Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance

Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013 Line Item 7061-9408 and G.L. c.69, §1J (z)
June 2014
June 2014

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to present a progress report on the ongoing work of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to provide targeted assistance to the districts and schools across the Commonwealth with the highest needs, pursuant to Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013, line item 7061-9408, and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 69 section 1J, which directs the Department to provide:

[T]argeted 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...

This work originally began in March 2010, when 35 Level 4 schools were announced and were the first to undertake a new turnaround planning process defined in An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, signed into law by Governor Patrick in January 2010.¹ This statute provided new flexibilities to turn around our state’s lowest performing schools. School year 2013 marked the final evaluation point for this cohort of schools, and I am pleased to say that 14 schools exited Level 4, with 5 schools moving to Level 1, the highest performance level.

Targeted Assistance funds were vital to the improvements in these schools. These funds helped finance new and innovative strategies to build strong practices in schools and districts necessary to meet the arduous challenge of turning around schools that had been the lowest performing in the state for many years. Targeted assistance funds were also used to document progress and conduct research to identify and share the strategies that were effective. The findings from this research, “Emerging and Sustaining Practices for School Turnaround June 2013” are attached to this report. This research has informed our strategies to foster rapid improvement in other schools that rank in the lowest 20 percent of the state’s performance.

¹ Massachusetts' state system thoroughly reviews and places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. This approach is detailed in our 2013 report, http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2013/10InterventionAndTargetedAssistance.pdf, and on the Department’s website http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general
In addition, under the authorities provided in *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education took the extraordinary step of placing the Lawrence Public School District under receivership, as a Level 5 district. To meet this unprecedented responsibility and opportunity, ESE directed Targeted Intervention and Assistance funds to provide expert assistance and targeted instruction in the state’s highest need district.

Finally, funds were used to provide an array of direct financial and professional development support to districts and school leaders and educators across the spectrum of Level 3, 4 and 5 districts to meet the challenges in closing the achievement gap for the wide range of students in their schools. As expectations rise to meet more rigorous standards, Level 3, 4 and 5 districts and schools depend on support efforts, networking, and targeted activities to expand their knowledge of effective practices to meet the growing and more challenging demands their students face.

The Targeted Intervention and Assistance funds are allocated to *intervene* in the state’s lowest performing schools and to help *prevent* further decline in student performance in other very low performing schools. This report summarizes and provides examples of the funds’ uses and illustrates the impact of the resources on the students and educators in the served districts.

Please let me know if I may provide you with any further information. I appreciate your support of the work we have been undertaking.

Sincerely,

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

Introduction..................................................................................................................... 1
Overview .......................................................................................................................... 3
Summary of Targeted Assistance Fund Use in 2012-2013........................................... 4
Examples of Impact of Targeted Assistance Funded through 7061-9408.................... 6
Use of Funds During July and August............................................................................. 8
Appendices
Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: Intervention and Targeted Assistance pursuant to Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013, 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 under 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 1I 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 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 the 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 teachers’ 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 the 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 10, 2014 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 house and senate ways and means committees and 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 districts operational budget; provided further, that for the purpose of this item, appropriated funds may be expended through August 31, 2014, 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 $250,000 shall be expended for the continuation of a parent engagement program established in item 7061-9408 in 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 to high-need districts and schools 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 those districts in Levels 3, 4, and 5 in the Accountability and Assistance Framework (see Appendix I), per its legal obligation to serve those with highest need. Pursuant to the provisions of M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J & 1K, the Department is required to intervene in Levels 4 and 5 districts and must make assistance available to Level 3 districts. All assistance is designed to broaden the knowledge and strengthen the use of effective practices in districts so their schools are able to implement the most current and effective instructional and supportive practices. The focus of the activity stems from the successful work of the Department, which demonstrated that school gains were generally sustainable only if the district supports to undergird them were in place, well defined, and strong. Based on this realization, efforts of team members in the Statewide System of Support and resources from Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts, state budget line 7061-9408, are centered on district capacity-building initiatives which will be highlighted in this report.

