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We particularly wish to thank leaders from the following schools and districts who shared their stories with us: Attleboro Public Schools, Barnstable Public Schools, City on a Hill Charter Public School, Lowell Public Schools, MATCH Charter Public School, Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District, Revere Public Schools, Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical High School, West Springfield Public Schools and Worcester Public Schools. These school and district leaders include Kenneth Sheehan, David Sawyer, Michelle Roy, Laurie Regan, Marie McKay, Jean Franco, Margaret Shepherd, Edie Lalltan, Claire Abrams, Melissa Driscoll, Laurie McIntyre, Judith Curley, Dr. Paul Dakin, Dr. Dianne Kelly, Matt Costa, Dr. Russell Johnston, Steven Lucey, Dr. Melinda Boone, Gregory Barres, Julie Keefe, Heidi Driscoll, Leslie Weckesser, Mike Larsson, Kristie Loftus, and Dr. Paul Hays.

The Winchendon Public Schools provided all images of students and educators found in this report. ESE thanks them for their generosity in sharing this media with us.

The Participating Race to the Top Districts

[Map of Massachusetts showing participating districts]
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A Letter From the Secretary

Dear Colleagues:

Over the course of the past year, I have made weekly visits to schools to see firsthand the great work teachers and administrators are doing to make certain that all students have high quality learning opportunities so that they are poised for a successful future. Our goal is to provide all students in the Commonwealth with access to high quality and inspirational educational opportunities that will transform their lives. We have made incredible progress with regard to implementing our Race to the Top initiatives, and I congratulate you on your efforts.

In 2010, we made a commitment to implement innovative and aggressive strategies to increase college and career readiness for all students and close persistent achievement gaps—and I have witnessed the positive impact of our Race to the Top strategies. With our curriculum frameworks, we are redefining what our students need to learn in order to successfully pursue educational and career opportunities after they graduate from high school. With our new educator evaluation system, we are providing our educators with meaningful feedback that will support their professional growth and improve student achievement. With our turnaround strategies, we are creating new opportunities for children to pursue their dreams and reach their potential. By implementing all of our Race to the Top initiatives, we are building a 21st century public education system, one that will prepare all of our students for college, career, and lifelong success.

I know that this is difficult and complicated work. But I have no doubt that by continuing to work together, we will achieve our Race to the Top goals. My office is working in partnership with Commissioner Chester and his team at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to effectively implement all of our Race to the Top initiatives; in addition, we will continue to work together to make sure that our students and educators receive the support that they need to achieve our ambitious agenda.

I also look forward to continuing our partnership with parents and family members, local and municipal officials, legislators, and business and community representatives to build on our progress to date.

Thank you for your commitment to the children of Massachusetts.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew H. Malone
Secretary of Education

A Letter From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

As a Commonwealth, we have made great strides in implementing the reforms we committed to when we developed our Race to the Top proposal back in 2010. When we wrote the proposal, we were firmly committed to the goal of success after high school for all students. To achieve that goal, we needed to make substantial improvements in several connected areas of work: curriculum frameworks and assessments, educator quality, school and district turnaround, and data and technology systems. We knew that the work would be challenging, but that it was the right work to do to move our state forward and give our students the best opportunity for success.

Now that we are entering our fourth year of implementation, it has been true to see the quality and quantity of work that our state has undertaken to deliver on the promise of preparing students for success after high school. Educators across the Commonwealth have developed and implemented curricula tied to the new statewide curriculum frameworks, which incorporate the Common Core State Standards. They have begun phasing in the new educator evaluation system; indeed, 62 percent were evaluated under the new standards during school year 2012-13, well over the required 50 percent. Districts are pilot-testing new curriculum materials and data reporting tools through Edwin, the state’s teaching and learning system. And the first cohort of Level 4 schools has completed its third year of implementing their school redesign plans, with 14 schools exiting Level 4 status—five moving all the way up to Level 1.

What has been most impressive, and what this report highlights, is how districts and educators have worked with the state to integrate these initiatives into a coherent reform strategy. Rather than viewing each initiative within Race to the Top as separate from one another, districts have risen to the challenge to find the common threads and weave them into their own local contexts. Whether it is Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical School’s work to connect literacy throughout the vocational subject areas, or Attleboro Public Schools’ alignment of the state reform strategy with its local priorities, or Lowell Public Schools’ efforts to become “Level 4 No More,” this has been important, enduring work that will pay off for years to come.

I invite you to read this report so that you can learn more about our reform strategy and hear the stories of districts that are making good headway on an integrated approach to implementation. We still have much work ahead of us to reach our goal of success after high school for all students. But thanks to educators around the Commonwealth, we are moving with purpose in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner
Taking Bold Steps

Our students need us to take bold steps to make every school an excellent one and prepare them for success after high school by strengthening our curriculum, helping educators to continuously improve their practice, providing appropriate supports for struggling youngsters, and turning around our lowest performing schools.

