



# Massachusetts ESSA Plan: Executive Summary

March 2017 Update

## Introduction

With the passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Congress maintained the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's original focus on advancing equity and excellence for all students, particularly disadvantaged and high need students. The Act's priority areas — academic standards that represent readiness for the expectations of post-secondary education and employers; accountability, support, and improvement for schools; ensuring effective educators; supporting all students; and academic assessments that form the backbone of accountability for results — align closely to the Commonwealth's existing strategies.

Massachusetts has much to be proud of in K–12 public education. Our schools are recognized as best in class among the states, and our students perform at academic levels commensurate with the highest performing education systems in the world. Yet despite our overall success, substantial gaps in student outcomes persist in our state, and too often those gaps are correlated with students' racial/ethnic identification, family economic background, disability status, and English language proficiency.

The goal of the Massachusetts K-12 public education system is to prepare all students for success after high school. This means that all students will be prepared to successfully complete credit-bearing college courses or certificate or workplace training programs, enter economically viable career pathways, and engage as active and responsible citizens in our democracy. Our work is to broaden students' opportunities and close gaps so that all students, regardless of background, are ready for the world that awaits them after high school.

Our ESSA plan is designed to **strengthen the quality and breadth of the instructional program students experience**, as that is our major lever for ensuring success after high school for all students. This focus includes special attention to two areas where state performance has been stagnant — **early grades literacy and middle grades mathematics** — to ensure our students are well prepared with strong literacy and mathematics skills. At the high school level, we will ensure that all students have **multiple high-quality pathways to educational and career opportunities after secondary school**. These pathways will include enhanced early college opportunities, expanded access to career-technical education, and career development opportunities that link to workforce skill needs.

Massachusetts will continue our commitment to **transforming the lowest performing schools and districts** through a strategy that includes state/local partnerships, empowering school and district innovation focused on student success, and aggressive intervention authority.

We continue to focus on providing **additional supports for students who have historically struggled to attain our proficiency standard** — including English language learners, students receiving special education services, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—to ensure that we reach all students. Among the strategies that support this effort are leveraging technology to support instruction and attending to the social-emotional development of students.

Connections among the early education, K-12, and higher education sectors will propel our progress toward these outcomes. The higher education community is key to defining the competencies needed for success after high school and is helping to develop our academic content standards and our state assessments. As well, the higher education community is working with the K-12 sector to expand early college opportunities. The early education sector is working with K-12 to realize a more effective early literacy agenda, as well as to strengthen the social-emotional development of young children.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education employs five overarching strategies to advance the goal of success after high school for all students:

- 1) Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments
- 2) Promote educator development
- 3) Support social-emotional learning, health, and safety
- 4) Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools
- 5) Use technology and data to support student learning

Massachusetts intends to use its ESSA implementation to refine, deepen, and accelerate our work on our five strategies and to promote coherence across our strategies through our focus on instructional quality. We will strengthen the design of our system of accountability to better identify those districts and schools making the most and least progress toward improving student outcomes, and we will improve our assistance for those farthest behind. We will also help districts reconsider how they use their people, time, and fiscal resources in support of these objectives.

We have great confidence in the ability of the Commonwealth's excellent educators and education system to successfully tackle the gaps in performance that exist and will continue to highlight and share the incredible work being done in schools and districts. Our state's success in turning around schools and districts convinces us that low achievement in high-poverty communities and neighborhoods is not pre-destined. We look forward to using the opportunity that Congress has provided through ESSA to build on what is working in Massachusetts, to curtail what is not working, and to accelerate our progress, particularly in our lowest performing schools and districts.

### **Our successes so far and the challenges that remain**

By any measure, Massachusetts public school students are among the strongest performing in the nation and the world. Our students have scored at the top of the National Assessment of Educational Progress ("the nation's report card") tests in grades 4 and 8 English language arts and mathematics for over a decade — a result unparalleled in any other state. In the most recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test of 15-year-olds, none of the 72 participating countries or territories performed higher than Massachusetts in reading, only one performed higher in science, and only 11 performed higher in mathematics. Our four-year high school graduation rates have improved steadily to 87.5 percent for the graduation cohort of 2016, and fewer than 5,600 students dropped out in the 2015–16 school year, down from nearly 10,000 in 2007–08.

