



# Report of Entry Findings

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational  
Technical School District

Tony McIntosh, Superintendent-Director

Presented and Accepted on March 21, 2023



Dedicated to Excellence in Education

***“A leader’s job is to look into the future and see the organization, not as it is, but as it should be.”***

***Jack Welch***

## ***Introduction***

I was hired as the incoming Superintendent-Director of the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District on March 3, 2022. Since I was appointed early in the spring, I was afforded the opportunity to overlap with the outgoing Superintendent-Director. During the spring of 2022 I spent a series of full days visiting the school, working with the outgoing Superintendent-Director, meeting the staff and students, and orienting myself to the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community. I was asked to attend a series of District School Committee meetings after my hire and was an active participant during many of the discussions about how to position the school for the transition from one Superintendent-Director to the next. I came to Shawsheen Valley Technical School from another regional vocational technical school and had over twenty years of experience working in similar schools across Massachusetts. I approached my new role with a desire to learn about the history and traditions of the school and the sending communities. I have transitioned from school to school two other times during my career and realized that I needed to come to Shawsheen Valley Technical School willing to listen and learn, and to restrict my natural response to want to address every issue immediately. Part of my planned transition was to purposely solicit information from all members of the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community.

I fully assumed the role of Superintendent-Director on July 1, 2022. I had been in the building the week before to spend two days working with the outgoing Superintendent-Director and was enthusiastic to officially take over. During my first week at the school, I had the opportunity to attend a facilities meeting that was organized and facilitated by the incoming Business Manager. Over the coming weeks I met with all of the year-round staff members to introduce myself and ask them all for feedback about how to improve the school. My meetings included all of the staff from the business office, the maintenance staff, the clerical staff, and the administrative team. I reached out to all of the members of the District School Committee and scheduled meetings with all of the

members by the community that they represented. The District School Committee held a planning retreat on Friday, July 8, 2022. I was an active participant in this planning retreat and welcomed the opportunity to further solidify my working relationship with the members of the District School Committee. I sent a welcome email to all members of the Shawsheen Valley Technical School faculty and staff and encouraged all of them to set up a time to meet with me during the summer. I had numerous staff members take me up on this offer and had the opportunity to sit down and have a personal conversation with approximately two dozen staff members. As the school reopened for the 2022-2023 school year, I continued to meet with staff and faculty to gather information from as many stakeholders as possible. I have had the opportunity to meet with all of the academic and most of the vocational technical departments as part of this process. During the fall and early winter of 2022, I spent time working with members of the sending communities to gather additional information about the school and areas of growth. This process included hosting all of the Superintendents from our sending districts, and all of the Town Managers from the sending communities. I met with members of the Parent Action Council and received a variety of feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the Shawsheen Valley Technical School.

In addition to the qualitative data that I collected during these in person meetings, I also reviewed a variety of documents relating to the operation and organization of the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District. In addition, I have spent time visiting the academic classrooms and technical instructional areas. These visits have provided me with additional quantitative data about the school and programs that I supervise.

The goal of my Report of Entry Findings is to communicate with all of the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District community members the information that I have collected as part of this process. As I have moved from being the incoming Superintendent-Director, to fully assuming all of the duties and responsibilities, several themes have emerged as I have worked to complete my entry plan. These themes have provided me with important information that needs to be analyzed, reviewed, and communicated as part of my transition.

## ***Overview***

Shawsheen Valley Technical School is located in Billerica, Massachusetts. The school is housed in a building that was originally built in 1970. The school has been well maintained during the last fifty plus years and has had a series of updates during that time. There has never been a major renovation, or expansion of the school since it originally opened.

Shawsheen Valley Technical School serves the communities of Bedford, Billerica, Burlington, Tewksbury, and Wilmington. In addition to serving these communities Shawsheen Valley Technical School also admits students from the Hanscom Air Force Base as part of their partnership with Bedford Public Schools. The school currently enrolls approximately 1,300 students in grades 9 through 12. Shawsheen Valley Technical School currently offers twenty different vocational technical program areas for students to select as their area of focus. The school offers a full complement of academic programs that support students that are interested in pursuing additional education upon graduation.

Admission to Shawsheen Valley Technical School is something that was brought to my attention by many of the community members that I met with as part of my onboarding process. While there have been numerous changes to the Admissions Policy, the school is still viewed as a valuable resource by our sending communities. During my efforts to draft this report of entry findings a group has filed a complaint that targets the selective admissions policies of all regional vocational technical schools, not just Shawsheen Valley Technical School. No outcome has been established at this time, but the outcome of this complaint has the potential to require system wide changes to the admissions policies of all regional vocational technical schools.

## ***Data Collection***

As I transitioned into the role of Superintendent-Director for the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District, I worked to develop a plan to gather, analyze, and report information about the district. Working with my mentor from the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP) I began to identify focus areas for my data collection. Events in the regional vocational technical community during this process further informed my efforts to gather and analyze data from additional sources. During my transition I have compiled data that includes

stakeholder interviews, document reviews, classroom and shop observations, and a review of the CTE Chapter 74 Admissions and Waitlist Analysis Data.

