

Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance (2013-2014)

Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014 Line Item 7061-9408 and G.L. c.69, §1J (z)
July 2015

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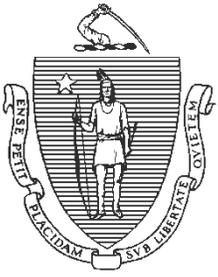
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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

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Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to present a progress report on the ongoing work of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“the Department”) to provide targeted assistance to the districts and schools across the Commonwealth with the highest need, pursuant to Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014, line item 7061-9408, and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 69 section 1J, which directs the Department to provide:

For targeted intervention to schools and districts at risk of or determined to be underperforming under sections 1J and 1K of chapter 69 of the General Laws, schools and districts which have been placed in the accountability status of identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring pursuant to departmental regulations...

This work originally began in March 2010, when 35 Level 4 schools were announced and were the first to undertake a new turnaround planning process defined in *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*.¹ This statute provided new flexibilities to turn around our state’s lowest performing schools. In the several years since this work began, 18 schools from this first cohort of designated schools have exited Level 4 status, with five schools moving to Level 1. While the majority of resources supporting school improvement were from federal School Improvement Grants (SIG), state targeted assistance funds were vital to achieving improvements in Level 4 schools. These funds have helped finance new, innovative, evidence-based strategies to build the strong practices in schools and districts necessary to meet the significant challenge of turning around schools that had been the lowest performing in the state for many years.

In addition, in October 2013 the Department for the first time exercised its authority under *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* to designate four Level 5 schools out of the first cohort of Level 4 schools that had not made sufficient progress over the terms of their Turnaround Plans. The Department assigned receivers in three of the schools—the Holland and Dever Schools in Boston and the Morgan School in Holyoke—to implement the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Turnaround Plans and assigned the New Bedford Public Schools Superintendent to oversee the implementation of the Turnaround Plan at the Parker School in that city. During the winter and spring of 2014, Local Stakeholder Groups were convened and, as

¹ Massachusetts' state system thoroughly reviews and places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in [Level 5](#). This approach is detailed in our [2013 report on intervention and targeted assistance](#), as well as on the Department’s [website](#).

required by the statute, the Commissioner developed Turnaround Plans to be implemented in each of the schools starting in the 2014-2015 school year.

Also under the authorities provided in *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education placed the Lawrence public school district under receivership as a Level 5 district in November 2011.² To meet this responsibility and opportunity, the Department directed some Targeted Intervention and Assistance funds to augment local resources in order to provide expert assistance in the state's highest need district.

Targeted assistance funds also were used to document progress and conduct research to identify and share effective strategies with other low-performing schools and districts. Evaluations of the targeted assistance efforts have been conducted annually by objective third-party research organizations. This year marked the final cycle of several years of evaluations with the production of two culminating analytical research documents: *Turnaround Practices in Action* and the *Final DSAC Evaluation Report*.³ This research has informed our strategies to foster rapid improvement in schools that rank in the lowest 20 percent of the state's performance.

Finally, funds were used to provide an array of direct financial and professional development support to district and school leaders and educators across the spectrum of Level 3, 4, and 5 districts to meet challenges in closing the achievement gaps for the wide range of students in their schools. As expectations rise to meet more rigorous standards, Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools depend on support efforts, networking, and targeted activities to expand their knowledge of effective practices to meet the growing and more challenging demands their students face. Targeted Intervention and Assistance funds were allocated to **intervene** in the state's lowest performing schools and to help **prevent** further decline in student performance in other very low-performing schools. This report summarizes and provides examples of the funds' uses and illustrates the impact of the resources on the students and educators in the served districts.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

² As of April 28, 2015, Holyoke Public Schools has been placed under receivership as well: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=17923>.

³ *Turnaround Practices in Action Report*: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/2014PracticesReport.pdf> and *Final DSAC Evaluation Report: 2014*: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/dsac/2014EvalReport-DSAC.pdf>

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this *Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance* pursuant to Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014, line item 7061-9408:

For targeted intervention to schools and districts at risk of or determined to be underperforming under sections 1J and 1K of chapter 69 of the General Laws, schools and districts which have been placed in the accountability status of identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring pursuant to departmental regulations, or which have been designated commonwealth priority schools or commonwealth pilot schools pursuant to said regulations; provided, that no money shall be expended in any school or district that fails to file a comprehensive district plan pursuant to the provisions of section 1I of said chapter 69; provided further, that the department shall only approve reform plans with proven, replicable results in improving student performance; provided further, that in carrying out the provisions of this item, the department may contract with school support specialists, turnaround partners and such other external assistance as is needed in the expert opinion of the commissioner to successfully turn around failing school and district performance; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on targeted intervention unless the department shall have approved, as part of the comprehensive district improvement plan, a professional development plan which addresses the needs of the district as determined by the department; provided further, that eligible professional development activities for the purposes of this item shall include, but not be limited to: professional development among teachers of the same grade levels and teachers of the same subject matter across grade levels, professional development focused on improving the teacher's content knowledge in the field or subject area in which the teacher is practicing, professional development which provides teachers with research based strategies for increasing student success, professional development teaching the principles of data driven instruction, and funding which helps provide common planning time for teachers within a school and within the school district; provided further, that funds may be expended for the purchase of instructional materials pursuant to section 57 of chapter 15 of the General Laws; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on instructional materials except where the purchase of such materials is part of a comprehensive plan to align the school or district curriculum with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks; provided further, that preference in distributing funds shall be made for proposals which coordinate reform efforts within all schools of a district in order to prevent conflicts between multiple reforms and interventions among the schools; provided further, that the department shall issue a report not later than January 9, 2015 describing and analyzing all intervention and targeted assistance efforts funded by this item; provided further, that the report shall be provided to the secretary of administration and finance, the senate president, the speaker of the house, the chairs of the house and senate ways and means committees, and the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on education; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on recurring school or school district expenditures unless the department and school district have developed a long-term plan to fund such

expenditures from the district's operational budget; provided further, that any funds distributed from this item to a city, town or regional school district shall be deposited with the treasurer of such city, town or regional school district and held in a separate account and shall be expended by the school committee of such city, town or regional school district without further appropriation, notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary; provided further, the department shall give priority to programs that have the capacity to serve not less than 25 per cent of a district's middle school population and make available documentation of a minimum of \$1 in private sector, local or federal funds for every \$1 in state funds; provided further, that appropriated funds may be expended for programs or activities during the summer months; and provided further, that \$250,000 shall be expended for the continuation of the parent engagement program under item 7061-9408 of section 2 of chapter 182 of the acts of 2008...

and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 69 Section 1J (z):

The commissioner shall report annually to the joint committee on education, the house and senate committees on ways and means, the speaker of the house of representatives and the senate president on the implementation and fiscal impact of this section and section 1K. The report shall include, but not be limited to, a list of all schools currently designated as underperforming or chronically underperforming, a list of all districts currently designated as chronically underperforming, the plans and timetable for returning the schools and districts to the local school committee and strategies used in each of the schools and districts to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students.