While we have made strong strides in providing an excellent education in Massachusetts, we have still not attained our goal of preparing all students for success after high school. A few facts highlight the broader story:

- Although most economically viable career pathways today require at least some postsecondary education, about one-quarter of Massachusetts public high school graduates do not enroll in a college or university in the fall immediately after their high school graduation.
- Among Massachusetts public high school graduates who go on to enroll in Massachusetts public colleges and universities, more than one-third take at least one remedial, non-credit-bearing course in their first semester.
- Student performance overall is strong compared to other states and nations, but some subjects and grade spans have not shown improvement. For example, proficiency in grade 3 reading has lingered at approximately 60 percent of students for more than a decade, as has proficiency in grade 6 mathematics.
- Students who are absent from school are not experiencing the curriculum and instruction that will help prepare them for success. Yet 12 percent of students were chronically absent last year, meaning that they missed 10 percent or more of their days of enrollment in a public school.
- Exposure to a broad curriculum is an important part of a student’s overall educational development. Yet at the high school level, only 72 percent of students completed MassCore, the state’s recommended curriculum for college readiness. About 6 percent of elementary and middle school students took no arts course in 2015–16; at the high school level, more than 50 percent took no arts in that year.
- In 2016, 79 percent of grade 9 students completed and passed all their courses; 21 percent did not. In Massachusetts, students who do not pass all their grade 9 courses are 14 times more likely not to complete high school in four years.
- Exposure to college-level coursework while in high school has been demonstrated to increase the likelihood of success in college. Yet only 36 percent of Massachusetts public high school juniors and seniors took at least one Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate (college-level) course in 2016.
- Critically, the **students who are not experiencing these opportunities are disproportionately our historically underserved student groups**: students who are English language learners, those receiving special education services, economically disadvantaged students, and/or members of racial and ethnic minority groups. Performance for high needs students on the above indicators is substantially worse. For example, proficiency rates for high needs students in both grade 3 reading and grade 6 math are approximately 20 percentage points lower than proficiency rates for all students, cohort graduation rates for disadvantaged students in Massachusetts are 10 to 20 percentage points lower than our state averages, and these students are two to three times more likely to drop out of school.

Advancing and accelerating our state strategies while promoting greater coherence across strategies through our focus on instructional quality and breadth will help us close these gaps and move closer to our goal of success after high school for all Massachusetts public school students.

## Our state strategies and connections to ESSA

### 1) *Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments*

The foundations of any effective statewide school reform and improvement effort are world-class academic standards to establish consistently high expectations for curriculum development and academic achievement along with valid, reliable assessments that provide educators, students, families, and the wider public with the information they need to measure progress and make sound decisions about both policy and practice.

Massachusetts has just completed revisions to its English language arts, math, and science curriculum frameworks to strengthen their rigor and improve their usefulness. We are now in the process of developing and deploying a new assessment system aligned with those standards that builds on the success of MCAS, our legacy assessment that was launched in 1998.

Over the next two years, we will closely evaluate the early results of our next-generation MCAS to ensure it is providing clear and accurate signals regarding the progress and challenges of our students and schools.

### 2) *Promote educator development*

Our expectations for student learning, the instructional program that students experience, and student success depend on the effectiveness of our educators — both teachers and administrators. Thus, our first two strategies are fundamentally intertwined, and we benefit from their synergy when we tackle them together. Our aim is that all students meet ambitious academic content standards as outlined in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks by participating in an instructional program that prepares them well for the transition after high school, provides support for them as individuals, and ensures access to great teachers and administrators. To accomplish this, we have identified four immediate priorities:

- **Priority 1:** Increase the effectiveness of first-year teachers to have an impact on students on day one and accelerate teacher impact in years two and three.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Strengthening educator preparation programs.** We will continue to refine our educator preparation program review process to focus on outcomes rather than inputs, including implementing performance-based assessments for teacher and principal candidates. We will encourage educator preparation programs and school districts to deepen partnerships to improve pre-service and first-year induction programs, including consideration of teacher residencies.
- **Supporting implementation of an educator evaluation and development framework that provides educators with meaningful feedback.** The state will continue to work with districts to support strong implementation of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework by providing guidance and resources, such as a calibration instrument that promotes shared understanding of expectations for strong instruction and conversations about effective feedback.
- **Directing greater attention to students' learning experiences and their access to effective educators.** We will provide reports to districts that identify and compare rates at which student subgroups are taught by inexperienced, out-of-field, and ineffective teachers. We will support

districts in the use of this tool through technical assistance, comprehensive video tutorials, and other resources.

- **Priority 2:** Strengthen the quality of school leadership.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Supporting the development of principals as instructional leaders.** The state will support principals in deepening their understanding of the curriculum frameworks and the high expectations for all students that the frameworks embody and will promote principals' role as instructional leaders by strengthening their skills in observing classroom practice, analyzing measures of student learning and teacher effectiveness, and providing timely and high-impact feedback to their faculty.
- **Expanding the pipeline of principals able to transform high-need schools.** We will work to build a cadre of experienced principals prepared to serve in turnaround schools to expand our capacity for effective intervention and sustainable improvement in our lowest performing schools and districts.

- **Priority 3:** Increase the quality of instruction by more strongly aligning instruction to the high expectations of the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Improving program and instructional quality in early learning.** In an effort to strengthen developmental and learning outcomes for our state's youngest students, the state will continue to address program and instructional quality for public school programs in preschool through third grade. We will continue to work collaboratively with our colleagues at the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, as we know successful connections across state agencies are critical to achieving excellence within the K-12 system. This initiative aligns with the focus of our collaborative work with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health on our State Systemic Improvement Plan for students with disabilities: improved outcomes for preschool children with disabilities. Together, we will continue to build partnerships and alignment among state agencies, public schools, and community-based preschool, after-school, and out-of-school time programs.
- **Focusing statewide efforts on early grades literacy and middle grades mathematics: areas where student performance is relatively weak or stagnant.** The early literacy focus of our state plan will ensure that students reach upper elementary grades with strong literacy skills. The middle grades mathematics focus will ensure that greater numbers of students reach high school ready to succeed in higher level mathematics. The state will prioritize these areas for supports for and assistance to districts so that we can shift the trajectory for all students upward.
- **Increasing student access to an ambitious, engaging, well rounded curriculum.** We will support educators in understanding the curriculum frameworks and employ high expectations for instruction. We will encourage districts to increase student access to high-quality curriculum and enrichment opportunities that include English language arts, mathematics, science, history and civics, the arts, foreign languages, computer science, physical education and health, career development education, dual-enrollment in postsecondary coursework, and alternate pathways to preparation for success after high school. We will provide guidance, technical assistance, and professional learning networks to support implementation of these initiatives for both pre-service and in-service educators. This support will include targeted support for educators

working with students with disabilities and English learners. Additionally, we continue to work to ensure that our curriculum standards are up-to-date and of the highest quality. We recently updated the state's frameworks in science and technology/engineering and in digital literacy and computer science; completed a review and revision of the English language arts and literacy and mathematics curriculum frameworks, which we hope to release this spring pending final Board approval; and began a review and revision of the state's history and social sciences curriculum frameworks. As a result of the feedback we received during our public consultation process for our ESSA plan, we are proposing to begin a review and potential revision of the state's curriculum framework for the arts, which was last updated in 1999.

- **Priority 4:** Increase student access to the supports they need to be successful in achieving the standards in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Implementing more effective programs to serve the students farthest behind.** The Every Student Succeeds Act provides us with many opportunities to improve results for student groups that have historically struggled to meet proficiency standards, in particular, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, English language learners, and students receiving special education services. Through grant funding, prioritized access to resources, and program initiatives at the state and local levels, we will accelerate the improvement of our lower performing students.
- **Implementing the next-generation Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test and supporting districts as they develop common assessments.** The state is upgrading the MCAS to better measure the critical thinking skills students need for success in the 21st century. The new test, informally called the next-generation MCAS, builds upon the best aspects of the MCAS assessments that have served the Commonwealth well for the past two decades. The tests will be administered entirely via computer for grades 3-8 by 2019. We will also work with districts to help them develop assessments that are common across schools, grades, and subjects so that they can more effectively compare progress and provide consistent feedback to teachers on their students' performance.