To set context, it is important to note that the Statewide System of Support is comprised of two offices that provide customized supports to districts and their schools. These offices use a mix of experienced educators, consultants, and high quality partners with vast experience in education to provide district and school assistance. They offer high quality and credible support with the insight, coaching, and resources essential for improvement. The two offices are organized as follows:
1. The Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST) serves the 10 largest high-poverty districts in the Commonwealth which, when combined, serve 191,431 students (2013 enrollment data). Liaisons, who are full-time employees of the Department, are assigned to these districts as point-people to address a number of district needs. The Liaisons provide direct services to these districts and access and coordinate supports from other offices at the Department based on needs highlighted in data, through improvement plans, through districts’ self-assessments, and through direct observations conducted by the Liaisons themselves. These ten high-poverty districts, known as the Commissioner’s Districts, also are eligible to be part of specialized projects for district and school improvement such as the Wraparound Zone project, and for connections with Priority Partners (consulting groups and individuals) who specialize in school turnaround work. Because these districts already have significant infrastructure in place, the work of the Liaisons and the focus of the turnaround projects often center on refining systems, improving communication and schools’ access to services, and strengthening the link between the central office and school sites.

2. The Office for the Regional System of Support delivers services through District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs), which are “virtual centers,” organized into six regions across the state. This office was created to address the needs of small and medium-sized districts, primarily in Levels 3 and 4, which have fewer schools and fewer central leadership positions to deliver the complex array of supports necessary to improve schools. Despite their smaller size, these districts, when taken together, serve 208,966 students (2013 data). The DSACs are staffed by educators who have expertise in school and district leadership, mathematics, literacy, and data use. Regional Assistance Directors (retired school superintendents) and Support Facilitators (retired principals), funded through 7061-9408, provide experienced leadership and guidance for targeted assistance efforts. These Department representatives, who operate as an integrated regional assistance team, offer districts a focused menu of assistance, customizing that assistance to meet districts’ specific needs.

The offices that comprise the Statewide System of Support focus on districts serving 42 percent of the students in the Commonwealth, with a high percentage being low-income students and English language learners.

**Impact Summary**

In 2013, results of the assistance efforts undertaken by the Statewide System of Support, along with districts’ own efforts, resulted in the following changes:

Two of the ten Level 4 districts, Lowell and Lynn, moved from Level 4 to Level 3: Lowell successfully improved performance in its one Level 4 school to Level 1, the highest performing level; Lynn successfully improved its two Level 4 schools up to Level 3 performance.

---

2 List of districts and schools by region and accountability and assistance level: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ayp/2013/levels.xlsx](http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ayp/2013/levels.xlsx)

3 [http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2013-10WraparoundZonesInitiative.docx](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2013-10WraparoundZonesInitiative.docx)
While not all districts were able to move all of their Level 4 schools out of that status, thus changing district status, the overall impact of capacity-building was seen as 14 schools in the Commissioner’s Districts exited Level 4 in 2013. Lawrence, the state’s only Level 5 district, achieved increases in its percent of students scoring Proficient or higher in mathematics, with a +17 change in Grade 3, +11 change in Grade 5, +11 change in Grade 8, and +10 change in Grade 10.

In the districts served by the DSACs, there is also evidence of successful results from capacity-building:

Eight (8) Level 3 districts in the lowest 20 percent exited Level 3 status; 5 districts with low MCAS participation exited Level 3 status, for a total of 13 total districts or 21 percent of the 2012 Level 3 districts exiting Level 3 status in 2013.

Forty four schools in DSAC served districts moved to a higher level: 15 schools moved from Level 3 to Level 2; 4 schools moved from Level 3 to Level 1, and 25 schools in DSAC served districts moved from Level 2 to Level 1.

According to an independent Evaluation Report of the DSACs conducted by the University of Massachusetts’ Donahue Institute in 2013, districts value the DSACs help. The DSACs work improves instruction and builds leadership capacity. In addition, DSACs assist districts in integrating and improving coherence among the major educational improvement initiatives that the Department is promoting, such as the implementation of the State’s updated curriculum frameworks, educator evaluation, and sheltered English immersion professional development.

