems to be a program where SWD have to find their place, instead of carefully designed programs to meet specific needs.

We recommend that the district reorganize staffing, curriculum and instruction to align practice to CR Part 200 as well as achievement goals that result in college and career readiness. The district needs to adopt a goal of rapidly increasing the achievement of students with disabilities. Teacher leadership focusing on cross-team success oriented instruction utilizing research-based best practices should be fostered and nurtured. This strategic plan should include specific goals around closing the achievement gap between SWD and their non-disabled peers as well as ensuring that all practices are consistent with state and Federal law. The leadership and instructional team at the high school seemed very much ready to take on this responsibility and move as quickly and creatively as possible to meet this goal.

Student achievement: In the section that follows, we provide comparisons of student achievement for all students, including SWD, with the *Comparison Group* and *Benchmark Group*. In this paragraph, we comment briefly on some of the specific issues associated with the achievement of

SWD at Homer. Of the 2006 cohort of entering 9th graders with IEPs, only 33% achieved a grade of 65% or better on the English Regents by June 2010; an additional 18% of the 2006 cohort of students with IEPs achieved between 55%-64% on the Regents or 65 on the Regents Competency Test (RCT) in Reading and Writing, the requirement for a local diploma. This means that 49% of the ninth graders with disabilities who entered in 2006 either failed to graduate on time, graduated with an IEP diploma, transferred to a GED program, or dropped out of school (NYS School Report Card, 2010). This issue could grow worse as a result of recent actions of the Board of Regents eliminating the option of RCTs for a local diploma with the entering high school cohort of 2011. All students with IEPs will have to earn a 55 for local diploma credit and a 65 for Regents credit on the five required Regents exams to graduate with a diploma.

The Regents are now considering discontinuing IEP diplomas in favor of a Certificate that would only be available to students taking the NYS Alternate Assessment (generally the lowest 1% of all students in a district). Many students who earned a diploma by passing RCTs or earned an IEP diploma if unable to pass Regents courses or tests may face the prospect of no diploma unless schools challenge assumptions about what students with mild or moderate disabilities can achieve. Currently no in-district students are considered “ungraded” and eligible for the NYSAA, although there is a graded 3-5 life skills class in the intermediate school, a graded 6-8 life skills class is in the junior high school, and a graded 9-12 life skills class is in the high school. It would appear that students with significant disabilities that preclude their inclusion in academic classes are in a possible diploma limbo, with no access to an eventual local diploma and the possible elimination of the IEP diploma for graded students. We also note a reported consensus among the OCM-BOCES districts to require an IQ in the 50’s range to be eligible for the New York State Alternative Assessment (NYSAA). This appears too restrictive, since it is not specified in the state’s list of criteria for eligibility. Instead the state allows 1% (or 1.5% with a waiver for exceptional circumstances) of the total 3-8 or 9-12 cohort of students to have NYSAA scores count equally with other scores towards school and district accountability. During the 2010-11 school year seven Homer students were “ungraded;” four of those completed the NYSAA for grades 3-8. The other three are secondary level ungraded students who complete the NYSAA once in grades 9-12.

All of those students attended BOCES programs and so counted only towards the “district” accountability in grades 3-8 and high school. Use of the NYSAA should be explored for in district students when appropriate. Homer may have as many as 21 students (1% of the 2009-10 School Report Card enrollment of 2,139 students in all grades) eligible to take the NYSAA. We recommend that the Committee on Special Education (CSE) consider carefully the eligibility of these students for “ungraded” status and participation in the NYS Alternate Assessment, which would demonstrate their accomplishment on the NYS Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities in a portfolio. If, however, some of the students in the life skills class can and should be taking the regular NYS assessments at their grade level, they will need access to a modified grade level curriculum.

It was not clear in our review that teachers had all of the data they need to inform instruction. Teachers should be provided detailed reports, available through the Data Warehouse system, on the performance of students across several “cubes.” As grade levels and departments they need to see how students perform on various types of items (multiple choice vs. constructed response), how the performance of students with disabilities compares to those in similar districts, what the distribution of scores reveals about the need for focus on academic language, self-directed strategy instruction and practice on intermittent common assessments aligned to the state assessments.

Administration of the Committee on Special Education: The CSE is managed by an experienced long term administrator. We interviewed parents of SWD who expressed positive experiences with special education staff and confidence that the special education administrator knew their children well. One parent, who travels frequently for work, said that the rapid response of special education staff to emails ensures her that she is able to support her daughter’s education.

The greatest challenges for the CSE appear to be at the high school, which has a classification rate of 18.5% and an additional 3.9% of students with 504 plans. In total, 22.4% of high school students in Homer are either classified as students with a disability or requiring modifications under Section 504. There is also limited use of the consultant teacher-direct service model at the high school in Regents classes. This is a concern both for pedagogical reasons and reporting reasons that could impact state aid. The junior high school has a classification rate of 16.2% and 7.35% of its students

have 504 plans totaling 23.55% of the population. These rates are much higher than would be predicted.

We found that it is common for parents not to attend the CSE meetings for annual reviews and re-evaluation. There is concern that some decisions may be made without full parent awareness. This is not consistent with either the letter or spirit of IDEA and must not occur.

QUESTION 3

What has been the performance of district students on state assessments? How does that performance compare with similar schools? How does that performance compare against benchmark schools?

How effective is the Homer Central School District in meeting its educational objectives as measured by state assessments? This section of the report is a review of Homer's results on various state assessments. We use three different reference points for our analysis. We begin with a comparison with the other schools in the BOCES on the 2011 examinations. We then look at the districts we identified as similar to Homer. We follow with a comparison with districts that Homer may want to consider as benchmarks. In both cases we examine the performance of several subgroups of students as compared to both the comparison and benchmark districts.

We began our comparison study by looking at 2011 BOCES rankings for 3-8 cohort assessments. This is the only time we use 2011 results as they are not yet official. We present these data as rankings only in order to illustrate how Homer students performed in comparison with other schools in the BOCES. These data reflect only one year of performance, and thus caution must be used in this analysis. A review of [Table 10](#) indicates on some measures, Homer is a leader in the BOCES. At five of the six grade levels examined, Homer is in the top half of the rankings in Mastery for English/Language Arts (ELA). In each of the other areas, in both ELA and Mathematics, Homer is in the bottom half of the rankings 4 of 6 times. On three occasions, Homer is in the top 20% of the group, Mastery for ELA, Grade 8; Mastery for Mathematics, Grade 8 and Proficiency for Mathematics, Grade 6. Interestingly, Homer is in the bottom 20% only twice, and one of those is

Proficiency for Mathematics Grade 8, the same grade level where it was second for mastery. The other was Mastery for Mathematics Grade 4, where it was in the top half for overall proficiency.

Table 10 – 2010 NYS Testing Program BOCES Rankings (n=24)

Assessment	Homer Rank, Proficient (3)	Homer Rank, Mastery (4)	Homer Rank, Combined
ELA 3	16	8	15
ELA 4	15	18	15
ELA 5	8	7	8
ELA 6	15	12	16
ELA 7	17	10	17
ELA 8	7	5	8
Math 3	18	14	15
Math 4	12	20	19
Math 5	15	10	13
Math 6	3	16	9
Math 7	14	14	15
Math 8	22	2	10

Source: District and BOCES officials

We then examine student performance on the broad range of state assessments within the *Comparison Group* for both cohort and individual assessments. Table 11 provides a single-year analysis of outcomes for the *Comparison Group*. These data are from the 2010 School Report Card, which are current on the NYSED website. The numbers in the table are the percentage of students that passed a given assessment. For Regents Examinations, the first number represents the percentage passing the examination while the second number represents the number passing with a grade of 85 or above. We caution that this is a single-year analysis. As such, it is more of a snapshot than a historical framework. In choosing the *Comparison Group*, we purposely selected schools that were performing at a level close to or above Homer. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that results in many areas are similar.

Nonetheless, the data indicates that Homer does match up well with the *Comparison Group*, performing a bit below the group average at the elementary level and slightly above the group average at the 8th grade level. At the high school level, Homer is higher than the group in some areas, and behind the group in others. Scores on these tests further affirm that the *Comparison Group* is a valid group of districts for side-by-side analysis.

Table 11 - Student Achievement for Comparison Districts

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Assessments (% passing)						(rank of 6)
<i>Elementary Level</i>						
ELA 4	71	65	70	58	74	62 (5)
Math 4	70	70	79	69	78	64 (6)
Science 4	96	93	99	90	98	96 (3)
<i>Middle School Level</i>						
ELA 8	69	60	61	58	67	67 (2)
Math 8	77	59	56	65	58	68 (2)
Science 8	93	89	95	94	95	95 (1)
<i>High School Level</i>						
Secondary Level English	93	90	84	83	95	77 (6)
Secondary Level Math	98	94	86	85	97	83 (6)
<i>Regents Exams % (>65/>85) - All Students</i>						
Comprehensive English	98/60	86/28	91/41	98/35	94/38	84/40 (6)
Math B*	86/51	90/24	38/5	73/0	51/0	71/6 (4)
Integrated Algebra	98/24	89/17	86/15	87/19	89/18	86/21 (5)
Geometry	92/30	93/22	89/25	83/19	79/17	94/30 (1)
Trigonometry*	89/39	0	81/27	85/26	0	81/38 (3)

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Global History & Geography	91/51	76/42	88/41	86/39	89/38	72/38 (6)
US History and Government	98/69	96/61	92/58	94/70	94/58	90/62 (6)
Living Environment	94/48	91/38	95/45	85/38	95/47	90/45 (5)
Physical Setting/Earth Science	96/56	88/27	83/33	81/26	80/35	79/38 (6)

Physical Setting/Chemistry	97/39	76/9	90/18	81/11	86/15	83/19 (4)
Physical Setting/Physics	100/54	91/27	92/61	87/25	84/18	91/41 (3)
Scholastic Aptitude Tests (N)	1511 (108)	1508 (61)	1459 (132)	1561 (61)	1543 (120)	1595 (72)
Reading	502	514	478	525	515	537
Mathematic	528	513	514	542	535	537
Writing	485	481	467	495	493	521
Act Composite (N)	23.6 (36)	NA	21.6	23.3 (42)	23 (26)	24 (73)

*Source: 2010 NY State Report Cards (<http://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/>), District Officials
Note that a score of 65 or above is a passing score. A score of 85 or above is deemed “passing with distinction.”*

There are three distinct classes of scores reported in Table 11. The first are scores in which all students in a given cohort are counted. The second reflects the percentage of students that took the test who achieved passing and mastery. We ranked Homer in comparison to the group. In the case of Regents Examinations, the ranking reflects the number of students scoring at or above 65.

The high school cohort scores in English and Mathematics refer to the percentage of the ninth grade cohort that was successful on the English 11 Regents and Mathematics A Regents or Integrated Algebra Regents Examinations. These numbers are typically close to graduation rates as a student who is successful on these examinations is usually on track to graduate. However, graduation rates are often somewhat higher than the cohort results, as graduation rates include local diplomas. The graduating class of 2010 could have included students who did not pass the required Regents examinations but still qualified for a local diploma and were thus counted in the graduation rate. This could include certain students with disabilities where they were exempt from Regents examinations as per their Individualized Education Plan and certain students with Section 504 accommodation plans that exempted them from certain of the required Regents examinations. This second option, i.e. Section 504 exemptions, is now phased out.

It is somewhat difficult to use multiyear data in the cohort comparisons K-8 as the NYSED changed the “cut points” on these exams for the 2010 tests. A score that demonstrated competency in 2009 may be deficient in 2010. Essentially, the department reasoned that scores on state cohort assessments should statistically align with New York scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Without a long and complicated discourse on this issue, we feel that this is an erroneous assumption that will only result in scores again being reset at some later time.

Students and teachers are highly motivated to perform well on state assessments. There is no extrinsic motivation for students who are chosen to take NAEP tests to perform to their best ability.

Homer students had mixed results in the 2010 Cohort examinations. Generally, middle school students scored at or above the average of the *Comparison Group* while elementary and high school students were below the group average. This is especially true for secondary English and mathematics. As we are only using a single year of data for this comparison, we reviewed Homer Central School District Report Cards for all years 2006-2010. This leads us to remark that overall performance shows an improvement trend 3-8 in both ELA and mathematics. In fact, the 2010 Grade 8 ELA is higher than most of the years prior to the change in cut points. The high school examinations have been relatively low throughout this period. The current percentages of students passing both examinations is 77 for English and 83 for mathematics, which is the second lowest in the five-year period we examined. (In 2007 it was 75% and 82%.) We also looked at graduation rates for the district. At 82%, Homer is the lowest in the *Comparison Group*. Since 2006 graduation rates have been 84%, 87%, 77% and 86%. At no time does Homer equal the current year *Comparison Group* average of 88.2%.

The second class of scores is Regents Examination results, and these are only for those students that actually sat for the examination. These scores are reported in two ways. The first number is the percentage of test takers who passed the examination. Second is the percentage of test takers who passed the examination with a score of 85% or above. We also provide rankings for each test.

In these comparisons, Homer does well in a few areas, notably geometry, trigonometry and physics. A concern surfaces when we examine the criteria required Regents examinations in English, social studies and science. In other words, these are the examinations students must take and include Earth Science, Global History and Geography either Math A or Integrated Algebra and English. It is in these areas, at least for the 2010 Report Card, where Homer demonstrated the least success. As part of our follow-up work, we will suggest that the subgroup on teaching and learning track student performance on these examinations in subsequent years as this can have a direct effect on graduation rates, especially given the elimination of Section 504 exemptions for Regents examinations. Failure to improve in these areas will impact graduation rates.

The second number in the Regents Examination comparison concerns the percentage of students taking a particular examination who scored above 85%. Generally, Homer students achieved mastery on Regents Examinations at about the same rate as did other school in the *Comparison Group*.

Table 12 - Special Education Results for Comparison Districts
Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2008-09 & 2009-10)

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer	Homer <u>All Students</u> 2010
<i>(% Passing)</i>							
<i>Elementary Level</i>							
ELA 4	62/38	42/13	76/29	17/4	56/38	48/7	62
Math 4	73/33	54/31	90/33	22/17	61/38	35/33	64
Science 4	86/86	75/63	90/96	53/52	94/94	73/80	96
<i>Middle School Level</i>							
ELA 8	45/19	19/20	29/13	5/5	44/19	18/21	67
Math 8	70/43	38/20	60/38	41/14	56/15	55/17	68
Science 8	60/65	38/75	64/85	55/60	72/75	62/75	95
<i>High School Level</i>							
Secondary Level English	74/56	44/59	50/64	40/35	64/74	55/33	77
Secondary Level Math	83/78	70/69	47/43	36/30	64/74	59/41	83

Source: 2008-09/2009-10 NY State Report Cards (<http://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/>).

The data in Table 12 suggests that students with disabilities (SWD) performed well below their non-disabled peers in the comparison districts in English/Language Arts. Learning disabilities are more likely to be manifested in English/Language Arts specifically at the eighth grade level. The Grade 8 ELA test is a challenge for many students, and particularly students with disabilities. All of the districts had very low Grade 8 ELA scores for SWD. Alden saw higher scores in 2009, but dropped sharply when cut points were changed in 2010. Homer was generally lower than the group as a whole. The 2009 ELA 4 and 8 were both second lowest in the group. The 2010 ELA 8 was the highest in the group, but still very low in comparison to non-disabled students. Mathematics scores were similar to the group as a whole, but also generally low. The high school scores suggest concern for graduation rates for students with disabilities. With a classification rate of almost 15%, this

could result in both the district and the high school becoming cited through the state accountability process.

The only positive trend is in science, where students with disabilities demonstrated passing rates closer to their non-disabled peers throughout the group. Homer was about average for the group as a whole.

We offer a word of caution in comparing scores of students with disabilities. The fact that a child is classified as a SWD does not equate to low ELA scores. One student may have a relatively mild disability, while another might have a severe learning disorder. In a very large population, from year to year there would not be enough variance to affect the outcome. However, the *Comparison Group* is made up of smaller school districts with average cohort sizes of about 180 students. Assuming a 14.8% classification rate, an analysis of the results of SWD could include a cohort of 27 students for any given year. In such a small group, the presence of just a few additional students with a severe disability could disproportionately affect group scores. So, when we see a very high or very low single year passing or failing rate, we should ask about variance in the cohort characteristics. That is why we present special education results over two years.

We also present results against the total student group for Homer. Even a cursory analysis makes it clear that many of the students who failed to meet proficiency in Homer are students with disabilities. For example, in 2010, 62% of all students scored at level 3 or 4 on the Grade 4 ELA examination. In that year, only 7% of Homer SWD scored at levels 3 or 4. Almost 40% of the students who failed to demonstrate proficiency were SWD. The implications are clear, not just for Homer but for all public schools. Find a way to help students with disabilities to be successful and overall student performance will improve.

Table 13 - Free & Reduced Lunch Results for Comparison Districts
Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2007-2009)

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer	Homer <u>All Students</u> 2010
Economically Disadvantaged							
<i>Elementary Level (%passing)</i>							
ELA 4	90/68	68/51	80/52	63/38	82/49	84/45	62
Math 4	90/57	73/64	88/63	70/52	84/66	79/49	64
Science 4	93/89	78/90	92/98	80/83	86/95	80/94	96
<i>Middle School Level (%passing)</i>							
ELA 8	91/-	66/43	59/54	56/28	71/69	48/49	67
Math 8	100/-	72/39	81/48	80/40	75/42	72/59	68
Science 8		63/73	86/92	69/92	83/92	78/85	95
<i>High School Level (%passing)</i>							
Secondary Level English	91/-	75/78	83/74	84/69	90/90	72/62	77
Secondary Level Math	77/81	93/87	90/79	86/69	88/93	63/76	83

Source: 2008-09/2009-10 NY State Report Cards (<http://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/>).

Table 13 presents comparison data for students eligible for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program. Poverty is often associated with student performance and has been shown to be offset, to some degree, by effective school programming. None of the comparison districts would be considered high need based on FRL rates alone. As with students with disabilities data, we also present Free and Reduced Lunch data for two years. In addition, we present Homer “all student” data for comparison purposes.

One of the frequent misunderstandings we encounter is the assumption that a family eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch is living under the Federal poverty level. Looking back at the data we presented on community demographics (Table 1), in the Homer Central School District, there were 323 children living under the Federal poverty rate according to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) from the 2009 US Census update. That means that 14.1% of children in the “relevant age” group came from families living below Federal poverty guidelines (<http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/saipe/saipe.cgi>). In 2009, Homer had a Free and Reduced Lunch rate of 28%. Though not technically living in poverty, the remaining 13.9% of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch are best characterized as economically disadvantaged. In all likelihood, the FRL lunch rate in Homer, as in most districts, is somewhat understated, as families must apply to receive the benefit, which can include both breakfast and lunch on school days. Some families simply choose not to apply. There is no way to accurately identify every family living in economic

stress, but it is safe to say that if 28% of the population is eligible for FRL, another 10-15% is either close to eligibility or eligible and did not apply for the benefit. This is especially true for older students, who are less likely to apply for the benefit. This could explain why Alden Central School, with an overall FRL rate of 26%, did not have enough economically disadvantaged students to report at grade 8 and 11.

The performance of economically disadvantaged students in Homer was lower than the Homer “all student” group in every assessment. In some cases, such as ELA 4 and 8, the performance of economically disadvantaged students was substantially lower than the group as a whole. Scores in grades 3 and 8 are generally low, but not consistently lower than the full *Comparison Group*. In one case, Grade 8 mathematics for 2010, Homer had the highest percentage of pupils scoring at or above 3 and was reasonably close to the “all student” group. The high school scores are the lowest in the group for each year in both assessments with the exception of mathematics in 2010 against Palmyra-Macedon.

It is not our experience that economically disadvantaged students will always score below non-disadvantaged students. In our work with Byron-Bergen, we found it notable that, there was little difference in the performance of students who are economically disadvantaged and the population as a whole on the 2009 NYS School Report Card. We found similar results in our work in the Albion Central School District in 2008.

For our second analysis, we looked only at demographic information and searched for higher performing schools with varying student demographics in upstate New York. We did not try to match enrollment or FRL percentage. Instead we accessed the similar school list that NYSED uses in making comparisons among schools and school districts (Group 30, 31 and 32, Middle School). The similar listing is divided into high-needs, average-needs and low-needs districts. All of the districts in this report are average-needs districts except Chenango Valley which is classified as a high-need rural district (Group 30). Group 31 generally includes average-need suburban districts and Group 32 average-need rural districts. Our task was to find leadership districts that might be benchmarks for Homer as it sets its achievement goals and develops processes to meet those goals.

Homer is an average-need rural district but can be considered a low-wealth district from the perspective of property value per student, income per student and Free and Reduced Lunch rates.

To give us a better sense of district performance, we used three years of data, thus allowing us to find districts with strong trends over the three-year period. Additionally, we applied a certain degree of local knowledge of districts that had instituted comprehensive school improvement efforts.

The districts we chose vary in size. Some are much larger than Homer. Larger enrollment, however, is not necessarily an asset in reaching higher levels of student achievement. All are NYSED average-need similar schools. Descriptions are as follows:

Holland-Patent Central School District: Although smaller than Homer, Holland-Patent, located outside of Utica, NY, is a very interesting benchmark district for Homer. CWR and FRL are both close to those of Homer. Both districts have a higher percentage of SWD and a high Pupil Need Index. Yet Holland-Patent has a 10 point higher graduation rate and demonstrates a solid trend of high level student achievement over a period of several years. This suggests institutional practices that lead to high levels of student achievement.

Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District: Niagara-Wheatfield has a FRL rate close to Homer's and more diversity in its student population. More suburban in nature, Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District is one of the few upstate districts that is actually growing. The district has been cited as a high performing school with an impressive graduation rate and has engaged in comprehensive strategic planning, focused specifically on student achievement. It ranks in the top quarter of schools in Western New York despite a higher FRL rate. Their results suggest a good benchmarking opportunity.

Lewiston-Porter Central School District: In Western New York, *Buffalo Business First* annually ranks each of the 97 districts serving the several counties around Buffalo. Lewiston-Porter ranks 10th. We do not necessarily subscribe to the ranking method, but do recognize there it as a consistent application. Lewiston-Porter is by no means a wealthy suburb. Its CWR (.792) is well below the state average and 16% of students are eligible for FRL. We wanted a range of upstate schools that

demonstrated higher performance, and Lewiston-Porter presents as a semi-suburban district with solid performance and a wealth factors not too distant from Homer.

Jamesville-Dewitt Central School District: We wanted to select one local district known for high performance regardless of demographics. Although to many living upstate, Jamesville-Dewitt is a wealthy suburb, it is actually an average wealth district in New York. The CWR is less than 1.00, and, though low compared to many, 13% of its students are FRL eligible. It may seem counter intuitive to select a suburban district as one of the benchmarks. However, we have found that some of the best of best practices are sometimes in suburban districts. Average wealth rural districts should be interested in learning from any district that can inform best practice.

Rockville Centre Union Free School District: At first glance, there may appear to be little that a district like Homer could take away from Rockville Centre in Nassau County. We disagree. Rockville Centre has one of the most impressive track records in “stretching” its students in the nation. According to the superintendent, Rockville Centre is an average wealth district on Long Island. As we are familiar with the district, we concur. The district is an older Long Island suburb. It has more upper middle class residents than Homer and also has a fair amount of diversity, including working class residents of color. Yet Rockville Centre has a reputation of outstanding outcomes for ALL of its students. In our own work, we have found truly outstanding instructional practices in Rockville Centre focused around the notion that “all means all” students. We believe every district can learn from Rockville Centre.

Sweet Home Central School District: We considered every upstate district as either a *Comparison District* or a *Benchmark District*. Sweet Home Central, outside of Buffalo, was a compelling choice. Sweet Home has a different student population than Homer as 76% of its students are white, 17% African-American and 3% Latino. It is larger, just under 3,600 pupils. Its PNI is very close to Homer (1.302) and has a 30% FRL rate, just above Homer. Among Buffalo area schools, Sweet Home ranks 22th out of 97 area districts in the *Business First* rankings. We chose Sweet Home for another reason. It literally borders the University of Buffalo, and thus, like Homer, has a higher percentage of adults with at least a bachelor’s degree. Despite higher FRL and PNI, student results are strong, and the graduation rate is high.

In [Table 14](#), we present comparison data using data from the 2000 Census, NYSED, Standard and Poor’s “School Data Direct” and City-Data.com. [Table 15](#) represents a three-year profile of the five benchmark districts and Homer.

Table 14 - District and Community Demographics

	Holland- Patent	Jamesville- Dewitt	Lewiston- Porter	Niagara- Wheatfield	Rockville Centre	Sweet Home	Homer
<i>District Demographics</i>							
BOCES	Erie 1	OCM	Niagara- Orleans	Niagara- Orleans	Nassau	Erie 1	OCM
Total district enrollment (09-10)	1,611	2,868	2,237	4,069	3,545	3,488	2,139
Am-Indian/Alaskan Native (%)	0	1	1	7	0	0	0
Black or African American (%)	0	10	2	3	6	17	1
Hispanic or Latino (%)	1	2	1	1	10	3	1
Asian//Pacific Islander (%)	1	7	1	2	3	4	1
White (%)	98	80	95	87	79	75	97
Multiracial (%)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Free/Reduced Lunch (%)	25	13	16	27	11	33	28
Limited English Proficient (%)	0	2	0	0	2	2	0
Attendance Rate (%)	95	96	92	96	95	93	95
Suspension Rate (%)	2	6	2	4	4	1	5
SWD (%)	14.86	8.67	12.3	10.33	9.78	6	14.8
Income per TWPU (\$)	89,025	216,678	181,194	102,570	361,840	138,672	106,952
Valuation per TWPU (\$)	255,387	426,712	375,784	292,627	1,106,805	458,751	265,273
Combined Wealth Ratio	.447	.928	.792	.514	1.88	.749	.504
Pupil Needs Index	1.428	1.151	1.139	1.226	1.092	1.302	1.519
Graduation Rate (%)	92	94	93	89	98	91	82
Teacher Turnover Rate <5 yrs. Exp (%)	12	17	16	25	30	33	7
<i>Community Demographics</i>							
Population	8,871	16,499	18,557	26,971	26,262	34,125	12,303
Adults w/at least B.A. degree (%)	23.04	54.82	33.44	19.49	61.09	40.14	28.68
Owner Occupied Housing (%)	87.46	78.41	80.18	80.78	78.74	59.23	79.6

Per Capita Income	\$27,370	\$42,668	\$33,627	\$25,529	\$52,012	\$22,286	\$25,051
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Source: 2000 US Census; 2005-2009 NCES School District Comparative Profiles; NYSED

Table 15 – Student Achievement in Benchmark Districts (3 years)

	Holland-Patent			Jamesville-Dewitt			Lewiston-Porter			Niagara-Wheatfield			Sweet Home			Rockville Centre			Homer		
Year	08	09	10	08	09	10	08	09	10	08	09	10	08	09	10	08	09	10	08	09	10
Elementary Level																					
ELA 4	95	81	65	87	89	79	83	87	77	76	81	63	80	82	65	96	95	92	73	86	62
Math 4	82	84	64	91	96	79	91	84	69	90	93	67	87	92	64	97	96	94	86	84	64
Science 4	95	99	99	95	98	97	95	96	98	92	95	94	91	93	92	97	96	96	94	93	96
Middle School Level																					
ELA 8	73	82	51	76	86	72	81	91	73	71	83	79	65	80	60	81	84	79	50	68	67
Math 8	66	85	48	89	91	78	87	95	62	76	86	58	74	94	64	86	94	76	67	88	68
Science 8	93	94	89	90	87	92	97	92	92		87	93	84	83	87	29	-	-	90	89	95
High School Level																					
Secondary Level English	90	90	90	90	96	90	88	90	96	92	90	90	85	89	92	98	99	97	85	86	77
Secondary Level Math	90	89	86	93	94	93	90	94	96	91	92	91	91	92	94	98	98	98	85	87	83
Regents Exams % (>65;>85) – All Students																					
Comprehensive English	98/46	95/32	97/51	95/55	95/52	96/62	97/47	97/44	99/64	94/51	97/41	94/44	92/47	92/40	89/40	98/76	96/71	97/69	96/51	87/37	84/40
Math B	77/21	74/29	65/4	70/26	64/24	72/32	85/30	74/25	75/18	58/10	64/12	66/3	80/30	59/11	66/12	76/34	78/34	65/0	80/28	58/15	71/6
Integrated Algebra	78/12	76/8	91/14	91/36	89/34	93/44	-	96/22	95/18	77/9	80/9	83/12	89/20	87/21	84/21	85/40	88/35	86/32	96/18	92/26	86/21
Geometry	-	72/16	64/16	-	91/46	91/41	-	-	92/31	-	74/22	77/14	-	86/17	77/17	-	83/46	79/27	-	96/46	94/30
Global History	84/37	84/43	92/50	80/45	91/59	88/63	93/56	94/55	95/72	85/41	86/40	85/47	87/47	83/47	81/39	86/47	87/55	87/52	74/33	74/41	72/38
US History	95/59	94/56	95/67	97/68	97/68	97/74	98/79	99/75	99/87	97/79	95/67	96/70	96/79	92/64	91/61	96/73	95/68	96/70	94/70	91/58	90/62
Living Environment	95/41	90/35	91/43	93/53	94/62	97/72	95/55	96/50	95/50	90/36	93/40	92/49	88/39	91/46	88/42	91/43	97/60	93/58	93/37	89/46	90/45

Source: 2008-10 NYSED SRC

The hope in establishing benchmark schools is to invite discussion around improvement and best practices. One of the primary factors in choosing benchmark schools was graduation rate, where Homer lagged behind. In the comparison of student achievement, we emphasize cohort scores because assessment results are measured against the entire group of grade cohorts. These data are from NYSED and include testing up through 2010. It is important that planners study the three years of data carefully to best understand the strengths and weaknesses of Homer when compared with these districts.

Generally, students from the Homer Central School District score below the *Benchmark Group* on the NYS ELA 4 test, when measured by the percentage of students scoring 3 or above. Their three-year average is higher than Niagara-Wheatfield and just lower than Sweet Home. Over the three years of the data, just fewer than 75% of Homer students scored a 3 or more on this test. Four of the comparison districts averaged over 80%. In mathematics, Homer is also below the group as a whole, but has a higher three-year average than Holland-Patent.

At the 8th grade level, Homer has the lowest three-year average in the group in ELA 8, but did well in comparison to many of the schools in 2010. Very low scores in 2008 hurt the average score. Holland-Patent had an unusually and uncharacteristically low level of student performance in both grade 8 assessments. In mathematics at the 8th grade level, Homer fared better, outscoring two of the districts on average.

High school cohort scores for Homer trend below the cohort group. In fact, Homer's three-year average is seventh out of seven for both secondary ELA and mathematics. This may be a primary cause for Homer's lower graduation rate.

Reviewing Regents examination scores, a number of interesting trends emerge. When we presented a single-year comparison of Regents examinations scores with the *Comparison Group*, we noted a concern with some of the required Regents examination results. The concern continues to manifest when we examine three years of data, especially in Global History, Geography, and Comprehensive English, where Homer students score below the entire group. In mathematics, however, Homer emerges as a leader in all three of the new examinations: Integrated Algebra, Geometry, and

Trigonometry, though it lags behind in the older Math B test. Math poses a different situation as the state moved from Math A and B to the newer curriculum.

An opportunity that is apparent in these data is to improve cohort scores in English and mathematics as well as Regents scores in English and Global Studies. This improvement should result in higher graduation rates.

Table 16 - Special Education Results for Benchmark Districts
Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2006-2008)

	Holland-Patent	Jamesville-Dewitt	Lewiston-Porter	Niagara-Wheatfield	Rockville Centre	Sweet Home	Homer (Rank)	Homer <u>All</u> Students
Assessments (% passing)								
<i>Elementary Level</i>								
ELA 4	26/18	57/28	60/22	28/11	70/46	35/19	48/7 (4)	62
Math 4	45/18	74/33	66/22	62/11	82/52	58/15	35/33 (6)	64
Science 4	100/95	84/79	91/94	72/63	78/76	58/62	73/80 (5)	96
<i>Middle School Level</i>								
ELA 8	45/11	44/25	54/34	34/33	36/40	9/6	18/21 (6)	67
Math 8	54/5	58/25	68/18	39/22	74/23	55/0	55/17 (4)	68
Science 8	77/56	61/59	54/72	50/79	NA	45/47	62/75 (1)	95
<i>High School Level</i>								
Secondary Level English	57/74	72/55	47/67	45/47	95/79	57/68	55/33 (7)	77
Secondary Level Math	57/56	68/68	63/67	45/42	74/82	60/60	59/41 (6)	83

Source: 2009-10 NYSED SRC

Table 16 presents two years of results for key cohort level assessments for students with disabilities (SWD). One may well be struck by the occasional large variance in year-to-year results for specific assessments. This may be a function of variance in the specific disabilities found within a very small cohort, thus causing large variances from year to year.

Generally, students with disabilities have more challenges in reading, writing, and listening than in mathematics and science, and results across the board for the benchmark districts tend to confirm

that, especially at the 8th grade level. Overall, Homer tends to score below the group as a whole. ELA 8 scores are a particular concern and an obvious improvement opportunity. We contrast scores for SWD by illustrating Homer’s “all student” scores for 2010 in the final column. Homer’s SWD group consistently scores well below their non-disabled peers in all assessments with elementary and middle school science showing the narrowest gap. We also provide a ranking of the two-year average, as we did for the *Comparison Group*. Generally, Homer ranks in the bottom half of the group and either 6th or 7th in 4 of the 8 comparisons. In the case of Science 8, Homer ranks 1st.

Table 17 - Free & Reduced Lunch Results for Benchmark Districts
Percent Passing for Each of Two Years (2009-2010)

	Holland-Patent	Jamesville-Dewitt	Lewiston-Porter	Niagara-Wheatfield	Rockville Centre	Sweet Home	Homer (Rank)	Homer <u>All</u> Students
Economically Disadvantaged <i>(% passing)</i>								
<i>Elementary Level</i>								
ELA 4	72/47	62/41	82/63	68/46	73/65	64/49	84/45 (5)	62
Math 4	70/47	85/52	76/55	90/46	82/67	81/50	79/49 (4)	64
Science 4	98/97	91/88	93/97	93/84	77/77	84/85	80/94 (3)	96
<i>Middle School Level</i>								
ELA 8	76/47	51/39	82/52	72/72	55/56	76/44	48/49 (3)	67
Math 8	65/48	74/43	88/42	81/41	71/39	92/44	72/59 (1)	68
Science 8	88/83	56/68	79/88	87/90	NA	79/75	78/85 (3)	95
<i>High School Level</i>								
Secondary Level English	87/88	80/74	100/93	88/85	98/95	88/89	72/62 (6)	77
Secondary Level Math	84/85	84/81	100/93	90/86	98/97	92/90	63/76 (6)	83

Source: 2008-09/2009-10 NY State Report Cards (<http://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/>).
 Note that a – means scores were suppressed for privacy (less than 5 students)

Table 17 presents comparison data for students eligible for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program and the *Benchmark Group*. None of the benchmark districts would be considered high need based on FRL rates. We also present Free and Reduced Lunch data for two years. The ranking under Homer is a two-year average and the “all students” scores are for 2010. Generally, scores of Homer students who are economically disadvantaged are low, as is the case in most districts. However, Homer students who are economically disadvantaged score below the entire group on the high school cohort assessments. This is a consistent pattern with both the *Comparison Group* and the

Benchmark Group, and is not predicted from the fourth and eighth grade cohort scores. This may be linked to lower graduation rates.

QUESTION 4

What is the district’s graduation rate and how does it compare? What are the intentions of students upon graduation?

We originally reported district graduation rates in the demographic comparisons of both groups of school districts. In this section, we provide data for both groups illustrating how many students graduate in the prescribed period of time and their postgraduate intentions. The two-year average for Homer is 84%. Compared to the *Comparison Group*, Homer ranks second lowest using a two-year average. The two-year average in this group is 87.7%. The group average ranges from 81.5% to 92%.

Table 18a - Graduation Rates for Comparison Districts (2009-10)

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Graduation Rate – (%)	91/91	93/91	80/83	88/87	84/89	86/82

Source: New York State School Report Cards for 2009-10

Compared to the *Benchmark Group*, Homer also ranks lowest using a two-year average. The two-year average in this group is 91.3% and has a range from 89.5% to 93. Again, Homer’s two year average is 84.

Table 18b - Graduation Rates for Benchmark Schools (2009-10)

	Holland-Patent	Jamesville-Dewitt	Lewiston-Porter	Niagara-Wheatfield	Sweet Home	Homer
Graduation Rate – (%)	95/92	92/94	88/93	90/89	89/91	86/82

Source: New York State School Report Card for 2009-10

There is a difference between graduation rates and the yearly drop-out percentage. Graduation rates refer to the percentage of students in a 9th grade cohort who graduate prior to the fifth September from the day they started high school. In other words, a student can graduate after attending the summer session following their senior year and be counted as graduated. The yearly drop-out rate is the percentage of all high school students who dropped out in a given year. Sometimes students drop out and then drop back in the following year. There is also a difference between a given district's graduation rate, and the percentage of its students who eventually obtain a high school diploma. Some enter the military or obtain a GED. It is reasonable to say that in any given school district the five-year high school completion rate is higher than the four-year graduation rate and these students are usually graduates of that district's high school. The percentage of students who eventually obtain a high school diploma is higher than the five-year rates.

We also examine and compare the aspirations of Homer students with those of other students in the *Comparison Group*. When added to the percentage of students planning to attend a two-year school, the total percentage of students planning on attending college is about the same in all six comparison districts. It should be stressed that this is a question asked of seniors, not freshmen. Therefore, those students who dropped out of school prior to senior year are not included in these data.

Table 19a - Postgraduate Intentions, Comparison Schools (2010 data)

	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Planning to attend college (%)	83	94	82	80	91	82
2-year college (%)	41	56	36	40	52	41
4-year college (%)	42	38	46	40	39	41
Postsecondary non-degree study (%)	2	0	3	0	0	1
Employment (%)	6	4	12	5	4	11
Military (%)	6	2	3	4	3	3
Other plans (%)	0	1	1	2	0	2
Unknown (%)	3	0	1	11	0	1

Source: New York State School Report Card for 2010

There is little variance among students planning on entering college upon graduation within the *Comparison Group*. Chenango Valley and Wayne have more students planning on attending two-year schools. Only Chittenango is slightly above the group average of students planning on attending four-year schools. Within the group as a whole, a higher percentage of students are planning on two-year schools than entering four-year schools. This is not clearly a strength or weakness. College is expensive and often students make plans based on what they can afford. There is no better bargain than a community college.

Table 19b - Postgraduate Intentions, Benchmark Schools (2009 data)

	Holland-Patent	Jamesville-Dewitt	Lewiston-Porter	Niagara-Wheatfield	Rockville Centre	Sweet Home	Homer
Planning to attend college (%)	71	94	90	81	98	88	82
2-year college (%)	45	25	40	48	16	35	41
4-year college (%)	27	69	50	33	82	53	41
Postsecondary non-degree study (%)	3	1	1	2	1	0	1
Employment (%)	18	4	4	9	1	9	11
Military (%)	5	0	6	2	0	1	3
Other Plans (%)	2	0	0	15	0	0	2
Unknown (%)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Source: NYSED School Report Cards

It is in the *Benchmark Group* where we see the starkest contrast in post-graduate intentions. Sweet Home, with close proximity to the University of Buffalo, has a high number of students with four-year college aspirations. Rockville Centre and Jamesville-Dewitt, with very high percentages of college-educated parents has an even higher percentage of students planning on four-year colleges. Holland-Patent, with no direct college connection and a lower percentage of college-educated parents, has the lowest percentage of students with four-year college aspirations.

Staff

As with our section on educational program, we introduce the section on staff with a series of questions to guide our examination, and we describe the specific methods we used in addressing these questions. Schools are a people business. Depending on the district, as much as 76% of a school budget might be devoted to staffing of one kind or another, including contractual staffing such as BOCES programs. Appropriate use of staff can result in improved academic achievement, better maintained facilities, stronger leadership, and a solid return to taxpayers. Our questions are as follows:

What is the current staffing for the educational program? What is the enrollment of the district? What are the enrollment projections? How will enrollment trends affect staffing in the educational program?

These questions are interrelated. We present enrollment projections using the Cohort Survival Technique and Live Birth Data from the New York State Department of Health. We then project educational staffing data against enrollment trends.

Do collective bargaining agreements contain unrecognized long-term fiscal or educational ramifications for the district?

We examine each of the collective bargaining agreements to ascertain if there are aspects that we foresee causing long-term issues for the district.

How is the district staffed in maintenance and custodial areas? What standards exist for these areas? Is district staffing aligned with these standards?

We examine the district's current maintenance and operations staffing against established standards.

What is the administrative structure of the district?

We list the various administrative positions within the district and compare them to those found in the comparison districts.

QUESTION 1

What is the enrollment of the district? What are the enrollment projections?

QUESTION 2

What is the current staffing for the educational program? How will enrollment trends affect staffing in the educational program?

Staffing is largely a direct result of enrollment. A district with 150 first graders needs more first grade teachers than a district with 100 first graders. The same is true in virtually every academic area. It is also true at the administrative level. A small high school might not require an assistant principal, while more students mean more issues and, inevitably, additional administrative support. Thus we present a model based on current enrollment and the staffing it generates. We make no value judgment in the model as to whether that staffing pattern best meets the needs of the district. We also project that pattern against enrollment changes. We use the Cohort Survival Rate approach in projecting enrollment.

Table 20 presents “survival rates” on a grade-by-grade basis for each of the previous five years using enrollment figures provided by the district.

