Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance

Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2012 Line Item 7061-9408 and G.L. c.69, §1J (z)
October 2013
October 2013

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to provide a progress report on the ongoing work of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to provide targeted assistance to the highest needs districts and schools across the Commonwealth pursuant to Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2012, line item 7061-9408 and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 69 section 1J:

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

As you may recall, in March 2010, 35 Level 4 schools were announced and were the first schools to undergo a new turnaround plan process defined in An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, the landmark legislation signed into law by Governor Patrick in January 2010. This statute provided new flexibilities to turn around our state's lowest performing schools. Funds from the targeted assistance to Schools and Districts account supports key interventions in the Level 5, 4 and 3 districts and schools. The Department also provided targeted supports to the schools and helped connect them to additional turnaround resources where appropriate.

The Department has been encouraged that 22 of the 34 Level 4 schools achieved significant gains in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics after the first year of turnaround efforts. A year later, after two years of turn around, we remain encouraged that student achievement data show that at least 16 of the 34 schools are on target to meet their ambitious improvements goals.

The Department has assessed progress and conducted research on the Level 4 schools to help identify and share effective practices, as well as to identify whether schools were on track to meet their identified goals. This research has informed district and school strategies to enhance rapid improvement in the turnaround schools. The continuing tracking of performance has been used to gauge progress and to focus state and local interventions during the course of the turnaround plan terms. A summary of the results from this research has been included in this report.
Please let me know if I may provide you with any further information. I appreciate your support and look forward to updating you on this important undertaking.

Sincerely,

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

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1

Summary of Targeted Assistance Fund use in 2012-2013 .......................................................... 3

Examples of Impact of Targeted Assistance: .......................................................................... 5

Continued Activities During July and August: ........................................................................ 6
Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Progress Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance Efforts pursuant to:

Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2012 line item 7061-9408

For targeted intervention to schools and districts at risk of or determined to be underperforming under sections 1J and 1K of chapter 69 of the General Laws, schools and districts which have been placed in the accountability status of identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring pursuant to departmental regulations, or which have been designated commonwealth priority schools or commonwealth pilot schools pursuant to said regulations; provided, that no money shall be expended in any school or district that fails to file a comprehensive district plan pursuant to the provisions of section 11 of said chapter 69; provided further, that the department shall only approve reform plans with proven, replicable results in improving student performance; provided further, that in carrying out the provisions of this item, the department may contract with school support specialists, turnaround partners and such other external assistance as is needed in the expert opinion of the commissioner, to successfully turn around failing school and district performance; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on targeted intervention unless the department shall have approved, as part of the comprehensive district improvement plan, a professional development plan which addresses the needs of the district as determined by the department; provided further, that eligible professional development activities for purposes of this item shall include, but not be limited to: professional development among teachers of the same grade levels and teachers of the same subject matter across grade levels, professional development focused on improving the teacher's content knowledge in the field or subject area in which the teacher is practicing, professional development which provides teachers with research based strategies for increasing student success, professional development teaching the principles of data driven instruction and funding which helps provide common planning time for teachers within a school and within the school district; provided further, that funds may be expended for the purchase of instructional materials pursuant to section 57 of chapter 15 of the General Laws; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on instructional materials except where the purchase of such materials is part of a comprehensive plan to align the school or district curriculum with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks; provided further, that preference in distributing funds shall be made for proposals which coordinate reform efforts within all schools of a district in order to prevent conflicts between multiple reforms and interventions among the schools; provided further, that the department shall issue a report not later than January 11, 2013 describing and analyzing all intervention and targeted assistance efforts funded by this item; provided further, that the report shall be provided to the secretary of administration and finance, the senate president, the speaker of the house, the chairs of the house and senate ways and means committees and the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on education; provided further, that no funds shall be expended on recurring school or school district expenditures unless the department and school district have developed a long-term plan to fund such expenditures from the district's
operational budget; provided further, that for the purpose of this item, appropriated funds may be expended through August 31, 2013, to allow for intervention and school and district improvement planning in the summer months; provided further, that any funds distributed from this item to a city, town or regional school district shall be deposited with the treasurer of such city, town or regional school district and held in a separate account and shall be expended by the school committee of such city, town or regional school district without further appropriation, notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary; provided further, that funds may be expended for the continuation of a parent engagement program under section 2 of chapter 182 of the acts of 2008; and provided further, the department shall give priority to programs that have the capacity to serve not less than 25 per cent of a district's middle school population and make available documentation of a minimum of $1 in private sector, local or federal funds for every $1 in state funds.