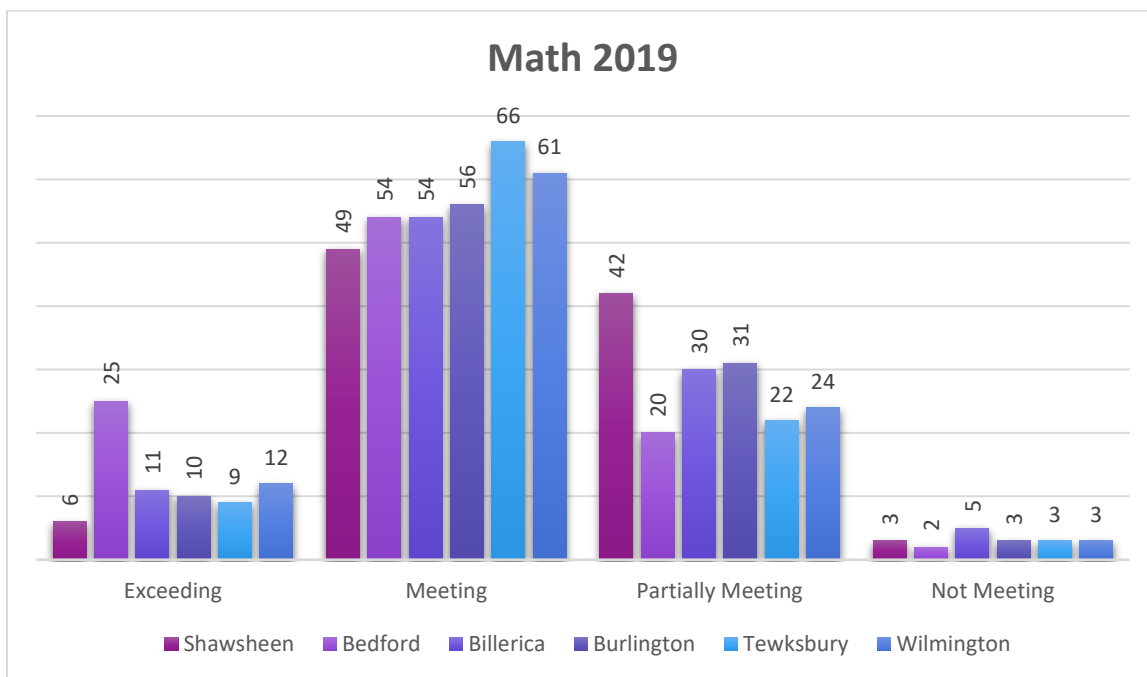
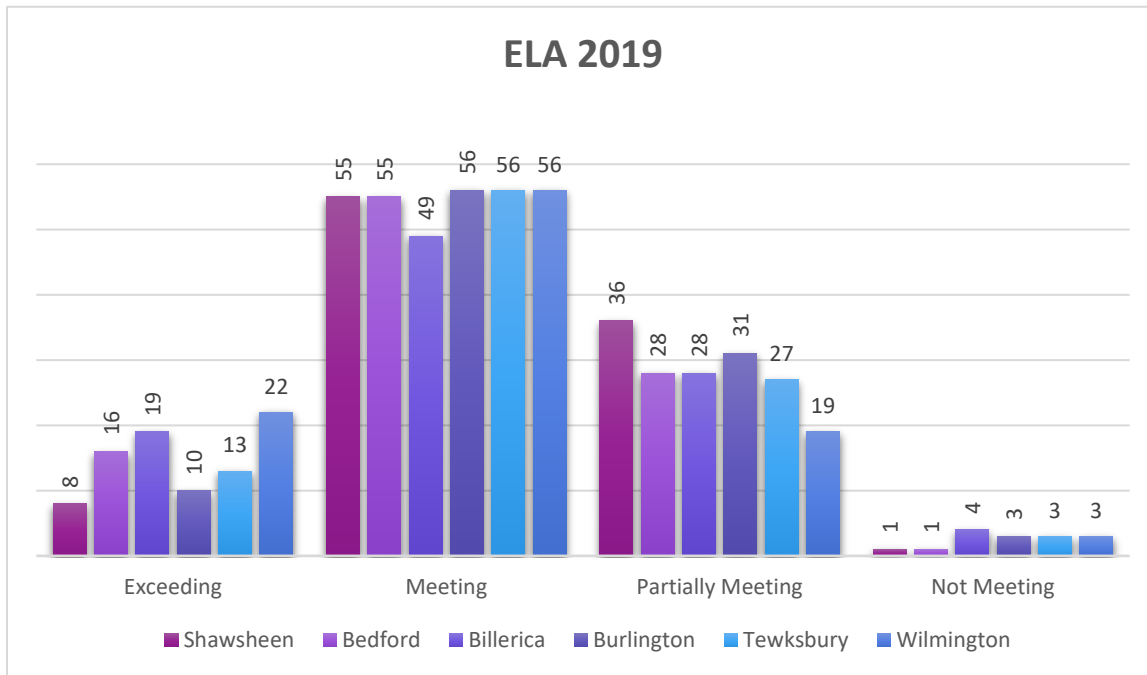
### ***Stakeholder Interviews***

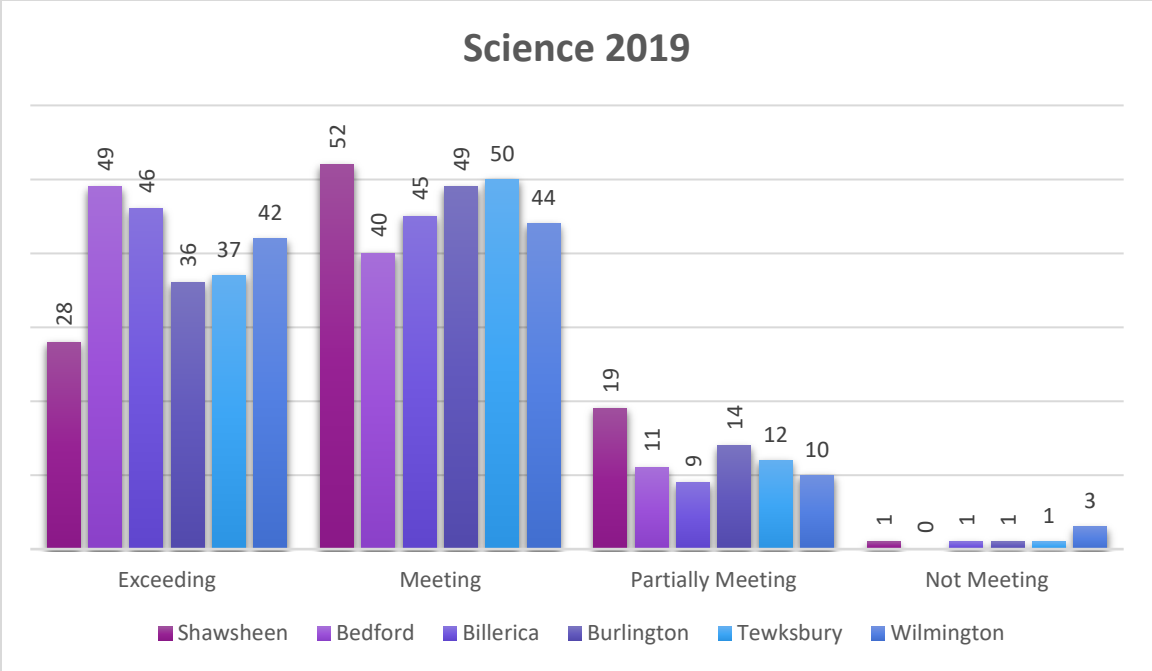
When I was hired for the position of Superintendent-Director my first focus was on how to engage all of the community stakeholders to help me learn about what Shawsheen Valley Technical School was doing well, and what needed to improve. This process involved a series of meetings that included members of the school committee, administrators, teachers, staff, community leaders, parent groups, and students. My approach to all of these meetings was to listen and learn from the school community members, and I focused on facilitating this during all of the meetings that were held. It was my goal to develop a better understanding of what was working well, and what needed to improve as I began my tenure as the new Superintendent-Director. My work with the stakeholder groups early on in the process helped to guide my efforts moving forward, and even led to me meeting with additional groups to gather additional information.

