Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Implementation Study:
Phase 1 Findings

September 2013

Julia Marchand

Mary Nistler

Matthew Welch

Contents

**Page**

[Introduction 1](#_Toc367866785)

[Study Phases 2](#_Toc367866786)

[Methodology 3](#_Toc367866787)

[Sample and Data Collection 3](#_Toc367866788)

[Data Analysis 5](#_Toc367866789)

[Limitations 5](#_Toc367866790)

[Phase 1 Findings 6](#_Toc367866791)

[Implementation Plan and Rollout 6](#_Toc367866792)

[Leadership 9](#_Toc367866793)

[Communication 10](#_Toc367866794)

[Capacity Building 12](#_Toc367866795)

[Collaboration 13](#_Toc367866796)

[Instructional Supports 14](#_Toc367866797)

[Alignment With Other Initiatives 16](#_Toc367866798)

[ESE Support 18](#_Toc367866799)

[Implementation Facilitators and Challenges 19](#_Toc367866800)

[Conclusion 22](#_Toc367866801)

[Summary of Phase 1 Findings 22](#_Toc367866802)

[Phase 2 Planning 23](#_Toc367866803)

[Appendix A: Phase 1 Interview Protocols 24](#_Toc367866804)

[District Leadership Interview 25](#_Toc367866805)

[School Leadership Interview 29](#_Toc367866806)

[District/School Coach Interview 32](#_Toc367866807)

[Appendix B: ESE District Implementation Surveys 36](#_Toc367866808)

# Introduction

First implemented by districts in the 2011–12 school year, the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics* were developed to explicitly define the knowledge and skills that students must master by the end of high school to become college and career ready by including both Common Core State Standards as well as standards unique to Massachusetts. In January 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) partnered with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a descriptive study of the implementation of the 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics*. The study aims to provide relevant and applicable information to ESE that informs the department’s support for implementation of the frameworks. Specifically, the study examines how the frameworks are being implemented in high-implementing districts and schools and describes the practices and supports that the high-implementing districts have put in place.

# Study Phases

The implementation study consists of three distinct phases and will conclude with submission of the final report in June 2014. The phases are aligned with data collection and reporting periods, as follows (data collection time periods are noted in parentheses):

* **Phase 1 (Spring 2013).** This phase focuses on organizational supports and infrastructure at the district and school levels. The intended purpose is to identify structures and organizational practices that respondents perceive to support implementation of the frameworks. Selected districts and schools that are actively implementing the frameworks are the sources for Phase 1 data.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* **Phase 2 (Fall 2013).** This phase focuses on the classroom, the point of service, in schools that are implementing the frameworks. The purpose of Phase 2 is to learn what high-implementing classrooms look like in terms of teacher practices, student activities, student engagement, resources employed (e.g., technology, materials), and the types of supports teachers have been provided to help them understand and implement the new standards. Schools from three districts that participated in Phase 1 will be the sources for data. **Phase 3 (Spring 2014).** This phase is similar to Phase 2 in that the focus will continue to be on the classroom. Phase 3 is an opportunity to examine implementation somewhat later in the implementation process; confirm (or revise) findings from Phase 2; and identify additional organizational factors or classroom practices that support implementation. Schools from three new districts will be the sources of data for this phase.

# Methodology

The methods for Phase 1 of the study are aligned with the primary goal of learning what high-implementing districts and schools have done to transition from former curriculum standards to the new 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics*. Phase 1 is exploratory, and the research team relied on semistructured interviews[[2]](#footnote-2) with stakeholders at the district and school levels to gather information (see Appendix A for Phase 1 interview protocols). During interviews, district and school leaders were asked about the implementation schedule, implementation leadership, communication, capacity building, collaboration strategies, instructional supports, alignment with other initiatives, and support from ESE and regional providers (e.g., District and School Assistance Centers, Readiness Centers, and Collaboratives).

## Sample and Data Collection

In the fall 2012, ESE developed and administered surveys designed to gather annual feedback from district-level curriculum directors or coordinators across the state regarding their current level of implementation of the 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics*. These ESE implementation surveys also are intended to help identify how ESE could further support districts in the rollout of the new frameworks through full implementation and will be administered annually. (See Appendix B for additional information about the ESE implementation surveys administered to districts.)

For Phase 1 of the study, ESE and AIR identified six districts[[3]](#footnote-3) that were implementing the curriculum frameworks at a higher level than most other Massachusetts districts, as determined by data from the ESE implementation surveys completed by districts. ESE staff who were familiar with the districts also were consulted about the districts’ progress in implementing the curriculum frameworks. At a minimum, Phase 1 districts had to have structures and supports for implementation in place and had to have made progress in developing curriculum guides in at least one subject area. In addition, districts were selected so that different geographic areas of the state were represented—this selection also ensured that districts of different size were included in the sample.

Districts were invited, but not required, to participate in Phase 1 of the implementation study. If district administrators agreed to participate in the implementation study, then the district was asked to nominate two district schools that were furthest along in implementing the frameworks. Table 1 shows the districts and schools included in the sample and their enrollment in the 2012–13 school year. The table also clarifies whether implementation of the English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks were addressed in the district and school-level interviews conducted for Phase 1.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Table 1. Phase 1 Sample of Districts and Schools

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| District | District Enrollment2012–13 | Interviews Covered: | School | Grades Served | School Enrollment2012–13 | Interviews Covered: |
| ELA | Math | ELA | Math |
| Cambridge Public Schools | 6,222 | X | X | John M. Tobin Montessori School | PK–5 | 274 | X | X |
| Maria L. Baldwin Elementary School | PK–5 | 304 | X | X |
| Chicopee Public Schools | 7,775 | X | X | Anna E. Barry Elementary School | K–5 | 448 | X |  |
| Chicopee Comprehensive High School | 9–12 | 1,459 |  | X |
| Hopedale Public Schools | 1,261 | General implementation | Memorial Elementary School | K–6 | 625 | X | X |
| Hopedale Junior–Senior High School | 7–12 | 536 | X | X |
| Lowell Public Schools | 13,879 | X | X | Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary School | PK–4 | 506 | X | X |
| Charles W. Morey Elementary School | PK–4 | 535 | General implementation |
| Pittsfield Public Schools | 5,987 | X | X | Taconic High School | 9–12 | 845 | X | X |
| John T. Reid Middle School | 6–8 | 576 | General implementation |
| West Springfield Public Schools | 3,882 | General implementation | West Springfield Middle School | 6–8 | 897 | X | X |
| Mittineague Elementary School | 1–5 | 147 | General implementation |

*Note:* ELA = English language arts and literacy

Across the six districts and 12 schools, a total of 31 interviews were conducted in April and May 2013. Interviews were in-person or over the phone, and most involved two or more respondents. At the district level, interviews were conducted with top district administrators (e.g., the superintendent or an assistant superintendent) and the person or persons charged with implementing the frameworks and working with schools (e.g., curriculum coordinators, district coaches, or assistant superintendents). At the school level, interview respondents included principals and the person or persons who were most responsible for supporting teachers in learning about and implementing the frameworks (e.g., instructional coaches, lead teachers, department chairs).

## Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and then professionally transcribed. As transcriptions were completed, the AIR team read the transcriptions to get an overview of implementation plans and activities. Transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo, a software program that facilitates the coding and analysis of qualitative data. Data were coded according to major categories and subcategories aligned with the interview protocols. An interim step in the analysis was the development of detailed summaries for each district, which described district implementation across topics, and a comprehensive summary for the school sample as a whole. The summaries allowed the AIR team to identify similarities and differences across districts and schools and identify common themes. Throughout the analysis, the AIR team repeatedly reviewed the original transcripts.

