



Race to the Top Executive Summary

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Accelerating reform

For the past two decades Massachusetts has engaged in a sustained effort to improve teaching and learning in classrooms across the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) enacted in 1993 established the state's commitment to standards-based reform, and since then this effort has enjoyed stable support from state policy leaders. This commitment has brought us to a point where, compared national and international standards, our students perform extremely well. The endurance and stability of this framework has been critical to the success that Massachusetts has experienced and will continue to be critical for its success in the future.

Despite these successes, however, gaps and inequities persist, which generates a constant sense of urgency that we can always be doing better on behalf of our nearly one million children. At the time that the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition was announced, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) was developing a new set of strategies to address these persistent achievement gaps and increase the number of high school graduates who are prepared to succeed in college and in the workplace.

ESE has partnered with districts to drive progress through the following strategies that map very closely to the reform areas outlined in USED's RTTT agenda:

- Improving educator effectiveness: Attract, develop, and retain an effective, academically capable, diverse and culturally proficient educator workforce to ensure every student is taught by a great teacher and every school and district is led by a great leader
- Strengthening curriculum, instruction and assessment: Provide curricular and instructional resources to provide every educator with the tools necessary to promote and support student achievement.
- Turning around the lowest performing districts and schools: Concentrate great instruction and additional supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools and their districts to create the conditions needed for improved student achievement.
- Using data and technology to support student performance: Empower educators and leadership teams with data and instructional tools to enhance targeted decision-making and improve student outcomes.

Over the last five years the support that Massachusetts received from the United States Department of Education (USED) through RTTT was critical in accelerating ESE's progress in each one of these strategic areas. All RTTT initiatives support ESE's focus on preparing Massachusetts students for success after high school. ESE's forward-looking vision is built on a belief that curriculum, enrichment programs, and development opportunities taking place in classrooms today must prepare students for the careers and postsecondary education opportunities that await them after graduation.

RTTT led to a number of important achievements that will have long-lasting impacts on our work at the state level and in our districts.

RTTT successes

1. Strengthened relationships with the field: RTTT prompted ESE to provide more technical assistance and direct support to schools and districts..
2. Developed high quality curriculum resources: RTTT gave ESE the resources to fill the gap between standards and assessments by developing high quality curriculum resources in collaboration with the field.
3. Connected curriculum and instruction with educator effectiveness: RTTT generated a new conversation among educators across the state about the elements of effective instruction.
4. Improved professional development: RTTT allowed ESE to expand its professional development offerings and institute new standards for high quality professional development.
5. Integrated the approach to college and career readiness: ESE is now working more closely with the Department of High Education (DHE) and other partners to better coordinate college and career development activities statewide.
6. Educator preparation: ESE now has more rigorous educator preparation standards and better mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of educator preparation programs.
7. Built a new data infrastructure: RTTT allowed for the development of data tools and instructional resources that did not exist five years ago.
8. Expanded the state's role in school and district turnaround: The Achievement Gap Act expanded the Commonwealth's authority to intervene in struggling schools and districts and RTTT provided much needed resources to help launch this work.

Despite these accomplishments, there are a number of challenges that persist among schools and districts in the Commonwealth that will focus our reform efforts going forward.

Remaining challenges

1. Closing the achievement gap: The Commonwealth is committed to preparing all students for success after high school in order to close the achievement gap.
2. Consolidating gains: At times the pace and scope of the reform initiated through RTTT challenged ESE's and LEAs' capacity. Both ESE and LEAs will need time to consolidate the gains that have been made in key areas such as educator evaluation, curriculum alignment, and data use.
3. Expanding ESE's technical assistance capacity: RTTT expanded ESE's capacity to provide technical assistance to the field, but more support is needed in this area.
4. Improving classroom practice statewide: RTTT initiated positive change in many classrooms across the Commonwealth, but not everywhere. ESE is now engaged in the difficult work of reaching educators in every classroom in the Commonwealth to improve curriculum and instruction.
5. Integrating technology and data use: RTTT allowed ESE to build out its data infrastructure; the next challenge will be to get classroom educators to maximize the use of these tools in their classrooms.
6. Improving resource allocation: RTTT provided much needed resources to the Commonwealth to initiate these reforms, but in the absence of these funds both the state and LEAs will need new approaches to resource allocation to sustain this work and support ongoing improvement.

Improving educator effectiveness

ESE believes that great teachers are crucial to student success and has placed an emphasis on recruiting, developing and retaining effective educators. RTTT provided ESE with the resources to equip teachers with the tools they need to be change agents in their districts by strengthening teacher preparation programs, ensuring each educator is provided with the feedback they need to improve, expanding professional development opportunities, and providing opportunities for leadership.

