
ESEA Flexibility Request

Massachusetts

March 31, 2015 Renewal Request
Revised June 15, 2015



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(The document was formatted to ease usability on October 14, 2011)

U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

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Paperwork Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1810-0708. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 336 hours per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202-4537.

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is offering each State educational agency (SEA) the opportunity to request flexibility on behalf of itself, its local educational agencies (LEAs), and its schools, in order to better focus on improving student learning and increasing the quality of instruction. This voluntary opportunity will provide educators and State and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. This flexibility is intended to build on and support the significant State and local reform efforts already underway in critical areas such as transitioning to college- and career-ready standards and assessments; developing systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; and evaluating and supporting teacher and principal effectiveness.

The Department invites interested SEAs to request this flexibility pursuant to the authority in section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which allows the Secretary to waive, with certain exceptions, any statutory or regulatory requirement of the ESEA for an SEA that receives funds under a program authorized by the ESEA and requests a waiver. Under this flexibility, the Department would grant waivers through the 2013–2014 school year, after which time an SEA may request an extension of this flexibility.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF REQUESTS

The Department will use a review process that will include both external peer reviewers and staff reviewers to evaluate SEA requests for this flexibility. This review process will help ensure that each request for this flexibility approved by the Department is consistent with the principles described in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*, which are designed to support State efforts to improve student academic achievement and increase the quality of instruction, and is both educationally and technically sound. Reviewers will evaluate whether and how each request for this flexibility will support a comprehensive and coherent set of improvements in the areas of standards and assessments, accountability, and teacher and principal effectiveness that will lead to improved student outcomes. Each SEA will have an opportunity, if necessary, to clarify its plans for peer and staff reviewers and to answer any questions reviewers may have. The peer reviewers will then provide comments to the Department. Taking those comments into consideration, the Secretary will make a decision regarding each SEA's request for this flexibility. If an SEA's request for this flexibility is not granted, reviewers and the Department will provide feedback to the SEA about the components of the SEA's request that need additional development in order for the request to be approved.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

An SEA seeking approval to implement this flexibility must submit a high-quality request that addresses all aspects of the principles and waivers and, in each place where a plan is required, includes a high-quality plan. Consistent with ESEA section 9401(d)(1), the Secretary intends to grant waivers that are included in this flexibility through the end of the 2013–2014 school year. An SEA will be permitted to request an extension of the initial period of this flexibility prior to the start of the 2014–2015 school year unless this flexibility is superseded by reauthorization of the ESEA. The Department is asking SEAs to submit requests that include plans through the 2014–2015 school year in order to provide a complete picture of the SEA’s reform efforts. The Department will not accept a request that meets only some of the principles of this flexibility.

High-Quality Request: A high-quality request for this flexibility is one that is comprehensive and coherent in its approach, and that clearly indicates how this flexibility will help an SEA and its LEAs improve student achievement and the quality of instruction for students.

A high-quality request will (1) if an SEA has already met a principle, provide a description of how it has done so, including evidence as required; and (2) if an SEA has not yet met a principle, describe how it will meet the principle on the required timelines, including any progress to date. For example, an SEA that has not adopted minimum guidelines for local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems consistent with principle 3 by the time it submits its request for the flexibility will need to provide a plan demonstrating that it will do so by the end of the 2011–2012 school year. In each such case, an SEA’s plan must include, at a minimum, the following elements for each principle that the SEA has not yet met:

1. **Key milestones and activities:** Significant milestones to be achieved in order to meet a given principle, and essential activities to be accomplished in order to reach the key milestones. The SEA should also include any essential activities that have already been completed or key milestones that have already been reached so that reviewers can understand the context for and fully evaluate the SEA’s plan to meet a given principle.
2. **Detailed timeline:** A specific schedule setting forth the dates on which key activities will begin and be completed and milestones will be achieved so that the SEA can meet the principle by the required date.
3. **Party or parties responsible:** Identification of the SEA staff (*e.g.*, position, title, or office) and, as appropriate, others who will be responsible for ensuring that each key activity is accomplished.
4. **Evidence:** Where required, documentation to support the plan and demonstrate the SEA’s progress in implementing the plan. This *ESEA Flexibility Request* indicates the specific evidence that the SEA must either include in its request or provide at a future reporting date.
5. **Resources:** Resources necessary to complete the key activities, including staff time and additional funding.
6. **Significant obstacles:** Any major obstacles that may hinder completion of key milestones and activities (*e.g.*, State laws that need to be changed) and a plan to overcome them.

Included on page 19 of this document is an example of a format for a table that an SEA may use to submit a plan that is required for any principle of this flexibility that the SEA has not already met. An SEA that elects to use this format may also supplement the table with text that provides an overview of the plan.

An SEA should keep in mind the required timelines for meeting each principle and develop credible plans that allow for completion of the activities necessary to meet each principle. Although the plan for each principle will reflect that particular principle, as discussed above, an SEA should look across all plans to make sure that it puts forward a comprehensive and coherent request for this flexibility.

Preparing the Request: To prepare a high-quality request, it is extremely important that an SEA refer to all of the provided resources, including the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*, which includes the principles, definitions, and timelines; the document titled *ESEA Flexibility Review Guidance*, which includes the criteria that will be used by the peer reviewers to determine if the request meets the principles of this flexibility; and the document titled *ESEA Flexibility Frequently Asked Questions*, which provides additional guidance for SEAs in preparing their requests.

As used in this request form, the following terms have the definitions set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*: (1) college- and career-ready standards, (2) focus school, (3) high-quality assessment, (4) priority school, (5) reward school, (6) standards that are common to a significant number of States, (7) State network of institutions of higher education, (8) student growth, and (9) turnaround principles.

Each request must include:

- A table of contents and a list of attachments, using the forms on pages 1 and 2.
- The cover sheet (p. 3), waivers requested (p. 4-5), and assurances (p. 5-6).
- A description of how the SEA has met the consultation requirements (p. 8).
- An overview of the SEA’s request for the ESEA flexibility (p. 8). This overview is a synopsis of the SEA’s vision of a comprehensive and coherent system to improve student achievement and the quality of instruction and will orient the peer reviewers to the SEA’s request. The overview should be about 500 words.
- Evidence and plans to meet the principles (p. 9-18). An SEA will enter narrative text in the text boxes provided, complete the required tables, and provide other required evidence. An SEA may supplement the narrative text in a text box with attachments, which will be included in an appendix. Any supplemental attachments that are included in an appendix must be referenced in the related narrative text.

Requests should not include personally identifiable information.

Process for Submitting the Request: An SEA must submit a request to the Department to receive the flexibility. This request form and other pertinent documents are available on the Department’s Web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility>.

Electronic Submission: The Department strongly prefers to receive an SEA’s request for the flexibility electronically. The SEA should submit it to the following address:
ESEAFlexibility@ed.gov.

Paper Submission: In the alternative, an SEA may submit the original and two copies of its request for the flexibility to the following address:

Patricia McKee, Acting Director
Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 3W320
Washington, DC 20202-6132

Due to potential delays in processing mail sent through the U.S. Postal Service, SEAs are encouraged to use alternate carriers for paper submissions.

REQUEST SUBMISSION DEADLINE

SEAs will be provided multiple opportunities to submit requests for the flexibility. The submission dates are November 14, 2011, a date to be announced in mid-February 2012, and an additional opportunity following the conclusion of the 2011–2012 school year.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MEETING FOR SEAS

To assist SEAs in preparing a request and to respond to questions, the Department will host a series of Technical Assistance Meetings via webinars in September and October 2011.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions, please contact the Department by e-mail at ESEAFlexibility@ed.gov.

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For each attachment included in the *ESEA Flexibility Request*, label the attachment with the corresponding number from the list of attachments below and indicate the page number where the attachment is located. If an attachment is not applicable to the SEA’s request, indicate “N/A” instead of a page number. Reference relevant attachments in the narrative portions of the request.

LABEL	LIST OF ATTACHMENTS	PAGE
1	Notice to LEAs	
2	Comments on request received from LEAs (if applicable)	
3	Notice and information provided to the public regarding the request	
4	Evidence that the State has formally adopted college- and career-ready content standards consistent with the State’s standards adoption process	
5	Memorandum of understanding or letter from a State network of institutions of higher education (IHEs) certifying that meeting the State’s standards corresponds to being college- and career-ready without the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level (if applicable)	N/A
6	State’s Race to the Top Assessment Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (if applicable)	
7	Evidence that the SEA has submitted high-quality assessments and academic achievement standards to the Department for peer review, or a timeline of when the SEA will submit the assessments and academic achievement standards to the Department for peer review (if applicable)	N/A
8	A copy of the average statewide proficiency based on assessments administered in the 2010–2011 school year in reading/language arts and mathematics for the “all students” group and all subgroups (if applicable).	
9	Table 2: Reward, Priority, and Focus Schools	
10	A copy of any guidelines that the SEA has already developed and adopted for local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems (if applicable).	
11	Evidence that the SEA has adopted one or more guidelines of local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems	
12	Level 4/Priority School Redesign Plan Template	
13	Statewide Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)	

COVER SHEET FOR ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

Legal Name of Requester: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Requester's Mailing Address: 75 Pleasant Street Malden, MA 02148
State Contact for the ESEA Flexibility Request Name: Matthew Pakos Position and Office: Director, School Improvement Grant Programs Contact's Mailing Address: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 75 Pleasant Street Malden, MA 02148 Telephone: 781-338-3507 Fax: 781-338-3318 Email address: mpakos@doe.mass.edu	
Chief State School Officer (Printed Name): Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.	Telephone: 781-338-3100
Signature of the Chief State School Officer:  X	Date: March 31, 2015
The State, through its authorized representative, agrees to meet all principles of ESEA flexibility.	

WAIVERS

By submitting this updated ESEA flexibility request, the SEA renews its request for flexibility through waivers of the nine ESEA requirements listed below and their associated regulatory, administrative, and reporting requirements, as well as any optional waivers the SEA has chosen to request under ESEA flexibility, by checking each of the boxes below. The provisions below represent the general areas of flexibility requested.

- 1. The requirements in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(E)-(H) that prescribe how an SEA must establish annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) to ensure that all students meet or exceed the State’s proficient level of academic achievement on the State’s assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics no later than the end of the 2013–2014 school year. The SEA requests this waiver to develop new ambitious but achievable AMOs in reading/language arts and mathematics in order to provide meaningful goals that are used to guide support and improvement efforts for the State, LEAs, schools, and student subgroups.
- 2. The requirements in ESEA section 1116(b) for an LEA to identify for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, as appropriate, a Title I school that fails, for two consecutive years or more, to make AYP, and for a school so identified and its LEA to take certain improvement actions. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA and its Title I schools need not comply with these requirements.
- 3. The requirements in ESEA section 1116(c) for an SEA to identify for improvement or corrective action, as appropriate, an LEA that, for two consecutive years or more, fails to make AYP, and for an LEA so identified and its SEA to take certain improvement actions. The SEA requests this waiver so that it need not comply with these requirements with respect to its LEAs.
- 4. The requirements in ESEA sections 6213(b) and 6224(e) that limit participation in, and use of funds under the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) programs based on whether an LEA has made AYP and is complying with the requirements in ESEA section 1116. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA that receives SRSA or RLIS funds may use those funds for any authorized purpose regardless of whether the LEA makes AYP.
- 5. The requirement in ESEA section 1114(a)(1) that a school have a poverty percentage of 40 percent or more in order to operate a school-wide program. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA may implement interventions consistent with the turnaround principles or interventions that are based on the needs of the students in the school and designed to enhance the entire educational program in a school in any of its priority and focus schools that meet the definitions of “priority schools” and “focus schools,” respectively, set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*, as appropriate, even if those schools do not have a poverty percentage of 40 percent or more.
- 6. The requirement in ESEA section 1003(a) for an SEA to distribute funds reserved under that section only to LEAs with schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. The SEA requests this waiver so that it may allocate section 1003(a) funds to its LEAs in order to serve any of the State’s priority and focus schools that meet the definitions of “priority schools” and “focus schools,” respectively, set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*.

7. The provision in ESEA section 1117(c)(2)(A) that authorizes an SEA to reserve Title I, Part A funds to reward a Title I school that (1) significantly closed the achievement gap between subgroups in the school; or (2) has exceeded AYP for two or more consecutive years. The SEA requests this waiver so that it may use funds reserved under ESEA section 1117(c)(2)(A) for any of the State's reward schools that meet the definition of "reward schools" set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*.

8. The requirements in ESEA section 2141(a), (b), and (c) for an LEA and SEA to comply with certain requirements for improvement plans regarding highly qualified teachers. The SEA requests this waiver to allow the SEA and its LEAs to focus on developing and implementing more meaningful evaluation and support systems.

9. The limitations in ESEA section 6123 that limit the amount of funds an SEA or LEA may transfer from certain ESEA programs to other ESEA programs. The SEA requests this waiver so that it and its LEAs may transfer up to 100 percent of the funds it receives under the authorized programs among those programs and into Title I, Part A.

Optional Flexibilities:

If an SEA chooses to request waivers of any of the following requirements, it should check the corresponding box(es) below:

10. The requirements in ESEA sections 4201(b)(1)(A) and 4204(b)(2)(A) that restrict the activities provided by a community learning center under the Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program to activities provided only during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session (*i.e.*, before and after school or during summer recess). The SEA requests this waiver so that 21st CCLC funds may be used to support expanded learning time during the school day in addition to activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session.

11. The requirements in ESEA sections 1116(a)(1)(A)-(B) and 1116(c)(1)(A) that require LEAs and SEAs to make determinations of adequate yearly progress (AYP) for schools and LEAs, respectively. The SEA requests this waiver because continuing to determine whether an LEA and its schools make AYP is inconsistent with the SEA's State-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system included in its ESEA flexibility request. The SEA and its LEAs must report on their report cards performance against the AMOs for all subgroups identified in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v), and use performance against the AMOs to support continuous improvement in Title I schools.

12. The requirements in ESEA section 1113(a)(3)-(4) and (c)(1) that require an LEA to serve eligible schools under Title I in rank order of poverty and to allocate Title I, Part A funds based on that rank ordering. The SEA requests this waiver in order to permit its LEAs to serve a Title I-eligible high school with a graduation rate below 60 percent that the SEA has identified as a priority school even if that school does not otherwise rank sufficiently high to be served under ESEA section 1113.

13. The requirement in ESEA section 1003(a) for an SEA to distribute funds reserved under that section only to LEAs with schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

The SEA requests this waiver in addition to waiver #6 so that, when it has remaining section 1003(a) funds after ensuring that all priority and focus schools have sufficient funds to carry out interventions, it may allocate section 1003(a) funds to its LEAs to provide interventions and supports for low-achieving students in other Title I schools when one or more subgroups miss either AMOs or graduation rate targets or both over a number of years.

If the SEA is requesting waiver #13, the SEA must demonstrate in its renewal request that it has a process to ensure, on an annual basis, that all of its priority and focus schools will have sufficient funding to implement their required interventions prior to distributing ESEA section 1003(a) funds to other Title I schools.

See page 97.

14. The requirements in ESEA sections 1111(b)(1)(B) and 1111(b)(3)(C)(i) that, respectively, require the SEA to apply the same academic content and academic achievement standards to all public schools and public school children in the State and to administer the same academic assessments to measure the achievement of all students. The SEA requests this waiver so that it is not required to double test a student who is not yet enrolled in high school but who takes advanced, high school level, mathematics coursework. The SEA would assess such a student with the corresponding advanced, high school level assessment in place of the mathematics assessment the SEA would otherwise administer to the student for the grade in which the student is enrolled. For Federal accountability purposes, the SEA will use the results of the advanced, high school level, mathematics assessment in the year in which the assessment is administered and will administer one or more additional advanced, high school level, mathematics assessments to such students in high school, consistent with the State's mathematics content standards, and use the results in high school accountability determinations.

If the SEA is requesting waiver #14, the SEA must demonstrate in its renewal request how it will ensure that every student in the State has the opportunity to be prepared for and take courses at an advanced level prior to high school.

See page 59.

ASSURANCES

By submitting this request, the SEA assures that:

- 1. It requests waivers of the above-referenced requirements based on its agreement to meet Principles 1 through 4 of ESEA flexibility, as described throughout the remainder of this request.
- 2. It has adopted English language proficiency (ELP) standards that correspond to the State's college- and career-ready standards, consistent with the requirement in ESEA section 3113(b)(2), and that reflect the academic language skills necessary to access and meet the State's college- and career-ready standards. (Principle 1)
- 3. It will administer no later than the 2014–2015 school year alternate assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards or alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities that are consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(a)(2) and are aligned with the State's college- and career-ready standards. (Principle 1)
- 4. It will develop and administer ELP assessments aligned with the State's ELP standards, consistent with the requirements in ESEA sections 1111(b)(7), 3113(b)(2), and 3122(a)(3)(A)(ii) no later than the 2015–2016 school year. (Principle 1)
- 5. It will report annually to the public on college-going and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and subgroups of students in each LEA and each public high school in the State. (Principle 1)
- 6. If the SEA includes student achievement on assessments in addition to reading/language arts and mathematics in its differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system and uses achievement on those assessments to identify priority and focus schools, it has technical documentation, which can be made available to the Department upon request, demonstrating that the assessments are administered statewide; include all students, including by providing appropriate accommodations for English Learners and students with disabilities, as well as alternate assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards or alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(a)(2); and are valid and reliable for use in the SEA's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system. (Principle 2)
- 7. It will annually make public its lists of reward schools, priority schools, and focus schools prior to the start of the school year as well as publicly recognize its reward schools, and will update its lists of priority and focus schools at least every three years. (Principle 2)

If the SEA is not submitting with its renewal request its updated list of priority and focus schools, based on the most recent available data, for implementation beginning in the 2015–2016 school year, it must also assure that:

- 8. It will provide to the Department, no later than January 31, 2016, an updated list of priority and focus schools, identified based on school year 2014–2015 data, for implementation beginning in the 2016–2017 school year.

9. It will evaluate and, based on that evaluation, revise its own administrative requirements to reduce duplication and unnecessary burden on LEAs and schools. (Principle 4)
10. It has consulted with its Committee of Practitioners regarding the information set forth in its ESEA flexibility request.
11. Prior to submitting this request, it provided all LEAs with notice and a reasonable opportunity to comment on the request and has attached a copy of that notice (Attachment 1) as well as copies of any comments it received from LEAs. (Attachment 2)
12. Prior to submitting this request, it provided notice and information regarding the request to the public in the manner in which the SEA customarily provides such notice and information to the public (*e.g.*, by publishing a notice in the newspaper; by posting information on its website) and has attached a copy of, or link to, that notice. (Attachment 3)
13. It will provide to the Department, in a timely manner, all required reports, data, and evidence regarding its progress in implementing the plans contained throughout its ESEA flexibility request, and will ensure that all such reports, data, and evidence are accurate, reliable, and complete or, if it is aware of issues related to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of its reports, data, or evidence, it will disclose those issues.
14. It will report annually on its State report card and will ensure that its LEAs annually report on their local report cards, for the “all students” group, each subgroup described in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II), and for any combined subgroup (as applicable): information on student achievement at each proficiency level; data comparing actual achievement levels to the State’s annual measurable objectives; the percentage of students not tested; performance on the other academic indicator for elementary and middle schools; and graduation rates for high schools. In addition, it will annually report, and will ensure that its LEAs annually report, all other information and data required by ESEA section 1111(h)(1)(C) and 1111(h)(2)(B), respectively. It will ensure that all reporting is consistent with *State and Local Report Cards Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended Non-Regulatory Guidance* (February 8, 2013).

Principle 3 Assurances

Each SEA must select the appropriate option and, in doing so, assures that:

Option A	Option B	Option C
<input type="checkbox"/> 15.a. The SEA is on track to fully implementing Principle 3, including incorporation of student growth based on State assessments into educator ratings for teachers of tested grades and subjects and principals.	<p>If an SEA that is administering new State assessments during the 2014–2015 school year is requesting one additional year to incorporate student growth based on these assessments, it will:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 15.b.i. Continue to ensure that its LEAs implement teacher and principal evaluation systems using multiple measures, and that the SEA or its LEAs will calculate student growth data based on State assessments administered during the 2014–2015 school year for all teachers of tested grades and subjects and principals; and</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 15.b.ii. Ensure that each teacher of a tested grade and subject and all principals will receive their student growth data based on State assessments administered during the 2014–2015 school year.</p>	<p>If the SEA is requesting modifications to its teacher and principal evaluation and support system guidelines or implementation timeline other than those described in Option B, which require additional flexibility from the guidance in the document titled <i>ESEA Flexibility</i> as well as the documents related to the additional flexibility offered by the Assistant Secretary in a letter dated August 2, 2013, it will:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 15.c. Provide a narrative response in its redlined ESEA flexibility request as described in Section II of the ESEA flexibility renewal guidance.</p>

CONSULTATION

An SEA must meaningfully engage and solicit input from diverse stakeholders and communities in the development of its request. To demonstrate that an SEA has done so, the SEA must provide an assurance that it has consulted with the State’s Committee of Practitioners regarding the information set forth in the request and provide the following:

1. A description of how the SEA meaningfully engaged and solicited input on its request from teachers and their representatives.

Massachusetts frequently reaches out to the state’s 80,000 educators on critical policy issues to gauge their perspective and viewpoint, and the development of the state’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility request was no different. In this case we received and incorporated feedback from teachers in several ways:

- We conducted a statewide survey of all our stakeholders, including teachers, to better understand which aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were their highest priorities for us to pursue in our waiver. Our two state teacher associations notified their memberships about the survey opportunity, and we received a strong response from teachers. Out of the 5,038 survey respondents, 2,913 (58%) were teachers.
- We worked closely with the two state teacher associations to review drafts of our proposals and gather their feedback.

Nearly 96% of teacher respondents to the survey who offered an opinion recommended that we seek a waiver to provisions of the NCLB. Strong consensus emerged that the state should seek flexibility on the federal goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014, the requirement to identify schools as in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, and the interventions required under NCLB for schools that have an accountability status. Three-quarters of teacher respondents identified each of these issues as areas that were important or very important reasons to seek a waiver. Educators also voiced strong support for flexibility from public school choice and supplemental education services (SES) requirements.

This feedback was important confirmation that a waiver of NCLB provisions would be strongly supported by our state’s teachers and helped to reinforce that our initial thinking on this waiver request would be well aligned with the viewpoint of our educators. Once we had drafted an outline of our proposal, we posted it on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) website to allow members of the public to provide additional comment on the details of our plans. We received 45 separate comments, including one from an individual teacher.

In addition to these opportunities for teachers to provide input, we worked closely with state teacher union representatives to develop and modify our proposal based on feedback they had received. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education met with union representatives and other key stakeholders on three separate occasions to inform them about the waiver opportunity and gather their suggestions and ideas. One of the two statewide teachers unions also provided written comment on the draft proposal, which helped to inform

the final iteration of the state’s proposal.

As a result of these conversations, we feel confident that the state’s teachers agree with our belief that the consequences for low performance need to be closely tied to resolving the root causes of the problem and should intensify as the problems worsen. They also clearly agree with our proposal to align the types of interventions required for schools and districts identified through the accountability system with those described in our existing Conditions for School Effectiveness (see Principle 2 for details).

Educator feedback also helped us to clarify areas of our proposal that were too complex. Many responded that our original proposal for calculating annual measurable objectives (AMOs) and identifying priority, focus, and reward schools was not sufficiently transparent and potentially could be confusing to the field. As a result of this feedback we modified the calculation of AMOs and the way schools are assigned to accountability and assistance levels. Further changes to the proposal based on feedback from both teachers and members of the general public are described in the next section.

2014 extension request

To prepare our request for an extension of ESEA flexibility through the 2014-15 school year, we again reached out to our state’s educators to solicit their input on our progress in implementing initiatives associated with the waiver and on some key issues around the accountability system.

The commissioner interacts frequently with leadership and membership of the state’s two teachers’ associations regarding our various state initiatives. As a result of concerns they and their members have raised about the pace of reform over the last year, we have adjusted our implementation timeline for Principle 3, educator evaluation. School year 2013–14 is now dedicated to pilot-testing the district-determined measures that will drive educators’ rating of impact on student learning, with full implementation in 2014-15. Similarly, we worked with teachers and their representatives to develop our plans under Principle 1 for trying out the PARCC assessments over the next two years, so that the state can make a fully-informed decision about whether to transition from MCAS to PARCC. Teachers strongly support our PARCC implementation strategy, with over 80 percent on a recent survey agreeing that Massachusetts should make sure that any new statewide student tests are at least as good as MCAS before schools are required to administer the new tests to all students.

To gain input from a wider array of teachers, we conducted a statewide survey in January 2014, which garnered responses from over 2,000 teachers. The majority of responding teachers agree that our current state accountability system is an improvement over the previous AYP system, that the schools and districts with the largest proficiency gaps should get the most support from the state, and that the accountability system should identify and recognize the schools with the best student outcomes. We take this as continued support from teachers for the overall concepts behind our waiver application.

Finally, we offered both state teachers' associations the opportunity to participate in focus groups to delve into greater detail on a few key areas about our application that we were considering changing. One of the associations sent several representatives, who provided detailed and thoughtful commentary on which schools should be identified for support, which high school indicators should be included, whether to make changes in how we use student subgroup data, and how to handle missing data and data from alternative schools. These representatives' and other stakeholders' opinions were strongly influential in our decision not to include college enrollment data in our measures of high school performance at this time.

March 2015 renewal request

Over the period of our current ESEA flexibility proposal, we have gathered information frequently from teachers about the state initiatives associated with the waiver. Our state's program evaluation strategy includes large-scale program evaluations of our implementation of the new curriculum frameworks, the educator evaluation system, and school and district turnaround, all of which include data collection from teachers as a key component of their research designs. From the teachers participating in this work, we have learned:

- Most Massachusetts teachers believe that the new curriculum frameworks will have a positive impact on students' ability to think critically and use reasoning skills, and that the frameworks will lead to improved student learning for the majority of students they teach.
- Our curriculum framework implementation is proceeding but is not yet complete. Nearly all teachers agree that the curriculum in their school is aligned with the curriculum frameworks, but districts are still working to adopt textbooks and other instructional materials, and teachers are still seeking additional training on the frameworks.
- Two-thirds of teachers agree that the new educator evaluation system provides opportunities to reflect on their practice. Nearly 90 percent view their own evaluation as fair, although as of a year ago, less than half viewed the system as a whole as fair.
- Teachers in districts participating in our Accelerated Improvement Plan process (for Level 4 districts with system-wide challenges) report that the process has enhanced their implementation of instructional shifts related to the new curriculum frameworks and has helped to define expectations and ensure a consistent focus on rigorous instruction.

We will continue this research as a means of ensuring that teacher perspectives inform our work on our state initiatives.

To gather feedback specifically on our waiver renewal proposal, we offered several opportunities for teachers to participate in focus groups or provide written commentary. We reached out to our two state teachers associations as well as to other groups that work to ensure teacher voice in state policymaking, such as our agency's teacher cabinet and external organizations like Teach Plus, Teachers 21, and our local Teach for America alumni network. This outreach was conducted in two phases: an initial phase to gather general impressions of the current system and vet potential areas for refinements, and a second phase where we

shared specific proposals we had developed on the basis of their initial feedback.

Participating teachers generally felt that the current accountability system was identifying the right schools for interventions, although they voiced concerns about the impact of negatively labeling schools. They noted that in their experience the strongest teaching is often in the schools in Levels 3 to 5, such that that the quality of teaching may not be accurately reflected in the system. They also observed that at times the relative measure of the school percentile, used to identify Level 3 through 5, is at odds with the school's progress towards their targets; schools can be meeting their Progress and Performance Index targets yet still be identified as Level 3 or lower if their overall performance is in the bottom 20th percentile. At the district level, they were concerned that so few of the state's Level 1 districts contain multiple schools and felt the approach of labeling a district at the level of its lowest performing school may not be appropriate.

They agreed on the need to address how English language learners were included in our state's system but would have liked us to go farther than we did in our proposals. Their concern was that it takes students years to gain sufficient academic proficiency in English to perform well on state assessments, and that a one- or two-year exclusion did not allow sufficient time for their English language development.

2. A description of how the SEA meaningfully engaged and solicited input on its request from other diverse communities, such as students, parents, community-based organizations, civil rights organizations, organizations representing students with disabilities and English Learners, business organizations, and Indian tribes.

In addition to educators, we solicited input on our proposal from a diverse range of stakeholders and education advocacy organizations. To reach them we collaborated with partner organizations¹ to invite their members to participate in our statewide survey, resulting in the largest response we have ever received for a survey of this type. We made a special effort to provide diverse stakeholders with an opportunity to give feedback by reaching out to them via the largest statewide advocacy groups for students with disabilities and English language learners, as well as the major state civil rights and community-based advocacy groups. The detailed responses and ongoing feedback informed our thinking throughout the development of our waiver proposal.

In addition to the 2,913 responses from teachers, we received survey responses from 162 superintendents, 553 principals, 810 other education stakeholders (e.g., district Title I and Title II-A directors), 27 business leaders, 175 parents, 70 students, 132 people representing nonprofit, advocacy, and philanthropic organizations (including civil rights and community-based organizations), and 196 others. Beyond responding to multiple-choice questions,

¹ These included: state associations of school superintendents, school committees, elementary principals, secondary principals, charter schools, vocational schools, and teachers unions; statewide advocacy groups for English language learners, students with disabilities, students, parents, and the business community; and the philanthropic and nonprofit sector.

respondents generated 114 pages of written comments on the survey's three open-ended questions.

Later in the process, these groups were also contacted to provide comment on the draft proposal that we posted on our website. We received a total of 45 written comments, with the largest response from district staff members who manage federal grant programs such as Title I and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and from nonprofit and advocacy groups.

Throughout the feedback process, we met with leaders of the statewide associations of superintendents, school committees, elementary and secondary principals, parents, vocational schools, charter schools and with the state's urban superintendent network to gather their feedback firsthand, answer their questions, and provide them with updated information. We offered our state Title I Committee of Practitioners three opportunities to discuss and comment on various iterations of our proposal. We also met with our Board-appointed Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC), which advises ESE on its accountability strategy, and the Board's Proficiency Gap Subcommittee, which focuses on ESE's efforts to close proficiency gaps for underserved groups.

Similar to what we learned from teachers, other stakeholders strongly encouraged the state to pursue a waiver of NCLB requirements. In all, 94 percent of those who offered an opinion said we should seek a waiver, and three-quarters or more felt that it was important or very important to seek a waivers from the current 100 percent proficiency goal, the identification of schools and districts for accountability status, and the consequences for identified schools and districts.

Stakeholder groups were remarkably consistent in their opinions; we saw very little variation across groups in their degree of support for a waiver or the types of provisions they felt we should include in our application. This served as important confirmation that we were on the mark with the broad outlines of our waiver proposal.

In both the survey and in various meetings with stakeholder groups, we asked for ambitious but attainable alternatives to the NCLB goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Stakeholders strongly urged us to set targets that recognize that students need varying levels of support as they progress toward proficiency. Many asked that we include a measure of student growth, and that we focus primarily on indications that gaps are closing rather than on overall performance. Stakeholders also urged us to develop a system that no longer penalizes high performing schools for slight drops in performance, a frequent complaint about Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). We have incorporated these ideas into our proposal.