In 2010, Massachusetts was awarded $250 million in Race to the Top (RTTT) funding from the U.S. Department of Education to accelerate its education reform efforts. One of only 12 states in the first and second rounds to receive this prestigious funding, Massachusetts received the highest overall score in this federal competition. The award recognized the Commonwealth’s commitment to strengthening the public education system to ensure that every student is college and career ready and able to compete in the global economy. The grant gave Massachusetts the funds to begin new initiatives to work towards realizing that commitment.

Massachusetts’ education reform strategy aims to prepare all students to succeed in the world that awaits them after high school by:

- Strengthening curriculum, instruction, and assessment,
- Improving educator effectiveness,
- Turning around the lowest performing schools, and
- Using data and technology to support student performance.

The first two years of Race to the Top focused intense effort on launching each of these strategies. The work in Year 3, July 2012 to July 2013, included integrating these initiatives into a coherent, strategic approach to reform, centered on achieving college and career readiness for students.

This report highlights three major RTTT initiatives currently underway and shares how each is being successfully implemented in schools and districts across the Commonwealth. The experiences in ten districts profiled in this report represent the stories of the over 230 participating school districts and charter schools that signed up to the challenge of implementing RTTT programs at the local level.

The initiatives highlighted in this report are:

- Implementation of the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics that incorporate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS),
- Improvement of teacher and principal effectiveness through educator evaluation, and
- Deployment of an online teaching and learning system, commonly known in the Commonwealth as Edwin.

The integration of these three major initiatives is central to Massachusetts’ Race to the Top education reform efforts. Read on to discover how the initiatives took shape in ten districts across the Commonwealth and how they continue to evolve as the state heads into Year 4 and beyond.

A National and International Leader

Massachusetts fourth and eighth graders have either placed first or tied for first in the nation on reading and mathematics for the past five consecutive administrations of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (“the nation’s report card”).

Massachusetts students exceeded the U.S. average and scored among the top performing education systems worldwide in reading, mathematics, and science literacy, according to the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment, tying for fourth worldwide in reading literacy after only students from Shanghai (China), Hong Kong (China), and Singapore.

Massachusetts students tied for second in science achievement on the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, trailing only students from Singapore. In mathematics, Massachusetts eighth graders tied for fifth, trailing only Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong SAR.

Narrowing the Gap

Narrowing the 10th Grade Achievement Gap (2002 - 2013)

Race to the Top by the Numbers

>> YEAR 3

- 234 Participating districts and charter schools
- 49,431 Participating teachers
- 640,892 K-12 students served
- 169 Districts that implemented the new Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts
- 178 Districts that implemented the new Curriculum Frameworks for Mathematics
- 34 Districts that piloted the Edwin Teaching and Learning System
- 37,940 Educators who earned performance ratings under the new educator evaluation framework
- 1 million+ Number of Edwin Analytics reports generated
The Massachusetts educator evaluation framework sets a strong foundation for using results to improve teaching and learning across the state. Districts may adopt the units, adapt or revise them, or use them to guide district-driven curriculum development.

**Initiative Spotlights**

**Publication of Model Curriculum Units**

The 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics shaped the work of ESE’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment units from 2010 to 2013. The frameworks define the knowledge and skills students must master by the end of high school to be college and career ready, and include both Common Core State Standards as well as standards unique to Massachusetts.

Massachusetts’ Race to the Top proposal made curriculum development a priority and set the goal of providing concrete examples of effective classroom instruction. The Massachusetts Model Curriculum Units (MCUs) are curricular units of study aligned to standards that promote effective instruction and assessment to improve student learning. Using an Understanding by Design structure developed by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, these units reflect the instructional shifts in the 2011 English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics frameworks and provide extensive online and print resources. Understanding by Design emphasizes the teacher’s critical role as a designer of student learning; teachers map curriculum around big ideas and essential questions, engage students in authentic learning experiences, and teach for understanding. Districts may adopt the units, adapt or revise them, or use them to guide district-driven curriculum development.

**Educator Evaluation**

The Massachusetts educator evaluation framework sets a strong foundation for using results to improve teaching and learning across the state.

- The framework strikes a balance between statewide consistency and local autonomy, ensuring that districts’ evaluation systems adhere to the key features of the regulations but can be customized to reflect the local context.
- The framework embeds multiple opportunities for educators to take greater ownership of the process, receive meaningful and timely feedback, and engage in activities designed to support professional growth.
- All educators, from classroom teachers to superintendents, participate in the same evaluation process, with a focus on continuous improvement to promote growth and development.
- Four types of Educator Plans enable districts to customize support to meet the needs of their educators.

Each Model Curriculum Unit includes a Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessment (CEPA). CEPA’s are tasks or a series of tasks integrated with curricula that require students to use their knowledge and skills to effectively create products or performances that demonstrate their understanding and ability. CEPA’s call for students to apply and transfer their learning, ideally within a meaningful context.