## Limitations

The intent of this study is to identify exemplary strategies and practices that are effectively supporting implementation of the frameworks. As described previously, Phase 1 is exploratory, and the findings presented in this report are based on preliminary information collected from stakeholders in a small sample of districts and their respective schools. Only interview data were collected, another limitation because, although data could be triangulated across respondents, it could not be triangulated across different methods, such as surveys, extant data, and observation data. Also, as the first of three phases—and an exploratory phase—Phase 1 can offer only preliminary findings. It would be premature to consider the assembled key findings as a blueprint or formula for successful implementation of the frameworks. At most, the Phase 1 findings represent promising practices that will be furthered explored in Phase 2 of the study.

# Phase 1 Findings

The following findings are based on interviews conducted in spring 2013 in a sample of six districts and 12 schools. The findings represent common strategies and practices, as described by district- and school-level interview respondents.

## Implementation Plan and Rollout

**Finding:** *All districts in the Phase 1 sample began the implementation of the frameworks with awareness sessions designed to inform school staff about the frameworks and the district’s broad strategy and timeline to reach full implementation.*

Districts and schools in the Phase 1 sample began implementation activities shortly after the curriculum frameworks for English language arts and literacy and mathematics were published in March 2011. In winter and spring of 2011, ESE staff presented regional sessions to acquaint districts with the significant shifts in the new standards. Districts conducted additional sessions in their schools as implementation advanced and/or at critical points in the process, such as when district-developed curriculum guides, revised to reflect the new frameworks, were ready for use. Districts described the process of implementing the frameworks in comparable terms: as a *slow*, *deliberate* process that will take several years and require a concerted effort from a broad spectrum of district and school stakeholders.

**Promising Practice**

In a high-implementing district, district personnel developed a video to introduce the frameworks to all district schools. Because this is a large district, all schools could be introduced to the frameworks in a short period of time; and all schools would hear a consistent district message related to the frameworks and implementation. A district administrator said, “We prepared a video that we showed to leaders and to teachers at the very beginning of the year because we were starting the implementation of the mathematics standards at that time.” At a later time, a similar approach was used to inform schools about the literacy standards and timelines. Teachers were among the presenters in the video and spoke on behalf of the different grade levels, describing how the frameworks differed from previous standards. Another interview respondent said:

In our district, it really helps to have teachers talking to teachers. That was one way of kind of getting the message out; to make sure everyone received it. We do that a lot with different initiatives. The superintendent will do a video on an early release day. She’ll set the tone—here’s the message. This is for everyone.

### Subjects and Grades

**Finding:** *Most of the districts in the Phase 1 sample are implementing the English language arts and literacy and the mathematics frameworks simultaneously across elementary through high school grades. This allows the district and school staff to have shared experiences with and conversations about the frameworks. Districts implement across subject areas and grade levels to prepare students and teachers for the upcoming assessments aligned to the new English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks.*

Among the districts in which interviews were conducted, most are implementing the English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks simultaneously and concurrently, in all grades. A district respondent said, “We felt strongly that we go full force with content standards the first year because that will minimize the gaps across the vertical alignment.” Another district respondent said:

We just felt that it was too important a change to do it in pieces. It had to be everybody in, having the conversation about this and what it meant at the same time. There are so many connections in a hierarchical way between what is taught in second-grade math and then what the kids need by fifth or seventh or 10th that we all needed to be at the table.

Another reason for implementing the frameworks across grade spans and content areas was the coming assessments aligned to the English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks. A district respondent said the “growing pains” anticipated from the rollout of the frameworks would be worthwhile because “by the time PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers)[[5]](#footnote-5) gets here, we should be closer to being really aligned to the Common Core.”

Finally, for districts accustomed to vertical K–12 cooperation, simultaneous implementation in all grades made obvious sense, which is reflected in this comment:

That practice of K–12 discussions about content and pedagogy has been something that we’ve been doing for a while. So it just seemed obvious that when we started to move to the Common Core, we would roll it out one time for everybody. It made sense for us to do it that way.

At least one district opted for a measured approach to implementation, developing resources for and implementing first in the early grades (e.g., K–2) before moving to the next grade span. A common rationale for this strategy was to allow time to develop deeper alignment up to the next level, including assessing the “ripple effects” of shifts in content from older to younger grades; and to better prepare younger students, for whom the frameworks will be a driving force throughout their education, for more rigorous courses of study. A district coordinator explained why this approach was selected:

Part of the reasoning was a lot of people had concerns that when kids moved into the next grade level they were going to be worried they wouldn’t have the prerequisite skills. . . . We thought that more kids would be successful at the next grade levels if we used a gradual process. One of our biggest sticking points was around the middle school, the high school transition because there was such a change between Grade 8 and Algebra I and the Grade 9 programs, that they [teachers?] wanted kids to be fully prepared with the Grade 8 program before moving on to Algebra I the next year. So that was very intentional why we stopped at eight and then moved Algebra I and geometry for next year.

### Implementation Stages

**Finding:** *The Phase 1 districts shared similar stages in their implementation process, beginning with needs assessments and continuing with the work of analyzing the standards, implementing the standards in the school, and revising materials and resources based on teacher experience.*

Regardless of how implementation was scheduled, implementation stages typically included
the following:

* **Needs Assessment.** A first step among some districts was to conduct an assessment of “what we were teaching and how it was going.” This component is also about determining the overlaps and differences between the old and new frameworks to identify “critical areas,” including major shifts in content.
* **Analyzing the Standards.** Critical to the implementation process is effectively analyzing—sometimes called *unpacking—*the standards and creating curricular maps, modules, and guides for teachers as they plan lessons and units of study based on the frameworks. This phase included districtwide design teams of teachers (from different schools and grade levels) who worked together to create the maps and guides.
* **Implementing the New Standards-Driven Curriculum in Schools.** This stage relies heavily on coaches and teacher leaders, who work closely with teachers to implement the frameworks. Often included in this phase are school-level professional learning communities, during which teachers learn more about the standards and discuss, review, and revise lessons.
* **Quality Reviews Based on Teacher Feedback.** After teachers have used the maps, guides, and modules, the district, through school coaches and/or teacher leaders, asks for teacher feedback, which was described as “critical” to revising materials, resources, and supports, typically over the summer.

**Promising Practice**

In one district, a respondent said the district began preparing for implementation of the frameworks as soon as the Common Core State Standards were adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in the summer of 2010, well before the publication of the final complete versions of the Massachusetts frameworks for English language arts and literacy and mathematics in March 2011. Start-up activities included a two-day informational session for all teachers followed by targeted professional development for school staff throughout the academic year.

 We got started right away. We had a plan. We got people involved immediately. I went to meetings [which included other districts] where there were people that hadn’t even started yet….We kind of stuck our neck out. We try to go right out there. If we’re asked to do something from DESE, we get started right away. I think, in this case, we had a prealignment team formed. We were already looking at the crosswalks. We brought consultants in.

## Leadership

**Finding**: *At both the district and school levels, leadership did not rest with a single individual but typically was distributed among several individuals or across a team that commonly included curriculum coordinators for English language arts and literacy and mathematics, other administrators, and teachers.*

A number of interview respondents stressed the importance of strong leadership at both the school and district levels. Several district respondents talked about the “latitude” they have been afforded by the districts, which has been critical for moving forward with implementation. Shared by one respondent, “That's been huge to come up with a vision and implement that vision. It couldn’t have been done without that latitude.” In the sections that follow, leadership at the school and district levels is explored as are key functions of leadership: communication, building capacity, and collaboration.

### District Level

**Finding:** *The implementation of the standards in the Phase 1 sample is driven by the district, which has leaders and leadership teams that provide direct support and guidance to schools.*

District leaders were visible and engaged in the implementation process. They led implementation and provided vision, direction, and support. A district respondent from one central office said:

My office’s responsibility is to make sure that it [implementation] is all organized and that there’s a clear direction…Also to make sure that the principals understand it and that it moves forward, that there are teachers using it, that the whole building’s use it, that we problem solve. If there’s a building that has a problem with something, they’ll reach right out. We’ll meet with them. We’ll problem solve it. Really, its organization and providing the platform for all the participation in an organized manner that makes sense to them. Because teachers are really good at figuring out you don’t know what you’re doing, if you don’t have a vision of where you’re going.

