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 **DESE 2024 Research Priorities**

 Office of Planning and Research

# Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE or the Department) Office of Planning and Research (OPR) regularly works with DESE program offices to identify their current high priority research questions, the answers to which could assist the agency in providing the most effective, highest quality services to the students, families, and educators of the Commonwealth. The purpose of this document is to share those identified research questions in the hopes of generating relevant research projects that can help inform decisions and improve services. Offices and research topics are presented in alphabetical order below.

OPR is the first point of contact for any external researchers wishing to use DESE data, whether on a contract with DESE or for their own research purposes. OPR can direct researchers to the non-confidential data that are publicly available and shepherd researchers through the process of qualifying to receive confidential data, if appropriate. More information about DESE data is available in the [Researcher’s Guide to Massachusetts State Education Data](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.doe.mass.edu%2Fresearch%2Fresearchers-guide.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK). We encourage research teams to consider and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion regarding their approach to research questions listed herein.

Research focused on any one or more of the priority questions below, whether broad or narrow in scope, would be of potential value to DESE. Please check the [Office of Planning and Research’s website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/researchers.html) for updates to the agency’s research agenda.

**If you are interested in addressing any of these (or other) research questions, please contact Matt Deninger, Chief Strategy and Research Officer at** **officeofplanningandresearch@mass.gov****.** Please be aware that contacting other DESE program offices directly without first working with OPR can lead to challenges with FERPA and legal procurement and data sharing. OPR works to prevent these challenges from interfering with research that would benefit the Commonwealth.

# 2024 Research Priority Topics

DESE’s [Educational Vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2023/2023-05/item7.1-educational-vision.pdf) states that as a result of their public education in Massachusetts, students will: Attain academic knowledge and skills, understand and value self, understand and value others, and engage with the world so that they can be curious and creative, shape their path, feel connected, and be empowered. Three strategic objectives guide DESE’s work:

1. Whole Student: Cultivate systems to support the whole student and foster joyful, health, and supportive learning environments so that all students feel valued, connected, nourished, and ready to learn.
2. Deeper Learning: Promote deeper learning so that all students engage in grade-level work that is real-world, relevant, and interactive.
3. Diverse and Effective Workforce: Develop and sustain a workforce that is diverse, culturally responsive, well-prepared, and committed to continuous improvement so that all students have equitable access to effective educators.

Research priority topics are listed below by office. Sample questions for research directions where applicable, however, ideas for projects that address these topics from a variety of perspectives are welcome.

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| **Strategic Objective** | **Program Office** | **Topic** | **SLDS or Original Data[[1]](#footnote-2)** | **Additional Context** |
|  | [College, Career, and Technical Education](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/) | **Early Warning Indicator System** * How can the system be updated and improved?
* What changes to the model are needed?
 | SLDS | [Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/ewis/default.html)[EWIS Monitoring](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/ewis/monitoring/) [Case Study: MA EWIS](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/1fbfc1a3-en.pdf?expires=1701873325&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=DE11D6A0C8DD9733E5866C03B619C285) |
| 1 | College, Career, and Technical Education | **Dropout and dropout prevention post-pandemic** * How did the pandemic impact student dropout?
* Are different approaches to dropout prevention needed post-pandemic?
 | SLDS & Original | [Analysis of Dropout Tool](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/ewis/analysis-tool.html)[Dropout Prevention and Reengagement](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/massgrad/default.html) |
|  | College, Career, and Technical Education | **Course taking** * What are the impacts of block scheduling?
* How can DESE improve the quality of and better use its Student Course Schedule data?
* What courses are students taking in acceleration and summer school? What are the impacts of these programs?
 | SLDS & Original | [Student Course Schedule Data Handbook](scs-datahandbook.docx%20%28live.com%29) |
|  | [Charter Schools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/) | **Virtual Schools*** How have admission policies impacted enrollment?
* What are the recruitment and retention plans at these schools? How are they being implemented? What are best practices?
 | SLDS & Original | [Public Virtual Schools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/cmvs/) |
| 1 | Charter Schools | **Chapter 222 in Charter Schools*** How does Chapter 222 inform school programming and behavior management systems?
* What shifts in school culture arose from Chapter 222 implementation?
* How have schools changed to be more affirming to students?
 | SLDS & Original |  |
|  | Charter Schools | **Charter School Performance Criteria** * What is the relevance and effectiveness of these criteria?
* What variation and alignment are there across the Charter School system?
 | SLDS & Original | [Performance Criteria](https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/performance-criteria.docx) |
|  | [Center for Instructional Support](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/) – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **Arts*** What are best practices in arts assessment?
 | Original | [Arts Framework](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/arts/) |
| 1 | Center for Instructional Support – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **8th Grade Civics Project***[Publicly procured research and evaluation underway, please contact OPR for additional guidance on open research questions in this content area.]*  | Original |  |
|  | Center for Instructional Support – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **Early Literacy*** What additional information can be learned from the Department’s early literacy screener data collection?
 | SLDS & Original | [Universal Screening Assessments](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/screening-assessments.html) |
| 2 | Center for Instructional Support – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support*** What are effective MTSS practices?
 | SLDS & Original | [MTSS Resources](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/mtss/) |
|  | Center for Instructional Support – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **History** * What is the impact of the Investigating History curriculum?
* What practice-based history assessments exist? What would need to be developed? What are the outcomes and lessons learned from piloting this type of assessment?
 | SLDS & Original | [Investigating History](https://www.doe.mass.edu/investigatinghistory/) |
| 3 | Center for Instructional Support – Humanities (CIS Humanities) | **Effective Professional Development*** Which PD opportunities are linked to positive student outcomes? How can these be scaled to encourage evidence-based, effective teacher PD?
 | SLDS & Original | [PD Information](https://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/) |
|  | Center for Instructional Support – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (CIS STEM) | **Math*** What are the impacts of math acceleration?
* To what extent are students in the Commonwealth prepared with math skills needed for college and career readiness?