### ***Technical and Academic Achievement Data***

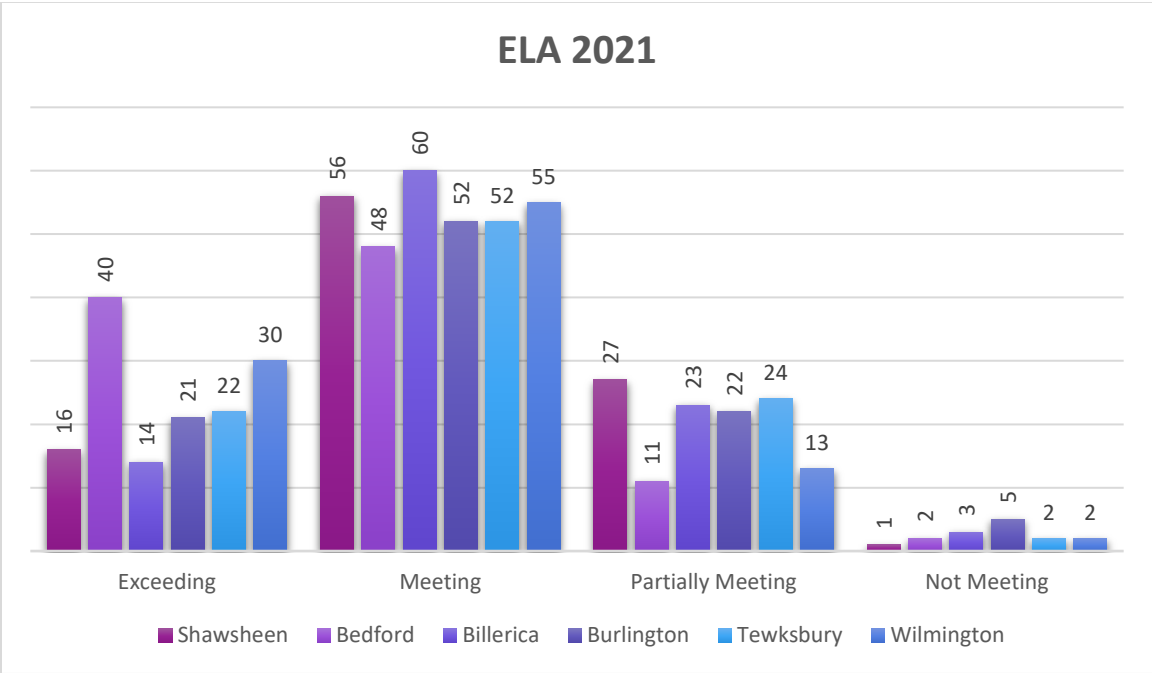
Measuring the performance of the vocational technical programs is an essential element for any school that offers Chapter 74 approved vocational technical programs. There is not a statewide performance metric that can be referenced, but numerous data points are available for review and comparison. Shawsheen Valley Technical School currently offers twenty vocational technical program majors, and each one has its own criteria for student success. One metric that I have found to be a strong indicator of program achievement is the number of students participating in cooperative education placements. Each Chapter 74 program has a list of competencies that students are expected to master during the duration of the program, and schools are charged with monitoring student progress from year to year. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has a number of dedicated Program Advisory Committee members that volunteer their time to guide and direct our twenty different vocational technical programs. Meeting with these groups provides the school with actionable information about how to improve our programs, and further support our sending communities.

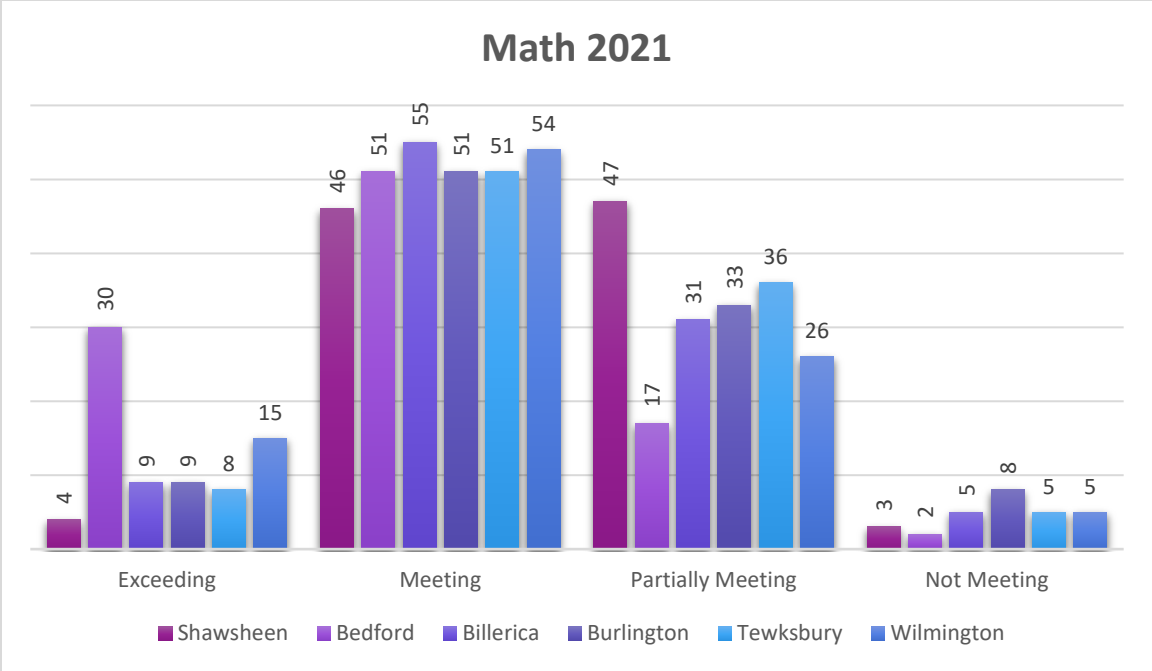
Shawsheen Valley Technical School has a strong history of academic performance as it relates to the MCAS testing program. Early in my transition I was presented with the performance data from the last school year.