Overview

In 2010, the legislature enacted *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted regulations to support its implementation. These regulations authorized two related sets of standards for schools and districts: the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and the *District Standards and Indicators*. These standards articulate essential elements for effective school and district practices and are source documents for the content and organization of the assistance provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“the Department”).

Pursuant to the provisions of M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J & 1K under the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, the Department is required to intervene in Level 4 and 5 districts and must make assistance available to Level 3 districts. All assistance is designed to broaden the knowledge and strengthen the use of effective practices in districts, so their schools are able to implement the most current and effective instructional and supportive practices for their students to achieve at their highest potential.

Targeted assistance supported by resources in line item 7061-9408 to high-need districts and schools is overseen by the Department primarily through the Center for Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance’s Statewide System of Support. The Department’s Statewide System of Support prioritizes assistance to those districts in Levels 3, 4, and 5 within the *Framework for District Accountability and Assistance* (see Appendix I), per its legal obligation to serve those with highest need.

This system is consistent with the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which requires establishment of a *Statewide System of Support* to prioritize financial supports and targeted assistance to help schools that are not meeting performance goals to raise student achievement, and which also requires classification of schools based on their performance.

Our research has shown that schools and districts that are most effective at improving student performance focus on a small constellation of mutually reinforcing and carefully executed standards. The Department's assistance is designed to use a variety of methods to help support districts' and schools' movement along the continuum toward high performing implementation of the Conditions for School Effectiveness and the District Standards and Indicators. Efforts of team members in the Statewide System of Support and resources from Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts, state budget line 7061-9408, are centered on district and school capacity-building initiatives, which are highlighted in this report.

In addition, the assistance is designed to support Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools in their implementation and integration of the new resources and tools that are the cornerstone of the Department's major goals and initiatives. As such, assistance providers foster the implementation of the *2011 Curriculum Frameworks* and *Model Curriculum Units*, the use of the Educator Evaluation system to improve the quality of leadership and instruction, and the use of data and resources accessed through Edwin Teaching and Learning and Edwin Analytics.

To address the range of needs in these districts, the Statewide System of Support uses two inter-related but different structures for providing assistance, so that supports can be customized to fit various districts' contexts. These structures use a mix of experienced educators, consultants, and high-quality partners with extensive and diverse experiences in education to provide district and school assistance. They offer high quality and credible support with the insight, coaching, and resources essential for improvement. **Together these offices served a total of 408,298 students or 43 percent of the state's total enrollment (955,572) across 20 percent of the Commonwealth's school districts in 2014. Over 60 percent (62.3 percent) of these students were low income, 15 percent were English language learners, and 19 percent were students with disabilities.** The focus and delivery systems of these two service structures are as follows.

1. **The Office of District and School Turnaround ("ODST")** focuses its support on the 10 largest highest poverty districts and their schools. These ten districts (often known as the "Commissioner's Districts") are designated in Levels 3, 4, and 5. The districts are Boston, Brockton, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield and Worcester. **ODST served a total of 192,248 students in these districts in 2014 (20 percent of the state's student enrollment).** This assistance delivery system is designed to build upon the considerable content and leadership infrastructure of these large districts. The Department's assistance focuses resources and support to enhance the operation of district systems so they will be well positioned to support the needs of their lowest performing schools. Assistance is provided through the deployment of liaisons and program coordinators from within ODST who coordinate within the Department's offices of Curriculum and Instruction; Educator Effectiveness; College and Career Readiness; English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement; Tiered Systems of Support; School Improvement

Grant Programs; and Special Education, Planning and Policy Development. Liaisons are full-time employees of the Department assigned to work with these districts as point-people to address a number of district and school needs. They provide direct services to these districts, and coordinate supports from other offices at the Department based on needs highlighted in data, through improvement plans, districts' self-assessments, and direct observations conducted by these highly skilled liaisons.

Additional assistance is provided by turnaround partners and consultants, vetted by the Department, with records of accomplishment -in improving outcomes for high-needs and urban students in a variety of areas essential to school and district turnaround and improvement. Because the Commissioner's Districts already have significant infrastructure in place, the work of the liaisons and the focus of the turnaround projects often center on refining systems, improving communication and schools' access to services, and strengthening the link between the central office and school sites.

- 2. The Office for the Regional System of Support** focuses support on small and medium-sized districts primarily in Levels 3 and 4. Support is delivered through virtual **District and School Assistance Centers ("DSACs")** that are organized into six regions across the state. The DSACs serve a broad range of struggling districts that often lack sufficient infrastructure and human resources to deliver the complex array of supports necessary to further their educational improvement efforts. To respond to these needs, DSACs are staffed by a team of experts, including former superintendents (known as Regional Assistance Directors) and principals (known as Support Facilitators), who provide experienced leadership and guidance for targeted assistance efforts to schools and districts, as well as specialists in mathematics, literacy, data use, and vocational technical education. These Department representatives, who operate as an integrated regional assistance team, offer districts a focused menu of assistance, customizing that assistance to meet districts' specific needs. In 2014, the **DSACs offered services to 61 districts that served 216,050 students or 23 percent of the Commonwealth's public school student population.**

Both the ODST assistance liaisons and the DSAC regional teams work in partnership with districts.⁴ They analyze data from a variety of sources, collaborate with district and school leaders to identify and focus on high leverage needs, and develop annual plans to implement assistance strategies that will best promote and stimulate rapid and sustained student performance gains. They can choose from a range of resources and strategies that support research-based approaches and respond to a variety of districts' requests and contexts.

Impact Summary:

In 2014, the assistance efforts undertaken by the Statewide System of Support, along with districts' own efforts, resulted in the following changes.