Two districts reported that the district superintendent is directly engaged in implementation efforts and is an advocate for the frameworks. In the other four districts, leadership is provided by district coordinators or administrators who oversee all aspects of implementation, including professional development, collaborative teams, and communication with schools. In one district, the coordinators are particularly active in schools, interfacing directly with principals, coaches, and teachers.

I think we feel very responsible for making sure that the implementation happens…One thing we do is try to be in schools, and we try to do walk-throughs with the principals to, as I mentioned earlier, to kind of—I don’t like to use monitor implementation, but just to gather information, so we can see if there are still gaps, or if teachers are confused, or [we may ask principals to help us] design the kind of supports we need to make sure that implementation happens across the board.

In particularly high-implementing districts, the leadership structure was clear, and district leaders were proactive in providing information and support to schools.

### School Level

**Finding:** *School-level leaders make sure the frameworks are implemented consistently and have established teams in a way that gives teachers a voice.*

Key responsibilities of school-level leadership are to set and communicate a vision for implementation, ensure that the frameworks remain a priority, and promote consistency across classrooms. School respondents described these roles as supportive and helpful in maintaining focus over the long process of implementation.

At the school level, leadership teams were developed, strengthened or repurposed to ensure that teachers were engaged in the change process. Schools created or strengthened school- and grade-level leadership teams to manage implementation and to help ensure that “decisions come from teachers.” School respondents emphasized the value of teacher participation in leadership committees, saying “The teachers aren’t afraid to tell us, ‘we don’t like this, this doesn’t work.’”

While giving teachers and other staff a voice, school leaders also sought to promote consistency in the implementation of the frameworks. For example, school interview respondents described how posters and other print materials were used to inform teachers of common expectations. They said principal walk-throughs were more common, conducted to monitor implementation and acknowledge teachers’ efforts.

## Communication

**Finding:** *A key message delivered by district leaders is that transitioning to the frameworks is difficult, will take a long time, and will be a major instructional shift from what schools do currently. Also, allowing teachers time to learn and avoiding “panic mode” are essential for implementation to progress.*

“Standards-driven instruction” is the goal and central message for many schools and districts as they move their teachers away from what is sometimes referred to as “program-driven” or “turn the page” instruction, in which a basal reader or mathematics textbook served as the curriculum. Replacing textbooks, for many teachers, were model units, from ESE or developed by districts and aligned to the frameworks, a major shift for teachers who had relied on textbooks and who also had autonomy in pacing their lessons and units of study. A district coordinator described the message given to these teachers:

People [teachers] at certain times did things on their own, and it is kind of a new concept to a lot of people to have a required curriculum. So we just want to make sure that people understand that this is something that needs to happen with their input and their feedback and constantly revising the units and making them better.

Another message conveyed by district administrators and coaches is that implementing the frameworks is very difficult and demanding work, which requires a significant shift not only in instructional practice but professional practice, particularly communication and collaboration between the district and schools and among teachers across grade spans. This message also is intended to develop a sense of teamwork so that no one, especially individual teachers, feels like he or she is to shoulder the burden alone. A district respondent said:

So when we come to them and we say, “Look, these are mandates. In some case, they’re unfunded mandates, but we are going to work at this as a team together.” They believe that we’re working at it together, not that we’re telling them that they have to do something. In today’s day and age, that makes all the difference in the world.

Another critical guideline related to implementation is to avoid “panic mode” as much as possible when new initiatives are launched and, instead, to emphasize that implementation of the frameworks is an ongoing process of steady progress, not an overnight shift to the new standards. This brought some of the district respondents back to the importance of keeping people informed, of communicating proactively so that “people know where we are and where we need to go.” One district leader made the following comment about the district’s overall goal and message:

It was never the goal just to say we’re implemented. It was our goal of implementing with quality and hopefully, thereby creating quality results. That is the focus. That’s the message that goes out, along with this idea that I do not expect perfection in a given year, that I do see this as a process, that I totally understand the vast amount of work that teachers are asked to do on a daily basis. And I want to make this as unstressful a situation as I can for them while still making sure that there is accountability to get better in all of these initiatives, but particularly in Common Core because that is going to make a major difference in terms of student performance. I think it’s not a mixed message, but it’s somewhat of a bifurcated message that yes, we have to do this—yes, it’s important to do this—but I don’t want to create a sense of panic or have people feel overwhelmed because then that, in itself, becomes a roadblock to success. So I would say those two major points are what we stress constantly at administrative meetings and in faculty meetings.

Respondents in another district spoke about minimizing anxiety and stress by maintaining open lines of communication with building staff to make sure they are not overwhelmed and making needed adjustments based on their feedback. A district leader shared:

We listen to them. If they feel like too much is coming, we hear. At the district level then we’ll say, “Okay, we’re going to slow down a little bit. We know that you have this, this, and this. We’ll pull back a little bit for right now, give you time to make sure that you have this under your belt, and then we can move forward.” It’s like a two-way communication that we have to make sure is open.

**Promising Practice**

One district informed principals of the coming changes and processes as early as possible, both to gain their trust and to avoid “springing any surprises” that can quickly derail implementation of any new initiative.

 We started on a whisper campaign with principals because we knew that that was a stakeholder that we needed to get onboard. We had individual conversations, kind of like, “Hey, we’re thinking about something. Want to take a look at it? How do you think that would work in your building?” From that, we then started to do some PD on PARCC because we also wanted them to see this [the frameworks] is important because this is coming.

 Another coordinator added, “It was to set the stage for why are going to make this dramatic change.”

## Capacity Building

**Finding:** *Train-the-trainer models of professional development were used to build teachers’ knowledge of the frameworks and their capacity to implement them in the classroom.*

Building the knowledge and skills of stakeholders is critical to successfully implementing new initiatives. Districts relied heavily on a train-the-trainer model of providing professional development, with building coaches or teachers receiving professional development from the district, state, regional providers, or consultants and then delivering a similar training in their schools. A key advantage of a train-the-trainer approach is that there is a recognized “person in the building that teachers can go to who really understands whatever that issue is and how to roll it out and what it looks like in terms of classroom application.” A district coordinator explained how this strategy plays out in schools:

So we did some professional development, when I say we, my district coaches and I, for the coaches to get them really solid with this new curriculum. And then, in turn, they go back to their schools, and they provide PD, whether it’s through common planning time, or some schools provide after school PD for teachers to reinforce that teaching. And then their coaching also revolves around that….

**Promising Practice**

Within the train-the-trainer model, at least one district made concerted efforts to develop and provide specialized training to building leaders. This was “to make sure that nothing is happening in a school that our principals can’t talk to with some degree of expertise and knowledge.” This strategy helped to establish the building leader as a primary resource for teachers, signal the importance of the initiative, and ensure consistency of messaging to all district schools.

 We almost template for them and model for them how to then roll this out. We don’t ask them to create their own PowerPoint, because what we want to make sure of is at least that the message is being given the same in all 14 buildings, and so that seems to work. It’s been a good model for us.

This train-the-trainer model has been helpful not only in building the knowledge of staff but also in creating a broad base of knowledge and expertise in schools on which future endeavors can be built. Building school capacity is clearly evident in one district that has encouraged teachers to assume greater leadership and collaborative roles within their schools. A district coordinator described their attempts in this way:

[We are] trying to foster this culture in schools that if you have new staff, to try to get folks to open up their classrooms, so that they can do some collaboration at the school level. And it might not even be official PD, but those folks might be teachers who were on the design committees. We’ve had them participate and expect them to share their knowledge and their work with teachers moving forward. [This is especially important] for schools that don’t have coaches—really trying to build that capacity.

## Collaboration

Interview respondents consistently stated that effective implementation requires collaboration between district and schools as well as among teachers and instructional leaders across schools, grades, and disciplines.

