Guidance and Requirements for Level 4 Districts

Accelerating Improvement for Student Learning

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Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Contents

1. Purpose and Theory of Action of State Intervention in Level 4 Districts

Guidance and Requirements for Level 4 Districts defines the roles and responsibilities for districts formerly declared "underperforming" by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) and future districts designated as Level 4 based on the findings of a district review. When the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts a review of district practice and concludes that a district's systems of support are not delivering the necessary educational services for its students, ESE is obligated to intervene as necessary to ensure that students' needs are met. In cases where the systems for supporting student learning are not rapidly improved after close monitoring and support, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will designate the district as Level 5 (chronically underperforming) and a receiver will be selected to manage key functions in the school district.

The designation of a Level 4 district based on a district review signals that the district is "at risk" of a chronically underperforming designation (see Appendix A for the state regulations). At Level 4, the district is still fully responsible for its programs and services, but will be monitored closely by ESE to ensure that district systems of support and student performance are rapidly and measurably improving.

This guidance defines a process and template for ambitious improvement planning with a rigorous focus on measuring implementation and outcomes. **If a Level 4 district can define a narrow set of priorities to accelerate student learning, execute well-defined strategies with a relentless focus on implementation, and systematically monitor the impact of those strategies to inform mid-course corrections, outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed. District turnaround is not about receiving additional funding, but about using existing resources – both financial and human resources – more strategically.**

Through the process described in this guidance, ESE seeks to provide support for districts to be successful in turning around district practice and accelerating improvement for the Commonwealth's most struggling students.

2. Background and Context

In April 2010, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) adopted regulations to define the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (ESE) approach to engaging with school districts to improve student performance. The *Framework for District and School Accountability* (see Appendix B) defines the roles and expectations of the district and ESE based on the performance of the district's schools.

Prior to 2008, the Board had designated five school districts as "underperforming" pursuant to the statute and regulations then in effect. Under the Department's guidance, each district developed a turnaround plan designed to improve its systems and student achievement. The Board approved the turnaround plans and has received annual updates on progress.

The regulations adopted in April 2010 placed the previously designated underperforming districts into "Level 4" of the new *Framework for Accountability and Assistance*. The regulations clarified the process for a district in Level 4 to be monitored, periodically reviewed and considered for removal from Level 4, either to Level 3 if systems and practices were substantially improved, or to Level 5 if the district required substantially more intense intervention – in the form of receivership – to improve its systems and student achievement.

To assess each district's progress in implementing its turnaround plan to strengthen district practices and improve student achievement, the Department (through the Center for District and School Accountability) is conducting a comprehensive district review in each Level 4 district.

The content of this guidance provides details about the process for monitoring and supporting these Level 4 districts as well as those that may be designated in the future.

3. Summary of Level 4 District Process

The Level 4 District Process defined in this guidance represents a more prescriptive approach to the accountability and assistance requirements for underperforming school districts. Because state regulations define Level 4 as "at risk" of Level 5 Co-Governance, the Level 4 process must have a laser-like focus on implementation and measuring progress. There are three fundamental principles underlying this approach:

1. <u>Students cannot wait for incremental improvement in their educational conditions</u> – given the trends of low performance in a Level 4 district and the lack of district systems to sufficiently respond, accelerated and rapid improvement is necessary for all students to graduate adequately prepared for college and careers.

2. <u>Monitoring progress in Level 4 districts must be based on outcomes</u> – while monitoring district implementation of key actions is necessary to ensure that progress is underway, ESE and districts must also use the impacts of those actions as a way to assess progress.

3. <u>The process of accelerated district improvement requires dedicated project management support</u> – existing district capacity is insufficient to implement and monitor dramatic transformation of district practice given current resources and systems. ESE must support the effort of Level 4 districts to manage the process of accelerated improvement planning, implementing, and monitoring.