As a result of this and other valuable feedback we focused our goals on closing proficiency gaps and reducing the proportion of students who are not college and career ready, and developed differentiated performance improvement targets for each subgroup. This input also reinforced our belief that including growth and performance in our new index of school progress and performance will be an effective way to measure progress and will create an incentive for schools to work toward college and career readiness for all students.

Stakeholders voiced broad support for our proposed intervention strategies, such as scaling interventions based on the level of need and including a broader set of interventions or responses than those currently allowed under NCLB. Many also noted that parent and community engagement and supports aimed at meeting the social, emotional, and health needs of students have been long neglected in state and federal policy discussions and urged us to make them a key part of the menu of interventions available to priority and focus schools. We agree that these have great potential to improve student learning outcomes and have included them in our proposal. Further, district superintendents offered support for our proposal that districts may be offered greater flexibility in the use of federal funds in return for leveraging state and local revenue to implement high impact strategies such as extending the school day or year and establishing on-the-job, embedded teacher development and planning.

We intend to continue to collaborate with diverse stakeholders and communities as we develop and implement our waiver proposal. As is our customary practice, we will keep stakeholders informed as key elements of the proposal are defined and offer them the opportunity to comment on any significant changes before final decisions are made. Mechanisms for accomplishing this may include individual or group meetings, conference calls, focus groups, email notifications, surveys, or other tools, depending on the question at hand and the nature of the feedback desired.

2014 extension request

As noted above, the commissioner interacts frequently with education stakeholders regarding our various state initiatives. These stakeholders include superintendents, principals, teachers, union leaders, students, business leaders, community and civil rights organizations, organizations that represent English language learners and special education students, and many others. Contact includes frequent individual discussions, participation in meetings and conferences, email notifications and other communiqués, and occasional systematic surveying and other data-gathering.

A strong concern has arisen from many of these groups over the last year that the work described in our waiver application is the right work, but that the pace of implementation is too fast. To respond to these concerns, we have adjusted our timelines on the educator evaluation initiative. School year 2013–14 is now dedicated to pilot-testing the district-determined measures that will drive educators' rating of impact on student learning, with full implementation scheduled for 2014-15. Similarly, we developed a two-year plan for trying out the PARCC assessments so that the state can make an informed decision about whether to transition from MCAS to PARCC.

To gather feedback specific to the accountability system, we offered all of these stakeholders the opportunity to participate in a statewide survey. This survey was made available for two weeks in late January 2014 in both English and Spanish. We worked through more than 30 stakeholder groups to get the word out about the survey and received over 3,000 responses. We also conducted focus groups with representatives of the stakeholder groups to dig deeper

on a few key issues. In both cases, most of the questions revolved around the five following issues:

- Which schools should receive the most support from the state?
- Should our system credit high schools for increasing post-secondary enrollment?
- Should our system credit high schools for re-engaging dropouts?
- How much should graduation and dropout rates count for in high school accountability?
- Does our accountability system sufficiently focus on student subgroups?

These two sources of feedback confirmed our course in some areas and caused us to change course others. For instance, stakeholders agreed that the state should prioritize the schools with the largest proficiency gaps (72.7 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed) and that the accountability system should somehow differentiate schools that work with students at risk of dropping out of school (74.4 percent agreed/strongly agreed). This led us to continue our intervention approach described in Principle 2 largely untouched and to add a measure of dropout re-engagement to our Progress and Performance Index (PPI).

Similarly, in both our survey and the focus groups, the sentiment was that the accountability system if anything pays too much attention to subgroups, rather than too little. For instance, on the survey, 74 percent of respondents felt that we either placed too much emphasis or the right amount of emphasis on subgroups, and only 12 percent felt there was not enough emphasis on subgroups. Thus, we propose only a minor change to our approach to subgroups. We will now require that in order to be identified as a Commendation/Reward school, schools must meet their PPI targets not only for their students in aggregate and their high needs groups, but also for all individual subgroups in the school.

In terms of where we shifted course, the largest changes were in the approach to high school accountability. When we began developing our waiver proposal, we had planned to include a measure of post-secondary enrollment to better measure whether high schools were producing graduates that were college- and career-ready. Yet in the focus groups, we heard clearly from the field that they did not support this approach for several reasons. Common concerns noted were that students may be prepared for college but not actually attend for reasons outside the school's control and that the measure does not credit schools for students who successfully pursue careers directly after high school. The survey, meanwhile, showed support for including additional measures of success during high school. This caused us to reconsider and instead plan to propose including a measure of successful high school course-taking once we have a complete four years of data at the end of the 2014-15 school year.

As is our practice, we will continue to listen to our stakeholders and use their feedback to drive the key features of our state's accountability and support systems.

March 2015 renewal request

As described in section 1 above, we have used a program evaluation strategy to collect information from stakeholder groups, particularly school- and district-based constituents,

regarding the state’s initiatives associated with the waiver. Highlights of recent findings include:

- Similar to teachers, principals and superintendents are seeing progress towards implementation of the curriculum frameworks and see their value in improving student learning. They too continue to seek more resources from the state in supporting their implementation.
- Large majorities agree that the new educator evaluation system: better differentiates between exceptional, capable, and weak performance; provides opportunities to reflect on their practice; and will help improve student learning.
- On the whole, principals perceive their own evaluations as fair, and they were much more likely than teachers to perceive the system as a whole as fair.
- A challenge for implementation this year is the district-determined measures (DDMs) of impact on student learning. The majority of districts have identified DDMs, but many are still working to determine how they will be administered and scored.
- The majority of district and school personnel who work with our Urban District Assistance team, which provides technical assistance and grants to our lowest performing districts, reported that these resources are effective to a moderate or great extent in supporting school improvement.

We will continue this program evaluation work to maintain our ability to gather regular, comprehensive feedback from the field.

With regard specifically to the waiver renewal proposal, we reached out to and interacted with over 50 stakeholders representing business leaders, civil rights and community organizations, advocates for and educators of English language learners and special education students, higher education and teacher preparation programs, parents, students, school committee members, school and district administrators, and teachers. We offered opportunities to provide feedback via focus groups or in writing at the initial reflection and idea generation stage and the later stage of vetting the specific proposals under consideration. We convened our Title I Committee of Practitioners twice to discuss our flexibility waiver renewal plans. We posted a public notice of our intent to seek renewal of our flexibility waiver, offering any interested party to provide input or comment, and discussed our proposed plans with the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education over multiple Board meetings.

Highlights of their comments:

- District personnel overall felt that the system was identifying the right schools and districts for intervention and support. As one example, a participant who led the accountability work for his district noted that he felt he could depend on the state’s percentile rankings to accurately identify which schools were improving quickly, staying steady, or declining.
- District personnel raised the same concerns that teachers did regarding the possibility of a school meeting its annual targets but still being designated as Level 3 or lower because of being in the lowest 20 percent of schools, but on the other hand they recognized that not being designated Level 3 would take away access to additional

resources from these lowest performing schools.

- All stakeholders agreed with the idea of adjusting how the performance of English language learners is included in the system. They worried that students at the lowest levels of English proficiency were doing poorly on the state assessments used in the accountability system because of their lack of understanding English, rather than a lack of actual content knowledge. Many urged us to consider alternatives that gave those students more time to reach English proficiency and/or took into consideration their current proficiency level, although a minority expressed concerns that this would lead to districts and schools holding themselves less accountable for the performance of these students
- Most expressed caution regarding using data about educators (whether performance evaluations, equitable access data, or otherwise) in the system at this point because of concerns around the potential unintended consequences of using these relatively new data in a high stakes fashion.
- Many expressed frustration at the limitations of the state’s data and wished that our system also took into consideration other factors such as school climate, social and behavioral supports for students, and other non-academic outcomes.

EVALUATION

The Department encourages an SEA that receives approval to implement the flexibility to collaborate with the Department to evaluate at least one program, practice, or strategy the SEA or its LEAs implement under principle 1, 2, or 3. Upon receipt of approval of the flexibility, an interested SEA will need to nominate for evaluation a program, practice, or strategy the SEA or its LEAs will implement under principles 1, 2, or 3. The Department will work with the SEA to determine the feasibility and design of the evaluation and, if it is determined to be feasible and appropriate, will fund and conduct the evaluation in partnership with the SEA, ensuring that the implementation of the chosen program, practice, or strategy is consistent with the evaluation design.

Check here if you are interested in collaborating with the Department in this evaluation, if your request for the flexibility is approved.

OVERVIEW OF SEA’S REQUEST FOR THE ESEA FLEXIBILITY

Provide an overview (about 500 words) of the SEA’s request for the flexibility that:

1. explains the SEA’s comprehensive approach to implement the waivers and principles and describes the SEA’s strategy to ensure this approach is coherent within and across the principles; and
2. describes how the implementation of the waivers and principles will enhance the SEA’s and its LEAs’ ability to increase the quality of instruction for students and improve student achievement.

Massachusetts has a long history of setting and maintaining high standards and expectations for all students and has worked hard to earn its current standing as the highest performing

state in the nation. Our request for an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver is driven by the belief that our continued progress will be enhanced by the adoption of a unitary state/federal accountability system that: sets standards for student learning that ensure readiness for college and careers; calls out and remediates performance gaps; expects continuous improvement of schools and districts; rewards strong performance; and aggressively addresses low performing schools and districts.

The Commonwealth's schools and districts are currently assessed based on both the state's five-level Framework for District and School Accountability and the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At one time both provided useful feedback, but NCLB's rising targets have made the metric no longer helpful in identifying schools and districts most in need of intervention. In 2011, the same year that Massachusetts led the nation in NAEP performance for the fourth time in a row, approximately 81 percent of our public schools and 90 percent of our districts were identified as not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

In contrast, Massachusetts' existing state system places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. The strength of this accountability system is undergirded by the state's 2010 *Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which provides tools, rules, and supports for the state to aggressively engage with schools and districts in Levels 4 and 5.

The collective message of the Commonwealth and federal accountability systems increasingly generates greater noise than signal - as more and more schools and districts are being judged inadequate under AYP but not under the Massachusetts's tiered system.

Our proposal seeks to enhance the state system by establishing a new goal: to cut our state's proficiency gaps² in half by 2017, thus reducing by half the proportion of students who are not college and career ready. To measure progress toward our goal, we will set new annual targets for the state and each district, school, and subgroup to reduce proficiency and achievement gaps. We will also establish a new marker to identify schools and districts with the largest gaps in proficiency and achievement and will further differentiate interventions by accountability status. Taken together, these changes will allow us to support every school where students continue to struggle. In so doing we will create a system focused on college and career readiness that incentivizes continuous improvement in every corner of the Commonwealth.

The four principles for improving student academic achievement and increasing the quality of instruction detailed in this waiver opportunity are well-aligned with the statewide reform efforts we currently have underway. Already we have established a new statewide educator evaluation system, adopted new statewide curriculum frameworks incorporating the college- and career-ready Common Core State Standards, and implemented aggressive strategies for turning around our lowest performing schools and districts.

² Thanks to Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education member and chair of the Board-appointed Task Force on Proficiency Gaps Jeffrey Howard for establishing this use of the term "proficiency gap." See *A Roadmap to Closing the Proficiency Gap* (April, 2010): <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/news/0410PGRoadmap.pdf>.

Reform has defined public education in Massachusetts for nearly two decades. While we have outpaced the nation and other countries in achievement, our work remains unfinished. This waiver will provide us with the flexibility we need to halve our proficiency gaps by 2017, create the clear and coherent system of accountability necessary to aggressively address low performance, call out and remedy proficiency gaps, enable continuous improvement, and reward strong performance. The road forward is long but clear; the work will not be easy, but is critically important. The Commonwealth’s students deserve nothing less.

PRINCIPLE 1: COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

1.A ADOPT COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS

Select the option that pertains to the SEA and provide evidence corresponding to the option selected.

Option A

The State has adopted college- and career-ready standards in at least reading/language arts and mathematics that are common to a significant number of States, consistent with part (1) of the definition of college- and career-ready standards.

- i. Attach evidence that the State has adopted the standards, consistent with the State’s standards adoption process. (Attachment 4)

Option B

The State has adopted college- and career-ready standards in at least reading/language arts and mathematics that have been approved and certified by a State network of institutions of higher education (IHEs), consistent with part (2) of the definition of college- and career-ready standards.

- i. Attach evidence that the State has adopted the standards, consistent with the State’s standards adoption process. (Attachment 4)
- ii. Attach a copy of the memorandum of understanding or letter from a State network of IHEs certifying that students who meet these standards will not need remedial coursework at the postsecondary level. (Attachment 5)

1.B TRANSITION TO COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS

Provide the SEA’s plan to transition to and implement no later than the 2013–2014 school year college- and career-ready standards statewide in at least reading/language arts and mathematics for all students and schools and include an explanation of how this transition plan is likely to lead to all students, including English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students, gaining access to and learning content aligned with such standards. The Department encourages an SEA to include in its plan activities related to each of the italicized questions in the corresponding section of

the document titled *ESEA Flexibility Review Guidance*, or to explain why one or more of those activities is not necessary to its plan.

Overview

Success in today's economy requires a higher level of education than ever before, leaving students who graduate from high school unprepared for the rigor of college or careers unable to compete with their peers. Massachusetts has long made college and career readiness a top priority, integrating this perspective into state standards and since 2007 recommending that all high schools require students to complete MassCore, a minimum program of academic studies, before graduation to ensure their preparedness.

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has taken steps to ensure that all students meet rigorous learning expectations across their program of studies. In 2010 the Board adopted the *Common Core State Standards in Mathematics* and the *Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy*. These evidence-based, internationally benchmarked standards are aligned with college and work expectations and were designed to provide the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college coursework and workforce training programs. Following the adoption of the standards the state added some unique Massachusetts standards and features, including pre-kindergarten standards. In December 2010 the BESE and Board of Early Education and Care adopted the new *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy*, both of which incorporate the Common Core state standards and create a new alignment between early education and the K–12 system.³ In 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) released a draft of its proposed new standards for science and technology/engineering,⁴ which incorporates key design elements of the *Next Generation Science Standards*. Work began on revisions to the Massachusetts science standards in 2009 and they will be presented to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for adoption in the 2015-16 school year. These new standards will eventually become the basis for the Commonwealth's MCAS assessment in science and technology/engineering. Massachusetts is also currently revising its digital literacy standards. The new standards will incorporate computer science standards, offering a roadmap to provide all of the state's students new coding competencies for the digital age. The *Massachusetts Career and Vocational Technical Frameworks* have been revised to reflect the 2011 ELA/literacy and math standards. Finally, plans are underway to revise a number of the state's other academic curriculum frameworks (arts, comprehensive health, foreign languages). In each of these revision processes, integration of relevant ELA and math standards from the 2010 Frameworks will be considered so that literacy and numeracy instruction are integrated into content-area instruction in other subject areas. As these guiding documents are updated, we continue to conduct outreach and professional development and work with the Massachusetts Departments of Higher Education and Early

³ These documents are posted at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html. Minutes of the Board meetings are at www.doe.mass.edu/boe/minutes/10/0721reg.doc and www.doe.mass.edu/boe/minutes/10/1221reg.doc

⁴ For the revised science standards, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/review.html>

Education and Care to create a system-wide P-20 focus on college and career readiness.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) staff played a lead role on the writing teams that developed the Common Core State Standards and the *Next Generation Science Standards* to ensure that the new standards would be as academically rigorous and challenging as our prior standards, and worthy of adoption in Massachusetts. Once the decision to adopt standards is made, the state initiates a multi-tiered effort to ensure that educators are fully prepared to bring the new standards to life in the classroom.

Alignment

Prior to adopting the Common Core State Standards and new science and technology/engineering standards, ESE conducted several analyses to measure the degree of alignment between the old and new standards. We found that in both mathematics and English language arts the standards were 90% aligned to our existing state standards; the additional depth in some areas found in the Common Core State Standards accounted for most of the difference. Massachusetts added some standards to the Common Core in the process of adopting its final curriculum frameworks, most notably a set of pre-K standards in both mathematics and English language arts. Massachusetts' additions comprise 2.5% of the English language arts standards and less than 4% of the mathematics standards, well below the allowable 15 percent. A similar alignment analysis of old and new science standards shows significant consistency in terms of science concepts, ensuring the new standards will at least be as strong as our current standards. The revised standards enhance the state's expectations for science by additionally including science and engineering practices and attending to more purposeful progressions across grades. Massachusetts has chosen to adapt the *Next Generation Science Standards* for several reasons,⁵ but the key design elements are consistent. Because of the state's deep involvement in the standards development process and the strong alignment between the old and new Massachusetts frameworks, the transition will not be as complex as in other states.

ESE has published crosswalks to indicate similarities and differences among the old and new standards.⁶ Districts are able to use these crosswalks to inform the alignment of their curriculum and instruction. ESE Student Assessment staff and the state's assessment contractor used the crosswalks as the basis for analyzing the alignment of existing test items to the new standards.

Special Populations

The state's college and career readiness aspirations extend to all students, including those who are in need of additional support due to a disability or because English is not their first language. To that end the state has prioritized the alignment of its English language proficiency standards and standards for students with disabilities.

In 2012, Massachusetts launched Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language

⁵ www.doe.mass.edu/stem/standards/NGSS-MAAComparison.html

⁶ www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore; www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/review.html

Learners (RETELL), a major initiative to strengthen the state’s programming for English language learners (ELLs). The initiative includes a number of components.

1. **Adoption of WIDA standards.** Massachusetts’ English language proficiency (ELP) standards were last updated in 2006 and at that time were closely aligned to the state’s 2001 English language arts curriculum framework. To realign the ELP standards with the state’s new standards, ESE signed a memorandum of understanding with the 27-state World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium to use their English language development standards. The WIDA standards are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, can be used by both English as a second language (ESL) and sheltered English immersion (SEI) content teachers, and address social and academic language development across the four language domains (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in the major content disciplines.
2. **Adoption of WIDA ACCESS.** WIDA standards are assessed using the ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication to English State-to-State for English Language Learners) test, an assessment that measures student progress in acquiring the English language. The ACCESS assessment, an appropriate and strong replacement for the current Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment, was first implemented in Massachusetts schools in the 2012–13 school year.⁷
3. **Sheltered English Endorsement Requirement.** Among its provisions, RETELL requires all core academic teachers of ELLs to earn a Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) Teacher Endorsement. One path to earning the endorsement is by taking an SEI Teacher Endorsement course. The SEI Endorsement courses created by the Department provide teachers with strategies to support ELLs to access and master the state’s rigorous standards in ELA, math and other subject areas. Between 2012 and 2016, the state will spend approximately \$12 million to provide well over 30,000 incumbent teachers and administrators with this SEI Endorsement training. Educator preparation programs are now required to provide SEI Endorsement training as a part of the initial licensure process for all core academic teachers. After 2016, the SEI Endorsement will be a requirement for employment for any core academic teacher providing instruction to ELLs.
4. **Model Curricula for ESL Teachers.** In Massachusetts, ELLs receive content instruction from SEI-trained teachers, and English language development instruction from ESL teachers. We are now working to identify the most important areas of overlap between key academic practices demanded by Massachusetts Frameworks, and the strategic language functions and embedded language forms ELL students must use in order to successfully master the key academic practices so that, working with the field, ESE can establish learning targets as foci for model ESL curricula. These model curricula will help ESL teachers supporting ELLs’ English language development and their capacity to access ELA and math standards.
5. **Other Efforts to Deepen Sheltered English Instruction Practices Beyond 2016.** Though the state’s core academic educators are all receiving SEI Endorsement training, we will continue to support educators’ efforts to implement SEI strategies – and thus to give ELLs greater

⁷ Documentation on the state’s decision to administer the ACCESS assessment: www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/0911/item4.html

opportunity to master content standards - in a number of ways, including promoting an array of “Extending the Learning” follow-up workshops and courses which give educators the opportunity to learn more deeply about aspects of SEI; courses for literacy and math coaches to support the integration of SEI practices into their work with classroom teachers; ESL teacher-leadership training to enable ESL teachers to more effectively advocate for ELLs and collaborate with their content-area classroom colleagues on behalf of ELLs; a observation tool educators can utilize to conduct focused observations for SEI practice; guidance on how to approach challenging aspects of ELL education like the nexus between ELL and Special Education, and how to meet the needs of students with interrupted formal education.

We have also been working to analyze and implement the learning and accommodation factors necessary to ensure that students with disabilities will have the opportunity to meet and exceed the college- and career-ready standards. In 2006, ESE published Guides to the Curriculum Frameworks in ELA, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and History/Social Science for Students with Disabilities⁸. The *Guides for ELA/Literacy and Mathematics* were updated in 2013 to align to the 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for ELA/Literacy and Mathematics*. The Guides for Science and Technology/Engineering will be updated following adoption in SY 2015-16. This alignment is conducted with advice from special education teachers who had used the previous *Guides*. The new *Guides* serve as a resource for other states throughout the country.

Further, our statewide teaching and learning system, EDWIN,⁹ is designed to promote and provide professional development on tiered instructional strategies so that all students can successfully access curricular content. The system itself also allows educators to generate data from formative assessments so that they can monitor student learning more closely and identify problems early. As for accommodations, Massachusetts has led the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) effort to develop a strategy for how students with disabilities will be accommodated in the assessment, using analysis of our existing accommodations to guide the work.

Outreach and Dissemination

ESE began dissemination of its new ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks in January 2011 through conferences, professional development, and collaborative regional events held in the state colleges and universities and open to the P–20 education community. The highlights of this effort were regional sessions to introduce the new frameworks to teams of educators from early education, K–12 and higher education institutions. Since 2012 the transition to the new curriculum frameworks has also been a featured theme of the state’s annual Curriculum and Instruction Summits , which are attended by more than 800 educators annually. Similar outreach has been undertaken for science since the draft standards were posted in December 2013. At the request of the state’s superintendents, in 2011 ESE shipped more than 170,000 print copies of the ELA and mathematics frameworks to

⁸ Guides to the Curriculum Frameworks in ELA, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and History/Social Science for Students with Disabilities: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html

⁹ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/>

districts so that individual teachers would have hard copies of the frameworks to use for their independent classroom alignment work, and continues to supply print copies to districts upon request.

Through its family literacy activities, ESE disseminated information using the Parents' Guide materials developed on the Common Core standards for the National Parent Teacher Organization.¹⁰

In the future ESE's annual Curriculum and Instruction Summits will continue to feature updated presentations on the new standards and assessments as well as new resources for college and career readiness. ESE is also partnering with the state Department of Early Education and Care to disseminate the standards to early childhood educators, with specific attention to family engagement strategies related to the frameworks.

Through a partnership with WGBH, Boston's local public television station, ESE is able to utilize the organization's media expertise to get information about helpful resources out to educators throughout the state. WGBH uses newsletters, conferences, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, online banner ads and a variety of other strategies to make educators aware of the state's Model Curriculum Units, Model Curriculum Maps, videos of aligned instructional practice, professional development opportunities and grants, and other supports.

The Department contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in January 2013 to conduct a two-year qualitative study of the implementation of the 2011 ELA and Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks at the district, school, and classroom level. AIR researchers conducted surveys, interviews with district and school personnel and observations of classrooms in a sample of five representative districts from 2013-2014. The AIR report was published in the fall of 2014. Key findings from the study related to implementation, supports, the change process and recommendations. These findings inform ESE's continuing efforts to support schools and districts in implementing the curriculum frameworks.

Key Findings Related to Implementation

- Most surveyed teachers reported that they were knowledgeable about the 2011 frameworks, and that they believe they will lead to improved student learning.
- The majority of surveyed teachers reported that they had at least partially incorporated the frameworks in their classrooms, with implementation in elementary schools further along than in middle and high schools.
- Implementation of the ELA and mathematics frameworks was on a similar trajectory within the sample of schools.

Key Findings Related to Supports

- District leaders emphasized a gradual process of transitioning to the frameworks and provided time for teachers to learn and share with each other.
- High school teachers felt less supported in implementing the 2011 frameworks than their

¹⁰ www.pta.org/ParentsGuide/

elementary and middle school colleagues.

- High school teachers perceived different challenges than their elementary and middle school colleagues.
- Teachers in higher implementing schools were more deeply engaged in collaborating and consulting with other teachers to support their transition to the 2011 frameworks.

Supporting Massachusetts Educators

We recognize that the successful implementation of the state’s new standards rests largely on the ability of educators to translate them into strong local curricula and instructional practices. To that end we have launched multiple ways of supporting Massachusetts’ 80,000 educators as they get to know and understand the new standards and explore ways to teach to them effectively. Among these methods of support:

- In 2010–11 ESE developed instructional modules on key aspects of the new standards (e.g., math practices, algebra, writing, reading complex texts, science and engineering practices) and collaborated with professional development providers to align their coursework with the state’s college- and career-readiness standards in ELA and mathematics. These courses are a key strategy of the state’s Race to the Top initiative through 2014, and are open to all educators, including teachers of English language learners, low income students, and students with disabilities.
- In the spring of 2011, ESE launched a professional development initiative for approximately 300 educators on the design of model curriculum units and performance assessments based on the new standards. This project, which continues through 2014, engages pre–k to 12 teachers in designing curriculum and assessment materials based on the new standards, the principles of Universal Design for Learning, and the structures of Understanding by Design. Participating teachers began pilot-testing these materials in classrooms in 2012, and there are now over 140 Model Curriculum Units (MCUs) aligned to state standards available to the state’s educators to adopt or adapt and to refer to as they continue their local curriculum development and alignment efforts. These MCUs form a core component of the resources available in EDWIN, the Race to the Top-funded statewide teaching and learning system. The Department also has several highly subscribed grant programs which provide sustained support to districts interested in adopting and/or adapting the MCUs.
- In conjunction with educators in the field, the Department has developed 24 Model Curriculum Maps. These exemplar maps are now available statewide and are very useful tools that districts can utilize to conduct local curriculum planning. Over the last several years, the Department has offered a series of Curriculum Mapping professional development programs in which exemplar maps are introduced and explained.
- Since 2011, through the state’s six regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs), ESE has offered targeted courses on aspects of the ELA and mathematics

standards and on using data to inform instructional decisions to districts with low-performing schools.¹¹ The state is also working with a vendor to provide a series of high-quality professional development resources for districts on using data effectively to improve classroom instruction. These resources are expected to be available to districts by the beginning of the 2015-16 school year.

- In the spring of 2012, Massachusetts launched the RETELL initiative, as described above. A major component of RETELL is the provision of professional development for teachers of English language learners on second language acquisition, the new curriculum frameworks, and the WIDA standards.
- Professional development on the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support¹² has also been designed and delivered to support educators, including teachers of students with disabilities and English language learners, to reach all students using the new standards. In 2014-15 approximately 1,000 educators in over 170 districts were enrolled in ten different graduate level courses through the Massachusetts FOCUS Academy¹³, with the aim of enhancing their ability to improve outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities, in safe and supportive inclusive environments. Additionally, educators in priority Level 3 and 4 districts have participated in Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports' Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Academies. These multi-year professional development opportunities include face-to-face, online, and job embedded components intended to strengthen participating educators' ability to deliver instruction and create supporting learning environments for all students, using the principles of UDL and PBIS.
- Because Massachusetts is a governing state of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) consortium, ESE staff members were active in the development of the *PARCC Model Content Frameworks*, guides for designing ELA and math curricula based on the Common Core standards. Published as working drafts in November 2011, these frameworks were reviewed and revised in 2012. The *PARCC Model Content Frameworks* and PARCC released prototype tasks and assessment items served as the basis of regional professional development available to all Massachusetts districts from 2012 through 2014. This professional development focused on raising awareness and understanding of the frameworks and curricula and assessments that are based on the frameworks.¹⁴
- Between 2012 and 2014, twenty-four P-16 Massachusetts educators participated in the PARCC Educator Cadre, a series of national meetings and online professional development for teams from PARCC states. These events were designed to allow members of the Educator Leader Cadres to test and refine instructional tools and

¹¹ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/dsac/pd>

¹² <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/mtss/ta/default.html>

¹³ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/dsac/pd/?section=MFA>

¹⁴ PARCC *Model Content Frameworks* and released items are available at www.parcconline.org.

presentations developed by PARCC and participate in professional development opportunities focused on the alignment of district curricula to the college- and career-ready standards and assessments. Massachusetts PARCC Educator Leader Fellows in turn have given hundreds of presentations at the state, regional, district, and school levels beginning in fall 2012. In fall 2014, PARCC Fellows provided forums throughout the state at which educators had the opportunity to take PARCC practice tests, discuss implications for curriculum and instruction, and make plans accordingly. Thus far, these forums have been attended by well over 1,000 educators.

- For principals and other administrators, Massachusetts has offered extended training by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) using Race to the Top funding. This training includes components focused on the new college- and career-ready standards in literacy, mathematics, and science.¹⁵
- ESE also uses its annual Curriculum Summits and superintendent, curriculum coordinator, and principal networks as a key strategy for supporting school leaders in the transition to the new standards. ESE’s Office of Educator Quality and Office for Curriculum and Instruction collaborated on the 2013 Curriculum Summit¹⁶ and a series of professional development activities and grant programs designed to link implementation of the standards and implementation of educator evaluation in 2013-2014.
- The integrative approach to the 2013 Summit reflects the Department’s prioritization of efforts to support districts with the integration of the state’s major initiatives, i.e. educator evaluation, Frameworks implementation, introduction of Next Generation assessments, and RETELL. To this end, ESE has been developing resources and trainings to explicitly support district leaders’ and classroom teachers’ integration efforts. Initiative integration was the theme of the Fall 2014 Curriculum Summit.

Preparing New Educators

In addition to preparing veteran educators, it is critically important that newly licensed teachers be prepared for the heightened expectations that new standards contain. ESE’s Office of Educator Policy, Preparation and Leadership worked closely with the state’s educator preparation program sponsoring organizations and the state’s institutions of higher education to develop new program approval regulations to ensure that all programs produce highly effective educators who have a deep understanding of the content contained in the state’s new curriculum frameworks. These new regulations were brought to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for discussion and vote in 2012.

Following the adoption of the new regulations, ESE aligned its professional standards for teacher licensure with the new standards and indicators for teacher evaluation, which are

¹⁵ www.doe.mass.edu/edleadership/nisl/

¹⁶ www.doe.mass.edu/candi/summit

linked to the state’s curriculum frameworks. In January 2014 the Board voted to adopt additional proposed regulatory changes that effect this linkage. Taken together, these two regulatory changes will ensure that incoming teachers and administrative leaders are prepared to implement new college- and career-ready standards in classrooms.

In summer 2014, ESE convened groups of educators to revise the Subject Matter Knowledge standards which guide educator preparation programs in their curriculum design, aligning them to the 2010 Massachusetts Frameworks in ELA and Mathematics. We anticipate that the new Subject Matter Knowledge standards will be approved in spring 2015.

Instructional Materials

Massachusetts’ effort to develop model curriculum units (MCUs) and performance assessments, as described above, will continue through spring 2015 and will engage pre-K to grade 12 teachers. The model units will be explicitly designed to support teaching and learning for all students, including English language learners, students with disabilities, low achieving students and students achieving at advanced levels.