MCUs and CEPA’s were designed by educators in curriculum design teams that represent over 60 Massachusetts Race to the Top school districts. Thirty-five MCUs were released in Year 3, and ESE will ultimately provide at least two units per grade level in English language arts/literacy, history/social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering, culminating in over 90 units. Because of a concern about a lack of growth in student achievement in early literacy, a full year of worth of curriculum units are being developed for grades K-3.

Published MCUs are currently on the ESE website at www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model for all educators to use. The units will also eventually live in the Edwin Teaching & Learning system and will offer access to additional tools and digital resources.

**Educator Evaluation (continued)**

In Year 3, implementation of the evaluation framework has deepened collaboration at many levels—among educators, between educators and their evaluators, and between and within labor-management working groups that have continued to support the roll-out of local evaluation systems. Level 4 schools were the first to implement the new framework in 2011-2012, and in Year 3, 2012-2013, Race to the Top districts implemented with at least 50 percent of their educators. While collective bargaining on local educator evaluation systems was challenging for some districts, the vast majority of districts reached agreement and successfully implemented the new framework. By the end of Year 3, in fact, 62 percent of all educators in RTTT districts were evaluated—well above the 50 percent threshold. As implementation expanded, inter-district collaboration also increased, with a focus on sharing best practices, early successes, and strategic problem-solving.

ESE provided a variety of well-received supports in Year 3, including launching a monthly newsletter, training materials, webinars and in-person workshops, and additional guidance on key questions from educators. Mirroring the efforts of districts to integrate multiple initiatives, ESE prioritized a focus on increasing both collaboration and cohesion between and among curriculum and instruction and educator evaluation initiatives at the Department.

By the end of Year 3, nearly 38,000 educators across the Commonwealth earned performance ratings under the new educator evaluation framework. The ratings show promising evidence that evaluation practices are resulting in better differentiation among educators: 85 percent of educators were rated as proficient, with 7 percent identified as exemplary and fewer than 8 percent rated as needs improvement or unsatisfactory. This marks a distinct change from former evaluation practices which typically rated educators on a two-point scale of “meets expectations” or “does not meet expectations.” Moreover, these results suggest that evaluators hold a high standard when recognizing excellence and are beginning to, when necessary, identify educators who need higher levels of support to improve their effectiveness.

ESE is encouraged by early evidence that the educator evaluation initiative is fulfilling its potential as a catalyst for growth and development; districts are linking educator evaluation goals to school and curricular improvement goals; evaluators are distinguishing among educator performance; and districts are setting a high bar for tenure. In Year 4, 2013-2014, non-Race to the Top districts will begin their work with the new system and all districts will pilot measures in preparation for evaluating the impact of their educators on student learning.

**The Edwin System**

The online Edwin system—the state’s new teaching and learning platform—promotes ESE’s focus on using data and technology to support student performance. This system will provide educators with relevant, real-time information and tools. Edwin will deliver its rich tools, reports, and resources through two separate web-based applications: Edwin Teaching & Learning and Edwin Analytics. Edwin Teaching & Learning is an instructional management system that provides near real-time teacher, student, and course information. Teachers will be able to access curriculum maps, model units, and assessments. Educators will also have the ability to analyze data in student level views in order to customize instruction and more effectively meet the unique needs of students in their district. Edwin Analytics is a unique reporting and data analysis tool that integrates longitudinal data from pre-kindergarten through public post-secondary education.

Year 3 served as a critical development year for the teaching and learning system. Procured in 2012 in collaboration with another RTTT state, Ohio, the system is now being customized to meet the specific needs of Massachusetts’ and Ohio’s educators and students. Launched through a spring pilot, the system reached a total of 34 districts by the end of Year 3. The pilot phase is now complete and many districts intend to expand participation across their district. By the end of Year 4, ESE aims to have all 168 RTTT districts using the system.
Revising and aligning curriculum, helping educators implement new standards by providing guidance on the hallmarks of high quality instruction, and using data to inform decision making at all levels can seem like a lot for a district to take on over the course of a few years. However, as the West Springfield Public Schools (WSPS) experience has shown, the inherent connectedness of these initiatives shines through once a district focuses on the right metaphorical bowling pins.

WSPS first focused on curriculum design. In Year 3, WSPS staff developed and implemented high-quality curriculum, using the Model Curriculum Units developed by ESE. “MCUs have been truly one of the best things that ESE has ever done. They have really shown us the way,” Superintendent Russell Johnston says. “They have shown us how to take the frameworks and translate them into meaningful lessons for students.”

Increased emphasis on teaching is another pin that WSPS identified as an integral component of student success and increased student achievement. Through the adoption of the new educator evaluation system, WSPS is working to cultivate and strengthen effective educators. As a district, WSPS has embraced the team approach and has truly made it their own.

“…”If you hit the right pins, all of the others fall down behind it. We had to identify the right pins for West Springfield. What are the things that we need to hit the hardest? Let’s focus there.”