Overall, the impact of capacity building was seen in many of the schools in the Commissioner's and DSAC districts. Eighteen, or **53 percent**, of the 35 schools in the first cohort of **Level 4 schools have exited** Level 4 status because they met their performance targets. (Two of the

⁴ List of districts and schools by region and accountability and assistance level:
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/2014/levels.xlsx>

original cohort of 35 closed.)⁵ Recent studies across several cohorts of Level 4 schools showed **significantly greater student performance gains over state or comparison schools** in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. For example, over the four years since the first cohort of schools was named Level 4 in 2010, the state has improved one percentage point in the students that were proficient or advanced on the ELA MCAS, whereas those Level 4 schools improved, in aggregate, four percentage points. **Sixty percent** of the 25 districts in the Urban Superintendents Network **increased the number of their schools in Levels 1 and 2**, and **25 percent of Level 3 and 4 elementary schools significantly raised third-grade reading proficiency** scores between 10 and 55 points in one year. The Composite Performance Index (CPI) **improvement trajectories in mathematics and science in Level 3 and 4 districts outpaced** the CPI trajectories in **Level 1 and 2 districts**. In the past two years, Level 3 schools in **DSAC districts improved the percentage of students in proficient and advanced MCAS categories at a faster pace than the state**. For example, mathematics scores rose 4.4 percent, while the state increase was 1.4 percent. From 2011-2014, one-third of Level 3 schools have moved out of the lowest 20th percentile, and Level 3 schools that remained in that status reversed the decline in percentile rankings from 2012-2014.

External evaluations of both ODST and DSAC work have been conducted and point to very positive findings in the development of systems of successful assistance for school improvement and turnaround practices. Key findings from the DSAC and ODST evaluation reports share insights from the school and district recipients of the assistance, indicating it is highly relevant and useful to their improvement efforts.

Summary of Targeted Assistance Fund Use in 2013-2014

The Department applies funds from the Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts account (state budget line 7061-9408) to support key interventions in the Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools. Between July 2013 and June 2014, \$7,795,601 was allocated. This includes \$927,694 that was carried over from the prior fiscal year to allow intensive programs to be implemented in July and August of 2013.⁶ Federal resources, primarily from Title I School Improvement funds and Race to the Top (“RTTT”) funds, have been used in coordination with the state’s Targeted Assistance funds to supplement and complement key assistance initiatives. (RTTT funding will no longer be available after June 2015, a situation that could curtail targeted assistance efforts in coming years.) While federal funds are used in a manner consistent with state legislation to help enhance some initiatives and expand their reach, state funding from the Targeted Assistance line is the main source of funds for the Department to fulfill its obligations under M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J & 1K, as noted earlier. The Department utilizes state funding to achieve strategic priorities designed to intervene in and strengthen districts and schools in the state’s most challenging educational environments.

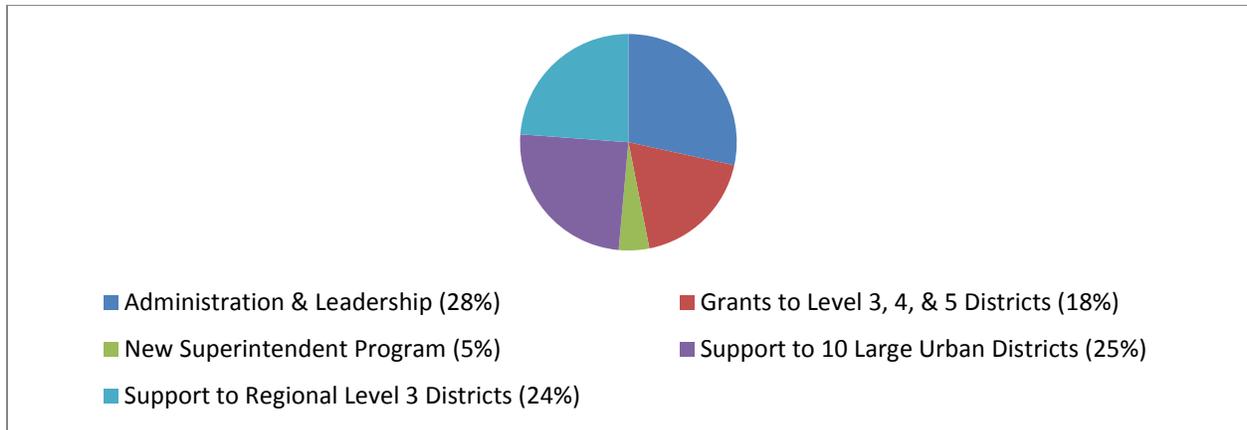
The vast majority of the state targeted assistance funds are expended through grants to districts or contracts with expert providers to enable Level 3, 4, and 5 districts to implement innovative,

⁵Level 4 Schools In Massachusetts: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/schools-list.pdf>

⁶ Prior Appropriation Continued (PAC) language that allows Targeted Assistance funds to be used during the summer enabled the Department to provide concentrated programs for educators and students and added to schools’ ability to make rapid improvement.

research-based strategies targeted to advance the performance of the state’s highest- need students and close the achievement gap.

Approximately 28 percent of the funds from this account were directed to administration and leadership. These funds support essential staffing positions that provide direct assistance to districts on the effective use of these and related funds to support interventions in planning, curriculum, instruction, and leadership areas, with the largest portion directed to the ten largest high poverty districts (Commissioner’s Districts). The following chart summarizes the breakdown of the resources.



Approximately 25 percent of the funds (\$1,917,693) were devoted to a variety of initiatives designed to strengthen the Commonwealth’s ten highest need districts and their schools. Twenty-four percent of the funds (\$1,849,167) were used to support a variety of activities supporting 61 districts and their schools through the DSACs. Approximately 18 percent of the funds (\$1,433,910) went directly to districts in the form of grants to enable the districts to address key needs for professional development, school intervention, and improvement purposes. Five percent of the funds (\$353,265) supported multiple cohorts of new district leaders in multi-year, content-based training and coaching (known as the New Superintendents Induction Program). In partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the new school superintendents are provided with expert training and support to strengthen their instructional leadership skills and knowledge in order to lead their districts in the current Massachusetts context.

The intensity and focus of assistance was based on district and school needs, their interest and capacity as well as their accountability status. What follows is a summary of the 7061-9408 resource use in FY2014 (excluding regular employee costs) organized by targeted audience for the assistance activity.

[These funds were allocated to work in tandem with federal Title I, Race to the Top, and School Redesign Grant funds to intervene in the Commonwealth’s lowest performing districts and schools (Levels 3, 4 ,and 5). As noted above, some of the federal funds are being reduced substantially at the end of fiscal year 2015.]