Accordingly, the Level 4 District process requires that districts use its District Review Report(s) to develop a new *Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP)* with clear and measurable benchmarks of progress. ESE will monitor district progress against the AIPs through a *Plan Highlight Report* produced by the district on a monthly basis. In order to support Level 4 district capacity for this work, ESE will offer assistance resources for an *Accelerated Improvement Manager* that will report directly to the superintendent and support the plan's development, implementation, and reporting. The Accelerated Improvement Manager will be jointly selected by ESE and the Level 4 district, and will be required to participate in ongoing technical assistance sessions to build his/her project management capacity and ensure clarity of responsibilities.

The following diagram outlines the Level 4 district Accelerated Improvement Plan process:

Phase 1: Accelerated Improvement Plan Development

Phase 2: Accelerated Improvement Plan Implementation and Monitoring
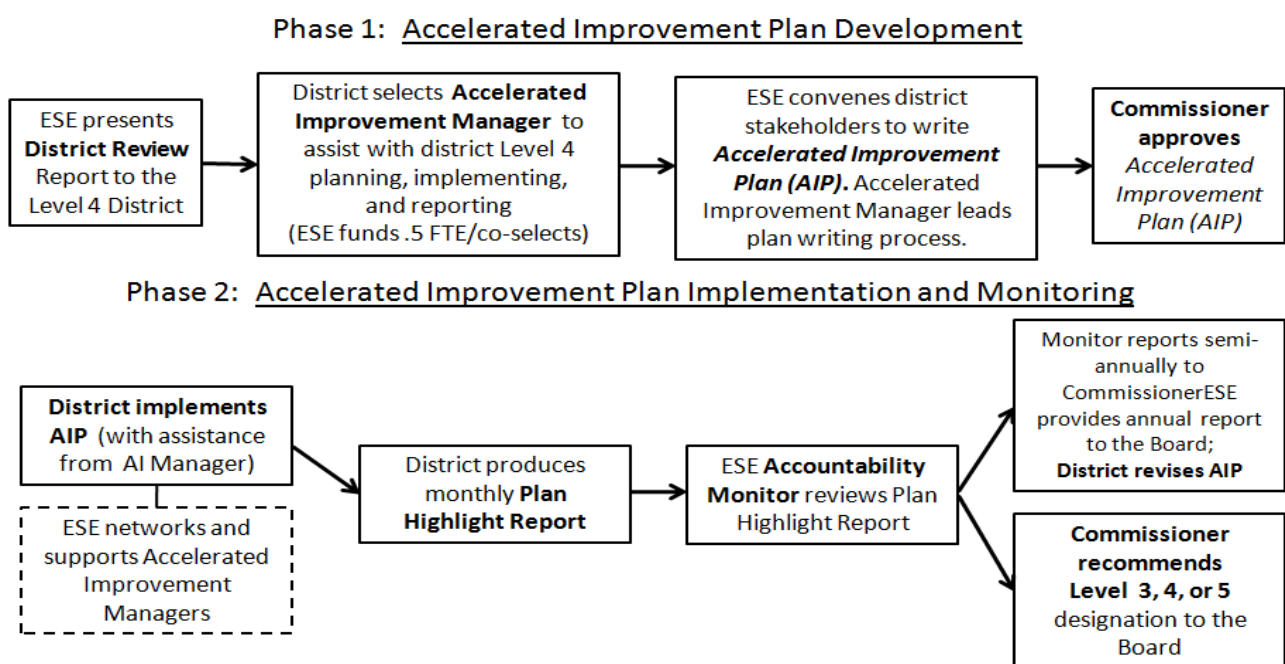
4. Accelerated Improvement Plan - Guidance

4.1 – Overview and Core Principles

Why this plan?

Any plan is about what people do. An effective plan captures the energy and passion people commit to doing the best for students. It should also reflect honestly and transparently on what has been achieved and what needs to be done. Fundamentally a plan must be aligned with district needs and realistic about the issues the district will face in bringing about accelerated improvement. It must be a living document, vividly integrated into the work of those who will implement it. An *Accelerated Improvement Plan* requires the use of evidence by the district to self-evaluate in order to define key issues and to assess its capacity to bring about accelerated improvement. It must facilitate an ongoing evaluation of each strategy's impact and provide a framework for agreeing what needs to be done next.