140 units for pre-K to grade 12 in mathematics, ELA/literacy, history/social science, science and technology/engineering, and vocational/technical subjects are now available online, and over 100 of these units are also now available through EDWIN, the state’s teaching and learning system, an online resource being built as part of the state’s Race to the Top strategy. Included in the Model Curriculum Units are ten early literacy units for each grade from kindergarten to grade 3, a collection created to exemplify how reading comprehension, writing, and language development can be integrated and aligned to the 2011 standards. With its partner the WGBH Educational Foundation (the Boston public broadcasting outlet), ESE created a video and a print guide to the process of developing curriculum units, and is producing a series of videos showing selected Model Curriculum Units being taught in the classroom. Massachusetts collaborated with Rhode Island, New York, and Achieve to create a rubric for evaluating the degree to which curriculum materials are aligned to the *Common Core State Standards*. Weeklong professional development courses on the Model Curriculum Units, open to all educators in the Commonwealth, were held in the summer of 2014.¹⁷

Accelerated Learning Opportunities

Massachusetts is developing several new pathways to expand access to college-level courses and their prerequisites.

- Through Race to the Top, we have established six STEM Early College High Schools, and several other districts are pursuing this strategy through their own funding. The STEM Early College High School program creates partnerships between middle/high schools and local colleges and universities so that students complete a sequence of STEM-focused courses leading to the acquisition of between 12 and 30 college credits

¹⁷ All materials related to the Model Curriculum Units are published at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model>.

before high school graduation. This program prioritizes access for low income and first generation college students.

- Race to the Top is also funding a professional development program to prepare vertical teams of teachers to teach rigorous courses in middle and early high school that will prepare students to take AP courses and other college-level coursework in their later high school years. The program offers training in English language arts, mathematics, and sciences. Through the summer of 2014, over 3,000 teachers have participated in this program.
- Our Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Program, run by the Department of Higher Education, enrolled over 2,062 high school students in 2013–14 in courses at public colleges and universities each year, at no cost to the student.

Transition to Next Generation Assessments

Massachusetts is a governing state in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium, and Commissioner Mitchell Chester is the chair of the consortium’s Board. PARCC is in the process of developing a common assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards which is scheduled to be completed and ready to administer in the 2014–15 school year. Massachusetts has committed to transitioning to this new assessment so long as it is determined to be as challenging as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment system (MCAS), which is widely seen as one of the most rigorous and reliable statewide assessment systems in the country.

In the meantime, ESE plans to continue to administer MCAS. The state has gradually transitioned the content beginning in 2011–12 to reflect the new English language arts and mathematics college- and career-ready standards. In 2011–12, the test included some items based on the new standards; in 2012–13 the majority of assessment items reflected the new standards, and in 2013–14 the entire MCAS ELA and mathematics assessment was based on the new standards. This approach was carefully designed to ensure that students and their teachers are not unfairly penalized as they adjust to the new standards.¹⁸

In November 2013, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to approve a two-year MCAS to PARCC transition plan, which will provide for a robust comparison of the MCAS and PARCC student assessment programs and thus enable the Board to determine in fall of 2015 whether to sunset the MCAS English language arts and mathematics assessments for grades 3-8 and employ PARCC as the state testing program for these subjects beginning in the 2015-16 school year. The plan called for Massachusetts schools to participate in PARCC field testing in 2013-14 and for districts to have the option of administering either the PARCC or MCAS assessments in 2014-15. Slightly more than half of all districts administering tests in grades 3-8 opted to participate in PARCC in 2014-15. In addition, approximately one quarter of all districts administering high school tests chose to have grade 9 and/or 11 students participate in PARCC. In all cases, student performance in

¹⁸ Details on the state’s plan to transition its statewide assessment to reflect the new standards: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/transition.

2013-14 and 2014-15 will be measured in relation to the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy*, both of which incorporate the Common Core state standards.

If the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education determines that the PARCC assessments are at least as comprehensive and rigorous as MCAS and that the state will adopt PARCC, we will transition fully from MCAS to the PARCC assessments. With the transition, we will establish a new set of performance targets and annual measurable objectives for our schools and districts.

Further, should the Board adopt PARCC, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education has committed to vote on whether to establish the PARCC College/Career Readiness benchmark scores as evidence that a student is ready for credit-bearing work in college. Currently, over one-third of students who have received passing scores on the 10th grade MCAS exam, graduated from Massachusetts high schools, and who subsequently enroll in public higher education in Massachusetts are required by their higher education institution to enroll in remedial courses that do not lead to college credit. This planned vote by the Board of Higher Education signals the common commitment of the state’s education leaders to provide students and their parents with clear signals regarding progress toward and attainment of college and career readiness.

Assessment transition details

Beginning in early fall 2013 and formally approved by a vote of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in November 2013, ESE has established a comprehensive two-year transition plan from MCAS toward the next-generation PARCC assessments. The intent of the transition plan has been to provide a robust comparison of the MCAS and PARCC assessments that will inform the Board’s fall 2015 decision to potentially adopt PARCC as Massachusetts’ single, college- and career-ready-aligned statewide assessment for English language arts and mathematics beginning in spring 2016. Major milestones of the plan are listed below.

2013–14 School Year

November 2013:	Following September Board discussion, Board votes on plan for two-year transition from MCAS to PARCC
Spring 2014:	PARCC field test administered in randomly selected Massachusetts schools/classrooms (and in other states)

2014–15 School Year

Fall 2014:	Analysis of PARCC field-test data by Department staff
Fall 2014	Board discussions regarding PARCC field test, planned PARCC operational tests, and comparisons to MCAS
Spring 2015:	Massachusetts schools administer first operational PARCC or MCAS assessments based on district choice; all grade 10 students continue to take MCAS in order to meet state

Competency Determination requirements

2015–16 School Year

Summer/early fall 2015:	Standard-setting for PARCC tests; analysis of operational data
Late fall 2015:	Board votes on full adoption of PARCC based on a determination of it being “as good as or better than” MCAS
Spring 2016:	Following fall 2015 Board vote, all schools administer the same single statewide assessment in grades 3-8: either PARCC operational tests or MCAS tests. Grade 10 students continue to take MCAS to meet state Competency Determination requirements

As of spring 2015, all major milestones listed above for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years have been met, and plans are on track for the Board’s determination in fall 2015. Since November 2013, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has discussed the PARCC assessments and progress of the transition plan at all but three of its monthly meetings, including joint meetings with the State Board of Higher Education.¹⁹ Additionally, at the request of the governor, the Board has scheduled five public forums on the PARCC assessment to be held in spring and summer 2015. At these forums members of the public have been invited to attend and offer their perspectives on the PARCC assessments. Information gleaned from these forums will help inform the Board’s fall 2015 assessment decision.²⁰

In spring 2015 approximately 860 schools in 194 districts have administered 2015 PARCC English language and mathematics tests to all of their students in grades 3-8²¹. In addition, approximately 105 high schools in 69 districts have administered optional 2015 PARCC tests to students in grades 9 and/or 11.²² The final date for 2015 PARCC testing is June 5.

Three primary criteria will inform the Board’s fall 2015 assessment decision: the quality, rigor, and efficacy of the PARCC tests. Evidence of PARCC’s quality, rigor, and efficacy will be drawn from five primary areas: the 2014 PARCC field test, the 2015 PARCC operational test, independent studies, and the PARCC scoring and standard setting processes. A list of anticipated studies addressing each of these criteria, updated as of winter 2014-15, is below. Data from these studies is analyzed and summarized for Board members on an ongoing basis.

¹⁹ See Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Board Documents: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/>.

²⁰ See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=17901>.

²¹ Certain Massachusetts students with significant cognitive disabilities continue to participate in the MCAS alternate assessment program.

²² See *Spring 2015 District Assessment Decision Update* at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=13541>.

STUDY: <i>(Commissioned by PARCC unless noted otherwise)</i>		QUALITY	RIGOR	EFFICACY	PROVIDES EVIDENCE FOR:	COMPLETED <i>Anticipated</i>
1	PARCC Field Tests: Lessons Learned	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of test questions and tasks Training materials and test administration procedures Computer based delivery platform Improvements needed for the operational tests including how to report results 	Fall 2014
2	Test Mode Comparability	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The comparability of student performance on paper-based vs. computer-based PARCC assessments 	<i>Spring 2015</i>
3	PARCC Item Research: Cognitive Labs	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ability of 3rd-grade students to handle technologies on PARCC computer based test items How well does PARCC provide a “level playing field” for disabled students and English language learners 	Fall 2014
4	Device Comparability	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The degree to which all allowed devices perform comparably during computer-based testing 	<i>Winter 2015</i>
5	Comparison of MCAS and PARCC <i>(MA Business Alliance for Education)</i>	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The structure, content, and purpose of the assessments Coverage of 2010 ELA and Math standards Capacity of high school assessments to measure college and career readiness Capacity of the assessments to capture the full range of student performance (without “floor” or “ceiling” constraints) 	Winter 2015
6	Feasibility of International Benchmarking		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying suitable methods for future international benchmarking studies (in 2015 and beyond) and investigating the technical feasibility of such method(s) – results to be reported in the “International Benchmarking Studies” (see #12) 	<i>Winter 2015</i>
7	Score Report Design	✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing reports for students/parents and educators that are accessible and useful; documenting work done to generate reports that yield actionable results 	<i>Winter 2015</i>
8	Accessibility	✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating the accessibility of items and the effectiveness of accommodations in helping make assessments more accessible to English language learners and students with disabilities 	<i>Spring 2015</i>
9	Analyses of the	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual end-of-course overviews of 	<i>Spring 2015</i>

	information obtained from End-of-Course high school assessments				<p>standards assessed and clusters emphasized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examples of key advances from previous grades or courses ○ Mathematical Practices in relation to course content ○ Fluency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scope and limits of how standards are assessed on end-of-course tests 	
10	Quality of Items	✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree to which PARCC items assess the standards and provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the standards ▪ The psychometric quality of English Language Arts/Literacy and mathematics assessments at the item- and test-level across grades and courses 	<p><i>Spring 2015 (Field Tests)</i></p> <p><i>Winter 2016 (Operational Tests)</i></p>
11	Post-secondary Educators' Judgment	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidence gathered from postsecondary educators who teach entry-level, college credit-bearing courses in mathematics and English regarding the minimum level of performance on PARCC items that would indicate students are academically ready to take and succeed in these courses 	<i>Spring 2015</i>
12	International Benchmarking Studies		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The alignment between results on PARCC assessments and student results on TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS, in grades 4, 8, and in high school 	<i>2016</i>
13	Comparability of Testing Modes & Devices	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impact, if any, of varying conditions related to: a) testing modes (paper and pencil vs. computer based) and b) the use of different devices approved for administering the computer based PARCC assessments, on test results 	<p><i>Spring 2015 (Field Tests)</i></p> <p><i>Fall 2015 (Operational Tests)</i></p>
14	Student results per test item (MA ESE)	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The distribution of student results along the PARCC scale (e.g., how well (“smoothly”) the test results of all students and of diverse student groups are distributed across the full range of student knowledge, skills, and abilities) 	<i>Summer 2015</i>
15	Standard Setting (Conducted by K12 + Higher Education professionals from all PARCC states)	✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The process used to align student results with each of the five PARCC performance levels ▪ Answering the question: How well the PARCC assessments set high but achievable expectations for students functioning at each of the 5 performance levels 	<i>Summer/Fall 2015</i>

16	Text-to-Speech	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which this accommodation results in a “level playing field” or, instead, a “differential boost” for students whose disability severely limits the ability to read and whose IEP requires this accommodation 	<i>Fall 2015</i>
17	Burlington and Revere Field Test Study <i>(Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy)</i>	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the administration of online PARCC testing (study was carried out in Burlington and Revere) Unforeseen challenges related to the online test administration that included: technology use, scheduling, staffing, student support, and data management 	Fall 2014
18	Quality of Test Administration Study	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving test administration technology and supports for the operational test using evidence collected from the field test (HumRRO, the evaluator, identified a number of improvements that PARCC has already instituted as a result of the study that included improvements in the administration materials and the online technology) 	<i>Fall 2014</i>
19	Inventory of state and local assessments and district case studies <i>(MA ESE)</i>		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The amount of assessment activity required by the state and local school districts The quality and value added of each category of mandated assessment activity 	<i>Spring 2015</i>
20	Survey of PARCC Impacts on Teaching and Learning <i>(MA ESE)</i>		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early insights into how school leaders and teachers are using the PARCC formative and summative assessments to inform, differentiate, and improve teaching and learning in their schools and classrooms 	<i>Fall/Winter 2016</i>
21	Fordham Common Core Alignment <i>(Center for Assessment, Fordham Institute and HUMRO)</i>	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing the content alignment and rigor of four assessment programs: MCAS, PARCC, Smarter Balanced, and the new ACT Aspire to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), through the examination of test items and scoring guides Comparing the accessibility of these assessments for all students and the transparency of test design 	<i>Summer 2015</i>
22	Teachers Examine PARCC: Perspective on the Quality of the New Assessments <i>(Teach Plus)</i>	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,000 teachers in IL, MA, TN, and DC extensively analyze the PARCC assessment for alignment to the standards, its ability to measure college- and career-readiness, and the assessment’s grade-level appropriateness 	Spring 2015

Implementation of Massachusetts’ two-year assessment transition plan is led by one of ESE’s

two deputy commissioners. In addition, ESE’s associate commissioner for student assessment is integrally involved in the cross-state development of PARCC tests, and staff in ESE’s student assessment unit play key roles in PARCC test development, PARCC test administration in Massachusetts, and plans for PARCC standard setting and reporting.

Increasing Rigor

Beyond adopting college- and career-ready standards and preparing for the transition to next-generation assessments based on those standards, Massachusetts has taken several steps in recent years to better ensure that all students are prepared for college and careers.

A significant first step in this direction was the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s endorsement of MassCore in 2007. This recommended high school program of studies includes four years of English language arts, four years of mathematics, three years of a lab-based science, three years of history, two years of the same foreign language, one year of an arts program and five additional core courses such as business education, health, and/or technology. MassCore also includes additional learning opportunities including AP classes, dual enrollment, a senior project, online courses for high school or college credit, and service or work-based learning. MassCore is not required, but districts are strongly urged to use the recommended coursework as a guide in setting their graduation requirements. In the 2013-14 school year more than 72 percent of graduating seniors had completed the MassCore program of studies.

This recommended course of study was reinforced in spring 2011 when the state Board of Higher Education voted to require four years of high school mathematics for admission to its four-year colleges and universities. This requirement will impact students entering the state’s higher education institutions beginning in fall 2016.

Beyond coursework, the state also established a graduation requirement to ensure that all students attained a minimum level of competency in English language arts, mathematics and science prior to receiving a high school diploma. From 2003 to 2008 all students were required to score a minimum of *Needs Improvement* on the grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) English language arts and mathematics tests to earn the Competency Determination needed to receive a public high school diploma; the requirement was increased to *Proficient* in 2008. Students who score *Needs Improvement* are required to complete an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) in the specific subject area(s) in which they are not yet proficient in order to graduate. The EPP includes, for each subject for which the student has not scored *Proficient* or higher on the high school MCAS:

- Documentation of the student’s strengths and weaknesses based on MCAS and other assessment results, coursework, grades, and teacher input;
- Coursework the student will be required to take and successfully complete in grades 11 and 12 in the relevant content area(s); and
- Assessments the school will administer to the student annually to determine whether

the student is making progress toward proficiency.

Coordination Across State Agencies

To be most effective, college and career readiness efforts need to start long before high school. Our state Executive Office of Education, established in 2008 to coordinate efforts across the three education agencies in Massachusetts, has made college and career readiness a priority. As a result, the Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, Early Education and Care, and Higher Education are collaborating to make the transition to college- and career-readiness standards a birth-to-20 initiative for the Commonwealth.

Together, the three education agencies and the Executive Office are working on a range of efforts to create a seamless system of education that prepares even our youngest students for success after high school. These initiatives include:

- A streamlined P–20 data system that allows educators to identify early the students who are off track and to track student progress throughout their educational careers;²³
- An online college planning tool²⁴;
- An enhanced flow of data sent back to high schools about the college success of their graduates;
- The development of stronger preschool/K–12 alignment in curriculum, instruction and assessment;
- An online teaching and learning system that provides access to high quality instructional and assessment materials and timely student data to all K–12 educators in public schools;
- Collaboration on birth to grade 3, parent education, and professional development initiatives; and,
- The development of kindergarten readiness assessments aligned to the new standards.

1.C DEVELOP AND ADMINISTER ANNUAL, STATEWIDE, ALIGNED, HIGH-QUALITY ASSESSMENTS THAT MEASURE STUDENT GROWTH

Select the option that pertains to the SEA and provide evidence corresponding to the option selected.

Option A	Option B	Option C
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The SEA is participating in one of the two State	<input type="checkbox"/> The SEA is not participating in either one	<input type="checkbox"/> The SEA has developed and begun annually

²³ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/ewis.html>

²⁴ <http://www.yourplanforcollege.org/>

<p>consortia that received a grant under the Race to the Top Assessment competition.</p> <p>i. Attach the State’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) under that competition. (Attachment 6)</p>	<p>of the two State consortia that received a grant under the Race to the Top Assessment competition, and has not yet developed or administered statewide aligned, high-quality assessments that measure student growth in reading/language arts and in mathematics in at least grades 3-8 and at least once in high school in all LEAs.</p> <p>i. Provide the SEA’s plan to develop and administer annually, beginning no later than the 2014–2015 school year, statewide aligned, high-quality assessments that measure student growth in reading/language arts and in mathematics in at least grades 3-8 and at least once in high school in all LEAs, as well as set academic achievement standards for those assessments.</p>	<p>administering statewide aligned, high-quality assessments that measure student growth in reading/language arts and in mathematics in at least grades 3-8 and at least once in high school in all LEAs.</p> <p>i. Attach evidence that the SEA has submitted these assessments and academic achievement standards to the Department for peer review or attach a timeline of when the SEA will submit the assessments and academic achievement standards to the Department for peer review. (Attachment 7)</p>
<p>For Option B, insert plan here.</p>		

PRINCIPLE 2: STATE-DEVELOPED DIFFERENTIATED RECOGNITION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUPPORT

2.A DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A STATE-BASED SYSTEM OF DIFFERENTIATED RECOGNITION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUPPORT

- 2.A.i Provide a description of the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system that includes all the components listed in Principle 2, the SEA’s plan for implementation of the differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system no later than the 2012–2013 school year, and an explanation of how the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system is designed to improve student achievement and school performance, close achievement gaps, and increase the quality of instruction for students.

Overview [Original 2012 Request]

The Commonwealth’s schools and districts are currently assessed based on both the state’s five-level Framework for District and School Accountability and the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Operating these dual systems at one time provided a wealth of valuable feedback, but the requirements under NCLB have declined into an administrative and fiscal burden that is no longer useful. The rising targets have resulted in far too many schools and districts being identified as in need of improvement to allow the state to best identify those most needing assistance or intervention.

In contrast, Massachusetts’ existing state system has proven extremely valuable. Our system places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. The strength of this accountability system is undergirded by the state’s 2010 *Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which provides the tools, rules, and supports necessary for the state to aggressively engage with schools and districts in Levels 4 and 5.

Our proposal seeks to enhance the state system by establishing a new goal: to cut our state’s proficiency gaps in half by 2017. We will also establish a new marker to identify schools and districts with the largest achievement gaps and will further differentiate interventions by accountability status. Taken together, these changes will allow us to support every school where students continue to struggle and create a system focused on college and career readiness that supports continuous improvement in every corner of the Commonwealth. Our commitment to continuous improvement is reflected both in the design of our accountability and support system and in the way we constantly assess the effectiveness of our system. If over time we do not see improvement across the spectrum, we will make appropriate adjustments to the system.

Goal and Annual Measurable Objectives

On October 25, 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to adopt a revised goal for all districts, schools, and subgroups in the state: to **reduce the proficiency gap by half by 2017**, thus reducing by half the proportion of students who are not college and career ready. Meeting this goal will require all schools and districts to accelerate

progress for all students, particularly those who are furthest behind. Through the hard work and dedication of their teachers and students, many Massachusetts schools and districts have already halved their proficiency gaps over the past five years, proof that our goal is ambitious, yet achievable.

To measure progress toward that goal and classify schools in an accountability and assistance level, we are proposing to create a Progress and Performance Index (PPI) that combines a set of measures that include our current best indicators of progress towards college- and career-readiness: progress on gap-closing as measured by our state assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science; performance at the *Advanced* and *Warning/Failing* levels; growth/improvement; and graduation and dropout rates for high schools. Beginning with 2014 accountability determinations, we propose to include credit in the PPI for high schools that successfully re-engage dropouts, and beginning with 2015 determinations to provide additional credit to schools and districts serving English language learners (ELLs) who demonstrate strong growth on the ACCESS for ELLs English language proficiency assessment. Targets will be differentiated for each district, school, and subgroup depending on its starting point in the baseline year, 2010–11, with the goal in each case to cut in half the proportion of students who are not on track to college and career readiness (performing at least at the *Proficient* level). As a result, districts, schools, and subgroups that are furthest behind are expected to make the strongest gains and thus close achievement gaps.

Massachusetts will continue to issue and report Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) determinations using PPI indicators for students in the aggregate, low income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and the state’s major racial and ethnic subgroups. We will also make determinations for a new “high needs” subgroup composed of students who are low income, have a disability, or are English language learners or former English language learners.

The high needs subgroup includes students falling into one or more of the following subgroups: student with disabilities, English language learners, former English language learners, and low income students. Many of our schools do not meet our current minimum N threshold of 40 students for issuing accountability determinations. By measuring progress and performance for the high needs student subgroup rather than considering each student demographic group individually, when using a minimum group size of 40 students we are able to hold nearly 200 more schools accountable for subgroup proficiency gaps along with overall performance. Beginning with accountability determinations issued in summer 2012, we lowered our minimum N threshold for subgroups from 40 to 30 students to better ensure a continuous focus on the achievement of all students, particularly those from traditionally low achieving demographic groups. In doing so, we held more than 100 additional schools accountable for students who are English learners, have disabilities, or come from low income families. All told, by using the high needs subgroup for accountability purposes and reducing our subgroup N size, more than 300 schools that in 2011-12 did not have sufficient numbers of students with disabilities, English learners, or low income students to allow us to render individual subgroup accountability determinations are now held accountable for the performance and progress of those students. Over the two-year period between 2014 and 2016, we intend to further

increase the number of schools and districts held accountable for student subgroups by lowering the minimum group size for accountability determinations from 30 in 2014 to 25 in 2015 and 20 in 2016. Additional details regarding subgroup size and the high needs subgroup, including safeguards Massachusetts will implement to ensure attention to the performance of all student groups, are described in section 2.B.

Beyond the indicators described above, accountability determinations will also consider participation in the state English language arts, mathematics, science, and English language proficiency tests. The PPI will include data for the four most recent years, with the most recent years weighted most heavily. Over time, as additional indicators of college and career readiness become available, we will expand and improve the index to include them. This index will allow us to better identify and describe schools and districts needing support across a spectrum of very strong to very weak performance. Additional details on our proposed AMO and PPI methodology appear in section 2.B.

Classification

We propose to classify schools as follows.

Level	Description
Level 1	Meeting gap narrowing goals
Level 2	Not meeting gap narrowing goals
Level 3	Focus: Lowest performing 20% of schools (including schools with the largest gaps)
Level 4	Priority: Lowest performing schools
Level 5	Priority: Chronically underperforming schools

We will also use four years of data to identify and recognize high achieving and/or greatly improving schools. These will be considered our state’s Commendation, or Reward, schools. Commendation schools will be classified in Level 1.

As described in more detail in sections 2.D.i and 2.E.i, PPI indicators for all students are the primary consideration in placing schools in Levels 4 and 5, while the PPI for both all students and the high needs subgroup are factors in the placement in Levels 1 and 2. Schools may be classified in Level 3 based on persistently low performance of all students, the high needs group, or any individual (discrete) student subgroup.

We propose to classify districts at the level of their lowest performing school, in keeping with Massachusetts’ current framework for district and school accountability and assistance. For example, a district with one or more Level 4 schools would be a Level 4 district, while a district whose lowest performing school is Level 2 would be a Level 2 district. An exception to this rule is for Level 5 districts and Level 5 schools, which are considered chronically underperforming under state law. Level 5 districts may only be designated as such by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Support

The development of the state’s framework for accountability and assistance was grounded in our belief in three core principles:

1. The district should be the entry point for the state’s accountability and assistance work, not the school. The state’s role should be focused on building district capacity to support and guide improvement efforts in individual schools.
2. A strong accountability system is not enough to ensure continued improvement. A parallel system of assistance and intervention is necessary to secure continued, strong improvement.
3. Every district does not need the same amount of support from the state. The depth of ESE’s engagement with each district should be based on the severity of the problem.

These three principles informed our thinking in the development of this waiver proposal. We are committed to moving away from the “one size fits all” method required under NCLB and to tailor our assistance and support to meet the actual needs of our districts. Our system of support for districts and schools seeks to clearly define the problem, what needs to be done immediately after classification on the framework, the range of activities that are permissible, and the scope and level of support that districts can anticipate from ESE.

Under our proposal districts will be required to reserve up to 25 percent of their Title I, Part A funds on a sliding scale to address identified needs. Districts will have the flexibility to scale their responses based on their unique needs, but ESE will improve its own fiscal accountability processes to monitor the quality and efficiency of district improvement efforts. Details are contained in Sections 2.D to 2.G.

Supports and interventions available to districts and schools will be available through a range of vehicles (professional development, online modules, professional learning communities, etc.) and will vary in scope to target particular areas that need strengthening. Massachusetts will no longer mandate NCLB school choice and supplemental educational services (SES) as currently required under NCLB. Supports and interventions will instead include: expanded learning opportunities for struggling students, which may include tutoring and other supports offered through strategic partnerships; professional development that is embedded, sustained, and connected to educators’ needs; and other supports aligned to ESE’s 11 Conditions for School Effectiveness, including those that address students’ social-emotional needs and family-school engagement. Specific focus will be placed on the particular needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. Additional details about possible supports and interventions are in Sections 2.F. and 2.G.

Timeline

The results of the spring 2011 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment (MCAS) will serve as the baseline for establishing AMO targets for 2011–12 through 2016–17 for all districts, schools, and subgroups. We will publicly announce our initial AMO determinations under this flexibility in August 2012, comparing the 2012 results to the 2011 baseline. At that same time, we will use the Progress and Performance Index (PPI) to classify all schools and districts in the

Commonwealth into Levels 1 through 5. Going forward, we will announce progress on AMOs and designations into accountability levels in the late summer each year based on the previous spring’s test results.

Communication

Beginning in spring 2012 we will provide district and school stakeholders, as well as parents and the general public, detailed information regarding the transition from Massachusetts’ current accountability and support system to the approach that is described in this request for flexibility. We will develop written materials and web-based presentations that will be available online at all times. We also plan to conduct webinars and face-to-face meetings with district and school staff. Further, we know that it is critical for internal staff and partners to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the system so that they can be ready to support the field and general public. Through discussions about our proposal, we have already begun the process of training our internal staff and partners, including our regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs), and will continue to conduct formal and informal trainings through the spring and summer of 2012.

2.A.ii Select the option that pertains to the SEA and provide the corresponding information, if any.

Option A

The SEA only includes student achievement on reading/language arts and mathematics assessments in its differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system and to identify reward, priority, and focus schools.

Option B

If the SEA includes student achievement on assessments in addition to reading/language arts and mathematics in its differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system and to identify reward, priority, and focus schools, it must:

- a. provide the percentage of students in the “all students” group that performed at the proficient level on the State’s most recent administration of each assessment for all grades assessed; and
- b. include an explanation of how the included assessments will be weighted in a manner that will result in holding schools accountable for ensuring all students achieve college- and career-ready standards.

Beyond English language arts and mathematics, ESE proposes to incorporate results from the state science assessment into the accountability framework. Students in Massachusetts public schools take science assessments in grades 5, 8, and high school and must pass the high school science assessment to receive a diploma; to date, however, these results have not been used in school or district accountability determinations. We intend to begin using science results in our

accountability system to reinforce our commitment to college and career readiness and emphasize the growing importance of competency in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in today’s economy. This heightened focus on science performance will intensify the need for our public schools to continue to make science education a priority, in addition to English language arts and mathematics.

Schools and districts will be held accountable in the Progress and Performance Index (PPI) for their progress on closing proficiency gaps in science. We do not have student growth data for this assessment so will not include it in the growth/improvement portion of the PPI. Additional details on the role of science in the accountability system are in section 2.B. See Attachment 8 for state-level assessment data for science.

2.B SET AMBITIOUS BUT ACHIEVABLE ANNUAL MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Select the method the SEA will use to set new ambitious but achievable annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in at least reading/language arts and mathematics for the State and all LEAs, schools, and subgroups that provide meaningful goals and are used to guide support and improvement efforts. If the SEA sets AMOs that differ by LEA, school, or subgroup, the AMOs for LEAs, schools, or subgroups that are further behind must require greater rates of annual progress.

<p>Option A</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Set AMOs in annual equal increments toward a goal of reducing by half the percentage of students in the “all students” group and in each subgroup who are not proficient within six years. The SEA must use current proficiency rates based on assessments administered in the 2010–2011 school year as the starting point for setting its AMOs.</p> <p>i. Provide the new AMOs and an explanation of the method used to set these AMOs.</p>	<p>Option B</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Set AMOs that increase in annual equal increments and result in 100 percent of students achieving proficiency no later than the end of the 2019–2020 school year. The SEA must use the average statewide proficiency based on assessments administered in the 2010–2011 school year as the starting point for setting its AMOs.</p> <p>i. Provide the new AMOs and an explanation of the method used to set these AMOs.</p>	<p>Option C</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use another method that is educationally sound and results in ambitious but achievable AMOs for all LEAs, schools, and subgroups.</p> <p>i. Provide the new AMOs and an explanation of the method used to set these AMOs.</p> <p>ii. Provide an educationally sound rationale for the pattern of academic progress reflected in the new AMOs in the text box below.</p> <p>iii. Provide a link to the State’s report card or attach a copy of the average statewide proficiency based on assessments</p>
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		administered in the 2010–2011 school year in reading/language arts and mathematics for the “all students” group and all subgroups. (Attachment 8)
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The overarching goal of Massachusetts’ proposed accountability system is to **reduce the proficiency gap by half by 2017**. This goal applies to the state and to all districts, schools, and subgroups. To measure progress toward the goal and classify schools in an accountability and assistance level, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) proposes to create a Progress and Performance Index (PPI) that combines four years of data on state testing participation, student achievement, student growth/improvement, and graduation and dropout rates to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced measurement of district and school progress toward college and career readiness. ESE will establish annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for each district, school, and subgroup using PPI indicators. The primary purpose of AMOs will be to provide transparent reporting of district and school progress toward college and career readiness for all students, and, in turn, to incentivize continuous improvement. The primary purpose of the PPI is to identify schools and districts most in need of assistance, and, accordingly, place schools and districts in our framework for accountability and assistance.

Our goal, reducing the proficiency gap by half by 2017, represents a refinement of Option A, equally as ambitious, and will help ensure all of our students are on a path towards college and career readiness. Evidence has shown that this goal also is achievable: Over the six years prior to our initial request for flexibility, 16 percent of Massachusetts schools had halved their proficiency gaps in ELA, 19 percent in mathematics.