### District Level

**Finding:** *District design teams consisted of teachers from all or most schools and grade levels. This ensured teacher voice in critical tasks such as the development of resources and also ensured that schools had informed teachers who could support implementation in their schools.*

In all districts, collaborative “design teams,” composed largely of teachers who work together across schools and grade levels, are an essential feature of successful implementation. It is within these teams that the critical tasks of analyzing the frameworks and creating curricular maps, modules, guides, and other resources take place. A district respondent advised that, in developing these materials, “You need to have the teacher voice because they’re out there every day, and they know what needs to be taught. They know the students they have.” One respondent from a high-implementing district said the teachers who do the work on these teams are a “great asset” because they are able to clarify the standards and materials when they are back in the schools.

**Promising Practice**

Critical to the success of design teams is that district coaches or coordinators are “keeping everyone on track and making sure the objectives are achieved.” Also, the composition of the team is important. As one district administrator said, the most experienced teachers are not necessarily the best ones to unpack the standards and develop new curricula. What matters more are teachers’ “dedication to understanding the standards, unpacking them, going to PDs, and [willingness to] learning more about them.” She added, “People want to be inclusive, but you definitely need to have people who understand what they’re doing.”

Unlike collaborative structures in schools that may have existed prior to the adoption of the 2011 frameworks, district-level design teams were specifically formed to support implementation of the new standards (which was suggested by state’s Race-to-the-Top district application guidelines). Separate groups were created for English language arts and mathematics, and within these large content-specific teams, smaller grade-level units often were carved out (e.g., Grades K–2, Grades 3–8, Grades 9–10, Grades 11–12), which “took the Common Core, took our curriculum, our resources, and melded them.” Team members serve as conduits for feedback regarding implementation, resources, supports, or suggested revisions, bringing comments from their school colleagues to the larger committees and district leadership. In many schools, they also function as on-site advisors who can answer questions and help their colleagues. A district respondent said:

Because there’s somebody from every building on that committee, they can also problem solve at the building and answer questions…And then that team member—if it needs to come to district—will talk to the district representative. A lot of people are talking, which gets us a lot of results.

### School Level

**Finding:** *Principals said teacher teams dedicated to the frameworks were critical venues for professional learning and implementation.*

Collaboration at the school level typically occurs in professional learning communities, data teams, or leadership teams. School leaders were clear that established collaborative time and space were significant priorities for them in moving forward with frameworks implementation. One leader shared:

My staff is probably sick of me saying this, but I think of our building as a PLC. I think we operate as a Professional Learning Community…We very much work as a unit, and any one of us will take the lead on something.

Although collaborative structures may predate the adoption of the 2011 frameworks, in many schools, the structures have been repurposed to promote teachers’ collective learning about the frameworks, foster collaboration on lesson planning, allow for debriefing on new lessons taught, and help school staff understand the “new mechanisms for teaching.” One school respondent remarked that her colleagues were a group that “works together, looks at data together, makes instructional changes together, [and] has instructional focus together,” due to a longstanding “superstructure of collaboration and communication.” A district coordinator referred to professional learning communities in schools as “the most powerful venue” for professional learning and implementation, adding, “The collaborative model of planning lessons and creating assessments and doing everything in a collaborative manner is absolutely necessary for this [initiative] to take effect.”

## Instructional Supports

**Finding:** *School instructional coaches are a primary strategy for communication in the building and between the districts and schools. In addition, they identify challenges teachers encounter and monitor implementation.*

School respondents indicated that a primary source of support and technical assistance in their schools are building coaches. They serve on school- and district-level implementation teams to develop materials and guidance, work with individual teachers based on need, deliver professional development, and are recognized as instructional leaders in their schools. They also apprise district coordinators of progress and issues in their schools; this information is then used to inform the development of districtwide professional development and resources. As one district respondent said, “Coaches are particularly important in the implementation of initiatives like the frameworks because district coordinators are stretched too thin to provide the immediate support that teachers often need.”

Other key supports for quality instruction are materials and resources aligned with the frameworks. These supports are largely developed, identified, or adapted by district-level design teams or committees (described in the previous section). In several districts, these teams have produced curriculum maps or guides that show the “progression of how to teach the standards.” The materials include primary resources or textbooks and supplemental resources that address missing standards or differentiation of needs. To meet a growing need and teacher demand, some teams also have created instructional units or modules (similar to model units in the process of being developed as part of the state’s Race to the Top Model Curriculum Unit initiative):

We had to create our units because there’s not much out there. That’s a huge challenge, and I’m sure you’ll see it across the schools. We’ve never really found a reading program or a writing program that’s been satisfactory, even before the new frameworks came out, but now, there really isn’t anything satisfactory out there, so we decided to create our own.

**Finding:** *Although new* *assessments aligned to the English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks were viewed as a coming challenge, in some districts, these and benchmark assessments aligned to the frameworks were considered to be drivers of implementation.*

In some districts, formative or benchmark assessments aligned to the frameworks have been or will be developed by district design teams and included in instructional modules and guides. They provide teachers with the means to periodically assess student learning (and the effectiveness of their own instruction based on the new standards) prior to statewide testing. Reflecting on assessments as drivers of instruction and implementation of the frameworks, one district lead commented:

[Assessment] gives us leverage in some ways, because if it’s true that these kinds of things are going to be assessed on the state test, then it makes sense, whether you believe that this is good teaching or good curriculum or not, that at least that will help your students if you teach it because it will be on there.

**Promising Practice**

Realizing the need for an easily accessible centralized repository to hold all resources developed by their alignment committees (e.g., curriculum maps, guides, and modules), one district created a password-protected Moodle site that teachers can access whenever and wherever they choose. The site is self-contained, and all materials and resources are hyperlinked and downloadable. “All of these documents are available now on Moodle. They are online, they’re interactive. All of the resources that were gathered are hyperlinked, so teachers can simply click on.”The hope and intent is that “a brand new teacher coming in can actually follow this as a road map.” For district leadership, the Moodle site provides a way of “actually seeing which schools are using it, which schools are not, so the accountability piece is there.”

## Alignment With Other Initiatives

**Finding:** *Districts and schools are facing numerous major initiatives that they find overwhelming and unaligned with one another.*

All interview respondents stated that schools and districts are overwhelmed with three major statewide initiatives being implemented almost simultaneously. These initiatives are implementation of the curriculum frameworks; the state’s new educator evaluation system; and Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL), a course required of educators of core subjects who teach English language learners. Respondents felt that these three initiatives are set to converge with the coming administration of new assessments aligned to the English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks in 2014–15, making for a “perfect storm” of colliding initiatives rather than a seamless alignment of mutually supportive initiatives.[[6]](#footnote-6)

### District Level

District respondents said it is very challenging to implement multiple initiatives at one time. Respondents perceive that the initiatives appear to be unaligned and that they impose a daunting and confusing set of unrelated demands. A district respondent said:

It’s very frustrating because I go to teachers, and they’re like, “You’re just telling me something else that I have to do, and you just told me yesterday I have to do PARCC, and you told me the day before I had to do the frameworks, and now you’re telling me I need to do WIDA [World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment].” I think that’s very difficult for teachers, and it puts us in a really tough position because we were trying to think about how to incorporate them. We’re doing it, but that’s just left every district
to think about what’s the messaging that’s going to be common with these. So it’s
been difficult.

In general, district respondents said initiatives must be aligned and prioritized so that school administrators and teachers can make sense of them. “Connecting the dots,” finding commonalities across initiatives, is typically something districts take on (some of them), with little guidance from ESE, according to district respondents.

