

Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance (2015-2016)

Chapter 133 of the Acts of 2016 Line Item 7061-9408 and G.L. c.69, §1J (z)
March 1, 2017

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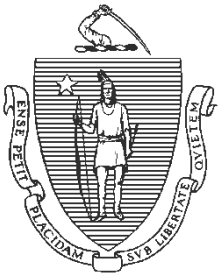
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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

March 1, 2017

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to present the progress report for FY2016, describing the ongoing work of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“the Department”) to offer targeted assistance to districts and schools across the Commonwealth with the highest need in order to maximize the rapid academic achievement of these students.

This report is responsive to the [Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69 section 1J](#), which directs the Department to issue a report to the legislature “*describing and analyzing all intervention and targeted assistance efforts funded by this item...*” and [Chapter 133 of the Acts of 2016](#), line item 7061-9408, which directs the Department to provide:

“For targeted intervention to schools and districts at risk of or determined to be underperforming or chronically underperforming...including schools and districts which have been placed in levels 3, 4 or 5 of the state’s framework for accountability and assistance... provided further, that the department shall issue a report not later than January 9, 2017 describing and analyzing all intervention and targeted assistance efforts funded by this item¹”

The Department has been working steadily and seeing progress among the lowest performing schools since 2010, when this work began under [An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap](#), legislation that provided new flexibilities and authorities for rapid school turnaround.² Under this statutory framework, the Department has been providing dedicated accountability, assistance, and targeted interventions to the state’s highest need schools and districts--that is, those districts and schools determined by the state’s accountability system to be performing in the lowest 20 percent of schools (Level 3), underperforming (Level 4), and chronically underperforming (Level 5).³ To accomplish this important turnaround work, the Department strategically augments, to the extent possible, the state targeted assistance funds (line item 7061-9408) with available federal resources to support school improvement.

¹ M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1J>, and Chapter 133 of the Acts of 2016: <https://malegislature.gov/Budget/FY2017/FinalBudget>.

² An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter12>.

³ 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 the Department’s [2013 report on intervention and targeted assistance](#), as well as on the Department’s [website](#).

During FY2016, resources were used to provide an array of direct financial and professional development support to districts and schools across the spectrum of Levels 3, 4, and 5. These targeted resources are designed to meet significant challenges in closing achievement gaps, with a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of English learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty. A constellation of strategic, research based interventions have been employed to build capacity in these schools and districts to better serve the needs of their students and improve student performance.

As the following report will describe, the investment in our lowest performing schools and districts has led to steady improvements across the Commonwealth in closing achievement gaps. We can now reflect back across four years of targeted assistance and intervention data for these schools. While we are not yet satisfied with the overall performance of these schools, the gaps with Level 1 and 2 schools are closing. Trends in schools that were in Levels 3-5 show they have made gains in both mathematics and English language arts, as measured by student performance, movement out of the lowest accountability levels, increases in graduation rates, and declines in dropout rates.

This report conveys an overview of the Department's system for targeted assistance and intervention, a description of the strategies being used for school turnaround, and an analysis of the impact that Targeted Assistance funds have had on student performance in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts.⁴

Sincerely,

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

⁴ The Legislative Report on Targeted Assistance Funds from the previous year can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/category.aspx?section=legislative&yr=2016>, and all previous Legislative Reports on Targeted Assistance Funds can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/category.aspx?section=legislative&yr=All>.

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this *Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance (2015-2016)* pursuant to [Chapter 133 of the Acts of 2016](#), line item 7061-9408:

“For targeted intervention to schools and districts at risk of or determined to be underperforming or chronically underperforming under sections 1J and 1K of chapter 69 of the General Laws, including schools and districts which have been placed in levels 3, 4 or 5 of the state’s framework for accountability and assistance pursuant to departmental regulations;... provided further, that the department shall issue a report not later than January 9, 2017 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...⁵”

and [Massachusetts General Laws 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...⁶”

Targeted Assistance Delivery System Overview

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“the Department”) has dedicated targeted assistance funds (state budget line item 7061-9408) to intervene, assist, and turn around schools and districts *at risk* of underperforming (Level 3), *underperforming* (Level 4), or *chronically underperforming* (Level 5) within the *Framework for District Accountability and Assistance* (see Appendix I) in order to close student achievement gaps. All schools with sufficient data, including charter schools, are classified into Levels 1-5, with schools that are meeting their gap-narrowing goals in Level 1 and those that require the most intervention and assistance in Levels 3, 4, and 5. This work has been ongoing since 2010 under [An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap](#) (“the Act”) in accordance with regulations adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.⁷

⁵ Chapter 133 of the Acts of 2016: <https://malegislature.gov/Budget/FY2017/FinalBudget>.

⁶ M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1J>.

⁷ An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter12>.

The Department prioritizes resources and intervention to Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools and provides: direct expert assistance and accountability from Department staff and its approved turnaround partners, funding and research based resources, and preferred access to professional development. The majority of these efforts are designed to enhance school and district capacity to effectively and proactively use proven instructional and supportive practices to boost and sustain rapid gains in student achievement.