Successes

As the initial entry points into the system, educator preparation and licensure are two areas that experienced fundamental changes as a result of RTTT. RTTT provided the resources for ESE to strengthen its standards for educator preparation programs and its approach to evaluating these programs. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) passed new licensure regulations in December 2011, and ESE has been evaluating educator preparation programs using these new standards.

An outgrowth of this work is that ESE has been working to develop a performance assessment for principals, known as the Performance Assessment for Leaders (PAL). The PAL will be part of the preparation and licensure process for aspiring principals and incorporates performance assessment tasks that more closely reflect the work of school leaders. PAL is expected to set a high bar for school leader candidates, which is important given the critical role that principals play creating the vision, support, organizational structures, and environment to support effective teaching and learning.

Once educators are in the classroom, evaluating teachers practice is important to support a cycle of continuous improvement. Prior to RTTT, districts instituted their own approaches to evaluating educator effectiveness, and some districts did a better job than others. The implementation of the educator evaluation framework has sparked conversations between educators across the Commonwealth about what good teaching looks like and how to look at effective teaching through the lens of curriculum and instruction and student performance.

This was possible because ESE successfully worked with unions to create model contract language to be fully adopted or adapted by districts. Educator Effectiveness Teachers and Principals cabinets were also established to deepen collaboration with educators in the Commonwealth and gain essential feedback and buy-in to the evaluation framework. ESE provided and continues to provide extensive training and support to the field to implement the new evaluation framework.

Table 1: 2013–2014 Educator evaluation results

	N	N evaluated	% evaluated	% Exemplary	% Proficient	% Needs Improvement	% Unsatisfactory
All educators	87,923	71,675	81.5%	8.1%	86.5%	4.8%	0.5%
All administrators	6,726	4,561	67.8%	12.9%	83.5%	3.4%	0.1%
Principals	1,827	1,299	71.1%	11.3%	84.1%	4.4%	0.2%
Teachers	72,518	60,720	83.7%	7.6%	86.8%	5.1%	0.6%

Table 1 shows that 81.5 percent of all educators in the Commonwealth were evaluated using the new framework during the 2013–2014 school, which was the first full year of implementation for all districts in the state. Most educators in the state across all classifications were rated proficient, with much smaller numbers rated in the exemplary, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory categories.

Now that close to all educators in the Commonwealth are receiving summative performance ratings, ESE is in the process of implementing the student impact ratings statewide to begin to assess the impact that individual educators are having on student performance. Listening to concerns expressed by the field, ESE opted to delay fully implementation of the student impact rating until the 2015–2016 school year. This was to give districts more time to develop the District-Determined Measures (DDMs) across all grades and subjects that they will use, in addition to student growth scores, to determine student impact ratings.

In order to improve professional growth and student learning, ESE is committed to ensuring the success of the statewide educator evaluation framework by providing educators with training materials and resources, meaningful guidance, timely communications, and by engaging educators in the development and ongoing refinement of the framework. ESE publishes a regular [newsletter](#) about educator evaluation, consults with teacher and principal advisory cabinets, supports professional learning communities in a number of districts to expand teacher leader roles and build evaluator capacity, and disseminates research findings. We also host an annual spring summit to highlight district initiatives and share best practices.

In addition to educator evaluation, professional development is essential to supporting a culture of continuous improvement. Over the course of RTTT, ESE has taken a much more active role in defining what constitutes a high quality professional development experience, in identifying high quality professional development providers, and creating a system to more closely track educators’ participation in professional development as part of the re-licensure. RTTT also prompted ESE to address critical areas of need related to professional development for educators who work with English Language Learners, for superintendents, and for school leaders.

Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL), which was launched with the support of RTTT funds, is focused on improving the quality of instruction for English language learners (ELLs). RETELL established a professional development curriculum to support the teaching and learning of ELLs in order to reduce proficiency gaps. Teachers that successfully complete the course earn a Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) endorsement on their license. This training was rolled out first to teachers in districts with the highest concentrations of

ELL students and is being expanded to reach all districts in the state and so far close to 14,000 educators have earned an SEI endorsement.