Among the districts in the study, frameworks implementation was most likely to be aligned with the state’s new educator evaluation system. Respondents in two districts have suggested that teachers adopt a goal related to the frameworks. In one of the districts, teachers were asked to consider developing a SMART goal that addresses framework adoption and implementation:

We simply said, “We are going to give you this goal as a way of getting started in the educator evaluation, using what you’re already doing in this other initiative to be a part of it. If you choose to do something else, then that’s between you and your building principal to negotiate.” I would say that there was a large percentage of teachers that were so thankful and said, “That’s one thing I don’t have to think about for this year. We’ll take that district goal and build that in as one of our professional goals or team goals.”

**Promising Practice**

In one particularly high-implementing district, respondents said they understood how the frameworks align with multiple initiatives such as the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS), RETELL, and the new educator evaluation system. District respondents talked about how both MTSS and frameworks implementation emphasize teacher collaboration and the frameworks clarify for principals what they should be expecting and observing from teachers. The respondents suggested that one way to facilitate connections within the district is to make sure that individuals working with special populations and/or on various statewide initiatives “are at the table with curriculum leaders when things are being planned out. There’s no stand-alone.” For this district, “things are coming together.”

### School Level

School respondents detected little alignment of the frameworks with other state initiatives. In their view, they are being asked to manage an “incredibly daunting” mix of programs and priorities. They said that, during the past year, at least half of their common meeting time—once devoted to frameworks implementation—was consumed by preparations for the new educator evaluation system.

Also, the coming assessments aligned to the new English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks are viewed with growing anxiety by school interview respondents. Although the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is making a three-year transition to the new standards, educators who have seen released items of the new assessments realize that they will be very different from MCAS. Some of the district respondents addressed the new assessments and speculated that they would facilitate implementation of the frameworks because what would be tested would be taught. However, school-level personnel were confused about the new assessments and their overlap with the current MCAS test. Responses to this tension have varied. In some cases, districts have fully

adopted the new standards. In others, schools and districts have complex strategies for meeting what are, at times, unclear expectations. For example:

When [the frameworks] came out, [our district] did a full adoption. We stopped teaching the prior Massachusetts standards and right away started to dive into the Common Core. The exceptions for that were Grades 3 and 4, where students were being tested on former standards [on the state test]. We did a hybrid where we taught to whatever standard had the higher level of rigor, which tended to be the Common Core Standard. When there was not an exact alignment—in some cases, there were topics that were addressed to the former standards that were not addressed in the Common Core standards—we made sure to teach those so that students wouldn’t be surprised by something on the test.

## ESE Support

**Finding:** *District personnel cited lack of guidance from ESE, and some perceived that there were no firm timelines for implementation.[[7]](#footnote-7) On the other hand, respondents from schools and districts found the ESE model curriculum units, guides, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials developed and disseminated between spring 2011 and spring 2013 to be helpful but not complete. As such, districts are developing their own materials and likely “reinventing the wheel.”*

In Massachusetts, the Education Reform Act of 1993 established curriculum frameworks as voluntary guidelines for district curriculum, which remained under local control. Interviewees perceived the voluntary nature of district adoption of the standards as a challenge at a time when major initiatives, including the frameworks, are also being implemented. A district respondent said:

Massachusetts is very well known for not committing to anything. I think that’s very common across a lot of things, across Massachusetts, that we don’t really just commit to—you’re going to do this, and you have to do this by this timeline, and here’s all the supports we’re going to put in it.

Several respondents mentioned the lack of guidance from the state:

I go to talk to other districts, and they say, “We’re just not ready. We do not want to do it.” And yet you talk to teachers, and the teachers say that “This is embarrassing. We’re not doing it yet.” So I don’t think there’s been anyone really forcing or saying, “Here’s where you should be at this year,” and hearing you say that the Department of Ed wants us to be full implementation next year. I know that but not a lot of the districts know that. And so there just hasn’t been a consistent message such as, “This is where you’re supposed to be this year. Grade 3 is supposed to be done, or Grade 8, or this amount of grades or whatever….” It clearly hasn’t gone to every district as a message because there are some districts that still haven’t done it yet, which is surprising.

Respondents expressed both appreciation and frustration with support from ESE. Most notably, the respondents who had used or were familiar with the model curriculum units, anchor papers, and other guiding materials, developed and made available by ESE, were positive about them and eager to receive additional resources from ESE. Respondents also appreciated the crosswalks that compare old and new standards as well the ESE webinars that helped districts and schools understand the frameworks. The webinars were an especially important resource when districts began unpacking the frameworks.

Nevertheless, a common refrain among respondents is that more resources, such as the model units, are needed. This may be because respondents are not aware of the availability of state resources or available resources were not complete.[[8]](#footnote-8) Across districts, respondents described the “hunting and pecking” needed to find quality materials that map to the frameworks. They shared the opinion that “the most difficult thing for teachers to do is to generate all that work, either the lesson plans or the assessments.” One district coordinator commented:

We [the district alignment committees] identified resources, which was very difficult, because we started early, so there wasn’t a lot out there. They really had to delve deep, and to find what they felt was important.

This results in inefficiencies in developing and gathering resources needed for implementation in schools. For some respondents, “it’s almost like every district is reinventing the wheel.” Although many respondents indicated that collaborative teams working together to discuss frameworks implementation and develop instructional materials and guides have been beneficial and positive experiences, some respondents also suggested that the state could be more proactive, particularly in the provision of resources: “DESE has been really supportive. The only thing I wish is…it would be great if they just were a little bit more ahead of us.”

## Implementation Facilitators and Challenges

Respondents were asked to reflect on major facilitators and challenges to implementation of the frameworks. Among both school and district interviewees, several common themes emerged and are presented below.

### Facilitators

**Strong and Distributed Leadership.** This type of leadership is manifested in the deployment of representative and broad-based teams and high levels of ongoing communication and support, all of which are also essential to obtain teacher buy-in. One district respondent, when asked to identify facilitators, connected these factors in the following comment:

I think strong leadership is crucial. That’s what I truly believe. Strong leadership that is shared with other people in the school so that teachers feel empowered too. I think when you have a culture like that, they know what needs to be done. They make sure it gets done. The right people are in the right places. I think the whole idea of meeting, sitting, talking with teachers, being in classrooms—the schools where that happens all the time, are schools that are moving. They’re working. Not to say the other schools aren’t working, but I think a strong leader is key, and I think teachers within the building are key.

**Collaborative Culture.** Distributed leadership and high levels of communication form the foundation for effective collaboration. Another interviewee described the importance of a collaborative culture to successful implementation:

We see the implementation going more smoothly in schools that had practices of working together and collaborating before. As new resources come or new expectations come, they have past practice on what to do to change something or learn something new…. They have a way of working together.

Essential for a collaborative culture, partnership based on mutual trust between the schools and district also was cited as a key facilitator of implementation. This was emphasized by a respondent who said:

The other lever I would say is building a level of trust—having a level of trust that permeates the system—that we are all working towards this together, that we’re not out to point fingers at anybody, that we’re not out to be punitive, that we’re not out to create panic. We’re not out to overwhelm. We are there to work through these issues together in a collaborative process for the best interest of the students who come through our doors each and every day.

**Ongoing Support.** After teams are formed and leaders have established implementation as a priority, providing ongoing support and professional development to teachers is also important. This increases their capacity to implement the frameworks and provides assurance that the standards are here to stay and teacher transitioning to the standards is critical. As one respondent explained regarding teacher buy-in and support:

Even if teachers give pushback, they like direction. They like to know that somebody is supporting them and doing this. Not everybody likes what it is, so the message has to be that we’re all in this together.

### Challenges

Respondents identified several challenges in implementing the frameworks. They include issues of a logistical, cultural, and pedagogical nature. Some interviewees suggested that these challenges can be overcome with “engaged, constructive, and courageous leadership.”