### ***3) Support social-emotional learning, health, and safety***

Academic and social-emotional skills and competencies are mutually reinforcing. Thus, preparing all students for success must include attending to their social emotional and health development. We will accomplish this by promoting systems and strategies that foster safe, positive, healthy, culturally competent, and inclusive learning environments that address students' varied needs in order to improve educational outcomes for all students.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Promoting social and emotional learning (SEL).** We will promote SEL with the goal of creating conditions that will support statewide implementation of SEL programs in preschool through high school. Through participation in the Collaborating States Initiative facilitated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), we will update and expand guidelines for implementing SEL curricula and explore ways to incorporate SEL into the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
- **Ensuring a positive school climate and providing safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students.** We will provide training, technical assistance, access to

resources and guidance to schools and districts as they consider using Title IV, Part A funds in this realm and will continue to support initiatives and resources such as the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool, Rethinking Discipline, Bullying Prevention and Intervention, and Substance Use and Abuse Prevention. In addition, we will encourage districts to increase student access to a broad, well-rounded curriculum that includes physical education and health (as required by state law in each grade) and will explore using a school climate indicator in our measures of school performance.

- **Promoting family engagement** as a key lever that contributes to positive outcomes for students. We will continue to find opportunities to provide training, technical assistance, resources, and guidance to schools and partners on effective family engagement strategies that promote the development of strong working relationships with families and appropriate community organizations to support students' success.

#### *4) Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools*

The state's lowest performing schools require evidence-based interventions and strong educators to support rapid improvement in the schools' ability to prepare their students for success. Over the past seven years, Massachusetts has used strong authorities codified in state law to implement an aggressive system of identification, support, and intervention in the state's lowest performing schools and districts. The state law emphasizes sufficient autonomy and flexibility to empower school leadership to make key decisions regarding staffing, resources, and schedules within a context of accountability for results. Under ESSA, we will continue to support and partner with districts as they strive to improve underperforming schools. Where districts are unable to implement effective improvement initiatives, we will utilize our authority under state statute to intervene.

Proposed changes to our school and district accountability system, described below, will help us prioritize which schools most need state assistance to improve student outcomes. The accountability system will identify the lowest performing 5 percent of schools, schools with the lowest performing subgroups, and high schools with four-year graduation rates below 67 percent so that those schools can be prioritized for assistance.

We will support the lowest performing schools by expanding the use of four evidence-based strategies that have emerged from seven years of research on turnaround schools in Massachusetts:

- Establish a school-wide community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration;
- Employ intentional practices for improving instruction;
- Provide student-specific supports and instruction to all students; and
- Provide appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral supports in order to create a safe, orderly, and respectful learning environment for students and teachers.

Research on Massachusetts schools demonstrates that formerly low performing schools in our state that have changed their trajectories implement these four evidence-based practices with fidelity. Third-party partners have been necessary to provide those schools with sufficient capacity and support to accelerate transformation. The use of evidence-based practices and effective partners are the cornerstones of our turnaround strategy and guide our interactions with our lowest performing schools and districts.



We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Providing low-performing schools direct expert assistance, funding, research-based resources, and preferred access to professional development.** These might include coaching, professional development focused on instructional leadership and curriculum development, planning and program implementation support, and data analysis assistance.
- **Intervening in chronically underperforming districts and schools.** In instances when all other avenues to implement ambitious and accelerated reforms have been exhausted in turnaround schools and districts, and when it is in the best interest of students, the state will place districts and schools under state receivership in accordance with state law. At present, three school districts and four schools are under receivership.
- **Supporting districts in establishing alternative governance structures for low performing schools that struggle to make rapid improvements in student achievement.** Alternative governance structures, such as Innovation Partnership Zones, keep schools within a district's control but allow for additional autonomies that may be necessary for persistently low-performing schools. To date, the Springfield Empowerment Zone has implemented an alternative governance structure to promote school improvement.