This is the premise of the Accelerated Improvement Plan – it is a vehicle for supporting urgent and sustainable change for the benefit of students and the community.

Core Principles of the Accelerated Improvement Plan

The plan must be easily understood by all affected audiences. The plan must capture in plain English the critical issues that have to be addressed in a district to bring about accelerated improvement. What will be done and why - the priorities for the district - must be evident to parents, teachers and the community.

The plan must be implemented by individuals who are entirely committed to its success. The expectation is that those who lead any area of the plan will commit their energy to its success. They will evaluate their own work and that of others in a timely, accurate and measured way, celebrating success as they go but also identifying barriers and the steps that will be taken to overcome them.

The plan requires collaboration and a willingness to challenge and be challenged. Not every step will work perfectly or end up being the right step. The people responsible must be prepared to honestly assess the plan's implementation and make the necessary mid-course corrections. This will support accelerated improvement.

The plan must focus on outcomes. The plan must focus on outcomes to determine whether actions are making a difference for students. Far too often, improvement plans consist of a series of action steps without building in an ongoing assessment of whether each step is having an impact. The action steps in a plan must be viewed as the means of delivering on the priorities and outcomes identified in the plan.

The plan must be a useful tool to those who must implement it and should be developed in partnership with those who must implement it. The plan should not be too long. It should be used and referenced daily by those responsible for its success. To achieve this it must be understood and embedded in ongoing conversations about improvement. Therefore it has to be clearly and precisely written. A good plan may change but a robust analysis of evidence must guide decisions about changes. A priority or strategy should not disappear because it becomes challenging or difficult. If it is to have a rapid impact, the plan must honestly confront the difficult issues.

Fundamentally an Accelerated Improvement Plan is about getting important things done – quickly and sustainably.

4.2 Structure of the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP)

The purpose of the AIP is to provide a structured and transparent approach that evaluates what the key issues are in a district and what will be done to bring about accelerated improvement.

Summary of Core Issues and Priorities – *explaining to the community what needs to be done and why*

The first requirement is to present what needs to be done and why. This written statement should use language that parents and community members can easily understand. The summary statement should be a maximum of 800 words.

This section must summarize the **core issues and challenges** that must be addressed in order to rapidly improve student outcomes. It should also show that the district has the capacity to sustain and secure these improvements. These core issues and challenges may be drawn from a district review report or other analysis of quantitative or qualitative data. This section must also make the connection between these core issues and the **District Priorities** (see below).

District Priorities – *presenting the overarching areas of focus for the plan*

Having stated what the core issues are, the plan then defines the key **District Priorities**. When faced with challenging circumstances, there is a temptation to create a long list of possible solutions. The District Priorities for improvement must succinctly describe no more than five overarching areas of focus. These District Priorities must take into account the District Review and other evidence and should align with ESE's District Standards and Indicators.

District Strategies – *defining the concrete initiatives under each District Priority*

Once five District Priorities have been identified, specific **Strategies** must be defined. These strategies will enable the district to achieve its priorities. There should be no more than five **District Strategies** for each priority. The Strategies can be prioritised in a logical sequence of implementation to ensure that the most urgent areas are addressed quickly. The sequence will be identified through the rank order of the strategies in the plan and the timelines against the actions. These Strategies may include the implementation of programs or initiatives, shifts in policy, establishment of partnerships, or changes in organizational structures. The plan must describe the **early evidence of change** and **outcomes** that will be visible for each **District Strategy**.

Early evidence of change seeks to establish the effectiveness of a strategy before the outcomes can be measured. Focusing on early evidence of change helps ensure each strategy is accelerating improvement by flagging areas where barriers need to be addressed. It will also allow the district to assess whether a failure to meet outcomes is a result of the wrong strategy or the right strategy being implemented poorly. Early evidence of change could relate to a measurable difference in practice that is taking place either in the classroom or in leadership and management. It could also reflect a shift in commitment and understanding by stakeholders that the strategy is essential to make much needed improvement.