Table 20 – Six-Year Cohort Survival Rates

	2005-6	1yr SR	2006-7	1yr SR	2007-8	1yr SR	2008-9	1 yr SR	2009-10	1 yr SR	2010-11	1 yr SR	2011-12
Pre-K Multi-Age	40 Multi-Age		36 Multi-Age		36 Multi-Age		35 Multi-Age		9 BOCES HES		8 BOCES HES		8 BOCES HES
K	162	0.95062	145	0.9931	140	0.99286	139	0.99281	147	1.08163	159	0.96226	153
1	150	0.95333	154	1	144	1.13194	139	0.97122	138	0.95652	159	1.0566	153
2	158	0.99367	143	1.04895	154	0.98052	163	1.03067	135	1.04444	132	1.03788	168
3	171	1.0117	157	1.03185	150	1.02667	151	1.03311	168	0.97619	141	1.05674	137
4	147	1.02721	173	0.98844	162	1.02469	154	1.05195	156	1.01923	164	1.04878	149
5	177	0.99435	151	1.04636	171	1.01754	166	1.01807	162	0.99383	159	1	172
6	178	1.08427	176	1.01705	158	1.05696	174	1.1092	169	1.11243	161	1.12422	159
7	191	1.02094	193	1.01036	179	1.04469	167	1.02994	193	0.95337	188	0.97872	181
8	195	1.08205	195	1.11282	195	1.07692	187	1.1016	172	1.04651	184	1.05435	184
9	210	0.8619	211	0.87204	217	0.84793	210	0.87143	206	0.85437	180	0.92222	194
10	195	0.92308	181	0.90608	184	0.92935	184	0.89674	183	0.9071	176	0.97727	166
11	180	0.98333	180	1.03889	164	0.98171	171	0.9883	165	1.08485	166	1.06024	172
12	177		177		187		161		169		179	0.96226	176
Out of District	49		53		77		72		61		68		46
Total Public	2380		2325		2318		2273		2233		2224		2218

In reading Table 20, the survival rate for each grade level for each year is to the right of the enrollment for that year.

In Table 21 we use the five-year “Cohort Survival Rate” for each grade level to project enrollment for the following five years. At the Kindergarten grade, we use Live Birth Rate data from the New York State Department of Health.

Table 21 – Homer Five-Year Enrollment Projections with Live Births

2011-12	Grade	6- year CSR	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
153	K	0.9955	131	145	121	125	125
153	1	1.0116	152	130	144	120	124
168	2	1.02269	155	154	132	146	122
137	3	1.02271	172	158	158	135	149
149	4	1.02672	140	176	162	161	138
172	5	1.01169	153	144	180	166	165
159	6	1.08402	174	155	146	183	168
181	7	1.00634	172	189	168	158	198
184	8	1.07904	182	173	190	169	159
194	9	0.87165	199	197	187	205	182
166	10	0.92327	169	173	171	163	179
172	11	1.02289	153	156	160	158	151
176	12		176	157	160	163	162
46	Out of Dist.		50	50	50	50	50
2218	Total Public		2178	2157	2128	2102	2072

Enrollment forecasting is necessarily speculative. The Cohort Survival Technique (CST) is a trend analysis that assumes that patterns will continue within each age cohort. We use seven years of enrollment to establish trends, and compute the average survival rate for each grade level. Seven years of enrollment yields six survival rate years. The CST approach assumes that these trends are inherent to the community. For example, in a community with a parochial school that serves Grades

K-6, but with no access to a parochial middle school or high school, it is predictable that public school enrollment would increase at Grade 7, as the children coming out of the parochial elementary school have limited choices for their secondary education. Another example might be a community with little choice for move-up housing. As families grow in size and income, it is predictable that they would, at some point, leave the community for better housing opportunities.

In the case of Homer, all of the six-year survival rates are above 1.00 with the exception of K, 9 and 10. Grade 9 and 10 survival issues are most commonly the function of ninth grade failure and drop outs. Most of Homer's graduation rate issues, we speculate, can be traced to the first two years of high school. We further speculate that the nearly 8% increase in ninth grade is associated with parochial school students who finish their grammar school experience and elect to attend Homer High School as well as ninth grade failures that bolster the numbers in Grade 9 and diminish the numbers in Grade 10.

Of course the most difficult estimations are for students not yet in school. We accessed Live Birth data from the New York State Department of Health to make our kindergarten predictions. Live Birth Rates are not firm predictors of kindergarten enrollment. Families are most transient during the beginning part of their children's lives, and so it is not certain that live births will actually continue in the district through kindergarten. In the case of Homer, the actual number of kindergarteners has been higher than the number of live births. We compared actual kindergarten enrollment with live births five years earlier and found that the live birth data was inaccurate in predicting actual kindergarten enrollment by an average of 14.13%. Therefore, our projections through 2014 for kindergarten reflect the live birth number x 1.1413. Live birth data is not available at this time for 2010.

The projections suggest a small decline in enrollment. This is not a function of students leaving the district, at least based on survival rates. The decline in enrollment is a function of smaller kindergartens. Upcoming live birth rate data suggests this issue will become more pronounced in the near term. However, Homer has a history of attracting kindergarteners and it may well be that more families will decide to settle in Homer. However, given the methods we are employing, we anticipate continued declines in enrollment.

Our next analysis is a comprehensive view of current educational staffing at Homer. We list almost every faculty position as a function of class assignments. We recognize that this approach may not recognize special assignments. However, we have found it is an appropriate way to illustrate an overview of district staffing. We then go on to provide the same analysis for future years using the actual enrollment projections. We suggest that the Homer governance and leadership teams use these data in the future and update them with enrollment changes.

Homer CSD	2011-2012 Current			2011-13 Projected			2013-14 Projected			2014-15 Projected			2015-16 Projected		
	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO
<i>Elementary</i>															
Kindergarten	8	153	19.1	8	131	16.4	8	145	18.1	8	121	15.1	8	125	15.6
Grade 1	8	153	19.1	8	152	19	8	130	16.3	8	144	18	8	120	15
Grade 2	8	168	24	8	155	19.4	8	154	19.3	8	132	16.5	8	146	18.3
K-2 Sp. Education	3.5	27	7.7	3.5	25	7.1	3.5	25	7.1	3.5	24	6.85	3.5	24	6.85
K-2 Speech	1.8	100	56	1.8	92	51	1.8	90	50	1.8	83	46	1.8	82	45.6
K-2 Reading	3	66	22	3	61	20.3	3	60	20	3	55	18.3	3	54	18
K-2 Phys Ed	3	485	161.7												
Grade 3	7	137	19.57	7	172	24.6	7	158	22.6	7	158	22.6	7	135	19.3
Grade 4	7	149	21.29	7	140	20	7	176	25.1	7	162	23.1	7	161	23
Grade 5	8	172	21.5	8	153	19.1	8	144	18	8	180	22	8	166	20.8
Grade 6	8	159	19.9	8	174	21.8	8	155	19.4	8	146	18.3	8	183	22.9
3-6 Sp. Education	8	126	15.7	8	130	16.3	8	129	16.1	8	132	16.5	8	132	16.5
Speech	1	50	NA	1	50	NA	1	50	NA	1	50	NA	1	50	NA
Reading	3	99	33	3	100	33.3	3	100	33.3	3	101	33.7	3	102	34
Art (w/elem)	3	951	317	3	946	315.3	3	917	305.7	3	922	307.3	3	911	303.7

	2011-2012 Current			2011-13 Projected			2013-14 Projected			2014-15 Projected			2015-16 Projected		
	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO
Music:Vocal	2	951	475.5	2	946	473	2	917	458.5	2	922	461	2	911	455.5
3-6 Phys. Ed.	3	625	208.3	3	639	213	3	633	211	3	646	215.3	3	645	215.3

<u>Junior High School</u>	2011-2012 Current			2011-13 Projected			2013-14 Projected			2014-15 Projected			2015-16 Projected		
	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO
English 7	2	179	89.5	2	172	86	2	189	94.5	2	168	84	2	158	79
English 8	2	148	74	2	182	91	2	173	86.5	2	190	95	2	168	84
Math 7	2	179	89.5	2	172	86	2	189	94.5	2	168	84	2	158	79
Math 8	2	181	90.5	2	181	91	2	173	86.5	2	190	95	2	168	84
Science 7	2	179	89.5	2	172	86	2	189	94.5	2	168	84	2	158	79
Science 8	2	183	81.5	2	181	91	2	173	86.5	2	190	95	2	168	84
Soc Studies 7	2	181	90.5	2	172	86	2	189	94.5	2	168	84	2	158	79
Soc Studies 8	2	183	91.5	2	181	91	2	173	86.5	2	190	95	2	168	84
	2011-2012 Current			2011-13 Projected			2013-14 Projected			2014-15 Projected			2015-16 Projected		

	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO
LOTE	4	362	90.5	4	351	87.8	4	360	90	4	356	89	4	324	81
Sp. Education	4	68	17	4	66	16.5	4	67	16.8	4	67	16.8	4	61	15.3
Music	2	262	131	2	253	126.5	2	261	130.5	2	259	129.5	2	238	119
Phys. Ed.	2	364	182	2	353	176.5	2	362	181	2	358	179	2	327	163.5
Art	2	204	102	2	197	98.5	2	202	101	2	200	100	2	183	91.5
Home & Careers	1	185	185	1	181	181	1	173	173	1	190	190	1	169	169
Health	2	185	92.4	2	181	90.5	2	173	86.5	2	190	95	2	169	84.5
Speech	.20	NA	NA	.20	NA	NA	.20	NA	NA	.20	NA	NA	.20	NA	NA
Librarian (Share with Int. School)	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
Nurse (Share with Int. Schhol)	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
<u>High School</u>															
English	8	691	86.4	8	697	87.1	8	683	85.4	8	678	84.8	8	690	86.3
Math	7	594	84.9	7	585	83.6	7	573	81.9	7	569	81.3	7	579	82.7
Science	10	630	63	10	620	62	10	608	60.8	10	603	60.3	10	614	61.4
Social Studies	8	715	89.4	8	704	88	8	690	86.3	8	685	85.6	8	697	87.1
Health	1	108	108	1	106	106	1	104	104	1	103	103	1	105	105
AIS	3	47	2.9	3	46	2.9	3	45	2.8	3	45	2.8	3	46	2.9
Sp. Education	7	135	19.3	7	133	19	7	130	18.6	7	129	18.4	7	132	18.9
Technology	2	128	64	2	126	63	2	123	61.5	2	123	61.5	2	125	62.5
	2011-2012 Current			2011-13 Projected			2013-14 Projected			2014-15 Projected			2015-16 Projected		

	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO	FTE TCHR	PUPIL	RATIO
Art	2	157	78.5	2	154	77	2	151	75.5	2	150	75	2	152	76
Music: Vocal	1	150	150	1	147.6	147.6	1	144.5	144.5	1	146.7	146.7	1	146	146
Music: Instrum	1	210	210	1	206.7	206.7	1	202.4	202.4	1	295.4	205.4	1	204.5	204.5
Phys. Ed.	4	693	173.3	4	682	179.5	4	668	167	4	678	169.5	4	675	168.8
LOTE	4	357	89.3	4	351	87.8	4	344	86	4	341	85.3	4	347	86.8
<i>K-12 Positions</i>															
School Social Worker	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
Librarians	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA
Nurses	5	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	5	NA	NA
ESL	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
Psychologists	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA
Counselors	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	NA	NA
Occup Therp	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
Physical Therp															
Tech Spec.	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA	3	NA	NA

Source: District Officials

QUESTION 3

How is the district staffed in maintenance and custodial areas? What standards exist for these areas? Is district staffing aligned with these standards?

The Homer Central School District (HCSD) uses a combination of cleaners and custodians to provide daily cleaning. There are currently 15 FTE cleaners (night) and one (1) FTE night supervisor responsible for 470,600 gross square feet; 396,886 cleanable square feet. Cleaning plans based on full-time equivalent and areas of coverage have been developed by the Facilities Department using Cleaning Cost Analysis Program (CCAP) Model prepared by Hillyard dated 2009.

Generally, a daily cleaning load of 2,500-3,000 sq. ft. per hour is reasonable, recognizing that more in-depth cleaning and special projects add to this load. Also, schools are regularly open to the public for after-school and special events. This adds to the cleaning load, not to mention the multiple set-ups and tear-downs.

In addition to the 15 cleaners and one (1) night supervisor HCSD has five (5) full-time custodians (day). The custodians are responsible for a combination of cleaning and minor maintenance work in the buildings (replacing lamps, general laboring to help mechanics, simple repairs to desks/chairs, etc.). As all cleaners have a mix of spaces, it appears that the district's staffing pattern is within general standards, albeit slightly higher than the above referenced standard of 2,500-3,000 sq.ft./hr./person.

There are currently three and one-half (3 ½) FTE maintenance workers (2 plumber/HVAC, 1/2 carpenter, and 1 electrician) responsible for 470,600 gross square feet. This averages 134,460 square feet per FTE, but in reality since each FTE is a specific trade, each FTE is responsible for 470,600 gross square feet. The exception is the combination plumber/HVAC mechanics; they have 235,300 gross square feet each. The one-half (1/2) FTE carpenter is one-half (1/2) FTE courier as well. The resulting 470,600 sq. ft./FTE appears very high and might result in less preventative maintenance than needed for long-term, life-cycle cost performance and savings.

There is currently no painter responsible for 470,600 gross square feet. The 470,600 sq. ft./FTE is a very high amount of real estate to not assign a painter. The building tours showed the lack of painting as a negative impact to schools aesthetics and overall appearance. A quick tour of the facilities is suggested, specifically looking at corridor walls, door frames, etc. to validate this concern and highlight the need.

There is currently one (1) FTE groundskeeper responsible for 45.6 acres. The District has the machinery necessary to allow more groundskeepers to keep up with mowing, though we assume it can sometimes feel burdensome. Other general work might suffer during the summer-winter months due to mowing and snow removal/salting operations.

Winter plowing, salting, and snow removal is performed by the five (5) maintenance workers and one (1) grounds person. The superintendent of buildings and grounds and a student helper back-up the five (5) maintenance staff.

Table 22 - FTE Staffing Summary for the Homer Central School District

FTE Position (Current Level)	Bldg. or Area of Coverage	Total Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage	Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage Per FTE	Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage Per FTE Per Hour
6 * Cleaners * Includes 1 night supervisor	Senior High School	138,530 cleanable sq.ft.	23,090 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	2,885 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1 Custodian	Senior High School	138,530 cleanable sq.ft.	138,530 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	17,315 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
6 Cleaners	Intermediate/Junior School	162,570 cleanable sq.ft.	27,095 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	3,390 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
2 Custodians	Intermediate/Junior School	162,570 cleanable sq.ft.	81,285 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	10,160 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
3 Cleaners	Homer Elementary	73,990 cleanable sq.ft.	24,665 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	3,085 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1 Custodian	Homer Elementary	73,990 cleanable sq.ft.	73,990 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	9,250 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.

FTE Position (Current Level)	Bldg. or Area of Coverage	Total Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage	Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage Per FTE	Sq.Ft./Acres of Coverage Per FTE Per Hour
1 Cleaners	Harnett Elementary	21,800 cleanable sq.ft.	21,800 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	2,725 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1 Custodian	Harnett Elementary	21,800 cleanable sq.ft.	21,800 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	2,725 cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
0 ** Cleaners ** out of SHS	Music/Bus Garage	24,650 gross sq.ft.	_____ cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	_____ cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
0 *** Custodian *** out of SHS	Music/Bus Garage	24,650 gross sq.ft.	_____ cleanable sq.ft. per FTE	_____ cleanable sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
2 Plumber/HVAC	All Buildings	470,600 gross sq.ft.	235,300 gross sq.ft. per FTE	29,415 gross sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1/2 Carpenter	All Buildings	470,600 gross sq.ft.	941,200 gross sq.ft. per FTE	117,650 gross sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1 Electrician	All Buildings	470,600 gross sq.ft.	470,600 gross sq.ft. per FTE	58,825 gross sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
0 Painter	All Buildings	470,600 gross sq.ft.	_____ gross sq.ft. per FTE	_____ gross sq.ft. per FTE per hr.
1 Grounds	All playgrounds + acreage	45.6 acres	45.6 acres per FTE	5.7 acres per hr.

Source: _____

QUESTION 4

Do current negotiated agreements contain provisions that may have escalating costs for the district?

We have reviewed each of the district's negotiated agreements with the sole purpose of identifying provisions that may have escalating costs for the district in the future. Generally we do not make valued judgments regarding the efficacy of any given clause in these agreements as it pertains to day-to-day operations. Having reviewed the agreement with the Homer Teachers' Association, we can make the following comments regarding long term issues:

1. Management rights are not impacted in any unusual manner by the collective bargaining agreement.
2. The retirement incentive for teachers does impose a future and current financial obligation upon the school district. The district has established reserves to fund this obligation.
3. The district deposits incentives in an employee sponsored 403(b) that requires no FICA contribution by the employer.
4. The obligation to fund health insurance benefits for retirees is limited and a function of the number of unused sick days available at the time of retirement. The current and potential financial obligation for this benefit has been estimated. The district has established a reserve to fund this obligation.
5. The health insurance benefit for teachers requires the teachers to pay a percentage of the cost. The percentage method insures that teachers will share in future cost increases for health insurance benefits. The district also has the option to implement an “equivalent” health insurance plan. The option to implement an equivalent plan allows the district to search for more cost-effective health insurance providers.
6. The collective bargaining agreement provides a 39-step schedule for salary and a 39-step schedule for longevity. The step schedules guarantee salary increases for salary and longevity to those teachers below step 39. These increases are still guaranteed by law after expiration of the collective bargaining agreement. This could impact future negotiations.

QUESTION 5

What is the administrative structure of the district?

In this section, we illustrate the administrative structure of the district against the *Comparison Group*. Homer is governed by a nine-member Board of Education. The Superintendent of Schools is the Chief Executive Officer of the Board and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the district. She is assisted by a school business official and an instructional director. There are 5 principals, one each at the high school, junior high school, elementary school, primary school and Hartnett, though this is a half time position. There is a full-time athletic director.

The administrative structure of Homer is not unlike that of the other districts in the *Comparison Group*.

Table 22 - Administrative Structure of Comparison Districts

Position Title	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Superintendent	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Curriculum and Instruction	.5	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0
Business Official	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Special Education	.5	1.0	.5	1.0	1.8	.8
Facility Operations	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Transportation	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0	1.0
Food Service	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0	BOCES
High School Principal	1.0	1.0 Exec 7-12 1.0 Deputy Exec	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Asst. Principal	1.0	.05	1.0		2	1.0

Position Title	Alden	Chenango Valley	Chittenango	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	Homer
Middle School Principal	1.0	See HS	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0 (JHS)
Middle School Asst. Principal	1.0	See HS	.5	1.0	1	
Elementary Principal	1.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	3	2.5
Asst. Elem. School Technology				TOSA		
Technology	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Athletic Director	Stipend MS Prin.	.5	1.0	1.0	1	1.0
Other		Guidance				

Source: District Officials includes variations on titles

Facilities (General Support)

What do the audit reports tell us about the district's financial management practices?

School districts are obligated to have an outside audit completed on an annual basis. Also, districts that are preparing to sell bonds or notes must issue an official statement regarding the financial status of the district. In this section we provide commentary and analysis of both reports.

How does Homer compare with other area schools regarding revenues, expenditures, and district wealth?

We searched the New York State Education Department website to discern comparison data comparing Homer with other schools in the OCM BOCES. We follow each comparison with comments.

What is the current status of the district regarding revenues and expenditures?

We reviewed the current budget, expenditures and revenues.

What is the status of the district's facilities and specifically, is the district on target to meet its long-term facility needs?

A member of our team toured district facilities. We also reviewed the district's "Five-Year Facilities Plan."

What is the status of the district's transportation program?

We accessed NYSED transportation data, along with district mileage and fleet information.

What is the status of the district's food service program?

We accessed NYSED food service data and reviewed current program information.

QUESTION 1

What do the audit reports tell us about the district's financial management practices?

To answer this question we performed two tasks. First, we framed our analyses by specifying a set of “sound financial management practices” that school districts should employ. The resulting framework followed from our review of multiple literatures. Second, we reviewed (a) the District’s Independent Auditor Reports and Management Letters from 2006 through 2010 and (b) the NYS Comptroller’s Audit of the District to determine whether HCSD employs the sound financial management practices that we specified.

Sound Fiscal Management Practices

Our review of the professional and scholarly literature on school finance, and our personal experience working in and with schools, suggests that “sound” financial management involve practices related to (1) generating resources, (2) allocating resources, (3) managing and reporting financial information, (4) safeguarding resources, and (5) managing specific functional areas (e.g., payroll). We use this section to describe briefly these activities. We present a fuller description of the sound financial management practices identified in the audits in the following sections.¹

(1) Practices Related to Generating Resources. Districts require fiscal resources to meet their charge. It is therefore imperative that the school board and administration have the knowledge to pursue and secure all the resources to which the district is entitled or could otherwise access. Sound financial management, therefore, requires that the Board and administration establish policies and practices that maximize resources from the following sources (a) *federal funds* (e.g., Title I); (b) *state funds* (e.g., foundation aid and categorical aids); (c) *local funds* (e.g., property taxes and PILOTS); (d) *investments* (e.g., FDIC insured, interest bearing accounts), (e) *grants* (e.g., private foundations); and (f) *debt*.

(2) Practices Related to Allocating Resources. Once the district secures resources, sound financial management requires that the board, administration, and staff allocate those resources in productive ways. To do so, the board and administration should undertake the following sequential steps: specify clearly the school’s objectives (i.e., strategic planning); identify the programs and services needed to attain those objectives (i.e., cost-effectiveness analysis); allocate resources to those programs and services (i.e., budgeting); and, then determine whether those allocations produced desirable results (i.e., program evaluation). Accordingly, district officials should develop and utilize (a) *multi-year strategic plans*; (b) *cost-effectiveness analyses*; (c) *budgets*; and (d) *program evaluations* to guide their resource allocations.

¹ The best financial practices specified here draw from Brent and Finnigan (2008).

