



# SHARPENING MICHIGAN'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TOOLS





**MICHIGAN**  
Department of  
**Education**



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Michigan Department of Education

Funding for this publication was provided by the Michigan Department of Education, ESEA Title I, and MI Excel.

# We are all dedicated

to improving student achievement in Michigan. It is the duty of every citizen, leader, educator, and parent to ensure that all students have the opportunities they need and deserve to become career- and college-ready. The welfare of our communities, our economy, and our democracy demands no less.

Our efforts to date have not delivered the educational outcomes that each and every student deserves. Our intervention tools must be sharper if we are to generate the type of swift, effective performance growth that we know is possible.

In 2011, the US Department of Education offered states an opportunity to think differently about their educational improvement efforts. States were told that some federal education mandates could be waived in return for significant positive changes in current school practice and support. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and several of its partners responded by thoughtfully re-visioning the delivery of MI Excel, the Statewide System of Support.

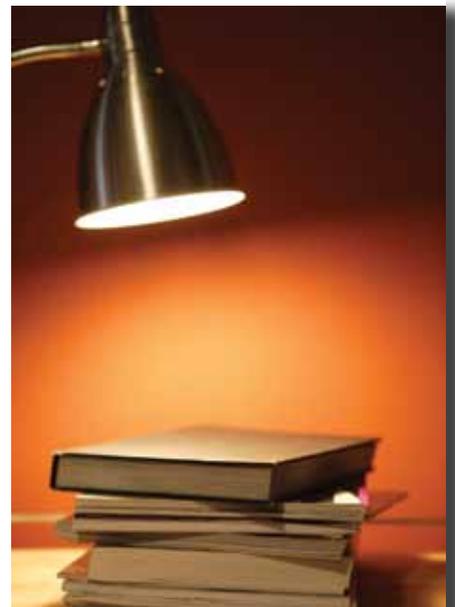
The new design is guided by the conviction that student achievement

can and does increase demonstrably when:

- Schools understand the needs of the students they serve.
- Schools are given the support they need to ensure teaching and learning are customized to the needs of their learners.
- Struggling schools are given additional district support for their improvement work (e.g., extra flexibility, additional resources for struggling students, and support for the adult learning needed to improve teaching and learning practices).

This approach is focused and diagnostic. It accommodates learner needs and local context while setting high standards for student growth and achievement.

Schools that take part in MI Excel will be given the support they need to consistently deliver on our state's promise of excellence and equity for each and every learner.



# Dear Michigan student,

Our state's system of public education has been created with your future in mind. We—your teachers, principals, administrators, school board members, and public officials—are working together to ensure that you get what you need to be successful in life. We are all accountable to you.

The good news is that many schools in our state are doing well. However, there are too many schools (including some of our highest performers) with groups of students who are not getting the support they need. There are also some extremely low-performing schools with systems that are failing their teachers, disappointing their communities, and—worst of all—shortchanging you. Our statewide achievement gap for some student groups, like African-American students and students with disabilities, is still considerable and must be minimized and eliminated.

We must ensure Michigan educators have the support and structure required to provide you with a quality education, no matter where you live or what you dream of becoming. In this document, you can find the very specific strategies we'll be using to help your school improve.

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*You are unique. So is your school. The people of Michigan are going to make sure you both get what you need to be successful.*

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Our new system of support will help schools give you a strong foundation as you move toward the future you deserve. We are just as passionate about your future as you are and look forward to seeing all that you're capable of becoming.



Mike Flanagan  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



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# Shared Beliefs

*During the next few years, an unprecedented amount of work will be undertaken as we collectively work to ensure every Michigan learner receives the education he or she deserves.*

**As we prepare our revised system for launch, it is important that all participating educators and specialists come together around a common set of non-negotiable beliefs.**

**Under MI Excel, Priority schools that receive Title I funds will work with intervention specialists committed to the following core ideas:**

- Each and every child can learn at high levels.
- Regardless of the challenges schools may have with student, parent, or community characteristics, schools are ultimately dedicated to delivering strong achievement results.
- The work of improving schools is both imperative and urgent.
- We must honor and build upon the skills, knowledge, and experiences of the professionals working in our schools and districts.
- MI Excel provides guidance and assistance but does not engage in the real work of change. Schools and districts will always bear the primary responsibility of improving themselves.
- Substantial, lasting improvement comes from the coherent, ongoing use of professional learning and discussion, data-based inquiry, and targeted support.
- MI Excel will maintain the highest standards of excellence, care, competence, and reliability.