ESE has also been working to develop the skills of school and district leaders. In spring 2010, ESE entered into a partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) to develop and implement the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP). The purpose of this program is to promote effective district leadership that is focused on student learning and continuous improvement. NSIP emphasizes five core objectives that expand district capacity and support school improvement:

1. Building instructional leadership
2. Developing effective leadership teams
3. Developing collaborative relationships with key constituencies
4. Managing resources strategically
5. Developing and implementing effective systems for supervision and evaluation

RTTT funds also allowed LEAs to use their grant funds to enroll school leaders in the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) program. Massachusetts has been participating in NISL for over a decade, and RTTT expanded the number of school leaders that could be trained. Over the course of the program 361 principals and other school-based leaders completed NISL training. ESE also established leadership training for classroom educators by using RTTT funds to establish the Project SUCCESS mentor training program in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Four hundred lead mentors from 70 districts were trained directly through the Project SUCCESS program, and an additional 96 were trained through the train-the-trainer model.

Challenges

Implementing the educator evaluation framework involved the largest expenditure of effort at both the state and local levels. The model contract language that was developed by ESE in partnership with the teachers' unions helped pave the way for implementation, but separate negotiations still needed to be completed in all 321 operating school districts in the Commonwealth, whether they opted to adopt or adapt the model language. Once negotiations were settled, districts then had to establish the routines necessary to successfully implement the evaluation system in practice. ESE has and continues to support district implementation, but districts are still working to integrate the evaluation cycle into their daily practice. The capacity to implement educator evaluation with fidelity varies both across and within districts. ESE is providing technical assistance to districts to support implementation.

Given the level of complexity and effort involved in this rollout, ESE made the decision to delay implementing the student impact rating and the staff and student survey portions of the evaluation framework. Districts are still working through developing the DDMs that they will use to determine student impact ratings in non-tested grades and subjects.

Looking ahead

Through its RTTT initiatives, ESE to made improvements to its educator preparation and development system from preparation programs to licensure to educator evaluation and

professional development. Implementation in all of these areas will continue well beyond RTTT. All schools in the Commonwealth will fully implement student impact ratings during the 2014–2015 school year.

RTTT has allowed ESE to rethink the work that it is doing to support professional development for educators at all levels, from classroom teachers to central office administrators. ESE intends to continue to play an active role identifying and supporting high quality professional development for educators.

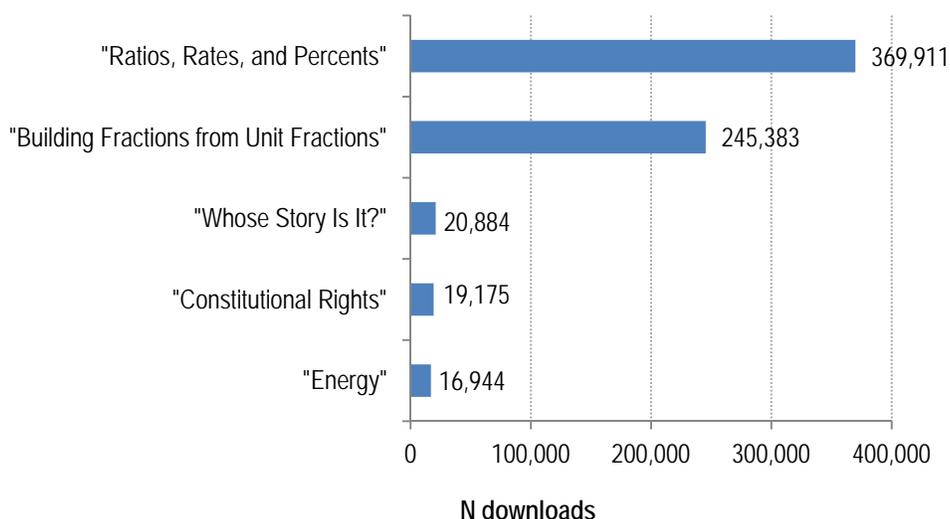
Strengthen curriculum, instruction and assessment

Massachusetts aims to ensure that all students have access to a challenging course of study. Along with educator evaluation, implementing the new curriculum frameworks has been one of Massachusetts' core RTTT priorities. ESE adopted new curriculum frameworks for ELA and mathematics, incorporating the Common Core State Standards, in March 2011. Since then work has progressed at both the state and local levels to adopt the new standards and to create high quality resources to support implementation.

Successes

RTTT allowed ESE to become a much more active partner with LEAs in developing curriculum resources that are aligned to the new standards. It has long been recognized that a missing piece in the Commonwealth's standards-based system was high quality curriculum resources to help districts teach to the standards. ESE centered much of its RTTT-funded activities in this area on working with Massachusetts educators to develop a comprehensive set of fully aligned [Model Curriculum Units \(MCUs\)](#) with associated curriculum maps and lesson plans. We now have over 100 fully aligned curriculum units in all grades and subjects available to educators throughout the state and beyond. The MCUs have been well received by the field, and districts are integrating them in whole or in part. Some MCUs were featured nationally by Achieve and generated hundreds of thousands of downloads.

