# Frequently Asked Questions: District Reviews

**What is a district review?**

The district review is an evidence-based process that assesses district systems, enabling district leaders to reflect on progress and strengthen performance. The focus of the district reviews is to provide formative and actionable feedback. These reviews are conducted according to Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

The district review is designed to examine the systems, policies, and practices that drive the day-to-day work of the district, as well as those factors that may help or hinder staff performance and, ultimately, student performance and outcomes. Analysis of these systems, policies, and practices includes a focus on the ways in which the district works to improve and promote equity for all students.

**Why was our district selected for this district review?**

Along with a handful of other districts, your district was selected from a pool of districts that (a) have not had a district review in the last five years, and (b) do not have a concurrent Tiered Focused Monitoring (TFM) or New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) review scheduled for the 2023-24 school year.

**Who is conducting the review, and what are their credentials?**

The review process is overseen by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), but the review itself will be conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). For more information, see the AIR website [here](https://www.air.org/).

**What are the reviewers looking for?**

The review focuses on DESE’s *District Standards and Indicators*. A detailed description of these standards can be found [he](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/district-review/district-standards-indicators.pdf)re.

**What is the difference between a comprehensive review and a targeted review?**

The comprehensive review focuses on all six DESE *District Standards and Indicators*. By comparison, a targeted review focuses on only three standards: either as a Student-Centered Systems review (Curriculum & Instruction, Assessment, Student Support) or as a Governance and Administrative Systems review (Leadership & Governance, Human Resources & Professional Development, Financial and Asset Management). If your district was selected for a targeted review, DESE will collaborate with your district to select one of these review types.

**Can we opt-out of this review? Can we delay it to a future year?**

No, districts may not opt-out or delay the review to a future year.

**What does the district review process entail?**

The process consists of four components: district self-assessment, document review, interviews, and classroom observations.

* *District Self-Assessment:* Your district will complete and submit a document that evaluates its strengths and areas for growth across the six DESE standards. *This task is required for districts with targeted reviews, but optional for districts with comprehensive reviews.*
* *Document Review:* AIR will request documents ranging from strategic plans to financial audit documentation to sample teacher and administrator evaluations.
* *Interviews:* the review includes conversations with school committee members, district and school leaders, union leadership, teachers, families, and students. AIR will work with to coordinate logistics and arrange for these discussions, and ideally, avoid the need for coverages or substitutes.
* *Classroom Observations*: AIR will work with your district to select a random sample of classrooms to observe. These reviews are to understand general themes in your district’s instructional practices, and will not be attributed to any individual teacher. Lessons should continue as they would normally.

**When will the visit take place?**

AIR and DESE will work with your district to select dates for an onsite visit between October 2023 and May 2024 that represent typical school days and are convenient for your community.

**When will the report be completed?**

The district will receive a *Districtwide Instructional Observation Report* that outlines findings from classroom observations approximately one month after the onsite visit. Approximately three months after the onsite, the district will receive a draft of the full report to review for factual errors. After any edits have been resolved, the final report will be posted to the DESE website. (Note that these estimates are based on previous years and may vary from district to district.)

**What is the result of the review?**

The entire review culminates in a published report that shares findings, relative to the *District Standards and Indicators* and recommendations for consideration. Superintendents often find their report helpful in identifying areas for growth and guiding the district’s strategic direction. You can view a library of past reports from other districts [here](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/district-review/).