Building Capacity to Implement and Sustain Effective Practices:

- Level 3 and 4 School and District Leaders: Conducting research on exiting Level 4 and other high performing schools to isolate, describe, and share practices that have led to rapidly improved performance.
- Level 3 and 4 School and District Leaders: Providing professional development on conducting *Learning Walkthroughs* to gather and analyze information on the implementation of instructional practices.
- Level 3 and 4 School and District Leaders: Providing professional development, networking, and organizational support to enable schools to implement structures for professional collaboration to support improved and targeted instructional practices.
- Level 3, 4, and 5 Schools and Districts: Contracting with an external evaluator to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts assistance model for the state’s ten largest urban “Commissioner’s Districts” by gathering formative and summative information from district and school leaders to ensure the continuing efficacy of the assistance provided and to document effective practices for wider dissemination and guidance.
- Level 4 and 5 Districts: Providing support grants to some districts to implement intensive professional development in literacy, focused training on implementing effective instructional practices, and developing tools and resources to share highly effective practices in rapidly improving Level 4 schools.
- Level 3, 4, and 5 Schools and Districts: Providing support for districts and schools to conduct self-assessments of their implementation of the Conditions for School Effectiveness and to develop and implement plans to institute new practices to meet more effectively these expected school conditions. The plans may involve contracting with expert providers, such as the Priority Partners for Turnaround.

Leadership Development for Turnaround and Instructional Leadership:

- Level 4 School Leaders: Supporting the design and implementation of a Turnaround Leadership Academy to create a pipeline of principals with the training and practical experience to lead turnaround in challenging schools.
- Level 2, 3, and 4 District Leaders: Partnering with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents to implement a *New Superintendents Induction Program* to build capacity of new district leaders to be instructional leaders.
- Level 3 School Leaders: Coaching for principals to facilitate and calibrate common understanding of instructional practices.

Data Analysis and Plan Development to Support Rapid Improvement:

- Level 5 Schools: Conducting of deep analyses by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education with assistance from staff in ODST as well as the Legal, Curriculum and Instruction, and Educator Effectiveness offices of the Department at the four Level 5 schools designated in October 2013, involving Local Stakeholder Group meetings to gather input into key improvement strategies followed by development of Turnaround Plans for each of the schools to be implemented in SY14-15.
- Level 4 School Leaders: Supporting Level 4 schools with district liaisons from ODST and DSAC staff to analyze data and develop strong Turnaround Plans that meet the Conditions for School Effectiveness. They also facilitate access to significant federal School Improvement Grant funds to support implementation of the plans.

- Level 3 and 4 District Leaders: Addressing areas of need identified in the District Reviews of the District Standards and Indicators through district-wide plan development and capacity building to track implementation and impact (both directly and using consultants).
- Level 3 and 4 School Leaders and Educators: Conducting assessments of the implementation of the Conditions for School Effectiveness by either facilitating self-assessments or deploying independent review teams.

Professional Development and Networking to Build Capacity:

- Level 3 and 4 District Leaders: Bringing together urban district leaders through an *Urban Superintendents Network* from the 10 Commissioner’s Districts as well as 15 of the superintendents in the medium-sized urban districts served by the DSACs. This long-standing network is a primary source of information sharing and problem solving.
- Level 3 and 4 District Content Leaders: Convening urban mathematics, literacy, science, school culture and student support, and English language learners’ networks to build the capacity and knowledge of urban content leaders to access and use the professional development and resources from the Department, such as the Model Curriculum Units and wraparound practices. These networks also create opportunities for urban content leaders to share best practices and implementation strategies. The Department’s content specialists from the Curriculum and Instruction units facilitate many of these networks.
- Level 3 and 4 District and School Leaders: Facilitating content and leadership networks regionally through the DSACs in mathematics, literacy, data use, English language learners, instructional leadership, principal leadership, and teacher coaching to provide opportunities for professional learning and capacity building based on current research of best practices as well as on the Curriculum Frameworks, Model Curriculum Units, and Educator Evaluation District- Determined Measures.
- Level 3 and 4 District and School Leaders: Facilitating a Turnaround Principals’ Network, and a “Thought Partnership” for urban district leaders for professional learning and problem solving.
- Level 3 and 4 Schools and Districts: Facilitating and delivering high-quality professional development supporting improved instruction in literacy, mathematics, science, and special education in Level 3 schools and districts through the DSACs and other partners.
- Level 3, 4, and 5 Schools and Districts: Supporting district and school teams to map curriculum and build capacity for the implementation of the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- Level 3 and 4 Districts: Providing grants to support participation in high-quality professional development designed to support the implementation of research-based effective instructional practices in mathematics, literacy, and key improvement practices such as Professional Learning Communities, classroom observations, data analysis, and planning. These grants are coordinated through the DSACs and are designed to align with districts’ strategic improvement initiatives and the Conditions for School Effectiveness.
- Level 3, 4, and 5 Schools and Districts: Providing implementation support for Universal Design for Learning and Tiered Systems of Support to provide effective access to learning for all students.

Identifying, Vetting, and Deploying Expert Partners:

- Level 4 Schools and Districts: Soliciting and vetting turnaround partners that provide expert direct assistance to Level 4 schools in the implementation of key Conditions for School Effectiveness.
- Level 4 and 5 Schools: Recruiting and matching schools with proven Operators or Receivers to lead the implementation of a turnaround that produces rapid improvement in student performance.
- Level 4 and 5 Districts: Funding Plan Managers and Plan Monitors in Holyoke, New Bedford, Lawrence, Randolph, Salem, and Southbridge to support the implementation of Accelerated Improvement Plans (“AIPs”) and the Level 5 District Turnaround Plan in Lawrence. These plans are district-level plans that are developed to guide the districts’ initiatives that focus key leadership and instructional improvement initiatives. Plan Managers fulfill essential functions that support plan development as well as establish and support systems to ensure effective implementation and impact. Plan Monitors provide accountability, ensuring that the districts gather data on impact and continually refine their strategies to achieve stronger results for students.
- Level 3 and 4 School Leaders: Funding contracted positions in the DSACs, including the Regional Assistance Directors (former School Superintendents) who lead the regional work, and a portion of the Support Facilitators’ (former school principals) contracts to provide direct professional coaching and assistance to Level 3 and 4 school leaders, faculty, and leadership teams.
- Level 3, 4, and 5 School and District Leaders: Utilizing the services of partners to plan and execute intra-district and inter-district networks for high school leaders and for teacher teams implementing specialized research-based instructional practices designed specifically to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities and other learners.