The plan should track **shorter term outcomes** as well as the desired, **final outcomes**. The former might be captured by an annual performance goal that shows incremental improvement while the latter will be measured by achieving the outcome as it is defined in the plan. Shorter term outcomes could be, for example, annual MCAS performance targets by the grades and subgroups who would be impacted by the introduction of the strategy. The final outcomes in this example would then be the aspirational MCAS performance targets to be achieved at the end of a three year period of implementation. (See Appendix C for more information about Implementation Benchmarks).

Action Steps – *mapping out the steps that must be taken to implement each strategy*

The **Action Steps** document what will happen, who will get the job done and in what timeframe. It is the place to map out and sequence the steps that need to take place to implement each district strategy. The appropriate "grain size" for the **Action Steps** should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district's daily work.

The plan should embed actions that help monitor the effectiveness of the plan's implementation. For example, there should be actions steps that establish the process and structures for documenting early evidence of change.

At every stage the plan must focus on expected outcomes. The evidence that will be used to document outcomes should be clear and apparent in the plan, and the plan must clearly define **who** will **do what** and **by when**.

Monitoring and Evaluating Progress through the Running Notes of Progress – *documenting what is working, what is not and why and monitoring the impact and pace of implementation*

To keep the Accelerated Improvement Plan active and current, there must be a robust process for **monitoring** and **evaluating** the impact of the plan and progress towards the goal of significantly improved student learning. **The Quarterly Progress Rating (QPR)** evaluates both the action steps of the plan and the outcomes. There are three possible ratings in each quarter on a traffic light system, red, yellow and green.

Progress on the implementation of each **District Strategy** is also monitored and evaluated by using the **Running Notes of Progress** to log **successes** and **barriers** to improvement. The **Running Notes of Progress** can be used to monitor progress and should be referenced when completing the **Quarterly Progress Rating**.

The Running Note of Progress is critical to the success of the AIP and the activity that sits within it. It is also a key tool for the Accelerated Improvement Manager and is part of the evidence base for the Highlight Reports.

Challenge Questions – *promoting debate to clarify thinking*

In the detailed guidance for each section of the Accelerated Improvement Plan (found on the following pages), there are a series of questions designed to promote debate and to clarify thinking. They can be used as the plan is being prepared or as a framework for evaluating its effectiveness. These questions provide a check and balance to support coherence and purpose and are part of ensuring that the plan is well understood and works as a living document.

4.3 ESE Support for Developing and Implementing the AIP

AIP Development Sessions

The details of the Accelerated Improvement Planning process will be communicated and supported through ESE-facilitated AIP development sessions for key stakeholders in each district and their Accelerated Improvement Managers (described below). ESE will schedule the AIP Development sessions in spring 2011.

Accelerated Improvement Managers

In order to support the development and implementation of an AIP, ESE will provide funding for a portion of a staff position to serve as Accelerated Improvement Manager. The Accelerated Improvement Manager will assist with defining the priorities in the AIP, and support the planning, controlling and monitoring of tasks and resources to meet the deadlines specified. Specifically, the Accelerated Improvement Planning will be responsible for:

- convening and facilitating district staff to ensure production of the district's Accelerated Improvement Plan;
- managing the implementation of the Accelerated Improvement Plan to ensure that deadlines are met; and
- ensuring that monthly Plan Highlight Reports are produced..

The Accelerated Improvement Manger will report directly to the superintendent and could either be a new appointment or a new deployment of existing staff who have the requisite skills. The Manager must have strong project management skills, which will be specified by the ESE, in order to provide comprehensive and focused support in the district for the development and implementation of the AIP. In addition to supplemental funding for the position, ESE will provide ongoing support and training for the Accelerated Improvement Managers across the state and will facilitate a network of Accelerated Improvement Managers. To ensure that the Manager has the confidence of both the district and ESE, the appointment of each Accelerated Improvement Manager will be decided on jointly by the ESE's Center for Targeted Assistance and the district.

They will communicate and build relationships at all levels of and across all disciplines and departments engaged with the AIP to ensure that accelerated improvement is made. The Accelerated Improvement Manager will support problem solving and have the ability to collaborate, negotiate, interact and influence people associated with the AIP.