# A Redesigned MI Excel

Michigan is offering educators the strategies they need to provide every student with a strong learning experience. Thanks to the locally-based interventions incorporated into our MI Excel redesign, customized supports for schools are now available.

Excellence and equity are the twin underpinnings of our work to improve student achievement in Michigan. We hold ourselves deeply accountable for providing rigorous, effective learning opportunities to all children, from infancy to adulthood. Student learning is the center and aim of all we do.

In re-designing MI Excel, Michigan adhered to the following core principles:

- All means all. Every child has an innate capacity for learning, and we must meet the needs of each and every Michigan student with high-quality systems, tools, and resources. Our expectations for each learner must be consistently high.
- Michigan has a wealth of expertise that can be brought to bear. We must begin to coordinate our leaders with an eye toward continuous improvement for all.
- One-size-fits-all approaches are less effective than those that diagnose and treat specific concerns. If we get smart about our interventions, we can get faster, stronger results.
- We need to invent and incubate an array of teaching practices to ensure we meet the needs of all learners.
- Our school-level interventions must be grounded in data and professional dialogue, if we are to efficiently use all available resources and effectively address the needs of every student.
- Our teachers and administrators are talented professionals capable of accomplishing the task before them. We must ensure our district systems support their work effectively and give them the time, tools, and resources they need to meet the needs of their students.
- We must ensure our children are career- and college-ready. We define this as student preparation that is adequate to allow a student to pass first-year technical training and first-year college courses in core content areas without remediation. Our state is preparing students not just for the opportunities we know about today, but also for the intellectual challenges of the future.

### *Understanding school needs*

In order to align with its core principles and comply with federal requirements, Michigan has developed a system for identifying and allocating services to its schools. A process comparable to medical triage will help properly allocate support to schools where learners' unmet educational needs are greatest.

Beginning in 2012, Michigan is assessing the performance of its schools using a slightly modified "Top-to-Bottom" list. This list ranks schools from top (highest-performing) to bottom (lowest-performing) based on student achievement, improvement, and differences in achievement between the highest- and lowest-performing students within a school.

Our Top-to-Bottom list is generated and released each August. At the same time, three new categories of school performance are now identified, in accordance with federal requirements. Priority, Focus, and Reward schools are being grouped as follows:

- **Priority schools** are those in the bottom five percent of schools on the Top-to-Bottom list. These schools are required to create and implement reform plans. Additional supports are also provided to turn around their performance.
- **Focus schools** are identified as the ten percent of schools with the widest gaps in student achievement between



low-performing (lowest 30 percent of students) and high-performing (highest 30 percent of students) within the school. These schools also receive additional support to review their data and implement strategies to address these gaps.

- **Reward schools** are those that achieve high levels of performance, proficiency, or growth, or those that "beat the odds" in comparison to their comparable peers. These are the strongest performing schools in Michigan and, as such, they are eligible for special recognition.

### *Emphasis at the district level*

The redesigned MI Excel aims its interventions at the district level as well as the school level. Districts have powerful tools for change and should support the development of appropriate structures, systems, skills, and resources.

Moreover, districts are keenly aware of each building's strengths, weaknesses, context, and culture. Their involvement can assist with the customization and rapid deployment of school improvement strategies.

MI Excel therefore focuses on helping districts build and direct their capacity to support school improvement. Specialists and facilitators are trained and assigned to districts to help them identify barriers to student achievement, whether at the school or in the central office. Through data analysis and professional discussion, these specialists can support districts and schools as they identify key priorities and reallocate human and fiscal resources more effectively to match those priorities.

As shown on the following pages, MI Excel provides active support as districts and schools work together to identify and address barriers to the success of their students.

The path toward sustained improvement is ambitious but attainable. Using the strategies outlined in this document, we believe MI Excel can support schools and districts with performance challenges and achievement gaps as they work toward success for all learners.