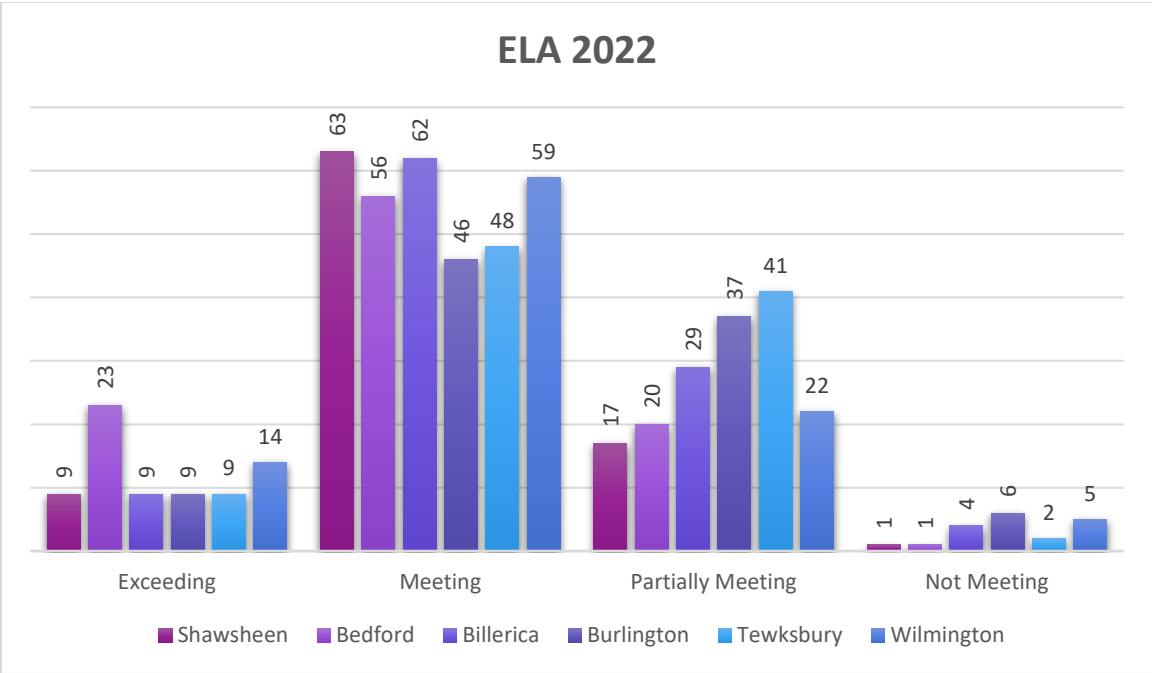


There was no MCAS testing data for 2020 due to the global pandemic.



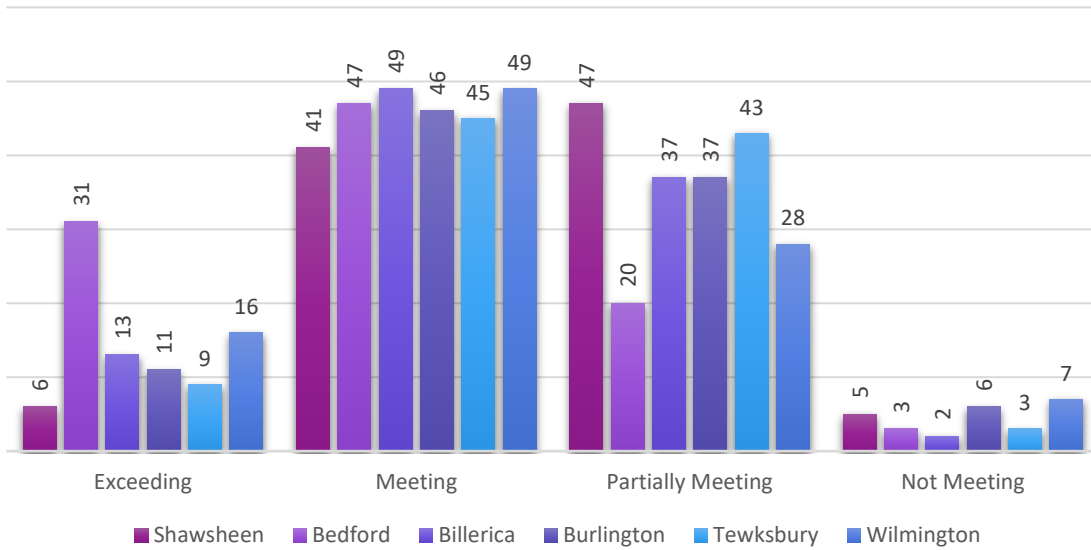


There was no science MCAS testing data for 2021 due to the global pandemic.

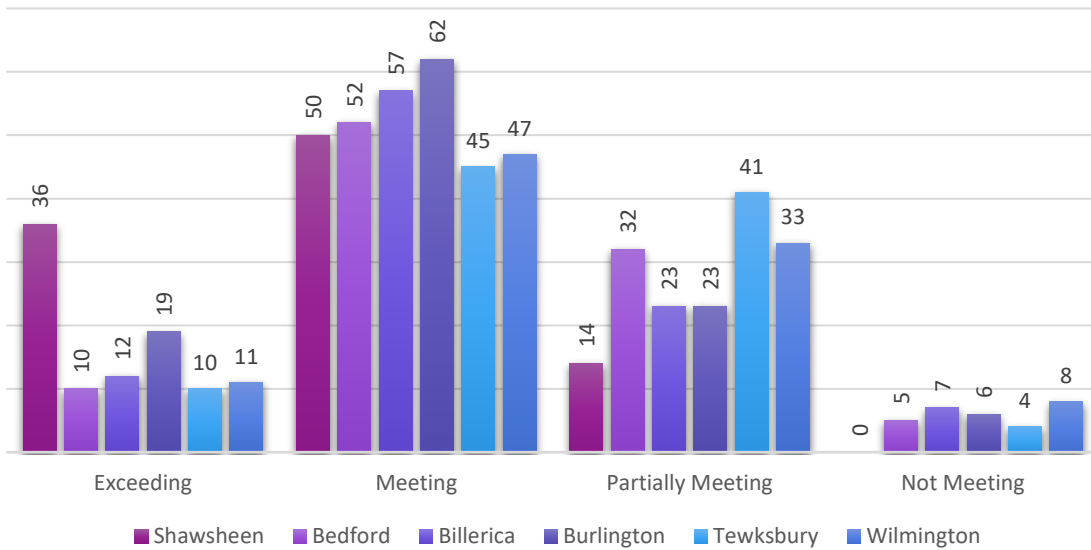




## MATH 2022



## SCIENCE 2022



## *Document Review*

During my collection of information, I reviewed a number of key documents that relate to how the district is organized and operated. This included the following documents:

- The Regional Agreement
- School Committee Policies
- Contracts with Employment Units (teachers, clerical, etc.)
- Individual Employment Contracts
- Budget Documents
- Grant Documents
- District Audit Reports
- Submitted Massachusetts School Building Authority Statement of Interest
- School Improvement Plan
- District Technology Information
- District Capital Improvement Plan
- Student Handbook
- Staff Handbook
- Program of Studies
- Evaluation System Forms and Reports
- MCAS “Report Card”
- Crisis Management Manual
- Graduate Plan Surveys
- District Admission Policy
- CTE Chapter 74 Admissions and Waitlist Analysis Data

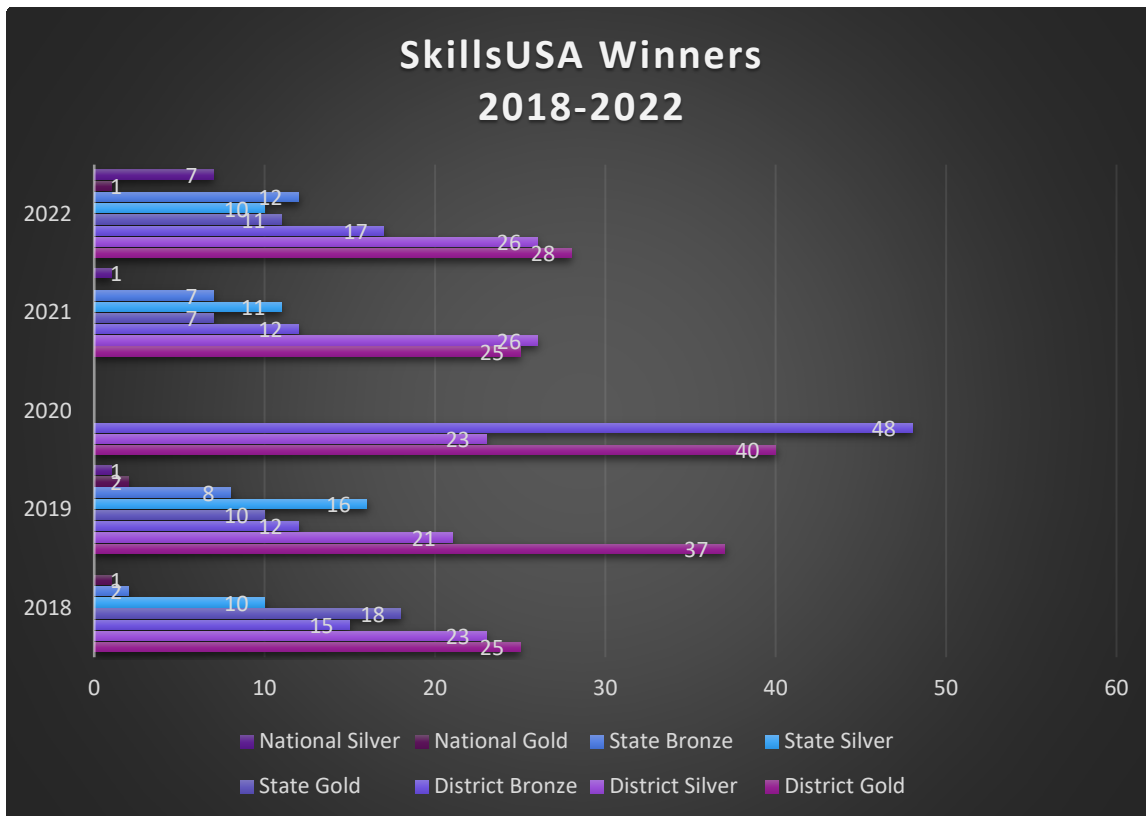
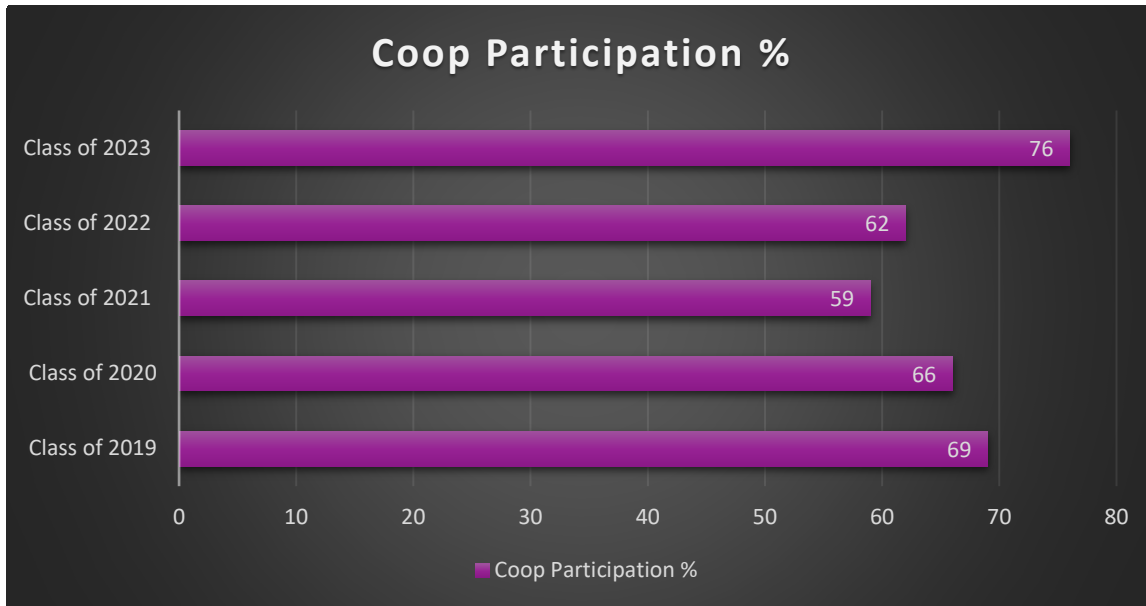
### ***Observations***

It is my opinion that one of the most important things for a school, or district, leader to do is to visit classrooms and shop areas. Throughout my meetings with members of the school community I kept referring to the importance of knowing what is taking place in classrooms and shops, and how this information helps to guide programming and budget related decisions. As I have worked to gather data, I have found no richer source of information than that information that I gathered during my visits to classrooms and shop areas. I have conducted these visits alone, with the Principal, and in the company of my mentor. The passion and dedication of the staff was on full display during these visits, and I have observed a number of great teaching practices in use.