They will be responsible for the identification, monitoring and mitigation of risk; the management, control and approval of change requests identified in the Running Notes of Progress and ensuring that the Quarterly Performance Rating (QPR) is completed. They will serve as liaison to the monitoring and quality assurance of the QPRs by the ESE Accountability Monitor.

4.4 ESE Accountability and Monitoring of the AIP

AIP Plan Highlight Report

Level 4 districts will be required to produce an AIP Plan Highlight Report on a monthly basis that will represent a snapshot status of progress on the AIP. Accelerated Improvement Managers will receive training and support on the format and purpose of the Highlight Report in order to support Level 4 districts in its development. The Highlight Report is a 2-3 page summary document issued monthly, showing the deliverables & achievements since the previous Highlight Report. It will also show a summary of the budget/resource, any new or changed issues and risks; and finally a list of activities/deliverables for the next period.

The Highlight Report will have a range of audiences .It will be a critical tool in ensuring the AIP stays on track.

ESE Accountability Monitor

The implementation and effectiveness of the district strategies set out in the AIP will be monitored on a regular basis by an ESE Accountability Monitor representing the Center for District and School Accountability. The ESE Accountability Monitor will de-brief the monthly Plan Highlight Reports with the Accelerated Improvement Manager and Superintendent (or designee). The ESE Accountability Monitor will report progress to the Commissioner at least twice annually.

4.5   AIP Highlight Report Template

District	
Report Date	
Superintendent/designee	
Accelerated Improvement Manager(s)/leads	
Reporting period	
Report no	
Start date	
Audience	

Highlights

> current project stage > key milestones/deliverables met with dates >early evidence of change indicators/ activities undertaken

Budget/Resource status

> project budget/resource   > project spend/resources sourced and allocated > remaining budget/resource unallocated

Exceptions

> key milestones/deliverables missed> absence of early evidence of change > key barriers to change identified> why > recovery plan/action to be taken

Issues / risks to be raised (new or changed)

> description of issue > impact of issue > action required > who > date required
> description of risk > probability > impact > mitigation > action > who > date required

Work for next period

> key milestone > deliverables > decision points with dates > planned activities>date of next report

4.6   Detailed Guidance and Challenge Questions

Section 1: Summary of Core Issues and Priorities

The first requirement is to present written text that clearly describes what needs to be done and why. This written statement should use language that parents and community members can easily understand. The summary statement should be a maximum of 800 words

This section must summarize the **core issues** and challenges that must be addressed in order to rapidly improve student outcomes. These core issues and challenges may be drawn from the district review report together with other analyses of quantitative or qualitative data. Effective use of data will be critical in identifying these core issues and challenges and monitoring progress towards goals. The issues should focus on the impact on student learning and achievement gains, the quality of educational services delivered. Using straightforward language, this section should also show that the district has the capacity to secure and sustain accelerated improvements. This section must also make the connection between the **core issues** and the **District Priorities** (see below).

Challenge Questions (Section 1)

1. Is it evident to parents the community and other stakeholders what the Core Issues are and what will be done to address them?

2. Does it make clear how it will improve the student achievement and the quality of educational services for students?

3. Is it evident that the core issues relate to the District Priorities?

Section 2: Plan Summary

This section will automatically be populated with the district priorities and strategies together with the evidence of change and the outcomes from the strategy sheets of the plan. The final column of the plan summary showing "interdependencies" will then need to be completed to show where strategies are linked and how they critically impact on each other.

In this section describe the specific **District Priorities** of the Accelerated Improvement Plan. It must be evident how these priorities link to the summary information in Section 1. For each priority the District Strategies should be documented with a brief description of the expected outcome of each strategy.

Where it is appropriate in terms of impact for students **District Priorities** should be ranked from 1 to 5. There should be no more than five **District Priorities**.

Whenever possible the **District Strategies** for each priority should be numbered in sequential order. There should be no more than five strategies for each priority.