*The use of categories and lists is just a starting point—we know there is a story behind every school.*



# Priority Schools

The task of improving Michigan's lowest-performing schools is not an easy one, but there are tens of thousands of students whose futures depend on our ability to accomplish this work.

Priority schools are those in the bottom five percent of schools on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. The work of improving these schools is both urgent and imperative.

MI Excel has been transformed into a highly customized system of support that can accommodate each Priority school's local context. Moreover, MI Excel fits into a broader system of reform and rapid turnaround that addresses the unique and challenging needs of Priority schools.

## *Structures and supports*

Priority Schools are placed under the supervision of the State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO) as a result of being identified as the lowest-performing five percent of schools in the state. Priority schools are required to submit redesign plans that include one of the four school intervention models identified by the federal government. The State School Reform/Redesign Office reviews and approves schools' redesign plans and provides technical assistance to Priority schools to support implementation of the plans. MI Excel provides additional resources to schools that receive Title I funds.



The State School Reform/Redesign District was created in 2010 and is under the leadership and general supervision of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Priority Schools that do not make satisfactory progress or have an approved plan may be placed in the State School Reform/Redesign District (SSRRD). Priority schools placed in the SSRRD are subject to the additional consequences including operation and management by the Educational Achievement Authority (EAA). The EAA was created to assume operation of the lowest-performing Michigan schools (i.e., those in the bottom five percent) that are not achieving satisfactory results on a redesign plan.

If the Priority school is a charter school, its authorizer may act to close the school.

## SRO Requirements & Timelines

All Priority schools must submit a reform/redesign plan that includes one of four federally defined intervention models:

- **Transformation** – The district addresses four specific areas: 1) developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, which includes replacing the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformational model; 2) implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies; 3) extending learning and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and 4) providing operating flexibility and sustained support.
- **Turnaround** – This includes, among other actions, replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the school's staff, adopting a new governance structure, and implementing a new or revised instructional program.
- **Restart** – The school district closes the school and reopens it under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an educational management organization selected through a rigorous review process. A restart school is required to enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.
- **School closure** – The district closes the school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other high-achieving schools in the district.

Each of the first two intervention models requires extended learning time for all students in all subjects, including enrichment time and professional learning time for staff.

Districts have 90 days to complete the initial submission of the reform/redesign plan for the Priority school. The SRO has 30 days from this date to review and approve appropriate plans, or provide feedback to disapproved plans. A revised plan must be submitted within 30 days of that feedback.

During the remainder of the school year, the Priority school may begin implementation, or begin making the required staffing changes and data collection to proceed.



**Title I funding requirements**

Priority schools that receive federal Title I dollars are required to use a portion of these funds to obtain additional support through MI Excel.

Districts with Priority schools must set aside 20 percent of their LEA Title I funds. These funds must be used to:

- Provide opportunities for students in the Priority school to attend other high quality schools in the region, and pay related transportation costs.
- Support increased learning time and/or additional help for English language learners and students with disabilities.

After these initial purposes have been fulfilled, the remainder of the district's set-aside must be used to fund other efforts related to improvement, including:

- Contracting with a local ISD/ESA for a School Improvement Review, which will give the school an external perspective on the processes that best support student achievement

- Culture/climate interventions as needed
- Providing daily or weekly time for teacher collaboration
- Professional learning on implementation of strategies aligned to its data-derived school improvement or reform/redesign plan

In addition to the district set-aside, a building-level set-aside of 10 percent is also required for Priority schools. This funding must be used to support one of the school-level interventions in the box below.

**Customized, intensive support**

MI Excel is focused on helping Title I districts build and redirect their capacity to support school improvement. Trained intervention specialists are assigned to districts to help them identify barriers to student achievement, whether at the school or in the central office. Through data analysis and discussion, these specialists support districts and schools as they do the hard work of identifying key priorities and reallocating human and fiscal resources more effectively to match those priorities.

Michigan State University employs and manages the work of the intervention specialists. AdvancED, Education Resource Strategies and Successline Inc. are also assisting MDE with program design and implementation.

MI Excel provides support as districts and Priority Schools work together to identify and address the key barriers to the success of their students.