Figure 1: Five most downloaded model units between May 2013 and July 2014



One of the key findings to emerge over the course of RTTT was the need to integrate educator evaluation with curriculum alignment. This push toward integration has been at the center of much of ESE's work with districts in these areas. From the perspective of educator evaluation, we have focused on using the educator evaluation framework to advance educators' professional practice and capacity for implementing the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. ESE also used RTTT funds to support Professional Practice Innovation Grants, which ask districts to take innovative approaches to implement the new educator evaluation framework in a way that promotes implementation of the Curriculum Frameworks. Similarly, each model curriculum unit is fully aligned with the educator evaluation standards and includes curriculum-embedded performance assessments (CEPAs) that can be used as DDMs.

ESE also built on the concept of curriculum-embedded performance tasks by developing the Massachusetts Performance Assessments of Knowledge and Skills (MPAKS). MPAKS are designed to assess standards that are not easily tested by traditional assessments. ESE has worked extensively with an advisory council of local educators to develop and review nine MPAKS in biology, grade 2 ELA, grade 4 history, grade 2 mathematics, physics, grade 4 science, grade 7 science, technology and engineering, and United States history. Approximately 43 teachers are administering and scoring MPAKS in their classrooms in the fall 2014. Student responses will be evaluated to inform future MPAKS development, and participating teachers will be surveyed to assess their experiences administering the assessment. By the end of RTTT, ESE's goal is to have several exemplars of performance assessments that have been tested, reshaped, and that are ready for the next stages of development to suit the needs of the Commonwealth.

Also, the agency's assessment staff has been working with LEAs to provide guidance on developing interim and formative assessments and to expand the number of assessment items in Edwin, the state's new teaching and learning system (described further below). ESE is planning to publish an Assessment Literacy Guidance document for Edwin Teaching and Learning in the spring of 2015. We are continuing to obtain new assessment items for Edwin Teaching and Learning, including MCAS items, and we are finalizing an agreement to obtain up to 8,000 high-quality assessment items from CoreSpring, a provider of assessment item banks.

The work that ESE has done to develop CEPAs, MPAKS, and interim and formative assessments support implementation of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Over the last five years, ESE has been laying the groundwork to make the transition from MCAS to PARCC by playing a leading role in developing and piloting the exam and by providing technical assistance to the field to ensure that districts are ready to implement the assessment. During the spring of 2014, 81,000 students in 345 districts and 1,050 schools participated in the PARCC field test, with 65 percent of students tested online. More than half of the students in Massachusetts are now signed up to take PARCC in spring 2015. The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) will vote on whether to formally adopt PARCC as the Commonwealth's summative assessment in the fall of 2015 for full administration statewide in the spring of 2016.

In addition to PARCC, ESE supported other efforts to increase the number of students prepared to succeed after high school. In 2012, the Task Force for the Integration of College and Career

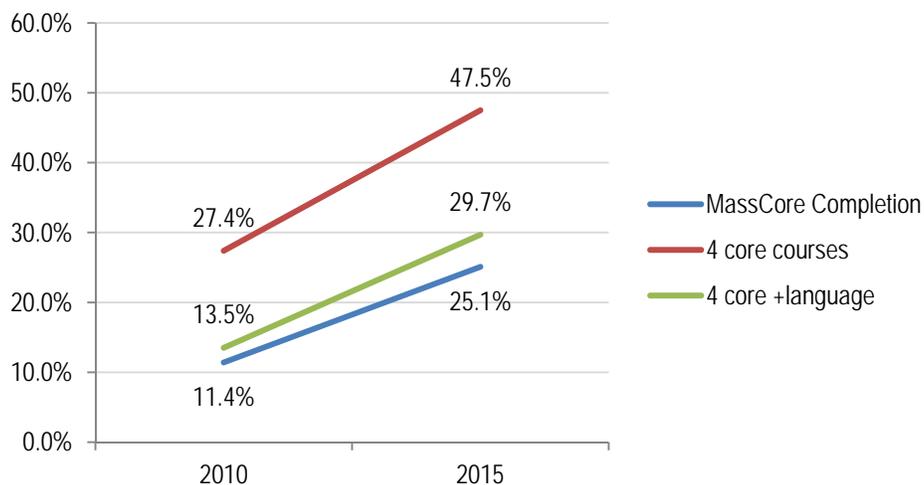
Readiness released a [comprehensive report](#) with a series of recommendations designed to promote structured, aligned, and strategic partnerships that support students' fluid movement through elementary, secondary, and higher education and into successful careers. Among these recommendations was to adopt and implement an expanded framework for [MassCore](#), Massachusetts' recommended high school course of study, that explicitly includes integrated career development experiences for high school students.