Evaluation Findings and Examples of Impact of Targeted Assistance Funded through 7061-9408

The implementation of the targeted assistance initiatives has resulted in changes in school and district performance, systems, and conditions. To achieve significant impact, the specific fund uses have been designed in partnership with the districts to advance practices that have been found through research to build capacity significantly for improvement in schools and districts.

While there is considerable work ahead to accomplish our goals of closing the achievement gap and raising the performance of students in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools across the state, there is strong evidence that the resources and assistance provided through the Statewide System of Support are rated as relevant and supportive by recipients and some student outcomes are improving.

The following examples provide evidence that these initiatives, funded with state targeted assistance funds, have resulted in positive outcomes that have strengthened district and school capacity for improvement.

Accountability Status Improvement:

As noted earlier, **four schools in the Commissioner’s Districts exited Level 4 status and two Commissioner’s Districts rose from Level 4 to Level 3.** Initiatives funded through line item

7061-9408, along with support from ODST liaisons, were common among these schools and districts and, thus, were part of the totality of efforts that resulted in the gains that were achieved. Furthermore, **13 percent of the districts in Level 3 in 2013 exited that status in 2014**, meaning that none of their schools was in the lowest 20 percent of performance in the state this year. These Level 3 districts received grants and assistance from the DSACs.

Effective Practices Identification and Dissemination:

An important function of the Statewide System of Support is to identify and disseminate effective practices. The Department contracted for and published the third report on emerging and sustaining practices in school turnaround, **Turnaround Practices in Action**,⁷ based on the growing body of evidence of practices that were common in high-achieving turnaround schools. Based on externally conducted monitoring site visits and student performance data reviews, the report identified that rapidly improving schools had common characteristics that led to strong results. These findings, aligned with other state and national research and the state's Conditions for School Effectiveness, have provided authentic models for improvement in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools around the state. ODST liaisons and DSAC Targeted Assistance Specialists--staff positions funded through Targeted Assistance funds--supported districts as they disseminated these practices to other high-need schools in the districts. The ODST team developed a revised Turnaround Plan Template and Turnaround Plan Guidance document ("the Template") that helps districts and schools make the most of the lessons learned about successful school turnaround in Massachusetts by aligning the Template with the four key Turnaround Practices.

Across subsets of the ten Commissioner's Districts, liaisons have established and facilitated networks with a problem-solving focus to share and disseminate effective practices. For example, the Superintendents' Thought-Partnership supports a group of superintendent peers as they collaborate to address immediate concerns through confidential and collegial problem solving. Liaisons, based on the input of that thought-partner group, also have established a Human Resources (HR) Leaders' Thought-Partnership in which the HR Directors from participating districts engage in facilitated conversations with one another, with their respective liaisons, and with a Department representative who has long-term experience with HR practices, recruiting, and negotiations. Both Thought-Partnerships are designed as *Professional Learning Communities*, in which the participating liaisons are members. Both have a problem-solving focus designed to build leadership capacity and enhance district systems. Liaisons also engage in turnaround planning with Level 4 schools and, in many cases, proactive planning with Level 3 schools, aiming to prevent Level 4 status by focusing on effective, research-based turnaround practices. Another networking experience provided to school and district leaders in the Commissioner's Districts is the opportunity to engage in cross-school and cross-district visitations. School and district leaders share effective practices from schools in levels 1-4, including several High-Percentile schools and Commendation Schools. These liaison-led networks provide educational leaders the opportunities to share best practices, implement effective turnaround strategies, and improve the outcomes for students in their schools and districts.

The Five District Partnership has provided support for development of common, coordinated, integrated curricula, assessment, materials, and instruction among some of the state's lowest

⁷Turnaround Practices in Action Report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/default.html>

performing districts (i.e., Chelsea, Malden, Winthrop, Everett, and Revere), with a plan to disseminate to other districts the promising practices developed. These districts formed the partnership, in part, to minimize lost learning time because of significant mobility across the communities by students and their families. Yearlong curriculum plans were created in mathematics and English language arts for grades 2-8, and an online teacher resource bank was instituted for easy access to, and sharing of, instructional and assessment materials. District administrators reported improved classroom teaching practices as a result of this effort.

The DSACs also lead a variety of networks that bring together colleagues across districts to share promising practices, strategies, and methods for improving classroom instruction and student performance and began disseminating the findings from the turnaround practices report to aid district improvements in Level 3 districts.

Key Findings from Several Recent Evaluations about ODST Assistance:⁸

- Respondents from all of the nine districts surveyed rated the District Liaison as effective in supporting school turnaround and improvement.
- District and school respondents reported liaisons served as a resource for, and provided access to, information; facilitated communication and understanding between the state and the district/schools; and provided hands-on support to schools through planning support and participating in *Learning Walkthroughs*.
- The vast majority of district personnel reported that Priority Partners (expert partners vetted by ODST to support the Conditions for School Effectiveness) were effective in supporting school turnaround and improvement.
- Over three-quarters of principals of Level 3 or Level 4 schools that worked with a Priority Partner reported the partner effectively supported school improvement.
- Sixty-five percent of principals of Level 3 or Level 4 schools with a School Redesign Grant (federal funds supporting turnaround) reported the grant resources and process supported school improvement. Respondents especially noted the value of the opportunity to identify and implement individualized solutions for schools as well as the process of developing a plan and direction for the school.
- Districts that engaged in AIPs, planning and implementation of district-wide focused plans, to address findings from a Department District Review of the District Standards and Indicators reported that they had improved systems and structures for using data, collaboration, and school and district leadership team operations.
- Districts with AIPs also noted that the strategies they implemented as a result of these plans resulted in a greater focus on developing principals' capacity to serve as instructional leaders, instructional shifts related to the Common Core State Standards, increased data-based decision-making and increased focus on differentiation, literacy, and student engagement.
- Districts participating in the Wraparound Zone Initiative (funded exclusively through Race to the Top) enhanced their 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. As the Wraparound Zone Initiative

⁸ American Institutes for Research, Selected High Level Findings from ODST Evaluation, October 2014, Summary of Preliminary AIP Findings Presented at 2014 NERA Conference, and Wraparound Zone Evaluation Findings. More information may be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/> and <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2014/10WZI-ReportFour.pdf>.

came to an end after a three-year targeted intervention, the final evaluation by the American Institutes for Research indicated district improvements in all the key focal areas, which included student behavior, family engagement, student referral process, and community partnerships. The report concluded that the districts generally exhibited a high degree of readiness for sustaining these changes.