In instances when all other avenues to implement ambitious and accelerated reforms have been exhausted in Level 4 schools and districts and when it is in the best interest of students, the state has intervened, using the Act's legal authorities, and has placed districts and schools under state receivership into Level 5 or chronically underperforming status. (At present, three districts and four schools are under state receivership.)

The foundation for the Department's assistance and intervention in all Level 3, 4, and 5 schools is significant turnaround research conducted in Massachusetts' Level 4 schools and districts that have made rapid student achievement gains. Research examining effective turnaround practices in Massachusetts schools ("the [Turnaround Practices](#)") provides models and guidance for all low performing schools to improve their own systems and practices.⁸ The assistance and interventions provided through the Department are designed to promote schools' implementation of these key practices at Levels 3, 4, and 5. The [Turnaround Practices](#) research identified four key focus areas for successful school turnaround: 1) leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration; 2) intentional practices for improving instruction; 3) student specific supports and instruction to all students; and 4) school climate and culture that provide a safe, orderly, and respectful environment for students and families.⁹ Department research has further indicated that the most effective way to improve student performance is through the faithful implementation of these practices in an integrated and coherent system for improvement.

STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts are supported by resources from throughout the Department. Mainly, the direct targeted assistance for turnaround in the high need districts and schools is overseen through the Statewide System of Support in the Center for District Support. The Statewide System of Support provides targeted assistance through a multi-pronged approach that offers customized support based on district size, capacity, and accountability status. In 2015-2016, the Statewide System of Support offered assistance affecting districts with a combined total of 387,719 students, which is 41 percent of the state's total student enrollment (953,429). Approximately 44 percent of these students were economically disadvantaged, 17 percent were English learners, and 19 percent were students with disabilities. The basic design for assisting these districts and their schools involves addressing their distinct strengths and needs in the following ways:

⁸ Turnaround practices research and evaluation reports: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/turnaround-in-massachusetts/turnaround-and-emerging-practices-reports.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

- Commissioner’s Districts (Levels 3 and 4) and Districts in Receivership (Level 5) -**
 The state’s 10 largest, highest poverty school districts, collectively known as the “Commissioner’s Districts”, are supported through full time liaisons, program specialists, and partners with expertise in collaborating with the large urban districts’ considerable content and leadership infrastructure. Services are based on needs identified through careful examination of data and focused by research, districts’ self-assessments, improvement plans, and direct observations conducted by these skilled liaisons. Additional assistance is provided by Department content experts in English language arts, mathematics, science, and English language development. Further external turnaround partners and consultants, who are vetted by the Department, with documented records of accomplishment at improving outcomes for high-need and urban students, provide additional targeted supports based on need. The Commissioner’s Districts are: Boston, Brockton, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield and Worcester. The accountability and assistance levels of these districts range from Levels 3-5.

In addition, each Level 5 district (Lawrence, Holyoke, and Southbridge) has a Receiver/Superintendent appointed by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (“Commissioner”) and receives prioritized assistance and support from the Commissioner and other staff from the Center for District Support and the Department. The 10 Commissioner’s Districts plus Southbridge collectively serve 194,460 students (approximately 20 percent of the state’s student enrollment). Approximately 54 percent of these students are economically disadvantaged, 25 percent are English learners, and 19 percent are students with disabilities.

- District and School Assistance Centers (Levels 3 and 4) -** Support to the small and medium-sized districts is delivered through [District and School Assistance Centers](#) (“DSACs”) organized into six regions across the state.¹⁰ The DSACs serve a range of struggling districts and their schools that may lack sufficient infrastructure and human resources to deliver the complex array of supports necessary to further their educational improvement efforts. DSACs are staffed by a team of experts. These include former superintendents and principals, who provide experienced leadership and guidance, as well as specialists in mathematics, literacy, data use, and career vocational technical education. These Department representatives, who operate as an integrated regional assistance team, offer districts a focused menu of research based assistance, customizing that assistance to meet districts’ and schools’ specific needs aligned to the Turnaround Practices. In 2016, the DSACs offered assistance and interventions to 54 districts that served 193,259 students (approximately 20 percent of the state’s student enrollment). Within these districts, DSAC offered support to 131 schools that were performing at Level 3 or Level 4, emphasizing access to rigorous instruction for all students, including those living in poverty, English learners, and students with disabilities. Approximately 33 percent of the students in these districts are economically disadvantaged, 8 percent are English learners, and 19 percent are students with disabilities.

¹⁰ For more information about the DSACs: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/district-and-school-resource-centers-dsac/>.

The following sections describe how the funds have been used (in some cases in combination with available federal resources) and their results for schools and districts at the different levels of accountability status (i.e., Levels 3, 4, and 5).