  | SLDS & Original | [Math Acceleration Grant 2022-2023](https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/accelerating-math/)[MassCore](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/masscore/) |
|  | Center for Instructional Support – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (CIS STEM) | **Science*** Elementary Science – How much instructional time is provided to students for science? What are effective schedules and structures to incorporate science instruction in elementary classrooms? Are elementary teachers specialized or general instructors?
* High school science – What are the course taking pathways in high school? Which science curricula are being implemented?
 | SLDS & Original |  |
| 3 | Center for Instructional Support – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (CIS STEM) | **Digital Literacy and Computer Science** * How are digital literacy and computer science teachers trained? What are their backgrounds and pathways into the field?
* How can DESE support the growth of teachers of color in this field?
 | SLDS & Original | [DLCS Resources](https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/dlcs/) |
| 1 | Center for Instructional Support – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (CIS STEM) | **STEM Identity and Belonging*** What research exists on developing STEM identity and belonging? How is this related to student outcomes? What programs exist to promote STEM identity and belonging?
 | Original |  |
| 3 | [Educator Effectiveness](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/) | **Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices*** What does this look like in classroom practices?
* What are the necessary classroom skills related to these practices?
 | Original | [DESE Definitions & Resources](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-sustaining/default.html) |
| 3 | Educator Effectiveness | **Educator Evaluation Rubrics*** How is the new educator evaluation rubric being implemented?
* What are the impacts of the new educator evaluation rubric?
 | SLDS & Original | [Information on Rubrics and Updates](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/rubrics/) |
| 3 | Educator Effectiveness | **Staffing Needs*** What are the trends in attrition, vacancies, and retention?
* How could apprenticeship models expand workforce diversity?
* How do different contexts and experiences shape teacher skills?
 | SLDS & Original |  |
| 2 | [Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning (KCL)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/kaleidoscope/) | **Deeper Learning*** What are best practices for Deeper Learning?
* What is the empirical research evidence around Deeper Learning?
 | Original | [Deeper Learning](https://www.doe.mass.edu/deeperlearning/) |
| 2 | Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning (KCL) | **Program/Project Scaling*** How can practices, structures, and schedules to support professional development and implementation of Deeper Learning be scaled up, while being mindful of constraints on teacher time?
* What can be learned about comprehensive planning and unified planning time practices in schools – such as best practices and related student outcomes?
 | SLDS & Original |  |
|  | [Office of Educational Technology (OET)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/) | **AI** * What are the uses in schools?
* What are the issues related to equity in AI use?
* What access to AI educational tools and programs exist?
 | Original |  |
|  | [Office of Language Acquisition (OLA)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/) | **Multilingual Learners*** What are the best practices for supporting early literacy among multilingual learners? How can these knowledge of these practices support systemic improvement in supporting learning for multilingual learners?
* What is the alignment between new federal and other requirements and the educational needs of Multilingual Learners?
 | SLDS & Original | [English Learner DART](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/)[Guidance and Laws](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/) |
|  | Office of Language Acquisition (OLA) | **DESE Grant Impacts*** What are the impacts of DESE competitive grants to districts to support Multilingual Learners and Immigrant Children and Youth?
 | SLDS & Original | [Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs - FY23](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2023/180/) |
| 3 | Office of Language Acquisition (OLA) | **ESL Teacher Shortage** * What are the reasons for teacher attrition?
* What do schools, districts, and educators need to recruit and retain ESL teachers?
 | SLDS & Original |  |
| 1 | [Safe & Supportive Schools (SaSS)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/) | **Evidence Based Guides to support:*** Rethinking discipline and alternatives to exclusionary practices.
* Student voice engagement.
* Strategic Objective 1 (see description above)
 | Original |  |
|  | Special Education ([SEPP](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/)/[SEIS](https://www.doe.mass.edu/seis/)) | **New IEP process** * How is the new IEP process being implemented? What are the impacts? How can it be improved?
 | SLDS & Original | [IEP Improvement Project](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/) |
| 3 | Special Education (SEPP/SEIS) | **Special Education Workforce** | SLDS |  |
| 3 | [Strategic Initiatives](https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/#:~:text=The%20Center%20for%20Strategic%20Initiatives,are%20traditionally%20or%20currently%20underserved.) | **Teacher Workforce Diversification***[Publicly procured research and evaluation underway, please contact OPR for additional guidance on open research questions in this content area.]*  | SLDS & Original |  |
|  | Strategic Initiatives | **Acceleration Academies** *[Publicly procured research and evaluation underway, please contact OPR for additional guidance on open research questions in this content area.]*  | SLDS & Original | [Acceleration Academy Grant](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2024/121/) |
| 3 | Strategic Initiatives | **Teacher Apprenticeship*** How can apprenticeship be leveraged to support BIPOC teacher and student success in becoming certified teachers?
 | Original |  |
|  | Strategic Initiatives | **Reducing Institutional Bias*** What best practices support institutions to create systems that reduce bias?
 | Original |  |

1. This column indicates whether these questions can be answered using existing data in MA DESE’s State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and/or whether original data collection would be required [↑](#footnote-ref-2)