Challenge Questions (Section 2)

1. When you consult students, parents and stakeholders is it evident that the Priorities make sense to them?

2. Do the Priorities and Strategies show that improvement will be sufficiently rapid and achieve the outcomes?

3. Are the District Strategies coherent and logical?

4. Are the Strategies achievable given the current capacity in the district?

5. Why are these strategies strong levers for change given the core issues and priorities?

Section 3: Strategy Sheets – The Heart of the Planning Tool

There should be one Strategy Sheet for each **District Strategy** under a given District Priority. On each sheet indicate the **District Priority** and the name/initials of the overall lead for the priority. The **overall lead** is the person who will be responsible for ensuring that all the components of the priority are addressed through the **Strategies** and **Action Steps** described in the Strategy Sheet. The overall lead will be responsible for monitoring the District Strategies for each priority. On each sheet also indicate the name/initials of the lead for each of the strategies that comprise the priority.

The Strategy Sheet also asks, *"Which recommendations from the District Review or other evidence does this Strategy address?"* This is important as we work to build coherence across the review and evidence gathering phases and the Accelerated Improvement Plan.

This is an **Accelerated Improvement Plan**. It is therefore critical to document the **early evidence of change** so we can monitor progress early and often. This is why the Strategy Sheet asks, "What are the key indicators for this strategy to show early evidence of change?"

The final section of each strategy sheet provides space to describe the **Action Steps** that will be taken to achieve each **District Strategy**. Only the key actions should be documented – the appropriate "grain size" for the **Action Steps** should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district's daily work, which should be tracked elsewhere.

An Action Step with a specific lead and a solid and realistic timeframe is more likely to have an impact. Timeframes should be specific and it should be very clear who will do what. Generalised notations like "All" or "To be Determined" should be avoided. Every Action Step must reflect **what will happen** not **what could** or **might happen**.

Each strategy will be monitored by assigning a **Quarterly Progress Rating (QPR)**. The quarterly rating of red, yellow, or green will be assigned by the person leading the implementation of each strategy. This will track progress on the process of implementation (action steps) and outcomes (early evidence of change as well as short-term outcomes and final outcomes).

Process and Outcome Ratings
The following rating system will be used on each Strategy Sheet to track progress:

	Red Rating	Yellow Rating	Green Rating
Process Rating Levels	A number of Action Steps have not begun or are at early stages.	Action is underway in all the Action Steps and next steps are clearly planned, but deadlines are not being met. The capacity to further implement the actions is secure.	Actions are complete or close to completion. For circumstances when the process is on-going, the capacity to continue to implement actions is secure and embedded.
	Red Rating	**Yellow Rating**	**Green Rating**
Outcomes Rating Levels	There is little evidence as yet that there is early evidence of change or that outcomes are being met. *Note: This may be the case even when the process rating is further advanced.*	There is some evidence of an impact on outcomes and the early evidence of change indicators are largely met. The process QPR rating is such that further impact on outcomes is secure.	There is strong evidence that the outcomes are being met. The Early evidence of change indicators are met. There is strong evidence that there will be further improvement and that the systems and structures that underpin the outcomes are secure and embedded.

Challenge Questions (Section 3)

1. Are the people leading the Priority and Strategy the right people with the capacity to ensure that it is effective?

2. Does the evidence base described in the plan suggest you will be able to make a sufficiently informed judgement on the QPR rating?

3. Are the 'when' timescales thought through and realistic in the context of the whole plan?

4. Do the Action Steps in this activity provide evidence that there is a focus on outcome rather than process?

5. Do the Strategies and Action Steps explicitly support the overall Priority?

6. Do the Action Steps address the recommendations in the District Review?

Section 4: The Running Notes of Progress

The Running Notes of Progress should provide a narrative of what is being done. Use this area to document where progress or success has been achieved and use this space to briefly summarize the key factors that are contributing to the success of the plan. Also record where there are emerging barriers or where there are concerns over capacity and pace. Each entry must be dated and add the initials of the person who submitted the entry. The running note of progress should also be used to indicate where the strategies need to be redesigned if early evidence of change and short term outcomes are not being met. This section should support the **Quarterly Progress Rating (QPR)** process and provide a single framework to capture live and relevant information. The person leading the implementation of the each strategy will monitor the Running Note of Progress and determine the process for entering notes.