**Inadequate Time.** Respondents said that not having adequate time is a serious issue, especially when “so much is changing and teachers are exhausted.” They noted that teachers need additional time to plan new lessons, align the frameworks with other initiatives, develop resources and assessments, and revise what they are doing based on data and feedback. One district leader talked about this challenge in light of coming assessments aligned to the new English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks:

I think the sense of urgency and not knowing what the next assessment is going to look like have been huge challenges—knowing that it’s coming. We don’t want any child sitting in front of an assessment and feeling he cannot succeed. That keeps us up at night. That’s created that sense of urgency. If we had another year, I think it would’ve been great. The content would be better developed if we had more time. I’m not sure this is because a glut of content knowledge is missing, or if it just appears that way because we’re trying to get so much in so quickly.

**Shifting to Collaborative Planning and Standards-Based Instruction.** Collaboration among teachers was described as a challenge. The frameworks present a shift from considerable teacher autonomy in planning and delivering instruction to more collaborative procedures and expectations, which is difficult for some teachers. Also difficult for some teachers is letting go of textbooks or specific programs, some of them central to certain federal grant initiatives, and adopting standards-driven planning and instruction (i.e., using guides rather than texts).

**Teachers Not Having Adequate Content Knowledge.** School and district respondents were concerned that some teachers had insufficient content knowledge to teach with the required level of rigor demanded by the frameworks. One district administrator said most mathematics teachers in her district do not “have the level of content knowledge they need to teach these standards and teach them well.” This is, in part, because of the way teachers learned and have traditionally taught mathematics, seeing mathematics as a “list of rules and procedures” to be checked off rather than concept based and interconnected. Now teachers have to teach for conceptual understanding as well as procedural understanding, and many are “learning this themselves as they are trying to teach it.”

**Teachers Not Having Adequate Pedagogical Knowledge.** Related to gaps in content knowledge, respondents also spoke about inadequacies of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge. They said many teachers have limited knowledge of and experience with pedagogical techniques that will shift the intellectual work of classrooms from themselves to their students and push students “to talk about what’s going on and why they think this and how they think it and [to offer] evidence and details.” Respondents also mentioned that teachers will need increasing support in learning to differentiate instruction and using data to diagnose student learning gaps.

# Conclusion

As the first phase of a three-phase study, this examination focuses on organizational supports and infrastructure at the district and school levels related to the implementation of the 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics*. Through district- and school-level interviews, the purpose of the Phase 1 study is to identify structures and organizational practices that respondents perceive to support implementation of the curriculum frameworks. The interview sample included six districts and 12 schools within these districts (two schools per district).

## Summary of Phase 1 Findings

Table 2 is a summary of Phase 1 findings described in this report. The findings reflect the views and opinions of the district and school personnel interviewed in this phase.

Table 2. Summary of Phase 1 Findings

| Topic | Phase 1 Findings |
| --- | --- |
| Implementation Plan and Rollout | * All districts in the Phase 1 sample began the implementation of the frameworks with awareness sessions designed to inform school staff about the frameworks and the district’s broad strategy and timeline to reach full implementation.
* Most of the districts in the Phase 1 sample are implementing the English language arts and literacy and the mathematics frameworks simultaneously across elementary through high school grades. This allows the district and school staff to have shared experiences with and conversations about the frameworks. Districts implement across subject areas and grade levels to prepare students and teachers for the upcoming assessments aligned to the new English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks.
* The Phase 1 districts shared similar stages in their implementation process, beginning with needs assessments and continuing with the work of analyzing the standards, implementing the standards in the school, and revising the standards based on teacher experience.
 |
| Leadership | * At both the district and school levels, leadership did not rest with a single individual but typically was distributed among several individuals or across a team that commonly included curriculum coordinators for English language arts and literacy and mathematics, other administrators, and teachers.
* The implementation of the standards in the Phase 1 sample is driven by the district, which has leaders and leadership teams that provide direct support and guidance to schools.
* School-level leaders make sure the frameworks are implemented consistently and have established teams in a way that gives teachers a voice.
 |
| Communication | * A key message delivered by district leaders is that transitioning to the frameworks is difficult, will take a long time, and will be a major instructional shift from what schools do currently.
* Allowing teachers time to learn and avoiding “panic mode” are essential for implementation to progress.
 |
| Capacity Building | * Train-the-trainer models of professional development were used to build teachers’ knowledge of the frameworks and their capacity to implement them in the classroom.
 |
| Collaboration | * District design teams consisted of teachers from all or most schools and grade levels, which ensured teacher voice in critical tasks such as the development of resources and also ensured that schools had informed teachers who could support implementation in their schools.
* Principals said teacher teams dedicated to the frameworks were critical venues for professional learning and implementation.
 |
| Instructional Support | * School instructional coaches are a primary strategy for communication in the building and between the districts and schools. In addition, they identify challenges teachers encounter and monitor implementation.
* Although assessments aligned to the new English language arts and literacy and mathematics frameworks were viewed as a coming challenge, in some districts, these and benchmark assessments aligned to the frameworks were considered to be drivers of implementation.
 |
| Alignment With Other Initiatives | * Districts and schools are facing numerous major initiatives that they find overwhelming and unaligned with one another.
 |
| ESE Support | * District personnel cited lack of guidance from ESE, and some perceived that there were no firm timelines for implementation. On the other hand, respondents from schools and districts found the ESE model curriculum units, guides, and other materials to be helpful but not complete. As such, districts are working on their own materials and likely “reinventing the wheel.”
 |
| Facilitators of Implementation | * Strong and distributed leadership in districts and schools
* Collaborative culture, allowing for partnership based on mutual trust
* Ongoing support and professional development for teachers
 |
| Challenges to Implementation | * Not enough time for teachers to carefully plan lessons, develop assessments, revise accordingly, and make connections to other initiatives
* Shifting to collaborative planning and standards-based instruction
* Teachers not having adequate content and pedagogical knowledge
 |

## Phase 2 Planning

The information collected in Phase 1 will inform the selection of a smaller sample of districts and schools for further study in Phase 2. In addition, the findings presented in this report will guide the development of data collection protocols that will assist AIR in expanding upon and clarifying existing themes; learning how implementation has progressed; identifying effective implementation practices in schools and classrooms; and developing a framework for implementation that assembles the implementation strategies, practices, and resources in a meaningful way.

# Appendix A: Phase 1 Interview Protocols

####

###### MA Curriculum Frameworks Implementation Study Phase 1:

#### District Leadership Interview

##### Status of Implementation

1. How would you assess the district’s overall implementation of the 2011 Curriculum Frameworks in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics?
	* Is the district where you want it to be at this point in time?
	* Is the district further along in implementing the ELA or math Frameworks?

##### Implementation Schedule

1. When did the district begin to make the transition to the new standards and what is the current district schedule for schools to implement the Frameworks?
* Did you begin with ELA and math simultaneously, or did you start with one subject then move to the other?
* Did you begin the transition with all grades simultaneously or did you start with one level (e.g., elementary, middle, high) and then move to the others?
	+ - (If the latter) Which school levels or grade clusters are/will be implementing first?
* How will this progress in the 2013-14 school year?
	+ - For ELA/literacy?
		- For math?

##### Implementation Leadership

1. What are general district and school responsibilities related to implementation of the new standards?
* What are the major tasks and responsibilities of instructional leaders in the Central Office (e.g., superintendents, curriculum coordinators)?
* What are the major tasks and responsibilities of the leadership in individual schools?
* Are there others who have significant responsibilities related to implementation of the Frameworks (e.g., coaches or school committee members)?
1. When the district communicates with the schools about implementing the Frameworks in ELA/literacy or mathematics, what is most emphasized?
* What do you think school leadership or implementation teams should be most aware of and/or focused on? (Consider content depth vs. breadth, understanding the shifts required, and new instructional approaches or practices.)
1. At the district level, are there committees or teams that are dedicated to the implementation of the ELA/literacy or math Frameworks?

If yes:

* + Who is on the team?
	+ How often do they meet?
	+ What are the team’s responsibilities?
	+ To what extent do the teams move implementation forward?
1. How has the district sustained implementation efforts when adverse conditions emerge, such as staff turnover or budget cuts?