Summary of Interventions and Impact in Level 3, 4, and 5 Schools and Districts

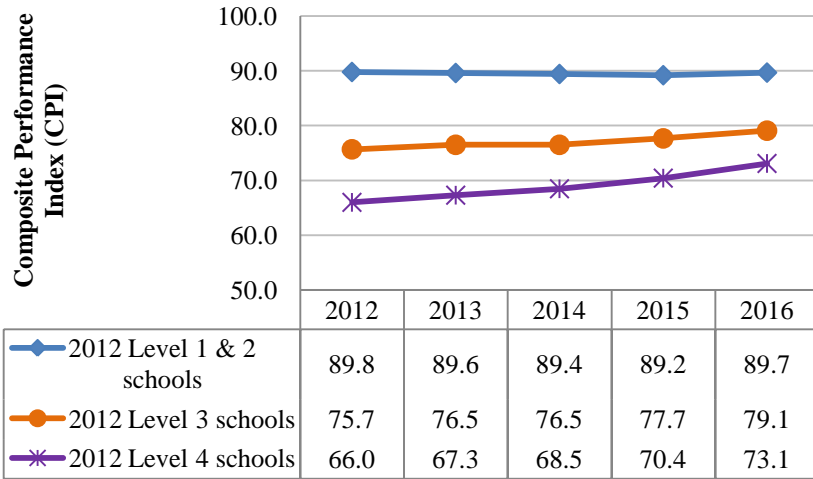
The Department continues to see positive trends in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts using allocated state targeted assistance and federal resources in FY2016. These trends are observed using multiple measures. The average Composite Performance Index (CPI) is one measure of progress. It is an index that indicates the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency in core subject areas. The CPI gains in mathematics and English language arts of students in Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools is a valuable means to benchmark student performance outcomes. Other useful measures of district and school improvement are upward movement out of Levels 3, 4, or 5 to higher accountability levels as well as increases in graduation rates and decreases in dropout rates.

We use these measures throughout this report to indicate impact and improvement, breaking out specific impact by accountability levels. While there will always be a lowest 20 percent of schools in terms of student performance, overall, there has been progress in closing achievement gaps between these schools and those performing at Levels 1 and 2. The following list highlights some of the broad trends for overall improvement across the system of support for the state's lowest performing schools, reflecting back across multiple years of intervention and assistance:

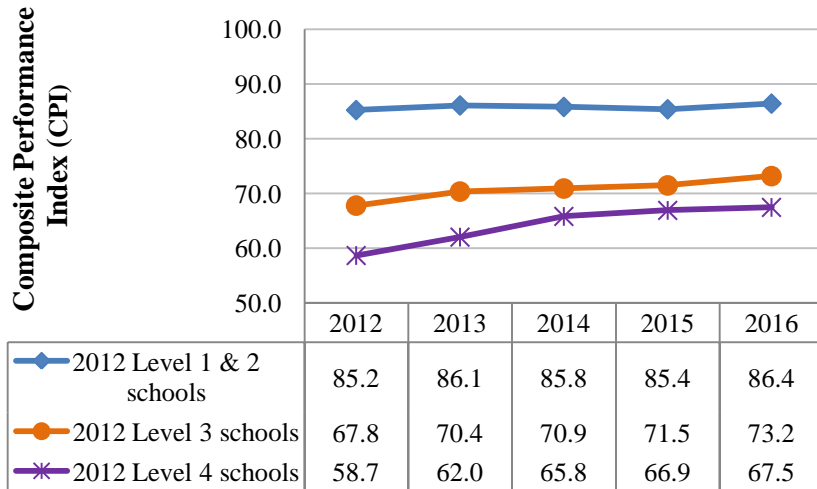
- Since 2011, 264 schools have exited Level 3 to Levels 1 or 2;
- Since 2012, graduation rates have been increasing in Level 3 and Level 4 schools, while dropout rates have been declining, with trajectories that exceed the state average improvements;
- Since 2013, which was the first year that any school was eligible for Level 4 exit decisions, 25 Level 4 schools in the Commonwealth have exited to Levels 1, 2, or 3;
- In 2016 alone, 41 schools exited Level 3 into Levels 1 or 2, two schools exited Level 4 to Level 1, and one school exited Level 4 to Level 3; and
- In the districts eligible for services from the Statewide System of Support during the 2015-2016 school year, there were 31 more schools with a Level 1 designation than in the previous year.

Furthermore, schools that were in Levels 3 and 4 in 2012 have made significant CPI gains in both mathematics and English language arts. The graphs below show the change in achievement from 2012 to 2016 based on 2012 accountability and assistance level cohorts.

Student Achievement in English Language Arts 2012-2016



Student Achievement in Mathematics 2012-2016



LEGEND: These graphs show the change in achievement from 2012 to 2016 based on 2012 accountability and assistance level cohorts. Schools with insufficient data in 2012, and schools that opened or reconfigured after 2012 have been excluded. Because the first Level 5 schools were identified in 2013, Level 5 school data are included in the Level 4 data.

The following descriptions present the strategies used to support turnaround in struggling schools and districts by state accountability level, moving along the intervention continuum from Level 5 through Level 3 schools and districts, and their observed impact.

LEVEL 5 SCHOOLS

Level 5 schools are those that are chronically underperforming, as defined by state law, [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J](#).¹¹ These schools, at the expiration of their Level 4 turnaround plan, failed to show enough improvement as required by the goals, benchmarks, and/or timetable of the turnaround plan. There were no new Level 5 schools identified in FY2016.