Our proposal assumes that scoring *Proficient* or higher on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System is a robust proxy for college readiness. Previous research²⁵ on Massachusetts high school graduates demonstrates that students scoring *Proficient* or higher on our grade 10 tests are substantially less likely to require remedial coursework in college. Specifically, the research shows that only 4 percent of students who score *Advanced* require remedial courses in public colleges and universities, and 25 percent of students who score *Proficient* but not *Advanced* need to enroll in a remedial course.

Throughout this section, we refer to measures based on MCAS, our existing state testing system. However, should the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education vote to adopt the PARCC assessments as our new statewide assessment system, we anticipate that we will reset our annual measurable objectives accordingly. The Board’s vote is scheduled for fall 2015. In addition, beginning with the 2010-11 school year our student-level data collection includes course completion and grades. We are also in the process of linking our PK-12 and higher education databases. As these data sets mature, we will be

²⁵ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/0208bhe.pdf>

incorporating indicators of course-taking into our measure of college and career readiness. These will include successful course completion in the first year of high school (ninth grade success), completion of MassCore (the Commonwealth’s college-ready course of study), and success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in college.

The Progress and Performance Index: Measures

The Progress and Performance Index is a four-year, comprehensive indicator of district and school progress towards college and career readiness that incorporates the best measures of readiness available in Massachusetts today. As additional measures become available, and as our state moves to next generation assessments in 2014–15 and beyond, we anticipate updating or expanding this index. For now, it includes four types of indicators: testing participation, student achievement, student growth/improvement, and high school indicators. In 2012 and 2013 we used graduation and dropout rates as our high school indicators. Beginning with 2014 accountability determinations, we propose to also include an indicator that credits high schools that successfully re-engage students who have previously dropped out of school. Beginning with 2015 determinations we propose to provide additional credit to schools and districts serving English language learners (ELLs) who demonstrate strong growth on the ACCESS for ELLs English language proficiency assessment.

ESE will use the PPI to classify schools and districts in levels under the framework for accountability and assistance, while AMOs will serve as transparent reporting measures that inform the public and other stakeholders of the progress schools and districts are making toward college and career readiness for all students. Details are below.

1. Testing participation

Participation on state assessments will remain a primary anchor of the accountability system. As is the case presently under NCLB, all districts, schools, and subgroups will be expected to assess at least 95 percent of their students on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and/or the state English Language Learner (ELL) assessment.²⁶

Any school with less than a 95 participation rate in ELA, mathematics, or science will automatically fail to make its AMO in the aggregate or the subgroup(s) for which the rate falls below 95 percent, and as a result can only be classified in Levels 2 and higher. A school that does not meet its participation AMO may not be classified in Level 1. A school with a participation rate for any student group that is below 90 percent can only be classified in Levels 3 and higher. To meet the participation standard, English language learners in their first year of U.S. schooling must participate in the state ELL assessment and the MCAS for mathematics and science. ELLs in their second year of U.S. schooling and beyond must participate in the English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science MCAS and the state ELL assessment. Exceptions to the ELL assessment requirement will be made only where accommodations for ELLs with disabilities are not available for a particular test.

²⁶ Massachusetts currently assesses English language learners with the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) but plans to adopt the ACCESS assessment associated with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium in 2012–13.

We will apply the same approach at the district level beginning with 2015 accountability reporting. In 2015 any district that – *at the district level* – has a student group with a participation rate below 95 cannot be classified in Level 1 and will only be classified in Level 2 or higher. Any district with a student group that has a participation rate below 90 percent cannot be classified in Level 1 or 2, and will only be classified in Level 3 or higher.

2. Student achievement

ESE will measure student achievement for districts, schools and subgroups with three indicators:

1. Closing proficiency gaps in ELA, mathematics, and science, as measured by the Composite Performance Index
2. Reducing the percentage of students scoring in the *Warning/Failing* category in ELA and mathematics
3. Increasing the percentage of students scoring in the *Advanced* category in ELA and mathematics

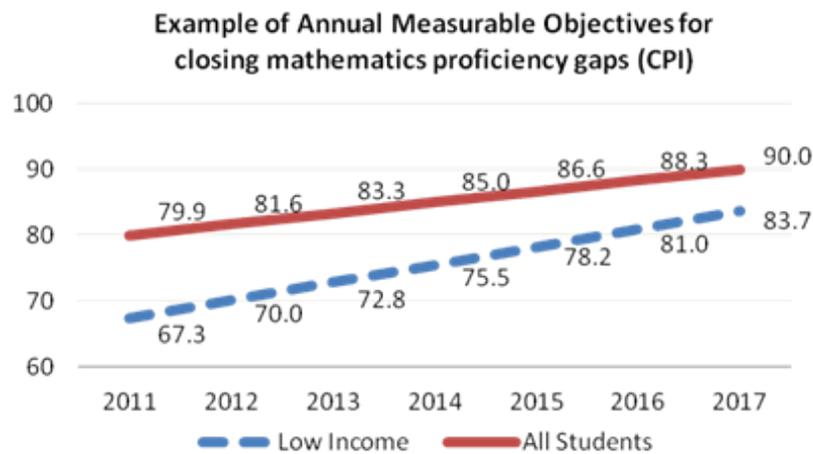
Progress on reaching the statewide goal of **reducing the proficiency gap by half by 2017** will be measured with the Composite Performance Index (CPI), a metric used in Massachusetts since 2004 that rewards continuous improvement toward proficiency. The CPI awards points to each student based on their achievement on the ELA, mathematics, or science assessments; a CPI of 100 indicates that all students are proficient or advanced. The points for all students in the district, school or subgroup are summed together and then divided by the number of students in the group being measured. The result is the CPI for that group and subject. For accountability purposes, ESE combines all tested grades when generating a district, school, or subgroup CPI. The following table provides an example CPI calculation for a group of 20 students.

MCAS Performance Level (Scaled Score Range)	Points Per Student	# of Students	Total Points
Proficient or Advanced (240–280)	100	10	1000
Needs Improvement High (230–238)	75	4	300
Needs Improvement Low (220–228)	50	3	150
Warning/Failing High (210–218)	25	2	50
Warning/Failing Low (200–208)	0	1	0
Totals		20	1500
1500 ÷ 20 = 75.0 CPI			

The proficiency gap, in turn, is defined as the difference between a subgroup’s CPI and a CPI of 100. For instance, if a school has a 2010–11 CPI of 79.9 for the “all students” category in mathematics, its mathematics proficiency gap would be 20.1 CPI points, or 100 minus 79.9.

ESE will set differentiated targets for all districts, schools, and subgroups to close proficiency gaps in ELA, mathematics, and science. The goal for all will be same: to reduce the proficiency gap by half by 2016–17. Targets will be differentiated based on the group’s baseline in the 2010–11 school year, an acknowledgment that every district, school, and subgroup will be starting from a different place and that those furthest behind will have the most progress to make.

For example, the school referenced above with the proficiency gap of 20.1 CPI points for all students will need to reduce that gap to 10 points by 2016–17, so its 2016–17 target will be a CPI of 90. The 10 CPI points the school is required to gain will be divided into six equal increments to establish targets for each of the six school years until 2016–17. Other subgroups within this school would have different CPI baselines and targets to reflect the need for different rates of improvement to reach the 2017 goal. For instance, if low income students in the same school have a CPI of 67.3 in 2011, their target will be 83.7 by 2017, a faster rate of increase than that of all students. The graph below illustrates this example.



ESE will assign credit in the Progress and Proficiency Index based on how close the district, school, or subgroup comes to meeting the annual targets for ELA, mathematics, and science. Full credit will be given to those that meet the target, as well as to schools whose CPI meets the 80th percentile or higher when comparing statewide results for all students (currently the 80th percentile equates to a CPI of approximately 95 for ELA and 91 for mathematics), or the 90th percentile for the group. This allows us to implement a key feature that was requested by our stakeholders: to enable high performing groups to meet the target even with minor drops in performance. This feature guards against penalizing an otherwise high-performing school or district for minor fluctuations that may reflect measurement imprecision rather than a true decline in performance. Partial credit will be awarded to those groups that show improvement in the CPI but fail to meet the target, minimal credit will be awarded to those

showing no change, while groups that decline will receive no credit. To incentivize and recognize very strong progress toward eliminating proficiency gaps, we will award additional credit to schools and groups that exceed their AMO targets or meet the 90th percentile or higher based on statewide results for all students. We expect all schools to not only strive to meet their established goals but to exceed them, and believe that stretching the PPI scale in a way that provides recognition for very positive progress toward eliminating proficiency gaps will create a strong incentive for schools to continue to improve student learning and the quality of instruction for all.

Points Awarded	Achievement Outcome
100	Exceeded AMO target or met CPI of 90 th percentile for all students statewide
75	Met AMO target or met CPI of 90 th percentile for the group or met CPI of 80 th percentile for all students statewide
50	Improved below target
25	No change
0	Decline in CPI

The second achievement indicator will be progress in **decreasing the percentage of students scoring in the *Warning/Failing* category** of the ELA and mathematics MCAS assessments. This indicator holds districts and schools accountable for their lowest performing students and rewards continuous improvement in reducing the percentage of low achievers, ensuring that the focus remain on all students, not just those closest to being proficient. ESE will assign credit in the PPI to those schools that reduce their percentage of students in the *Warning/Failing* achievement categories by 10 percent or more each year. Those that fail to reduce the percentage of students in the *Warning/Failing* categories by 10 percent or greater will not receive credit in the PPI for this indicator.

Points Awarded *	Achievement Outcome
25	Decreased percentage of students in <i>Warning/Failing</i> categories by 10 percent or more
0	Did not decrease percentage of students in <i>Warning/Failing</i> categories by 10 percent or more

* Schools without all PPI indicators (e.g., schools without science results) will be assigned credit for this indicator in proportion to the total number of indicators for the school.

The third achievement indicator is **improvement in the percentage of students scoring *Advanced*** on the ELA and mathematics MCAS assessments, intended to hold districts and schools accountable for and to incentivize continuous improvement beyond proficiency. Fewer than 5% of students who score *Advanced* on the grade 10 MCAS tests require remedial courses in college, so creating an incentive to reach *Advanced* will also foster college and career readiness.

ESE will assign credit for this indicator based on changes in a group’s percentage of students scoring *Advanced* relative to the prior year.

Points Awarded *	Achievement Outcome
25	Increased percentage of students in the <i>Advanced</i> category by 10 percent or more
0	Did not increase percentage of students in the <i>Advanced</i> category by 10 percent or more

* Schools without all PPI indicators (e.g., schools without science results) will be assigned credit for this indicator in proportion to the total number of indicators for the school.

3. Growth/Improvement

Massachusetts views the ability to include student growth and improvement along with achievement in our accountability system as a major benefit to this waiver opportunity.

Since 2008 Massachusetts has annually reported a measure of student growth on the MCAS. Each student with at least two consecutive years of MCAS scores receives a student growth percentile (SGP), which measures how much the student changed relative to other students statewide with similar scores in previous years. Student growth percentiles range from 1 to 99, where higher numbers represent higher growth and lower numbers represent lower growth. SGPs are calculated for both ELA and mathematics in grades 4 through 8 and grade 10, and we aggregate them for groups of students with the group median.

Our impact data clearly demonstrate that high levels of growth place students on track to proficiency and, in turn, college and career readiness. Specifically, our data show that growth at the 60th percentile results in all students being on track to proficiency in ELA and the vast majority of students being on track to proficiency in math. Accordingly, in PPI calculations, ESE will assign full credit to districts, schools, and subgroups that show substantial growth/improvement. With this indicator we aim to incentivize high growth, increasing growth rates from year to year, and reducing the number of non-proficient students in a school. Accordingly, we will assign credit for:

- Exceeding the 2012 median SGP for the state. The statewide median SGP for all students through 2012 was 50, so a student group would receive full credit in the PPI with an SGP of 51 or higher.
- Increasing the group’s median SGP over the previous school year.
- Reducing the percentage of non-proficient students by at least 10 percent (assuming at least 30 students in the group are tested).

Our proposed assignment of credit for growth/improvement is described in the table below.

Points Awarded	Meet SGP Target	Increase SGP	Decrease % Not Proficient
100	Median SGP of 60 or higher	or +15 points	
75	Median SGP between 51-59	or +10–14 points	or ≥10%
50	Median SGP of 41-50	or +1–9 points	
25	Median SGP of 31-40		
0	Median SGP of 1-30		

4. High School Indicators.

For high schools, we include both graduation and dropout rates in the Progress and Performance Index as indicators of success in preparing students to be ready for college and careers. Beginning with 2014 accountability determinations, we also propose to provide credit to high schools that successfully re-engage students who have dropped out of school. Massachusetts is currently exploring additional measures of college and career readiness for use in the PPI and will propose to include other measures as they become available.

High schools will be held accountable for their cohort graduation rate and will be required to meet the state target to receive full credit in the PPI. However, the PPI will also award partial credit for continuous improvement in the four- and five-year graduation rates. The chart below describes points assigned for 2011–12. In 2012–13 and beyond, Massachusetts will increase its four- and five-year graduation rate targets.

Points Awarded	Four-Year Rate	Five-Year Rate
100	≥ 95%	or ≥ 95%
75	≥ 75%	or ≥ 80%
50	Any improvement of 2.5 percentage points or more	or Any improvement of 2.5 percentage points or more
25	No change	or No change
0	Decline of more than 2.5 percentage points from prior year	or Decline of more than 2.5 percentage points from prior year

High schools will also be held accountable for their annual dropout rate. The cohort graduation rate is a cumulative four-year statistic and is difficult to improve in one year. Including the dropout rate provides an opportunity to reward schools that are reducing dropouts, even if the impact has not yet registered in the cohort graduation rate. Districts, schools and subgroups will all be expected to halve their annual dropout rates by 2017, with differentiated targets similar to those described above.

For example, a school with a 2010–11 annual dropout rate of 3.0% in the “all students”

category will have a goal of reducing that percentage to 1.5% by the end of the 2016–17 school year. The 1.5 percentage points will be divided into six equal increments to establish targets for each of the six school years until 2016–17. Similar to the CPI targets, groups would have differentiated targets with the same goal. For example, English language learner students in that same school with a starting dropout rate of 5.0% would have a goal of 2.5% by the 2017 school year.

Credit for the annual dropout rate in the PPI will be awarded as follows:

Points Awarded	Dropout Rate Outcome
100	Met final (2016-17) target or met dropout rate of 90 th percentile for all students statewide
75	Met annual target or met dropout rate of 90 th percentile for the group or 80 th percentile for all students statewide
50	Improved below target
25	No change
0	Increase in annual dropout rate

Some of the most challenging work that high schools do involves identifying, reaching out to, and successfully re-enrolling and graduating students who have previously dropped out of school. In 2012 and 2013, the PPI did not reflect school success in this area. Beginning with 2014 accountability determinations, we will assign credit in the PPI to high schools that successfully re-engage students who have previously dropped out of school.

A re-engaged student, for this metric, is defined as a previous dropout that re-enrolls in school for two consecutive Student Information Management System (SIMS) collection periods, graduates, or obtains a certificate of high school completion. The indicator only includes students who were officially reported as dropouts in previous data collection periods. As a reflection of both the state’s declining dropout rate (2.2 percent in 2013) and the challenging nature of successfully re-engaging dropouts, the total number of students statewide who are counted in this measure is small. In 2012, a total of 437 students in 142 schools (approximately 36 percent of all high schools) were counted as having been re-engaged. At the individual school-level, the median number of re-engaged students in the 142 schools that re-engaged dropouts was one.

Credit for re-engaging dropouts in the PPI will be awarded to high schools as follows:

Points Awarded *	Outcome
25	2 or more re-engaged dropouts
0	Less than 2 re-engaged dropouts

* Re-engaged students are credited to the school that re-enrolls/graduates them, regardless of which schools the students originally dropped out from.

Beginning with 2015 accountability determinations, we propose to award additional credit in the PPI to schools and districts serving English language learners (ELLs) who demonstrate strong growth on the ACCESS for ELLs English language proficiency assessment. To date, our school and district accountability system has only incorporated results from ACCESS tests into accountability metrics used for districts receiving federal Title III funds (specifically, through Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objective reports), and has not used results from an English language proficiency assessment in our PPI calculations or Level determinations.

With several years of ACCESS results available, we are now able to calculate student growth percentiles based on ACCESS (SGPAs) using the same methodology we use for student growth percentile (SGP) calculations based on our regular statewide assessments. Median SGPAs provide a clear signal regarding the rate at which the English language learners in a particular school or district are increasing their English language proficiency, with SGPAs of 60 or higher on the 100-point SGPA scale representing particularly strong gains as compared to other English language learners who have similar ACCESS score histories. Including the SGPA in PPI calculations is a means of signaling the critical nature of increased English language proficiency for English language learners and recognizing the hard work that educators in our schools and districts are doing to help their English language learners rapidly acquire proficiency in English.

Specifically, we will assign additional credit in the PPI to schools and districts whose English language learner subgroup demonstrates strong growth on the ACCESS for ELLs assessment, as follows:

Points Awarded *	ACCESS for ELLs Outcome
25	Median SGPA of 60 or higher for ELL students
0	Median SGPA lower than 60 for ELL students

* Points will be awarded to the ELL subgroup, the high needs subgroup, and the aggregate group. ELL subgroup must meet minimum group size requirements to receive credit.

In 2014, just over 200 Massachusetts schools had an ELL subgroup that met the minimum group size of 30 and was eligible to receive a student growth percentile based on ACCESS for ELLs results. Approximately 20 percent of those schools, the majority of which are located in

urban school districts, had an SGPA of 60 or higher and would be eligible for the additional PPI credit. In future years, we will explore the possibility of incorporating results from our statewide English proficiency assessments more broadly into our school & district accountability system.

In the future, we anticipate seeking additional flexibility for certain recently-arrived ELL students who score in the lowest levels of English proficiency on the ACCESS for ELLs assessment.

Calculating the Progress and Performance Index

The PPI combines all of the indicators described above into a weighted index that uses four years of data. After accounting for the participation requirement, the PPI consists of ten indicators for elementary and middle schools and thirteen indicators for high schools in each year, as follows:

Category	Indicators
Participation	ELA, mathematics, science
Achievement	
• Reduce proficiency gaps	ELA, mathematics, science
• Increase % <i>Advanced</i>	ELA, mathematics
• Decrease % <i>Warning/Failing</i>	ELA, mathematics
Growth	
• Meet growth objective	ELA, mathematics
• Demonstrate high growth in English language proficiency for English language learners	--
Additional indicators for high schools	Cohort graduation rate, annual dropout rate, re-engagement count

Each year, each district, school, and subgroup²⁷ will be given full or partial credit, as described above, on each of these indicators. These scores will be combined together for an overall rating for each year. Next, we will combine four years of ratings into a weighted index, with the most recent year's data carrying the greatest weight, as follows:

- Most recent year: 40%
- One year prior: 30%
- Two years prior: 20%
- Three years prior: 10%

PPI results will be reported on a 100-point index for each district, school, and subgroup, as

²⁷ Due to the small number of re-engaged dropouts statewide, credit for this indicator will only be assigned at the “all students” level and for the high needs subgroup for a school.

well as the state as a whole. A district, school, or group will be considered to have met its AMO if it achieves a PPI of 75 or higher.

Classifying schools and districts

A primary goal of this proposal is to unify our federal and state accountability systems. Too often today our districts and schools are confused by how the two systems interact and are left unsure of how their accountability designations were determined. We believe that the PPI will solve this problem. The same data indicators across the same number of years will be used both to report federal determinations for districts and schools and to classify them within our state accountability system. A unified system of accountability will help schools understand their data and how it relates to their classification and will help ESE target its resources and interventions effectively to the schools and districts in most need.

We propose to classify schools and districts as follows.

Level	Description
Level 1	Meeting gap narrowing goals
Level 2	Not meeting gap narrowing goals
Level 3	Focus: Lowest performing 20% of schools (including schools with the largest gaps)
Level 4	Priority: Lowest performing schools
Level 5	Priority: Chronically underperforming schools

We will also use four years of data to identify and recognize high achieving and/or greatly improving schools. These will be considered our state’s Commendation, or Reward, schools. Only schools in Level 1 may be classified as Commendation schools.

Schools will be assigned into Levels 1 and 2 based on their PPI for two groups: all students and high needs students. The high needs subgroup includes students falling into one or more of the following subgroups: student with disabilities, English language learners, former English language learners, and low income students. Many of our schools and subgroups did not meet our prior minimum N threshold of 40 students for issuing accountability determinations. By measuring progress and performance for the high needs student subgroup rather than considering each student demographic group individually, we were able to hold nearly 200 more schools accountable for subgroup proficiency gaps along with overall performance. Beginning with accountability determinations issued in summer 2012, we lowered our minimum N threshold for subgroups from 40 to 30 students to better ensure a continuous focus on the achievement of all students, particularly those from traditionally low achieving demographic groups. In doing so, we held more than 100 additional schools accountable for students who are English learners, have disabilities, or come from low income families. All told, by using the high needs subgroup for accountability purposes and reducing our subgroup N size, more than 300 schools that previously did not have sufficient numbers of students with disabilities, English learners, or low income students to render individual subgroup accountability determinations will now be held accountable for the

performance and progress of those students.

Using the high needs subgroup for classification into Levels 1 and 2 holds many more schools accountable for traditionally under-served students and addresses a frequent stakeholder criticism of the AYP system in that it eliminates multiple-counting of individual students who may be classified in multiple subgroups. At the same time, this approach retains a focus on all students, including racial and ethnic minorities. In 2010-11 the high needs group included 82% of African-American/Black students and 88% of Hispanic students statewide. At the school level, approximately 20 percent of African-American/Black and Hispanic students attend schools that fail to meet the minimum N size of 30 for their racial/ethnic group. When we use the high needs group and the same N size, however, only 15 percent of African-American/Black and Hispanic students are not included in individual subgroup determinations. In other words, using the high needs subgroup allows us to hold more schools accountable for African-American/Black and Hispanic students than using the traditional racial/ethnic subgroups alone.

- Stakeholders expressed strong support for the use of the high needs subgroup and in general perceived it as a fairer means of classifying schools and districts. We believe in the benefits of this approach; however we understand the need to implement certain safeguards to ensure that districts and schools attend carefully to the performance of individual subgroups and take action accordingly. We will issue AMO/PPI determinations for all groups with 30 or more students, and will publicly report on the performance and progress of all groups with 20 or more students. Each district will be required to publish annual report cards and make the report card available via its web site.
- We will use AMO/PPI determinations for all student groups to direct supports and interventions in districts with schools in Levels 2 through 5. See sections 2.D, 2.E, and 2.F for details.
- We plan to bolster our current improvement planning requirements for all districts, regardless of accountability and assistance level, related to the districts' special education, English learner, and low income students.
- We will classify a school in Level 3 based on the persistent low performance of any student group.

As demonstrated above, our approach to classifying schools into Level 1 ensures a focus on historically disadvantaged and underserved populations: all students from low income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners are included in the high needs group, and the high needs group also includes more than 80 percent of African-American/Black students and nearly 90 percent of Hispanic/Latino students statewide. Our approach also prevents any school that is not on track to reducing proficiency gaps for its high needs students from receiving the highest rating in our school and district accountability system. Our analyses indicate that across all Level 1 schools proficiency gaps (as measured against targets) and achievement gaps (between subgroups) have decreased between 2011 and 2014. The pattern is similar for graduation rate gaps. Sample data are below.

Level 1 School Mean Proficiency Gap Change, 2011 to 2014

Group	ELA CPI				Math CPI			
	N	2011	2014	Change	N	2011	2014	Change
Black	44	15.5	11.7	-3.8	44	23.7	19.0	-4.7
Hispanic	81	21.4	16.5	-4.9	81	25.5	19.4	-6.1
SWD	189	23.6	20.1	-3.5	189	31.2	27.4	-3.8
ELL	49	30.8	25.1	-5.7	49	29.9	22.3	-7.6
Low Income	216	18.1	13.9	-4.2	216	23.3	17.7	-5.6
High Needs	344	18.0	13.8	-4.2	344	23.0	17.4	-5.6

Level 1 School Mean Achievement Gap Change, 2011 to 2014**English language arts Composite Performance Index (CPI)**

Groups	2011	2014
Black-White	6.2	4.8
Hispanic-White	8.2	6.5
SWD-All	14.2	12.5
LEP-All	9.3	7.8
Low Income-All	4.8	3.4
High Needs-All	7.5	5.6

Level 1 High School Mean 5-Year Graduation Rate Gap Change, 2011 to 2014*

Groups	2011	2014
SWD-All	5.9	4.6
Low Income-All	5.7	3.9
High Needs-All	5.9	4.5

* Minimum number of schools for reporting mean gaps: 15

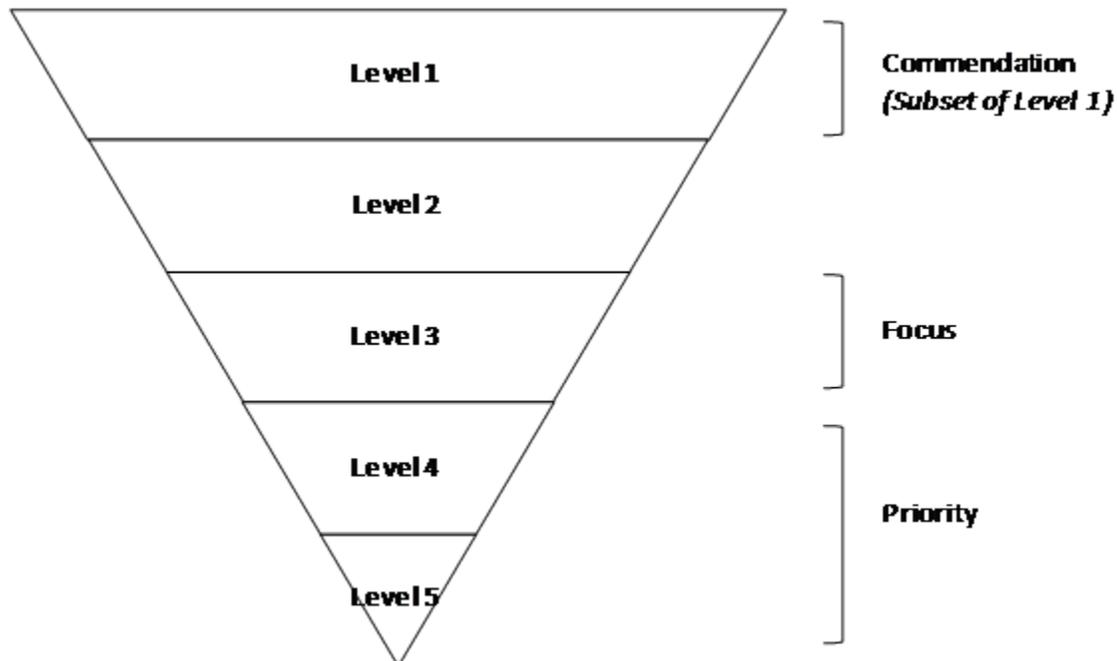
We are committed to carefully monitoring and adjusting our approach to issuing annual accountability determinations for Massachusetts schools and districts. If our planned approach fails to result in improved achievement for all students, we will make the necessary adjustments.

To enhance our focus on high needs students, for accountability determinations based on results from spring 2015 we plan to reduce our minimum group size from 30 to 25 students. In 2015, this change will only apply to subgroups in schools and districts that were large enough to receive accountability determinations in 2014 (groups of 30 or more students). For 2016 accountability determinations, we plan to further reduce our minimum group size from 25 to 20 students. Approximately 150 schools with accountability determinations had high needs student populations that in 2014 fell below the minimum group size of 30, and thus accountability determinations for those schools were made solely using results for students in the aggregate. Based on 2014 data, reducing the minimum subgroup size to 20 students will allow us to hold approximately 70 additional schools accountable for their high needs students. Accordingly, by 2016 we anticipate that through this change we will be able to hold approximately 95 percent of all schools with accountability determinations accountable for

their high needs students. Lowering our minimum subgroup size to 20 will also reduce complexity in our accountability system by a degree; our minimum group size for students in the aggregate (not subgroups) is, and will remain, 20.

As described in more detail in sections 2.D.i and 2.E.i, PPI indicators for all students are the primary consideration in identifying schools for placement in Levels 4 and 5. As described in section 2.E., schools may be classified in Level 3 based on the persistent low performance of all students, the high needs group, or any individual student subgroup. As in section 2.F., schools are classified into Levels 1 and 2 based on the PPIs for both all students and the high needs subgroup.

Below is a graphical summary of our proposed accountability levels and how they relate to the required designations of Reward, Focus, and Priority schools.



Although Massachusetts schools participated in a field test of the new PARCC assessments in 2013-14, we were able to render new accountability determinations for nearly all schools, and field test participation did not hinder our ability to issue PPI/AMO determinations and classify schools and districts into Levels in summer 2014. For any school or single-school district that had insufficient MCAS data as a result of field test participation, we held constant the school's level from 2013 to 2014.

For accountability determinations based on results from 2014-15, when school districts may choose to administer either MCAS or PARCC in their schools as part of Massachusetts' two-year "test drive" of the PARCC assessments, we will use a statistical approach known as equipercentile linking to link 2015 MCAS and PARCC results. We will also calculate comparable student growth percentiles (SGPs) for schools that administer MCAS and schools

that administer PARCC. As a result, we will be able to calculate 2015 PPIs and accountability and assistance levels for all schools regardless of the test they administered. The accountability level for any school that administers PARCC can only improve or remain the same as its 2014 level. It cannot decline. This “hold harmless” approach to the level does not apply to schools that administer MCAS in 2015; such schools will receive a new level as usual.

Beginning in 2015, we have requested a waiver of the requirements in ESEA sections 1111(b)(1)(B) and 1111(b)(3)(C)(i) that require states to apply the same academic content and academic achievement standards to all public schools and public school children in the State and to administer the same academic assessments to measure the achievement of all students. We are requesting this flexibility to avoid double-testing students who are not yet enrolled in high school but who take advanced, high school level, mathematics coursework. All districts in the Commonwealth have the option of providing high school-level mathematics courses to students attending middle school. In 2015, approximately 3,000 students enrolled in grade 8 have registered to participate in the PARCC Algebra I assessment, and we anticipate that number to increase in future years. Any student benefiting by this waiver will take additional advanced high school math coursework after entering high school, and will be assessed accordingly with a statewide high school mathematics assessment that is aligned with the coursework and differs from the middle school assessment the student took.

2015 accountability determinations for any middle school enrolling a student who benefits from this waiver will incorporate results from the advanced mathematics assessments. Moving forward, accountability determinations for any high school enrolling a student who benefits from this waiver will incorporate results from the additional advanced mathematics assessment that is administered.

2.C REWARD SCHOOLS

2.C.i Describe the SEA’s methodology for identifying highest-performing and high-progress schools as reward schools.

ESE agrees that schools that make great progress deserve to be recognized and plans to meet the federal requirement for Reward Schools by adapting its existing Commendation School identification process. Schools will be identified as Commendation Schools if they demonstrate high achievement, make strong progress, or narrow proficiency gaps. Commendation Schools will be determined by identifying the strongest performers over four years on various elements of the Progress and Performance Index (PPI) described in section 2.B. and will be commended in every category in which they meet the qualifying criteria. Schools that do not meet their cumulative PPI targets for all student subgroups may not be designated as Commendation Schools. Based on preliminary simulations, ESE expects approximately 5 to 10 percent of all schools to annually meet the criteria for designation as Commendation Schools. Districts will not receive Commendation designations.