4.7 Accelerated Improvement Plan Template

Section 1: Summary of Key Issues and Priorities

In this section summarize the key issues arising from the District Review and any other available quantitative and qualitative evidence. Identify the District Priorities that the AIP will focus on, and why they are important (maximum 800 words).

Section 2: Plan Summary

District Priority 1:		
District Strategies	**Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes**	**Interdependencies (links to other strategies within the AIP)**
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
District Priority 2:		
District Strategies	**Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes**	**Interdependencies (links to other strategies within the AIP)**
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

District Priority 3:		
District Strategies	*Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes*	*Interdependencies (links to other strategies within the AIP)*
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
District Priority 4:		
District Strategies	*Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes*	*Interdependencies (links to other strategies within the AIP)*
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

District Priority 5:		
District Strategies	*Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes*	*Interdependencies (links to other strategies within the AIP)*
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Section 3: District Strategy Sheet
(There is one District Strategy Sheet for each Strategy under a Priority)

A. District Priority 1:		B. Priority Lead:
C. Strategy Number and Description:	D. Short term and Final Outcomes from the Strategy:	E. Strategy Lead:

F. Which recommendations from the District Review or other evidence does this strategy address?	
G. What are the key indicators for this strategy to show early evidence of change?	H. By when?

I. Action Steps to Achieve the Outcomes for the Strategy	J. Who will Lead?	K. When will it Start?	L. When will it be Complete?
1.1			
1.2			
1.3			
1.4			
1.5			

Quarterly Progress Rating (QPR) of the Strategy
Key: P = Process, O = Outcome

	Jan	April	July	Oct	Jan	April	July	Oct	Jan	April	July	Oct
P												
O												

It is critical to provide a separate rating for the process of implementation (action steps) and outcomes (early evidence of change as well as short-term outcomes and final outcomes).

Section 4: Running Notes of Progress

Date	Running Notes of Progress and/or Barriers to Achieve the Outcomes	Initial

Appendix A: Excerpts from State Regulations (603 CMR 2.0)

2.05 Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 4

(1) Placement of districts in Level 4 If a district scores in the lowest 10 percent statewide of districts of the same grade levels as calculated pursuant to 603 CMR 2.06(1)(a), the Board may place it in Level 4 upon recommendation of the commissioner based on findings from a district review showing serious or widespread deficiencies, relating to one or more district standards, that are likely to have a substantial negative effect on the educational achievement of students attending school in the district and place the district at risk of being placed in Level 5 if deficiencies are not addressed effectively and in a timely manner.

. . .

(4) Appointment of assistance liaison and accountability monitor Upon placement of a district in Level 4 or the placement of any of its schools in Level 4 the Department may appoint

(a) an assistance liaison

(i) to support the district in developing and carrying out a turnaround plan for each of its Level 4 schools, if any; and

(ii) if the district has been placed in Level 4, to support the district in district improvement planning pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(8); and

(b) an accountability monitor to determine and report on

(i) whether the goals, benchmarks, and timetable in the turnaround plan for each of the district's Level 4 schools, if any, are being met; and

(ii) if the district has been placed in Level 4, whether the goals, benchmarks, and timetable in the district's District Improvement Plan approved pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(8) are being met.

. . .

(8) District improvement planning for Level 4 districts

(a) The Department shall use

(i) data on student performance and the District Analysis and Review Tool provided by the Department under 603 CMR 2.03(3); and

(ii) qualitative information about the district, including information from the most recent district review to establish goals and benchmarks for each Level 4 district to achieve in order to correct the serious or widespread deficiencies identified in the district, and to establish a timetable for achieving them.

(b) Each Level 4 district shall revise its District Improvement Plan to include the goals and benchmarks established by the Department under 603 CMR 2.05(8)(a), along with strategies and action steps to achieve those goals and benchmarks by the timetable established by the Department.