(3) Practices Related to Managing and Reporting Financial Information. The Board, administrators and staff should allocate resources in accordance with the District’s educational philosophy and goals. The practices related to managing and reporting financial information are the means by which internal (e.g., the Board) and external stakeholders (e.g., regulatory agencies, banks, and the community) monitor these allocations. Sound financial management, therefore, requires that District officials (a) *account for financial transactions* in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP); (b) *generate financial reports* in accordance with GAAP and the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) Statement No. 117; (c) *monitor key financial variables to assess financial condition* (i.e., School Fiscal Health); and (d) *understand audit procedures and practices*.

(4) Practices Related to Safeguarding Resources. The Board, administrators and staff have a legal and fiduciary responsibility to safeguard the district’s resources from risk of loss, obsolescence, waste, and misappropriation. To do so, district officials should (a) *develop and maintain comprehensive written financial policies and procedures* (e.g., payroll), (b) *develop and manage internal control systems* (e.g., segregating/separating duties); (c) *manage risk/insurance*; (d) *identify and disclose related party transactions*, (e) *identify and implement cost-reduction strategies* (e.g., piggy back purchasing), and (f) *employ competitive bidding practices*.

(5) Practices Related to Specific Functional Areas. Several functional areas call for district officials to exhibit additional sound financial management practices, including (a) *managing compensation and benefits/personnel records*, (b) *managing food services* (e.g., purchasing and FRPL), and (c) *managing procurement/purchasing*.

One should not view each of these five domains as a closed set of activities. Any given financial transaction can involve multiple practices that span several domains. For example, when the district secures state aid (generating resources), it then needs to properly account for (managing financial information) and safeguard these resources (safeguarding resources), and, ultimately, put them to productive use (allocating resources). Here we use these domains to organize those financial management practices that HCSD should employ as resources flow through their district from the originating source to the point of use.

Analysis of the District's Audit Reports

With the set of sound financial management practices in hand, we next sought to determine whether the HCSD employs these practices. To do so, we reviewed the District's Independent Audit reports for the years ended June 30, 2006 through 2010, the five most recent years. The intent of the independent audits is to provide internal (e.g., Boards) and external stakeholders (e.g., NYSED, taxpayers and lending agencies) with "reasonable assurance" that the District's financial statements are presented fairly without material misstatement. In addition, we examined the independent auditor's Management Letters that followed from these audits. Though not required by Generally Accepted Auditing Standards, auditors often provide suggestions to management via a separate letter that recommends ways for the District to improve their fiscal operations (e.g., procurement, accounting, reporting, compliance, and cash management).

We also reviewed the audit conducted by the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC). The audit follows from Chapter 267 of the Laws of 2005, which required the OSC to audit each school district, BOCES and charter school at least once by March 2010. The stated purpose of an OSC audit is to identify "strategies to reduce costs and to strengthen controls intended to safeguard local government assets."

Taken together, we reviewed all known independent audits of HCSD for the period July 1, 2006 to July 6, 2010. We use the term review purposively and with emphasis. We made no effort to verify the accuracy of the auditors' findings or recommendations. The financial statements remain the representations of district officials and the auditors' reports the views of the respective firm or agency. Instead, we analyzed and coded findings from the reports using the sound financial management practices specified above as organizing categories. For example, if an auditor's report held that the District's practice for recording encumbrances differed from GAAP, we noted such comment.

Because the independent and OSC audits vary in scope and time period, we present our analyses of these reports in turn. As we demonstrate, the various audits, neither individually nor collectively, address the range of sound financial practices specified above. Auditors, by policy (e.g., Generally Accepted Auditing Standards), report on some practices related to generating resources (e.g., federal grant compliance), managing and reporting financial information, safeguarding resources (e.g., internal controls), and specific functional areas (e.g., purchasing and personnel), but do not address other practices (e.g., strategic/long range planning). Accordingly, we do not comment on the District's use of these practices in this section.

(1) Practices Related to Generating Resources

Investments: Sound financial management requires that the district invest excess cash in interest bearing accounts and take necessary precautions to avoid risk of loss, such as making deposits with FDIC insured institutions and being knowledgeable of early withdrawal penalties. Further, NYS General Municipal Law dictates that districts may only make deposits with or invest in FDIC-insured banks located within the State, obligations guaranteed by the United States or New York State, and repurchase agreements of the State or its localities. Further, collateral is required for deposits not covered by FDIC insurance.

We noted that each Independent Audit report for years ended June 30, 2006 through 2010 indicated that the District's aggregate bank balances were properly insured or collateralized with the pledging financial institution in the District's name.

Securing Grants: Sound financial management requires that districts solicit grants from governmental agencies, corporations, foundations, and individuals to fund initiatives, programs, or operations. This requires that boards and administrators have the ability to identify funding sources, as well as the skills to write, or engage others to write, effective grant proposals. If the district obtains a grant, administrators must manage the funds (e.g., budgeting) and take steps necessary to ensure compliance with record keeping and monitoring requirements. In addition, federal grants need to comply with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87.

The audits did not reveal whether HCSD secured the full range of federal funding to which the District was entitled during the respective period. However, without exception, the independent audit reports indicate that HCSD complied in all material respects with the compliance requirements applicable to each of its major federal grant programs.

(2) Practices Related to Allocating Resources.

Budgeting: By design, audits do not review whether HCSD employs best practices related to allocating resources (e.g., strategic planning and cost-effectiveness). However, the 2006-2010 audit reports do offer limited insight into the efficacy of the District's budgeting process. Specifically, the audit reports indicate that the District consistently posts large variances between actual and budgeted revenues and expenditures. For example, the audits report large, favorable expenditure variances. Even favorable variances can undermine the

publics' confidence in the district's ability to project accurately the expenditures needed to meet stated budget goals.

We also noted that the Management Letter dated October 2, 2007 recommended that the District undertake a "formal long-term (three to five years) budgetary planning in conjunction with the annual budgetary process." Though the auditors did not make such comment in 2008 or 2009, they did so again in the Management Letter dated October 8, 2010. Though by design long-term budgets rely on projected costs and revenues, they are an invaluable planning tool.

Therefore, we suggest that the District follow the auditors' recommendation and develop annually a long-term budget.

Lastly, the Management Letter dated October 2, 2007 recommended that the District review "current fund balance reserve accounts to determine appropriate levels from both a short-term and long-term planning perspective regarding appropriation of funds to support the General Fund budget or capital funds." The auditors made the same recommendation in 2008, 2009, and 2010. We did note that the October 8, 2010 Management Letter indicated that the District was in the process of addressing this concern, and has made some progress in this regard. We concur with the audit recommendation, and suggest that the District move quickly to evaluate and adjust their reserve accounts to inform budget development and communication.

(3) Practices Related to Managing and Reporting Financial Information.

Accounting for Financial Transactions and Generating Financial Reports: Sound financial management requires that districts maintain a complete and accurate record of their financial transactions in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and generate financial statements in accordance with GASB #34 – Basic Financial Statements and Management's Discussion and Analysis for State and Local Governments.

HCSO received a *qualified* opinion from their auditors for fiscal year ended June 30, 2006. The qualification resulted because of the following violation of GAAP:

It is the policy of HCSO to prepare its budget on a basis different from generally accepted accounting principles as it pertains to the recording of expenditures. In addition, encumbrances are recorded on a basis different from generally accepted accounting principles. The effect of this departure on the

financial statements is an estimated overstatement of fund balance reserved for encumbrances at June 30, 2006 of \$570,000 and an understatement of unreserved fund balance of the same amount.

The independent auditors did not report this qualification in subsequent audit years, suggesting that HCSD appropriately remedied the means by which it accounted for encumbrances. HCSD received an unqualified opinion from their auditor for the years ended June 30, 2007 through 2010 – indicating that the financial statements that they audited “present fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information...and the respective changes in financial position for the year then ended, in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America”

(4) Practices Related to Safeguarding Resources

Developing comprehensive written financial policies and procedures. Sound financial management requires that the district develop and maintain *written* policies and procedures to govern its many financial activities (e.g., payroll procedures, procurement procedures, financial controls, information/data security, and financial reporting). We cannot overstate the importance of having a written, agreed upon set of financial policies in place. The written procedures facilitate the transparency of financial management practices and provide directives for internal control, fiscal management, and reporting systems. Further, manuals can serve as a “disaster recovery plan” in the event that unintentional or intentional acts compromise the accounting information system.

In 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 the auditors recommended that HCSD take steps to improve the financial management of extra-classroom activities. Each year the auditor’s management letter indicates that the District took steps to remedy, in part, concerns report during the prior-year’s audit. We note that in 2010 the District had several concerns outstanding. We recommend that the district take steps to attend to this matter in the current period.

We noted no additional issues regarding Developing Comprehensive Written Financial Policies and Procedures in the Districts’ Audit Reports or Management Letters

Developing and Managing Internal Control Systems. Sound financial management requires that boards and administrators safeguard district resources by implementing and maintaining an effective internal control system. In simplest terms, internal controls are practices and procedures that give a district and their stakeholders’ assurance (albeit limited) that assets are safeguarded; policies, laws, and regulations are

followed, and accurate and timely records are maintained. The NYS office of the Comptroller lists the following internal controls as necessary:

- (a) establishing an adequate control environment – a preventive control where administrators set the tone for safeguarding assets by modeling ethical behavior, following policies that they have established, and holding themselves and others accountable for their actions;
- (b) segregating/separating duties – a preventative control that seeks to deter the commission of undesirable acts (e.g., fraud) by prohibiting a single person from controlling multiple components of a financial transaction (i.e., authorizing, recording, and custody);
- (c) reconciling financial records – a detective control that attempts to uncover intentional and unintentional recording misstatements by periodically comparing different financial records (e.g., bank statements and check registers); and
- (d) accessing data and inventories – a preventive control that denies unauthorized access to financial records (e.g., password protected computer accounting systems) and resources (e.g., credit cards and check books), and monitors access to physical assets (e.g., locked supply cabinets and tagged equipment).

It is noteworthy that employees can collude to bypass many internal controls.

Segregating duties. For the year ended June 2006, the auditors' management letter noted that the District's financial management practices resulted in a deficiency in internal control. Specifically, the auditor noted that the District did not segregate duties properly, as the "treasurer receives cash, prepares the bank deposit and takes the deposit to the bank, enters all cash receipts into the accounting software, and prepares the bank reconciliation." The auditor recommended that the following

Director of Business and Finance review and approve bank reconciliations. This review should include reviewing the bank statements and canceled checks and investigating any unusual items. Additionally, we recommend that the mail be opened by an employee other than the treasurer. Cash receipts should be recorded, and this list should be reconciled to the daily deposits.

The auditors Management Letter dated October 2, 2007 reported that the district implemented the recommendation. We noted no other issues concerning the segregation of duties in subsequent audits or management letters.

Manage risk/insurance. Sound financial management requires that district officials safeguard their resources by seeking to reduce or eliminate risk. One means by districts can transfer risk is to maintain appropriate types and levels of insurance coverage (e.g., property and liability). Without exception, the independent audits did not report any instances in which the District did not cover its risks through commercial insurance purchased from independent third parties, or that settled claims from such risks exceeded commercial insurance coverage.

Employing competitive bidding practices. Typical competitive bid policies include specification of a threshold amount and statements regarding bid splitting, advertising, public opening, and awarding. Districts should use these practices to discourage suspect related party transactions and reduce costs by encouraging competition in the purchase of goods and services. Without exception, the independent audits and management letters did not report any instances in which the District did not employ competitive bidding practices.

(5) Practices Related to Specific Functional Areas.

Managing Compensation and Benefits/Personnel Records. Sound financial management requires that boards and administrators understand how to establish and manage their district's compensation and personnel record systems. Payroll management entails, among other duties, creating and distributing checks, collecting and remitting withholdings, and stewarding benefits. Sound financial management practice dictates that the HCSD develop a system of internal controls to ensure that contracts and authorization support payments. Employment contracts should specify salaries and wages, and make clear how the school will account for and compensate employees for sick and vacation days during employment and upon termination.

The Management Letter dated October 2, 2007 reported that a sample review of the District's personnel files revealed that many files were missing needed I-9 forms or were otherwise incomplete. The Management Letter dated October 9, 2008 indicated that the District to corrective action. We noted no further issues regarding this area in the subsequent audits or Management Letters.

Managing Procurement/Purchasing. Sound financial management requires that boards and administrators establish and manage procurement/purchasing systems that ensure expenditures are a proper district expense. The system should require that documentation support each step of the procurement process, including authorized requisitions, itemized invoices, and receiving documents. District officials should also segregate duties so that no single individual controls multiple steps of a transaction (e.g., approve, pay for, and receive goods). Purchasing also requires adherence to competitive bidding policies. Finally, a sound procurement process requires that the district's schools maintain "petty cash funds" to pay for or reimburse employees for school-related expenses. The steward of the petty cash fund should not make disbursements in the absence of supporting documentation (e.g., approved receipts).

Further, New York State Education Law recommends that school boards appoint a person or persons to serve as the "claims auditor." The role of the claims auditor to review and approve vouchers and invoices submitted to the District before payment

Without exception, the independent audits and management letters did not report any instances in which the District did not properly manage procurement/purchasing.

Office of the State Comptroller Audits

We also reviewed an audit of HCSD conducted by the Office of the State Comptroller. The OSC audit differs in two ways from the independent audits and therefore make comparisons between them inappropriate. First, the periods covered by the audits differ. The independent audits cover the annual periods July 1, 200X to June 30, 200X, while the period covered by the OSC audit is July 1, 2009 – July 6, 2010, varying in term and ending point. Secondly, the audit scopes are different, and so too are the procedures performed. The purpose of an independent audit is to offer an opinion as to whether the school presents their financial statements fairly, without material misstatement, and report on, but not offer an opinion on, the schools' internal controls over financial reporting. The stated purpose of the OSC audits is to examine whether the District "achieved information technology cost savings and if it's composting program had a positive impact on the environment." Specifically the OSC auditors sought to answer the following questions:

- *Have District Officials achieved cost savings by utilizing free information technology applications?*
- *Have District officials implemented procedures to decrease the District's environmental impact through recycling its organic waste?*

(1) Practices Related to Generating Resources. None examined

(2) Practices Related to Allocating Resources. None examined

(3) Practices Related to Managing and Reporting Financial Information. None examined

(4) Practices Related to Safeguarding Resources

Identify and implement cost-reduction strategies. The OSC auditors determined that the District “realized a cost savings of approximately \$47,000 by using a free e-mail application” rather than upgrading their current, vendor provided system. Though not made clear in the OSC report, if the free e-mail system enables the District to avoid recurring licensing fees, it will also realize a portion of the savings annually. Further, the new system offers the District improved services (e.g., document sharing) that enable staff to increase their productivity.

The OSC auditors also reported that the District implemented a composting initiative that will reduce garbage related costs by about \$1,500 annually. In addition, the composting program provides an instructional opportunity for staff and students, as well as a means for the District to demonstrate its commitment to reducing greenhouse emissions.

(5) Practices Related to Specific Functional Areas. None examined

Summary of Independent and OSC Audit Findings

Our review of the independent and OSC audit reports enable us to make several generalizations regarding the degree to which HCSD employs some, but not all, of the sound financial management practices that we specified. First, with the exception of the year ended June 20, 2006, HCSD received an *unqualified opinion* of their financial statements. To be clear, an unqualified opinion does not speak to the financial condition of the District (e.g., solvency), but does provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free of material misstatement. It remains the responsibility of the Board to monitor the financial health of their district. They can now do so with some confidence that their financial statements reflect accurately the financial condition of the District.

Our review, however, revealed ways in which the District can improve its fiscal planning process, specifically by annually developing a multiyear budget. (three to five year). We also recommend that the District review their Management Letters and make corrective actions in a timely manner. We noted during the course of our review that with few exceptions (i.e., classroom activity funds) the District implemented the corrective actions recommended in prior years’ management letters, demonstrating both the utility of these letters in identifying

ways in which the District can improve their fiscal management practices, and the desire of District to employ financially sound practices.

These represent just a few possibilities of how the HCSD can use audit reports to assess their some of the fiscal management practices specified here. However, the audits do not report on what some might reasonably argue is the set of financial management practices that can most contribute to District success – Practices Related to Allocating Resources, including using strategic planning, decision analysis, and program evaluation techniques to allocate resources in productive ways. Though existing research provides little definitive guidance on the expected effects of programs and policies across schools broadly, a given school can still use these techniques to allocate resources productively in light of their own circumstances.

QUESTION 2

How does Homer compare with other area schools regarding revenues, expenditures, and district wealth?

The New York State Education Department provides data regarding various aspects of school wealth, revenue, and expenditures. These data are fully audited by the State Education Department and are from the 2008-2009 school year. Therefore, some of this data are slightly different than data we used in earlier sections of the report which are from different state aid years. We provide information on district wealth, revenues, and expenditures.

Wealth is a relative term when it comes to schools. Does wealth mean how much income is available per student, how much property value backs up each student, how many students receive free and reduced lunch or some other measure? As explained earlier, the state uses the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR), a combination of income per student and property value per student to measure wealth. While this may be an adequate measure of the wealth of a district, it may not adequately portray the wealth of the students who live in the district and attend district schools. When comparing Homer with other districts, CWR suggests the district is in the bottom quartile of the state in wealth. In the OCM-BOCES, Homer ranks 18th in wealth out of 23 school districts.

There is a fair amount of variation in the OCM BOCES ranging from Fayetteville, which is close to the state average in wealth, to Marathon, which is below the city of Syracuse, which is not a member of the BOCES. The average CWR of the BOCES is .571. Homer, with a 2008-200 CWR of .524 is just below the BOCES average.

Table 23 – District Wealth Comparisons, 2008-09

District	Revenue Per Pupil	Full Value Per Pupil	Income Per Pupil	Combined Wealth Ratio
Homer	\$16,821	\$222,612	\$ 86,660	0.524
Baldwinsville	\$16,532	\$230,511	\$111,696	0.616
Cazenovia	\$14,612	\$351,876	\$135,350	0.822
Chittenango	\$16,854	\$208,264	\$ 92,830	0.529
Cincinnatus	\$19,149	\$186,664	\$ 59,278	0.394
Cortland	\$14,596	\$204,206	\$ 83,106	0.492
DeRuyter	\$20,525	\$208,723	\$ 64,863	0.435
E Syracuse-Minoa	\$19,758	\$328,135	\$ 93,301	0.656
Fabius-Pompey	\$19,451	\$237,537	\$ 94,757	0.566
Fayetteville	\$15,913	\$320,318	\$194,033	0.986
Jamesville-DeWitt	\$16,189	\$381,854	\$176,689	0.992
LaFayette	\$21,344	\$220,090	\$110,564	0.601
Liverpool	\$17,938	\$244,705	\$109,678	0.624
Lyncourt	\$17,291	\$249,121	\$ 92,579	0.57
Marathon	\$18,073	\$131,384	\$ 53,033	0.315
Marcellus	\$14,891	\$233,226	\$ 99,417	0.577
McGraw	\$17,423	\$177,701	\$ 70,820	0.423
North Syracuse	\$15,418	\$229,147	\$ 99,342	0.572
Onondaga	\$18,668	\$222,564	\$100,079	0.569
Solvay	\$18,881	\$243,761	\$ 83,558	0.535
Tully	\$15,699	\$230,854	\$ 97,299	0.567
West Genesee	\$14,219	\$241,645	\$110,887	0.625
Westhill	\$15,913	\$267,767	\$130,389	0.717
Syracuse	\$18,764	\$130,653	\$55,277	0.321
State	\$19,740	\$477,400	\$148,900	1

Source: NYS Master File 2008-09,
<http://www.oms.nysed.gov/faru/documents/MASTERFILEforweb.xls>

To a large extent, district wealth predicts revenue source. For most districts, it seems that a relatively small amount of education funding comes from the federal government, despite the promises of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On the average, 46.1% of local school district revenues are state aid, and 49.16% are provided through local property taxes with the remainder coming from federal and other sources. In Homer, local taxes made up 33.64% of revenue. Federal aid is generated, in part by a school's Free and Reduced Lunch and Limited English Proficiency rates. In the case of Homer, these rates are similar to those found in other districts within the BOCES. State aid, however, is a function of district wealth per student as indicated by the Combined Wealth Ratio. Overall, Homer is above average within the BOCES for state aid and below average for local contribution. Almost two-thirds of the cost of public education in Homer comes from sources other than local taxes.