#### *5) Use technology and data to support teaching and learning*

We seek to improve the state's data infrastructure and promote a culture of effective data and technology use in districts and schools. We will accomplish this by investing in efforts to increase access to technology, streamlining reporting requirements, and providing resources and tools to advance effective data use and personalized learning.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Shining a light on equity and access concerns through data reporting.** The Every Student Succeeds Act requires additional reporting on school-level expenditures and access to effective educators that will provide districts with valuable information and comparisons about how they allocate resources to their lowest performing students and schools.
- **Building technological capacity and infrastructure.** The Every Student Succeeds Act funds will supplement existing state efforts to bridge the digital divide that exists among schools across the Commonwealth and expand access to high-quality digital learning opportunities, particularly for students in rural, remote, and underserved areas. We will also continue to implement the Schools Interoperability Framework to streamline and automate data reporting for districts.
- **Supporting high-quality professional development for educators to personalize learning and improve academic achievement through technology.** Through a public-private partnership, we will catalyze personalized learning in the Commonwealth to better prepare students for their future. Among other activities, the partnership will help schools pilot projects that allow students to progress through the curriculum based on demonstrated competency on the expectations set forth in the curriculum frameworks.
- **Updating and improving our Edwin Analytics tools.** Edwin Analytics is the secure system by which the state provides data reports to districts and schools. We will update the Edwin Analytics reports to report on data from the state's next-generation MCAS test and will continue to add to the bank of reports available to help districts better understand their student-level data. We will also add and update reports for educator preparation programs to strengthen their support of aspiring teachers and administrators.



## Success after high school

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a number of initiatives designed to support student access to multiple high-quality pathways to educational and career opportunities after high school. These programs improve the quality of students' high school experiences by increasing graduation rates, exposing students to career and technical skills, and promoting postsecondary access.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Supporting use of our Early Warning Indicator System.** The state produces reports that predict the likelihood of students successfully attaining their next academic milestone throughout their K–12 and postsecondary careers. The Every Student Succeeds Act will allow us to continue to help districts identify students who are likely to be off track and provide resources to implement effective interventions.
- **Providing graduation supports for student subgroups.** The Department is developing specific tools and supports to help schools and districts increase graduation rates for students with disabilities and English learners, whose graduation rates have historically lagged behind state averages.
- **Expanding postsecondary access.** The Department continues to promote the development of early college models, including dual-enrollment programs, and partners with organizations across the state to increase the number of graduates that enroll in postsecondary education or training. We will continue to collaborate with our state partners at the Department of Higher Education to ensure that expectations, experiences, and connections between our agencies are well-aligned.
- **Expanding access to career development education, high-quality career pathways, and computer science.** The Department provides funding and technical assistance to schools, districts, and workforce investment boards to increase the number of students who participate in meaningful work-based learning while in high school. Of particular note, Massachusetts recently won a \$2 million grant to accelerate the development of high-quality career pathways and help ensure that high needs students are prepared for success after graduation. In addition, following the recent adoption of a new curriculum framework on digital literacy and computer science, we plan to accelerate our focus on computer science through deployment of model curriculum units, supporting teachers in their understanding and implementation of the new curriculum frameworks, and the possible inclusion of computer science in MassCore, the Commonwealth's recommended high school course of study for college and career readiness. In all of this work, ESE seeks to build upon and expand the successes of our full-time vocational technical schools and expand access to career-technical education through cultivation of partnerships among these schools, comprehensive high schools, post-secondary institutions, and employers.

## School and district accountability

The state's accountability system is our primary way of measuring each school's and district's progress toward attaining the state goal of success after high school for all students. The Every Student Succeeds Act provides us with an opportunity to refine our accountability system to better align it with ESE's goals and strategies. This will allow us to broaden the dimensions of performance we consider, as well as improve our system for assisting those schools and districts farthest behind in attaining the state's goals.