– Dr. Russell Johnston, Superintendent, West Springfield Public Schools

This newfound meaning resonates with teachers as well. Through adopting MCUs and CEPAs, WSPS staff members have learned the value of new assessment practices and are engaging with the curriculum on a much deeper level. “Teachers are now understanding that they need to own the information. They just can’t rely on resources that come out of a box,” Superintendent Johnston explains. “They need to think deeply. We are much more precise in our teaching.”

Though they were not an early adopter district for educator evaluation, WSPS voluntarily carried out an informal, in-district pilot. The district created an educator evaluation steering committee that includes representatives from each school and that continues to meet with Superintendent Johnston on a regular basis to ensure the evaluation process is relevant and useful to teachers.

The educator evaluation system was created as a means to improve educator performance and student achievement, yet it has also changed and improved the way teachers and other district staff relate to evaluation. One West Springfield teacher shared his positive experience with the process. “The process increases your voice in your own evaluation,” he notes, “It made me feel more empowered.” The teacher reported the new system encouraged educators to be active participants in their evaluations and have the opportunity to reflect, self-evaluate, and create concrete goals for themselves. This new autonomy afforded to teachers, in his experience, allows them to take ownership and play a greater role in how they are being assessed while also setting the stage for richer conversation and feedback throughout the evaluation process.

In addition to educator evaluation, West Springfield believes the Edwin platform will simultaneously promote student achievement and educator effectiveness by fostering data-informed decisions at all levels across the district. The district is currently using Edwin Analytics to analyze data to strengthen student learning outcomes and to uncover areas of growth for both individual educators and overarching district improvement. The Edwin Teaching & Learning system will ultimately be a place where teachers can seamlessly access instructional materials, curriculum planning tools, MCUs, and a variety of assessments. The district looks forward to using the assessment components of the new system, as it will allow teachers to see where students are struggling “almost instantly.”

WSPS is focused on institutionalizing these reforms and building staff capacity to ensure their successful implementation for years to come. As a district, it has focused on identifying the right pins and highlighting the connections among them. Educators have worked to make those connections transparent as a means to help all district staff own, maintain, and sustain their newfound roles and responsibilities.

Superintendent Johnston is appreciative of the direction and communication ESE has provided to WSPS along the way and stressed, “We couldn’t have done what we’re doing without Race to the Top. There is no question.”
Lowell Public Schools’ (LPS) success story has been one of alignment and focus on a common goal. For LPS, this goal was an intense focus on instruction—and its alignment to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks—as the vehicle to narrow the district’s achievement gap.

This unwavering commitment to aligned instruction has led to Lowell’s proudest accomplishment in Year 3—bringing its once-Level 4 school, the Murkland Elementary School, to its current Level 1 status. Because of this change, the district moved out of district Level 4 status to Level 3. The district is proud to be “Level 4 no more.”

The steps taken to help the school achieve its newfound Level 1 position taught district staff valuable lessons to mirror and implement in other schools. Not only are all schools in the district now Level 3 or above, but Year 3’s positive data results have diminished concerns of any school in the system dropping below Level 3 in the coming year.

Lowell has taken RTTT very seriously as the district strives to significantly improve the overall practices within each of its schools. LPS began by implementing educator evaluation to improve educator effectiveness throughout the district in Year 3. They trained evaluators in the Massachusetts model system using a “train the trainer” approach and, taking advantage of opportunities for local flexibility, “Lowelized” many of the methods used.

Each school selected three representatives, for a total of 68 teachers, to become district trainers. These trainers then trained almost 300 of their 1,049 colleagues over the summer. Fifty percent of teachers and administrators were rated this spring, with a goal of 100 percent in the coming year. Throughout the process of training and evaluating educators, LPS leaders have leveraged the existing spirit of collaboration with the union to proactively emphasize a focus on conversations about continuous improvement.

Throughout Year 3, the district stressed the concept that evaluation is a cyclical process. Whereas in the past, evaluation always felt like a single snapshot, the message became one of the cycle of continuous improvement and ongoing conversation. “Everyone can improve,” one district leader said, “from the superintendent down to a new teacher in training.”

LPS has also sought opportunities to make connections across RTTT initiatives. As one district leader noted, LPS “had to have education evaluation so we could have administrator and teachers on board to look at effective instruction. This feeds into curriculum alignment with the guides and maps.”

“With math, for example, this process meant using the state’s Understanding by Design template and aligning select MCUs. Teachers met after school and worked alongside coordinators and math coaches to align curriculum and go deeper with Understanding by Design work. The district also updated assessments to align to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and has performance rubrics aligned to the post-test.

“Level 4 no more is the direct result of our focus on curriculum alignment and standards-driven instruction. We are now working to see if we can mirror the work going on at the Murkland Elementary School so other schools can have the same successes.”

– District Leader, Lowell Public Schools

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been a cornerstone in the district implementation of a guided curriculum. In Year 3, LPS found PLCs supported district work by allowing for a strong forum where coaches were at the table with teachers. Coaches supported teachers and made sure they were appropriately understanding and analyzing the standards. These conversations pushed a culture of rigor and intentionality. LPS has encouraged sustainability of results by holding staff accountable for supporting implementation, participating in PLCs, and maintaining high expectations for other teachers and students. The district is focused on protecting and preserving PLCs by continuing to provide time for educators to collaborate through data summits and other professional development settings.