Level 4 and 5 District Improvement:

- Level 4 districts with AIPs continued to report the effectiveness of the AIP process and its ability to identify gaps in district capacity and promote strategic planning for rapid improvement. As with the reports from previous years, 2014 Monitoring Reports from Level 4 districts with AIPs continued to note significant gains and traction in implementation of strategic initiatives aimed at building the foundation for improved district systems of support for schools.
- Leaders in the Level 5 district of Lawrence report that **implementation of the district turnaround plan is fully under way and progressing**. It includes the partnership of education management organizations and other partners, such as the Lawrence Teachers Union, in the management of Lawrence's Level 4 schools. Other partners also helped facilitate key turnaround strategies in human capital development throughout the district, targeted academic supports such as the vacation Acceleration Academies, and reallocated resources from central office to the schools.
- In Randolph, Targeted Assistance funds continued to be used to support a **parent engagement program**, which is a strategy integrated with the district's AIP to engage community organizations, strengthen the home-school partnership, and increase parent leadership and capacity to support students.

Level 3 District Improvement and the Regional Assistance Strategy:

The final external evaluation of the six regional DSACs, conducted by the University of Massachusetts' Donahue Institute (UMDI) after a three-year period of annual evaluation, shows significant value and impact of DSAC assistance to accelerate school improvement. The report noted that districts are seeking intensive assistance from the DSAC staff to support a range of improvement initiatives. Because the Department's Framework for District Accountability and Assistance states that Level 3 districts need only access assistance voluntarily, this demand for assistance shows the value they perceive in the services they are receiving from their regional DSACs.

Key Findings from the 2014 DSAC Evaluation:⁹

- Ninety-eight percent of eligible districts engaged voluntarily with DSAC teams in School Year 2014, with 93 percent of these districts having been engaged in ongoing, sustained participation around a portfolio of integrated services for several years. The steady growth of over triple the initial engagement in 2011 indicates significant confidence by districts in the relevance and quality of DSAC teams' support. The integrated, customized, and differentiated model of assistance, as well as the DSAC's position within the Department, were cited as particularly valuable.

⁹ Final DSAC Evaluation Report: 2014: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/dsac/2014EvalReport-DSAC.pdf>

- Over 75 percent of eligible districts used DSACs to support self assessment and planning, effective data use and accessing Department data sources, implementation of professional development and monitoring impact of the training, coaching leaders to establish conditions for implementing turnaround strategies, and developing effective standards-based curricula.
- DSACs played a critical role in connecting the Department’s initiatives to districts’ own improvement priorities, deepening districts’ understanding of the initiatives and helping educators integrate the initiatives into their own improvement efforts.
- DSAC assistance was cited as helping districts and schools accelerate their improvement efforts, and implement improvement strategies more consistently and effectively for better results. DSACs helped promote consistency and continuity across schools in their districts by supporting the use of *Learning Walkthroughs* and Professional Learning Communities.
- DSAC assistance also was cited as helping build principals’ capacity as instructional leaders and shift toward distributed models of leadership in schools.

Use of Funds during July and August

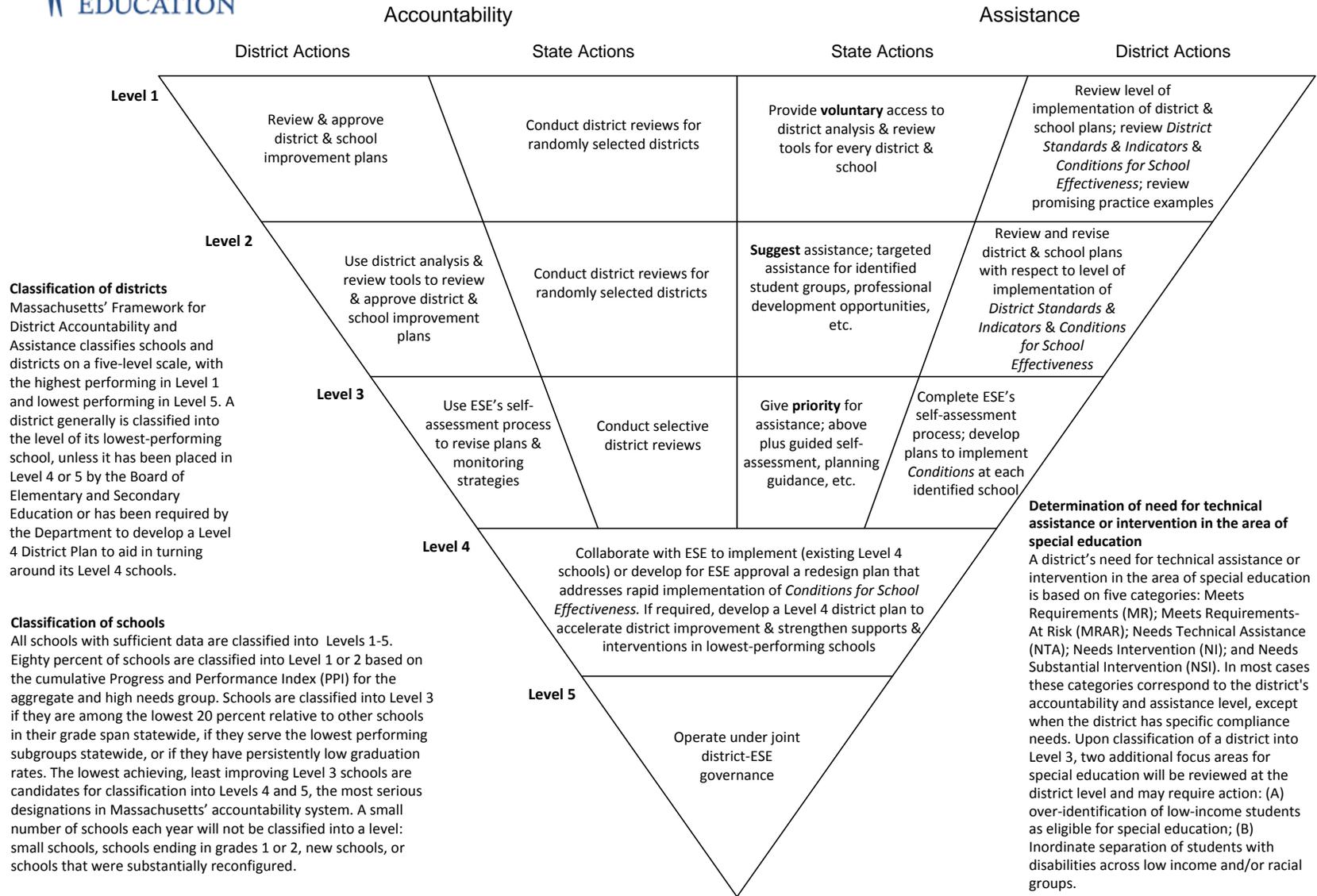
Budgetary flexibility enables funds in the Targeted Assistance account to carry over into July and August. Because districts and schools can often best convene teams and engage in activities during the summer months once school is not in session, use of some portion of funds during summer is highly effective. This flexibility enables the Department to have these activities in place during a critical time when districts and schools are most able to take advantage of them in preparation for the upcoming school year.