Interventions: The four Level 5 schools, designated as chronically underperforming in October 2013, continue to implement their turnaround plans. These schools are: UP Academy Holland and Paul A. Dever Elementary in Boston, Morgan Community Elementary in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary in New Bedford. UP Academy Holland and Dever Elementary are managed by school operators (funded from state budget line item 7061-9408), while Morgan and Parker have superintendents as receivers to oversee their turnaround plans.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the four Level 5 schools placed significant emphasis on several key strategies. These included:

- Engaging teachers and staff in summer professional development and building structures for ongoing training throughout the school year designed to create and sustain healthy school cultures, develop curriculum, review student and school data, and involve families;
- Making use of data to identify essential areas of focus for students and schools; and
- Prioritizing family outreach and family engagement by creating specific plans and expectations for their schools and receiving training from partners, including community organizations, to design more effective strategies.

In addition, key activities related to implementation of turnaround plans continued from prior years. In FY2016, these schools continued their strong focus on the following: monitoring site visits and classroom observation training to assist schools with ongoing assessment and analysis of their educational programs, English language development incorporated into classroom activities, use of extended time, and establishment of additional supports for struggling students. These interventions were supported by local, state, and federal funds.

Impact: While there is still significant work to be done in terms of improving overall student achievement at each of the schools, student testing data from the 2015-2016 school year showed that three of the four Level 5 schools showed gains in their overall school percentile ranking.

LEVEL 5 DISTRICTS

Three districts have been designated as chronically underperforming, or Level 5, in accordance with [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K](#).¹² The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (“Board”) placed

¹¹ M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1J>.

¹² M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1K>.

the Lawrence Public Schools under receivership as a Level 5 district in November 2011, the Holyoke Public Schools under receivership as of April 2015, and the Southbridge Public Schools under receivership as of January 2016.¹³ A list of these districts, in accordance with [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J](#), can be found in Appendix III. Targeted strategic intervention and assistance from the Department that goes back to 2011 when the first district was designated Level 5. These districts are in varying stages of implementing turnaround plans and research based turnaround strategies. An update about each of these school districts follows.

Lawrence Public Schools:

Interventions: In FY2016, students in Lawrence Public Schools continued to make strong gains - evidence that districts serving students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds can meet high expectations. FY2016's key initiatives included: fostering high-performing autonomous schools, bringing in partners to operate and support schools, renewing the district turnaround plan, increasing vacation-learning and summer-learning opportunities, increasing enrichment opportunities, implementing the new teacher contract, expanding teacher leadership opportunities, continuing the high school transformation, and expanding pre-school and kindergarten programs. Each school's program is tailored to the needs of its students.

Impact: The average CPI in Lawrence increased significantly from 2012 to 2016, including an increase of more than 11 points in mathematics over the last four years. The average CPI in mathematics and English language arts for English learners in Lawrence outpaced the CPI gains for students in the aggregate, decreasing the achievement gap. The district's proficiency rates in English language arts, mathematics, and science have increased during the receivership. The graduation rate has increased every year by 19.5 percentage points since 2011 (from 52.3 percent to 71.8 percent); the dropout rate has been cut nearly in half during this same time period.

Holyoke Public Schools:

Interventions: The Holyoke Public Schools modified its turnaround plan in October 2015 to simplify and revise terminology.¹⁴ The use of targeted assistance funds under line item 7601-9408 to assist Holyoke emphasized leadership training and turnaround plan development. The plan prioritizes providing:

- High quality instruction for all;
- Personalized pathways;
- Engaged students, family, and community;
- An effective and thriving workforce; and
- A system of empowered schools.

Impact: During the 2015-2016 school year, Holyoke undertook several initiatives as part of the turnaround plan. A major area of focus was supporting every K-8 school in developing plans for

¹³ The Department's announcement that Holyoke Public Schools has been placed under receivership can be viewed at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=17923>; the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's determination to place Southbridge Public Schools under receivership can be viewed at: <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/bitstream/handle/2452/392102/ocn663905261-2016-01-26.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁴ Turnaround Plan for Holyoke Public Schools: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/level-5-district-holyoke-public-schools-turnaround-plan.pdf>.

extending the school day (full day plans) for students to 7.5 hours. The increased time allows for more professional learning and collaboration as well as additional opportunities for student enrichment. The district engaged in a redesign of its central office, which led to additional funds being reallocated directly to schools. The district has engaged in a multi-year secondary redesign project. Additionally, the district expanded its dual-language program by size and location, now serving students in pre-kindergarten through second grade in two schools.

Southbridge Public Schools:

On January 26, 2016, after extensive review and discussion, the Board voted to designate Southbridge Public Schools as a chronically underperforming (“Level 5”) district, thereby authorizing the Commissioner to appoint a receiver for the district. At the time of designation, Southbridge was among the lowest performing districts in the state in terms of the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the 2015 MCAS assessments. The Commissioner selected a receiver for the Southbridge Public Schools, and she started on May 2, 2016.

In FY2016, Southbridge organized to develop a turnaround plan and, after input from an array of local stakeholders in accordance with [M.G.L. c. 69, s. 1K\(b\)](#), the Commissioner and Receiver released the district’s Level 5 Turnaround Plan on June 24, 2016. The use of targeted assistance funds under line item 7601-9408 for Southbridge emphasized leadership training and turnaround plan development. The turnaround plan includes the following priority areas intended to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students:

- Ensuring an inclusive and supportive school community with high expectations and rigorous, equitable, and personalized instruction for all students, including students with disabilities and English learners;
- Developing a district wide professional culture of highly effective teaching and leadership;
- Creating the conditions to enable and apply evidence-informed decision-making;
- Establishing systems and processes to cultivate and leverage family engagement and community partnerships; and
- Organizing the district and reallocating resources to ensure high-quality management, accountability, system wide coherence, and sustainability.