With all of these changes geared toward curriculum in Year 3, LPS noticed significant changes in the level of rigor that teachers were ready to incorporate into their curriculum units. Students are adjusting positively to the rigorous units—teachers have noticed students are ready for more complex material earlier in the year than in the past. Students need less review time of the previous year’s material and can work more rapidly through the new, challenging modules.

Piloting the Edwin Teaching & Learning System enabled Lowell to explore larger conversations around overall curriculum and assessments. The district elected for a targeted roll-out of the system in the pilot phase during Year 3—a small number of teachers at the high school were among the first users. District leaders see the potential of the system to tie together the other two initiatives, supporting educator evaluation and the curriculum frameworks.

“We’re finally pulling a mosaic together that makes sense, with instruction for students at the core,” notes Edie LaBran, LPS’s educator evaluation lead. This message has been clearly communicated across the district along with the expected outcomes for students and teachers as these pieces come together. Lowell leaders have emphasized this message further, stating, “We believe in the children of Lowell Public Schools, we believe that they can reach their goals and be prepared for career and college success. Everyone in this district works hard to make sure this can happen. It makes the work very rewarding for everyone.”
Barnstable Public Schools
EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE

As Barnstable Public Schools (BPS) prepared to take on Race to the Top, the district purposefully aligned Race to the Top initiatives to its district goals. “Race to the Top is truly intended to feed growth and it has done that for our district,” said Marie McKay, Assistant Superintendent.

“The educator evaluator framework has raised the level of professional discourse immensely,” McKay notes. BPS used RTTT funds to hire an outside consultant to provide specific, ongoing coaching on the new educator evaluation framework to evaluators in the district. Centered on the new evaluation rubric and the district’s priority indicators and elements, the coaching has been helpful in educating district evaluators while also opening up the channels of professional conversation. New and revised strategies for collecting evidence and providing feedback are discussed monthly between colleagues and the district is in the process of creating a common vocabulary around these topics.

“By having the district prioritize the educator evaluation framework, particularly around curriculum and instruction, it’s shown the connection between well-structured lessons, Understanding by Design, and understanding the new curriculum. The instructional piece becomes the evaluation piece in a way. You utilize your evaluation process to have teachers reflect on their instruction.”

– Marie McKay, Assistant Superintendent, Barnstable Public Schools
The Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical High School has aligned Race to the Top’s initiatives to the specific learning needs of its students and the college-and-career-ready goals in the vocational-technical school context. Aligning to the new curriculum has been a driver for improving teaching and learning at the vocational-technical high school and school leadership has implemented the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics frameworks with thoughtfulness about the specific needs of their students and educators.

The English Language Arts and Literacy Framework articulates what it means to be college and career ready, a goal that closely aligns to the school’s mission. The new standards have put the responsibility into the hands of all educators across the school, regardless of their subject area, helping all teachers to understand that they are responsible for improving student literacy. For vocational teachers, this pedagogical focus is a huge but critical shift. Until two years ago, vocational and academic teachers would have participated in separate curriculum design sessions. But for the development of the Model Curriculum Units, all teachers were included together. This change in practice has created a common understanding of pedagogy, assessment, and instruction. Teachers say this collaboration in developing MCUs has changed the way they teach.

Southeastern has also embraced the new educator evaluation system. The new evaluation system is changing the culture of teaching as both academic and vocational teachers have the same rubric for evaluation, making it very clear that “teaching is teaching no matter the content.” To support staff implementation, Superintendent Luis Lopes built a Southeastern-specific online program to meet the needs of staff and create opportunities for instant and constant communication between evaluators and educators.

“The that’s what everything is about... looking at what we can do to ramp up student achievement—and sustain it—with a positive culture that focuses on teaching and learning.” — Heidi Driscoll, Academic Director Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical School

The school looks forward to fully implementing the Edwin platform and using the vocational-specific tools that Edwin offers. Technical teachers will record students’ progress toward proficiency in the standards contained in the vocational-technical education frameworks. The inclusion of the competency tracking functionality in the Edwin Teaching & Learning system is an important development, adding a tool that encourages technical teachers to use the system. For a vocational-technical high school, there is great potential in providing all teachers access to historical data for new students. Students come to Southeastern from 13 different sending schools across nine different districts. The instant historical data and student assessment information will help teachers target their instruction.

Southeastern’s leadership team is excited to see where student achievement will go as a result of their efforts to implement the new curriculum and educator evaluation system. “That’s what everything is about,” explains a school leader, “looking at what we can do to ramp up student achievement—and sustain it—with a positive culture that focuses on teaching and learning.”
For Revere Public Schools, Race to the Top work is aligned to and closely supports the district’s focus on what it calls the 4 Rs: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Resilience. District leaders credit the new educator evaluation framework as a structure that allows them to make connections between programs, encouraging educators to focus on aligning their teaching goals to the work they are doing in transitioning curriculum to the 2011 Curriculum Frameworks that incorporate the Common Core State Standards and using data in the classroom.