**Summary of Targeted Assistance Fund Use in 2012-2013**

The Department applies funds from the Targeted Assistance to Schools and Districts account (state budget line 7061-9408) to support key interventions in the Levels 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools. In FY13, $8,066,518 was allocated during the school year from September 2012 – June 2013. This includes $1,499,478 that was carried over and intensive programs were implemented in July and August of 2012. Federal resources, primarily from Title I School Improvement Funds, are often used in coordination with the state’s Targeted Assistance funds to supplement and complement key assistance initiatives. While federal funds are of help in enhancing some initiatives and expanding their reach, however, state funding from the Targeted Assistance line is the main source of funds for the Department to fulfill its obligation under M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J & 1K, noted earlier. The Department utilizes state funding to achieve strategic priorities designed to intervene in and strengthen both districts and schools in the state’s most challenging educational environments.

---

5 Prior Appropriation Continued (PAC) language that allows Targeted Assistance funds to be used during the summer enables the Department to provide concentrated programs for educators and students and adds to a schools’ ability to make rapid improvement.
The vast majority of the funds are allocated through grants to districts or contracts with expert providers to enable Level 3, 4 and 5 districts to implement innovative research based strategies targeted to advance the performance of the state’s highest need students and close the achievement gap.

Approximately 23 percent of the funds from this account are directed to school administration and leadership. These funds support essential staffing positions designed to provide direct assistance to districts on the effective use of these and related funds to support the interventions in planning, curriculum, instruction, and leadership areas. The following chart summarizes the breakdown of the resources.

What follows is a summary of the 7061-9408 resource use (excluding regular employee costs) organized by assistance functions and targeted districts:

1. Support and Monitoring for Level 4, Level 5 and Commissioner’s Districts: A total of approximately 23 percent of the funds ($1,817,547) is devoted to a variety of initiatives designed to strengthen the Commonwealth’s ten highest-need districts and their schools. Examples include:
   a. Funding Plan Managers and Plan Monitors in Holyoke, New Bedford, and Lawrence to support the implementation of Accelerated Improvement Plans or the Level 5 District Turnaround Plan (in Lawrence). These plans are district level plans that are developed to guide the districts’ initiatives that focus key leadership and instructional improvement initiatives. The Plan Managers fulfill essential functions that support plan development as well as establish and support systems to ensure effective implementation and impact. The Plan Monitors provide accountability, ensuring that the districts gather data on impact and continually refine their strategies to achieve stronger results for students.
   b. Supporting strategic partnerships for Level 4 districts to intervene in the districts’ lowest performing schools. The partners, vetted for proven expertise and evidence of impact in turnaround, embed their support in districts and schools to establish interventions and systems that research has shown to be effective in rapidly accelerating student performance.
c. Funding the development of a toolkit for Boston designed to help principals build, assess, support and strategically coordinate partnerships with community and educational organizations in high need schools.

d. Partnering with an expert partner to conduct a planning audit in a Level 4 districts to assess the deployment of resources including human resources and to recommend more effective financial and resource management.

e. Strengthening districts’ ability to assess Academic Return on Investment through the development and use of a toolkit and consultancy sessions to enable districts and its schools to effectively sustain school turnaround when federal school improvement funds diminish.

f. Contracting with an external evaluator to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts assistance model for the state’s ten largest urban “Commissioner’s Districts” by gathering formative and summative information from district and school leaders to ensure the continuing efficacy of the assistance provided. The study is ongoing in school year 2013-2014.