As an outgrowth to this work, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) and BESE approved the state's new college and [career readiness definition](#) in 2013. Voting on the definition marks the first time that the two boards overseeing the state's K–12 schools and public colleges and universities have partnered in formal agreement on what it means for students to be prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workplace. The definition sends a clear, unified message to educators, students, parents, and employers about our expectations and the level of preparation and performance that signals a student's readiness for college and careers. The definition provides a solid foundation for continued collaboration between the K–12 and higher education systems.

ESE is encouraging more districts to adopt MassCore as their required course of study for all high school students. Since the beginning of RTTT the state has seen steady growth in the number of high schools requiring MassCore as a graduation requirement, at the same time as graduation rates are increasing statewide

A survey of Massachusetts high schools conducted in the summer of 2014 found that 25 percent of high schools now require their students to complete MassCore in order to graduate, nearly a 14 percentage point increase over 2010. We have also seen consistent growth in schools requiring the four core courses in the MassCore course of study: mathematics, English language arts, science technology/engineering, and history/social studies and in the four core courses plus foreign language. We expect that number will continue to grow as more districts align their requirements to increased admissions standards at Massachusetts public higher education institutions.

Figure 2: Schools requiring a rigorous course of study



The Pre-AP teacher training project aimed to increase the number of low income and high needs students that succeed in AP courses and testing by providing teachers in grades 6–12 with high quality training to develop teaching skills, lesson content, and tests that prepare students for AP coursework. Key parts of this work were collaboration with vertical teacher teams within districts and the opportunity for regional professional learning and networking opportunities.

Over 2,000 teachers received training in chemistry, biology, physics, middle and high school grades math, and middle and high school grades English and composition. Pre-AP teacher training enabled schools to meet the growing demand for AP courses and test preparation. Between 2009 and 2013, AP exam taking in Massachusetts increased by 32 percent, from 50,239 exams to 74,668, and the number of subsidized exams taken increased from 6,454 to 12,730, indicating that more low income students were taking AP courses.

Preparing more students for careers in STEM fields was another area where ESE invested RTTT dollars. The purposes of STEM Early College High Schools (ECHS) are to prepare the state's young people for productive careers serving the state's STEM workforce needs and to reduce and ultimately eliminate achievement gaps in high school completion, college preparedness, and completion of STEM degrees by:

1. Developing a scope and sequence of required, academically rigorous STEM coursework along with career development education enrichment opportunities.
2. Providing organizational, study, research and other skills required to be successful in STEM fields.
3. Partnering with higher education, businesses, and community organizations.
4. Creating a strategy for recruiting and retaining students, with a particular focus on first generation college attending students.

STEM ECHS's are connecting students to college and universities as well as careers in science, technology engineering, and math fields. The STEM ECHS project has contributed to the growing statewide participation in early college school design models and more dual enrollment opportunities to support the post-secondary outcomes of first generation college students.

Challenges

LEAs are moving to implement the new curriculum frameworks and to implement PARCC, but districts still need support in both of these areas. Some districts are better positioned than others to align their curricula to the new frameworks, and some districts have more capacity than others to administer PARCC as an online assessment. The Commonwealth is undertaking an effort to provide assistance to districts through an IT bond bill that will provide needed funds to district that will allow them to upgrade and expand their technology to support PARCC administration as well as to integrate technology in classroom instruction.

Another challenge in this area is that ESE is now focused on influencing change at the classroom level more directly than in previous reform efforts. Integrating educator evaluation and curriculum alignment have been central in this effort. Educator evaluation has helped generate conversations between classroom teachers and school leaders around what good instruction looks like and has promoted more meaningful conversations between teachers. The process of

developing MCUs and MPAKS has also established a much more collaborative relationship between ESE and the field around the development of high quality curriculum resources and accompanying maps and performance assessments, which can also be used as DDMs. The challenge ahead is sustaining work that is already underway in classrooms and providing effective professional development to support implementation at all levels.

More students in the Commonwealth are required to complete the MassCore program of study to graduate from high school than was true 4 years ago, but still only 25 percent of Massachusetts high schools require MassCore. ESE continues to encourage and provide technical assistance to support more high schools to move toward MassCore and particularly to encourage more at-risk students to complete a rigorous course of study.

Looking ahead

Transitioning to PARCC will be the biggest challenge of the upcoming school year. We are scheduled to pilot test the assessment in a number of school districts during the spring of 2015 and the BESE is scheduled to vote on whether to adopt PARCC during the fall of 2015.