(c) Each Level 4 district shall submit its revised District Improvement Plan and any successor District Improvement Plan for approval by the Department. A district whose revised District Improvement Plan is approved by the Department shall receive priority for Department assistance. From year to year, continued priority for Department assistance shall be dependent on the district's success in achieving the goals and benchmarks in the approved District Improvement Plan or approved successor District Improvement Plan in accordance with the approved timetable.

(9) Annual report to Board The commissioner shall report annually to the Board on the progress made by districts and schools in Level 4.

. . .

(12) Removal of district from Level 4

(a) Upon placement of a district in Level 4 pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(1), the commissioner shall define for the district the academic and other progress that it must make for it to be removed from Level 4. Such progress may include

(i) an increase in student achievement for three years for students overall and for each subgroup of students, as shown by

a. an increase in MCAS scores and an increase in average student growth percentile;

b. a reduction in the proficiency gap;

c. a higher graduation rate; and

d. a measure of postsecondary success, once the Department identifies one that is sufficiently reliable,

valid, and timely;

(ii) the implementation of district systems and practices that meet district standards established under 603 CMR 2.03(4); and

(iii) progress in implementing in the district's schools the conditions for school effectiveness described in 603 CMR 2.03(4)(b).

(b) The commissioner, in defining the required progress for the district, shall customize it to the particular reasons the district was placed in Level 4, defining it as any or all of the progress in 2.05(12)(a)(i), (ii), and (iii), or any other progress the commissioner determines appropriate.

(c) The commissioner shall remove the district from Level 4 when the commissioner determines, based on evidence that may include evidence from a report from the accountability monitor appointed pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(4)(b) or from a follow-up review, that

(i) the district has achieved the academic and other progress defined by the commissioner under 603 CMR 2.05(12)(a) and (b) as necessary to allow it to be removed from Level 4; and

(ii) the district has the capacity to continue making progress without the accountability and assistance provided by Level 4.

. . .

2.06 Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 5

(1) Placement of districts in Level 5

(a) A district shall be eligible for placement in Level 5 if it is not a single-school district and it scores in the lowest 10 percent statewide of districts of the same grade levels on a single measure developed by the Department that takes into account:

(i) district MCAS performance over a four-year period based on Composite Performance Index (CPI) in English language arts; CPI in mathematics; and percentages of students scoring in the "warning" or "failing" category on MCAS; and

(ii) beginning on July 1, 2011, improvement in student academic achievement.

(b) The Board may place an eligible district in Level 5 of the framework for district accountability and assistance, if the commissioner so recommends, on the basis of one or more of the following:

(i) a district review report;

(ii) a report from an accountability monitor appointed pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(4)(b);

(iii) a follow-up review report;

(iv) quantitative indicators such as student attendance, dismissal, suspension, exclusion, promotion, graduation, and dropout rates, upon the determination of each indicator's reliability and validity, or lack of demonstrated significant improvement for two or more consecutive years in core academic subjects, either in the aggregate or among subgroups of students, including designations based on special education, low-income, English language proficiency, and racial classifications, or annual growth in MCAS performance for students in the district as compared with peers across the Commonwealth; or

(v) the failure of a Level 4 district to meet, in a timely manner, the benchmarks or goals in its current District Improvement Plan as approved by the Department pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(8).

(c) Not more than 2.5 percent of the total number of school districts may be in Level 5 at any given time.

(d) Before the commissioner recommends that an eligible district be placed in Level 5, a district review team including at least one member with expertise in the academic achievement of students with limited English proficiency shall conduct a district review to assess and report on the reasons for the district's underperformance and the prospects for improvement, unless the commissioner determines that a new review is unnecessary because a district review conducted within the last year is adequate.

(e) Before placing a district in Level 5, the Board shall consider the findings of the most recent district review, as well as multiple quantitative indicators of district quality such as those listed in 603 CMR 2.06(1)(b)(iv).

(f) School district and municipal officials, including the school committee, as well as the local teachers' union or association president or designee, a representative of the local parent organization, and members of the public, shall have an opportunity to be heard by the Board before final action by the Board to place the district in Level 5.