Relationships between teachers have also proved beneficial in the implementation of these initiatives. Scheduling common planning time for teachers has facilitated collaboration around these new educator evaluation and curriculum frameworks. Teachers use this time together to develop professional learning goals related to their evaluations and discuss common lessons aligned to the new curriculum frameworks.

“These are not separate initiatives; it is one giant reform initiative. Revere is helping teachers handle this change through using the evaluation system as a communication system and re-carving the school day, giving teachers time to work and think with their colleagues.”

— Dr. Paul Dakin, Superintendent, Revere Public Schools
The Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District has integrated Race to the Top initiatives with a focus on goals. From fine-tuning SMART goals to focusing on standards-based goals for students, Mahar has embraced RTTT to make teaching and learning more effective. The educator evaluation framework heightened the awareness of setting high quality goals. Unlike the previous evaluation processes, educators now set goals based on their own data, writing them as action plans with a focus on student learning goals. Educators collaborate and work as teams to set up realistic and meaningful professional goals. Overall, the district has focused on conveying the message of educator evaluation—not as another requirement, but as a way of setting objectives and measuring how they are being met.

**Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District**

**GOAL SETTING**

The Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District has integrated Race to the Top initiatives with a focus on goals. From fine-tuning SMART goals to focusing on standards-based goals for students, Mahar has embraced RTTT to make teaching and learning more effective. The educator evaluation framework heightened the awareness of setting high quality goals. Unlike the previous evaluation processes, educators now set goals based on their own data, writing them as action plans with a focus on student learning goals. Educators collaborate and work as teams to set up realistic and meaningful professional goals. Overall, the district has focused on conveying the message of educator evaluation—not as another requirement, but as a way of setting objectives and measuring how they are being met.

**Educator Evaluation: Findings from RTTT District Implementation**

An independent evaluator gathered data related to Year 3 district implementation of the educator evaluation framework from 279 individuals across 50 schools in 14 districts. Findings include the following:

- Massachusetts educators have responded positively and invested substantial time in the implementation of the new evaluation system.
- Most stakeholders feel that the new evaluation system is fairer than the previous system because the ratings are made on a common rubric with multiple data points and the process is more transparent.
- Successful implementation requires a full labor-management partnership, along with ongoing collaborative work between the district and the union to develop and refine the system.
- School leadership and culture appear to influence the quality of implementation.
- Districts have mounted substantial communication efforts designed to help educators understand the new evaluation system. Enlisting teacher-leaders to train their colleagues in the new system appears to be a particularly effective approach.

**MATCH Charter Public School: Developing Common Practices**

Prior to RTTT, MATCH Charter Public School already evaluated teachers on a regular basis. Yet the evaluations differed across the organization. “Historically, the evaluation process had not been as aligned across middle school, high school, and elementary levels,” said MATCH Chief Operating Officer Mike Larsson. Larsson noted that MATCH’s implementation of the new educator evaluation system has brought clarity and efficiency to the evaluation process as well as new layers of transparency, such as reporting to the Commonwealth and the public. “This educator evaluation system has allowed us to really align across the institution and look at it in a smarter, more efficient way. As we grow from a smaller school to a larger one, it has helped us keep things in line on the evaluation side.”

**Every educator is an active participant in the evaluation process**

1. Self-Assessment
   Every educator assesses their own performance using a performance rubric and student data

2. Analysis, Goal Setting and Plan Development
   Every educator proposes at least one professional practice goal and one student learning goal. Team goals must be considered.

3. Implementation of the Plan
   Educators and their evaluator collect evidence and assess progress.

4. Formative Assessment/Evaluation
   Every educator has a mid-cycle review.

5. Summative Evaluation
   Every educator earns one of four ratings of performance.
For Attleboro Public Schools (APS), diving head first into each of the three initiatives as an early adopter district was an easy decision, in part due to the “neat match” between district priorities and those of Race to the Top. As Superintendent Kenneth Sheehan noted, RTTT “allows for a culture change to exist that allows for teaching and learning to improve … and that’s what we are all really here for.”

The district sees educator evaluation as an opportunity to be forward-thinking and has used the change to deeply integrate evaluation into all other district initiatives. “We didn’t want it be an island,” said Assistant Superintendent Dave Sawyer. They also knew they could not do this sensitive work alone. From the onset, teachers were seen as active partners. APS also embraced the union as a full partner and collaborated closely along the way to ensure the union was well-informed and involved. District leadership was not surprised by some initial apprehension, but overcame this hurdle through open dialogue and frequent communication—making it clear that the central purpose is to give teachers constructive feedback to help them grow as professionals.