Table 24 – District Revenue Source Comparison, 2008-09

District	Federal	State	Local
Homer	3.07%	63.29%	33.64%
Baldwinsville	2.15%	50.98%	46.87%
Cazenovia	2.22%	43.23%	54.55%
Chittenango	3.23%	62.91%	33.85%
Cincinnatus	4.39%	74.07%	21.54%
Cortland	5.59%	65.45%	28.96%
DeRuyter	3.16%	64.70%	32.14%
E Syracuse-Minoa	2.40%	44.84%	52.76%
Fabius-Pompey	2.02%	59.78%	38.19%
Fayetteville	1.73%	33.85%	64.42%
Jamesville-DeWitt	2.79%	34.30%	62.92%
LaFayette	2.82%	63.52%	33.67%
Liverpool	2.20%	52.47%	45.33%
Lyncourt	3.36%	50.31%	46.33%
Marathon	3.33%	77.04%	19.63%

Marcellus	2.06%	53.67%	44.27%
McGraw	3.97%	73.54%	22.49%
North Syracuse	3.25%	52.99%	43.76%
Onondaga	1.81%	57.54%	40.65%
Solvay	3.04%	55.67%	41.29%
Tully	2.90%	55.74%	41.36%
District	Federal	State	Local
West Genesee	2.60%	52.35%	45.05%
Westhill	2.27%	49.63%	48.10%
OCM Average	2.89%	56.17%	40.95%
Syracuse	8.43%	71.31%	20.26%
State	4.75%	46.10%	49.16%

Source: NYS
2008-09,

Master File

<http://www.oms.nysed.gov/faru/documents/MASTERFILEforweb.xls>

An examination of expenditure comparisons often uncovers opportunities for school districts. Understanding where expenditures are higher or lower than those of similar districts and the state as a whole, can lead to discussion about district priorities and plans. Looking at state averages, only BOCES and debt service expenses are appreciably higher than the average district expenditure statewide and that is misleading. The “Big 5” city districts in New York State, including New York City, do not belong to a BOCES and thus have virtually no BOCES expenses. This impacts the state average significantly. Upstate districts tend to have much higher building aid ratios than downstate districts and thus, have been aggressively completing building projects throughout the last decade. That has resulted in higher debt service for upstate districts; however much of that debt service is paid through state building aid. Homer spends somewhat more on BOCES services than other districts in the group, but Homer also spends much less on outside tuition, suggesting fewer students with disabilities going to higher cost private placements and more going to BOCES placements. Also, BOCES expenditures are another area in which the district has a partner, in that a substantial portion of BOCES expenditures are reimbursed by the state the following school year.

The district spends less per pupil than the BOCES average and much less than the state average; in fact, the state average is 17.38% higher than Homer. That is not a surprise as the cost per pupil down state is much higher than it is upstate. To be sure, there are individual districts that spend more than four times what Homer spends per pupil, thus bringing up the state average. A better gauge is the area average and that is a bit more than 2% more than Homer.

Homer spends more of its budget on instructional salaries but less on benefits than the BOCES average. It is below both the BOCES and State in transportation expenditures, which is quite remarkable considering the size of the district.

Table 25 – Expenditure Comparisons, 2008-09

District	Expend Per Pupil	BOE	Central Admin	BOCES Instruction	Tuition	Instructional Salaries	Other Instructional Expenses	O/M	Benefits	Trans.	Debt Service	Misc.
Homer	\$16,012	0.39%	1.67%	9.25%	0.07%	44.93%	1.28%	6.38%	22.98%	4.08%	8.97%	0.00%
Baldwinsville	\$16,025	0.60%	1.41%	6.57%	0.44%	43.15%	2.07%	6.06%	23.25%	5.87%	6.96%	3.62%
Cazenovia	\$14,306	0.49%	2.19%	3.56%	0.47%	44.58%	2.74%	7.06%	27.42%	4.62%	6.86%	0.01%
Chittenango	\$16,280	0.36%	1.58%	5.64%	0.13%	38.34%	1.23%	8.20%	25.69%	5.46%	13.36%	0.00%
Cincinnatus	\$20,165	0.57%	3.37%	15.57%	0.40%	37.46%	2.83%	5.51%	18.80%	4.02%	11.03%	0.44%
Cortland	\$14,746	0.30%	1.47%	8.88%	0.40%	43.35%	4.11%	7.06%	22.56%	2.70%	4.15%	5.03%
DeRuyter	\$20,620	0.98%	3.05%	13.59%	0.17%	39.32%	1.37%	6.15%	22.43%	5.72%	3.93%	3.29%
E Syracuse-Minoa	\$18,781	0.52%	1.57%	4.80%	0.40%	44.48%	1.48%	7.49%	28.36%	5.02%	5.65%	0.23%
Fabius-Pompey	\$18,726	0.39%	2.65%	6.26%	0.11%	37.05%	1.69%	7.71%	23.58%	6.42%	14.00%	0.14%
Fayetteville	\$15,505	0.25%	1.49%	6.27%	0.24%	40.03%	3.90%	9.26%	21.51%	5.35%	10.85%	0.87%
Jamesville-DeWitt	\$15,750	0.19%	1.14%	5.21%	0.33%	45.76%	2.40%	6.82%	24.67%	3.76%	8.93%	0.78%
LaFayette	\$21,835	0.83%	2.48%	9.16%	0.00%	44.85%	2.75%	7.75%	21.14%	4.03%	6.35%	0.68%
Liverpool	\$17,324	0.76%	0.98%	5.41%	0.27%	45.83%	0.93%	7.48%	26.46%	4.64%	6.07%	1.17%
Lyncourt	\$15,416	2.31%	3.84%	6.03%	10.76%	36.18%	2.05%	6.38%	22.76%	5.02%	4.33%	0.33%
Marathon	\$17,808	0.29%	1.99%	12.37%	0.01%	36.06%	3.22%	4.14%	29.14%	3.74%	9.05%	0.00%
Marcellus	\$14,226	0.93%	1.50%	5.64%	0.00%	44.56%	1.24%	7.73%	23.53%	5.55%	9.30%	0.00%
McGraw	\$16,248	0.40%	3.74%	7.46%	0.00%	41.61%	2.17%	8.95%	23.57%	3.25%	8.51%	0.34%
North Syracuse	\$15,402	0.33%	1.15%	6.97%	0.32%	43.26%	4.55%	7.05%	24.37%	5.31%	6.64%	0.04%
Onondaga	\$19,140	1.31%	2.86%	6.81%	0.00%	35.90%	4.98%	10.36%	17.41%	6.68%	9.65%	4.04%
Solvay	\$18,478	0.52%	2.44%	8.23%	0.33%	39.19%	2.42%	5.51%	22.40%	4.86%	11.52%	2.59%
Tully	\$14,800	0.68%	2.59%	8.61%	0.09%	40.90%	2.02%	7.95%	20.93%	5.59%	10.63%	0.00%
West Genesee	\$13,854	0.24%	1.61%	7.59%	0.00%	45.74%	3.20%	6.86%	21.37%	5.39%	8.00%	0.00%
Westhill	\$15,062	1.27%	1.79%	7.12%	0.00%	44.82%	2.76%	6.98%	21.93%	5.56%	7.77%	0.00%
OCM BOCES Average	\$16,805	0.65%	2.11%	7.70%	0.65%	41.62%	2.50%	7.17%	23.32%	4.90%	8.37%	1.03%
Syracuse	\$18,232	0.25%	1.37%	1.20%	0.85%	46.62%	8.12%	5.67%	25.42%	3.88%	5.08%	1.54%
State Average	\$19,381	0.33%	1.63%	4.02%	2.71%	44.21%	5.63%	6.30%	23.74%	5.11%	5.42%	0.89%

Source: NYS MASTER FILE 2008-09, <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/faru/documents/MASTERFILEforweb.xls>

As part of our review, we looked at the status of the current district budget including revenues and expenditures through the end of June, 2012. It is not our intention to substitute our judgment for that of school officials, but only to cast a second set of eyes on district data. We hope our observations will be of further support in the district's stewardship efforts.

In our review we found that budgeted state aid revenue differs from the estimates for 2011-2012 state aid provided last spring. Actual state aid output reports for 2011-2012 are not yet available to school districts at the time of this review. The amounts budgeted for state aid should be verified when the output reports become available. In addition, we were able to verify that the local tax levy is at the level established in the budget. Tax collection was taking place during our research, and so we can make no statement regarding the percentage of the levy collected prior to return to the county. It should be noted that the increase in STAR reimbursement to homeowners is capped at 2%. We also found that other revenue estimates to be reasonably projected in accordance with prior years.

On the expenditure side of the budget, we looked at traditional large expenditure categories. We found that all salaries had been encumbered in accordance with projected annual expenses. This is a prudent and recommended school business process. We also conducted an analysis of the BOCES budget and project and, at this time, the BOCES budget is adequate; encumbrances should be adjusted in accordance with the most ongoing changes in the BOCES monthly bill. That bill will change as the district changes its service requests. The budget for debt service is verified and adequate for current year obligation.

Recently the cost for public employee pensions has received significant scrutiny. It should be noted that employer contribution rates are about half of their 1980s peak. We found that retirement system obligations are adequately budgeted and sufficient to meet current year obligations. Additionally, the district has established and maintained adequate reserves to help ensure the financial stability of the district in the current year and succeeding years as well.

Overall the current school district budget looks sound. Given our review, which is a snapshot as of September 2011, it appears that the district will realize revenues in excess of expenditures. The

District has accumulated substantial reserves. The total of all reserves is approximately \$17,000,000. The largest of these reserves is the debt service reserve; \$9,000,000.

QUESTION 3

What is the status of the district's facilities and specifically, is the district on target to meet its long-term facility needs?

In order to answer this question, a member of our team visited and toured the Homer Central School District campus, reviewed key documents, and interviewed the district's Director of Facilities.

Buildings

The Homer Central School District has eight (8) buildings. The District uses five (5) buildings for instruction and three (3) provide support for various services.

The district's buildings are as follows:

- Senior High School
- Intermediate/Junior High School
- Two Elementary Schools:
 - Homer Elementary
 - Hartnett Elementary
- Music/Bus Garage
- Storage Building
- Concession Stand
- Press Box

A member of the Warner Study Team toured each of the four (4) schools and four (4) of the non-school buildings with Mr. Laird Updyke, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, on September 28, 2011. The Property Condition Assessments, Building Condition Surveys, and Five-Year Capital Plan were discussed for each district building.

Summary of District Building Conditions

Homer Elementary School

The elementary school was built in 1925, renovated in 1948, 1950, & 2009. The building is 82,600 square feet and is a multi-story structure. We found the building to be in very good condition. We note the following:

- Corridors are speed tile walls (lower), painted plaster above, and in good condition. Floors are generally terrazzo with some a terrazzo-like Fritz tile, and some ACT/VCT, also in good condition.
- Toilet rooms also appear to be in good condition as are the various office areas, art/music, library, and faculty area.
- The main office was designed for optimal security. Poor visibility had been a concern. It appears the new layouts are delivering better results. This is true in all elementary offices.
- Typical classrooms are vinyl composition tile (VCT) floors. Walls are painted. Generally found in good repair.
- The library is in very good condition.
- The gymnasium is a typical elementary station, with a hardwood floor and in good condition. It has painted concrete masonry unit (CMU) walls which are also in good condition.
- The food preparation area is in good condition. The school has a cafeteria that appears to be in good condition.
- It appears that the mechanical rooms are in good working condition.

- Roof Areas: Those areas that were able to be seen from building interiors were ethylene propylene diene terpolymer (EPDM) or “single-ply.” No known issues were reported or observed.
- The rear parking lot (north and/or James St.) was observed to be in very poor condition. Insufficient parking was also observed (cars parking on lawn areas, etc.).

Hartnett Elementary School

This elementary school was built in 1934, with a 1964 addition. The building is 29,800 square feet and is a multi-story structure. We found the building to be in good condition. We note the following:

- Corridors are plaster walls, painted. Floors are terrazzo, also in good condition.
- Toilet rooms also appear to be in good condition as are the various office areas and faculty area.
- New main entry area improves visibility, allowing an open entry sequence. The main office was designed for optimal security. Poor visibility had been a concern. It appears the new layouts are delivering better results. This is true in all elementary offices.
- Typical classrooms have wood or VCT floors, good condition. Walls are painted. Generally found in good repair. The ceilings are lay-in ACT found good repair.
- It appears that the mechanical rooms are in good working condition. However, the domestic water storage tanks are not currently used (3 out of 4). It was reported the bladders/diaphragms need replacement. Although water capacity is not reported to be an issue, due to current well and pump flow, there may be a time when these tanks would mitigate capacity issues. The tanks should be put on a long-term maintenance/repair/replacement program.

- The library is in very good condition.
- The gymnasium is a typical elementary station, with a hardwood floor and in good condition. It has painted CMU walls which are also in good condition.
- The food preparation area is in good condition, albeit it very small. No flow or capacity issues were reported. The school has a cafeteria that appears to be in good condition, again very small.
- Roof Areas: Those areas that were able to be seen from building interiors were ethylene propylene diene terpolymer (EPDM) or “single-ply.” No known issues were reported or observed.
- The parking lot and driveways were observed to be in very poor condition.
- The playground equipment appears quite old. Should be reviewed for current codes and safety regulations.

Intermediate/Junior High School

The middle school was built in 1965, with 1975 and 2005 additions. The building is 147,890 square feet and is a multi-story structure. We found the building to be in very good condition.

- Corridors are ceramic tile walls, and in fair condition. Floors are terrazzo, in good condition.
- New main entry area improves visibility, allowing an open entry sequence. The main office was designed for optimal security. Poor visibility had been a concern. It appears the new layouts are delivering better results.
- Typical classrooms have VCT floors, good condition. Walls are painted. Generally found in good repair. The ceilings are lay-in ACT found good repair.

- Toilet rooms were generally in good condition as were office areas, and computer/technology areas.
- The locker rooms, particularly the boys, show heavy wear. The lockers are damaged and rusted. Ventilation appeared to be very low. Should be reviewed and remedied if required.
- The library is in very good condition.
- The gymnasium has typical hardwood floors that appear to be in good condition reflecting normal wear. Walls are painted CMU and in good condition reflecting normal wear.
- The science rooms were observed to be in fair condition, showing heavy wear. Casework and lighting upgrades could be considered.
- The auditorium is an excellent facility.
- The mechanical rooms are in good condition. Existing boilers were reported in good working condition.
- Roof Areas: Those areas that were able to be seen from building interiors were ethylene propylene diene terpolymer (EPDM) or “single-ply.” No known issues were reported or observed.
- Overall storage issues were observed and reported throughout facility.

Senior High School

The high school was built in 1950, with 1960, 2003, and 2009 additions. The building is 185,660 square feet and is a multi-story structure. We found the building to be in good condition.

- Corridors are speed tile walls (lower), painted plaster above, and in good condition. Some floors are terrazzo, in good condition. Some floors are terrazzo-like Fritz tile, also in good condition. Other flooring was VCT.
- Typical classrooms have VCT/ACT floors, good condition. Walls are painted. Generally found in good repair. The ceilings are lay-in ACT found good repair.
- Toilet and locker rooms were also in good condition. The boys generally show wear suggesting repairs.
- The library is in very good condition.
- The gymnasium has typical hardwood floors that appear to be in fair condition reflecting normal wear but high use. Walls are CMU, painted and in good condition. Bleachers are in good condition. It was reported the gym is a bit small for a high school, particularly for basketball. The basketball court lines come almost to the end/side walls.
- The mechanical rooms are in good condition. Existing boilers were reported in good working condition. It was reported that the hot water recirculation loop had a leak, and the repairs were underway during the time of our tour.
- The music area and technology labs all appeared in good condition reflecting normal wear.
- The auditorium is small and may only hold one grade at a time. The rigging system is not able to accommodate current high school drama requirements. In addition, switching and lighting issues/concerns were reported.

- The cafeteria is in good condition.
- Roof Areas: Those areas that were able to be seen from building interiors were ethylene propylene diene terpolymer (EPDM) or “single-ply.” No known issues were reported or observed.
- Unique to this building is a very large basement & crawl space. This space offers much needed storage to the district and is used accordingly. Of concern is that the amount of storage may increase the fire load of the building beyond the life safety system capacity/capability. This is a noted concern that should be reviewed as part of the district’s updated facilities plan.
- The sidewalks (north end) are uneven, cracking, spalling, etc. The sidewalks should be put on a long-term maintenance/repair/replacement program.
- The tennis courts were reported to have drainage and subbase issues.

Music/Bus Garage

The music/bus garage was built in 1950, with 1960 and 1986 additions. The building is 24,650 square feet and is a single-story structure. We found the building to be in fair condition.

- The overall size of the bus garage areas appeared small/tight for the work/repairs observed. Buses barely fit in the bays, sticking out in the rear to allow for access to hood/engine work.
- It was reported that due to the tight configuration of the building, buses have to back out onto adjacent road without good visibility. This was a reported safety concern and should be reviewed further.
- The roof was reported as a 1970s vintage single-ply, presumed EPDM, ballasted. The maintenance staff is concerned about the remaining useful life of this roof system. Although

no known leaks were reported, early signs of failures (shrinkage, opening of lap joints, etc.) were reported. The roof should be put on a long-term maintenance/repair/replacement program.

Storage Building

The storage building was built in 1985. The building is a single-story wood-framed structure. We found the building to be in good condition.

- The building is currently used to store custodial and cleaning supplies at one end.

Concession Stand

The concession stand building was built in 2005. The building is a single-story structure. We found the building to be in very good condition.

Press Box

The press box building was built in 1990. The building is a multi-story structure. We found the building to be in fair condition.

- Exterior paint is needed.
- Interior paint is needed.
- Interior light shields are rusted due to high moisture.

Maintenance and Operations

Many districts have chosen to create comprehensive maintenance and operations plans. This creates a more systematic and predictable approach to the M/O function that can better inform planners. The Homer Central School District does not have a written, comprehensive, systematic plan. A

typical District Comprehensive Maintenance Plan would specifically address each of the following areas:

- Work order management
- Preventative maintenance
- Inspections
- Environmental and safety issues
- Training
- Funding

This is not to say that the district is not proceeding in a judicious planned manner. The district has implemented a computerized preventative maintenance (Q-Center) and work order tracking system (In-House, electronic). Scheduling/Performing of school generated work orders did not appear to be an issue. However, without a formal preventative maintenance and operation program the district could incur additional long-term expense or operational gaps.

Utility Consumption Summary

As part of our review, we typically examine (actual) utility consumption records for the 20__-20__ school year. However, HCSD is not currently tracking their utility consumption and was therefore unable to provide the last year's data for review. It is our understanding this data is available through NYSMEC online. We recommend HCSD gather and review this data, at least annually, to compare previous years to current years. Also it is recommended that HCSD establish an operational utility baseline so that if/when energy performance or reduction projects are implemented, a true operational impact can be assessed.

Energy Management

The district employs a computerized energy management system (Siemen's Appogee) that allows ongoing monitoring of heating, cooling, and air-exchange systems. The system allows for scheduling of all system operations and setbacks. Load shedding, consumption data and equipment

efficiency are not current uses, but could be. It also alerts staff of major problems with the HVAC system; however, the system is not staffed full time, so many HVAC issues are reported out of the buildings via occupants.

The district currently implements set-back standards as follows: 68°F (Heating) and 78°F (Cooling); however these can and sometimes are overridden. We suggest that the district consider NYSERDA to initiate energy conservation along with using the Siemen’s system already in place.

The district can also look into expanding its initiatives aimed at sustainability. They are as follows:

- Facility chemicals & cleaning supplies
- Automatic flush valves
- Recycling program for cardboard and office paper
- Composting

SED Student Capacity Summary

School buildings receive initial capacity ratings by the New York State Education Department. These ratings are reported in the district’s official statement.

▪ K-thru-2 nd Grade	867	students
▪ K-thru-6 th Grade	270	students
▪ 3 rd -thru-6 th Grade	795	students
▪ 7 th -thru-8 th Grade	750	students
▪ 9 th -thru-12 th Grade	1,054	students
TOTAL	3,736	students

Five-Year Facility Plan

The Board of Regents requires all school districts to maintain a five-year facility plan. The purpose of the plan is to protect and enhance the community/state investment in school district facilities. In many districts in New York State, a substantial portion of school construction funding comes from the state. This is clearly true in Homer where the current building aid ratio is 53%. We reviewed the district's required five-year plan recently prepared/submitted by Hunt Engineers, Architects, and Land Surveyors, PC. Our comments on the plan follow:

Districtwide Five-Year Capital Plan Summary

- Current Overall Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$44.3M** (rounded)
 - \$94/gross sq.ft. investment over the five (5) years in aggregate (\$44.3M/470,600 gross sq.ft.)¹
 - \$19/gross sq.ft. each year average (above divided by five (5) years, rounded)

¹ [4 school buildings plus music/bus garage]

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded):
 - Year 1 = \$18.6 million
 - Year 2 = \$2.6 million
 - Year 3 = \$7 million
 - Year 4 = \$0 ²
 - Year 5 = \$0 ²
 - *Contingency (25%) Years 1-5 = \$8.7 million*
 - *Incidental Cost (22%) Years 1-5 = 7.4 million*

² [Only three (3) projects are currently proposed in five-year plan. We project that each of the three (3) projects would be done in one (1) year (each), leaving two (2) years without projects.]

The plan covers a wide range of planned improvements, a combination of unquestionable needs and desired preferences. Our review of the plan raises concerns about allocation distribution;

specifically, the high first (Year 1) allocation. We suggest reviewing the planned work activities to create a more manageable approach, with the high point of the distributed allocation in the middle year(s). Specifically, we suggest combining similar work types to achieve an efficient work flow and general condition (mobilization/supervision/coordination) cost minimization. Another approach could be to look out more than five (5) years.

During our review of the five-year plan we did not see any specific mention of hazardous materials; specifically, asbestos which is common in schools of this age. The plan should be reviewed with its authors to be sure that for the work being proposed any/all hazardous material costs are accounted for. We strongly discourage using contingencies (or percentages of construction) to estimate these costs. Hazardous material costs vary widely and should be specifically estimated for the proposed work.