Our state's existing accountability system rests primarily on student achievement, growth, and graduation data, with an emphasis on closing gaps for historically low-performing subgroups. These data are fundamental to the educational enterprise. If students are not proficient on grade-level material and are not graduating, then schools and districts are not doing their jobs. And if not all students are performing well, the accountability system should highlight those gaps.

Our accountability system will include an accountability index through which we make distinctions in school and district effectiveness. In addition, our system will include parent-friendly school and district report cards and online profiles. We are committed to providing families and the public with a robust picture of each school and district. These online profiles and report cards will include a wider range of indicators than will be incorporated in the accountability index.

In selecting indicators to be part of the accountability index, several principles will guide our decisions:

- We will focus on academic performance (e.g., academic achievement and graduation rates) more so than on school inputs. Student learning is the core work of schools.
- We will balance robustness with simplicity and transparency. We want to be sure that the signal (academic performance) is not drowned out by noise. While more inputs paint a more complete profile of schools, we do not want the accountability index to mask schools that are struggling with basic literacy, mathematics, and science instruction. We anticipate a larger number of indicators in our school report cards and profiles than will contribute to the accountability index.
- We will ensure the validity and reliability of our accountability index so that it is technically defensible.
- We will set targets that require that each school and district stretch and continually improve.
- We will align accountability incentives for districts, schools, educators, and students to ensure that all parties are rowing in the same direction.

We will ensure an appropriate balance between expanding the elements that contribute to the accountability system on the one hand and ease of interpreting the results on the other. A key purpose of an accountability system is to identify the schools and districts that need the most assistance to bring their students up to the state's academic expectations. The system must focus attention on the schools and districts farthest behind in core academic subjects, because we have a duty to address the needs of the students in those schools. Expanding the number of measures adds dimensionality to the system, but a system with too many measures runs the risk of providing a weak signal regarding the efficacy of the academic program. We need to balance robustness with simplicity and transparency.

The Commonwealth's plan distinguishes what will be reported as components of school and district profiles, both on the public website and in school and district report cards, versus elements that will comprise the accountability metric. We have done so because of our concern that input measures essentially become prescriptions and/or mandates; because combining outcomes and inputs into a single system blurs its focus; and with little experience in measuring curricular opportunity (for example, quantity versus quality of access to a given subject) we have determined that it is premature to incorporate such elements in an accountability metric. However, we are committed to reporting publicly on curricular opportunities, and we will therefore work both internally and with the field to develop the right measures and report them in the right way on our school and district profiles website and in our school and district report cards.

We heard strong support from stakeholders for the inclusion of certain input measures, specifically access to a well-rounded curriculum including the arts, physical education, advanced coursework, computer science, career development education, and other offerings. At least in the initial years of the new accountability system, such input measures are better represented as indicators in a school or district report card so that the information is readily accessible to parents, policymakers, and the public, rather than as indicators in an accountability system.

In our proposed new accountability system, student achievement and growth and graduation data remain core measures of school and district results, and opportunity gaps for high needs students remain of paramount consideration. In addition, we propose to expand the measures included in the system to create a more comprehensive picture of student opportunity and outcomes and increase the value placed on improvement. By doing so, we intend to promote a more well-rounded view of school performance and to encourage schools and districts to focus on increasing equitable access to educational opportunities. These measures also more strongly connect to our strategies.

In keeping with the focus on excellence and equity, our proposed new system will prioritize strong outcomes for all students and closing gaps for high needs students. High needs students are defined as students who are current or former English language learners, receive special education services, and/or are economically disadvantaged.

Among the accountability index indicators (core measures) to which we are committed are:

- Students' scores on our statewide assessments
- A measure of growth to standard<sup>1</sup> (i.e., based on year-to-year gains, whether the student is on track to reach proficiency within two or three years)
- Gap closing by accelerating the gains of the lowest performing students
- High school graduation rates
- English learner progress and attainment of proficiency in English

Other accountability index indicators that we are considering include:

- Student engagement (e.g., attendance, chronic absenteeism)
- Dropout rates
- Successful completion of a broad and challenging curriculum
- Ninth grade success

These measures would be aggregated into an overall school performance index. Per the federal law, the core measures outlined above would be given much greater weight in the calculation than the additional measures. For certain measures, we may begin by including them in enhanced reporting on our school and district report cards to encourage state and local conversations about programmatic and/or policy changes, such as expanding course offerings and ensuring a well-rounded curriculum including arts, physical education, and service learning.