Commendation for High Achievement

High achieving schools are those with the highest relative performance for both the aggregate and high needs groups across the PPI achievement indicators (i.e., CPI proficiency gaps, percent *Warning/Failing*, percent *Advanced*, annual dropout rate, and four-year and five-year cohort graduation rates). To be eligible, a school must meet the following conditions:

- Be classified in Level 1;
- Have a school percentile of 90 or higher in the most recent year;
- Meet the cumulative PPI target of 75 in the most recent year for all student groups;
- Assess 20 or more students in the aggregate in each of the most recent four years and assess 30 or more high needs students in each of the most recent four years;
- Rank within the top 10% of schools with similar grade spans overall and on the PPI achievement indicators for both the aggregate and the high needs groups;
- Achieve an aggregate five-year cohort graduation rate of 94% or higher;²⁸ and
- Demonstrate improvement on the CPI for all subgroups in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the most recent four school years.

Commendation for High Progress

High progress schools are those with the highest relative performance on the PPI growth/improvement indicators (median student growth percentile and changes in CPI) in both English language arts and mathematics for students in the aggregate. To be eligible, a school must meet the following conditions:

- Be classified in Level 1;
- Meet the cumulative PPI target of 75 in the most recent year for all student groups;
- Assess 20 or more students in the aggregate in each of the most recent four years;
- Rank within the top 10% of schools with similar grade spans on the PPI improvement indicators for students in the aggregate;
- Demonstrate improvement in the five-year cohort graduation rate for students in the aggregate over the most recent four school years, or achieve an aggregate five-year cohort graduation rate of 94% or higher for three consecutive years;
- Demonstrate improvement on the CPI for all subgroups in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the most recent four school years.

Commendation for Narrowing Proficiency Gaps

Schools commended for narrowing proficiency gaps are those that are most successful in narrowing proficiency gaps between the school's high needs subgroup and the state's all students group. To be eligible, a school must meet the following conditions:

- Be classified in Level 1;
- Meet the cumulative PPI target of 75 in the most recent year for all student groups;
- Have been in existence for four full years;

²⁸ This is approximately equivalent to the 75th percentile of five-year graduation rates for the 2011 cohort.

- Have a substantial percentage of its tested students in the high needs subgroup (percentages will vary by school type);
- Rank in the top 25 percent of all schools in the state for both ELA and mathematics – measured separately and by school type –based on its progress in narrowing achievement gaps between the school’s high needs subgroup and the state’s all students group over the past four years, as measured by the CPI;
- Have a change in performance of all tested students in the school over the past four years that is not less than the change in performance of all tested students in the state in both ELA and mathematics, as measured by the CPI;
- Have each subgroup in the most recent year rank in the top 40 percent of performance statewide for that subgroup in both ELA and mathematics by school type (elementary, elementary-middle, middle, middle-high, high school);
- For high schools, have four-year and five-year cohort graduation rates for each subgroup over the past four years that are in the top 40 percent of all high school graduation rates for that subgroup in the state.

Our approach to linking 2015 MCAS and PARCC assessments, described in Section 2.B above, will provide us the ability to identify new Commendation Schools in 2015.

2.C.ii Provide the SEA’s list of reward schools in Table 2.

2.C.iii Describe how the SEA will publicly recognize and, if possible, reward highest-performing and high-progress schools.

Schools that make great progress and have success in closing proficiency gaps deserve to be celebrated and recognized for their achievements and can serve as useful mentors for schools that continue to struggle. We plan to designate an elite group of schools (approximately 5 to 10 percent of all schools, based on current simulations) that make substantial gains as Commendation Schools and recognize them annually both through an annual press release and by awarding each school with a certificate for display within the school. Once named, these schools will have the opportunity to engage in regional activities and meaningful partnerships with our Level 3, 4, and 5 (Priority and Focus) schools.

Both the state’s District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) and assistance liaisons from our Office of District and School Turnaround, two major components of our statewide system of support, regularly convene school and district leaders in study groups to discuss key issues such as the characteristics and implementation of interventions that show great promise. Our stakeholders have voiced a clear desire for more systematic way to share best practices, and under this flexibility, our Commendation Schools could serve as valuable demonstration sites. Depending on the availability of funding, these schools may be eligible for a limited number of “promising practice” grants to encourage their leadership teams to participate in communities of professional practice with their peers from schools with similar demographic and performance profiles within the DSAC regions and Commissioner’s districts, particularly schools in Levels 3, 4, and 5 of our state’s district framework for accountability and

assistance. This will help connect our lower performing schools with relevant and proven models for improving results.

We anticipate that educators from the state’s Commendation Schools will welcome the opportunity to share their lessons learned with leadership teams from other schools and will appreciate the recognition their schools will receive as a result of this new designation.

The partnerships between Commendation Schools and Level 3, 4, and 5 schools will be just one facet of a larger system of networking and partnership activities already in place in Massachusetts that we anticipate enhancing through this waiver. For details, please see the description of our process for building state, district, and school capacity in Section 2.G.

2.D PRIORITY SCHOOLS

2.D.i Describe the SEA’s methodology for identifying a number of lowest-performing schools equal to at least five percent of the State’s Title I schools as priority schools.

Massachusetts currently has a strong system for identifying and intervening in our lowest performing schools and districts. The waiver will enable us to integrate our state system with federal accountability requirements and, in turn, expand the supports available to those schools.

In our current state accountability system, we designate the lowest performing 20% of schools in the state as Level 3. Under state law we may designate up to 4% of those as Level 4 schools: the lowest performing, slowest improving schools statewide. Both Level 3 and Level 4 schools are currently identified with the same indicators we propose to include in the Progress and Performance Index (PPI), using a slightly different methodology. Both designations are made using four years of data. Through this process we have already identified 35 schools as Level 4 schools, 34 of which remain open as of fall 2011 (see Attachment 9). On November 15, 2011, the Commissioner named an additional six Level 4 schools. We propose to classify all 40 of these schools as Priority schools for the purposes of this waiver. These are all schools that were identified as being among the lowest 4% of all schools in the state based on performance of all students in terms of proficiency on Massachusetts’ statewide assessments, having an aggregate graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years, and/or a Tier I or Tier II school under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program that is using SIG funds to implement a school intervention model.

As new assessment data becomes available, we will identify additional Level 4/Priority schools using the methodology described above to meet the requirement that Priority schools equal 5% of the state’s Title I schools. We will continue to identify Level 4/Priority schools from among the lowest performing 20% of schools. However, we will adjust the current methodology for identifying Level 3 schools to ensure that this group includes the

schools with the largest achievement gaps, as Level 3 will now be used for identification and classification of our Focus schools. The methodology for identifying Focus schools is described in section 2.E.iii.

Under state law, Level 5 is the most serious category in Massachusetts' accountability system, representing receivership. Districts are independently eligible for placement in Level 5 on the basis of a district review, the report of an appointed accountability monitor, a follow-up review report, quantitative indicators set out in state regulations, or failure of a Level 4 district to meet the ESE-approved benchmarks or goals in its improvement plan in a timely manner. As of April 2015, Massachusetts has two Level 5 districts and four Level 5 schools. In our context, Priority schools include any school in Level 5 and may include the lowest performing schools in Level 5 districts.

The Commissioner will have discretion to classify a school as Level 4/Priority based on a number of factors, including resource availability and other information collected beyond the PPI.

2014 update: In fall 2013 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education classified four Level 4/Priority schools into Level 5 for chronic underperformance. These, Massachusetts' first Level 5 schools, are now under state control. Like Level 4 schools, Level 5 schools are considered Priority schools.

State law requires that the total number of Priority schools not exceed 4% of all schools statewide. This limit is larger than the minimum number of schools we will need to designate to meet the federal waiver requirement for Priority schools, so we anticipate no difficulty in integrating the two systems.

2015 update: Although Massachusetts schools participated in a field test of the new PARCC assessments in 2013-14, we were able to render new accountability determinations for nearly all schools, and field test participation did not hinder our ability to identify new Level 4/Priority schools. The Commissioner identified six new Level 4/Priority schools in September 2014. Additional Level 4/Priority schools, if any, will be identified following the release of 2015 assessment and accountability results in fall 2015.

No existing Level 4/Priority schools participated fully in PARCC field testing in spring 2014. Accordingly, the field test did not impact our ability to render exit decisions for existing Level 4/Priority schools. Similarly, our approach to linking 2015 MCAS and PARCC assessments, described in Section 2.B above, will provide us the ability to render exit decisions as appropriate for Level 4/Priority schools in summer 2015.

2.D.ii Provide the SEA's list of priority schools in Table 2.

2.D.iii Describe the meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles that an LEA with priority schools will implement.

Overview

As described in Section 2.D.i., our lowest-performing schools are classified as Level 4 or Level 5 in our district framework for accountability and assistance. For the purpose of this flexibility, these will be our Priority schools.

Since the 2010 enactment of the Commonwealth’s Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, state law and regulation require that once a school is placed in Level 4, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) must notify the district’s school committee, superintendent, local teachers’ union or association president, and the school’s principal and parent organization. This begins a purposefully detailed, inclusive process designed to involve the community in the turnaround of the Level 4 school, resulting in a redesign plan approved by the commissioner. State law (M.G.L. Chapter 69, Section 1J) requires that the redesign plan be designed only after soliciting the recommendations of a local stakeholder group, convened by the superintendent, that includes representatives from the district’s school committee, the school’s administration and faculty, local social service, health and child welfare agencies, local workforce development agencies, parents, community members, ESE, and other stakeholders. The federal requirements for school improvement grant funding, both generally and for each intervention model, are integrated within the redesign plan. The superintendent must submit the redesign plan to the local stakeholder group, local school committee, and lastly to the commissioner for approval.

Beyond contributing to approval of the plan, the state assigns assistance liaisons and accountability monitors, defines exit criteria, including measurable annual goals tailored to each school and based on empirical data, assesses fidelity to the federal turnaround principles as well as district capacity to implement one of four federally-required implementation models, and provides targeted assistance via partner providers, tools, templates, and other resources.

Redesign Plans

Our system requires districts with Level 4 schools to develop a redesign plan to rapidly implement interventions aligned to each of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and to turnaround practices that have been identified as effective²⁹. These conditions identify research-based interventions that all schools, especially those that are most struggling, need to implement to effectively meet the learning needs of every student in every student subgroup. Our *District Standards and Indicators* identify the characteristics of effective districts in supporting and sustaining these conditions in their schools.

We provide our Level 4 schools and districts with a redesign plan template that meets the statutory requirements for a “turnaround plan” under state law, and also serves as the foundation for any district application for federal School Improvement grant (Section 1003(g))

²⁹ The Turnaround Practices Report highlights practices and strategies observed in schools that have shown significant and rapid gains in student achievement, and can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround>.

funding. The redesign plan takes the place of any other school improvement plan and is a multi-part instrument that, for a three-year period:

- Addresses district-level capacity to support its Level 4 schools;
- Provides a blueprint for intervention at each identified school;
- Sets measurable annual goals which serve as the standard for exiting Level 4 status. (Complete details are contained in the redesign plan template, included as Attachment 12.)

Within the redesign plan, districts are required to identify any district-level issues that will be addressed. Prior to identifying interventions in Level 4 schools, they must demonstrate that they have the capacity to plan for, implement, and monitor school-level redesign efforts, including the effective allocation of resources (people, time, materials, and fiscal, including all ESEA funds).

In addition, the district must:

1. Clearly describe what their approach will be to result in rapid, systemic change in its Level 4 schools within three years. This must include a theory of action guiding their strategies and school-level interventions;
2. Provide a description of the district's redesign and planning process, including descriptions of teams, working groups, and stakeholder groups involved in the planning process, especially the process used by district-and school-level redesign teams to identify the interventions selected for each Level 4 school;
3. Describe how the district will recruit, screen, and select any external providers to provide the expertise, support, and assistance to the district or to schools;
4. Describe the district's systems and processes for ongoing planning, supporting, and monitoring the implementation of planned redesign efforts, including the teaming structures or other processes, such as the use of liaisons, coaches, or networks, that will be used to support and monitor implementation of school-level redesign efforts;
5. Describe which district policies and practices currently exist that may promote or serve as barriers to the implementation of the proposed plans and the actions they have taken or will take to modify policies and practices to enable schools to implement the interventions fully and effectively;
6. Describe how the district will ensure that the identified school(s) receive ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the state, district or designated external partner organizations;
7. Describe how the district will monitor the implementation of the selected intervention at each identified school and how the district will know that planned interventions and strategies are working,

Examples of Meaningful Interventions

In addition to identifying systems, processes, and issues at the district level, the plans must also describe how the school will implement interventions aligned to the Conditions for School Effectiveness as a blueprint for school-level redesign efforts. A description of each condition

and examples of meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles that districts with Priority schools could implement is below.

Condition for School Effectiveness	Examples of Interventions	Turnaround Principles Addressed
Effective School Leadership	The district has a pipeline for identifying, recruiting, selecting, and supporting school leaders who are likely to be successful in accelerating student achievement and supporting adult learning in the Level 4 school. ³⁰ The intervention includes quantitative and qualitative tools that create a profile of the effective leader and places the individual within a continuum on an individualized professional learning plan that matches support to the principal's strengths and needs. The principal receives a signing bonus to work in a Level 4 school and has further opportunities for financial rewards based on the school meeting specific academic achievement targets. ³¹	Provide strong leadership
Principal's Staffing Authority	Base the district and Level 4 school's recruitment, selection, incentives, and induction efforts on rigorous turnaround competencies that aggregate best practices and research about effective teaching and turnaround schools from leading teacher recruitment organizations (e.g., Teach for America, The New Teacher Project, the Boston Teacher Residency Program) and that serve as key leading indicators of the teacher's likely effectiveness in improving student achievement outcomes. ³²	Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction; Strengthen the school's instructional program
Professional Development and Structures for Collaboration	Redesign the school day to facilitate school-based learning communities for teachers in Level 4 schools to create opportunities for peer-led support and accountability. This intervention provides space and place for differentiated paths and plans for teacher growth and improvement depending on their career stage and performance, as well as their rating of practice and impact on student learning based on multiple measures. The intervention may also include instructional coaches who work with teachers to	Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction; Redesign the school day, week, or year; Strengthen the school's

³⁰ Examples of how we prepare district and school leaders to effectively lead their systems, are posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edleadership/nisl/>.

³¹ Details about the state's vision for creating a cohesive school leadership system are posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edleadership/mcls/>.

³² Details on the staffing authority intervention are posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/framework/level4/SelectingTeachers.pdf>

	strengthen their skills in areas such as lesson planning, student data analysis, and in-class pedagogy. (For a more detailed description of this particular intervention, please refer to Section 2.E.iii.) ³³ The intervention would be coupled with a schedule for conducting regular learning walkthroughs to place the instruction observed on a continuum of practice that encourages collaborative conversations among participants about the nature of teaching and learning, which can lead to decisions and actions that are deeply rooted in the classroom experience. ³⁴	instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement
Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time	Implement a tiered system of support focused on system-level change in classrooms, the entire Level 4 school, or across a network of Title I school to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, and students who are academically advanced. (For a more detailed description of this intervention, please refer to Section 2.E.iii.)	Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction; Redesign the school day, week, or year; Strengthen the school's instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement
Students' Social, Emotional, and Health Needs	Provide school-based services to address the social, emotional, and health needs of the students in the Level 4 school. The school and parents jointly address the developmental needs of students early in their education; school teams including school nurses, counselors and teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss and address the challenges of individual students; students receive routine and preventative care. As a consequence, the proportion of at-risk students will decline as they progress through school, and inequalities in literacy, numeracy, and other measures of educational attainment would be sharply reduced. (For a more detailed description of	Strengthen the school's instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement; Establish a school environment that improves school safety and discipline and

³³ The state's Common Planning Time Self-Assessment is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ucd/CPTtoolkit.doc>.

³⁴ The state's Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ucd/walk/ImplementationGuide.pdf>.

	this intervention, please refer to Section 2.E.iii.)	addressing other non-academic factors that impact student achievement; Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement
Family-School Relationships	Establish a coordinated early childhood education program that provides young children who are likely to belong to the focus group in a Level 4 school with the early learning experiences they will need to succeed in elementary school. The intervention may also employ an intergenerational component that helps parents provide a home environment that supports children's learning needs, provides opportunities for them to monitor the progress of their child and communicate with school personnel, and provides assistance to parents to tutor their children at home to reinforce work done in school. (For a more detailed description of this intervention, please refer to Section 2.E.iii.)	Establish a school environment that improves school safety and discipline and addressing other non-academic factors that impact student achievement; Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement
Strategic Uses of Resources and Adequate Budget Authority	Use of our District Analysis and Review Tools (DARTs) to analyze more than 40 quantitative indicators to gauge the overall health of the district and school, especially as compared to like districts and schools that are getting better results over time, to self-evaluate and make sound, strategic decisions in the allocation of resources and in specific areas such as staffing and finance and in serving English language learners. ³⁵ We are also developing a similar tool for examining school and district strengths and needs with respect to its students with disabilities. ³⁶	Provide strong leadership; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement
Aligned Curriculum	Implement a six-stage process for developing professional learning communities in the school that define the roles and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders at each stage. The six stages are: 1) launching the work of the instructional team to reduce teacher isolation by	Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction; Redesign the

³⁵ The DART tool is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>

³⁶ The District Data Team Toolkit is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/lg.html>.

	<p>increasing professional collaboration around the instructional core, establishing a vision and purpose, and handling logistics and setting norms; 2) analyze data and set instructional and performance targets at each level (school, grade/course, classroom, and for individual students); 3) prioritize students' skill, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving needs, and develop a plan to address each student's individual needs; 4) build and share standards-based lessons and monitor progress; and 6) celebrate success and review progress by reflecting on the work of the instructional team and archiving and disseminating effective lessons.³⁷</p>	<p>school day, week, or year; Strengthen the school's instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement</p>
Effective Instruction	<p>Within a tiered system of support, the district and Level 4 school has a model for English language learner instruction that conceptualizes academic language, effectively addresses the core components of English language acquisition, incorporates academic language in instructional practice, and focuses on mastery that will support these students' successful preparation for college and career. Classroom routines, content and language expectations will be coordinated at each language proficiency level and during transition from one level of language acquisition to the next. Embedded professional development is designed to match the professional and learning needs of staff and to build upon English learner teaching strategies across all content areas. The model includes an English learner coach who works side by side with mathematics and literacy coaches in the Level 4 school, as well as other specialists. The coach follows a schedule that allows for collaboration with other coaches by following an established coaching cycle, as well as "on demand" coaching. The coach identifies language needs, develops and supports sheltering strategies for all English learners in the Level 4 school, and monitors language development.³⁸</p>	<p>Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction; Redesign the school day, week, or year; Strengthen the school's instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement</p>
Student Assessment	<p>Within a tiered system of support, the district and school has a balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments. The system is guided by is</p>	<p>Ensuring that teachers are effective and able</p>

³⁷ Professional Learning Community guidance is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/lg.html>

³⁸ Details on our blueprint for tiered systems of support is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/>.

	<p>guided by: 1) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expressions, and multiple means of engagement), 2) valid research, 3) the analysis of MCAS results and other assessments, and 4) input from professional staff. One such intervention may include the Galileo Instructional Data System. This assessment and data analysis system enhances the ability of teachers, school and district leaders, parents, and students to identify trends in student learning, improve classroom instruction, and ultimately raise student academic achievement. Districts design benchmark (interim) assessments and then use the technology for administration, analysis, and reporting. These assessments provide data to inform instruction, support programmatic decision-making, encourage collaborative inquiry, and enable systematic student interventions in Level 4 schools.³⁹</p>	<p>to improve instruction; Redesign the school day, week, or year; Strengthen the school’s instructional program; Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement</p>
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Because our Level 4/Priority schools are required to address all of these conditions at once in their redesign plans, we have seen many of these schools rapidly transform into high functioning learning environments for students. This occurs through the redesign of school and district systems and supports including school leadership, instruction, and family/community partnerships. It also involves a rapid diagnosis of student needs, instruction tailored to the needs of each student, and a culture of high expectations for all students, parents, and families.

2.D.iv Provide the timeline the SEA will use to ensure that its LEAs that have one or more priority schools implement meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles in each priority school no later than the 2014–2015 school year and provide a justification for the SEA’s choice of timeline.

Massachusetts has already begun to implement meaningful interventions in its existing Level 4/Priority schools. In January 2010, the state legislature passed *An Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which codified through law and regulation the identification of the state’s lowest performing schools as Levels 4 and Level 5. Massachusetts identified 35 Level 4/Priority schools in spring 2010. As of November 2011, 34 of those schools remain open and are in the process of implementing redesign plans. Results from the 2011 MCAS show that two-thirds of our Level 4/Priority schools showed substantial improvement in student achievement in both English language arts and mathematics, so we are confident that our turnaround strategies hold great promise in rapidly improving student results.

³⁹ Details on best practices in using the Galileo Instructional Data System is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/galileo/0509teleconf.pps>

Our Commissioner identified an additional 6 Level 4/Priority schools on November 15, 2011. We will identify additional Level 4/Priority schools based on assessment results from spring 2012 and beyond. We are committed to ensuring that the turnaround principles are implemented in each Level 4/Priority School by the start of the 2014–15 school year.

As of September 2013, our Commissioner had identified a total of 47 Level 4/Priority schools, one more school than we were required to identify under our original ESEA flexibility request. Forty of these schools implemented meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles prior to or by the start of the 2013-14 school year. The remaining 7 schools began implementing such interventions by the start of the 2014-15 school year.

In September 2013 the Commissioner identified 7 new Level 4/Priority schools, and in September 2014 identified an additional 6 new Level 4/Priority schools. All Level 4/Priority schools are expected to begin implementing meaningful interventions aligned with turnaround principles prior to or by the start of the school year following the year of designation.

2.D.v Provide the criteria the SEA will use to determine when a school that is making significant progress in improving student achievement exits priority status and a justification for the criteria selected.

In accordance with state regulations governing district and school accountability and assistance (603 CMR 2.00), ESE has established the following academic exit criteria for existing Level 4 schools, which also apply to new Level 4/Priority schools. The exit criteria require schools to demonstrate substantial progress for students in the aggregate and for each eligible subgroup. In order to exit Level 4/Priority status, the school must achieve a cumulative Progress and Performance Index (PPI) score of 75 or higher for the school as a whole and for each subgroup. Improvement in additional areas, such as student rates (e.g., attendance), college and career readiness, and school climate may also be factored into the decision to remove a school from Level 4/Priority status. Data analysis using school-level data demonstrates that achieving a cumulative PPI of 75 is at least as challenging a goal for Level 4/Priority schools as the criteria the state had previously established for exit.

In addition, prior to removing a school from Level 4 status, ESE will ensure that the capacity and conditions are in place at both the district and school levels to sustain that improvement. ESE requires that each school eligible for removal from Level 4/Priority status submit “exit assurances” to the Department for review. In this application, the district must identify the flexibilities that each school intends to sustain once removed from Priority status and the mechanisms and/or funding sources that will be used to sustain each flexibility. In addition, they must justify their rationale for requesting an extension of certain turnaround flexibilities once removed from Priority status.

Schools that do not demonstrate sufficient gains to meet exit criteria by the end of their turnaround term remain in Level 4/Priority status and continue to be considered

underperforming under state law. These schools fall into four general categories: schools that are making meaningful progress with their existing turnaround plans but need additional time to demonstrate the ability to exit Level 4/Priority status; schools in need of considerable strategic changes to existing structures and programs in order to make the necessary progress; schools that in the first years of turnaround demonstrated limited progress and have entered into partnerships with state-approved turnaround operators; lastly, schools that have made little or no progress and are unable to meet the exit criteria may be designated as a Level 5 school in an effort to create rapid, dramatic improvement in student achievement.

Schools falling into these four categories receive additional support from staff in ESE’s Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST) in refining and strengthening turnaround plans and are subject to enhanced monitoring. ODST liaisons and other ESE staff prioritize assistance to these schools that may include strategic connections with effective partners, as well as more frequent site visits to support and track effective implementation of turnaround strategies and necessary supports from the district. For certain persistently low performing Level 4 schools that fail to demonstrate the ability to exit Level 4/Priority status, ESE provides enhanced support to the district to facilitate partnerships with in-district receivers to directly operate the Level 4/Priority school. As of spring 2015, this model has been adopted for 9 schools in two districts.

When a school has very weak or declining performance after three years of implementing turnaround strategies, the Commissioner can exercise his authority under state law to place the school in Level 5, state receivership. Level 5 designations and in-district receivership are two routes for increased interventions that are permitted by state statute and that set the stage for greater accountability and flexibility to address a persistently low performing school’s needs. The Commissioner determines which route will have the greatest impact and opportunity for sustained change in the school and district.

When there is funding available, ESE may also make available to schools exiting Priority status “sustainability” grants. The purpose of these grants is to help the district and school sustain the progress it has made.

2.E FOCUS SCHOOLS

2.E.i Describe the SEA’s methodology for identifying a number of low-performing schools equal to at least 10 percent of the State’s Title I schools as “focus schools.”

State statute requires ESE to identify Level 3 schools as the lowest performing 20% of all schools in the state. We do this using four years of data on the performance of students in the aggregate on the same indicators we plan to use in our Progress and Performance Index (PPI). Schools are identified proportionately by grade span to ensure equitable

representation of all types of schools. We propose to combine this approach with one that identifies the schools with the largest achievement gaps and classify all these schools as Level 3/Focus schools.

To identify Level 3 Focus schools under our proposed new system, we will begin by identifying the 10% of Title I schools in the state with persistently low subgroup achievement levels and graduation rates, based on the performance of any individual subgroup (i.e., the high needs group, low income students, English language learners, students with disabilities, or any of the state’s major racial and ethnic subgroups) and per the waiver requirements for Focus schools. Among this 10% of schools, we will first select high schools with persistently low graduation rates for any subgroup.⁴⁰ The remaining schools to meet the 10% requirement will be those with the lowest performance on PPI indicators for any subgroup. We will select schools proportionately within grade spans, consistent with current practice, and will ensure that any low performing student group, including English language learners, students with disabilities, low income students, and racial/ethnic subgroups, is represented.

To meet the state requirement to designate the lowest 20% of all schools as Level 3, we will need to identify additional schools in this level. These schools will be those with the lowest relative performance on PPI indicators for students in the aggregate. All schools in Level 3, whether identified on the basis of low graduation rates, low subgroup performance, or low aggregate performance, will be considered Level 3/Focus schools.

With each Level 3/Focus School designation we will clearly indicate the student group that should be prioritized at the school; for example, “Focus on English language learners” or “Focus on high needs students.” If a Focus School has more than one low performing subgroup, then ESE will identify each of the lowest performing groups to maintain priority on the students most in need of additional support. These designations, along with subgroup AMO/PPI determinations, will guide the interventions described in 2.E.iii.

2.E.ii Provide the SEA’s list of focus schools in Table 2.

2.E.iii Describe the process and timeline the SEA will use to ensure that its LEAs that have one or more focus schools will identify the specific needs of the SEA’s focus schools and their students and provide examples of and justifications for the interventions focus schools will be required to implement to improve the performance of students who are the furthest behind.

Timeline

As described in Section 2.E.i, we will use the four most recent years of data to identify Level 3/Focus schools. Beginning in summer 2012, districts will be notified annually if one or more

⁴⁰ Beginning in 2015, we will increase the threshold for high schools considered to have “persistently low graduation rates” and classify into Level 3 any non-Priority school with a graduation rate less than 67 percent for the most recent four-year graduation rate and less than 70 percent for each of the three prior five-year rates for any subgroup.

of their schools will be designated as a Level 3/Focus school. This designation will serve as a formal acknowledgement that current practices are not working in a way that serves all students and will trigger a requirement for the district to establish priorities for action and make decisions about the allocation of resources, including people, time, materials, and funding. Our Office of District and School Turnaround and our regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) will be available to support these schools in this planning process.

Following the designation of a Level 3/Focus school, districts will create a plan for implementing the interventions they have identified. As described in Section 2.G, ESE staff will work collaboratively with district and school staff to ensure that the plans to support identified student groups are appropriate. ESE may require districts to implement specific interventions based on our interpretation of the needs assessment, student performance data, including AMO/PPI determinations for all student groups, or other information, such as findings from a review of the district and its schools by our accountability office.

Once the planning is complete, it is expected that work will begin immediately. The district will be required to implement the interventions at the beginning of the school year in which the school received its Level 3/Focus designation. Level 3/Focus schools identified in summer 2012 will begin implementing interventions at the start of the 2012-13 school year.

Although Massachusetts schools will participate in a field test of the new PARCC assessments in 2013-14, we anticipate being able to render new accountability determinations for nearly all schools, and do not expect that field test participation will hinder our ability to identify new Level 3/Focus schools in summer 2014, or to make exit decisions for existing Level 3/Focus schools. Similarly, our approach to linking 2015 MCAS and PARCC assessments described in Section 2.B above, will provide us the ability to identify new Level 3/Focus schools from the pool of schools that administer MCAS in 2015 and allow to render exit decisions for existing Level 3/Focus schools regardless of the 2015 assessment they administer.

Process

Level 3/Focus schools will use the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* to determine which interventions should be considered the highest priority.⁴¹ This is a rigorous state-developed instrument designed to enable districts and schools to gauge their development of each condition and related interventions along a continuum. (The 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness* are the same areas that must be addressed by our Level 4/Priority schools in developing redesign plans, as described in Section 2.D.iii.)

The conditions are aligned with our six *District Standards and Indicators*, a set of key indicators of the district's ability to effectively support all of its schools while intervening aggressively in its most struggling schools.⁴² In performing the needs assessment, the district may discover that more systemic change is needed in its systems and structures, such as how

⁴¹ The Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/>

⁴² The District Standards and related indicators are available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/StandardsIndicators.doc>

the school is governed, staffed, or funded.

All of the state’s districts are expected to make steady progress toward implementing the *Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness* in their schools and those with Level 4/Priority schools are required to develop a redesign plan to rapidly address all 11 conditions. Level 3/Focus schools are expected to use the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* to prioritize those conditions directly linked to the most struggling student groups and implement interventions most likely to have a positive impact on these populations. In some schools this may affect only specific student groups, while in others these interventions may have a direct impact on every student. The process used to develop plans to improve implementation of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* is designed to prioritize interventions that address the needs of low-achieving students and those at risk of not meeting the state academic standards, including English learners, students with disabilities, low income students, and those from low-achieving racial/ethnic subgroups.

We propose that a district with one or more Level 3/Focus schools be required to reserve up to 25 percent of its Title I, Part A funds to support the implementation of interventions.

To conform to the rules for qualifying Title I school attendance areas, we propose allowing the district to set the funding aside at the district level. This will enable the district to address needs in multiple Title I schools or to use Title I funding for district-wide support (e.g., instructional coaches or school networking activities). We anticipate that by giving districts some degree of flexibility in how to use these resources, they will be able to maximize the benefit based on the unique needs of their Level 3/Focus schools.

The following examples illustrate two likely scenarios we anticipate that some districts may face:

- A district with one Level 3 school and a moderate Title I, Part A allocation may have a focus population that is small in size relative to the overall enrollment of the school. In this case, a single, targeted intervention may be appropriate. Alternately, a district with either multiple Level 3 schools or a single Level 3 school with a large enrollment or more than one focus population may need to fund a broader set of interventions to impact the entire school or system. Under this scenario, more resources and a longer-term change process may be needed, and we would require the district to commit 20 percent of their Title I, Part A funding over a period of several years.