2. Level 3 and Level 4 (Non-Commissioner’s) District and School Support: A total of 26 percent of the funds ($2,071,737) are used to support a variety of activities supporting 60 districts and their schools through the District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs). Examples include:

   a. Funding contracted positions in the District and School Assistance Centers including the Regional Assistance Directors (former School Superintendents) who lead the regional work, and a portion of the Support Facilitators contracts (former school principals) who provide direct professional coaching and assistance to Level 3 and 4 school leaders, faculty and leadership teams.

   b. Funding Plan Managers to support Accelerated Improvement Plan development and implementation in Randolph, Salem, and Southbridge to assist smaller urban Level 4 districts focus on improvement efforts and accelerating student learning.

   c. Facilitating and delivering high quality professional development supporting improved instruction in literacy, mathematics, science, and special education in Level 3 schools and districts through the DSACs and other partners.

   d. Utilizing the services of partners to plan and execute intra-district networks for high school leaders and for teacher teams implementing specialized research-based instructional practices designed specifically to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities and other learners.

3. New Superintendents Induction Program, available to all new superintendents in all districts, with preference to Levels 3, 4, and 5.: 5 percent of the funds ($425,000) supports multiple cohorts of new district leaders in multi-year, content-based training and coaching.

   In partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the new leaders are provided with expert training and support to strengthen their instructional
leadership skills and knowledge in order to lead their districts in the current Massachusetts context.

4. **Grant Funding for Level 3, 4 and 5 Districts: approximately 21 percent of the funds ($1,661,186) goes directly to districts in the form of grants to enable the districts to address key needs for professional development, school intervention and improvement purposes. Examples include:**

   a. Providing Level 4 and 5 District Support Grants to implement strategic improvement efforts including intensive professional development in literacy; focused training on implementing effective instructional practices; and developing tools and resources to share highly effective practices in rapidly improving Level 4 schools. These grants are organized and customized to the needs of the districts with the support of Commissioner’s Districts liaisons who partner with district leaders to identify key district needs and essential strategic uses for the funds.

   b. Providing grants to Level 3 districts to support participation in high quality professional development designed to support the implementation of research based effective instructional practices in mathematics, literacy and in key improvement practices such as Professional Learning Communities, classroom observations, data analysis and planning. These grants are coordinated through the DSACs and are designed to align with districts’ strategic improvement initiatives and the Conditions for School Effectiveness.

   c. Providing support for districts and schools to conduct self-assessments of their implementation of the Conditions for School Effectiveness and to develop and implement plans to institute new practices to more effectively meet these expected school conditions. The plans may involve contracting with expert providers, such as the Priority Partners for Turnaround.

   d. Supporting district and school teams to map curriculum and build capacity for the implementation of the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

   e. Providing training and implementing support for universal design for learning and tiered systems of support to provide effective access to learning for all students.

**Examples of Impact of Targeted Assistance Funded through 7061-9408:**

The implementation of the targeted assistance initiatives has resulted in changes in school and district performance, systems, and conditions. In order to have significant impact, the specific fund uses have been designed in partnership with the districts to advance practices that have been found through research to significantly build capacity for improvement in schools and districts. The following examples provide evidence that these initiatives, funded with state Targeted Assistance funds, have resulted in positive outcomes that have strengthened district and school capacity for improvement.

**Accountability Status Improvement:**

As noted earlier, 14 schools in the Commissioner’s Districts exited Level 4 status, with 5 meeting all accountability targets and moving into to Level 1 (the top performance level) and others moving to Levels 2 and 3. (See Appendix II.) In two cases, this caused a change in overall
district status, permitting two districts to move from Level 4 to Level 3. Initiatives funded through line item 7061-9408, along with support from Liaisons, were common among these schools and districts and, thus, were part of the totality of efforts that resulted in the gains that were achieved. Furthermore, **21 percent of the districts in Level 3** in 2012 exited status in 2013, meaning that none of their schools were in the lowest 20 percent of performance in the state this year. These Level 3 districts received grants and assistance from the District and School Assistance Centers.