Capital Assets Plan by Building

Homer Elementary School

Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$4.7M**. This represents (rounded) an average of \$950,000 commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - o Year 1 = \$3.3million
 - o Year 2 = \$1.4 million
 - o Year 3 = \$0³
 - o Year 4 = \$0³
 - o Year 5 = \$0³

Harnett Elementary School

Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$5.1M**. This represents (rounded) a \$1 million commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - Year 1 = \$5.1 million
 - Year 2 = \$0⁴
 - Year 3 = \$0⁴
 - Year 4 = \$0⁴
 - Year 5 = \$0⁴

Intermediate/Junior High School

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$11.7M**. This represents (rounded) a \$2.3 million commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.
- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - Year 1 = \$10.1 million⁵
 - Year 2 = \$1.2 million
 - Year 3 = \$500,000
 - Year 4 = \$0
 - Year 5 = \$0

⁵ [\$10.1 million is an aggressive allocation to spend in one year. In addition, this school was observed to be in better condition than others. A more even distribution of dollars across years or reallocating dollars to higher needs in other buildings is a noted concern/question.]

Senior High School

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$19.7M**. This represents (rounded) a \$3.9 million commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *10% contingency and 25% incidental* cost per year:
 - Year 1 = \$8.1 million ⁶
 - Year 2 = \$1.3 million
 - Year 3 = \$10.3million ⁶
 - Year 4 = \$0 ⁶
 - Year 5 = \$0 ⁶

⁶ [\$8.1 and 10.3 million are aggressive allocations to spend in one year (each). In addition, this school was observed to be in good condition compared with others. A more even distribution of dollars across years or reallocating dollars to higher needs in other buildings is a noted concern/question.]

\$0 million is allocated for two (2) of the five (5) years. Repackage into \$~4M/year projects?

Music/Bus Garage

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$1.7M**. This represents (rounded) a \$340,000 commitment per year over the five years of the Capital Plan.

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - Year 1 = \$1.5 million
 - Year 2 = \$200,000
 - Year 3 = \$0
 - Year 4 = \$0
 - Year 5 = \$0

Storage Building

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$125,000**. This represents (rounded) a \$25,000 commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.
- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - o Year 1 = \$125,000
 - o Year 2 = \$0
 - o Year 3 = \$0
 - o Year 4 = \$0
 - o Year 5 = \$0

Concession Stand

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$25,000**. This represents (rounded) a \$5,000 commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.
- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - o Year 1 = \$25,000
 - o Year 2 = \$0
 - o Year 3 = \$0
 - o Year 4 = \$0
 - o Year 5 = \$0

Press Box

- Current Five-Year Capital Plan allocation = **\$205,000**. This represents (rounded) a \$41,000 commitment per year over the five (5) years of the Capital Plan.

- Capital Plan planned cost distribution (rounded), including *25% contingency and 22% incidental* cost per year:
 - o Year 1 = \$205,000
 - o Year 2 = \$0
 - o Year 3 = \$0
 - o Year 4 = \$0
 - o Year 5 = \$0

Reviewer's Note: Due to rounding there is ~\$1M difference between individual building analyses and the overall five-year plan analysis that initiates this section several pages earlier.

Based on our review of district facilities, we recommend the following to supplement the required Five-Year Plan:

- Create a written Comprehensive Maintenance/Operations Plan.
- Provide ongoing paint, patch, and carpet program. This change will have a good life cycle cost benefit to the district.
- Complete annual roofing assessment, repair, and maintenance program. We suggest that district personnel walk each roof, twice annually, identifying needed flashing repairs/replacements, seam deteriorations, drain assembly inspections, etc. Since all roofs in HCSD are EPDM, a reasonable annual investment (per Manufacturer's Warranty Requirements) can maximize life cycle cost benefit.
- Consider a sustainability initiative. This does not necessarily have to be LEED, rather clear goals that maintain or increase maintenance/operations standards while using more environmentally responsible equipment, techniques, procedures, supplies, etc.

- Using the current Siemen's building automation system to track and record, trend data on utility uses to establish an operational baseline. Compare with NYSMEC database. After a baseline has been established, use automation to gain energy and operational efficiencies. Measure and record performance with any changes over time.

QUESTION 4

What is the status of the district's transportation program?

The Homer Central School District operates its own transportation system with its own personnel. The district offers transportation to all students that live within three-quarters of a mile of their school.

- The geographic area of the District is relatively large, 164 square miles; it is the largest (geographically) in Cortland County.
- The vast dispersion of students about the district (13.51 per square mile) presents a challenge to transport students efficiently and with economy.
- The supervisor of the transportation operation (Charles Paquette) is a highly experienced individual. Mr. Paquette was hired in November 2010.
- The cost of supervision is greater than the average for comparable schools. As a percentage of total transportation costs it represents approximately 11%.
- Ninety percent of miles driven are for regularly scheduled routes. This is at the average for the comparable schools.
- The number of drivers is adequate. The district does not experience inordinate difficulty in maintaining a staff of regular drivers and substitutes. Consequently, mechanics and supervisory personnel are usually not pressed into service as substitute bus drivers.

- The District does not share resources with other districts. The fueling stations and bus garage are owned and operated by the school district.
- All special needs runs are operated by the district. No runs are contracted to external organizations.
- The District maintains a fleet of 47 vehicles. Vehicles are replaced every nine years on average. The average numbers or miles on a bus at the end of its useful life ranges from 130,000 to 150,000 miles.
- Relations with the School Bus Drivers Association are stable. The district's bus drivers' union is affiliated with CSEA.
- A collective bargaining agreement is in place and will expire on June 30, 2012. No grievances have been filed and there have been no labor relations issues of significance in recent years.
- Relations with the community regarding transportation are generally positive.
- The Safety Record of the program is very good. The DOT inspection was 95% in August 2011. The accident rate is very low.
- The 19A files for all drivers are complete and up to date.
- Overall the financing of the transportation program is effective and it operates at a favorable economy of scale in comparison to the comparable school districts. Please note the following:

- Approximately ninety percent of the District's current year transportation expenditures are eligible for state aid. This translates into a similar reimbursement rate for every dollar spent.
- The cost of supervision as a percentage of the total transportation budget is greater than the average of the comparable school districts.
- The cost of fringe benefits as a percentage of the total transportation budget is higher than the average of the comparable districts. The district has a relatively low turn-over in its drivers. The benefits available to transportation staff may be an incentive for the drivers to stay continue with the district.
- The number of non-aidable miles driven is very small. (Sports, Field Trips, etc. ...).
Approximately 91% of the miles driven are eligible for aid.
- The transportation cost per student is below the average for comparable schools.
- The transportation cost per mile is slightly above the average and this may be due to the large geographic area over which students are transported.

Table 26 - Data from TRA Report – State Education Department for 2010-2011 Transportation Aid

Data Item	Homer	Alden	Chittenango	Chenango Valley	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	AVERAGE
Mileage - Regular Scheduled Routes	473,255	571,492	614,792	285,463	602,740	608,399	526,024
Total Annual Mileage	521,310	586,215	686,105	305,602	648,808	721,790	578,305
Total NR and Public Enrollment	2,309	2,032	2,343	1,875	2,192	2,652	2,234
'06 Public Enrollment	2,215	1,859	2,278	1,860	2,121	2,527	2,143
Sq. Miles in District	164	56	64	22	49	60	69
Enrollment/Sq. Mile	14	33	36	84	44	42	42
Total Assumed Capital Expense	\$ 541,045	\$ 225,506	\$ 430,513	\$ 172,514	\$ 65,793	\$ 452,083	\$ 314,576
Personal Services (Bus Drivers and Mechanics)	\$795,794	\$1,105,474	\$1,502,620	\$ 543,468	\$1,022,235	\$1,205,431	\$1,029,170
Employee Benefits	\$ 333,125	\$ 297,942	\$ 687,325	\$ 175,704	\$ 299,968	\$ 396,791	\$ 365,143
TOT OP + CONT EXP FROM GEN FUND	\$1,552,660	\$1,745,447	\$2,613,350	\$ 970,403	\$1,692,592	\$ 2,056,404	\$1,771,809
TRANS AID ELIGIBLE EXP	\$1,975,321	\$2,057,877	\$2,829,931	\$1,039,466	\$1,596,615	\$2,340,895	\$1,973,351
Salaries - Supervision	\$ 132,934	\$ 117,486	\$ 92,087	\$ 69,744	\$ 89,929	\$ 152,017	\$ 109,033
Employee Benefits - Supervision	\$ 50,885	\$ 45,818	\$ 19,879	\$ 23,770	\$ 33,825	\$ 34,919	\$ 34,849
Tot Exp for Trans Supervision	\$ 183,819	\$163,404	\$ 111,966	\$ 93,514	\$ 123,754	\$ 185,936	\$ 143,732
TRANSPORTATION AID PAYABLE IN 2010-2011	\$ 1,777,789	\$1,850,032	\$2,546,938	\$ 935,520	\$1,436,954	\$1,748,649	\$1,715,980
Data Item	Homer	Alden	Chittenango	Chenango	Palmyra-	Wayne	AVERAGE

				Valley	Macedon		
<i>SUMMER TRANS AID</i>	\$ 17,951	\$ -	\$ 27,715	\$ 251	\$ 4,086	\$ 8,502	\$ 11,418
Aid % for Eligible Expenses	91%	90%	91%	90%	90%	75%	88%
Cost per mile	\$4.02	\$3.36	\$ 4.44	\$3.74	\$2.71	\$ 3.48	\$3.62
Cost per student	\$ 907	\$ 1,050	\$ 1,347	\$ 659	\$ 859	\$ 1,016	\$ 973
Total Trans Exp	\$1,738,555	\$1,908,751	\$2,725,316	\$1,063,557	\$1,816,346	\$ 2,242,340	\$1,915,811
Ratio: Superv/Oper Exp	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits % of Total Op Cost	22%	18%	26%	19%	18%	19%	20%
% of Reg/Total Miles	91%	97%	90%	93%	93%	84%	91%

QUESTION 5

What is the status of the district's food service program?

The Food Service Program of the Homer Central School District has enjoyed a high rate of student participation. Unlike many food service programs, no support from the general fund has been required to support the Homer program.

The Food Service Program is financially sound and enjoys a high level of student participation. Please note the following:

- The Food Service Program is managed by an employee of the OCM BOCES, Wendy Swift. Ms. Swift manages the Homer program and the programs of two other school districts.
- A reasonable budget has been established for the program that is in accordance with expected revenues and expenditures. The program has been self-supporting and has generated significant operating surpluses over recent years.
- The participation rate in the school lunch program is very good. The ADP for school lunch is approximately 1,400 students; that is approximately 64% of the student population. ADP as a percentage of the student population has increased slightly over the last five years. This participation rate is above the average for the comparison schools.
- The FRL percentage has increased from 25% to 30% over the last five years; the district has made significant efforts to ensure that eligible students are enrolled in this program.
- The breakfast program participation is strong with an average ADP of 425 students. That represents a very significant percentage of the student population relative to comparable schools, 19%. It is three percent (3%) greater than the average of the comparison schools.

- The Food Service Program has generated an operating surplus in the 2010-2011 school year; this will result in an increase in the program’s fund balance. The use of the fund balance for contingent needs and other capital improvements is an option for the future. A plan for the use of excess fund balance has been submitted with the State Education Department.
- The program utilizes MyNutri-Kids.com to provide for payment, pre-payment and anonymous administration of the Free and Reduced Breakfast/Lunch Program.

Table 27 - District Food Service Program Comparisons, current

Data from NYS Child Nutrition and Management System - June 2011	Homer	Alden	Chittenango	Chenango Valley	Palmyra-Macedon	Wayne	AVERAGE
REDUCED %	7.2%	12.1%	9.2%	9.0%	6.4%	8.5%	8.7%
FREE %	23.6%	18.6%	22.1%	24.6%	26.9%	17.3%	22.2%
TOTAL	30.8%	30.7%	31.3%	33.6%	33.3%	25.8%	30.9%
ADP – Breakfast	425	295	326	238	220	283	
Percentage of Enrollment	19.28%	15.75%	14.96%	15.04%	11.12%	11.70%	14.6%
ADP – Lunch	1411	1192	1431	939	1282	1314	
Percentage of Enrollment	64.02%	63.64%	65.51	59.36%	64.78%	54.32%	61.9%
Estimated Enrollment	2204	1873	2183	1582	1979	2419	

Source: _____

QUESTION 6

What issues are outstanding that might impact the district’s ability to plan for the future?

Our research reveals a number of issues that will impact the district’s ability to plan for the future. Like most upstate schools, Homer should be expected to be fairly static in terms of growth. The total assessed value of the district is not likely to increase in a significant way for the foreseeable future. There is no reason to believe that enrollment will grow, and is more likely to decline.

Kindergarten projections are particularly worrisome, though Homer has always enrolled more students than live birth data would predict. Although somewhat difficult to predict, it is reasonable to suspect that the fiscal health of New York State will continue to affect the district in a negative way. Added to this, it is questionable that the federal government will be able to continue to support local school districts as in the past few years, although there is funding in the current proposal by the President, there is little bipartisan enthusiasm for the bill.

Both the New York State Teachers' Retirement System and the New York State Employees' Retirement System have been relatively low-cost benefit programs for the state up through 2009. However, both systems were seriously affected by the economic crisis that started in September of 2008, and thus contribution rates have risen significantly. This will be a challenge for all school budgets, especially in communities seeing little or no growth.

There are certain tax certiorari proceedings currently in process that may have an adverse impact upon the assessed valuation of district property. There is the potential for significant tax refunds.

The 2% property tax cap will impact the district's ability to fund programs from local sources. The good news is that Homer faces these sharp economic challenges from a position of relative strength. There are significant reserves which can offset the gap caused by the tax cap.

Student performance especially for students with disabilities (SWD) is of concern. We are concerned that the district may not be in compliance in all areas, and suggest the district look at those issues carefully. Additionally, we predict serious issues in making annual yearly progress for SWD in most areas including graduation rate. There is also a clear gap between the proficiency of economically disadvantaged students and all other students. The discontinuation of the "basic" classes was establishing a unified curriculum for the district's students. It is important that the district move to close the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled as well as economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.

Respectfully submitted:

The Warner Center Study Team

Appendix A

Homer Central School District Strategic Planning Process:

Comprehensive Program Evaluation Survey

**The Warner Center
University of Rochester
Stephen Uebbing, Ed.D.
Team Leader**

For the purposes of this survey, we would appreciate if you would follow the following format:

-Elementary school refers to students in grades PreK – 5.

-Middle school refers to students in grades 6 - 8.

-High school refers to students in grades 9 – 12.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please feel free to email Dr. Uebbing at suebbing@warner.rochester.edu or call 585-489-5461 (mobile).

1a. Does your district offer a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program?

Yes

No → GO TO 2a

1b. How many pre-kindergarten students were enrolled in the program in the 2007-08 school year?

_____ (# of students)

2a. Does your district offer a kindergarten program?

Please include regular kindergarten as well as transitional kindergarten and transitional first grade, if offered.

Yes

No → GO TO 3a

2b. How long is the school day for a kindergarten student?

Full day (4 hours or more per day)

Half day (less than 4 hours per day)

Both offered

3a. Do you have any magnet schools in your district?

(A magnet program offers enhancements such as special curricular themes or methods of instruction to attract students from outside their normal attendance area.)

Yes

No → GO TO 4

3b. **If yes**, please name the school and provide a 1-2 sentence description:

4a. Does your school district offer any of these special programs:

4b. Programs with special instructional approaches

(e.g., Montessori, self-paced instruction, open education, ungraded classrooms, etc.)

Yes

No

If yes, please provide short description:

4c. A program in which at least half of the core subjects are taught in a foreign language

(A foreign language immersion program)

Yes

No

4d. Advanced placement (AP) courses for college credit

Yes

No

If yes, please list courses:

4e. Distance learning course(s) (Taught primarily via television, satellite, Internet, or e-mail)

Yes

No

4f. Alternative, Stay-in-School, or Dropout Prevention Programs for **MIDDLE** school students

Yes

No

4g. Alternative, Stay-in-School, or Dropout Prevention Programs for **HIGH** school students

Yes

No

4h. Other special programs you'd like us to know about for **MIDDLE** school students (please list; use back side of page, too):

4i. Other special programs you'd like us to know about for **HIGH** school students (please list; use back side of page, too):

5a. Does your district offer an Extended-Day Program providing instruction beyond the normal school day for students who need academic assistance?

Yes (Please indicate grade levels: _____)

No

5b. Does your district offer any SUMMER school activities for students enrolled in this school who need ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE?

Yes

No

5c. LAST summer (2010) or this school year (2010-11), were summer school activities or academic intersessions provided for students enrolled in this school who sought ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT OR ENRICHMENT?

Yes

No

6a. Does your district offer Before-School or After-School Day Care Programs for ELEMENTARY students?

Yes

No

6b. Does your district offer any After-School Programs for MIDDLE school students?

Yes

No

7. THIS school year (2010-11), did your district use the following methods to organize most classes or most students in any of your schools?

7a. Grades subdivided into small groups such as “houses” or “families”

Yes (Which schools? _____)

No

7b. Student groups that remain two or more years with the same teacher (e.g., looping)

Yes (Which schools? _____)

No

7c. Multi-age grouping (Most students normally in different grades placed together)

Yes (Which schools?) _____)

No

7d. Block scheduling (Class periods scheduled to create extended blocks of instruction time)

Yes (Which schools?) _____)

No

8a. In what grade do you begin offering foreign language instruction?

6

7

8

Other: _____

8b. What languages are offered to **MIDDLE SCHOOL** students?

French

Spanish

German

Latin

Japanese

Russian

Italian

Mandarin Chinese

Other: _____

8c. What languages are offered to **HIGH SCHOOL** students?

- French
- Spanish
- German
- Latin
- Japanese
- Russian
- Italian
- Mandarin Chinese
- Other: _____

9. Are the following opportunities available for **HIGH SCHOOL** students?

- Dual or concurrent enrollment that offers both high school and college credit funded by the school or district?
 - Yes
 - No
- Career and technical education courses (These include courses on topics such as agriculture, business, computer science, health care, public and consumer services, communications, construction, engineering, manufacturing, repair, science, or transport technologies.)
 - Yes
 - No
- Work-based learning or internships outside of school, in which students earn **COURSE CREDITS** for supervised learning activities that occur in paid or unpaid workplace assignments
 - Yes
 - No
- Specialized career academy (Curriculum organized around a specific career area such as health, hospitality, IT)
 - Yes
 - No

10a. Of the students enrolled in your district, how many students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) because they have special needs?

___ # of students

10b. Does your school have a Student Support Team (SST), whose mission it is to provide a place to strengthen and support students who are having difficulty in the school environment? The SST is part of the regular education environment.

Yes

No

10c. Do you offer a 6-1-1 option for special education students in your district?

Yes

No

10d. Do you offer a 12-1-1 option for special education students in your district?

Yes

No

10e. What other teaching models do you have available in-district for special education students?

Resource room support

Co-teaching

Other (please specify: _____)

10f. How many students with disabilities are in each of the following instructional settings in your **ELEMENTARY** schools?

- All day in a regular classroom (100 % of the school day)
- Most of the day in a regular classroom (75 % of the school day)
- Some of the day in a regular classroom (50 % of the school day)
- Little or none of the day in a regular classroom (25% or less of the school day)

10g. How many students with disabilities are in each of the following instructional settings in your **MIDDLE** schools?

- All day in a regular classroom (100 % of the school day)
- Most of the day in a regular classroom (75 % of the school day)
- Some of the day in a regular classroom (50 % of the school day)
- Little or none of the day in a regular classroom (25% or less of the school day)

10h. How many students with disabilities are in each of the following instructional settings in your **HIGH** schools?

- All day in a regular classroom (100 % of the school day)
- Most of the day in a regular classroom (75 % of the school day)
- Some of the day in a regular classroom (50 % of the school day)
- Little or none of the day in a regular classroom (25% or less of the school day)

11. What kind of transition services do you provide to help special education students either plan for college or the workplace? (You may use the back side of the page, too.)

12. Of the students enrolled in your district in the 2007-08 school year, have any been identified as Limited English Proficient? [Limited English Proficient (LEP) refers to students whose native or dominant language is other than English and who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language as to deny them the opportunity to learn successfully in an English-speaking-only classroom.]

Yes

No

13. Does this school require Limited English Proficient students to pass a test of English language proficiency to complete its Limited English Proficient program?

Yes

No

14. Are Limited English Proficient students in this school administered assessments at least once per year to determine their level of English language proficiency?

Yes

No

15. Do your schools' library media centers have any paid state-certified library media specialists?

Elementary School

Yes

No

Middle School

Yes

No

High School

Yes

No

16. Is there an Enrichment Program for the students in your elementary schools?

Yes

(Which grades? _____)

No

17. What subjects does the Gifted and Talented Program cover?

Math

Science

English/Literature

Social Studies

Foreign Language

Computer Science

Music

Art

Other (please specify): _____

18. Does Gifted and Talented instruction take place primarily within your school/school building, or primarily outside it (for example, at another school)?

Inside the school building

Outside the building or at another school

19. Which of the following statements best describes the way Gifted and Talented instruction is organized for the students in your elementary schools?

Circle one choice below.

Students are taken from their regular classes for supplemental Gifted and Talented (GT) instruction

1

GT students are grouped together for all or most subjects and have their own curriculum

2

GT students are given enriched instruction only in the particular subjects in which they excel

3

GT students are given supplemental instruction within their own classroom

4

Combination of above or other arrangement: please specify the arrangements above by number, or specify here: _____

5

20. What main factors are considered in the selection of students for the Gifted and Talented program? (You may answer YES to any of the factors below.)