**What a Priority school can expect**

Districts with more than one Priority school are assigned a lead intervention specialist, who meets with district personnel to learn about current efforts to improve the Priority school(s). The lead intervention specialist assigns one or more intervention specialists to work with the district and its school(s), in partnership with key district-assigned staff and an ISD-assigned School Improvement Facilitator. The intervention specialist then provides a robust "data wall" for local school and district leaders to consider. This data offers the groundwork for future team analysis and strategic development.

The specialist spends 30–50 days per academic year in the district, supporting districts and schools as they:

- Agree on the causes underlying key data elements.
- Identify both school- and district-level strategies to improve instructional quality and student learning, school culture and climate, and to address policies and practices to sustain these efforts.
- Select the appropriate reform/redesign model (if they have not already done so), as well as the appropriate detailed requirements and strategies to be implemented over the next year and throughout the term of the reform plan.
- Develop and agree on milestones of progress for both the district and school.
- Select appropriate targets for leading indicators of progress and implementation indicators that will be used by the School Reform Office to monitor progress in plan implementation.

**Building-Level Set-Aside Options**

Funds must be used for any of the following purposes, aligned with the building's needs:

- Option 1:** Procure professional learning on implementation of strategies aligned to the data-derived plans for improvement or reform/redesign, including adoption of rapid turnaround practices.
- Option 2:** Contract with a local ISD/ESA for a School Improvement Review
- Option 3:** Provide daily/weekly time for teacher collaboration
- Option 4:** Pursue culture/climate interventions, use of time analysis, or culturally responsive teaching interventions as needed



These efforts must take place over a short time to help the district and school develop the reform/redesign plan for submission to the SRO during the required timeframe. All of these take place during the initial year of designation as a Priority school (also known as Year One, or the “planning year” for Priority schools).

### *Supporting plan implementation*

Following the plan development and approval, the intervention specialist continues to have discussions and review data with the district. This support is designed to help the district and school work together to refine strategies for addressing the required turnaround efforts and goals. The intervention specialist can provide help in addressing district systems issues where necessary to boost school-level performance. The intervention specialist works throughout Year Two of implementation to help the district ensure its local reform efforts are moving forward effectively.

During the remaining two years of reform plan implementation (Years Three and Four), the intervention

specialist continues to work with the school and district to gather relevant data to update and refine the plan. If adequate progress is not being made despite full implementation of the plan, a transformation team may be utilized. This team is led by the intervention specialist and may include outside experts in needed areas such as human resources, finance, school law, curriculum, assessment, and other areas as needed.

Part of the function of the intervention specialist is to bring coherence to district support of each Priority school's improvement activities. The specialist can help coordinate an array of available supports to help maximize their effectiveness.

Intervention specialists are employees of Michigan State University, and their work is supported through federal Title I funds to the Michigan Department of Education. As such, these specialists are required to document the technical assistance work they are doing with the school, as well as provide information or clarification about local implementation of school reform/redesign plans. However, the specialists are not specifically

monitoring compliance efforts for the school, and will not, under any circumstances, be prescribing specific interventions or providing oversight recommendations to MDE. The primary role of these specialists is to facilitate supports for reform.

### *Other supports for Priority schools*

In addition to the data tools and an intervention specialist, MDE and MI Excel provides a number of resources and programs intended to assist schools in engaging in reform efforts. For Title I schools, these may include:

- Content coaches
- Professional learning
- Culture/climate interventions
- MDE-approved restructuring model from outside vendor
- Technical assistance with specialized tools such as the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum or other efforts.
- Site visits from educational consultants to engage in data review, planning, training, and other professional learning or school reform planning efforts.

The following supports are available for non-Title I and Title I schools alike:

- Networking meetings to allow schools engaged in reform efforts to collaborate and share ideas and resources.
- Online professional learning tools including “courses” on topics of teaching and learning and systems-related school improvement and reform efforts.