### ***Conclusions***

It was apparent during all of my interviews that there is a great sense of history and pride associated with all members of the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community. My efforts to learn about all aspects of the school and the communities was met with a cooperative spirit and numerous opinions. These interviews showcased a number of district achievements, but three distinct themes emerged from my interviews. While numerous opportunities for growth and improvement will be discussed in later sections, I think that it is important to recognize these areas of strength before moving on. The Shawsheen Valley Technical School community displayed a great sense of pride in relation to their historic achievement on the MCAS exam. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has continued to outperform the majority of our sending communities, and numerous stakeholders pointed to this as a sense of pride and accomplishment. The second point of pride that was expressed during my interviews was the number of students that participate in cooperative education placements. Students serving in these roles help to support our sending communities and provide a pipeline of trained individuals to support business and industry. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has historically outperformed other vocational technical schools in this metric and is usually among the top three districts across the Commonwealth in both the percentage of students participating and the total number of students working. The third area of accomplishment focused on student achievement as it relates to the local, state, and national SkillsUSA competitions. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has a long history of students performing well at all levels of competition, and just last year was proud to boast a National Gold Medal winner in Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (HVAC/R). These three points of pride

were pointed out by a number of community stakeholders and form a solid foundation of achievement to build upon as I work with these groups to move the district forward.



## ***Focus Areas***

All of my efforts throughout the process that I followed to collect information for this Report of Entry Findings have led me to three distinct focus areas for my work moving forward. Meeting with all of the school community stakeholders, reviewing district documents, my visits to classrooms and shops, and reviewing admissions data has helped me to identify themes and trends that are essential to helping Shawsheen Valley Technical School meet current and future educational needs. The focus areas that I have identified will help to guide the next phases of my work and provide the structure for the continued progress that all members of the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community expect.

## ***Teaching and Learning***

It is my belief that all students can learn, and that all students deserve a supportive and motivating teacher in their classroom or vocational technical program area. During my data collection process, it has been clear that there are many passionate educators at Shawsheen Valley Technical School that work to deliver on this belief every day. My past experiences in education have taken me to three other regional technical school districts, and they all had unique elements. I have worked in a small school, located in a rural area, and at two schools that have very diverse populations that serve large sending cities as part of their catchment areas. My experiences in all of these districts have shaped my educational beliefs and instructional approaches. I believe that good teaching practices start with meeting students where they are and providing multiple means to help them develop the skills that they need. These approaches are appropriate in every content area, and across all grade levels. As I worked to collect information from a variety of stakeholders, I came to the realization that teaching and learning are the most important aspects of any school, and that supporting the staff and students at Shawsheen Valley Technical School in this area is essential to deliver on my educational beliefs.

There are many research-based instructional approaches currently being utilized to provide instruction in the classrooms and vocational technical program areas of Shawsheen Valley Technical School. During my observations of classes during my information gathering phase, I noticed that the school does not currently have a structure to provide feedback and support to all educators regarding teaching and learning, across all content areas and grade levels. Many of the

faculty and staff pursue professional development activities that help them grow and expand their personal capacities, but a school wide system to grow and share these practices needs to be developed.

One of the points that was made during my information gathering efforts was that the school does not have a consistent vocabulary and language for discussing student achievement and growth. As teachers work to build capacity and drive student achievement it can be difficult to have these conversations without a clear understanding of student expectations and outcomes. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has taken the initial step of establishing Interdisciplinary Discussion Groups during the current school year. These groups have been meeting on professional development days and discussing a series of prompts provided by the Administrative Team. Moving forward, it is important to build upon the initial success of these groups and further develop educator capacity to review, revise, implement, and update instructional practices.

In meetings with members of the Administrative Team it was shared that as a school Shawsheen Valley Technical School needs to develop and share a guiding set of classroom practices that all teachers are aware of and work to implement. The evaluation process was mentioned as part of this feedback, and the team suggested working to formally connect these two principles. Developing and sharing specific classroom practices will help all staff members to maximize their instructional impact and will help to boost student achievement across the school.

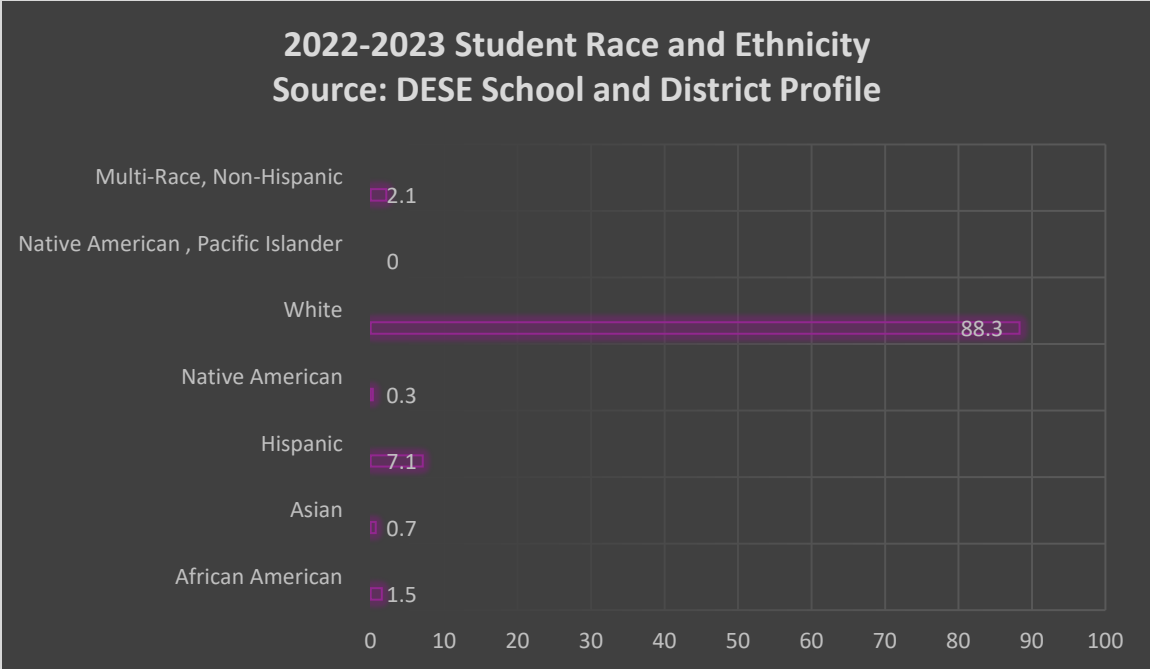
Inconsistencies in practices for curriculum development and revision have been shared as part of the information gathering process. All of the academic departments have been working to identify grade level power standards and connect this information to the process for determining student course levels during the current school year. On the vocational technical side, individual clusters and departments have been working to review and update program curriculum based on a number of the Frameworks for these programs getting updated. There is not currently a consistent, school wide approach to how this work is being completed.