LEVEL 4 SCHOOLS

Level 4 schools are identified, from among the lowest percentiles of performance, as underperforming schools based on an analysis of four-year trends in absolute achievement, student growth, and academic improvement trends. By statute under the Act, Level 4 schools are allowed flexibilities and autonomies to accelerate student achievement and are given targeted assistance from the Department.

Interventions: As noted earlier, the assistance provided to Level 4 schools is based on the [Turnaround Practices](#) research that has identified key practices in Level 4 schools that have seen achievement gains and have exited from Level 4 status.¹⁵ Tools, resources, coaching, grants, and

¹⁵ Turnaround practices research *Impact Study*: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/turnaround-in-massachusetts/turnaround-and-emerging-practices-reports.html>.

networking opportunities provided through Department assistance are designed to promote these schools' implementation of these key practices. Examples of this assistance includes: facilitating self assessments based on the Turnaround Practices, providing school based monitoring site visits, soliciting and vetting turnaround partners who provide expert assistance on the implementation of key Turnaround Practices, offering grants to enable key stakeholders to participate in the development of turnaround plans, providing classroom observation training, facilitating the implementation of improvement plans, and assisting with data analysis to monitor and update turnaround plans.

Impact: When schools have effectively implemented the Turnaround Practices, that specifically include making effective use of flexibilities and autonomies, they have made good progress. In comparing performance trends of schools in Level 4 from 2012 to 2016, accountability results indicate that the average CPI in this cohort of schools increased significantly in both English language arts and mathematics over the past four years. The gains in this same cohort of schools outpaced the gains among schools that were in Levels 1, 2, and 3 in both subjects. For English learners and students with disabilities, the average CPI in mathematics and English language arts in the Level 4 schools outpaced the CPI gains for both of these subgroups in Level 1 and 2 schools from this same 2012 cohort. These improvements can be associated with classroom instructional shifts to better align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks as well as increased data-based decision making and targeted instructional practices, as indicated across several research and evaluation reports.¹⁶

This year, three of the 34 schools in Level 4 (9 percent) exited Level 4 in 2016 into Levels 1 or 3. Since 2013, which was the first year that any school was eligible for Level 4 exit decisions, 25 of the Level 4 schools that completed their Turnaround Plan implementation cycle have exited to Levels 1, 2, or 3. A list of the schools currently in Level 4, in accordance with [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J](#), can be found in Appendix II.¹⁷

LEVEL 4 DISTRICTS

According to the Massachusetts accountability system, district levels generally are determined by the level of the lowest performing school operating within the district. Level 4 districts can also be determined by district review findings and other evidence of systemic challenges. At the start of the 2015-2016 school year, nine districts were designated as Level 4. Seven of these districts were designated Level 4 due to having at least one Level 4 school, while two districts continued to be designated as Level 4 due to previously identified underperformance of district systems. Two, among these nine districts, met both criteria, previously having been identified as having underperformance in their district systems as well as having at least one underperforming (Level 4) school.

Interventions: Districts with Level 4 schools receive the range of supports to implement Turnaround Practices that are outlined in the previous section. Additionally, the districts with

¹⁶ Turnaround practices research and evaluation reports: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/turnaround-in-massachusetts/turnaround-and-emerging-practices-reports.html>.

¹⁷ M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1J>.

significant systemic challenges receive targeted support through an Accelerated Improvement Planning (AIP) process. This process is intended to address need areas identified by the Department in [district reviews](#) as a strategy to respond to recommendations from the district review and promote strategic planning and implementation of effective practices for rapid improvement.¹⁸ AIP effectiveness as an assistance strategy was noted in an earlier external evaluation, indicating that it assists districts to: use data more effectively, improve structures for collaboration, and increase focus on developing principals' capacity to serve as instructional leaders, resulting in higher expectations for students.¹⁹

Impact: In 2016, plan managers and monitors were funded for these districts with targeted assistance funds under state budget line item 7061-9408 to continue to support AIPs; less support was provided to districts that showed they were developing capacity to implement the work more independently. Monitoring reports in 2016 from most districts with AIPs (Randolph, New Bedford, and Salem Public Schools) continued to note a range of gains and traction in the implementation of strategic initiatives aimed at improving district systems of support for schools in response to previous district reviews by the Department.²⁰ One district, Southbridge Public Schools, as noted above, was placed under receivership in Level 5 because of insufficient progress.

Interventions: Another targeted assistance and intervention effort provided to strengthen Level 4 capacity is the facilitation of and strategic support for the Springfield Empowerment Zone ("Zone"). The Zone is a collaboration between the Department, Springfield Public Schools, and the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, Inc. designed to turn around nine underperforming middle schools in Springfield. The first year of implementation reflected some student performance improvements over the previous years. Some of the strategies employed in the Zone during FY2016 were:

- Piloting a new and innovative approach to school support through the use of Chief Support Partners;
- Staffing schools earlier than in previous years to fill approximately 100 teacher vacancies by the first day of school;
- Hiring higher quality candidates who better reflect the racial distribution of the student body than in the past, with 30 percent of new hires being people of color;
- Building strong relationships with many district and school departments and leaders;
- Supporting principals' operational and budget needs;
- Doubling the size of math-focused Empowerment Academies that served over 500 students voluntarily over their April vacation for an additional 25 hours of quality math instruction;

¹⁸ *Evaluation of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) Process:* <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/research-eval.html> and District Review Documentation: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/reports/district-documentation.html>.