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<sup>1</sup> We anticipate implementing a growth-to-standard measure; however if growth to standard is not technically feasible based on new statewide assessment results, we will continue to use our existing student growth percentiles.

The accountability index would be used as the first step for classifying schools into performance levels. Each level would have an associated percentile range. But the system for designating performance levels would not be entirely relative. Every year, the state would also set out performance targets based on the measures in the index for each of the school performance levels that would encourage each school to continually improve. If a school met or exceeded those targets, it could attain that level even if its index would have otherwise placed it lower. In this way, the expectations for performance are clear and known ahead of time for all schools, and performance level designations do not depend solely on the performance of other schools.

Per the requirements of the federal law, the lowest performing 5 percent of schools and high schools with four-year graduation rates below 67 percent will be identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Schools above the bottom 5 percent overall but that have very low-performing subgroups will be identified for targeted support and improvement. These schools, along with schools nearing those categories, will implement a turnaround plan to improve student performance and will be eligible for a wide variety of supports and services aligned to our evidence-based practices for school turnaround, as described above. Under our plan, a district's accountability level would be determined by the overall performance of its students rather than the level of its lowest performing school as it is currently.

An important caveat to this section of our plan is that we do not currently have state data on several of the indicators we have proposed. Most notably, we are just beginning a new statewide assessment program in the 2016–17 school year and do not yet have data on student performance under the new assessment system. Until we have data and can conduct simulations for combining multiple indicators to generate the summary measures of school and district performance, we present this section as a conceptual framework for the accountability system we plan to launch at the end of the 2017–18 school year. The academic and other indicators that we generate at the close of the 2016–17 school year will serve as a baseline for the new system.

As noted above, we will enhance our annual school and district report cards, making them more user-friendly and adding various measures of school and district performance beyond those included in the formal accountability system. Elements that we anticipate including in school and district report cards and profiles include:

- Breadth of curriculum (e.g., access to courses beyond English language arts, mathematics, science, history and civics, such as the arts, physical education, computer science, and community service)
- School-level financial allocations and expenditures
- School climate surveys
- Enrollment in career-technical education and other pathways (e.g., early college) as data become available
- Percent of high school graduates achieving the competency determination without needing Educational Proficiency Plans
- Percent of third graders achieving proficiency in reading
- Percent of sixth graders achieving proficiency in mathematics
- Data related to pre-kindergarten experience/readiness for kindergarten

## Strategic resource use

In an era of increasing demands for public services as the state's population ages, the education sector will be competing with other public services for financial resources. Districts must continue to find ways to get more out of the people, time, and fiscal resources they already have to help improve outcomes for students, including by reducing inequities in the allocation of resources to different types of students. To this end, the state has created a new Office of Resource Allocation Strategy and Planning to develop new tools and supports for districts to rethink how they use their resources.

We will advance this work under ESSA by:

- **Developing a consolidated district application for federal education grants consistent with state and local priorities.** Currently districts apply separately for each of the funding sources provided for under ESSA. By creating a consolidated application connected to our state strategies, we will encourage districts to use their federal resources more strategically towards improving outcomes for all students.
- **Enhancing reports on school-level expenditures.** Massachusetts already collects school-level per-pupil data and reports the data in a limited way, but we will use ESSA as an opportunity to advance our work in this area. We have already begun pilot testing Resource Allocation and District Action Reports that use these data to provide comparisons and insights on how districts use their resources. These reports will be available statewide during the 2017–18 school year.
- **Requiring resource use reviews in the lowest performing schools.** The turnaround plan for schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and intervention will include an analysis of inequities in access to resources for students in those schools to inform the strategies included in the plan.