Designing and implementing school wide approaches to teaching and learning are essential to moving the district forward. Students and staff benefit from structured, consistent approaches to classroom practices and a shared understanding of program curriculum development and implementation.

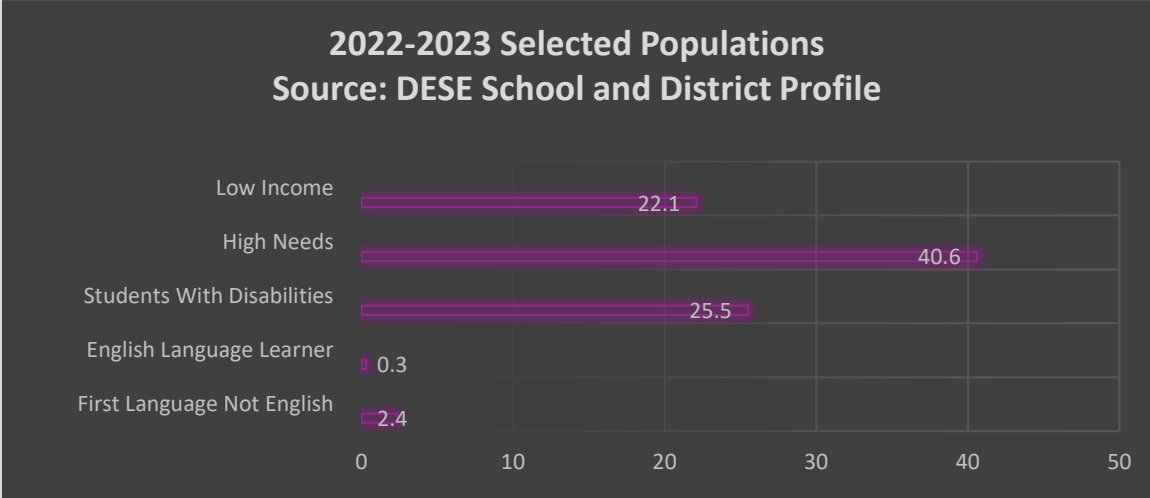
### *Access, Equity and Outreach*

One of the underlying principles that has cut across all of my discussions is the concept of making sure that all students in our sending districts have all of the information needed to make an informed decision about attending Shawsheen Valley Technical School. During my discussions with numerous stakeholders, it was clearly communicated to me that all eighth-grade students from our sending communities need to be provided the opportunity to visit the school and tour our facility during the course of a regular school day. Many of our current students have family members that have attended Shawsheen Valley Technical School and are very aware of the programs that we offer. It was shared that additional outreach efforts are needed on two fronts: in communities that are currently underserved, and first-generation attendees. The communities of Bedford and Burlington are historically underrepresented, and often do not fill the number of student seats allotted to them in the Regional Agreement. Building additional connections with both of these communities is necessary to provide access and information to all of the students enrolled in their schools. The second focus group are students that do not have a family member that has attended Shawsheen Valley Technical School in the past. Students and families that are not familiar with vocational technical education tend to stay in their sending communities because they are not familiar with the application-based learning model that is at the heart of a regional vocational technical school. Hosting students during the school day helps to remove barriers of participation by ensuring that all eighth-grade students can see the program offerings regardless of any transportation or other logistical issues.

Shawsheen Valley Technical School has seen the number of English Learners (EL) and Former English Learners (FEL) enrolled in the school increase significantly during the past few school years. All indications are that this trend will continue and providing access to these students during the school day is critical to supporting them as they explore their public high school options. The number of eligible eighth graders that are designated as English Learners in the sending districts has doubled during the past year, and this trend is predicted to continue for the foreseeable future. Providing supports to all students, and their families, as they work to apply for admission to Shawsheen Valley Technical School is critical to ensure equity and access for all.