Expanding the use of the curriculum materials that were developed through RTTT is another focus area. Development of the MCUs demonstrated the high quality results that can be achieved through collaboration between ESE and the field. We are now engaged in efforts to support and expand the use of these materials in classrooms. Similarly, once we are at a stage where the MPAKS are ready for broad release, we will be undertaking similar efforts to promote use of those materials.

Turning around the lowest performing districts and schools

In 2010, Massachusetts enacted the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, which expanded the state's authority to intervene in underperforming schools and districts; established innovation schools; and increased the cap on charter schools in underperforming districts. Turning around the performance of underperforming districts and schools is essential to the Commonwealth's effort to close the achievement gap. RTTT-funded interventions in this area targeted academic and non-academic areas of students' lives to ensure that they have the supports they need to succeed in school. Additionally, RTTT has provided the opportunity for low performing districts to contract with turnaround experts, accelerating the pace of progress and building a foundation for the district to sustain after RTTT funds expire.

Successes

Massachusetts has taken an aggressive and proactive approach to turning around its lowest performing schools. One of the major initiatives undertaken by ESE at the outset of RTTT was to approve a group of Priority Partners for Turnaround in a number of key reform areas: social emotional and health needs, maximizing learning time, effective use of data, and district systems of support. Priority Partners are external organizations that have a proven track record of results and demonstrated effectiveness in accelerating school improvement. Priority Partners were vetted through a rigorous review process and are familiar with the context and requirements of Massachusetts school turnaround work.

Through RTTT ESE provided competitive grant funding for Level 4 districts to establish Wraparound Zones. The purpose of the Wraparound Zone (WAZ) initiative was to build district and school capacity to systematically address students' non-academic barriers to learning. Understanding that needs differ across communities, ESE has given WAZ districts the flexibility to tailor the program and its supports to the local context.

Under RTTT, 32 WAZ schools were established in six districts. Each participating school and district implemented a unique set of strategies to create a positive climate and culture, proactively identify and address student needs, and better capitalize on the expertise and resources of the community to meet those needs. Among the first cohort of 35 turnaround schools, 18 (51 percent) successfully exited Level 4 status after 3 years. Fifteen of the 35 schools participated in Wraparound Zones and 10 (67 percent) qualified to exit Level 4 status.

Each WAZ district is developing a sustainability and replication plan, and ESE will be highlighting promising practices and lessons learned. Early evidence from the evaluation of the initiative, as well as from reports from the field, reveal positive indicators about the sustainability of the work: improved systems for supporting students have been embedded at the district and school levels; new and vital partnerships have been established and formalized; and WAZ strategies are being replicated at non-WAZ schools in each district. An evaluation of the WAZ initiative conducted by AIR found that, "Overall, analysis of the evaluation data... shows that the WAZ initiative has made a significant contribution to student outcomes in WAZ schools, and perhaps more important, has enhanced districts' capacity to support the implementation of strategies focused on a positive school climate, identifying and addressing student needs, and creating and maintaining meaningful school-community partnerships."

Another major turnaround effort that was initiated concurrently with RTTT was the designation of the Lawrence Public Schools as a Level 5 district, which placed the district in state receivership. The BESE voted on November 29, 2011, to designate the Lawrence Public Schools as a Level 5 district, pursuant to the Board's authority under the Achievement Gap Act of 2010. This gave the commissioner the authority to appoint a receiver to act as the superintendent and the school committee for the district during the period that the district remains in Level 5 status. Jeff Riley, the state appointed receiver, worked with ESE to develop an accelerated turnaround plan for the district that focused on six themes:

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

Lawrence serves a student population of approximately 13,600 students and operates 33 schools, of which six have been identified as Level 4. ESE engaged a number of proven partners to assume the responsibility, subject to the receiver's review, for operating the four K–8 Level 4 schools, including Unlocking Potential, the Community Group, and the Lawrence Teachers Union. Phoenix Foundation has been engaged to create and operate a new alternative high school, and Match Tutors has been engaged to support the two Level 4 high schools. The proven partners, some of which have experience operating charter schools, have agreed to operate these schools without a charter and without a lottery system for student enrollment, while employing teachers and other staff who become members of the local unions.

Since the district was placed in receivership, students in the Lawrence Public Schools have made strong gains in MCAS performance, particularly in mathematics. In addition, year-to-year student learning progress, as measured by the MCAS student growth percentile, has improved in both English language arts and mathematics. The 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. Over the past two years, student performance at four schools was strong enough to raise the schools to Level 1 status, bringing the number of Level 1 schools in the district to six. These early results are strong evidence for the efficacy of the district's accelerated turnaround strategies.