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 69 Section 1J (z)

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

Targeted Assistance is provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) primarily through the Center for Accountability, Assistance and Partnerships’ Statewide System of Support. The Statewide System of Support prioritizes assistance to the highest need districts in the state – those identified as Levels 3, 4, and 5 in the Accountability and Assistance Framework (please see Appendix I). Under the direction of M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J & 1K, the Department is required to intervene in Level 4 and 5 districts and must make assistance available to Level 3 districts. All assistance is designed to build and enhance the capacity of districts and their schools to support rapid student achievement gains and to implement practices that will support sustained and continuous improvement.

The two offices of Statewide System of Support are designed to respond to the different contexts and needs of targeted districts.

1. The Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST), serves the 10 largest high poverty districts in the Commonwealth. Service is provided through the deployment of liaisons, coordination with other Department offices, support for specialized projects for school and district turnaround such as Wraparound Zones, planning and support for Level 4 schools and districts, and partnerships with expert organizations that have had success working with school and district turnaround. This approach suits the needs of larger districts in which there is significant infrastructure for curriculum, services to special populations, and the like.

2. The Office for the Regional System of Support, delivers services through six virtual regionally organized District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs). This office was created to address the needs of small and medium-sized districts which have fewer schools and fewer people in central leadership positions to deliver the complex array of supports necessary to improve their schools. The DSACs are staffed by experts in school and district leadership, mathematics, literacy, and data use.

Summary of Targeted Assistance Fund use in 2012-2013

The Department applies funds from the Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts (line item 7061-9408) account to support key interventions in the Level 5, 4 and 3 districts and schools, respectively.1 These funds are supplemented and complemented by federal resources primarily from Title I School Improvement Funds where appropriate and available. The following summarizes the resource use by assistance function (excluding regular employee costs).

1. Level 5 District Support (1 district, the Lawrence Public Schools): 7 percent of the total funds are devoted to both grants to the district and contracts with expert partners including2:
   a. Supporting evaluation and capacity building for school and district leaders

---

1 Please see 2012 Lists of Massachusetts Schools and Districts by Accountability and Assistance Level, http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/default.html
2 Note: Some of the resources described in function 2 also impact Lawrence Public Schools, the level 5 district.
b. Planning and implementing components of Level 4 School redesigns for rapid improvement
c. Redesigning mathematics curriculum at the high school and providing related professional development

2. **Level 4 District Support and Monitoring (12 districts):** 40 percent of the funds are devoted to a variety of grant funded and contracted initiatives designed to strengthen the Commonwealth’s highest need districts and their schools.\(^3\) Examples include:

   a. Hiring trained consultants, called Plan Managers, to assist districts in accelerated improvement planning. The Plan Manager works directly with district leaders to develop, implement and establish sustainable systems to focus districts on key improvement strategies designed to address challenges identified in the Department’s accountability reviews and other data.
   b. Hiring monitors to review progress and hold districts accountable for the implementation of the accelerated improvement plans
   c. Supporting training for School Committees to build systems and structures for aligning leadership activities with research based strategies
   d. Supporting coaches for superintendents to build capacity to manage extraordinary challenges in district leadership
   e. Providing funds to districts to support literacy and language development curriculum alignment and capacity building
   f. Supporting additional resources for systemic improvement in high school and middle school turnaround

3. **Level 4 School Support (43 Schools):** 5 percent of the funds are devoted to supplementing federal assistance funds to:
   
   Hire contractors to provide independent reviews of Level 4 schools to identify strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of turnaround initiatives in the state’s highest need schools