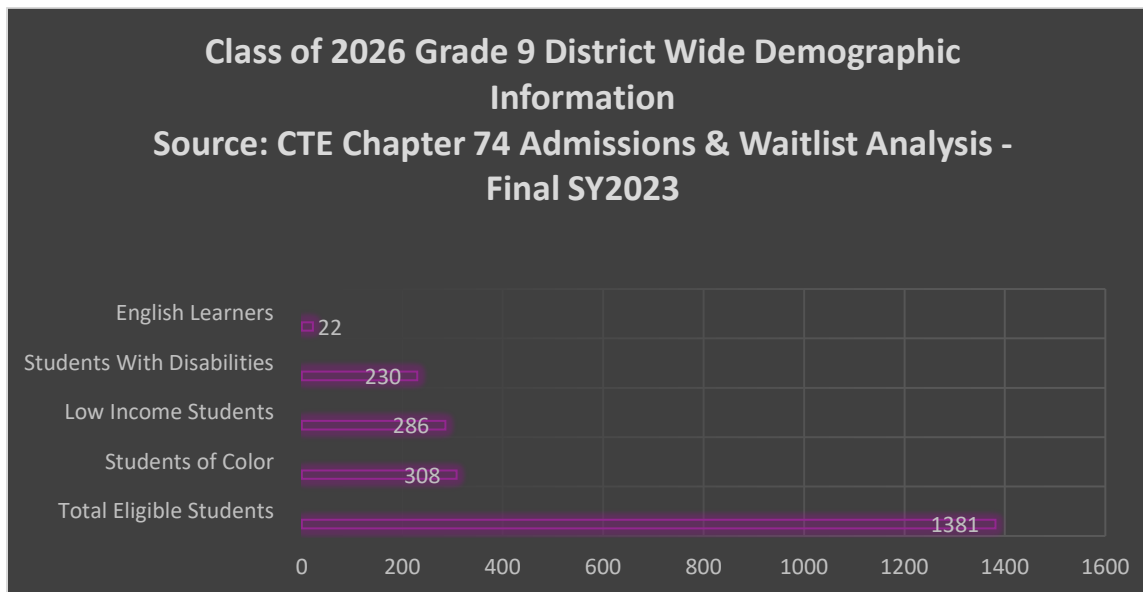


The current school enrollment percentages for the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District (see chart above) are reflective of the five sending communities. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has traditionally been a choice for many blue-collar families in our sending communities and has supported multiple generations of students from these families as they have worked to learn the skills and competencies necessary to provide for themselves and their families. This trend has started to change, and Shawsheen Valley Technical School is working diligently to create a school that is welcoming, rewarding and creates a strong sense of belonging for students from all backgrounds.





Shawsheen Valley Technical School has a long history of supporting Students with Disabilities, and High Needs Students. As the graph above illustrates these two Selected Populations represent a significant percentage of the school's enrollment. During my data collection process this information was shared as a source of pride by many members of the school community. Shawsheen Valley Technical School has strived to meet students where they are and worked to develop their potential throughout their time at Shawsheen Valley Technical School.



As Shawsheen Valley Technical School begins the next phase of its work to support students from all backgrounds it is important to recognize the demographics of our sending communities (see chart above). Our school district is not as diverse as some, but Shawsheen Valley Technical School is committed to supporting all students, from all of our communities as they work to access the programs and courses that we offer.

During my meetings with students and the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) it was shared that some students are not able to access a full complement of academic courses within the confines of the current master schedule. There are currently many students that need to take foreign language outside of regular school hours. This is facilitated by offering these courses at night, and over the summer. A number of parents expressed frustration with this process and have advocated to make changes to the master schedule to ensure that all students can access all of their desired academic courses during the regularly scheduled school day. It has also been shared that a number of students get locked into specific pathways that do not allow them the flexibility to move between courses

and course levels as their interests and plans change. The current schedule features a number of double block class sessions, and this fundamentally limits the number of courses that students can access in the current schedule format. Finding ways to support all students, across all subjects and levels, is essential to providing equitable access to content so that all students are prepared for future employment and additional training.

Within the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community it was shared that not all of the technical programs enjoy the same level of exposure to incoming students, and that this can lead to programs that are not being accessed by portions of the student demographic. The creation of a school wide program to expose all students to every technical program was advocated for, and this would help to ensure that every incoming student has a solid base of knowledge to utilize as they work to determine what programs they want to explore upon enrolling at Shawsheen Valley Technical School. Equitable access to students is an essential element of program development and needs to be considered moving forward.

Shawsheen Valley Technical School has made significant changes to the Admissions Policy that governs the process used to receive, review, and offer admissions to the school. In reviewing the data for the last available year of information, it is clear that these changes have had an impact on creating equitable access for all students. Moving forward, it is important to stay focused on ensuring that these efforts are maintained and expanded. Regional vocational technical school admissions are a hot button issue in Massachusetts right now, and Shawsheen Valley Technical School is committed to supporting all students interested in seeking admission.

### ***Infrastructure***

During my transitional meetings to begin my time at Shawsheen Valley Technical School I was party to a number of discussions about a planned Statement of Interest that was being submitted with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. The school occupies the original building and has not seen a major renovation since it was opened in 1970. Shawsheen Valley Technical School was not selected to be moved forward from this initial submission, but the district is working to submit a revised submission. During my initial meetings with the district leadership, and members of the District Committee, it quickly became apparent that there are some pressing issues with the current building. Most of our science courses are forced to share lab spaces, and often need to

change meeting locations to facilitate effective delivery of the curriculum. The school has renovated and modified every available storage space and converted these into instruction spaces. The high percentage of students with disabilities has required more and more classroom space to be used to support these students, and this has further limited classroom capacity. The current auditorium will only seat approximately 140 people, and our smallest class is currently 285 students. Our lunchroom does not have sufficient capacity to hold students, and as such we are currently running five different lunch periods to support the delivery of this critical service. The majority of our technical program shop areas are undersized based on current guidelines, and we are limited in the options that we have to expand the footprint of these programs. A number of the infrastructure systems are at, or near, the end of their lifecycle and will need to be replaced in the coming years. In this year's Capital Budget, the school is requesting \$475,000 to complete an emergency repair of a section of an exterior wall located above the pool area. Failure to address this issue in a timely manner could lead to costly roof damage, and/or not being able to utilize sections of the building during a lengthy repair process. During my information gathering, it has become apparent that a significant investment in infrastructure will be required in the coming years, whether that is the cost of updating the current facility or building/renovating a new one.

### ***Summary***

This process has allowed me to meet with, and hear from, a variety of stakeholders from the Shawsheen Valley Technical School community. I would like to extend my appreciation to everyone that participated in this process, and I am truly impressed by the passion and dedication that was apparent throughout this process. As I move forward with my tenure as Superintendent-Director, I feel it is critical that we keep these three distinct focus areas at the heart of our improvement efforts. These themes will help to ensure equitable access to the school, programs, and the schedule, provide high quality instruction in every classroom and vocational technical program area, and to maintain a safe and welcoming campus. As the Superintendent-Director I am looking forward to working with all of the community stakeholders to create the specific plans and action items needed to move these ideas from words in this report to actionable results.

## *Next Steps*

This Report of Entry Findings will be presented to the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical District Committee on Tuesday, March 21, 2023. After the formal presentation to the District School Committee the document will be made available to all district stakeholders. I will be utilizing this report to develop and share a District Strategic Plan. This plan will be developed with further stakeholder input during the summer and early fall of 2023. This three-to-five-year plan will help to establish the goals and timelines needed to build on our successes and to address our challenges. The District Strategic Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated to reflect changes in district priorities and the need to adapt to constantly changing circumstances.