The Achievement Gap Act also gave the Commissioner the authority to declare chronically underperforming schools within districts Level 5, triggering state governance and requiring the Commissioner to convene a local stakeholder group, create a turnaround plan that will rapidly improve student achievement, direct the superintendent or an appointed receiver to implement the plan, and evaluate the school at least annually.

In October 2013, four schools were placed into Level 5: Dever Elementary School and Holland Elementary School in Boston, Morgan Full Service Community School in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary School in New Bedford. The Blueprint Schools Network and the UP Education Network were appointed as receivers to Dever and Holland respectively, Project Grad was appointed the receiver to Morgan, and the superintendent of the New Bedford Public Schools was appointed as the receiver of Parker.

ESE is working closely with all four Level 5 school teams to provide support, technical assistance, and oversight as the school year gets underway. ESE staff members have observed extensive summer professional development and classroom instruction at all four schools. The team reports that the quality of instruction varied among classrooms, but all campuses are focusing on setting high academic and behavioral expectations for students.

Challenges

The Achievement Gap Act expanded ESE's authority to intervene in struggling schools and districts, and RTTT provided much needed funding to support these efforts. While there are clear successes that we can point to as an agency, turnaround efforts have not yielded the necessary results in a number of schools.

Building ESE's capacity to handle this critical work continues to be a challenge, particularly in light of the fact that additional districts and schools could be declared Level 5 in the coming years. Declaring a school Level 5 and selecting an operator to manage the school on behalf of the Commonwealth creates a significant amount of assistance work for the agency. It fundamentally changes the relationship of the school to the district with regard to instructional leadership, but still requires maintaining and managing operational ties between the turnaround partner and the district. ESE has more work to do to identify turnaround partners who can engage in this work and to build the capacity of existing turnaround partners. This is an area that ESE will need to continue to address as it shifts from its past role as a largely compliance-oriented agency to one that is more focused on providing technical assistance.

Looking Ahead

The success of the WAZ initiative has prompted ESE to assess the other work that it is doing to support students' social-emotional health needs. We are starting to look at how various units within the agency are supporting this work and how these efforts might be coordinated, with the potential that these projects might play a more prominent role in the agency's strategic plan and delivery initiatives.

The team is also working to recruit, vet, and build the capacity of additional turnaround operators. ESE has partnered with The District Management Council to produce recruitment materials and has already received three proposals from new potential organizations, with more anticipated in the next few weeks. In addition, the team will be offering a second round of investment funding to help promising organizations build the infrastructure necessary to position themselves as receivers and/or operators. The team is also conducting site visits to observe the work of some of these organizations, in case additional receivers are needed.

Springfield Public Schools is engaging in a unique endeavor to dramatically transform their middle schools, five of which have been struggling in Level 4 status since 2010 and another three that were designated as Level 4 this past fall. The plan calls for the creation of a Springfield Empowerment Zone that will have unprecedented Level 5-like autonomies to address the challenges of the schools and engage with the necessary partners to meet their needs.

Using data and technology to support student performance

Access to near real-time data allows educators to maximize classroom time by identifying areas where students need the most support. RTTT provided key resources that allowed ESE to simplify data reporting at the same time that it greatly expanded and improved its data warehouse and built a new online teaching and learning platform to support classroom instruction. Professional development opportunities are being provided in tandem with new tools, creating a culture of data-driven instruction in districts.

Successes

ESE's efforts to improve data infrastructure focused on implementing the School Interoperability Framework (SIF) and building Edwin Analytics. SIF provides near real-time data transmission between LEAs and the state. After technical delays hampered progress in the first two years of the project, we now have 233 districts, enrolling close to two thirds of the students in the state, that are able to submit their data to ESE using SIF. Our goal is to have all 408 districts certify

their Student Information Management System (SIMS), Student Course Schedule (SCS), and Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS) data using SIF by the end of the 2015 calendar year.

Real-time data transmission via SIF is integral to fully realizing the potential of the Edwin Analytics and Edwin Teaching and Learning Systems. Edwin Analytics is the Commonwealth's data warehouse in which educators at all levels, including district and school level administrators and classroom teachers, can access student performance, Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS), educator, and school finance data. SIF will substantially reduce the lag time between data collection and data reporting, maximizing the impact that the data can have on district decision-making. Together, SIF and Edwin Analytics represent a marked step forward in ESE's data collection and data reporting capabilities. Edwin Analytics is also central to ESE's efforts to promote a culture of data-informed decision-making. Usage statistics show that educators are using Edwin Analytics at high levels, with over 1.2 million reports generated in SY 2013–14. One of ESE's goals before the end of RTTT is to create training modules that will be available in Edwin Analytics to maximize use of the tool.