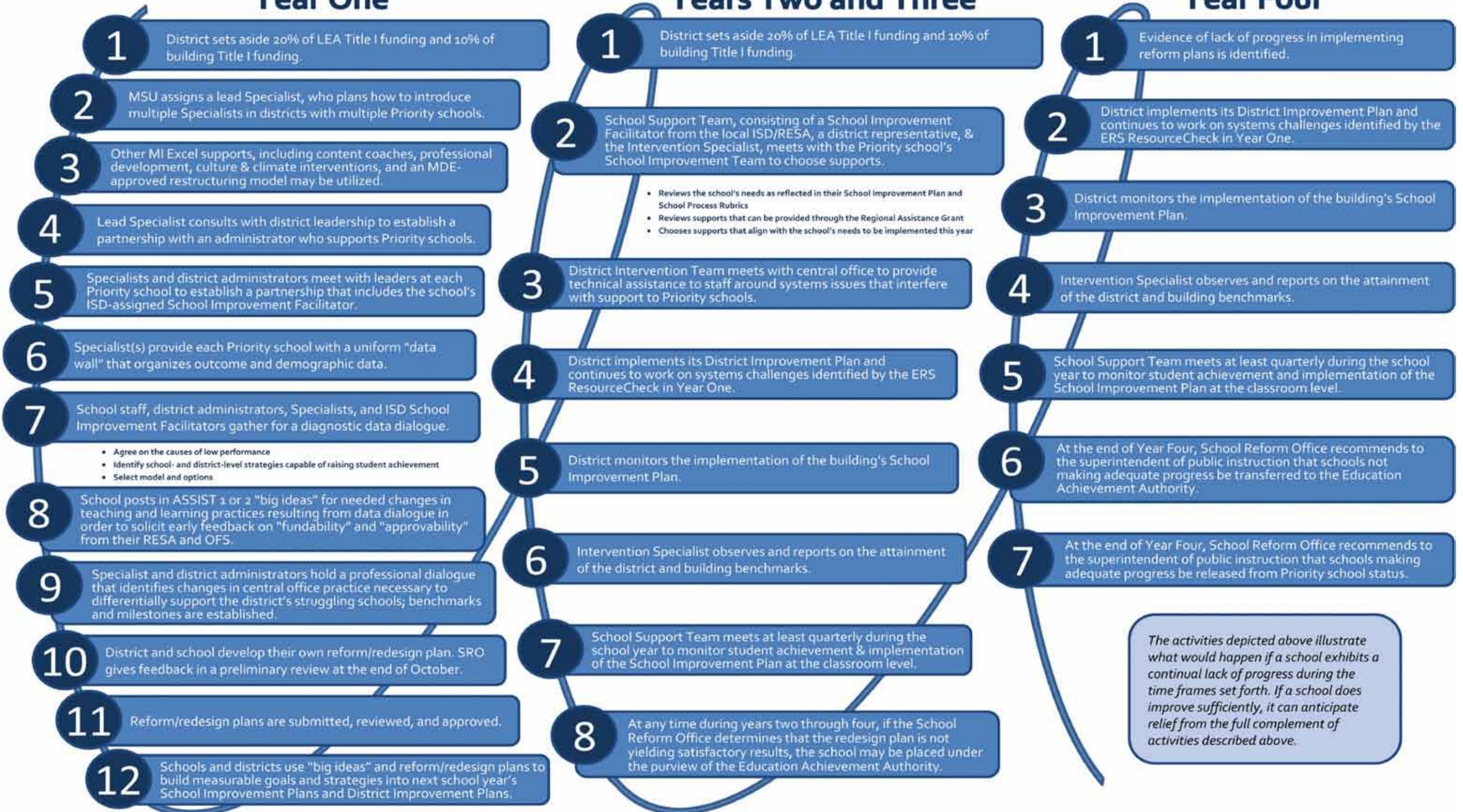
***Professional discussion is critical to building future success and sustaining achievement over time.***

# Priority School Activities

## Year One

## Years Two and Three

## Year Four



*The activities depicted above illustrate what would happen if a school exhibits a continual lack of progress during the time frames set forth. If a school does improve sufficiently, it can anticipate relief from the full complement of activities described above.*



# Focus Schools

Focus schools may be providing a very high-quality education for a majority of their students but still have a disproportionately large gap between high and low achievers. This means that lower-performing students aren't getting the support they need.