##### Alignment of Materials and Assessments

1. How is alignment of instructional materials with ELA/literacy or math Frameworks (e.g., scope and sequence maps, lesson plans, textbooks) being accomplished and by whom?
* How were materials developed or selected? What criteria were considered?
* Are decisions about adoption of new materials made at the district or school level?
* Were any materials created by the district? If so, please describe how you went about the process of creating materials.
1. Has the district also considered the selection or development of new formative assessments in ELA/literacy and math? Please explain.

##### Instructional Methods

1. How do you think the ELA/literacy or math Frameworks will impact the instructional methods teachers use?
* How big a shift is this for teachers?

##### Alignment with Other Initiatives

1. To what extent does implementation of the Frameworks align with other key initiatives that are currently underway in the district (e.g., educator evaluation, RETELL, school turnaround, early education, college-and-career readiness)?
* What are these initiatives?
* How are they aligned with implementation of the Frameworks?

##### Professional Development for School Leadership

1. Have principals and members of school leadership teams been provided professional development related to ***leadership*** for implementing the Frameworks?

If yes:

* + What did the PD cover?
	+ Who provided the PD?
	+ Are any of these PD opportunities ongoing?
1. Has the professional development for school leaders been sufficient or is more needed? If more is needed, describe what topics and type of professional development is needed.

##### Professional Development for Teachers

1. What kinds of professional development and support related to Framework implementation are teachers in your district getting? (Consider content knowledge, understanding the Frameworks and the shifts required, and new instructional approaches or practices.)
2. Who are the main providers of support to teachers in your district as they try to make sense of and implement the Frameworks in their classrooms? (Consider district or school-level coaches, consultants, resource teachers, or other specially trained staff.)
3. Is there a role for school-based collaborative learning teams (e.g., professional learning communities) that focus on the Frameworks and their implementation? If so, please describe.
	* In what ways, if at all, do such teams differ for ELA/literacy and mathematics?
4. Do you think teachers in the district have adequate knowledge and support to implement the Frameworks?
	* What more do you think teachers need that is currently not provided?
		+ For ELA/literacy
		+ For mathematics

##### ESE Support

1. What supports or resources from ESE have been most useful to the district and/or schools in implementing the Frameworks (e.g., resources on the ESE website, presentations at conferences and meetings, statewide networks, summer PD institutes, C&I or STEM Annual Summits, participation in the model curriculum unit project, PARCC Fellows, grants, staff advice)?
2. In what ways do you think ESE support might be strengthened? (Consider professional development, resources, communication, webinars, website, and networks.)

##### Regional Provider Support

1. What supports or resources from regional providers have been most useful to the district and/or schools in implementing the Frameworks?
	* District and School Assistance Centers
	* Readiness Centers
	* Collaboratives
	* Other
2. In what ways, if any, do you think support from regional providers might be strengthened?

##### External Context

1. Are there factors in your community, the state, or the nation that positively influence, either directly or indirectly, Frameworks implementation in your district? Please explain.

##### Assessing Implementation

1. How prepared are the district’s schools for full implementation of the ELA/literacy and math standards in the 2013-14 school year?
2. What has been the strongest lever that has facilitated implementation of the Frameworks in your district?
	* In ELA/literacy
	* In mathematics
3. What have been the biggest challenges to implementation of the Frameworks in your district?
* In ELA/literacy
* In mathematics
1. How do you think schools that are successfully implementing the Frameworks differ from less successful schools?

##### Final Thoughts

1. Is there anything you would like to add about implementation of the Curriculum Frameworks in your district?

***Thank you very much for your comments and time.***

###### MA Curriculum Frameworks Implementation Study Phase 1:

#### School Leadership Interview

##### Status of Implementation

1. How would you assess the district’s/school’s overall implementation of the 2011 Curriculum Frameworks in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics?
	* Is the district/school where you want it to be at this point in time?

##### Implementation Leadership

1. At this district/school, is there a committee or team that is dedicated to the implementation of the ELA/literacy or math Frameworks?

If yes:

* + Who is on the team?
	+ How often do they meet?
	+ What are the team’s responsibilities?
	+ To what extent do the teams move implementation forward?
1. How has the district/school sustained implementation efforts when adverse conditions emerge, such as staff turnover or budget cuts?

##### Alignment of Materials and Assessments

1. How is alignment of instructional materials with ELA/literacy or math Frameworks (e.g., scope and sequence maps, lesson plans, textbooks) being accomplished and by whom?
* How were materials developed or selected? What criteria were considered?
* Are decisions about adoption of new materials made at the district or school level?
1. Has the district/school also considered the selection or creation of new formative assessments in ELA/literacy and math? Please explain.

##### Instructional Methods

1. How do you think the Frameworks will impact the instructional methods teachers use?
* How big a shift is this for teachers?

##### Alignment with Other Initiatives

1. To what extent does implementation of the Frameworks align with other key initiatives that are currently underway in the district/school (e.g., educator evaluation, RETELL, school turnaround, early education, college-and-career readiness)?
* What are these initiatives?
* How are they aligned with implementation of the Frameworks?

#####

##### Professional Development for School Leadership

1. Have school leaders been provided professional development related to ***leadership*** for implementing the Frameworks?

If yes:

* + What did the PD cover?
	+ Who provided the PD?
	+ Are any of these PD opportunities ongoing?
1. Has the professional development for school leaders been sufficient or is more needed? If more is needed, describe what topics and type of professional development is needed.

##### Professional Development for Teachers

1. What kinds of professional development and support related to Framework implementation are teachers in your district/school getting? (Consider content knowledge, understanding the Frameworks and the shifts required, and new instructional approaches or practices.)
2. Is there a role for school-based collaborative learning teams (e.g., professional learning communities) that focus on the Frameworks and their implementation? If so, please explain.
3. Do you think teachers in the district/school have adequate knowledge and support to implement the ELA/literacy or mathematics Frameworks?
* What more do you think teachers need that is not currently provided?

##### Coach Role

1. What are your core activities as a coach to support implementation of the Curriculum Frameworks?
2. How does the district/school support you in your role as a coach?

##### ESE Support

1. What supports or resources from ESE have been most useful to you as you work with teachers to implement the Frameworks (e.g., resources on the ESE website, presentations at conferences and meetings, statewide networks, summer PD institutes, C&I or STEM Annual Summits, participation in the model curriculum unit project, PARCC Fellows, grants, staff advice)?
2. In what ways do you think ESE support might be strengthened? (Consider professional development, resources, communication, webinars, website, and networks.)

##### Regional Provider Support

1. What supports or resources from regional providers have been most useful to you as you work with teachers to implement the Frameworks?
	* District and School Assistance Centers
	* Readiness Centers
	* Collaboratives
	* Other
2. In what ways, if any, do you think support from regional providers might be strengthened?

##### External Context

1. Are there factors in your community, the state, or the nation that positively influence, either directly or indirectly, Frameworks implementation in your district/school? Please explain.

##### Assessing Implementation

1. How prepared is the district/school for full implementation of the ELA/literacy and math standards in the 2013-14 school year?
2. What has been the strongest lever that has facilitated implementation of the Frameworks in your district/school? Please explain.
3. What have been the biggest challenges to implementation of the Frameworks in your district/school?
4. How do you think schools that are successfully implementing the Frameworks differ from less successful schools?

##### Final Thoughts

1. Is there anything you would like to add about implementation of the Frameworks in your district/school or your role as a coach?

***Thank you very much for your comments and time.***

###### MA Curriculum Frameworks Implementation Study Phase 1:

#### District/School Coach Interview

##### Status of Implementation

1. How would you assess the school’s overall implementation of the 2011 Curriculum Frameworks in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics?
	* Is the school where you want it to be at this point in time?
	* Is the school further along in implementing the ELA or math Frameworks?