In exchange for greater flexibility in the use of Title I funds for interventions, we will increase our oversight efforts to ensure the quality and efficiency of district improvement work in the Level 3/Focus schools. For example:

- We will ensure interventions are funded based on the scale of the problem and implemented according to prescribed timelines;
- We will track the expenditure of Title I reservation funds across years as part of the Title I grant approval process by collecting data on the impact of interventions and requiring each district to provide quantitative data as part of their justification for continuing specific interventions from year to year;

- We may allow districts to amend their Title I grant applications to change their intervention activities, but we will not allow districts to reduce their annual reservation spending; and
- In some instances, we may require a district to carry over unspent funds for an intervention in a given year to fund the intervention in the following year or require that funds for interventions be expended over multiple years. In such cases, ESE will closely monitor the district’s reservation spending to ensure that fiscal accountability obligations are met.

Examples of Interventions⁴³

The Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment is designed to be an in-depth examination of current practice that identifies areas of strength and highlights areas requiring intervention. The tool delineates the level of development of each condition along a continuum: *Little Evidence*, *Developing*, *Providing*, and *Sustaining*. District and school leaders, the Office of District and School Turnaround liaisons or regional District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) specialists, staff responsible for day-to-day instruction, and other key stakeholders will work together to use the self-assessment and other sources of information to prioritize those conditions requiring the most urgent attention and identify appropriate interventions. Interventions may be scaled based on need and availability of funds. For example, a district may redesign the school day to provide academic tutoring for a small focus population, or it may engage in a more comprehensive effort to provide a broad array of academic and/or enrichment opportunities for the entire school population.

Below are five sample scenarios that illustrate interventions that districts may select to address the needs of students in their Level 3/Focus schools.

1. A district redesigns the school day to facilitate *school-based learning communities* for teachers in its Level 3 school(s) to create peer-led support and accountability opportunities. Professional development requirements are raised, and teachers and school leaders work together to develop effective instructional practices, studying what actually works in classrooms. With the implementation of Massachusetts’ new educator evaluation regulations, this intervention provides space and place for differentiated paths and plans for teacher growth and improvement depending on their career stage and performance, as well as their rating of practice and impact on student learning based on multiple measures. It may also include instructional coaches who work with teachers to strengthen their skills in areas such as lesson planning, student data analysis and in-class pedagogy. This approach would strengthen teachers’ professional practice and improve the quality of instruction. This

⁴³ The process for identifying and implementing interventions described in this section applies to all schools placed in Level 2, 3, and 4 on our framework for district accountability and assistance. The primary differences are the scope of the problem (e.g., districts with one or more Level 4 school must implement multiple interventions aligned to all 11 Conditions for School Effectiveness; those with Level 3 or Level 2 schools other levels may implement fewer, more targeted interventions to address specific areas of need) and the level of ESE engagement (e.g., districts with Level 2 schools have relative autonomy in selecting interventions; districts with Level 3 schools consult with the DSAC in selecting interventions and must present a proposal to ESE for approval; interventions in Level 4 schools require the Commissioner’s approval as part of the redesign plan).

intervention would be appropriate for elementary, middle, and high schools.

2. A district implements a *tiered system of support* focused on system-level change in classrooms, the entire Level 3/Focus school, or across a network of Title I schools to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are academically advanced. The flexible tiers provide a robust and responsive educational environment that provides students with a continuum of multiple supports to meet their needs, with each tier providing an increased intensity of academic and non-academic supports. The movement and the intensity of support are based on data from universal screenings, assessments and progress monitoring, and the data drives the instructional decision-making throughout the process. The tiered system is supported by incorporating technology as an instructional tool and part of a data collection system. For English language learners, the system includes a model for conceptualizing academic language, a framework for effectively addressing the core components of English language acquisition and incorporating academic language in instructional practice, as well as a focus on mastery that will support these students' successful preparation for college and career. For students with disabilities, the system specifies how relevant information from each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be incorporated into the design and implementation of instruction and assessments to enable students eligible for special education services to fully access the system of tiered instruction and non-academic supports. This approach will help educators know how to provide appropriate levels of interventions for all students and triage supports to meet the needs of every student, especially students with disabilities, English learners, and low achieving students. This intervention would be appropriate for elementary, middle, and high schools.
3. A district provides *school-based services* to address the social, emotional, and health needs of the students in the Level 3/Focus school. The school and its parents jointly address the developmental needs of students early in their education; school teams composed of school nurses, counselors and teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss and address the challenges of individual students; students receive routine and preventative support and care. Students with acute health problems receive services in a timely manner; their health is monitored in a systematic way as they progress through school, and problems are addressed early that might otherwise impede their learning. As a consequence, the proportion of at-risk students declines as they progress through school. This method will boost student performance by addressing the issues in their lives outside the school context that may be affecting their ability to learn at school. Such an intervention would be highly appropriate for elementary schools, but may also have applications for middle and high schools.
4. A district *redesigns the school day or year* (which may include time before school, after school, vacations, weekends, and summers) to provide a broad array of academic and/or enrichment opportunities to students in the Level 3/Focus school in addition to the learning experiences they already receive. This additional time is

focused on a small set of clear and ambitious goals for student learning in which each student has a schedule and academic program tailored to address their individual needs, which may include tutoring and other academic supports. Students are provided with a broad array of enrichment opportunities that deepen their engagement in school in areas including the arts, foreign languages, hands-on science, business, community service learning, and leadership. This type of intervention will help to foster trusting relationships and a sense of belonging for students; engage them in activities and routines intended to reinforce school values, behaviors and attitudes necessary for success such as hard work, perseverance and responsibility; improve the transition from middle to high school; and promote youth leadership, 21st century skill development, and college and career readiness. Such an intervention would be appropriate for elementary, middle, or high schools, and could be targeted to address a subset of students within the school.

5. A district establishes a *coordinated early childhood education program* to provide young children likely to belong to the focus group in a Level 3/Focus school with the early learning experiences necessary to prepare them for the academic expectations of elementary school. Collaborative planning and decision-making structures exist between the district, its Level 3/Focus schools, and early childhood centers. An integrated professional development system is formed, providing early childhood and elementary school educators with frequent opportunities to collaborate and share information and data ensures aligned, age-appropriate learning experiences for students, and structured opportunities for education professionals in both sectors collaborate in helping families and educators identify children’s needs early and refer them to appropriate services. Such a program may also employ an intergenerational component to help parents develop a home environment that supports their children’s learning needs, provides opportunities to monitor the progress of their child and communicate with school personnel, and provides assistance to parents to tutor their children at home to reinforce work done in school. Such an intervention would be appropriate for elementary schools.
6. A district provides *intensive support to one or more Level 3/Focus schools with high English learner populations*. Such an intervention would be comprehensive and multifaceted, touching multiple aspects of the school’s organizational structure and instructional program. It would be guided by a theory of action grounded in ensuring that each child’s unique needs are evaluated and appropriate instruction provided to ensure that all children, particularly the school’s culturally and linguistically diverse children, have opportunities to succeed in school. Classroom teachers will receive training that will enable them to effectively instruct ELLs. Multidisciplinary school teams will receive training in differentiating cultural and linguistic differences from disabilities in making special education eligibility determination decisions for English learners. All instruction and interventions will be purposefully designed to consider each student’s cultural and linguistic background as well as their linguistic proficiency in English or their native language. The district will redesign the school schedule to allow for collaboration among all educators (e.g., speech and language therapists,

school psychologists, counselors, ESL/Bilingual specialists, etc.), thereby providing opportunities for professional dialogue, peer coaching, and the creation of instructional models integrating the best practices of the various fields of education and related services, nationally and in Massachusetts. The school will recruit staff qualified to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, and the district will create a continuum of opportunities for both program staff and parents to learn more about each other, their child’s strengths and needs, and potential parent roles, from volunteering in the classroom to making decisions about programmatic issues to advocating for their children’s education.^{44 45}

For any school (elementary, middle, or high school), the district may also identify one or more ESE-approved partner(s) to add value and capacity to the district and school in implementing the chosen interventions. (See section 2G for the process we will use for the rigorous review and approval of external providers to support the implementation of interventions in priority and focus schools.) Potential partners could include technical assistance organizations, community-based organizations as part of our wraparound zone initiative, or a Commendation School in the region with demonstrated success in serving the focus population. (See section 2.C.iii for further detail.)

Evidence of Success in Similar Schools

The interventions described above are purposefully aligned to our *Conditions for School Effectiveness*. Our District Standards, in turn, specify those district-level systems and practices necessary to provide and/or support the implementation of these conditions in schools. In 2009, ESE contracted with the Regional Education Laboratory-Northeast and the Islands (REL-NEI) to provide evidence validating the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*. REL-NEI staff researched libraries, federal resources, and online databases to find rigorous and current research on each condition. The resulting document, the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Research Guide*, is available as a resource to help school and district leaders make sound decisions in selecting interventions aligned to priorities, evaluating them, and justifying their expense.⁴⁶

Based on evidence we have accumulated over the past two years in reviewing district and school plans that address the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, we are now able to identify and disseminate information about interventions conducted successfully in schools with similar demographic and performance characteristics similar to our Level 3 schools. Specific examples include:

- The state’s *Turnarond Practice* and *Emerging Practices* reports, originally developed to support the implementation of our *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in Level 4/Priority schools, provide valuable case studies of successful school turnaround

⁴⁴ For a description of the tools district and school leaders will use to perform a needs assessment of the school’s organizational structure and instructional program, please see 2.G.

⁴⁵ Adapted from Esparza Brown, J. & Doolittle, J. (2008) *A cultural, linguistic, and ecological framework for response to intervention with English language learners*. Tempe, AZ: The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) and Naughton, S. (2004). *Preschool issues concerning English language learners and immigrant children: The importance of family engagement*. Oakland, CA: Children Now.

⁴⁶ The Conditions for School Effectiveness Research Guide is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/>

efforts in Massachusetts and nationally. Each resource identifies key practices and interventions the districts and schools profiled in the case studies employed to achieve their reform goals; highlights existing connections between these practices and the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, and provides links to additional aligned resources to help facilitate redesign and reform efforts.⁴⁷ These resources are designed to help school and district leaders maximize collaborative time for teachers and time on learning for students; make informed decisions in identifying partners; explore collective bargaining implications; identify, recruit, and hire outstanding staff; address students' social, emotional, and health needs; and provide alternative English language education program scenarios for English learners, among other interventions. The four school turnaround practices form the foundation of the Turnaround Plan template and frame the assistance approach delivered by the Office of District and School Turnaround and the District and School Assistance Centers.

- We have developed a blueprint outlining a tiered system of supports. The *Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS)* describes the flexible tiers, the core academic and non-academic components of the system, and the larger framework of district supports.⁴⁸ This system is aligned with our *District Standards and Indicators*, is one of our 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, and provides the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures necessary to successfully implement such a system. We have compiled a growing list of presentations from districts and schools that illustrate how they implemented tiered systems of support to address students' academic and non-academic needs, especially the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. For example, the Memorial Elementary School in Winchendon implemented literacy interventions for struggling readers with a focus on inclusion. The district implemented an uninterrupted 90-minute literacy block in which students are placed in flexible tiers based on data, students receive targeted instruction in specific skills, and progress monitoring is used to determine if students have reached their benchmark using instruments such as DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation), and the Fountas–Pinnell Benchmarking Assessment System. The district provided a literacy coach for grades K–2, engaged staff in a graduate-level course on inclusion, engaged staff in book study, and trained all staff in the use of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). In the first year, the district saw a reduction in referrals for special education services, more than 80 percent of students progressed to the next school at benchmark, and staff reported an increase in student-centered collegial discussion.⁴⁹
- Our Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative, which began in 2006, has provided us with compelling examples of how schools can redesign the school day or year to maximize time for core academics and provide a well rounded education for all

⁴⁷ A complete list of resources is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/default.html>

⁴⁸ An overview of our MTSS initiative, including how tiered systems of support align with and are supported by our *Conditions for School Effectiveness and District Standards*, is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/>

⁴⁹ Additional information on Winchester and other presentations are posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/ta/presentations/>.

students, particularly at-risk students. As of 2014-15, the ELT grant supports the implementation of an additional 300 hours for all students in 22 high poverty schools in 11 districts, serving over 12,000 students. ELT has provided us with compelling examples of how schools can redesign the school day or year to maximize time for core academics, provide a well rounded education for student through engaging enrichment opportunities, and support effective teacher collaboration and professional development (PD) time. The following descriptions highlight some successful time-leveraging school redesigns made possible through this grant:

- **Matthew J. Kuss Middle School (Kuss) in Fall River.** Prior to implementing ELT, Kuss was the first Massachusetts school designated as “Chronically Underperforming”. Since adding 300 additional hours, the school has adopted a school schedule which allows for double blocks of ELA, mathematics, and science for all students which allow for deeper instruction and learning in addition to a strong system of differentiated support for students. Since making changes such as this, the school has earned the state’s highest accountability classification of Level 1.
- **A.C. Whelan Elementary School, Revere:** Professional development time for teachers at A.C. Whelan Elementary School is made possible by the strategic inclusion of daily physical education. In particular, physical education teachers provide instruction throughout the day on Friday to all students, in order to logistically allow teachers to meet for an uninterrupted two hour PD. In addition to Friday PD, teachers also collaborate in teams daily. According to teachers, time for professional development and teacher collaboration has resulted in a strong professional culture, positive school morale, and cohesive teaching practices and expectations.
- **Ferryway School, Malden:** At the Ferryway School in Malden, enrichment opportunities are assigned based on student choice from a variety of offerings, such as Dance, Mythbusters Club, and Handmade Books. Teachers note a strong correlation between project-based enrichment opportunities driven by student choice and deeper student engagement in school, as well as a positive school culture.

For the past several years, our accountability office has undertaken a series of comprehensive district reviews that provide an assessment of district systems, allowing district leaders to reflect on their improvement goals and strengthen performance.⁵⁰ The reviews are based on Massachusetts’ District Standards and Indicators.⁵¹ Nineteen of these reviews were completed in the 2013-14 school year; twenty one will be completed in the 2014-15 school year. The accountability office has also provided optional meetings as a follow-up to district reviews (ten such meetings were conducted in the 2013-14 school year). These meetings are designed to support districts as they internalize and prioritize report findings and develop a

⁵⁰ District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

⁵¹ District Standards are currently Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management. The indicators are continuously updated and clarified to reflect ESE priorities.

plan to implement recommendations. The meetings are also an opportunity to identify additional supports that DSACs can provide based on the needs of each district.

ESE's Office of District and School Turnaround staff and District and School Assistance Center specialists regularly review Level 3/Focus school performance data with school and district leaders to assess progress. The ongoing nature of ODST and DSAC targeted assistance is conducive to cycles of inquiry to support districts and focus schools in identifying, monitoring and revising intervention strategies and tools. Beginning in 2015, if Level 3/Focus schools do not improve performance sufficiently to exit Level 3/Focus school status, DSAC and ODST staff will utilize data submitted by districts as part of ESE's monitoring process for Level 3/Focus schools (see Section 2.G) that assesses progress made during the previous school year in implementing the schools' targeted improvement strategies for focus populations and the extent to which they are meeting the preliminary benchmarks they had previously articulated. These data are used to drive a reevaluation of the improvement plan and its implementation. Assistance staff offer additional supports targeted to the findings from the re-evaluation of the plan. For example, schools may engage in an intensive external school review process that highlights and prioritizes actions needed to tackle the causes of the underperformance. Then assistance staff facilitate access to tailored supports to strategically address needs such as Sheltered Content Instruction for ELLs or facilitation of PLCs or Lesson Studies to raise educator capacity to reach all students.

The flexibility of the ESEA waiver will enable us to provide our districts with a differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system grounded in shared tools, processes, and resources, as well as a common language for discussing the interventions and supports we have learned are necessary to support the needs of our most struggling students.

- 2.E.iv Provide the criteria the SEA will use to determine when a school that is making significant progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps exits focus status and a justification for the criteria selected.

A list of Level 3/Focus schools will be publicly released each year based on the four most recent years of data, with the previous year's data carrying the most weight. We anticipate some movement in and out of this designation each year as prior years' data becomes less heavily weighted. A school may meet its AMO/PPI targets but still be classified as a Level 3/Focus School if it remains among the lowest performers relative to other schools in the state. This allows ESE to direct resources and interventions to the lowest performing schools, even if they are meeting their targets. Conversely, schools that improve their performance such that they do not have the largest graduation or proficiency gaps or the lowest overall performance for their grade span may only exit Level 3/Focus School status if they also meet their AMO/PPI targets for the group(s) whose performance led to schools' identification. Because of the way the PPI is calculated, to move out of Level 3/Focus School status, schools will need to demonstrate sustained improvement over several years and should be on track for their progress to continue.

We will generate and release our first list of Level 3/Focus schools using the methodology described within this request for flexibility in August 2012, incorporating results from spring 2012.

TABLE 2: REWARD, PRIORITY, AND FOCUS SCHOOLS

Provide the SEA’s list of reward, priority, and focus schools using the Table 2 template. Use the key to indicate the criteria used to identify a school as a reward, priority, or focus school.

TABLE 2: REWARD, PRIORITY, AND FOCUS SCHOOL

LEA Name	School Name	School NCES ID #	REWARD SCHOOL	PRIORITY SCHOOL	FOCUS SCHOOL
<i>Ex. Washington</i>	<i>Oak HS</i>	<i>111111100001</i>		<i>C</i>	
	<i>Maple ES</i>	<i>111111100002</i>			<i>H</i>
<i>Adams</i>	<i>Willow MS</i>	<i>222222200001</i>	<i>A</i>		
	<i>Cedar HS</i>	<i>222222200002</i>			<i>F</i>
	<i>Elm HS</i>	<i>222222200003</i>			<i>G</i>
TOTAL # of Schools:					

Total # of Title I schools in the State: _____

Total # of Title I-participating high schools in the State with graduation rates less than 60%: _____

Key	
<p>Reward School Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Highest-performing school B. High-progress school <p>Priority School Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C. Among the lowest five percent of Title I schools in the State based on the proficiency and lack of progress of the “all students” group D. Title I-participating or Title I-eligible high school with graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years E. Tier I or Tier II SIG school implementing a school intervention model 	<p>Focus School Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> F. Has the largest within-school gaps between the highest-achieving subgroup(s) and the lowest-achieving subgroup(s) or, at the high school level, has the largest within-school gaps in the graduation rate G. Has a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement or, at the high school level, a low graduation rate H. A Title I-participating high school with graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years that is not identified as a priority school

2.F PROVIDE INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS FOR OTHER TITLE I SCHOOLS

- 2.F Describe how the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system will provide incentives and supports to ensure continuous improvement in other Title I schools that, based on the SEA’s new AMOs and other measures, are not making progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps, and an explanation of how these incentives and supports are likely to improve student achievement and school performance, close achievement gaps, and increase the quality of instruction for students.

Since 2009, Massachusetts has defined its approach to district engagement based on the premise that district accountability and ESE assistance must be closely linked to produce continuous and sustainable improvement. In our view, districts are only as strong as their weakest school, which is why we assign them to one of five levels corresponding with the level assigned to each district’s lowest performing school(s).⁵² Those requiring minimal state intervention are placed in Level 1; those requiring the most intervention are placed in Level 5 (see illustration below).

Our state system of support enables us to provide comprehensive assistance to districts that is differentiated by need, provides structured opportunities for teachers, administrators and district leaders to engage in activities including coaching, action research, facilitated work teams, professional communities of practice, and resource networking. Our *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and our *District Standards and Indicators* provide processes and tools to support evidence-based practices across the Commonwealth.

We know that we will only attain continuous improvement for all students if districts and schools share our vision and work with us as partners. To ensure this necessary “buy-in” from our districts and schools, the goals and targets that we set for them must be achievable as well as ambitious. Although we anticipate that the majority of schools and districts will initially be designated in Level 2, we are confident that the design of our PPI—which awards schools and districts credit for exceeding individual targets, reducing the numbers of lowest performing students, increasing performance at the *Advanced* level, and demonstrating substantial growth from year to year—will serve as a motivating factor and help lead to increase the quality of instruction and improve student learning for all.

We also know that for our plans for accountability and support to succeed they must be workable and manageable. We must target resources where they are most needed and resist the temptation to spread available resources too thinly. We are committed to recognizing strong performance, calling out and remedying proficiency gaps wherever they exist, and focusing with laser-like intensity on our lowest performing schools. We are also committed to constantly monitoring the effectiveness of our system and, if we do not see continuous improvement across the spectrum, adjusting the system as necessary.

⁵² Exceptions occur when a separate district accountability review process or other information identifies persistent, pervasive issues with district governance or district-level systems. In these rare cases, the district may be identified as Level 4 even though all its schools perform at higher levels. Currently three Massachusetts districts fall into this category.

Accountability Reporting and Required Actions for All Schools and Districts

ESE publishes annual accountability reports for all schools and districts, classifying schools and districts into Levels 1 through 5. Accountability reports contain Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) determinations using PPI indicators for students in the aggregate, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and the state’s major racial and ethnic subgroups. The primary purpose of AMOs is to provide transparent reporting of district and school progress toward college and career readiness for all students, and, in turn, to incentivize continuous improvement. The primary purpose of the PPI is to identify schools and districts most in need of assistance, and, accordingly, place schools and districts in our framework for accountability and assistance.

If a district, school, or individual student group does not meet AMO or graduation rate targets for one or more specific PPI indicators, it is clearly identified in the public accountability report and spurs specific follow-up actions. All schools and districts are expected to analyze disaggregated data for all student groups to ensure interventions and supports are appropriately aligned to address needs. This analysis will help identify strengths upon which they may want to build or expand, as well as any areas for improvement or increased focus.

When a school is classified in Levels 2 through 5, the district must:

- Conduct a self-assessment to review and revise district and school improvement plans with respect to the level of implementation of Massachusetts’ *District Standards and Indicators* and the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, and revise those plans accordingly.
- Identify which Standards and Conditions are supported by the activities proposed in its annual Title I grant application, connecting Title I-funded expenditures to areas of low performance. Title I grants are reviewed by ESE’s Title I staff and, for districts in Levels 3-5, ESE district liaisons and DSAC staff.
- Prioritize schools based on need and spend between 5 and 25 percent of the district's Title I, Part A allocation on interventions and supports that address the needs of the district's lowest-achieving students in its lowest-performing schools, either through an additional allocation of funds directly to schools, through a district reservation, or both, as determined by the district. Targeted grades, subjects, and populations must be identified in the grant application, and specific, measurable data must be provided as rationale for continuing – or discontinuing – specific activities.
- Report annually to ESE information related to Title I expenditures for schools in Levels 2-5, including activities or interventions that occurred during the most recent school year that were implemented as a result of the school’s accountability and assistance level designation, progress toward improvement goals, and any organizations that the school or district partnered with to improve student achievement.

Differentiated Recognition

We will commend schools for high performance, high progress, and for success in closing

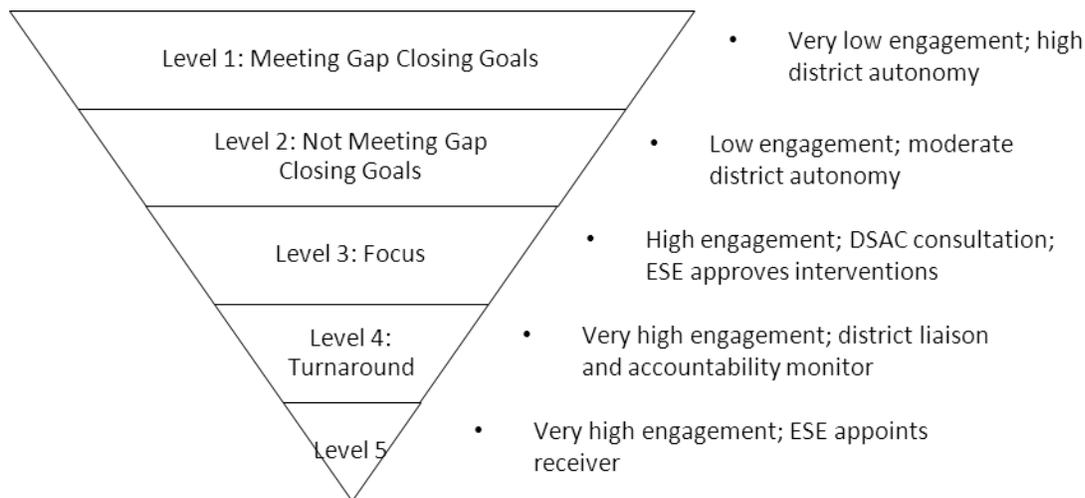
proficiency gaps. Our Commendation Schools may serve as demonstration sites for effective or promising practices, and may receive incentives to collaborate with Level 3/Focus schools that have been unsuccessful in meeting the needs of their lowest achieving students.

Differentiated Accountability

The amount of flexibility and autonomy each district receives is determined by its classification on the state accountability system.

- Level 1 districts are granted considerable autonomy and flexibility and have access to the online tools and resources available to all LEAs.
- Level 2 districts are granted some autonomy but must perform an annual needs assessment based on the state’s *Conditions for School Effectiveness* to implement and/or improve conditions in their schools that are not effectively supporting the needs of all students. To spur rapid improvement in the lowest performing schools within Level 2, we will identify those Level 2 schools that are on the cusp of entering Level 3.
- Level 3 districts receive priority assistance from the regional District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) and engage with the DSAC in both the needs assessment process and in the identification of interventions.
- Level 4 districts must rapidly implement priority areas for improvement from among the 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in their Level 4 schools, are assigned a liaison from ESE to engage their leadership team in system-level analysis of district support activities, and are closely monitored for efficacy and impact. In some cases, Level 4 districts may also receive support from their regional DSAC.
- If a school or district is placed in Level 5, the most serious designation on our framework, we will engage a receiver to oversee its management.

The diagram below summarizes how accountability levels will relate to ESE supports and engagement.



Differentiated Supports

Our framework for district accountability and assistance provides an array of supports, services, and opportunities for schools and districts to engage in professional learning communities focused on establishing high expectations for all students, a common language to discuss school improvement efforts, and a knowledge base from which all educators can benefit.

We provide multiple *resources and tools*, many of which are available online, and are accessible for use by school and district leaders, other educators, school committees, and the public. To support the use of these tools we provide a network of *regional assistance* through our six District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs). In collaboration with partner organizations, DSACs use a regional approach to support self-assessment and planning, provide regional opportunities to learn about and share effective practices; and train, model, and facilitate the use of our resources and tools. Districts have a strong incentive to participate in DSAC activities because they add value and needed capacity, provide customized professional development and other supports; and serve as a venue for networking opportunities. Further, the relationship between a DSAC and a district is collaborative, not evaluative, fostering trust and an atmosphere of support.

Each DSAC is led by a Regional Assistance Director (RAD), a recently retired superintendent selected based on his or her prior record of accomplishment. Most RADs have operated one or more districts in the region and brings a deep understanding of the local, civic, cultural, economic, and educational context and the ability to meaningfully engage local stakeholder groups in the work. The RAD works directly with the region’s superintendents, providing opportunities for honest conversations about strengths and needs. Each RAD is supported by a team that includes a former principal, a data specialist, a mathematics specialist, and a literacy specialist, with the availability of additional support from ESE specialists as needed. Each DSAC serves as a forum for regional networks of school and district teams on various topics, especially the education of English language learners and students with disabilities, and for developing strong instructional leaders.

Other available tools and resources include:

- The District Analysis and Review Tools (DARTs) report on more than 40 quantitative indicators to allow all stakeholders to gauge the overall health of school or district. Users can track pertinent data elements over time and make sound, meaningful comparisons to the Commonwealth or to comparable districts. The DARTs provide a snapshot of school and district trends and allows users to examine trends over the most recent five years of available data; view school- and district-level data on easily accessible graphical displays; reflect and self-evaluate; locate comparable schools and districts elsewhere in the state based on student characteristics; and make comparisons to enable a district to collaborate with a similar district that has shown promising trends.

- Online models and self-assessment tools for district and school improvement that are aligned with our 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and six *District Standards and Indicators*;
- The Early Warning Indicator Index system, a data-driven system to identify high school students who are at risk of not graduating on time. We are using federal Longitudinal Data System Grant Program (LDS-2) funding to expand the system to identify K–12 students that are potentially off track for their grade level or developmental age, including those students who are not on track to graduate with their peers and are identified as potential dropouts.
- We provide targeted grants to enhance district and regional capacity to plan, implement, and sustain practices to improve student performance that are aligned with the 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness*. One of our goals as an agency is to guide school and district leaders to think more strategically about how best to maximize the various grants they receive, either through entitlement or competitive opportunities; ensure that grant resources are used in ways that directly contribute to attainment of agency goals; and create new practices within the agency itself to improve our practices around grant development, assessment, and award determination.
- The Commonwealth’s professional development programs will be scaled up through the DSACs, through train-the-trainer models, and through online webinars and courses. In addition, the quality of external professional development will be heightened through the establishment of new, more rigorous criteria for professional development providers in literacy and mathematics.
- Our foundational professional development course menu, offered through the DSACs and other sources, is designed to build educator effectiveness in five critical content areas: 1) instructional leadership, 2) sheltering content for English language learners, 3) inclusive instructional practices for students with disabilities, 4) mathematics, and 5) literacy.
- A Behavioral Health and Public Schools Self-Assessment Tool that allows districts and schools to evaluate their practices and strategies for supporting positive behavior and health of students. <http://bhps321.org/>.
- The Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a blueprint for school improvement that focuses on system structures and supports across the district, school, and classroom to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students. It was developed to help guide the establishment of a system that provides high-quality core educational experiences in a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and targeted interventions/supports for students who experience academic and/or behavioral difficulties and students who have already demonstrated mastery of the

concept and skills being taught. A self assessment accompanies the MTSS blueprint for schools/districts to use to assess their current status in each of the core components in academic and non-academic domains. The self-assessment, which is aligned with the District Standards and Indicators, will help schools and districts establish priorities and should be used to develop a coherent action plan tailored to meet the individual needs of a school or district. The self-assessment is flexible enough so that it can be used repeatedly to monitor growth and adjust the action plan.

Our *district liaisons* serve as project managers, and provide a direct communication link to ESE and coordinate support to the Commonwealth’s 10 largest urban districts to enhance their capacity to support every school, with a particular focus on their Level 4/Priority schools. Working with senior district leadership, the liaisons facilitate the development of professional learning communities in each school, support the use of multiple forms of data to inform system-wide action planning, and provide resources for systematic observation of classrooms, discussion of evidence, and action planning to improve teaching and learning and make effective use of collaborative planning time.

The delivery structure of our statewide system of support – DSACs for regional assistance and district liaisons for our largest urban districts, working in coordination with our Office of Tiered System of Supports – allows us to flexibly target support where it is needed most and attend particularly to ESE’s key initiatives, such as the use of data to drive improvement, implementation of educator evaluation and educator effectiveness policies, and implementation of the state’s curriculum frameworks in our work with the Commonwealth’s schools and districts.