## Ongoing review and refinement

In developing our state plan, we benefited greatly from the voluminous feedback we received from our stakeholders. We collected feedback over the course of nearly 12 months, during which we connected with nearly 200 stakeholder groups, along with hundreds of educators, parents, and students. We also conducted five public forums in fall 2016 with more than 250 participants, participated in close to 100 community meetings and presentations, and received approximately 3,200 responses to our stakeholder feedback surveys. We made numerous revisions to our plans as a result of this engagement.

During our official public comment period from early February to early March we received feedback from over 1,000 people. The overwhelming majority of those who commented (94-96 percent) expressed support for our identified focus areas: early grades literacy, middle grades mathematics, high-quality educational and career pathways for high school students, and additional supports for historically disadvantaged students. The strongest endorsement amongst respondents was for our focus on early grades literacy and additional supports for historically disadvantaged students, with three-quarters of those who commented stating that they “Strongly agree” with these focus areas.

Ninety-six percent of respondents to our February/March feedback survey expressed support for including as indicators in the accountability system access to the arts and to a broad curriculum generally, including such elements as computer science, career-technical programs, and advanced coursework. Eighty-seven percent supported the use of school climate and culture measures, 84 percent supported the inclusion of ninth grade course passing rates, and 83 percent supported including chronic absenteeism in the system. Of the six proposed indicators in the survey, ninth grade course passing rates

and chronic absenteeism received the smallest number of responses indicating “strong” support. Finally, 86 percent of respondents supported our revised approach to measuring district performance whereby results for all students in the district would be used to determine the district’s level as opposed to basing the determination on that of its lowest performing school. Forty-seven percent of respondents to the survey stated that the plan reflected feedback that they or the people they represent had provided, and more than half indicated that they had had sufficient opportunities to provide input on our state plan.

Our Office of Planning and Research will take the lead on ESSA implementation for ESE. Over the past six-plus years, the Office of Planning and Research has employed a sophisticated approach to monitoring and improving the quality of our implementation and refining our improvement strategies over time. This approach identifies key initiatives that support each agency strategy and develops specific plans, benchmarks, and outcomes for each. We dedicate three ESE staff to monitoring the implementation of these plans and assisting program offices with analytical and strategic capacity to extend their work. We will continue to use this method of review and continuous improvement to advance our work and hold ourselves accountable for our ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes, particularly for historically disadvantaged subgroups.

We will promote continuous improvement in districts by taking advantage of new resources we have already developed for district strategic planning, the consolidated federal grant application described above, and an enhanced focus on performance and outcomes in our program review and monitoring activities. Our Planning for Success model for district strategic planning involves three steps: creating a plan, aligning systems to the plan, and implementing the plan (including evaluating and monitoring progress). We will encourage districts to use this planning model as the structure underlying the plan we will require as part of their annual federal grant application, which will begin to help districts to establish local evaluation practices where they do not already exist. Over time, we will add in more supports to help districts evaluate their progress, particularly in conducting formal evaluations where needed as part of the language throughout ESSA that requires evidence-based interventions. This work will be driven by our new Office of Resource Allocation Strategy and Planning within the Office of Planning and Research, which has responsibility for promoting strategic resource use and grant coordination in districts and will take the lead in developing our strategy across program offices to review each district’s proposed expenditures of federal funds under ESSA. Modifications to program review and monitoring activities are being led by our Office of Public School Monitoring.

As we refine our implementation of our plan, stakeholder voice and analysis of the strong work underway in Massachusetts districts and schools will continue to play a prominent role. We hold regular meetings with many of our stakeholder groups, including superintendents, principals, teachers, union leadership, school committee members, state board members, state legislators, parents, students, and so forth. Our work to promote arts education has been informed by recommendations from the state’s [Creative Challenge Index](#) Commission and supported through targeted appropriations from the state legislature. We have established intentional processes that allow us to study the effectiveness of our initiatives, and we will continue to learn from local implementation efforts and make adjustments to our plans as necessary. We will continue these conversations and analyses, and also offer additional opportunities for stakeholders to provide input, particularly at key junctures when we are considering significant changes to an element of the plan.