Focus schools are designated as schools with the largest gaps in student results (as identified by statewide assessments) between high- and low-achieving students within a school. This calculation takes each building's assessed gaps in every core subject (mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies) and combines them into a standardized average gap for all students in the school.\*

All Focus schools must close their achievement gaps by developing and implementing strategies to support students in the bottom 30 percent. Title I Focus schools that are not able to close gaps over multiple years will have increased requirements for use of Title I funding.

If a school that qualifies as a Focus school based on its achievement gap is also a Priority school, it will be designated a Priority school and be required to address those requirements. Priority school designations outweigh Focus school designations and requirements.



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\*The number of special education students a school is educating should not impact the achievement gap, as these students may use one of the several alternate assessments offered by Michigan, and these are only compared to other students using the same assessment. In other words, there are no "apples to oranges" comparisons that affect a school's designation as a Focus school.



### *Why do these gaps exist?*

There are many different reasons for achievement gaps, ranging from imprecise data use to a real and meaningful lack of knowledge about how to most effectively address the unique needs of some student populations. Strong teaching may have been chiefly defined in “typical” settings, and differentiated instruction targeted at specific populations requires new thought and innovation.

Moreover, there are some districts that have high-performing schools with large achievement gaps as a result of the deliberate juxtaposition of two student populations. These schools are able to demonstrate strong results with both high and low achievers (for example, successful assimilation of refugee students into a general population). However, the high gaps in these schools will remain indefinitely due to local population changes (for example, of fresh populations of immigrant students each year) or other strategic reasons.

Because there are so many reasons for these achievement gaps, the need for a differentiated system of working with schools becomes more critical. MI Excel is now flexible enough to accommodate the realities of all Focus schools.

### *Structures and supports*

MI Excel has been carefully designed to move into a next-generation system of professional problem-solving, targeted strategies, and local improvement that benefits all learners. Because it is locally based and data-driven, this new framework is particularly well positioned to address achievement gap concerns.

Unlike Priority schools, Focus schools do not fall under the explicit supervision of the School Reform Office within MDE. Rather, MDE will coordinate opportunities for dialogue and develop dynamic toolkits for these schools.

### *Title I Focus schools*

Focus schools that receive federal Title I dollars are required to use a portion of these funds to obtain additional support through MI Excel.\*

After the Focus school list is released, each district with a Focus school will be notified that it needs to set aside 10 percent of its Title I LEA funds. During the first year of Focus school identification, this district-level set-aside must be used to provide opportunities for students in the Focus school to attend other high-quality schools in the region, and pay related transportation costs.

After these initial purposes have been fulfilled, the remainder of the district's first-year Title I set-aside must be used to fund other efforts related to improvement. Either of the first two options depicted in the blue box (below) may be chosen. In addition, MDE will pay for a trained district improvement facilitator during this first year.

During the second year of identification, the district must set aside **15 percent** of its LEA Title I allocation for Option One or Two below. However, at this time Option Three also is required and is the district's financial responsibility.

In the third and fourth years of Focus school(s) identification, the district will set aside **20 percent** of its Title I allocation for one of the first two options below, plus Option Three.

## **District-Level Set-Aside Options**

**Option One:** Provide a differentiated system of support that includes extra supports for students with disabilities and English language learners if the school does not currently have one. If the school is implementing such a system, increase the scope or enhance the fidelity of its implementation.

**Option Two:** Job-embedded professional learning for staff aligned to the building's needs assessment.

**Option Three:** Contract with a district improvement facilitator to examine achievement gap data and identify strategies for addressing the gaps.

\*Non-Title I districts with Focus schools will have access to the same opportunities for support through MI Excel but must use other budget sources to procure them.

At the Focus school building level, a 10 percent Title I funding set-aside is required during each year of identification.\* These funds may be used for one or more of the following purposes, in alignment with the building's needs:

- Option A: Offer job-embedded professional learning on the implementation of a differentiated system of support and/or alternative instructional strategies for students in the lowest-performing student groups.
- Option B: Provide daily or weekly time for teacher collaboration.
- Option C: Contract for the administration of the Survey of Enacted Curriculum.
- Option D: Contract with the local regional education agency (ISD/RESA) or MDE for a School Improvement Review, which will give the school an external perspective on processes that best support student achievement.
- Option E: Provide job-embedded professional learning about implementing the Dynamic Learning Maps Common Core Essential Elements for teachers with MI-ACCESS students in the bottom 30 percent.
- Option F: Adopt culture and climate interventions as needed.