4. **Level 3 District and School Support (60 districts with 385 schools):** 24 percent of the funds are used to support a variety of contracted and grant activities delivered through the District and School Assistance Centers. Examples include:

   a. Contracting with former school superintendents to lead regional assistance delivery to Level 3 districts
   b. Allocating grant funds to all Level 3 districts to support implementation of effective instructional practices in literacy, mathematics, and science
   c. Contracting with former school principals to coach school leaders to establish professional learning communities, conduct classroom observations, use data to target instruction to student needs, and to implement other research based turnaround strategies

\(^3\) Level 4 districts include: Boston, Fall River, Holyoke, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Worcester, Springfield, Gill-Montague, Randolph, Salem, and Southbridge.
5. **Professional Development for Level 3, 4 and 5 districts**: 12 percent of the funds are devoted to the delivery of focused training and support to enable educators to address fundamental needs of their students. Examples include high quality, embedded professional development in:

   a. Universal Design for Learning to enable educators to address the range of learners in high need schools
   b. A range of Literacy and Mathematics courses to bolster teachers’ knowledge to deliver rigorous and aligned content instruction
   c. Data use and analysis

6. **New Superintendents Induction Program (available to new superintendents in all districts with preference to Levels 3-5)**: 12 percent of the funds support multiple cohorts composed of new district leaders to conduct multi-year content based training and to support direct coaching of new district leaders.

**Examples of Impact of Targeted Assistance:**

- **An independent evaluation**[^4] of the District and School Assistance Centers (DSAC) conducted by the UMass Donahue Institute reported that over 93 percent of districts reported overall satisfaction with the targeted assistance that was provided. Leaders reported that the **professional development** that was delivered was valuable with immediate and substantial impact on classroom instruction. In addition, district leaders reported that DSAC consultants were valuable strategic thinking partners who were instrumental in creating the impetus for positive improvement and change.

- **Level 4 district leaders** report that the **accelerated improvement plan process** is working effectively, especially in regards to identifying district capacity gaps and focusing districts’ and schools’ strategic efforts to accomplish meaningful improvement.

- **Monitoring reports from Level 4 districts** engaged in the accelerated improvement plans note significant gains and traction in implementation of strategic initiatives designed to lay the foundation for improved district systems of support for their schools. The development of these systems was supported by the **plan managers** working in partnership with the district leaders.

- The Department has assessed progress and conducted **research**[^5] on the Level 4 schools to help identify and share effective practices, as well as to identify whether schools were on track to meet their identified goals. This research has informed district and school strategies to enhance rapid improvement in the turnaround schools. The continuing


tracking of performance has been used to gauge progress and focus state and local interventions during the course of the turnaround plan terms.

The Department has issued two reports that identify successful turnaround practices: Emerging Practices in Rapid Achievement Gain Schools-2012\(^6\) and Emerging and Sustaining Practices for School Turnaround – 2013\(^7\).

An additional research report School Redesign Grant - Management Briefing Memo - 2013\(^8\) has found that the emerging best practices identified in our first cohort of Level 4 schools are prompting districts to apply the lessons learned to implement systems that incorporate these best practices in order to impact improvement in all of their high need schools.

**Continued Activities During July and August:**

Budgetary flexibility enables funds in the Targeted Assistance account to carry over into July and August. This flexibility is essential to the delivery of planned and strategically targeted assistance. School districts depend on the summer months when educators have more flexible schedules to run comprehensive professional development, to convene teams of educators to develop and refine curriculum, and to conduct other crucial activities that build capacity for the upcoming school year. This flexibility enables the Department to have these activities in place during this critical time.

---


\(^7\) [http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-06/spec-item1-emergingpractices.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-06/spec-item1-emergingpractices.pdf)

\(^8\) [http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-06/spec-item1-SRGbrief.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-06/spec-item1-SRGbrief.pdf)
**Appendix I**

**Framework for District Accountability and Assistance**

### Classification of districts

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

**Classification of schools**

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

**August 2012**