The senior leadership of the Center for Accountability, Partnerships, and Targeted Assistance and the district liaisons further this work by convening a monthly meeting of the Urban Superintendents Network (USN). The USN is chaired by superintendents from three different regions of the state and provides leaders from 23 urban districts with an opportunity to share ideas, concerns, and solutions to common problems with each other. Commissioner Chester uses the USN as a resource to gain input on policy decisions, including pursuing this waiver opportunity, and practical implementation challenges such as implementing the educator evaluation framework.

As our districts progress towards the goal of halving the proficiency gap for all students, they will steadily progress toward the full implementation of the 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in all schools, with priority given to schools in Levels 3 and 4.

As shown in the table below, districts will be required to reserve up to 25 percent of their Title I, Part A funds to address identified needs. The *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* will be the primary instrument for identifying and prioritizing those needs, and the funding formerly set aside for public school choice, supplemental educational services, and required professional development will be used for the interventions and supports that address

the identified needs.

Designation	Title I Reservation
Level 1	Up to 1% ⁵³
Level 2	5 – 20% ⁵⁴
Level 3	20%
Level 4	25%
Level 5	25%

Although Massachusetts schools participated in a field test of the new PARCC assessments in 2013-14, we were able to render new accountability determinations for nearly all schools, and field test participation did not hinder our ability to classify schools and districts into Levels in summer 2014. For any school or single-school district that had insufficient MCAS data as a result of field test participation, we held constant the school’s level from 2013 to 2014.

As described in Section 2.B, for accountability determinations based on results from 2014-15, when school districts may choose to administer either MCAS or PARCC in their schools as part of Massachusetts’ two-year “test drive” of the PARCC assessments, we will use a statistical approach known as equipercentile linking to link 2015 MCAS and PARCC results. We will also calculate comparable student growth percentiles (SGPs) for schools that administer MCAS and schools that administer PARCC. As a result, we will be able to calculate 2015 PPIs and accountability and assistance levels for all schools regardless of the test they administered. The accountability level for any school that administers PARCC can only improve or remain the same as its 2014 level. It cannot decline. This “hold harmless” approach to the level does not apply to schools that administer MCAS in 2015; such schools will receive a new level as usual.

⁵³ A district that receives a Title I, Part A allocation of greater than \$500,000 must reserve not less than 1% of its Title I, Part A allocation to carry out the provisions of section 1118, including promoting family literacy and parenting skills.

⁵⁴ The size of the reservation that will be required will be based on the scope of the problem the district has identified, the size of the focus school, and whether the district serves multiple focus schools.

2.G BUILD SEA, LEA, AND SCHOOL CAPACITY TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING

- 2.G Describe the SEA’s process for building SEA, LEA, and school capacity to improve student learning in all schools and, in particular, in low-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps, including through:
- i. timely and comprehensive monitoring of, and technical assistance for, LEA implementation of interventions in priority and focus schools;
 - ii. holding LEAs accountable for improving school and student performance, particularly for turning around their priority schools; and
 - iii. ensuring sufficient support for implementation of interventions in priority schools, focus schools, and other Title I schools identified under the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system (including through leveraging funds the LEA was previously required to reserve under ESEA section 1116(b)(10), SIG funds, and other Federal funds, as permitted, along with State and local resources).
- Explain how this process is likely to succeed in improving SEA, LEA, and school capacity.

The state’s district framework for accountability and assistance has established a coherent structure for linking ESE accountability and assistance activities with districts based on their level of need and has provided school and district leaders with common indicators and tools for diagnosing problems and identifying appropriate interventions. To guide this work we have developed two important tools:

- The *District Standards and Indicators* identify the characteristics of effective districts in supporting and sustaining school improvement.
- The *Conditions for School Effectiveness* identify those research-based practices that all schools, especially our most struggling schools, require to effectively meet the learning needs of all students. This tool also defines what each condition looks like when implemented purposefully and with fidelity.

As described in Section 2.F, our framework provides an array of supports, services, opportunities, and incentives for schools and districts to engage in professional learning communities focused on high expectations for all students, school and district improvement efforts, and the formation of a knowledge base from which all educators can build their capacity to support student learning.

The interventions in our Focus and Priority schools will be aligned to the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, allowing us to compare the implementation of these interventions across all schools, between schools with similar demographic profiles and performance histories, and from classroom to classroom. This will provide state, district, and school leaders with a shared understanding of what is necessary to effectively achieve these conditions; where and when innovation should be encouraged and where consistency should be maintained; and how scarce time, fiscal, material, and human resources can be allocated efficiently and

effectively.

Our user-friendly, interactive data reporting tools like the District Analysis and Review Tool (DART), our School and District Profiles website, and our Education Data Warehouse also provide valuable information on leading indicators and student outcomes for all districts, schools, and student groups—particularly English learners and students with disabilities.

- To assist district and school teams in addressing the needs of their English learner populations, in December 2011 we released the DART for English Learners. This tool allows district and school teams to draw comparisons across districts and schools in English learner enrollment, MCAS performance, and performance on the ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs) tests.. The tool also allows users to flag achievement gaps within the school or district between their English learner population, students who were formerly English learners, and students who are non-English learners. Users can disaggregate ACCESS performance by grade, by the number of years an English learner has been enrolled in Massachusetts schools, and by domain (writing, reading, speaking, and listening).⁵⁵
- To assist district and school teams in addressing the needs of their students with disabilities, we have paired the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* with a tiered instruction self-assessment.⁵⁶ This tool assists will users in examining the extent to which the school has a multilevel system that maximizes student achievement, reduces behavior problems, identifies students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitors student progress, provides and adjusts evidence-based interventions, and identifies students who may have learning disabilities. In addition, we will also be releasing a DART for Students with Disabilities in summer/fall 2012 with similar capabilities in disaggregating data within a school or district’s student population as well as drawing comparisons and flagging achievement gaps between populations. Both the English Learner tool and the forthcoming tool for students with disabilities will allow users to locate areas of strength in the instructional program in addition to areas needing improvement. As such, these tools and related data displays will serve as important artifacts when district and school leaders collaborate to evaluate existing interventions for these populations, as well as select new ones.⁵⁷

Using these data, our District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) will give first priority for technical assistance to districts with Level 4/Priority and Level 3/Focus schools within their region. The DSACs will serve as a hub for engaging educators in professional learning communities, and our Commendation Schools may serve as demonstration sites to highlight promising and effective practices.

⁵⁵ The District Analysis and Review Tool for English Learners is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>.

⁵⁶ A working draft of the tiered instruction self-assessment instrument is posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/sa/>

⁵⁷ For detailed descriptions of interventions for English learners and students with disabilities, please see 2.E.iii.

Our proposed system will hold districts accountable for improving their school and student performance. All districts, including those in Level 1, will be required to develop and implement an annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning process using our district standards and indicators, resulting in a three-year District Improvement Plan. This plan will be designed to improve performance, particularly in the Level 3/Focus and Level 4/Priority schools in these districts.

Currently every school annually adopts school performance goals and develops and implements a written School Improvement Plan to improve student performance. We propose no change to this requirement through this waiver request. Under state law the school and district improvement plans must be aligned with one another and be based on an analysis of data that includes but is not limited to student performance and the District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) provided by ESE, as well as an assessment of actions the district and its schools must take to improve that performance.

The accountability and assistance level of a district is determined by the level of its lowest performing school, and the level of ESE engagement and funding that may be required to implement interventions increases as the needs of one or more schools in the district increase.

Commendation Schools

As described in Section 2.C.iii, we will call our Reward schools “Commendation Schools.” These schools will be annually recognized through a state-level event to promote and celebrate their significant progress, high performance, and/or success in closing proficiency gaps and will receive a Commendation School certificate for display within the school.

Under this flexibility, our Commendation Schools will have the option of serving as demonstration sites within each DSAC for practices that are effective or show great promise. Dependent on funding availability, Commendation Schools will be eligible for a limited number of promising practice grants to encourage their involvement in networking activities and other efforts to disseminate best practices and lessons learned. In particular, we will seek to foster close partnerships between Commendation Schools and schools in Levels 3, 4, and 5 that share similar demographic and performance profiles. Commendation Schools will be selected from schools that are in Level 1, based on their progress and performance.

Level 1

Districts in which all schools are placed in Level 1 will be considered Level 1 districts, indicating that they are making steady progress toward full implementation of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* while recognizing the need to continue to support all students. Most of these districts will not be required to reserve Title I, Part A funding for interventions or supports; those that receive more than \$500,000 will be required to reserve 1 percent for parent/guardian involvement. These districts will retain access to all of the resources and tools available to districts with more serious issues. A Level 1 school in a district with Level 2,

3, 4, or 5 schools will receive the lowest priority for support and intervention.

Level 2

Districts where the most serious accountability level of any school is Level 2 will be considered Level 2 districts. This designation will require the district to assess the level of implementation of one or more of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in the Level 2 school(s) and provide the support necessary to increase their effectiveness. The district will be required to reserve a portion of its Title I, Part A allocation to fund interventions and supports that deepen the level of implementation. The district will be required to use the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* to identify priorities but will retain the flexibility to decide which interventions to fund, based on its unique needs. A Level 2 school in a district with Level 3, 4, or 5 schools will receive moderate priority for support and intervention. However, ESE will specifically identify those Level 2 schools that are on the cusp of entering Level 3 in order to spur rapid improvement in the lowest performing schools within Level 2. These low-performing Level 2 schools will receive targeted support from the DSAC staff or an ESE-appointed liaison, and have the option of engaging in Monitoring Site Visits and/or creating modified Accelerated Improvement Plans to drive meaningful changes to district systems that impact teaching and learning. ESE will review all proposals to fund interventions in Level 2 schools prior to implementation.

Level 3/Focus

Districts with one or more Level 3/Focus schools will be placed in Level 3. Designation as a Level 3/Focus School will serve as a clear sign that current practices are not working in a way that serves all students and that urgent and dramatic change is needed for, at a minimum, the focus population. All Level 3 districts must use the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* to identify unmet conditions and revise their District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans to meet them.

Level 3 districts will be required to reserve a substantial portion of their Title I, Part A allocations to fund those interventions aligned to the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* most likely to have an immediate, positive impact on the focus population. In addition, districts will be required to evaluate the extent to which their own systems and processes anticipate and address issues including school staffing, instructional and operational needs, especially at their lowest performing schools.

Any district with one or more Level 3/Focus schools will receive priority assistance from the regional District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) or ESE district liaison, and seek their counsel in using the *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* to identify priorities and interventions. ESE staff will work collaboratively with district and school staff to ensure that the plans to support identified student groups are appropriate. ESE may require districts to implement specific interventions based on our interpretation of the needs assessment, student performance data, including AMO/PPI determinations for all student groups, or other information, such as findings from a review of the district and its schools by our

accountability office.

Level 4/Priority

Districts with one or more schools among the lowest performing 4 percent of schools in the state may be placed in Level 4. These districts will be required to reserve 25 percent of their Title I, Part A allocation and other funds (such as federal school improvement grant (Section 1003(g)) funding) to support interventions to rapidly implement all of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in its Level 4/Priority school(s). A description of the interventions aligned with the turnaround principles that district with Level 4/Priority schools will implement is provided in Section 2.D.iii.

ESE may appoint an assistance liaison to support any district placed in Level 4 to help in the development and implementation of a turnaround (redesign) plan for each of its Level 4 schools, along with an accountability expert to monitor whether the goals, benchmarks, and timetable in the redesign plan for each of the Level 4 schools are being met.

It is important to note that some districts may be placed in Level 4 because of concerns raised during a district accountability review process, even if their schools' performance is higher than Level 4. For these districts, ESE oversees an Accelerated Improvement Plan process to drive meaningful changes to district systems that impact teaching and learning. To support this process, ESE provides a Plan Manager to assist the district in developing and implementing the improvement plan, as well as a Plan Monitor to review evidence and periodically report to the public as to whether the plan is having an impact. To date, one of these districts has exited Level 4, based largely on its success implementing its Accelerated Improvement Plan. Currently, five Level 4 districts are implementing Accelerated Improvement Plans to address weaknesses in district systems identified by district reviews.

Level 5/Priority

Like Level 4 schools, Level 5 schools are considered Priority schools for the purpose of this flexibility. Districts with at least one Level 5/Priority school are not automatically placed in Level 5, the most serious category in our accountability system, representing receivership. Rather, districts are eligible for placement in Level 5 on the basis of a district review; the report of an appointed accountability monitor; a follow-up review report; quantitative indicators set out in state regulations; or failure of a Level 4 district to meet the ESE-approved benchmarks or goals in its improvement plan in a timely manner.

When a district is placed in level 5, the Commissioner will appoint a receiver for the district. The receiver (according to state law M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K) will retain all of the powers of the superintendent and school committee and full managerial and operational control of the district. 25 percent of the district's Title I, Part A application may be used to fund interventions and supports at ESE's discretion.

In accordance with federal guidelines, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education uses Title I school improvement (ESEA section 1003(a)) funds to provide supports and interventions to Title I schools in Levels 3-5: its priority and focus schools. The Senior Associate Commissioner for the Department's Center for Accountability, Partnerships, and Targeted Assistance has established a careful and strategic budgeting process that is used to annually determine appropriate levels of support for the Commonwealth's neediest schools, given available funding. ESE may only opt to use ESEA section 1003(a) funds to support Title I schools in Level 2 when it has been determined through the budgeting process that all Title I priority and focus schools in the state have sufficient funding to implement their required interventions. ESE will not use ESEA section 1003(a) funds to support Level 1 schools.

Identification of External Providers

In some cases, a district may seek to collaborate with one or more external providers to support the implementation of interventions in Level 3/Focus and Level 4/Priority schools. Under this flexibility, we propose to extend our current process to identify external providers to our Level 3/Focus schools. This will expand our state capacity to serve our lowest performing schools and districts with high quality interventions demonstrated to improve student outcomes.

In 2011-12 we issued a series of procurements, each with an emphasis on a particular Condition for School Effectiveness, to identify Priority Partners with a proven record of accomplishment and demonstrated effectiveness in accelerating school improvement. All applicants were put through a rigorous review process prior to being selected. The process for reviewing and approving applicants under those procurements is described below.

Five-person review teams that include external and internal reviewers with relevant expertise and experience review written proposals from potential providers. All review teams participate in a training session, facilitated by ESE, to orient them to the review process and to participate in a joint scoring activity. Submissions are evaluated through a two-tier review process, as described below, with only top scoring proposals moving to Tier Two.

In Tier One, a formal review of each proposal will be conducted using a standard process and scoring rubric to assess the following qualification areas: *Defined Theory of Action*; *Experience and Willingness to Collaborate for Turnaround*; *Ability to Build Capacity for Sustained Improvement*; and *Proven Outcomes-Based Measurement Plan*. A subset of the review team will read and score each proposal. The outcome of each review will include: 1) a Tier One evaluation score, based on the combined scores of the reviewers; 2) a summary of strengths and weaknesses; 3) a set of questions and/or areas for further clarification to be addressed. The full review team will convene after all proposals have been reviewed and scored by teams. The purpose will be to develop a shared understanding of each proposal's team score, strengths/weaknesses, and areas in need of further clarification; based on this information, the review team will come to agreement about which proposals will proceed to the Tier Two Evaluation.

For each proposal that advances to Tier Two, the review process will involve a thorough evaluation of the applicant’s demonstrated record of effectiveness and financial capacity. In addition to the evidence submitted in the written proposal, customer reference interviews will be conducted by an ESE team member, using a standard protocol and reference interview rubric. The interviewer will score the results; detailed notes will be shared with one other member of the review team.

Based on the results of the Tier One and Two evaluations, external provider management teams with high scoring proposals will be asked to participate in an interview with the review team. The interview will include both standard and customized questions based on the review of written proposals and reference interviews to clarify key issues; solicit additional information; and evaluate the provider’s understanding of the expectations for working with a Level 3 or Level 4 school. The management team may also be asked to submit an amended proposal that reflects the feedback and expectations shared by the review team during the interview.

The full review team will make recommendations for the selection of Priority Partners, based on the combined results of the Tier One and Tier Two evaluations and the management interviews.

As of March 2015, we are revising our process for approving external providers. Our intent is to implement a more effective evaluation process that will identify organizations with a proven record of success in accelerating and supporting school improvement. Our goal remains to establish a carefully vetted group of organizations that can offer services aligned with the Conditions for School Effectiveness (CSEs) and the District Systems of Support (DSSs), and we anticipate that our new systems will better support the identification of proven partners and the implementation of their models to build school and district capacity.

Monitoring structure for ensuring successful implementation of interventions in Level 3-5 schools and districts

ESE conducts regular school and district reviews aimed at producing clear pathways toward district and school improvement. Comprehensive reviews of state and federal programs occur on a six-year rotating schedule. Each year approximately 20 additional districts are identified for a district accountability review conducted by ESE’s Office of District and School Accountability. These reviews are framed around six standards: leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources, and professional development.

Level 3 Schools and Districts

Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, ESE will modify its Level 3/Focus school support and monitoring processes to better ensure that targeted supports and/or interventions are implemented for students identified through each Level 3/Focus school designation. The

specific steps ESE will take are described below.

1. **Improved data collection.** ESE will modify its annual Title I data collection tool to require each Title I focus school to provide more explicit information about the targeted supports and interventions it has put in place to address the needs of students in identified subgroups. This information will inform ESE support and monitoring activities.

Implementation timeline: We will conduct an off-schedule data collection in September 2014 with each Title I focus school identified for the 2014-15 school year. We will also collect end-of-year data in summer 2015 and subsequent summers. The data we collect will inform support and monitoring activities during 2014-15, as well as the format of the end-of-year data collection tool.

2. **Enhanced support and monitoring.** ESE's District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) and Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST) staff will use the data from the fall 2014 data collection described above in planning and progress monitoring meetings with district leaders in each district that has a focus school. Meetings will focus on the supports and interventions implemented for each school and focus population, resources and partners engaged in the work, progress attained to date, and any additional data acquired through the monitoring system in place. DSAC and ODST assistance staff will support the implementation of strategies, where appropriate, to maximize the impact on student learning outcomes.

Implementation timeline: Initial planning meetings between DSAC, ODST, and district staff will take place in fall using data collected from the September 2014 data collection and, in subsequent years, the end-of-year data collection. Mid-year meetings will take place in the winter and will focus on progress attained to date, any necessary mid-course corrections, and plans for further implementation and monitoring of each strategy. At the end of the school year, DSAC & ODST staff will meet a third time with district and school leaders to review the body of evidence collected throughout the school year related to implementation of planned interventions, to analyze data reflecting growth in student performance, and to determine the success of the supports and interventions and overall progress toward plan goals. The summer will be used for refinement of plans in order to begin the cycle of continuous improvement during each subsequent school year.

Overall implementation timeline:

August-September	Focus school data collection completed
September-October	Initial planning meetings between DSAC, ODST, and district staff using information gathered through annual data collection
January-February	Mid-year meetings between DSAC, ODST, and school & district staff focused on current progress, mid-course corrections, continued implementation, and monitoring
May-June	End of year meetings between DSAC, ODST, school & district staff to review body of evidence collected related to implementation of planned interventions, analyze student growth and performance data, and determine success and overall progress toward plan goals and outcomes
July-August	Refinement of plans to begin the cycle of continuous improvement during each subsequent school year

As noted above, ESE’s Office of School and District Accountability reviews and reports on the efforts of all schools and districts, including those placed in Levels 3 and 4, to improve the academic achievement of their students.⁵⁸ The office implements comprehensive, on-site district reviews, which include detailed examinations of student performance, school and district management, instruction, and overall district governance, including examination of district and school improvement plans and other documentation to ensure alignment of resources with identified priorities. The office also oversees the work of ESE Monitors in some Level 4 districts. As described in 2.E.iii, in certain years the office conducted a series of district reviews with a focus on students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low income families.

Level 4 Schools and Districts

Level 4/Priority districts and schools receive an extra level of scrutiny. As noted in 2.D.iii, districts with Level 4 schools must develop a redesign plan to rapidly implement interventions aligned to each of *Conditions for School Effectiveness* in those schools. Within the redesign plan, districts are also required to identify any district-level issues that will be addressed. Subsequent to plan approval, all Level 4 schools receive an annual Monitoring Site Visit conducted by an accountability team assigned by ESE. The team collects information on district and school improvement efforts, holds the district and school accountable for implementing interventions, and provides feedback to ESE and to the district on the efficacy and impact of those interventions.

⁵⁸ State law requires the office to review at least 40 districts annually, not less than 75 percent of which are districts whose students achieve at low levels, either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar student populations. In practice, these are our Level 3 and 4 districts. (The remainders of the reviews are divided equally among districts whose students achieve at high levels relative to districts that educate similar student populations, and randomly selected districts.) Budgetary restrictions may impact the number of district reviews conducted within a given fiscal year.⁵⁸

Level 5 Schools and Districts

As noted above, Level 5/Priority is the most serious category in Massachusetts' accountability system, representing receivership. The Commissioner may place a Level 4 school in Level 5 at the expiration of its redesign plan if the school has failed to improve as required by the goals, benchmarks, or timetable of its redesign plan; or if district conditions make it unlikely that the school will make significant improvement without a Level 5 designation. Districts are independently eligible for placement in Level 5 on the basis of a district review; the report of an appointed accountability monitor; a follow-up review report; quantitative indicators set out in state regulations; or failure of a Level 4 district to meet the ESE-approved benchmarks or goals in its improvement plan in a timely manner. Under state law, the commissioner and the receiver will create a Level 5 District Plan that will include district priorities and strategies to accelerate achievement with measurable benchmarks of progress that connect directly to accelerated improvement of outcomes for students in all schools. The receiver will implement the Level 5 District Plan and provide a monthly highlight report of progress toward measurable benchmarks of progress that connect directly to accelerated improvement of outcomes for students in all schools.⁵⁹

Massachusetts placed the Lawrence School District in Level 5 in November 2011. Lawrence is the first district in the state to be designated Level 5. Shortly after the designation, the Commissioner named a receiver for the district, and developed an improvement plan that was approved in May 2012. Six themes guide the vision for the plan:

- Build on excellence in Lawrence and add capacity through talented people and partners from across Massachusetts
- Focus on schools as the unit of change and aim to build a district of highly autonomous, high performing neighborhood schools
- Empower the individuals closest to the students, who know how to best meet their unique needs
- Examine investments to ensure they support initiatives that will produce the best results for LPS students
- Move with speed, and maintain momentum to drive continued progress over time
- Focus on results rather than processes and adjust the plan based on results

As of 2014-15, Lawrence serves a student population of approximately 13,600 students and operates 33 schools, of which 6 schools have been designated Level 4. ESE, with the receiver, engaged a number of proven partners to assume the responsibility for operating the four K-8 Level 4 schools. Additional partners were engaged to create and operate a new alternative high school, and to support the two Level 4 high schools. The proven partners, some of which have experience operating charter schools, agreed to operate these schools without a charter and without a lottery system for student enrollment, while employing teachers and

⁵⁹ On November 25, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education placed the district of Lawrence in Level 5, the first district in Massachusetts to be so declared.

other staff who become members of the local unions.

Based on 2013 and 2014 statewide assessment results, achievement for Lawrence students has improved over the course of the receivership. Additionally, the district's four-year high school graduation rate improved from 52.3 percent in 2011 to 61.3 percent in 2013, and the high school dropout rate decreased from 8.6 percent in 2011 to 5.8 percent in 2013. There is still much work to do to ensure that all students are ready for success at the next level, however the early results are strong evidence for the efficacy of the district's accelerated turnaround strategies.

In April 2015 Massachusetts placed a second district, the Holyoke Public Schools, in Level 5.

Reducing burden and enhancing fiscal flexibility

We view this flexibility as an opportunity to add momentum to current initiatives designed to guide school and district leaders in developing their improvement plans while also sharply reducing the administrative burden the existing dual accountability systems currently create. The fiscal flexibility offered will also enhance this work by allowing our districts to use their fiscal resources more strategically.

Our state law already calls for a single three-year District Improvement Plan and annual action plans, and a single School Improvement Plan. Moreover, these plans must be aligned and must be based on an analysis of data, including but not limited to data on student performance, as well as an assessment of actions the district and its schools must take to improve that performance.

Under this flexibility, our existing integrated district and school planning cycle would replace the requirements for plans currently mandated under ESEA sections 1116(b) and 1116(c).

With this proposal, we request a waiver of the requirements in ESEA sections 2141(a), (b), and (c) regarding highly qualified teacher improvement plans and the associated restrictions on the use of Title II Part A and Title I, Part A funds. Flexibility from these requirements will allow ESE and our state's school districts to focus fiscal and staff resources on the development and quality implementation of our new educator evaluation and support system, while reducing the burden that would come with implementing mandates that do not align with current efforts.

We further propose to use the flexibility offered to transfer funding from authorized programs into Title I, Part A and the optional flexibility to repurpose the 21st Century Community Learning Center funds. Conversations with district leaders and other stakeholders made clear that the freedom to think differently about these funding sources will allow the state and districts to enhance the Commonwealth's already strong record of achieving college and career readiness for its students, a meaningful system of accountability and supports, and effective instruction and leadership in our public schools. It will also

potentially allow the state to streamline and better coordinate grant application processes and reduce burden on districts. ESE will carefully examine any proposed transfer of Title IIA funds by a district, however, and may limit such transfer for districts that are not on track to meeting educator evaluation implementation or other priority educator effectiveness goals.

In addition, Massachusetts is interested in ways that federal funds might leverage state and local revenue sources to encourage the implementation of strategies that have a strong likelihood of accelerating student progress. Toward this end, the Commonwealth plans to give preference in making some discretionary Title I and 21st Century Community Learning Center funds available to districts based on local district revenue matching from non-federal sources to support activities such as: an expanded instructional day and/or instructional year; year-round school calendar; targeted teacher training for high need areas (e.g., working with ELLs, STEM subjects); differentiated staffing designed to provide differentiated academic interventions for students; expanded social, emotional, and health supports and interventions; differentiated compensation tied to productivity and responsibility; and job-embedded teacher and administrator development tied to productivity goals.

PRINCIPLE 3: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

3.A DEVELOP AND ADOPT GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Select the option that pertains to the SEA and provide the corresponding description and evidence, as appropriate, for the option selected.

Option A	Option B	Option C
<input type="checkbox"/> If the SEA has not already developed any guidelines consistent with Principle 3, provide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the SEA’s plan to develop and adopt guidelines for local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems by the end of the 2011–2012 school year; ii. a description of the process the SEA will use to involve teachers and principals in the development of these guidelines; and iii. an assurance that the SEA will submit to the Department a copy of the guidelines that it will adopt by the end of the 2011–2012 school year (see Assurance 14). 	<input type="checkbox"/> If the SEA has already developed and adopted one or more, but not all, guidelines consistent with Principle 3, provide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. a copy of any guidelines the SEA has adopted (Attachment 10) and an explanation of how these guidelines are likely to lead to the development of evaluation and support systems that improve student achievement and the quality of instruction for students; ii. evidence of the adoption of the guidelines (Attachment 11); iii. the SEA’s plan to develop and adopt the remaining guidelines for local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems by the end of the 2011–2012 school year; iv. a description of the process used to involve teachers and principals in the development of the 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If the SEA has developed and adopted all of the guidelines consistent with Principle 3, provide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. a copy of the guidelines the SEA has adopted (Attachment 10) and an explanation of how these guidelines are likely to lead to the development of evaluation and support systems that improve student achievement and the quality of instruction for students; ii. evidence of the adoption of the guidelines (Attachment 11); and iii. a description of the process the SEA used to involve teachers and principals in the development of these guidelines.

	<p>adopted guidelines and the process to continue their involvement in developing any remaining guidelines; and</p> <p>v. an assurance that the SEA will submit to the Department a copy of the remaining guidelines that it will adopt by the end of the 2011–2012 school year (see Assurance 14).</p>	
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Even the best, most experienced educators need to be regularly evaluated to ensure that their strengths are recognized and enhanced and their weaknesses are identified and supported to ensure future success in the classroom. Research demonstrates that looking at student achievement impacts is an important and valid way of measuring teacher effectiveness, and that these measures are strengthened when they are used in conjunction with well designed classroom observations and well trained principals or mentors.

On June 28, 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved new state regulations on educator evaluation (603 CMR 35.00) to provide every school committee with the tools to hold all educators accountable for their performance and enable them to help all students perform at high levels. The regulations require that school committees establish a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process for teachers and administrators based on the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework. (See Attachment 10 for regulations, and see Attachment 11 for minutes from the June 2011 BESE meeting.)

The regulations apply to all administrators and teachers employed in public schools throughout the state and are designed to:

- Promote growth and development among leaders and teachers;
- Place student learning at the center, using multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement;
- Recognize excellence in teaching and leading;
- Set a high bar for professional teaching status; and
- Shorten timelines for improvement.

The development of the state’s educator evaluation regulations took more than a year, involved establishing a 40-member statewide task force on educator evaluation, included public discussions at eight Board meetings, substantial and ongoing public outreach efforts, and a robust regulatory comment period.

These regulations represent a significant change in Massachusetts, where educator evaluations have long been done at the discretion of the local district. While the state established principles to guide the evaluation process, evaluation systems were entirely developed and bargained locally, with wide variation in process, consistency, rigor, and effectiveness. The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework and Model System, described in section 3B, offer the opportunity for a more coherent, fair, and useful evaluation system for all of Massachusetts' educators.

The BESE first adopted educator effectiveness as one of its five strategic goals in August 2008. Educator effectiveness was also at the core of Massachusetts' Race to the Top goals and strategies, and between 2010 and 2011 the Board's focus on evaluation intensified, beginning with a May 2010 discussion that established a statewide task force on educator evaluation and set parameters for prospective changes to regulations. The task force met regularly for seven months and included representatives from key stakeholder groups, practitioners, business representatives, parents, experts in evaluation, psychometrics and statistics, and a student representative.⁶⁰ Throughout the task force's deliberations the BESE received regular updates on progress and discussions, with educator evaluation discussed at eight Board meetings between May 2010 and May 2011.

In March 2011 the task force presented its report and recommendations to the Board. In its report, the task force noted that evaluation practices statewide were extremely uneven and were not accomplishing the goals of supporting professional growth, accountability, and systemic improvement. The task force called for a "breakthrough" in educator evaluation that would only be possible through greater statewide consistency in evaluation standards, practices, ratings, and other design features, such as self-reflection and goal setting. These components, along with additional features designed to make student learning a more central part of educator evaluation, were key elements of the initial regulations that the Commissioner proposed to the Board in April 2011.

The task force's recommendations for new state teacher and administrator performance standards were also informed by the work of a prior statewide project that involved over 40 classroom teachers, teacher educators, and other policy experts in defining the knowledge and skills of High Expertise Teaching (HET). The HET project set forth a new knowledge and skills framework that paid particular attention to research-based educator practices, inclusion, and the importance of professional culture. These priorities, in turn, were reflected in the standards and indicators recommended by the statewide task force, and adopted after a robust public comment period and further refinement by BESE.

⁶⁰ The task force also included members with strong backgrounds in ESL and special education, including the state's teacher of the year—an ESL teacher, the state chapter presidents of the Council for Exceptional Children and Council of Special Education Administrators, as well as a parent representative from the MA Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils at the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs.

Both HET and the task force recommendations focus on the cultivation of high expertise in teacher practice and administrative leadership, with a particular focus on promoting the learning, growth, and academic achievement of all of the Commonwealth’s students. Following the approach adopted by HET, the task force and the state’s standards address the imperative of “teaching all students,” just as Massachusetts holds all students to common educational standards. In Massachusetts, all really does mean all.