	Yes	No
Scores on standardized examinations given to all students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional test results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher or counselor recommendations and reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School grades	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provides opportunities for racial and ethnic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Is there a Gifted and Talented Program for the students in your **MIDDLE** schools?

Yes

Which grades _____)

No

22. What subjects does the MIDDLE SCHOOL Gifted and Talented Program cover?

Math

Science

English/Literature

Social studies

Foreign Language

Computer Science

Music

Art

Other (please specify: _____)

23. Does Gifted and Talented instruction take place primarily within your school/school building, or primarily outside it (for example, at another school)?

- Inside the school building
- Outside the building or at another school

24. Which of the following statements best describes the way Gifted and Talented instruction is organized for the students in your middle schools?

Students are taken from their regular classes for supplemental Gifted and Talented instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
GT students are grouped together for all or most subjects and have their own curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
GT students are given enriched instruction only in the particular subjects in which they excel	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
GT students are given supplemental instruction within their own classroom	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Other arrangement: please specify: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

25. What main factors are considered in the selection of students for the Enrichment Programs at the middle school?

	Yes	No
Scores on standardized examinations given to all students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional test results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher or counselor recommendations and reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School grades	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provides opportunities for racial and ethnic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. All schools have some students who learn differently or at a different pace than other students. Do your **ELEMENTARY** schools offer any of the following remedial activities for these students?

Check yes or no on each line.	ELEMENTARY PROGRAM AVAILABLE?	
	Yes	No
Pull-out program in reading or English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pull-out program in math	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult tutors work 1:1 with students in reading or English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult tutors work 1:1 with students in math	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer-tutoring in any subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra subject period instead of elective or exploratory course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-school or before-school classes or coaching classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra work or homework from classroom teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Saturday classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (describe):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

27. Please attach a list of any elective courses you offer at the **MIDDLE** and **HIGH** schools.
28. Does the high school offer a specific course to prepare for the SAT/ACT?
- Yes
- No
29. How many full-time school counselors are available? What is the student load per counselor?

Elementary: _____ # of counselors Student load per counselor: _____

Middle: _____ # of counselors Student load per counselor: _____

High: _____ # of counselors Student load per counselor: _____

30. Do high school student receive the following career planning services?

	Yes	No	School does not offer
a. Help with filling out college/vocational/technical school applications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Help with filling out financial aid forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Assistance in writing essays for college applications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Days off from school to visit college or vocational/technical schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Career placement counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Practice interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31. Do your elementary schools offer a chorus/choir?

- Yes (If yes, please specify grade levels: _____)
- No

32. What grade level can students start studying an instrument? _____

33. Do your elementary schools offer a band for students?

- Yes (If yes, please specify grade levels: _____)
- No

34. Do your elementary schools offer an orchestra for students?

- Yes (If yes, please specify grade levels: _____)
- No

35. Are the following activities available to **MIDDLE SCHOOL** students in your school?

	Yes	No
4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs, or Boy Scouts/Girls Scouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic honor societies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Band	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bicycling, rollerblading, or skateboarding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business or entrepreneurship club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chess club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chorus or choir	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community service club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conservation, recycling, or environmental group such as the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creative writing or literary magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debate or speech team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drama club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educational clubs (Odyssey of the Mind, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign language club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Future Farmers of America club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orchestra	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other subject matter clubs (art)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photography club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science club (Please specify if there is a specific focus such as astronomy, robotics, Project Lead the Way, etc. _____)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student yearbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre (e.g. school plays or musicals)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Religious organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interscholastic sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intramural sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocational education clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

36. Which extracurricular sports teams are available to **MIDDLE SCHOOL** students?

Please check ✓ if sport is available.

	Boys	Girls
Baseball/softball		
Basketball		
Cheerleading or dance		
Field hockey		
Football		
Golf		
Gymnastics		
Ice hockey		
Soccer		
Swimming		
Tennis		
Track		
Volleyball		
Wrestling		
Cross country		
Lacrosse		
Ski/Snowboard		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

37. Are the following activities available to **HIGH SCHOOL** students (grades 9-12)?

	Yes	No
4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs, or Boy Scouts/Girls Scouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic honor societies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Band	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bicycling, rollerblading, or skateboarding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business or entrepreneurship club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chess club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chorus or choir	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community service club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conservation, recycling, or environmental group such as the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creative writing or literary magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debate or speech team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drama club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educational clubs (Odyssey of the Mind, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign language club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Future Farmers of America club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orchestra	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other subject matter clubs (art)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photography Club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science club (Please specify if there is a specific focus such as astronomy, robotics, Project Lead the Way, etc.): _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student yearbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre (e.g. school plays or musicals)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Religious organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interscholastic sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intramural sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocational education clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

38. Which extracurricular sports teams are available to **HIGH SCHOOL** students?

Please check ✓ if sport is available.

	Boys	Girls
Baseball/softball		
Basketball		
Cheerleading or dance		
Field hockey		
Football		
Golf		
Gymnastics		
Ice hockey		
Soccer		
Swimming		
Tennis		
Track		
Volleyball		
Wrestling		
Cross country		
Lacrosse		
Ski/Snowboard		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

39. Do you partner with any outside organizations (businesses, not-for-profit organizations, churches, to provide special programs or services to your students? If so, explain:

40. Currently, does someone at your school oversee or coordinate school health and safety programs and activities?

Yes

No

41. Is there a full-time registered nurse who provides health services to students at your school? (A full-time nurse means that a nurse is at the school during all school hours, 5 days per week.)

Yes

No

42. Does your district offer student services or programs related to the following topics? (Mark yes or no next to each topic.)

	Yes	No
HIV, STD, or teen pregnancy prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tobacco-use prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nutrition and healthy eating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Character education (Programs for social, emotional, and ethical development)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying and/or violence prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tobacco use prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alcohol use prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drug prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

43. Does the **HIGH SCHOOL** have a student-led club that aims to create a safe, welcoming, and accepting school environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity? These clubs sometimes are called gay/straight alliances.

Yes

No

This survey was originally developed by Dr. Sherri Lauver.

Perception Data: Survey and Focus Groups

The Warner Study team employed multiple strategies to collect data regarding the perceptions of stakeholders in the Homer Central School District. These strategies include individual and group interviews and administration of a community survey. We refer to the group interviews as focus group activities. This section of the report is limited to analysis of the interviews and focus group activities.

The team conducted a series of individual interviews with key decision makers within the district. Interview protocols were designed using Bryson and Alston's work on strategic planning in the public and not-for-profit sector. Protocols are attached as an appendix to this section of the report. We interviewed each of the district-level leaders, building leaders, members of the Board of Education, the President of the teachers' association and support employees association, heads of support service departments and numerous other individuals.

In addition to the interviews, the study team conducted a series of focus group activities in which an analyst posed specific questions gleaned either from the literature on strategic planning or questions geared to answer specific concerns identified by the study team. These sessions included multiple opportunities in each of the school buildings for faculty and staff, and for students in the high school. Parent opportunities were made available in conjunction with the team's visits to schools and during an evening session. Specific opportunities were also made available for members of the various support services as well as business and community members. In addition, we received input on the mission and vision of the district at the Vision Summit.

In total, eight (8) members of the Study team interacted with approximately 160 stakeholders of the Homer school community. We talked with a broad range of stakeholders but did not interview the superintendent, as we did not want the perceptions of the individual who will be charged with implementing the district's strategic plan overly influencing the data.

Participants were told that their comments were intended to be “generally confidential,” meaning that no study team member would reveal the identity of any participant nor link a specific job title to a specific response. We could not in any way guarantee, however, that in group interviews another member of the group would not reveal such comments, including the participant’s identity. We also could not guarantee that others, when they read the report, would not make assumptions and guesses, both correct and incorrect, as to the source of individual comments. We also told participants that if we encountered information regarding an immediate health and safety threat or illegal activity, we would report any such information to the superintendent, and, if necessary, reveal the information source.

Sessions ranged in length from 40 minutes for some groups to 90 minutes for some individual interviews. At the start of each session, the analyst gave a brief overview of the strategic planning process and the role perceptions played in understanding the issues facing the district.

We told participants that we would not take comments focused on a particular individual and would present our findings in language that would not allow easy identification of any individual. There are exceptions. When comments were directed toward a single office, such as the superintendent, that could not be avoided.

The primary purpose of the perception data is to assist in an analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats facing the district, so that the district can effectively plan for the future. The term SWOT is frequently used in the literature to describe this analysis. The perception data, when joined with the Program, Staff and Facilities Report and survey data, gives decision makers and stakeholders a comprehensive view of the “state of the district.” The nature of this process is that it tends to generate criticism. Stakeholders are asked for weaknesses and often are quick to provide a list. We do not make judgments as to the accuracy of the information we receive from stakeholders.

Organization of the Report: As the primary purpose of these data is to inform decision makers in the SWOT analysis, we will present data under the general categories of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Some areas were identified by respondents as both strengths and weaknesses. This is common not only as we analyze data from group to group, but sometimes within a group. That is because some specific elements can genuinely be viewed as both a strength and a weakness. In other cases some elements are viewed as a strength by some stakeholders and a weakness by others. We encourage readers to review the entire report before formulating conclusions.

Strengths

Homer is a district that sees itself as a good place, with deep traditions and a proud past. Although participants were quick to tell us about weaknesses and problems, they were sometimes effusive in their praise and demonstrated genuine affection for the school and the larger community. We emphasize this at the start because the nature of this process tends to focus on weaknesses. That is a good thing. Organizations engage in strategic planning in order to get better. Stakeholders want improvement. That tends to stack the deck in favor of weaknesses and improvement opportunities. It should not diminish the considerable and deep strengths of the district.

In our interviews we defined strengths as follows: *“Internal strengths are resources or capabilities that help a school district accomplish its mission and mandates and create public trust.”*

Predominant Strengths. There are four predominant strengths of the district that were identified in virtually every interview and every group. They include the quality of the faculty and staff, community support, a safe supportive environment and pride.

Faculty and Staff. With only a few exceptions participants were very positive regarding the people who worked for the Homer Central School District, whether they were members of the faculty or support staff. We also heard, though less consistently, positive comments about school leaders. Words like caring, committed, dedicated, and capable were common. Parents told us stories about how individual teachers made a difference in the lives of their children. “Kids are put first” was a theme we heard many times. Several students commented that many of their teachers were particularly caring and would do whatever was necessary to help them. One of the questions we always ask students is whether it is easy to obtain extra help when they are having difficulty with a class. The students we talked to were unanimous that teachers were available and willing to assist. We also heard comments about the instructional expertise of the faculty, noting that many were experts in their content area. The words “talented” and “knowledgeable” were used to describe teachers. Staff interaction with parents and the ability of staff to adapt to change were both mentioned as strengths. The longevity of both faculty and staff were seen as strengths. One teacher noted how the faculty was able to deal with the many changes being imposed by federal and state requirements with a minimum of problems.

On several occasions we heard specific praise regarding the work ethic of Homer non-instructional employees. This came from teachers, department heads and community members.

We heard very positive testimonies about every group of employees. “Hard working administrators,” “dedicated paraprofessionals,” “great bus drivers,” “excellent support staff” were all terms we heard from a variety of stakeholders.

Community Support. One of the most frequently cited strengths of the school district was the deep support of the Homer community. “Supportive community” and “supportive parents” were two of the most common responses from stakeholders. Respondents told us that the Homer community values and respects education. We heard many positive comments about the Parent Teacher Association. Although communication is also cited as a weakness, many parents and community members thought it was a strength.

There is also a perception that there are many opportunities for parent involvement in the school district. The parents we talked with felt welcomed and valued in the Homer Central Schools.

There was also a sense that the school was actively involved with various institutions in the community. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that Homer literally borders the city of Cortland, and is thus heavily affected by the presence of SUNY at Cortland, there is a strong sense that the schools, not the college, are the center of the community.

Safe Supportive Environment. In our work in public schools, we always ask students whether the school is a safe place. The Homer students we talked to were unanimous that their schools were safe. In fact they thought the question was almost unnecessary. “Of course it is safe here,” we heard, “this is Homer.” From our work in many other districts, we can say that they have little sense of how fortunate they are to take school safety for granted. One could not help but gather in that sense of safety while walking through the high school. We observed well behaved, respectful students going about the business of their education. Of course there are always exceptions, but Homer presented itself as a very safe environment. We did hear some concerns about bullying. When we probed, the main source seems to be cyber bullying, a serious and difficult issue for schools and students.

There is a very strong sense that Homer is a particularly caring school community. Students talked about how they came together around a recent tragedy regarding a player from another school who was fatally injured in a football game at Homer. There was a palpable sense of concern for the player several weeks after the accident. “Our children benefit from a caring environment”, one parent told us. A teacher described a “culture of caring” within the schools.

Respondents characterized the culture of Homer as not only caring, but collaborative and positive. A good part of a safe supportive environment is about relationships. We noted positive relationships in almost every

dimension of the school community. One respondent characterized Homer as a place where there is a high degree of collaboration based on strong relational trust.

Pride. Both the mission and vision of the Homer Central School District emphasize pride as a district value. In actuality, this is an acronym for Passion for Learning, Respect for Others, Integrity, Devotion to Civility, and Excellence of Instruction. In our conversations with stakeholders we found it is also a way to describe how the majority of stakeholders felt about the district. From the Board President and Superintendent, to faculty, staff, parents and students, we sensed a real feeling of pride to be associated with Homer. To be certain, there is plenty of criticism (our section on weaknesses is always longer than the section on strengths), but we found this sense of pride to be compelling.

Many parents, in particular, were extremely proud to have their children in the Homer schools. Again, they were quick to offer suggestions for improvement as well, but overall, they were almost boastful (in the positive sense) about their schools.

Secondary Strengths. Whereas, faculty and staff, community support and pride were almost always cited as strengths of the district, there were a number of other areas that were frequently cited, but not with the consistency of the predominant strengths. Some of these secondary issues were cited as a strength by some and a weakness by others. When an issue was seen as both a strength and weakness, we list it as a secondary, rather than predominant.

Leadership. Overall, we heard many more positive comments about leadership on both the building and district level than criticism. One of the most frequently cited strengths was the administrative team, not differentiating between building and district. Building leaders are seen as hard working and dedicated. Several parents were excited about the “new administrative team” and felt that the district was ready to go “from good to great.”

We will share criticism regarding district leaders in the weakness section, but after “Faculty and Staff” the single most commonly cited strength of the district was the new superintendent. In fact, we would have listed it as a predominant strength, except there were balancing criticisms that we share in the weakness section. The new superintendent was seen by many respondents as “exactly what the district needs.” Her curriculum expertise and work ethic were specifically cited as strengths. It was noted that she is seen in the buildings and very clear and transparent in her communications, especially to the board of education. One respondent noted that there was a “positive energy” in the school under the new superintendent. A teacher proudly proclaimed that “our district and leadership is the best in the area.” This positive feeling came through in many stakeholder groups, but not nearly as strongly among teachers and especially high school teachers.

Another leadership aspect that came through as a strength is the emergence of stronger teacher leaders. Recently departmental leadership was restructured into “Curriculum Area Lead Teachers” giving more leadership opportunity to designated teachers.

Student Body. We frequently heard positive comments about the student body from faculty, staff and community members. The decorum of the student body was a particular strength. A number of faculty and staff mentioned the district’s efforts in character education as key to positive student behavior.

Technology. Overall, respondents were positive about the district’s progress in providing and integrating technology for the educational program. Many teachers, students, and parents commented about not only the presence of new technology, but its impact on instruction. Concerns were raised that training needs to continue, and some were concerned that technology support was too thin. But the general direction of the district regarding the provision of new technology and its impact on classroom instruction was seen as a strength. In the weakness section, we will discuss a number of criticisms that emerged regarding technology.

Materials and Resources. The majority of participants in our focus groups, especially teachers, saw the provision of instructional materials and resources as a strength of the district. “We are resource rich,” one teacher commented. Many of the teachers we talked to agreed that needs (in terms of supplies and resources) are provided. Several teachers praised the provision of science materials at the elementary level. There was, however, considerable concern regarding recent budget cuts and the ability of the district to continue to

provide needed resources. There was also criticism, which we highlight later, regarding specific text books especially at the elementary level.

Educational program and student opportunities. This is an area that was frequently mentioned as a strength. A number of high school students, and parents identified the Advanced Placement program as a great strength for Homer. The music, art and theater programs were mentioned as specific strengths. Overall, there is a strong perception among stakeholders that there are ample opportunities for Homer students. When we asked students what they were most proud of they frequently cited the athletic program. A very common theme across community members was the quality of the educational program of the district.

The extra-curricular program in general was also specifically cited as a district strength.

Overall Financial Position of the District. Over the years, Homer has accumulated fairly substantial reserves, and this is generally known throughout the district. Many of the respondents we talked to mentioned the financial stability of the district. In recent years there have been cuts to program and staff as a result of the state budget crisis and decreasing state aid. Some districts cannot reasonably expect to survive in a financial climate that is becoming more and more difficult. Homer is in better shape than most.

Employee Relationships. Public education in New York is heavily unionized. With very few exceptions, employees in public schools belong to unions, and the exceptions are usually the superintendent and senior executive leadership along with their confidential support staff. In our experiences we have seen many instances where these relationships have deteriorated to the point of being dysfunctional. This is not the case in Homer. We interviewed union leaders in all areas along with members of board of education and senior management team. In every instance we heard and observed mutual respect and a high degree of civility. Obviously they have disagreements, but there appears to be a genuine desire to reach conclusions that are in the best interests of all parties and benefit the students of the district.

We were able to discern a high level of trust among both district and union leaders. Indeed, one long term leader noted that the district has a long history of cooperation and trust.

What is often a barrier to progress and a clear weakness is a perceived strength in the Homer Central Schools.

Communication. Although we clearly heard negative remarks about communication, there were many stakeholders from multiple groups who saw communication as strength. This was more prevalent at the elementary grade levels than the secondary levels. Generally parents were positive about communication both from the district and individual schools and, in the case of elementary parents, about their child's teacher. Some faculty and staff specifically mentioned internal communications as a strength.

District Size. A common theme among respondents was that the size of the district was a strength. There is a perception that it is big enough to offer a comprehensive program, but small enough to know and attend to the needs of its students. There is a perception that it is difficult to fall between the cracks at Homer. Students acknowledge that they know their classmates and feel known and cared about. Parents are comfortable that their children are in a place where they are valued as individuals.

Food Service. We do not usually find that school food service programs are identified as a strength area, but in the case of Homer, we believe that it was. This is not because there were repeated compliments about the school food, though there were some, (especially the hot turkey sandwiches.) We did not hear any complaints about the food service program, which is highly unusual. Additionally, in our interview with the school business official, we found that the program operates at a profit. This is quite unusual and a clear sign, along with no complaints, at least to us, that the school food service program is a district strength.

Buildings and Grounds. Facilities were perceived as a strength by many, which we found was a function of which district facility the respondent utilized the most. Recent renovations are apparent throughout the district. There is a state of the art auditorium, and impressive outdoor athletic facilities. In general district

facilities were in very good condition and notably clean. We found no case of poorly maintained school facilities and most stakeholders agreed. Under the weakness section, however, we do note some criticisms.

Other Strengths. There were other strengths identified by stakeholders on a more individual basis. Several individuals were positive about the work of the Board of Education. Board members impressed us as positive and supportive people who genuinely cared about the work of public education. Several individuals noted that they perceived that the board and superintendent were working together effectively. Some teachers noted that they had a strong tradition of academic freedom, specifically the freedom to modify the curriculum to meet student needs. This was perceived as essential by these teachers.

The Hartnett School was mentioned as a specific strength, noting that promises were kept and the school remained open.

One teacher praised the teacher mentoring system, noting it was a model for the area. Academic rigor and a high college going rate were also mentioned as strengths. One teacher noted that full inclusion at the elementary level was a district strength.

Weaknesses

In our interviews, we defined weaknesses as follows: *“Internal weaknesses are deficiencies in resources or capabilities that hinder a school district’s ability to meet its mandates, fulfill its mission and create public trust.”*

Predominant Weaknesses. There were several areas that were almost universally recognized as weaknesses of the school district. These include the following: curriculum development, programs for students with disabilities, professional development, and increasing state mandates.

Curriculum Development. The Homer Central School District has not engaged in a long period of comprehensive, systematic, ongoing curriculum development. There is a strong sense among many stakeholders that this places the district at a disadvantage. Our own examination of curriculum maps suggests that curriculum development is still emerging within the district. There are two compelling issues associated with curriculum development. The first is the new common core standards which will apply to all public schools in the state and most public schools in the nation. Districts that have engaged in ongoing development of curriculum may find it less difficult to make adjustments to meet the new requirements. The second issue may pose a greater challenge to Homer. We came away with a strong sense that curriculum in Homer has been viewed by many as in the realm of individual classroom teachers. One teacher was adamant that one of the greatest strengths of the district was the traditional practice of allowing faculty to adjust the curriculum to meet the perceived needs of individual students. That practice will be severely limited as the state and district implement the common core standards. This could be a challenge in a district where individual curriculum discretion is apparently a common and valued practice.