**Effective Practices Identification and Dissemination:**

An important function of the statewide system of support is to identify and disseminate effective practices. The Department contracted for and published the second report of **Emerging and Sustaining Practices in School Turnaround** based on the growing body of evidence of practices that were common in high-achieving turnaround schools. Based on externally conducted monitoring site visits and student performance data reviews, the report identified that rapidly improving schools had common characteristics that led to strong results. These findings, aligned with other state and national research and the state’s Conditions for School Effectiveness, have provided authentic models for improvement in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools around the state. Urban District Assistance Liaisons and DSAC Targeted Assistance specialists, staff positions funded through Targeted Assistance funds, supported districts as they disseminated these practices to other high need schools in the districts.

**Principal Leadership Support:** A virtual **Principals’ Network** was set up in 2013 and will be fully operational during 2013-14 to build leadership capacity through a peer-sharing and support model. Sixty leaders have signed on and will be engaging with one another during the school year.

**Level 4 and 5 District Improvement:**

- Level 4 districts with **Accelerated Improvement Plans (AIP)** continued to report the effectiveness of the AIP process and its ability to identify gaps in district capacity and promote strategic planning for rapid improvement. As with the reports from the prior year, 2013 **Monitoring Reports from Level 4 districts** with AIPs continued to note significant gains and traction in implementation of strategic initiatives aimed at building the foundation for improved district systems of support for schools.

- Leaders in the Level 5 district of Lawrence report that **implementation of the district turnaround plan is fully under way** and includes the partnership of education management organizations and other partners, such as the Lawrence Teachers Union, in the management of Lawrence’s Level 4 schools. Other partners also helped facilitate key turnaround strategies in human capital development throughout the district; targeted academic supports such as the vacation Acceleration Academies; and reallocated resources from central office to the schools.

- In Randolph, Targeted Assistance funds have been used to support a **parent engagement program** which is a strategy integrated with the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).
**Level 3 District Improvement and the Regional Assistance Strategy:** The annual external evaluation of the six regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) conducted by the University of Massachusetts’ Donahue Institute (UMDI) continues to show significant and growing engagement by Level 3 districts and schools in the offered assistance. The UMDI study noted **56 of the 60 priority districts worked with the DSACs, which was an increase of more than 25 percent over SY12.** The report also noted that districts are seeking intensive assistance from the DSAC staff calling on them to support a greater range of improvement initiatives. Because the Department’s Framework for District Accountability and Assistance states that Level 3 districts need only access assistance voluntarily, this increase in demand for assistance shows the value they perceive in the services they are receiving from their regional DSACs.

The following findings from the UMDI 2013 report show that:

- The satisfaction rating for the DSAC assistance was 98 percent for district leaders and 100% for school leaders.
- Leaders indicate that DSAC support has contributed to positive changes at the classroom level, generally related to new lessons or curriculum and new methods of instruction. Classroom level changes largely involve targeted groups prioritized by DSAC support, although some leaders emphasize broader school or even district-wide changes resulting from the structural and systemic nature of DSAC’s work.
- DSAC supports the Department’s major systems improvement initiatives and assists districts in integrating those initiatives into their own educational improvement efforts. Importantly, the flexibility of DSAC assistance allows continued support of the Department’s reform initiatives consistent with the individual specialized needs of districts.
- Leaders cite the critical opportunities for collaboration fostered through the regional networks and other cross-district initiatives sponsored by DSAC.

**Use of Funds During July and August:**

Budgetary flexibility enables funds in the Targeted Assistance account to carry over into July and August. Because districts and schools can often best convene teams and engage in activities during the summer months once school is not in session, use of some portion of funds during summer is highly effective. This flexibility enables the Department to have these activities in place during a critical time when districts and schools are most able to take advantage of them in preparation for the upcoming school year.