Appendix I

August 2012



Framework for District Accountability and Assistance



Classification of districts
 Massachusetts' Framework for District Accountability and Assistance classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, with the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. A district generally is classified into the level of its lowest-performing school, unless it has been placed in Level 4 or 5 by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education or has been required by the Department to develop a Level 4 District Plan to aid in turning around its Level 4 schools.

Classification of schools
 All schools with sufficient data are classified into Levels 1-5. Eighty percent of schools are classified into Level 1 or 2 based on the cumulative Progress and Performance Index (PPI) for the aggregate and high needs group. Schools are classified into Level 3 if they are among the lowest 20 percent relative to other schools in their grade span statewide, if they serve the lowest performing subgroups statewide, or if they have persistently low graduation rates. The lowest achieving, least improving Level 3 schools are candidates for classification into Levels 4 and 5, the most serious designations in Massachusetts' accountability system. A small number of schools each year will not be classified into a level: small schools, schools ending in grades 1 or 2, new schools, or schools that were substantially reconfigured.

Appendix II
Level 4 and Level 5 Schools in Massachusetts (2010 – 2014)

Level 4 Schools Identified in 2010

Closed

1. Agassiz Elementary, Boston
2. Henry Lord Middle, Fall River

Exited Level 4 in 2013

1. Blackstone Innovation Elementary, Boston
2. Harbor Middle Pilot School, Boston
3. John F. Kennedy Elementary, Boston
4. Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School, Boston
5. William Monroe Trotter Innovation School, Boston
6. John J Doran Elementary, Fall River
7. Matthew J. Kuss Middle, Fall River
8. Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary, Lowell
9. E.J. Harrington Elementary, Lynn
10. William P. Connery Elementary, Lynn
11. Gerena Elementary, Springfield
12. Homer Street Elementary, Springfield
13. Alfred J. Zanetti PK-8, Springfield
14. Union Hill Elementary, Worcester

Exited Level 4 in 2014

1. Jeremiah E. Burke High School, Boston
2. Brightwood Elementary, Springfield
3. Elias Brookings Elementary, Springfield
4. Chandler Elementary, Worcester

Identified as Level 5 in 2014

1. John P. Holland Elementary, Boston
2. Paul A. Dever Elementary, Boston
3. Morgan Community Elementary, Holyoke
4. John Avery Parker Elementary, New Bedford

Continuing in Level 4

1. Dearborn Middle School, Boston
2. Elihu Greenwood, Boston
3. English High School, Boston
4. William J. Dean, Holyoke
5. Community Day Arlington Elementary (Formerly Arlington Elementary School), Lawrence
6. SPARK Academy (Formerly South Lawrence East Middle School), Lawrence
7. South Lawrence East Middle School (8th Grade), Lawrence
8. High School of Commerce, Springfield
9. Chestnut Street Middle, Springfield
10. John F. Kennedy Middle, Springfield
11. M. Marcus Kiley Middle, Springfield
12. White Street Elementary, Springfield

Level 4 Schools Identified in 2011

These schools may be eligible for exit from Level 4 status based on 2015 accountability data.

1. Business Management & Finance High School, Lawrence
2. International High School, Lawrence
3. UP Academy Leonard Middle School (Formerly James F. Leonard Middle), Lawrence
4. Hayden-McFadden Elementary, New Bedford
5. Bentley Elementary, Salem
6. Burncoat Street Elementary, Worcester

Level 4 Schools Identified in 2012

These schools may be eligible for exit from Level 4 status based on 2016 accountability data.

1. Mattahunt Elementary, Boston
2. Oliver Partnership School (Grades 1-5) (Formerly Henry K. Oliver), Lawrence
3. UP Academy Oliver Middle School (Grades 6-8) (Formerly Henry K. Oliver), Lawrence
4. William N. Deberry, Springfield

Level 4 Schools Identified in 2013

These schools may be eligible for exit from Level 4 status based on 2017 accountability data.

1. Riverbend/Sanders Street Elementary, Athol-Royalston
2. William Ellery Channing, Boston
3. Winthrop Elementary, Boston
4. Watson Elementary, Fall River
5. New Bedford High School, New Bedford
6. High School of Science and Technology, Springfield
7. Milton Bradley Elementary, Springfield

Level 4 Schools Identified in 2014

These schools may be eligible for exit from Level 4 status based on 2018 accountability data.

1. Dorchester Academy High School, Boston
2. Henry Grew Elementary, Boston
3. John J. Duggan Middle, Springfield
4. Forest Park Middle, Springfield
5. Van Sickle Middle, Springfield
6. Elm Park Elementary, Worcester

Appendix III

State Releases 2014 MCAS School and District Results; Four Schools to Exit Underperforming Status

Malden - The Patrick Administration and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education today released the 2014 school and district MCAS results and commended 42 schools statewide for their high achievement, high progress, and/or narrowing proficiency gaps.

The state also announced that four schools designated as "underperforming" or Level 4 will exit that status after meeting their turnaround goals. Those four schools include Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Boston, the first Level 4 high school to exit that status. Of the 34 schools that were in the first cohort of Level 4 schools named in 2010, the majority have now exited underperforming status.

Also notable in today's results is the fact that Revere's schools are all Level 1 or 2 and that the Lawrence School District continues to improve - evidence that districts that serve students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds can meet high expectations.