With the framework set for educator evaluations and a clear focus on supporting teaching and learning, Attleboro simultaneously worked toward preparing teachers for delivering more rigorous course material. A number of district teachers and coordinators were invited to participate in the ESE project of writing of Model Curriculum Units. As part of that involvement, participants received extensive professional development in Understanding by Design by Jay McTighe. The district embraced this framework—writing its own curriculum units, providing training to other teachers, and piloting units in classrooms. As teachers worked to refine the units, rigor and complexity increased. APS saw students benefiting from the individual units as they demonstrated the ability to tie the lessons to real life.

APS looks forward to these reform efforts to be in place in the district for years to come. “We didn’t pick anything to do to just do it, but looked towards the long range vision of what we can sustain,” explains Superintendent Sheehan. “We didn’t take on anything that will be a flash in the pan. Hopefully all these changes are built to last.”

City on a Hill Charter Public School

City on a Hill Charter Public School saw Race to the Top as an opportunity to partner with the Commonwealth and leverage statewide resources to implement initiatives the organization knew it needed to launch. Chief Academic Officer Dr. Paul Hays notes, “As a school and an organization, we had already spiritually and emotionally embraced that we needed to do a better job of collecting and using data to inform our decision-making process during the school year. Race to the Top was a catalyst to help us do the job we wanted to do and had to do. Now that we’ve gotten it done, we are a stronger organization and our teachers are better at doing what they need to do, which is reflected in their practice.”

With the alignment of the curriculum, introduction of the new educator evaluation system, as well as Edwin, CoaH teachers are using data to analyze their work, their department’s work, and the work of the school itself. “In the past, folks professed that they were afraid of data and were using it in basic ways to support their teaching,” Dr. Hays said. Now, standardized systems and reflection protocols are being used organization-wide to drive student achievement.
In its District Redesign Plan of 2011, the Worcester Public Schools articulated four key areas of focus to drive accelerated sustainable change across the district: human capital development, instructional delivery and systematic implementation of core curricula, supplemental and intensive supports for students, and strategic partnership development. Race to the Top presented both a challenge and a lever to accelerate the work and keep it aligned in service to their vision.

Developing the Worcester Framework for High Quality Teaching and Learning provided a framework for adults in the system to understand the criteria for their success, and continues to provide a way to guide and target training and supports to enable adults to meet these high expectations. RTTT funding has supported the district’s strategic redesign in human capital through implementation of an educator evaluation system anchored in concrete practices articulated in the Framework. Research has shown these behaviors and practices have been successful for raising student achievement.

At the same time, RTTT supported the district’s enlistment of practitioners from WPS to come together in teams to create curriculum maps for each grade level to align with the new cognitive demands of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. With the new curriculum rollout, educators are adjusting how they plan for teaching and how they teach to the articulation of grade-level standards and students are engaging with material on a deeper and more connected level. As Dr. Boone put it, “Curriculum frameworks create a foundation for how we approach teaching and learning and professional development.”

By aligning new curriculum materials that enable teachers to teach what their students need to know in order to achieve at high levels, with transparent expectations for teacher professional practice, the district not only conveys high expectations for adult and student performance but provides a roadmap for achieving them.
Race to the Top Initiatives

Race to the Top funding has allowed ESE to accelerate many facets of education reform and to initiate a series of projects that are broadly organized into four areas: standards and assessments; great teachers and leaders; school turnaround; and data systems.

Strengthening curriculum, instruction, and assessment

- Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks: In 2010, the state adopted new curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics. These frameworks, which incorporate the Common Core State Standards as well as Massachusetts-specific content, define the knowledge and skills that students must master to be college and career ready by the end of high school.

- Model Curriculum: ESE has developed Model Curriculum Units and Maps. Each unit includes a curriculum embedded performance assessment, lesson plans and digital resources. Districts can choose to adopt, adapt, or use templates to create their own.

- MassCore: The Massachusetts High School Program of Studies (MassCore) is a recommended high school course of study. MassCore is intended to help our state’s high school graduates arrive at college or the workplace well prepared (and reduce the number of students taking remedial courses in college.) The recommended program of studies includes: four years of English, four years of math, three years of a lab-based science, three years of history, two years of the same foreign language, one year of an arts program and five additional “core” courses such as business education, health, and/or technology.

- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Early College High Schools: Competitive planning and implementation grants through Race to the Top (RTTT) have been provided to the Boston Public Schools, Marlborough Public Schools, Quaboag Regional School District, Randolph Public Schools, Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical School, and Worcester Public Schools. These programs provide students with a college experience and an opportunity to explore STEM career pathways while still in high school.

- Your Plan for College: This toolkit provides strategies for school counselors and parents to prepare for college application, admissions and financial aid.

- Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling is a programmatic, organizational tool that links school counseling programs to supporting college and career readiness standards. The School Counseling Model provides comprehensive support for student achievement and education reform.

- Innovation Schools: The Innovation Schools initiative provides educators in all districts the powerful opportunity to create new in-district schools that operate with greater autonomy and flexibility.