Edwin Teaching and Learning is the other side of ESE's Edwin system, providing tools that support many of the state's curriculum and instruction initiatives, including MCUs, online interim and formative assessments, curriculum maps, digital resources, and a competency tracking system for career and vocational technical educators. Edwin Teaching and Learning is a cost-effective alternative for districts that are seeking an integrated learning management system.

There are now 32,000 educators in 145 districts registered to use Edwin Teaching and Learning. An average of 500 users per month logged into the system between August and November 2014, and the number of users logging in increased each month over this time period. Overall, however, we are seeing low levels of usage with only 20 districts actively using the system, mostly to develop interim and formative assessments. ESE sponsored six Edwin road shows in October and November that were attended by 900 educators from across the Commonwealth to raise awareness and promote use of the system.

ESE understands that simply providing districts with more data is not enough and that training on data use is critical to helping schools and district leverage these new tools. One of the agency's more successful efforts has been direct technical assistance provided to districts through the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) data specialists. DSACs are a network of six regional assistance centers that provide technical assistance to Level 1, 2, and 3 districts. The district data specialists work with district personnel in their respective DSAC regions to improve their use of data to improve instruction, focused on using the district [data team toolkit](#) that ESE developed in 2010. Over 10,000 educators have received training from the DSAC data specialists since 2011. In addition, ESE used RTTT funds to launch the Data in Action project (DIA) to provide additional resources to educators to support use of the agency's data tools.

Challenges

ESE experienced a number of delays implementing SIF, but after re-starting the project, implementation has progressed and we are expecting all 406 districts in the Commonwealth to be

uploading SIMS, SCS, and EPIMS data via SIF to ESE by the end of 2015. Implementing SIF will allow the Commonwealth to fully realize the potential of Edwin Analytics and the Edwin Teaching and Learning System. At the same time, state needs to increase its efforts to get more districts to adopt and actively use the Edwin Teaching and Learning System.

Our original vision of data training for educators shifted over the course of RTTT as we gained knowledge about what approach would be most effective and sustainable for the state. We are now developing training modules through the DIA project for Edwin Analytics and School and District Profiles to promote greater knowledge and more effective use of specific data reports and tools within these two platforms.

Looking Ahead

Fully implementing SIF will be a major step forward for the agency and for districts across the Commonwealth not only from a data management perspective, but also from the perspective of data usage and data access. It could also lay the groundwork for ESE to administer other data collections, such as school finance data, using SIF.

Going forward, ESE's priority is continue to provide outreach and technical assistance to districts to leverage the data tools that have been built and expanded over the past four years. This will include providing technical support to districts and continued training such as that provided by the DSAC Data Specialists.

Beyond RTTT

RTTT funding has been critical in allowing Massachusetts to accelerate progress toward fulfilling the ambitious reform agenda that the state launched more than two decades ago. RTTT allowed the Commonwealth to advance in a number of key areas concurrently and to build connections between the various initiatives in a way that was new. Without RTTT, the Commonwealth would not have made the progress that it has over the last five years.

What is different? Five years ago, the state did not have an educator evaluation system, but ESE is now engaged in an ongoing conversation with the field about how districts can support continuous improvement among educators and promote high quality instruction. The development of MCUs and MPAKS demonstrated how educators can lead the way in developing high quality curriculum resources for their peers across the state and beyond. We have also expanded the number of high quality professional development offerings and instituted standards around what quality professional development looks like, standards that did not exist five years ago. We are now taking a more integrated approach to college and career readiness and are seeing continued growth in graduation rates and in the number of graduates completing a rigorous course of study. The Achievement Gap Act expanded the Commonwealth's authority to intervene in struggling schools and districts and RTTT provided much needed resources to help launch this work, which is starting to pay dividends. Finally, supported by SIF, Edwin Analytics is providing districts with valuable data to inform initiatives and classroom instruction.

There were challenges along the way. At times LEAs struggled to keep up with the pace of reforms and some LEAs progressed further than others. ESE also experienced false starts with some of its initiatives and others fell short in meeting their original targets. In the post-RTTT period, we will focus on consolidating the progress that we have made and deepening the impact

of the reforms we have initiated, particularly in educator evaluation, curriculum and instruction, school and district turnaround, and data use training.

Looking back, RTTT will be viewed as a critical investment that allowed ESE to open a new chapter in its ongoing efforts to expand educational opportunity, one marked by a much deeper level of collaboration between ESE and school districts across the Commonwealth.