¹⁹ American Institutes for Research, *Evaluation of Massachusetts District and School Turnaround Assistance: Impact of School Redesign Grants (SRG):* <http://www.air.org/resource/evaluation-massachusetts-district-and-school-turnaround-assistance-impact-school-redesign>.

²⁰ For more information about District Reviews and AIPs: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/reports/district-documentation.html>.

- Assisting the launch of a new talent partnership to attract, select, develop, and retain great educators across Western Massachusetts; and
- Launching the New Classrooms' Teach to One: Math program at two Zone schools where math results were lagging.

LEVEL 3 SCHOOLS

Level 3 schools are those performing in the lowest 20 percent of aggregate school performance, or with one or more subgroups among the lowest performing 20 percent relative to other schools in the Commonwealth, and/or with persistently low graduation rates.²¹

Interventions: Level 3 schools are offered direct support from the Statewide System of Support staff, including Liaisons for the schools in the Commissioner's Districts and regionally based DSAC team members for other Level 3 schools, to implement Turnaround Practices. Statewide System of Support staff partner with leaders to assist Level 3 schools with: self assessments, action planning, data review, and progress monitoring to complete the cycle of inquiry and improvement. Statewide System of Support staff provide technical assistance that entails serving as guidance experts to identify areas of need and utilize tools and research to improve instructional programs and outcomes for students. They link schools to financial, informational, and organizational resources that align with their needs, partnering with leadership to strengthen systems and to solve implementation challenges.

Impact: Since 2011, 264 schools have exited Level 3 to Levels 1 or 2. Of the schools eligible to receive support from the Statewide System of Support, 39 (14 percent) of the 273 Level 3 schools identified in 2015 exited to Levels 1 or 2 in 2016. The average CPI in Level 3 schools that were eligible to receive support from the Department's Statewide System of Support in 2012 increased over the four year period, with significant gains in English language arts and mathematics. The average CPI for students with disabilities in 2012 Level 3 schools outpaced the CPI gains of all students in these schools in both mathematics and English language arts. The same is true for English learners in English language arts. Graduation rates have continued to increase in Level 3 schools since 2012, while dropout rates have declined, with trajectories that exceed the state average improvements.

LEVEL 3 DISTRICTS

Interventions: As with Level 4 schools and districts, the Department has utilized the Turnaround Practices at the district level to build capacity, tools, and resources for district and school leaders to target specific areas of need in Level 3 schools so they can proactively implement effective turnaround strategies. Some of the strategies provided to Level 3 districts include: partnering with district leaders on school visits and classroom observations, providing expert guidance to identify areas of need and research based solutions, facilitating regionally based professional development and peer networks that reflect cross district regional needs, offering leadership development and coaching, assisting with self assessment and planning, and providing support and resources to bolster district efforts to improve these schools.

²¹ Schools with "persistently low" graduation rates have cohort graduation rates of less than 67 percent for the most recent four-year rate and less than 70 percent for each of the three prior five-year rates for any subgroup.

In 2016, the Department provided several different direct grant programs to support efforts in the lowest performing schools in Level 3 districts. Most direct grants provided to these districts included a combination of both state Targeted Assistance funds (7061-9408) and federal Title I funding (7043-1001). Districts supplemented support to their lowest performing Level 3 and 4 schools using these funds to build instructional and leadership capacity, improve student learning in core content areas, support improved results for English learners and students with disabilities, and support students' social, emotional, and health needs. All strategies aligned to the effective practices research.

Additionally, the Five District Partnership Grant Program supported a multi-year development process to create a common set of coordinated and integrated curricula, assessments, materials, and instruction among some of the state's lowest performing districts (Chelsea, Malden, Winthrop, Everett, and Revere) in the Greater Boston region. These districts share a transient student population in common, as families move among the districts in the area. This coordination is intended to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students by enabling them to move among the districts without experiencing gaps in instructional design and approach. The promising practices under development will be disseminated to other districts.

The Statewide System of Support also oversaw two grant programs that were specified in the FY2016 state budget line item 7601-9408. The Parent Engagement and Supplemental Science grant to Randolph Public Schools was closely integrated with that district's AIP. The Milton Public Schools Early Literacy Program grant helped meet the needs of public school students from low income households within the community. Both of these grant programs were designed to improve student performance and develop promising practices that the Statewide System of Support can disseminate more broadly to other districts.

Impact: In 2016, of the 54 districts designated Level 3 and offered services by the Statewide System of Support, five districts improved to Level 2 because they no longer had any schools designated as Level 3.

Cross-Cutting Assistance Themes

Some other practices and supports funded through state Targeted Assistance resources are cross-cutting and impacted schools and districts across the three levels. The implementation of targeted assistance initiatives have 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.