Programs for Students with Disabilities. There was widespread disagreement regarding how the district should provide for students with disabilities (SWD), but there was a fair amount of consensus that this was a concern within the district. We refer back to the Program Staff and Facilities Report where we noted that the district did not appear to offer the full continuum of services, that certain students were in a program not likely to lead to a standard high school diploma and that the way special education and related service faculty were used throughout the district did not appear to be effective. In our focus groups and interviews, many respondents expressed concern about the low academic performance and graduation rates of SWD.

In our interactions with faculty and staff, there were numerous concerns expressed about the perceived lack of special education staff. However, the issue that received the most discussion was changes at the high school. Homer is a unique district. It has a long tradition as a high performing school, especially within Cortland County. It has a population that is remarkably diverse in terms of income and standard of living. Homer and the surrounding area are residential in nature, with a fair number of middle class and upper middle class

families. However, Homer is a very large district, and contains sparsely populated areas that seem to include more poverty. In our comparisons, Homer had the highest poverty rate among the comparison group in the Program, Staff and Facilities Report, yet had relatively high mean income and adult education levels. For many years Homer has offered a program similar to the Regents/non-Regents programs offered in New York State prior to the standards movement. This approach is no longer consistent with education law. Homer has a lower than predicted graduation rate, especially for students with disabilities and disadvantaged students. The non-Regents approach does not prepare students for the Regents examinations, which are a prerequisite for the New York State Regents diploma, which is now the basic high school diploma in New York. Most of the students in the non-Regents or “basics classes” were students with disabilities (SWD) classified under Part 200 of the Commissioners Regulations and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while others are students with disabilities with accommodation plans under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Though enrolled in “basics classes” these students were not prepared for the basic high school diploma offered in New York State, as the curriculum in these basic classes does not prepare these students for the Regents examinations. We do not see these classes as consistent with current state regulations.

This year the district eliminated many of these classes at the high school in favor of an inclusion model. We heard deep concern from several stakeholder groups including teachers, aides, students and parents about the implementation of this model. Many feel it was forced by the superintendent. Some are asking for the reinstatement of the “basic” classes. Teachers are adamant that they do not have the training to work with SWD; some students complained that the behavior of some students in the inclusive classrooms compromises the learning of other students. This concern was also expressed by parents.

The administration sees the previous model as discriminatory, illegal and ineffective, contributing to the district’s lower than expected graduation rate.

Concerns about programs for SWD are not only prevalent at the high school. In every building we heard concerns from a variety of perspectives. These concerns focused on the perceived inadequacy of the program provided. We were told that there was unwillingness to administer test modifications for some students. There were also concerns about related service providers being “spread too thin.”

Professional Development. There appears to be a changing sense of the quality of professional development in the district. There was fairly uniform criticism of the district's PD efforts, but some sense that recent work suggests improvement. We were told that at one time the teachers' union and the administration had an active committee known as the Professional Staff Development Committee, which, is not currently actively supported by the teachers' union. Union leaders acknowledged a need to more fully attend to and support district wide PD initiatives, but also noted that they had allowed their previous role to be taken by others. We heard that teachers have little time to meet, and that their time with students was compromised by PD. We are not in a position to assign responsibility for the general criticisms of the district's PD program, but the emergence of the common core standards as the baseline for public schools in this state will require a very high level PD.

Increasing State Mandates. We heard from a number of respondents that teacher morale was starting to suffer in Homer. Because we work in many districts, we can say categorically that is a statewide issue. Starting last year when the state suddenly, and we think inappropriately, raised the cut points on NYS assessments leading to an unprecedented number of schools identified as needing improvement, the impact of state mandates on districts has affected teacher morale. These mandates are more profound this year as teachers now prepare for the common core standards and an APPR model that overemphasizes test scores (author opinion noted) and an expedited 3020A process that could lead to dismissal based, in part, on test scores. Add to this the new tax cap, a general degradation of public opinion regarding public school teachers and high profile attacks on teachers unions in Wisconsin and other states, and there is little wonder that teacher morale in Homer is affected. In Homer, this is the first year of an inclusion model that many teachers do not support and feel was imposed on them by the school administration. This is yet another morale issue. However, our opinion is the previous system of "basic" classes could not stand.

We need to make note that though we heard many concerns about these issues, we were generally impressed by the resiliency and positive attitude of faculty, staff and administration regarding these mandates. We have worked in districts where there is a sense of organizational depression. Homer is not that kind of district.

Secondary Weaknesses. There were a number of other areas that were often cited, but not with the consistency of the predominant weaknesses. The predominant weaknesses were almost never cited as strengths. Some of these secondary issues were cited as a strength by some and a weakness by others. When an issue was seen as both a strength and weakness, we list it as a secondary, rather than predominant.

Communication. We heard a fair number of concerns regarding communication, especially communication from central office to teachers. When we probed for specific issues it was difficult to discern the actual concern, but the feel was common and expressed numerous times. Often communication is a code word for something else such as not feeling heard on issues of importance. We can only speculate on this concern, but do note that it was stronger among high school staff.

Enrichment. Programs for gifted and talented students and enrichment programs in general were identified as a weakness by many stakeholders especially parents and teachers. This is less true at the high school where students have AP and honors classes, but pronounced throughout the rest of the district. It was expressed to us that some programs for enriched students were scaled back during recent budget cuts.

Student behavior. Though we found student behavior generally positive, we heard many concerns from teachers about the growing number of very difficult students in their classrooms and their perception that the district was increasingly unwilling to take strong action to deal with these students. Some of the students felt that student discipline was inconsistent. There was a perception among some teachers that students are being allowed to remain in classrooms whereas in the past they would be removed. Student behavior was an issue in the high school related to inclusion as noted earlier. This was expressed by teachers, parents and students.

Increasing student needs. One of the most common concerns we heard from stakeholders was that Homer was seeing more students living under the poverty level, and that these students had more intense needs for academic support. In the Program Staff and Facilities Report we address the misconception of many people that all students eligible for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program come from families in poverty. Using 2010 NYSED Report Card information, about 28% of Homer students were eligible for the FRL program in 2010, but according to the United States Census, only about 14.1% come from families under the Federal poverty guidelines. We could compare this to the Rochester City School District where 85% of the

students were eligible for FRL and about 38% come from families under the poverty level. We will use the term “economically disadvantaged” to refer to these children, as it is more accurate. This is not to suggest that there are not a substantial and growing number of district children who come from families living in poverty.

Children who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to experience difficulty in school for various reasons. Teachers and school leaders we talked with were clear that the issues of the economically disadvantaged made disproportionate demands on the school system as a whole and individual teachers specifically.

Teachers also noted challenges in developing relationships with working class parents who are not as comfortable with school issues as their middle class peers. Teachers saw a greater need to reach out to these parents and understand their concerns.

Enrichment. Though the AP program and opportunities for program choices at the high school were seen as a strength, many stakeholders noted a general absence of enrichment opportunities at the elementary schools. There does not seem to be a systematic approach to enrichment or acceleration at the elementary schools.

Leadership. We listed leadership as a secondary strength in the prior section. We now list it as a secondary weakness. Again, our interpretation is based on an analysis of the qualitative data we collected in the focus groups and interviews. By far, the largest group of stakeholders we interviewed was teachers. Their views of leadership varied. They were generally positive about building leadership, but quick to point out issues such as perceived inconsistency in dealing with discipline and, in the minds of some, less than the desired amount of visibility. There was more criticism around central office leaders. Some perceived central office to be “micromanaging” the buildings. Though some told us central office leaders were more visible, others disagreed. There was a sense among some that the superintendent was imposing changes on the schools. Some saw this as a top down approach. This was particular to the issue of the basic classes in the high school. Some told us that trust was low between the faculty and central administration. While most stakeholder groups were positive about the superintendent, some teacher groups, specifically at the high school, were critical.

Some felt that the district was historically inept at true collaboration. Generally respondents were more positive about building level leadership, though they felt that these leaders were overwhelmed.

Hartnett. While individuals directly associated with the Hartnett School were very supportive of the continuation of that school, others expressed that it was a burden and could not be sustained. When we probed on that issue, we found that most of the feelings about Hartnett were based on opinion that may not have been informed by analysis. We also found that those who supported Hartnett were particularly strong in their beliefs. We suspect this will be an ongoing issue for the district.

Technology. Although there was a perception that the district is improving in both access and use of technology, there were many stakeholders who felt the impact of technology on teaching and learning was limited. When asked to rank the “use of technology” on a scale of 1-5, the average score was approximately 3. When asked to rank the availability of technology, the average score was approximately 4.

Though many were happy with the technology advances the district is making there was a fair amount of specific criticism. For example, we heard a specific concern about the lack of technology at Hartnett. We also heard a concern about a lack of technology in music.

Again, the students had a particular perspective on the technology issue. They were critical of some teachers who did not effectively use technology. They also expressed concerns about access. Apparently the high school had a computer lab that is no longer available. Students were vehement that this was a loss to them, and that it was more difficult to access technology this year.

Teachers at the elementary school noted that the district previously had a “computer teacher” in that building, but the position was eliminated. That, in the eyes of some of these teachers was a great loss for the building.

Facilities. This is another area identified as a secondary strength as well as a secondary weakness. We heard a number of criticisms regarding facilities. Specifically the high school gymnasium is apparently too hot many times throughout the year. Every student group raised issues regarding the high school gym. One teacher was very critical of the high school in general, feeling it was poorly laid out and in less than optimal

condition. There were concerns raised about Hartnett, both regarding the overall condition of the building and the feasibility of keeping it opened.

The separate building for the high school music program was perceived to be inadequate and dysfunctional. The notion of students having to go outdoors to attend music classes was seen as problematic.

Culture. It was suggested that there was a culture of complacency within the district. The district was “too insular” and being what was perceived as the best in Cortland County, should not be good enough. Some indicated that the district was stuck in the past, and that what used to be good enough would no longer do, but people were resisting that reality. The district has a formal mission and vision, but it did not, in the minds of some, drive the district. There was a willingness to do what had been done before but a real resistance to actually make positive changes. One aspect of this culture may be a conflict between the need to develop and implement a unified curriculum, such as will be required by the common core standards, and the notion of academic freedom and the value placed on modification of the curriculum based on perceived student need.

Budget Cuts. Like most schools, Homer has experienced a series of budget cuts in recent years. Specific positions have been eliminated. There is a perception that these budget cuts have hurt the program the district provides for students. In almost every group, there was some issue about cuts in some aspect of the school program. It was noted by several that support positions, such as counselors and social workers were impacted by these cuts.

Teaching Issues: We indicated earlier that there was overwhelming praise for the faculty from a majority of respondents. However, there were criticisms as well. Many of the concerns raised came from other faculty members, parents and students. Many noted what they perceived to be an overemphasis on testing, especially at the high school. This topic may well belong in the predominant weaknesses as part of our discussion on state mandates. However, the way it was presented to us suggests it is beyond an imposed issue, and may speak to issues of pedagogy and expectations. We had a number of teachers tell us that there was way too

much testing in the district, always noting that this was an issue related to the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, and not unique to Homer. Parents also related a frustration regarding too much testing. But it was our conversations with high school students that were most concerning. They suggested that testing was absolutely driving instruction. They were adamant that the academic culture of the school was determined by the state examinations. One parent lamented that there was not enough rigor at the high school sensing that good regents' results were the primary goal of many teachers. One student told us of an instance in which a teacher started what was going to be an engaging discussion on a science topic but cut it off, as "it's not on the Regents." We were surprised as to the uniformity of agreement on this issue among the students.

One respondent was clear that in too many cases the methodology of instruction was not aligned to the needs of students noting what was perceived as overuse of worksheets and a disregard for best practice in instruction. (These) "teaching methods are not effective for struggling students," we were told. A teacher confided to us that there is too much wasted class time in too many classes. There was a perception that "people are doing what they always have done" despite the changing needs of the student body. Data is not being used, we were told, to inform instruction.

Some of the same parents who praised faculty and staff complained about low expectations and a "lack of benchmarks" for student progress. One parent noted that there was not enough emphasis on balanced reading K-12 and complained about a "waning work ethic" and a low graduation rate. We heard concerns from parents about tenure and "some teachers" that they perceived as ineffective. There were concerns that some teachers resisted accountability.

One student group was particularly thoughtful in their comments. When we asked them about 21st Century Skills, they told us that many classes are about "compliance not creativity." They were especially critical of many assessments which they saw as busywork. They too believed there were some teachers who were not effective.

It needs to be emphasized that in most, but not all cases, respondents were clear that their concern were limited to a small percentage of the overall faculty.

Other Weaknesses.

Here we list other issues that were identified as weaknesses. These may have been identified by only a few individuals in focus groups.

We heard criticism about both the math and reading series used at the elementary school. Some teachers told us the district lacked a strategic direction and was prone to using a “band aid approach” to problem solving.

High school students were critical of physical education in general feeling it should be optional or, at least, pass/ fail.

The sixth grade was noted as an organizational concern, as it is apparently not clearly aligned with either the elementary school or the junior high school.

There was concern expressed that AIS programs were inadequate.

Some felt that there was a lack of respect for non-instructional staff. There was also criticism regarding the district’s field trip policy.

The transitions between schools were noted as a weakness. It was noted that teachers are being saddled with more and more out of pocket expenses to support their programs.

It was noted that Homer students are not exposed to diversity in race and culture, though they are exposed to diversity in socio-economic background.

Some teachers felt that there was not enough push-in support for students with disabilities, resulting in a less effective program for both SWD and their non-disabled peers. There was specific criticism regarding pull out programs for remedial programs.

A very small number of respondents recognized the issues associated with declining enrollment.

It was noted that some staff abused sick days.

The dismissal system at the intermediate school was noted as problematic as was the districts implementation of response to intervention at that building.

Concern was expressed that the district did not adequately support the arts and programs in languages other than English.

Opportunities

We asked participants to think creatively, to build on and create strengths, to modify and eliminate weaknesses. However, given the time restraints of the school day, we elected to differentiate the second part of the interview. Faculty, staff, and students were asked questions about the school program and student life; while board members, school leaders, and parents were asked about opportunities and threats.

In our interviews, we defined opportunities as follows: “*External opportunities are outside factors or situations that the school district can take advantage of to better fulfill its mission.*” We report these data together along with suggested actions for improvement in this section.

Expand partnerships with area colleges and other agencies. This was the most common response to opportunities for the district. Homer is in the center of the upstate New York higher education system. Though there was widespread agreement that the district did work with Cortland State, there were many who thought that this relationship, as well as relationships with other area colleges, could be expanded. Additionally, it was noted that there were many other partnership opportunities for the district including BOCES, the local historical society and state parks located in the area.

Provide more enrichment. There were many examples of additional enrichment opportunities that could be considered; some linked to the partnership ideas expressed above. Various stakeholders wanted to expand student awareness of technology, introduce programs on nanotechnology, provide more accelerated classes, and utilize more field trips.

Build Trust. A number of respondents suggested that there has been a lack of trust in the district for some time. Given that lack of trust, any action by the board of education or superintendent tends to be viewed with some skepticism, even though the trust gap existed prior to the service of some board members and the superintendent. Several respondents said that the district had to work to build trust with the public as well as the faculty and staff. When we probed as to how to do this, the sense was that the district needed to be as transparent as possible, create highly effective communication systems and listen to the concerns of constituents.

Specific Actions. A number of participants offered opinions on specific actions the district could take. The following specific actions were suggested to enhance strengths and minimize weaknesses:

- Develop a focused professional development plan.
- Reinstate the basic classes.
- Visit high performing schools to learn about best practices.
- Increase the effective use of volunteers.
- Create an education foundation.
- Organize opposition to the state budget cuts.
- Trust the judgment of the teaching staff.
- Administer reading assessments to all incoming 9th graders.
- Revisit the School Alliance for Continuous Improvement (SACI) process.
- Create time for curriculum improvement.
- Have counselors emphasize college readiness.
- Institute Reading Recovery.
- Continue with the strategic planning process.
- Institute Universal Pre-Kindergarten.

- Institute high school classes on study skills, hygiene and nutrition.
- Engage stakeholders.
- Develop a distance learning program.
- Do not make further budget cuts.
- Improve paraprofessional training.
- Educate taxpayers and the community.
- Start school later in the day.
- Decrease class size.
- Streamline the mission statement.
- Use the financial framework in decision making instead of the political framework.
- Create more opportunities for parent involvement.
- Introduce LOTE in 5th grade.
- Unite staff around a common mission.
- Use guided reading in the junior high school.

Threats

The questions about threats to the district elicited several dominant responses. We defined threats in our interviews as follows: *“External threats and challenges are factors that can affect your school district in a negative way, making it harder to fulfill your mission.”*

The overwhelming response to the question about threats was financial, specifically the state budget crisis. Attached to these concerns was the upcoming school budget, which many assumed would be another painful process. Other threats listed were also listed as weaknesses.

- Declining enrollment.
- No Child Left Behind.

- Decline of the family.
- Low educational expectation on the part of families.
- No mandate relief.
- Low morale.
- Administration changes.
- Apathy especially among parents.
- Too many administrative duties.
- APPR.
- Brain Drain (graduates leave the area for other opportunities).
- Anti-public education environment.
- Fear of change.
- Complacency.
- Losing Hartnett.
- Teaching is becoming increasingly stressful.
- Trickle down of stress from NCLB to the children.
- State and local economy.
- Taxpayer support.

Other Items

We asked “*how effective is Homer in preparing students for life and work in the 21st Century.*” We asked respondents to gage their answers against the Partnership for 21st Century Skills model. Responses were varied. The majority of responses were not clearly positive or negative. Most thought the district had a considerable “way to go” in almost every aspect with the exception of basic skills. There was some feeling that the district was more effective with the top third of the student body than middle or struggling students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Our interviews were always limited by time. In order to maximize participation, we conducted most of our interviews with teachers and students during the school day, fitting our interactions into one academic period. That way we could catch teachers during planning time or students during study hall or an advisory period. We did not want to negatively impact any instructional time. There were some specific questions we had for both teachers and students and, therefore, we opted to substitute these questions for the questions about opportunities and threats. Although we did not ask teachers about opportunities specifically, several of the opportunities listed previously did come from our teacher interviews.

We wanted to get a sense of how the faculty and staff viewed certain key components of the instructional system. These include curriculum, use of data, and professional development. We want to emphasize that in no way does this constitute an evaluation of these elements. We are simply obtaining base line data that should be useful to the planning team.

We looked at the 21st Century Schools Model and asked instructional personnel to comment on each area. Our comments are necessarily brief, but attempt to sum up the sense of the group.

Curriculum Development. This is seen as an area for improvement by teachers. It was also noted as an area for improvement by parents, administrators and board members.

Professional Development. Overall, with few exceptions, this is seen as an area for improvement for the district.

Use of Assessments. Perceptions were mixed. No one saw this district as a leader in using assessment for learning. Many thought the district relied too much on standardized tests. Most saw this as an area for improvement.

Availability of Technology. This was usually seen as a strength of the district. There were only a few exceptions and some specific issues which are noted in the weakness section of this report.

Use of Technology. Often when we heard about the availability of technology, we also heard about the need for more technology support and training. This was seen as an emerging area for the district.

Development of Critical Thinkers. Teachers were fairly neutral about the district's success here, with a few exceptions. Those who were negative focused on the lack of opportunities for enriched students.

Development of Creativity. Teachers were moderately positive about the district's success in developing creativity in its students. Those who were negative focused on the lack of opportunities for enriched students.

Development of Communication Skills. Generally teachers were positive, but again, only moderately.

Development of Students who work Collaboratively. This was a stronger issue, across the board, but especially with elementary and middle school teachers.

Use of Data. We approach our work with the belief that appropriate classroom assessment is an important key to instructional improvement. We are influenced by Marzano's (2007) findings on the importance of ongoing formative assessment and the use of data to inform instruction. In order to do this, teachers need data that is easy to access and relevant to its purpose (i.e., informing instruction). It is critical that teachers not feel overburdened in data collection or analysis.

We asked teachers to respond to the following question regarding assessment and data:

“Does the district use data to guide instructional practice?”

Generally teachers were positive in their assessment of the district's efforts to gather data and use it to improve instruction, but only with the caveat that this was perceived as something in the fairly early stages of development. However, some teachers did not think the district was effective in this area. Many noted that this is “beginning to happen.”

Questions for Students

There is some information one can only get from talking with students. We interviewed high school students during the school day. We asked the students a number of questions, which we present in the order in which they were asked.

“What are you most proud of about your school?”

Students most commonly responded that they were proud of the school’s sports program, but also listed a caring environment, academics, teachers, and the AP programs.

“If you could change one thing, what would it be?” (Remember, no people)

We did not want this question to be an invitation to remark on individual teachers or others, and so we limited answers to programs and other aspects of the school. A fair number of students used this opportunity to complain about some aspect of the physical education program suggesting that it be optional or pass-fail and that the gymnasium was “always hot.”

It was in this forum that students suggested that the high school was overly focused on testing.

“Do you think you will be prepared for college when you graduate?”

The students we talked with were mixed in their response. Some were strongly positive, especially students in advanced classes. Most were “hopefully positive” meaning that they perceived that they were being prepared, but were not certain. Some, however, were negative. .

“Do you think your school program is preparing you for the 21st Century?”

Again the most positive students were those in advanced classes. Among other students, there were mixed responses.

Finally, we asked students if they felt safe in school. Without exception the students we met indicated they felt safe. Only a few suggested concerns about bullying. None of the students we talked to indicated they felt threatened by anything happening in or related to the school.