Resources mentioned in this report are found at:

Appendix I

Framework for District Accountability and Assistance

August 2012

Level 1
- Review & approve district & school improvement plans

Level 2
- Use district analysis & review tools to review & approve district & school improvement plans
- Conduct district reviews for randomly selected districts

Level 3
- Use ESE’s self-assessment process to revise plans & monitoring strategies
- Conduct selective district reviews

Level 4
- Collaborate with ESE to implement (existing Level 4 schools) or develop for ESE approval a redesign plan that addresses rapid implementation of Conditions for School Effectiveness. If required, develop a Level 4 district plan to accelerate district improvement & strengthen supports & interventions in lowest-performing schools

Level 5
- Operate under joint district-ESE governance

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

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

Determination of need for technical assistance or intervention in the area of special education
A district’s need for technical assistance or intervention in the area of special education is based on five categories: Meets Requirements (MR); Meets Requirements-At Risk (MRAR); Needs Technical Assistance (NTA); Needs Intervention (NI); and Needs Substantial Intervention (NSI). In most cases these categories correspond to the district’s accountability and assistance level, except when the district has specific compliance needs. Upon classification of a district into Level 3, two additional focus areas for special education will be reviewed at the district level and may require action: (A) over-identification of low-income students as eligible for special education; (B) Inordinate separation of students with disabilities across low income and/or racial groups.
State Upgrades 40 Percent of Schools Named Underperforming in 2010 as Schools Meet their Three-Year Turnaround Goals

2013 Statewide MCAS Results Show Continued Record Achievement by 10th Graders

MALDEN – The Patrick Administration and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education today announced that 14 out of 34 schools designated as "underperforming" or Level 4 in 2010 will exit that status after meeting their three-year turnaround goals.

The state's landmark Achievement Gap Act of 2010 provided the necessary framework and tools in the state's most persistently low performing schools to support the accelerated improvement of student achievement and a high-functioning learning environment for students within three years. Level 4 schools are both low performing on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) over a four-year period and not showing signs of substantial improvement over that time. Schools designated as Level 4 must develop a turnaround plan for the school and are eligible to receive federal School Redesign Grant funds.

The 14 schools named underperforming in 2010 that are now exiting Level 4 have successfully met their individual measurable, annual goals over the past three years by increasing student achievement and showing significant progress in implementing conditions at the school and district level for continuing to accelerate improvement.

"Investing time, money and new ideas in education works, and is probably the wisest investment state government can make," said Governor Patrick. "The Achievement Gap Act, our consistently strong budget support, and most especially the renewed commitment of Massachusetts teachers are making a difference. We need to keep that going."

"The results released today are a tribute to the incredible amount of hard work put in by teachers and school staff across the Commonwealth," said Secretary of Education Matthew Malone. "Schools that once were on life support are now thriving. But even as we celebrate we know there are more schools that need our support and we pledge to be there to help lift them up."

The Governor and state education officials will visit Orchard Gardens K-8 School in Boston today to celebrate the school's exit from Level 4.

"We have made tremendous progress in our schools in recent years," said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. "We know how to turn schools around. Orchard Gardens is just one example. Schools that need additional help are our top priority. Even though we lead the nation in urban education we recognize there is always more work to do."

The Administration also announced that 10th grade students once again achieved record high performance in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (STE), according to the 2013 statewide results of the MCAS exams. This year, 91 percent of students at grade 10 scored Proficient or higher in ELA, 80 percent in mathematics, and 71 percent in STE.

Despite the gains at grade 10, though, 40 percent of students who graduate from public high school in Massachusetts and enroll in one of the Commonwealth's postsecondary campuses are placed in developmental, non-credit bearing coursework.

"While I am pleased to see more than a decade of continuous improvement at grade 10, it’s clear that MCAS is not providing us with the signal or rigor we need to tell us whether students are on track and ready for college-level work," said Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester. "To remedy this, schools are implementing new college and career ready standards and we are developing a next-generation assessment system to assess a broader range of the skills we value and employers tell us are necessary to prepare students for success after high school."

At grades 3-8, results were up in mathematics since last year, except grade 6 where they were unchanged. Results in ELA were mixed. The percent of students scoring Proficient or higher in mathematics increased between one and six percentage points since 2012 in all grades except 6, and performance is up between three and seven percentage points across all grades from five years ago. Students made ELA gains at grade 5 and 6, but saw four percentage point declines at grades 3 and 4. Student performance in ELA at grades 3 and 4 over the past five years is flat.
Other statewide results include:

- Eighty-eight (88) percent of 10th graders last year (class of 2015) met the state's minimum testing requirements to earn a high school diploma after their first attempt, by scoring Needs Improvement or higher in ELA, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering. That compares to 86 percent of students who met the requirement after their first attempt last year (class of 2014), 83 percent in 2009 (class of 2011), and 68 percent ten years ago when the graduation requirement first took effect (class of 2003).