The Statewide System of Support has provided extensive coaching, guidance, professional development, and networking opportunities for Level 3, 4, and 5 district and school leaders. These strategic approaches to connecting key district and school leaders have yielded experiences that have informed systemic changes and resulted in improved systems across the districts.

In addition to building capacity to implement the Turnaround Practices research, additional cross-cutting strategies included the following approaches:

- Facilitating training and systematic implementation of programs designed to remove barriers to learning for high need students such as: Universal Design for Learning, [Tiered Systems of Support](#), Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems, social emotional supports, and [Wraparound Zones](#) to provide effective access to learning for all students;²²
- Continuing partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents to provide a New Superintendents Induction Program that builds instructional leadership capacity across the state;
- Facilitating and offering high quality professional development at regional, district, and school levels on Learning Walkthroughs and data analysis that facilitate the cycle of inquiry, effective instructional and student support practices in academic content areas and for the needs of student subgroups, and integration of career vocational technical education shop classes with academic classes;
- Coaching and networking for superintendents, principals, and teachers to facilitate and calibrate common understanding of effective instructional practices and the research based cycle of inquiry that leads to improved outcomes;
- Providing assistance, information, guidance, and networking for urban leaders through a variety of mechanisms, such as the Urban Superintendent’s Network, Human Resource Directors’ Network, and District Turnaround Leaders’ Network to build capacity through sharing of best practices and thought-partnering with others in similar roles to solve complex challenges that will improve student outcomes for every student;
- Offering regionally based networking opportunities primarily for DSAC served districts, but open to Level 2 districts as well, which address a variety of topics specific to regional needs and focused on particular district and school roles, content, and student groups, including leadership for: principals, instructional leaders, instructional coaches, high schools, and career vocational technical education as well as literacy and mathematics instruction, data use, and the needs of English learners and students with disabilities;
- Assisting organization and implementation of improved schedules and structures, such as common planning time for teachers to collaborate on effective instructional practices;
- Offering direct grants and training to targeted districts for high quality professional development designed to support the implementation of research based effective instructional practices, aligning curriculum with the 2011 Curriculum Frameworks;
- Developing research and disseminating tools and resources that facilitate sharing of highly effective practices from rapidly improving schools;
- Facilitating use of federal funds, including School Improvement Grants, Commendation/Blue Ribbon grants, and supports for students living in poverty.

²²Wraparound Replication Cookbook: <https://sites.google.com/site/masswazcookbook/resources> and Massachusetts Tiered System of Support: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/e/programs/accountability/tools-and-resources/massachusetts-tiered-system-of-support/>.

Targeted Assistance Fund Use in 2015-2016

As described above, the Department applies funds from the Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts account (state budget line item 7061-9408) to support key interventions in the Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts. Federal resources, primarily from Title I School Improvement funds and federal special education resources, were used in coordination with the state's Targeted Assistance funds to supplement and complement key assistance initiatives. While federal funds are used in a manner consistent with all statutes and regulations 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](#) and [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K](#), and, as noted earlier, to achieve strategic priorities designed to intervene in and strengthen districts and schools in the state's most challenging educational environments.²³ The total expenditures from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 from line item 7061-9408 were \$7,976,958. The chart below summarizes the distribution of these funds.

Administration, staffing, etc.	\$1,817,461
Regional Supports to Level 3 Districts	\$980,635
Level 3, 4, 5 District and School Support Services	\$3,263,412
Evaluation Projects	\$101,059
New Superintendents Induction Program	\$249,718
<u>Grants to Level 3, 4, and 5 Districts and Schools</u>	<u>\$1,564,673</u>
Total	\$7,976,958

The vast majority of the state targeted assistance funds were used to enable Level 3, 4, and 5 districts to implement innovative, research based strategies targeted to advance the performance of the state's highest need students and close the achievement gap. The intensity and focus of assistance was based on district and school needs, interest, capacity, and accountability status. In FY2016, Targeted Assistance funds (line item 7061-9408) continued to contribute to initiatives designed to achieve rapid improvement through capacity building and embedding of research based, effective turnaround practices in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts. The support provided by Commissioner's Districts Liaisons, DSAC teams, and expert external partners, as well as the direct grants and targeted high leverage programs, were strategies that assisted districts and schools to achieve the improvements noted in this report.