In the spring of 2011 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) staff met with more than 500 educators and other stakeholders to explain the proposed regulations. ESE also sponsored six regional forums across the state for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to learn about the proposed educator evaluation regulations and provide feedback. Of the nearly 800 educators and other stakeholders who attended these forums, 51 percent were teachers, 42 percent were administrators, and 7 percent were other stakeholders. Attendees were invited to share their views through question and answer sessions and electronically, using audience response technology.

When asked how useful their past evaluations have been in improving their practice as an educator, just 11 percent reported that evaluations were very useful, 56 percent said they were somewhat useful, and 43 percent said evaluations were not useful at all. Other highlights:

- Nearly nine of 10 respondents supported including educator self-reflection and self-assessment (25% somewhat support; 64% strongly support).
- More than eight of 10 respondents supported including goals for improving educator practice (23% somewhat support; 59% strongly support).
- More than three of four respondents supported including goals for improving student growth and learning (25% somewhat support; 52% strongly support).
- Two-thirds of the respondents supported including multiple measures of student learning and growth in educator evaluations (21% somewhat support; 46% strongly support).

Prior to the public release of the preliminary regulations in April 2011, ESE held a regulatory public comment period and received more than 500 written comments⁶¹ by the June deadline. Comments ranged from detailed substantive critiques to suggestions for fine-tuning and word changes to statements of support or straight opposition to the new regulations. All feedback, as well as ESE’s response to it, was shared with the Board to inform their decision-making, and published on the ESE website.

Overall, the feedback received during the comment period reflected significant interest in and support for the reform of the state’s educator evaluation system. Supporters indicated

⁶¹ Feedback was also received from statewide organizations representing special education teachers and administrators and teachers of English Language Learners.

their interest was driven by a range of issues, including a desire for change; support for prioritizing student learning and professional growth; concern about the implementation challenge for school districts or educators; and the desire for guidance in determining educator impact on student growth in all grades and subjects (especially non-MCAS grades and subjects), as well as for specialist fields.

Collectively, both the formal regulatory comment and the informal feedback informed and helped to refine the final regulations that the Commissioner proposed to the BESE in June 2011.

As ESE supports all LEAs in the state to implement and refine evaluation systems aligned to the Framework, we continue to involve teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in refining our evaluation instruments and tools. We regularly gather feedback at all information sessions and professional development opportunities for districts, and we frequently collaborate with our LEAs to develop new guidance and resources. We have found this collaboration essential for ensuring that our approach to evaluation is valuable to all educators and produces feedback that is reliable, fair and actionable. Further, we continue to conduct research on the implementation of the Educator Evaluation Framework; using federal funds allocated from Race to the Top, Massachusetts has contracted with SRI International to conduct a multi-year study of the implementation of the Educator Evaluation Framework. Findings from SRI are presented to the Department regularly; we use these findings to shape the support and guidance we offer to districts.

3.B ENSURE LEAs IMPLEMENT TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- 3.B Provide the SEA’s process for ensuring that each LEA develops, adopts, pilots, and implements, with the involvement of teachers and principals, including mechanisms to review, revise, and improve, high-quality teacher and principal evaluation and support systems consistent with the SEA’s adopted guidelines.

General Overview and Implementation Timeline

Since the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted new regulations on the evaluation of educators in June 2011, Massachusetts has been deeply engaged in developing and implementing a new Educator Evaluation Framework.

Implementation began almost immediately in fall 2011 in the state’s 34 lowest performing (Level 4) schools, at an additional high school receiving a federal School Improvement (Section 1003(g)) grant, and in 11 districts and four special education collaboratives whose applications to serve as early adopter sites were accepted in summer 2011. Implementation began in Massachusetts’ 258 Race to the Top districts (66 percent of all public school districts) in the fall of 2012 and in remaining districts in the fall of 2013. As of 2014-15, all districts are implementing the Educator Evaluation Framework for all educators.

Evaluation Framework Overview

Massachusetts' educator evaluation regulations specify principles of evaluation that must be incorporated in all district educator evaluation systems. These include a five-step evaluation cycle with the following components: (1) self-assessment, (2) professional practice & student learning goal setting, and educator plan development, (3) plan implementation, (4) mid-cycle formative assessment/evaluation, and (5) summative evaluation. The regulations also establish evaluation Standards and Indicators of Effective Practice, set forth required categories of evidence for use in evaluations, establish four performance levels for professional practice, and require evaluators to rate each educator's impact on student learning as high, moderate, or low based on patterns and trends in student performance as measured by assessments known as "District-Determined Measures". These principles of evaluation result in a framework that focuses on the intersection of educator practice and educator impact on student learning and, as a result, comprises two linked, but independent, ratings:

1. Each educator is assigned a Summative Performance Rating⁶² at the end of the 5-step evaluation cycle. This rating assesses an educator's practice against four statewide Standards of Effective Teaching or Administrator Leadership Practice⁶³, as well as an educator's progress toward attainment of her/his professional practice and student learning goals.

In the Summative Performance Rating, the evaluator classifies the teacher or administrator's "professional practice" into one of four performance levels: *Exemplary*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, or *Unsatisfactory*. The evaluator applies her/his professional judgment to determine this rating based on multiple categories of evidence related to the four Standards, including classroom observations and artifacts of instruction; multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement; and student feedback (in the case of all educators) and staff feedback (in the case of administrators). The evaluator also applies her/his professional judgment to assess all of the evidence related to an educator's goals and determines the extent to which the educator is progressing toward each goal.

Student growth plays a significant factor in the Summative Performance Rating in two ways. First, multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement are a required source of evidence. An evaluator will review outcomes from student measures that an educator has collected to make judgments about the effectiveness of the educator's practice related to one or more of the four Standards. Such evidence may be from classroom assessments, projects, portfolios, and district or state assessments. Second, evaluators must consider progress toward attainment of the educator's student

⁶² For more information about the Summative Performance Rating see ESE's Performance Rating Guidance available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/implementation/RatingEdPerformance.pdf>.

⁶³ The four standards for teachers are (1) curriculum, planning & assessment, (2) teaching all students, (3) family & community engagement, and (4) professional culture. The four standards for administrators are (1) instructional leadership, (2) management & operations, (3) family & community engagement, and (4) professional culture.

learning goal when determining the Summative Performance Rating.

- Each educator is also assigned a Student Impact Rating,⁶⁴ which is separate but complementary to the Summative Performance Rating. This rating is informed by patterns (at least two measures) and trends (at least two years) in student learning, growth, and achievement as measured by statewide growth measures (student growth percentiles, or SGPs) where available, and District-Determined Measures (DDMs). DDMs are measures identified or developed locally by each district.

In order to determine the Student Impact Rating, the evaluator will apply her/his professional judgment and analyze trends and patterns of student learning, growth, and achievement presented by the SGPs and DDMs to determine whether the educator’s impact on student learning is *high*, *moderate*, or *low*. Each educator will be matched with at least two measures each year (DDMs and/or SGPs) to generate the data necessary for evaluators to determine Student Impact Ratings. Student growth percentiles from state assessments must be used as at least one measure where available.

Student growth is a significant factor in the Student Impact Rating, as the rating is wholly derived from the evaluator’s judgment of student outcomes from multiple measures of learning, growth, and achievement.

The two independent ratings that comprise Massachusetts’ framework intersect, resulting in twelve possible rating combinations as illustrated in the matrix below.

Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework				
Summative Performance Rating	<i>Exemplary</i>	Exemplary, Low	Exemplary, Moderate	Exemplary, High
	<i>Proficient</i>	Proficient, Low	Proficient, Moderate	Proficient, High
	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	Needs Improvement, Low	Needs Improvement, Moderate	Needs Improvement, High
	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	Unsatisfactory, Low	Unsatisfactory, Moderate	Unsatisfactory, High
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>
		Student Impact Rating		

⁶⁴ For more information about the Student Impact Rating see ESE’s Impact Rating Guidance available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/ddm/EducatorImpact.pdf>.

The intersection of the two ratings determines the consequences for the individual being evaluated. Strong Summative Performance Ratings (i.e., *Proficient* or *Exemplary*) and at least a *Moderate* Student Impact Rating is the expectation. Where the Summative Performance Rating *Needs Improvement*, the educator is placed on a Directed Growth Plan of a length to be determined by the evaluator, not to exceed one year. A Directed Growth Plan is developed jointly by the educator and the evaluator and includes activities focused on areas in need of improvement. Educators rated *Needs Improvement* must be rated at least *Proficient* by the next evaluation cycle or are rated *Unsatisfactory* and placed on improvement plans. Where the Summative Performance Rating is *Unsatisfactory*, the educator is placed on an Improvement Plan of at least 30 days and not more than one year, as determined by the evaluator. An Improvement Plan is developed by the evaluator to address areas the educator has demonstrated unsatisfactory practice. Failure to achieve a rating of at least *Proficient* after completing an improvement plan can lead to dismissal. A Summative Performance Rating of *Exemplary* or *Proficient* coupled with a *Low* Student Impact Rating results in (a) a one-year Self-Directed Growth Plan that focuses on the discrepancy between the two judgments, and (b) requires the intervention of the evaluator’s supervisor.⁶⁵

Every Massachusetts educator will receive both a Summative Performance Rating and a Student Impact Rating as required by our state framework for educator evaluation. Each rating draws upon a vast evidentiary base, and both include substantial use of measures of student growth. The intersection of the two ratings results in one of twelve possible performance and impact combinations. Together, the two ratings provide educators with a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their own professional practice and the impact they are having on student learning, as well as how the two relate. As described above, student growth plays a significant part in determining ratings, being factored into each educator’s evaluation in three different ways: (1) multiple measures is a required category of evidence in the determination of the Summative Performance Rating, (2) evaluators must factor in progress toward attainment of student learning goals in the determination of the Summative Performance Rating, and (3) the Student Impact rating is determined by analyzing patterns and trends in student learning, growth, and achievement.

Furthermore, as described in the following section, Massachusetts will use the 12 possible ratings to identify effective and less effective educators, ensure students have equitable access to excellent educators, and implement differentiated strategies to enhance educators’ effectiveness.

Evaluation Rating Data

ESE collects educator evaluation data through the Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS). Race to the Top Districts were required to report Summative Performance Ratings for at least 50 percent of educators following the 2012-13 school year and

⁶⁵ For more information about the intersection of the Summative Performance Rating and Student Impact Rating and Educator Plans, see the Quick Reference Guide on Educator Plans available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/ORG-EducatorPlans.pdf>.

100 percent annually thereafter. All other districts were required to report Summative Performance Ratings for the first time following the 2013-14 school year and annually thereafter. Districts have begun collecting educator impact data in the 2014-15 school year. All districts will report Student Impact Ratings to ESE for some educators following the 2016-17 school year and annually thereafter, given ESE’s April 2015 publication of the “Alternative Pathways for Evaluating Educator Impact Proposal”.⁶⁶ All districts will report Student Impact Ratings for all educators by the end of the 2017-2018 school year and annually thereafter. ESE publishes educator evaluation rating data on its website disaggregated by district and school, subject to suppression rules implemented to protect individual educator confidentiality. Individual evaluation data submitted to ESE is confidential and is not subject to disclosure under public records law per 603 CMR 35.11(6) and Section 2 of Chapter 131 of the Acts of 2012 (An Act Providing for the Implementation of Education Evaluation Systems in School Districts).

Ultimately, ESE’s educator evaluation ratings and data collection efforts will enable the Department to provide district leaders with reports regarding the alignment of effective educators with high needs student populations. These reports will catalyze efforts to support students’ equitable access to excellent educators (see below for additional details on reporting on the distribution of teachers).

For the purpose of reporting on educator effectiveness, ESE has delineated the following categories: highly effective, effective, and ineffective. These categories are applied to the twelve possible rating combinations as in the table below:

● = Highly Effective ● = Effective ● = Ineffective

Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework				
Summative Performance Rating	<i>Exemplary</i>	Exemplary, Low	Exemplary, Moderate	Exemplary, High
	<i>Proficient</i>	Proficient, Low	Proficient, Moderate	Proficient, High
	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	Needs Improvement, Low	Needs Improvement, Moderate	Needs Improvement, High
	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	Unsatisfactory, Low	Unsatisfactory, Moderate	Unsatisfactory, High
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>
		Student Impact Rating		

⁶⁶ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/QRG-AlternativePathways.pdf>

Reporting on Distribution of Educators by Effectiveness Rating

The requirements for equitable access stipulate that low-income and minority students shall not be disproportionately assigned to educators who are ineffective. Massachusetts is committed to ensuring equitable access for low-income and minority students to effective educators—both teachers and principals—across our state. To that end, ESE has developed two educator evaluation rating data reports for its Edwin Analytics platform accessible to all district and school leaders. We believe making these data accessible will catalyze conversation and action to ensure equitable access. The *Educator Evaluation Rating District Aggregate report* provides district and school leadership with a view of the distribution of educator evaluation ratings for all educators within a school district, alongside information about the distribution of the district’s student population. This report currently includes Summative Performance Ratings and will be updated to include Student Impact Ratings when those ratings are available. The *Educator Evaluation Roster report* provides district and school leadership with a customizable roster that displays an educator’s educator evaluation data alongside additional data points such as educator preparation program and licensure information, as well as information about the educator’s tenure within her/his current district. This report will also be enhanced to include Student Impact Ratings once they are available.

ESE has also developed a third Edwin Analytics report for our educator preparation programs to better understand the effectiveness of their program completers. The Educator Evaluation Rating Summary for Program Completers report allows preparation program staff to view aggregated educator evaluation ratings for their program completers overall and/or by program. Envisioned as a tool to support continuous improvement of Massachusetts educator preparation programs, this report provides programs a unique opportunity to see how effective their completers become as educators over time and as compared to the state overall. As programs improve, so will the quality of the Commonwealth’s educator workforce.

While the existing reports serve to assist districts in making sound decisions about educator assignment, an additional Edwin Analytics report for districts is in development that approaches equitable access from a different perspective, that of the student. ESE is working with stakeholders to develop a report that focuses on individual students’ learning experiences. The report will help schools and districts identify specific students who have been denied equitable access to effective educators so they can take appropriate actions moving forward. This report will include multiple data points about students’ teachers over the past five-year period, including: inexperienced teachers, evaluation ratings, absences and unlicensed teachers.

These reports will help identify areas of inequitable access to effective teachers and administrators, especially among (a) high poverty and/or high minority schools and (b) hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas. In addition, ESE will consider where measures of equitable access might be integrated into state-wide systems, including our evaluation and accountability systems.

ESE has also developed an annual report for each district and school that describes the distribution of educators by Summative Performance Rating (i.e., *Exemplary*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, or *Unsatisfactory*). This report is submitted to each superintendent and publicly available (subject to suppression rules implemented to protect individual educator confidentiality) in order to assist districts in reviewing the ratings data and to catalyze discussion and action.⁶⁷ Additionally, in accordance with federal requirements, ESE will produce an Equity Plan to submit to the U.S. Department of Education in June 2015. This plan will report on the analysis of educator distribution using various measures of quality and impact, including the Summative Performance Rating as well as student growth percentiles (where they exist for educators), especially among high poverty and high minority schools. Using 2015-2016 data and annually thereafter, ESE will produce a report for district leaders (unsuppressed) and the public (suppressed to protect confidentiality of educators) that displays the distribution of Summative Performance Ratings and Student Impact Ratings. The report will also use the schema described in the matrix above to show the distribution of educators that earn each of the 12 possible rating combinations, and by extension the distribution of ratings by the three categories of effectiveness (highly effective, effective, and ineffective). Data will be reported in the aggregate on teachers and administrators at the district and school level. These reports will be publicly available.

Implementation Timelines

Summative Performance Rating: RTTT districts reported these ratings for at least 50 percent of educators following the 2012-13 school year and reported for all educators following the 2013-14 school year. Non-RTTT districts reported for at least 50 percent of educators following the 2013-14 school year and will report for all educators following the 2014-15 school year.

Student Impact Rating: These ratings are based on patterns (at least two measures) and trends (at least two years of data) in student growth based on statewide growth measures, where available, and district-determined measures. Districts piloted DDMs during the 2013-14 school year in at least five required areas: (1) early grade literacy, (2) early grade math, (3) middle grade math, (4) high school writing to text, and (5) one traditionally non-tested grade/subject. DDM implementation commenced for all educators in all subjects and grades in 2014-15. All Massachusetts districts will determine each educator's impact and assign a designation of high, moderate, or low student growth for each DDM to each educator. Districts will advise all educators of these designations for all implemented DDMs before the end of the 2014-15 school year. Student Impact Ratings will be determined and reported to ESE following the 2015-16 school year (after the second year of data collection) and each subsequent year.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Public-facing educator evaluation reports are available on ESE's website at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/educatorevaluationperformance.aspx.

⁶⁸ Due to the complexity of identifying at least two measures for all educators, districts were given the option to request a one year extension of the time to implement DDMs for specific grades/subject and courses. The majority of districts sought extensions in at least some areas. As a result, some educators are on track to earn Student Impact Ratings following the 2015-16 school year (based on measures administered in 2014-15 and 2015-16), while others will earn their first Student Impact Ratings following the 2016-17 school year (based on measures administered in 2015-16 and 2016-17). Additionally, given the Alternative Pathways Proposal issued in April 2015, some districts may elect to use an additional year to refine measures of educator impact for some educators; in these cases, some educators in some districts would not receive their first Student Impact Rating until 2017-2018.

Alternative Pathways Proposal: In December 2014, ESE collaborated with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents to survey districts to understand the state of the work. The survey revealed wide variance in the degree of readiness for collecting Year 1 data. This survey data was corroborated by findings from an independent program evaluation, conducted by SRI International via a contract with ESE. Both sources revealed local collective bargaining and a lack of district-level assessment expertise and resources as impediments to the timeline. As a result of these data and extensive stakeholder engagement, ESE established the [Alternative Pathways Proposal](#) in April 2015 in an attempt to help all districts gain footing to move this work forward. The proposal permits districts to submit a request for (1) an additional year to continue refining measures before they “count” as Year 1 data sources, (2) a different process for determining Student Impact Rating that adheres to ESE’s core principles for evaluating educator impact, or (3) both. Districts must submit their requests by June 30, 2015. Under this request process, the outer boundary for full implementation is that districts collect Year 1 data for *most* educators by 2015-16 and all by 2016-17, with ratings to follow for *most* educators in 2016-17 and all by 2017-18.

Support for Effective Implementation

ESE is committed to supporting and monitoring the effective implementation of the regulations. In June 2011 ESE secured the services of AIR/Learning Points Associates to partner in the design and piloting of the state’s implementation support strategy. The educator evaluation project leads for ESE and AIR/Learning Points Associates worked closely with the Leadership Steering Committee (LSC) an ESE team charged with designing, piloting, implementing and monitoring the state’s new educator evaluation regulations. The educator evaluation team utilizes ESE’s delivery and project management processes to develop a robust annual project plan, track specific details of its implementation, and monitor district execution. ESE has also engaged in a multi-year study led by SRI International evaluating the agency’s implementation support efforts as well as districts’ implementation. .⁶⁹ Findings from the SRI study are a significant driver of the team’s work.

We recognize that implementation of new evaluation systems aligned to the MA Educator Evaluation Framework is challenging and have worked closely with districts to support their planning and development. As part of our ongoing support we have developed a range of materials for districts to use in building and implementing their own evaluation systems, including:

- A Model System that unpacks the regulations and includes: comprehensive implementation guides to support implementation of each component of the framework (including administrator and superintendent evaluation), model collective bargaining language districts can adopt or adapt, and model performance rubrics

⁶⁹ Information about the SRI study, including research briefs and ESE’s responses to findings is available on ESE’s website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/study/>.

aligned to the MA Standards and Indicators of Effective Practice;

- Quick Reference Guides and Implementation Briefs to distill aspects of the framework and build district capacity;⁷⁰
- A series of training modules for evaluators and training workshops for educators, including an Assessment Literacy webinar series;
- A website to serve as a central repository for information, resources, and tools⁷¹
- Regularly updated frequently asked questions posted on the website;
- A bimonthly educator evaluation e-newsletter featuring best practices from the field and announcements of new resources and technical assistance opportunities;⁷²
- An annual convening of all districts focused on the integration of educator evaluation systems with other critical district and state initiatives; and
- A network of approved “support providers” selected by ESE to assist districts and promote statewide consistency in implementation on issues such as evaluator training and inter-rater reliability, funded through RTTT.

Model System

The state rolled out an eight-part model evaluation system and a variety of performance rubrics from January 2012 through July 2014 to provide the maximum support to districts as they begin the complex process of redesigning their evaluation systems.⁷³ The elements of the Model System include:

- **Part I: District-Level Planning and Implementation Guide**
- **Part II: School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide**
- **Part III: Guide to Rubrics and Model Rubrics for Superintendent, Principal and Teacher**
- **Part IV: Model Collective Bargaining Contract Language**
- **Part V: Implementation Guide for Principal Evaluation**
- **Part VI: Implementation Guide for Superintendent Evaluation**
- **Part VII: Rating Educator Impact on Student Learning Using District-Determined Measures of Student Learning**

⁷⁰ QRGs are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>. Implementation Briefs are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/ddm/briefs.html>.

⁷¹ www.doe.mass.edu/eval/

⁷² <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/communications/newsletter/>.

⁷³ The Model System is posted on ESE’s website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/model/>. The webpage includes a description of each part of the Model System.

- **Part VIII: Using Staff and Student Feedback in the Evaluation Process**

The Model System was supplemented by training modules intended for evaluators and school leadership teams and training workshops intended for teachers that addressed specific elements of implementation to support initial rollout.

Training Modules for Evaluators	Training Workshops for Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 1: Overview (and 1 hour Overview version) • Module 2: Unpacking the Rubric • Module 3: Self-Assessment • Module 4: S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Educator Plan Development • Module 5: Gathering Evidence • Module 6: Observations and Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation • Workshop 1: Rubric Review • Workshop 2: Self-Assessment • Workshop 3: S.M.A.R.T. Goals • Workshop 4: Gathering Evidence

ESE is committed to working closely with districts to ensure effective implementation that meets the intent of the new regulations and provides educators with the useful feedback and support they need to improve and strengthen their practice. ESE has built a range of feedback loops and mechanisms into the implementation supports it is providing which will allow mid-course adjustments to be made, when necessary. We continue to reach out to stakeholders to identify additional needed supports in critical areas such as the evaluation of special education teachers, ESL teachers, and Specialized Instructional Support Personnel.

Rating Educator Impact on Student Learning

As described above, all educators are required to be evaluated using at least two measures of student learning. Their impact on student growth will be rated on a scale of high, moderate, or low based on state assessments (when available) and at least one other district-determined measure common across grades or subjects district-wide, such as student portfolios, capstone projects, and performances.

ESE has developed and disseminated guidance and tools to support DDMs development, as well as guidance on how to use these measures, plus state assessment data when available, to rate educator impact on student learning and growth.⁷⁴ Most recently, ESE has produced a series of

⁷⁴ ESE released Part VII of the Model System in August 2012. Part VII contains guidance for districts on identifying and using district-determined measures of student learning, growth and achievement, and determining ratings of high, moderate or low for educator impact on student learning. ESE supplemented Part VII with Technical Guide A in May 2013 to provide guidance to districts on how to evaluate and identify district-determined measures (DDMs) and published Technical Guide B in September 2013 to provide guidance on piloting DDMs and identifying approaches to measuring student growth. In addition, ESE has provided a series of supports to help districts integrate implementation of the new educator evaluation system and implementation of the shifts in

Implementation Briefs designed to support teams of educators to identify or develop DDMs. ESE is also supporting a DDMs Development Leadership Grant provided to six educational collaboratives who have organized working groups of educators to develop example DDMs that will be shared across the Commonwealth in spring 2015.

Using Student and Staff Feedback

In developing the state's new regulations, the task force recognized that information from a wide variety of sources, such as students, teachers, and parents, is invaluable in gaining a full picture of each educator's performance.

The new regulations call for the use of student feedback for teacher evaluations, and staff feedback for administrator evaluations. Recognizing that there are complex issues to consider in collecting and making effective use of this type of feedback, the regulations did not require this feedback to be used right away. Districts are required to begin incorporating student and staff feedback into the evaluation process during the 2014-15 school year. To support this additional category of evidence, ESE disseminated guidance and tools for using student and staff feedback in July 2014. Most notably, ESE worked with nine pilot districts and stakeholders from across the Commonwealth during the 2013-14 school year to develop ESE's Model Feedback Surveys. Student surveys for classroom teachers are available in standard and short forms and in two grade bands: grades 3-5 and grades 9-12. Staff surveys for school leaders are also available in standard and short forms. The Model Feedback Surveys are open-source and are the only surveys explicitly designed to align to the MA Standards and Indicators of Effective Practice.

Ensuring Effective and Consistent Implementation

Massachusetts' Educator Evaluation Framework was carefully designed to balance the need for statewide consistency with local district autonomy. All districts have the flexibility to either adopt the Model System, adapt the Model System to meet local conditions, or modify their own evaluation systems consistent with the principles of Massachusetts' framework.

In addition, districts are responsible for determining which additional, non-state required measures should be used to determine Student Impact Ratings and which tools to use to collect student and staff feedback..

- While the framework does not supersede collective bargaining, local agreements must be entirely consistent with the principles articulated in the regulations. ESE developed model collective bargaining language as part of its Model System covering both the Summative Performance Rating and Student Impact Rating.. All districts were required

curriculum and instruction embedded in the new ELA and math Curriculum Frameworks. In particular, ESE has made available a series of resources, technical assistance, and professional development aimed at helping districts build comprehensive plans for integrating these two key initiatives. Additional ESE supports around DDMs include the identification of example DDMs in a wide array of grades/subjects and courses, regional technical assistance and networking sessions, and DDMs and assessment literacy webinar series.

to submit their educator evaluation systems and collective bargaining agreements to ESE for review.

ESE also collects and analyzes evaluation data from districts annually to ensure that the evaluation regulations are being implemented effectively statewide. The results are publicly reported by ESE, enhancing the transparency of this effort. A detailed timeline for key state and district implementation requirements follows.

January 10, 2012	ESE issues Model System forms, templates, and guidance; RTTT districts begin collective bargaining at the local level
August 2012	ESE provides guidance on district-determined measures of student learning, growth, and achievement
Summer 2012	RTTT districts submit their proposed educator evaluation systems to ESE for review, including collective bargaining agreements
September 2012	RTTT districts implement educator evaluation
By January 2013	All remaining districts begin collective bargaining
September 2013	All districts implement educator evaluation All districts submit a list of the DDMs to be piloted during the 2013-14 school year
By June 2014	All districts submit their final plans for implementing statewide growth measures and DDMs for the purpose of collecting Year 1 Student Impact Rating data during the 2014-15 school year ⁷⁵
July 2014	ESE issues direction on gathering student and staff feedback; ESE reports to the Board on feasibility of parent feedback
Summer 2016	All districts submit Student Impact Ratings based on data from the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

The Department is committed to supporting district planning and development and to bring cohesion to educator evaluation implementation and other programs such as Title II, Part A. The purpose of Title II, Part A is to increase student achievement through comprehensive district initiatives that focus on the preparation, training, recruitment, and retention of effective educators. The goal is to improve the overall effectiveness of all educators, making those activities that focus on educator effectiveness a high priority.

⁷⁵ Note: In conjunction with the June submission, districts were permitted to request an extension of the time to implement DDMs for specific grades/subjects or courses for which DDMs had not yet been identified. Such requests were evaluated on a district-by-district basis and approval was contingent upon receipt of a rationale that included a statement of the efforts made to date to identify DDMs for the specified grade(s)/subject(s) or course(s), as well as a plan for how the district will use an additional year to research and pilot potential DDMs. See memorandum from Commissioner Chester, dated 8/15/13: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=7640>.

To sharpen this focus on educator effectiveness, ESE will revise its Title II, Part A Needs Assessment to better enable the use of Title II, Part A funding to leverage any evident weakness in a district’s educator evaluation implementation, recruitment, retention and professional support of educators. ESE will ask districts to target the use of Title IIA to meet the goals of promoting effective educators. Specifically:

- ESE will pre-populate each district’s Title IIA Needs Assessment with such data as aggregated educator evaluation results, staff retention rates, and state assessment and accountability data. Districts will be required to use this information to guide their Title II, Part A spending and align the use of Title II, Part A with the goal of educator effectiveness. Districts will be required to articulate broader goals for their school systems and students than currently required through the needs assessment process, and align application of Title II, Part A funding to those goals with outcome measures.
- In addition, ESE will revise its grant review and approval process to include a protocol to carefully examine any proposed transfer of Title II, Part A funds to ensure certain criteria are met relative to implementation of educator effectiveness priorities prior to approval.
- As part of the Title II, Part A sub-grantee application approval and monitoring process, ESE will require districts to provide data on the impact of activities previously funded by the Title II, Part A grant related to the quality of teacher practice and student learning.

The Department is dedicated to helping educators improve their practice through participation in high quality professional development. High quality professional development is a set of coherent learning experiences that is systematic, purposeful, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving teacher practice and student outcomes. Toward that end, we have invested RTTT funds to develop guidance and resources to improve professional development and make the educator work more efficient.

- We have established [state standards for high quality professional development](#) and have incorporated these standards into our Title II, Part A sub grantee application process;
- In May 2015, we will be launching a Case Study video library showcasing how to use the Massachusetts Standards for High Quality Professional Development for result-oriented PD planning and implementation, including how to use educator evaluation data to inform professional development planning and delivery;
- In May 2015, we will be releasing a Professional Development Planning Guide that provides an overview of a planning process that supports effective professional development aligned to the [Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development](#);
- In May 2015, we will be releasing a *Toolkit for Assessing Professional Development*. This resource is designed to help district and school leaders assess the quality and results of their district and school professional development. It was developed to help determine whether the professional development achieved its intended goals and objectives and guide improvement in professional development planning and implementation;
- Additionally, in early spring 2015 we will release revised Induction and Mentoring guidelines that align with educator effectiveness initiatives.

March 2015 renewal request: Massachusetts has selected Option C for Principle 3 Assurance 15 (see page 9). The preceding description of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework and associated implementation efforts illustrates full SEA and LEA commitment to implementing thoughtful and comprehensive evaluation processes for all educators that adhere to federal guidelines for ESEA flexibility. As required by the *2013 ESEA Flexibility Guidance for the Renewal Process*, the narrative explains progress in ensuring that each district is on track to implement high-quality teacher and principal evaluation systems (e.g., annual rating data collection and reporting, required DDMs implementation plan and update submissions, the leveraging of the Title IIA grant application process and monitoring to home in on educator evaluation implementation), the changes ESE has made to the implementation schedule to ensure that districts implement well-designed systems that will endure, rather than rushed systems that would buckle under scrutiny (e.g., DDMs extension request process, Alternative Pathways Proposal), and steps ESE will take to ensure continuous improvement of the framework (e.g., Edwin Analytics reports, DDMs Development Leadership Grant, stakeholder feedback loops).

SAMPLE FORMAT FOR PLAN

Below is one example of a format an SEA may use to provide a plan to meet a particular principle in the *ESEA Flexibility*.

Key Milestone or Activity	Detailed Timeline	Party or Parties Responsible	Evidence (Attachment)	Resources (e.g., staff time, additional funding)	Significant Obstacles