- Between 2007 and 2013, the achievement gap in ELA in terms of the percentage of students scoring Proficient or higher for white students and African American/black students narrowed at grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. The gap between white students and Hispanic or Latino students narrowed at all grades except grade 3, where it was unchanged. The greatest narrowing of the gap in ELA for African American/black students and Hispanic or Latino students occurred at grade 10, where it narrowed by 19 percentage points and 17 percentage points, respectively.

- In mathematics between 2007 and 2013, the achievement gap between white students and African American/black students and between white students and Hispanic or Latino students narrowed at all grades (3-8 and 10). Among African American/black students, the greatest narrowing of the gap occurred at grades 6 and 8, where it narrowed by five percentage points. For Hispanic or Latino students, the greatest narrowing of the gap occurred at grade 3, where it narrowed by six percentage points.

**Accountability Designations for the 2010 Level 4 Schools:**

Of the remaining third-year turnaround schools that are not exiting, 15 will remain in Level 4 after showing some but not sufficient improvement, one school closed, and four schools are under consideration for a "chronically underperforming" or Level 5 designation that would trigger state receivership. The four schools facing state receivership are Dever Elementary School and Holland Elementary School in Boston, Morgan K-8 School in Holyoke, and Parker Elementary School in New Bedford. Under Level 5, the commissioner of elementary and secondary education is responsible for creating a turnaround plan for the school and holding the superintendent or a new leader, called a receiver, responsible for operating the school and implementing the plan.

**Exit Level 4:** Trotter Elementary School (Level 1), Orchard Gardens K-8 School (Level 1), Harbor Middle School (Level 3), Blackstone Elementary School (Level 3), and John F. Kennedy Elementary School (Level 3) in Boston; Kuss Middle School (Level 1) and Doran K-8 School (Level 2) in Fall River; Murkland Elementary School (Level 1) in Lowell; Connery Elementary School (Level 3) and Harrington Elementary School (Level 3) in Lynn; Zanetti K-8 School (Level 1), Gerena Elementary School (Level 3), and Homer Elementary School (Level 3) in Springfield, and Union Hill Elementary School (Level 3) in Worcester.

**Remain in Level 4:** Dearborn Elementary School, Burke High School, The English High, and Greenwood School in Boston; Dean Vocational Technical High School in Holyoke; South Lawrence East Middle School and Arlington Elementary School (grades 2-4) in Lawrence; Brookings Elementary School, Brightwood Elementary School, High School of Commerce, White Street Elementary School, Killey Middle School, Chestnut Street Middle School, and John F. Kennedy Middle School in Springfield; and Chandler Elementary School in Worcester.

**Closed:** Lord Middle School in Fall River.

**Move to Level 5 under consideration:** Dever Elementary School and Holland Elementary School in Boston; Morgan K-8 School in Holyoke; and Parker Elementary School in New Bedford.

For schools exiting Level 4, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will immediately begin an exit assurances approval process with the 14 schools and their districts to ensure that the conditions necessary for sustained improvement remain in place.

Schools remaining in Level 4 will require support from their district leadership teams to assess current needs and determine what specific changes and enhancements must be made to dramatically increase the impact of turnaround efforts. This may involve modifying and strengthening existing turnaround plans, creating ambitious new goals under existing plans, or developing new plans with different strategies.

Before making a Level 5 designation, state regulations indicate that the commissioner must hear from members of the school community, including school, district, and municipal officials; members of the school committee; representatives from the local teachers' union; a representative from the school's parent organization; and family members of students at the school. Commissioner Chester will visit the communities of the schools under consideration for Level 5 designation over the next month to hold meetings prior to making a final determination.