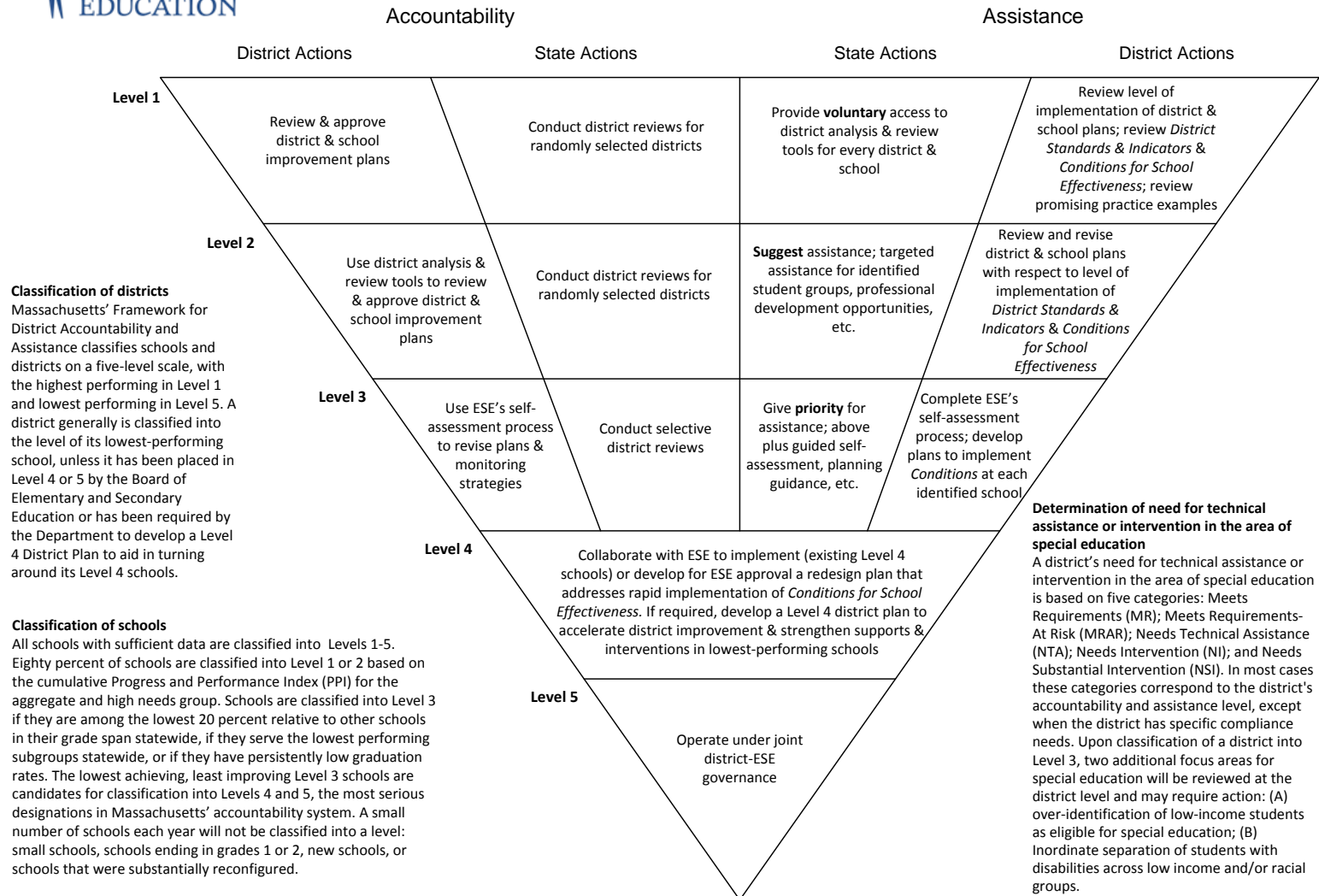
²³ M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1J> and M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1K>.

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.

Determination of need for technical assistance or intervention in the area of special education
 A district's need for technical assistance or intervention in the area of special education is based on five categories: Meets Requirements (MR); Meets Requirements-At Risk (MRAR); Needs Technical Assistance (NTA); Needs Intervention (NI); and Needs Substantial Intervention (NSI). In most cases these categories correspond to the district's accountability and assistance level, except when the district has specific compliance needs. Upon classification of a district into Level 3, two additional focus areas for special education will be reviewed at the district level and may require action: (A) over-identification of low-income students as eligible for special education; (B) Inordinate separation of students with disabilities across low income and/or racial groups.

Appendix II

List of 2016 Underperforming and Chronically Underperforming Schools

2016 Level 4 & 5 Schools

<u>School Name</u>	<u>Accountability & Assistance Level</u>
Dearborn	Level 4
Henry Grew	Level 4
UP Academy Holland	Level 5
John Winthrop	Level 4
Mattahunt	Level 4
Paul A Dever	Level 5
William Ellery Channing	Level 4
Brighton High	Level 4
Excel High School	Level 4
The English High	Level 4
Madison Park High	Level 4
Dorchester Academy	Level 4
Mary Fonseca Elementary School	Level 4
Samuel Watson	Level 4
Morgan Full Service Community School	Level 5
Wm J Dean Vocational Technical High	Level 4
Oliver Partnership School	Level 4
UP Academy Oliver Middle School	Level 4
Business Management & Finance High School	Level 4
International High School	Level 4
Hayden/McFadden	Level 4
John Avery Parker	Level 5
New Bedford High	Level 4
Milton Bradley School	Level 4
John J Duggan Middle	Level 4
Forest Park Middle	Level 4
John F Kennedy Middle	Level 4
M Marcus Kiley Middle	Level 4
Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (North)	Level 4
Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (South)	Level 4
Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (Talented and Gifted)	Level 4
Van Sickle Academy	Level 4
Van Sickle International Baccalaureate	Level 4
High School Of Commerce	Level 4
Springfield High School of Science and Technology	Level 4
Elm Park Community	Level 4
Riverbend-Sanders Street School	Level 4

Appendix III

List of 2016 Chronically Underperforming Schools

2016 Level 5 Districts

Holyoke Public Schools
Lawrence Public Schools
Southbridge Public Schools