Improving educator effectiveness

- Educator Evaluation: New regulations for evaluating teachers and administrators were promulgated in June 2011. The regulations, which apply to both administrators and teachers throughout the state, are designed to:
  » Promote growth and development amongst leaders and teachers,
  » Place student learning at the center, using multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement,
  » Recognize excellence in teaching and leading,
  » Set a high bar for professional teaching status, and
  » Shorten timelines for improvement.

- New Superintendent Induction Program: The MA Association of School Superintendents and ESE has partnered to develop a three-year induction program for cohorts of superintendents new to the role or the district.

- Project Success Academy is a hybrid (online and in-person) mentor training program focused on developing leadership capacity and supporting effective mentoring of first-year educators. To date over 300 educators have participated in the program that was developed in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth.

- The Massachusetts Licensure Academy (MLA) was created to assist teachers with waivers earn licensure. The MLA provides graduate-level courses that address the competencies for the preliminary licensure of Teacher of Students with Moderate Disabilities, and the content information included in the English as a second language (ESL) teacher test.

- UTeach at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell is a STEM-focused educator preparation program that is part of the national UTeach network which began at the University of Texas Austin.

- Human Resources (HR) Pilot Project is developing more efficient, effective, and supportive comprehensive HR systems in three districts: Attleboro, Brockton and Revere. The project was developed through a partnership with the Working Group for Educator Excellence (WGEE).

Turning around the lowest performing schools

- Turnaround Teacher and Leader Teams: One of the key objectives of RTTT is to turn around underperforming schools and districts so that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities that prepare them for successful futures. Participants in this program receive intensive professional development to support the turnaround process in Level 4 schools.

- District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs): Six regional assistance centers to help districts and their schools strategically access and use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for all students. The services provided by the centers are integrated with the RTTT initiatives.

- Priority Partners for Turnaround: Priority Partners have a demonstrated record of effectiveness in accelerating school improvement and have been vetted through a rigorous review process. Priority Partners are familiar with the context and requirements of Massachusetts school turnaround work; understand Massachusetts’ Conditions for School Effectiveness; and are part of a Priority Partners Network to facilitate collaboration & alignment.

- Wraparound Zones develop systems to address students physical, social, and emotional health needs in promoting academic success. This project builds district capacity to support their schools’ efforts to meet the non-academic needs of students.

Using data and technology to support student performance

- Edwin: The Massachusetts teaching and learning platform provides educators with a comprehensive integrated suite of cutting-edge tools and resources that promote best practices in classroom instruction and assessment.
  » Edwin Analytics is a powerful reporting and data analysis tool that gives authorized district staff access to new information, reports and perspectives on education and programs that specifically support improvements in teaching and learning.
  » Edwin Teaching & Learning is an instructional improvement system that contains near-real time information, curriculum and assessment tools and digital resources.

- Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) computer software improves already-existing data collection systems providing timely information to automate state reporting.
Massachusetts is now approaching its final year of the Race to the Top program. The work completed to date through RTTT’s various initiatives reflects the Commonwealth’s unwavering commitment to its vision of student success, a vision which continues to be the focus of every district, school, and community in the Commonwealth. As Massachusetts educators work to maintain, strengthen, and sustain the work that is already taking place, here is some of what the education community in Massachusetts can expect to see in Year 4 of the program:

• Year 4 will bring a continued focus on the alignment between curriculum and educator evaluation. Through regular convenings, webinars, materials, and grant programs, many resources will be made available to districts to help them implement the new curriculum frameworks and the educator evaluation system in a way that promotes integration and cohesion across initiatives.

• Additional curriculum and instruction resources are available to all districts across the state, culminating in more than 90 MCUs and accompanying CEPAs, lesson plans, and digital resources spanning grades PreK–12 in mathematics, English language arts, history & social science, science, technology and engineering. By year end, educators will have access to over 90 full curriculum units. Materials will be housed in the Edwin Teaching & Learning system.

• In Year 4 of educator evaluation, RTTT districts and charter schools will implement the new evaluation system with all educators. Non-RTTT districts will begin implementation with at least 50 percent of educators. In addition, all districts (RTTT and non-RTTT) and RTTT charter schools will pilot DDMs in at least five areas: (1) early grade literacy, (2) early grade math, (3) middle grade math, (4) high school writing to text, and (5) a traditionally non-tested grade and subject (e.g., fine arts, music).

• Edwin teaching and learning districts will prepare for and, in some cases, implement a district-wide roll-out of the system. The intended focus of Year 4 is to familiarize all teachers with the integrated information and tools that Edwin Teaching & Learning offers. During the 2013–2014 school year, approximately 130 new RTTT districts will receive training and begin using the system.

On a broader scale, the Commonwealth will continue to do the work we have been doing, keeping in mind our goal to prepare all students for success in the world that awaits them after high school. Massachusetts will work to ensure that RTTT initiatives and frameworks become an integral part of educator and district practice so that they will be maintained, sustained, and strengthened once Race to the Top comes to an end.
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