"Teachers and students across the Commonwealth have much to be proud of with this year's MCAS results," said Governor Patrick. "This improvement is the direct result of collaborative work between our schools and our student, but as achievement gaps still persist, we must continue to invest in education so that each student has the chance to succeed."

"Closing the achievement gap is our priority, and the strides we have made are reflected in these MCAS results," said Secretary of Education Matthew Malone. "Our progress is due to the incredible work happening in classrooms across Massachusetts every day. I'm so proud of the Commonwealth's teachers and students for their accomplishments."

This year's MCAS scores follow years of improved results for students. Between 2007 and 2014, the percent of students scoring Proficient or higher on the MCAS grew in most grades in English language arts, mathematics and science and technology/engineering. Improvement has been particularly strong for African American/black students and Hispanic/Latino students, who have narrowed achievement gaps with their white peers.

However, achievement gaps remain, and there is wide variation in schools' ability to serve their students. The state's landmark Achievement Gap Act of 2010 created an accountability system that carefully identifies the state's most persistently low-performing schools and helps accelerate student achievement in those schools. That system has already shown results, and it will be used to support six newly-identified Level 4 Schools in Boston, Worcester and Springfield.

"I am pleased to see achievement gaps narrowing, and I am pleased to see that low-performing schools can and do improve when provided the right conditions," said Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester. "I know that some schools are still struggling, and I and my staff look forward to working with them to

strengthen leadership and instruction and raise expectations. The fact that Revere's schools are all Level 1 or 2 and that the Lawrence School District continues to improve is evidence that teachers and schools do make a difference, and that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds are not predestined to low academic performance."

The 42 Commendation schools announced today include three Massachusetts public schools that the U.S. Department of Education is considering for designation as 2014 National Blue Ribbon Schools. Blue Ribbon Schools are recognized in two categories: closing gaps and exemplary high performance. This year, Julia Bancroft School in Auburn and Barry School in Chicopee are under consideration for closing gaps, and East Elementary in Sharon is under consideration for high performance.

Accountability Designations:

Under the state accountability system, the state uses MCAS scores over time, student growth percentiles and other factors to classify schools into Levels 1-5 as follows:

- Level 1: Meeting gap narrowing goals
- Level 2: Not meeting gap narrowing goals (or MCAS participation of less than 95 percent)
- Level 3: Among lowest performing 20 percent of schools or subgroups (or MCAS participation of less than 90 percent or persistently low graduation rates)
- Level 4: Among lowest achieving and least improving schools
- Level 5: Chronically underperforming schools

A total of 424 schools statewide are classified as Level 1 for meeting their performance benchmarks, including gap narrowing goals.

Exiting Level 4 this fall: Burke High School in Boston, Chandler Elementary Community School in Worcester, and Brightwood and Brookings elementary schools in Springfield. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will immediately begin an exit assurances approval process with these four schools and their districts to ensure that the conditions necessary for sustained improvement remain in place.

Remaining in Level 4: From the first cohort of Level 4 schools named in 2010, Elihu Greenwood Elementary and English High School in Boston, Dean Vocational Technical High School in Holyoke, Community Day Arlington Elementary (formerly Arlington Elementary School) and Spark Academy (formerly South Lawrence East Middle School) in Lawrence, and White Street Elementary School and Commerce High School in Springfield. These schools have shown some but not sufficient improvement.

Schools remaining in Level 4 will require support from their district leadership teams to assess current needs and determine what specific changes and enhancements must be made to dramatically increase the impact of turnaround efforts. This may involve modifying and strengthening existing turnaround plans, creating ambitious new goals under existing plans or developing new plans with different strategies.

Newly designated Level 4: Henry Grew Elementary and Dorchester Academy schools in Boston, Elm Park Community School in Worcester, and three Springfield middle schools: Forest Park, Van Sickle and Duggan. The Department placed these six schools in Level 4

based on their MCAS performance from 2011-2014 and, in the case of the high school, its graduation and dropout rate data.

Under closer review: Dearborn Middle School in Boston and Kiley, Chestnut Street and Kennedy middle schools in Springfield. The Commissioner is concerned about the pace of improvement at these existing Level 4 schools and will be looking for concrete plans that address those concerns.

2014 District and School Level Summary:

Statewide Totals by Level	Districts		Schools	
	#	%	#	%
Level 5	1	0%	4	0%
Level 4	10	3%	36	2%
Level 3	66	17%	297	18%
Level 2	233	61%	854	53%
Level 1	73	19%	424	26%
Total	383	100%	1,615	100%
Insufficient Data**	24	-	245	-

**Schools and single-school districts with insufficient data to be eligible for a level are schools ending in grade PK, K, 1 or 2; very small schools, and schools without four full years of data.

2014 MCAS Results

Statewide MCAS results showed that 90 percent of 10th graders scored Proficient or higher in English language arts, 79 percent in mathematics, and 71 percent in science and technology/engineering (STE).

In grades 3-8, scores varied only slightly compared to 2013. Student performance in English language arts in grades 3 and 4 has been flat over the past six years.

Other statewide results include:

- Eighty-eight (88) percent of 10th graders last year (class of 2016) met the state's minimum testing requirements to earn a high school diploma on their first attempt by scoring Needs Improvement or higher in English language arts, mathematics and science and technology/engineering. That compares to 88 percent of students who met that threshold after their first attempt last year (class of 2015), 86 percent in 2012 (class of 2014), and 68 percent 11 years ago when the graduation requirement first took effect with the class of 2003.
- Between 2007 and 2014, the achievement gap in English language arts in terms of the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher for white students and African American/black students narrowed in all grades. The gap between white students and Hispanic or Latino students also narrowed in all grades. The greatest gap narrowing in English language arts for African American/black students and Hispanic or Latino students

occurred in 10th grade, where it narrowed by 15 percentage points and 16 percentage points respectively. That represents a 50 percent and 47 percent narrowing of the gap respectively.

- In mathematics between 2007 and 2014, the achievement gap between white students and African American/black students and between white students and Hispanic or Latino students narrowed at all grades except grade 5, where the gap between whites and African Americans/blacks increased by a single point. Among both African American/Black students and Hispanic or Latino students, the greatest narrowing occurred in grade 3, where it narrowed by 7 points for African American students and 9 points for Hispanic or Latino students.

For more information on MCAS or to view school or district results, visit http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/mcas.aspx or <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>. For more information about accountability and assistance level designations, visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/default.html>.