##### Implementation Schedule

1. When did the school begin to make the transition to the new standards and what is the current schedule for the school to implement the Frameworks?
* Did you begin with ELA and math simultaneously, or did you start with one subject then move to the other?
* Did you begin with all grades simultaneously or did you start with certain grades and then move to the others?
	+ - [If the latter] Which grade clusters are/will be implementing first?
* How will this progress in the 2013-14 school year?
	+ - For ELA/literacy?
		- For math?

##### Implementation Leadership

1. What are general district and school responsibilities related to implementation of the new Frameworks and standards?
* What are the major tasks and responsibilities of instructional leaders in the Central Office (e.g., superintendents, curriculum coordinators)?
* What are the major tasks and responsibilities of the leadership in this school?
	+ Are there others who have significant responsibilities related to implementation of the Frameworks (e.g., coaches or school committee members)?
1. At this school, is there a committee or team that is dedicated to the implementation of the ELA/literacy or math Frameworks?

If yes:

* + Who is on the team?
	+ How often do they meet?
	+ What are the team’s responsibilities?
	+ To what extent do the teams move implementation forward?
1. How has the school sustained implementation efforts when adverse conditions emerge, such as staff turnover or budget cuts?

##### Alignment of Materials and Assessments

1. How is alignment of instructional materials with ELA/literacy or math Frameworks (e.g., scope and sequence maps, lesson plans, textbooks) being accomplished and by whom?
* How were materials developed or selected? What criteria were considered?
* Are decisions about adoption of new materials made at the district or school level?
1. Has the school also considered the selection or development of new formative assessments in ELA/literacy and math? Please explain.

##### Instructional Methods

1. How do you think the ELA/literacy or math Frameworks will impact the instructional methods teachers use?
* How big a shift is this for teachers?

##### Alignment with Other Initiatives

1. To what extent does implementation of the Frameworks align with other key initiatives that are currently underway in the school (e.g., educator evaluation, RETELL, school turnaround, early education, college-and-career readiness)?
* What are these initiatives?
* How are they aligned with implementation of the Frameworks?

##### Professional Development for School Leadership

1. Have the principal and members of school leadership team(s) been provided professional development related to ***leadership*** for implementing the Frameworks?

If yes:

* + What did the PD cover?
	+ Who provided the PD?
	+ Are any of these PD opportunities ongoing?
1. Has the professional development for school leaders been sufficient or is more needed? If more is needed, describe what topics and type of professional development is needed.

##### Professional Development for Teachers

1. What kinds of professional development and support related to Framework implementation are teachers in your school getting? (Consider content knowledge, understanding the Frameworks and the shifts required, and new instructional approaches or practices.)
2. Who are the main providers of support to teachers in your school as they try to make sense of and implement the Frameworks in their classrooms? (Consider district or school-level coaches, consultants, resource teachers, or other specially trained staff.)
3. Is there a role for school-based collaborative learning teams (e.g., professional learning communities) that focus on the Frameworks and their implementation? If so, please describe.
	* In what ways, if at all, do such teams differ for ELA/literacy and mathematics?
4. Do you think teachers in the school have adequate knowledge and support to implement the Frameworks?
	* What more do you think teachers need that is currently not provided?
		+ For ELA/literacy
		+ For mathematics

##### ESE Support

1. What supports or resources from ESE have been most useful to the school in implementing the Frameworks (e.g., resources on the ESE website, presentations at conferences and meetings, statewide networks, summer PD institutes, C&I or STEM Annual Summits, participation in the model curriculum unit project, PARCC Fellows, grants, staff advice)?
2. In what ways do you think ESE support might be strengthened? (Consider professional development, resources, communication, webinars, website, and networks.)

##### Regional Provider Support

1. What supports or resources from regional providers have been most useful to the school in implementing the Frameworks?
	* District and School Assistance Centers
	* Readiness Centers
	* Collaboratives
	* Other
2. In what ways, if any, do you think support from regional providers might be strengthened?

##### External Context

1. Are there factors in your community, the state, or the nation that positively influence, either directly or indirectly, Frameworks implementation in your school? Please explain.

##### Assessing Implementation

1. How prepared is the school for full implementation of the ELA/literacy and math standards in the 2013-14 school year?
2. What has been the strongest lever that has facilitated implementation of the Frameworks in your school? Please explain.
	* In ELA/literacy
	* In mathematics
3. What have been the biggest challenges to implementation of the Frameworks in your school?
* In ELA/literacy
* In mathematics
1. How do you think schools that are successfully implementing the Frameworks differ from less successful schools?

##### Final Thoughts

1. Is there anything you would like to add about implementation of the Curriculum Frameworks in your school?

***Thank you very much for your comments and time.***

# Appendix B: ESE District Implementation Surveys

##### Background

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) surveyed district-level curriculum directors and coordinators across the state to:

1. Gather feedback about where districts were in the process of implementing the 2011 *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics*
2. Identify areas where and how ESE could support districts in the rollout of the 2011 frameworks through full implementation.

The ESE implementation surveys were first administered at the start of the 2012–13 school year, through the online survey tool SurveyGizmo. Participation was voluntary. Not all questions were required to be answered. Some questions permitted multiple responses, and some questions were open ended. There were 104 respondents comprising district curriculum directors or their appointees.

ESE plans to administer the surveys at regular intervals in order to assess districts’ progress toward full implementation.

##### **Findings (as of Fall 2012)**[[9]](#footnote-9)

* About three quarters of the responding districts are using leadership teams or have completed the formation of such teams.
* More than one third of the districts reported using written implementation plans or having finished developing a plan. About half of responding districts reported being in the process of developing a plan.
* Between about two thirds and three quarters of responding districts have conducted awareness sessions on the framework for all teachers in all grade spans.
* Almost half of the districts are drafting curriculum maps.
* More districts have completed the alignment in mathematics (about 5–21percent) than in English language arts and literacy (7–9 percent). Approximately three quarters of districts are still in the process of aligning materials in both mathematics and English language arts and literacy.
* Districts are further along in the implementation process in mathematics than in English language arts and literacy—full implementation in all grades in mathematics is 26–41 percent of districts versus 15–24 percent of districts in English language arts and literacy.
* Roughly one third of responding districts said that they provided professional development courses on the new framework for all teachers in all grades.
* Between one half and two thirds of responding districts said that they provided support for all teachers in all grades through coaching or professional learning communities.
1. Prior to Phase 1, ESE developed and administered English language arts and literacy and mathematics implementation surveys in fall 2012 and will administer these surveys annually to analyze districts’ implementation progress over time. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Semistructured interviews include an outline of the topics or issues to be covered, but the interviewer is free to vary the wording and order of the questions. This allows for a more flexible, exploratory, and conversational type
of interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One district originally selected, Stoughton, declined to participate in the study. In consultation with ESE, the research team chose West Springfield instead. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Frameworks covered depended on who was interviewed. In most districts and schools, English language arts and mathematics content specialists, coordinators, or coaches were interviewed. In other districts and schools, district or school leaders talked generally about implementation of the new standards as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. PARCC is a 20-state consortium working together to develop next-generation K–12 assessments in English and mathematics. Massachusetts is a Governing State in the PARCC consortium. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It is important to note that, although the implementation of new standards, new assessments, and the educator evaluation system were all conceived together by ESE as a comprehensive system in the state’s Race to the Top application, the RETELL initiative was a separate entity, funded through a state legislative line item beginning in fiscal year 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In fact, ESE published guidance in 2011, specifying that districts were expected to fully implement the frameworks by the beginning of the 2013–14 school year. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In the 2012–13 school year, four model curriculum units had been publicly released to all districts, and only 35 draft model units had been released to the state’s Race to the Top districts, not enough to guide teachers through an entire school year of instruction. In September 2013, 34 curriculum units, revised to reflect teacher feedback from the previous year’s pilot, were published for use by any district within and beyond Massachusetts on the state’s public website, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/>. ESE projected that a total of 90 units would be published in the 2013–14 school year. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. All findings are for both mathematics and English language arts and literacy unless otherwise noted. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)