### *What a Focus school can expect*

Focus schools are identified in August of each school year. Following identification, a lead district improvement facilitator meets with district personnel with multiple Focus schools to learn about current efforts to improve the school(s). The lead facilitator assigns one or more

improvement facilitators to work with the district and its Focus school(s).

Each facilitator is in the district for 40 hours during the first year of identification. The facilitators are responsible for:

- Supporting and collaborating with districts as they address school-level gaps.
- Reviewing school-level data.
- Leading and facilitating professional discussion with district-level staff about what district-level system changes are required to help schools narrow these gaps.
- Helping district leaders identify proven, research-based strategies for bringing about change.
- Acting as a resource for the district as improvement plans are developed, implemented and submitted to MDE for approval.
- Facilitating communications about ongoing change efforts.
- Observing and reporting results.

All district improvement facilitators are trained, employed, assigned, and evaluated by Michigan State University. They use strong, practical tools and resources that have proven effective in schools with similar populations.

Because district improvement facilitators are employees of MSU and are paid for by Title I funds through MDE, they are required to submit reports to both parties. Focus schools (and their districts) can expect to receive copies of all facilitator reports.



### *District toolkit*

MDE has developed a toolkit for districts with Focus schools. Part of this toolkit offers a needs assessment to help districts diagnose where they are not giving their schools adequate support for the processes that close student achievement gaps. This needs assessment is based on Education Resource Strategies's ResourceCheck tool.

MDE offers technical assistance to Title I districts on the use of this toolkit. These districts have one year to self-diagnose and work with the facilitator to implement changes in their supports to Focus schools based on the resources provided. If there are schools in the district that continue to be identified as Focus schools for a second school year, these districts must fund the district improvement facilitator out of their own Title I set-aside money.

\*Non-Title I Focus schools will have access to the same opportunities for support through MI Excel, but must use other budget sources to procure them.

In addition to the tools and resources already described, MDE and MI Excel will be providing a number of resources and programs intended to assist schools as they engage in reform efforts. These include:

- Networking meetings that allow schools engaged in reform efforts to collaborate and share ideas and resources.
- Online professional learning tools.
- Participation in the Michigan Superintendent's Dropout Challenge.

Focus school leaders also should be aware of opportunities provided through Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which offers support for children from birth to age five. Research shows that early learning interventions are extremely effective in overcoming obstacles to achievement, and can help address achievement gap issues in the long run.

### *"Good-Getting-Great"*

There are some high-performing schools with large achievement gaps that are unavoidable, even strategic. Whether the schools are experiencing new populations of immigrant students each year or including students with disabilities in unique ways, their gaps are unlikely to disappear.

We expect the facilitated professional discussion that takes place during these schools' first Focus Years to be flexible enough to conclude that this purposeful type of gap is reasonable. The appropriately customized path forward for these schools may be simply to continue as is. In these cases, we have

designed an exit path from the Focus School category called Good-Getting-Great (G-G-G) schools.

Good-Getting-Great schools can:

- Receive written Good-Getting-Great designation from the state superintendent. This designation can be made only upon submission of documentation from the facilitated professional discussion that the school meets eligibility requirements, as follows:
  - The school's overall achievement level is 75 percent or above.
  - The school's bottom 30 percent (though initially low-performing) is making rapid enough progress to achieve Safe Harbor status.
- Be removed from Years Two and Three Focus school lists, even though their overall achievement gap may warrant inclusion.
- Reconvene a facilitated professional discussion to examine the same diagnostic data before Year Four's list is

calculated in order to determine whether they continue to meet G-G-G eligibility requirements.

- Reconvene the professional discussion every two years thereafter to ensure appropriate attention is paid to all student populations.

The support system of comprehensive diagnostic data, facilitated professional discussion, and customized interventions can also identify the appropriate type of interventions and supports for other high-performing schools with large gaps. The school is still held accountable for its performance, but not all interventions require transformative strategies; some consist of maintaining what is working well while strengthening or deepening efforts with the particular low-performing population.

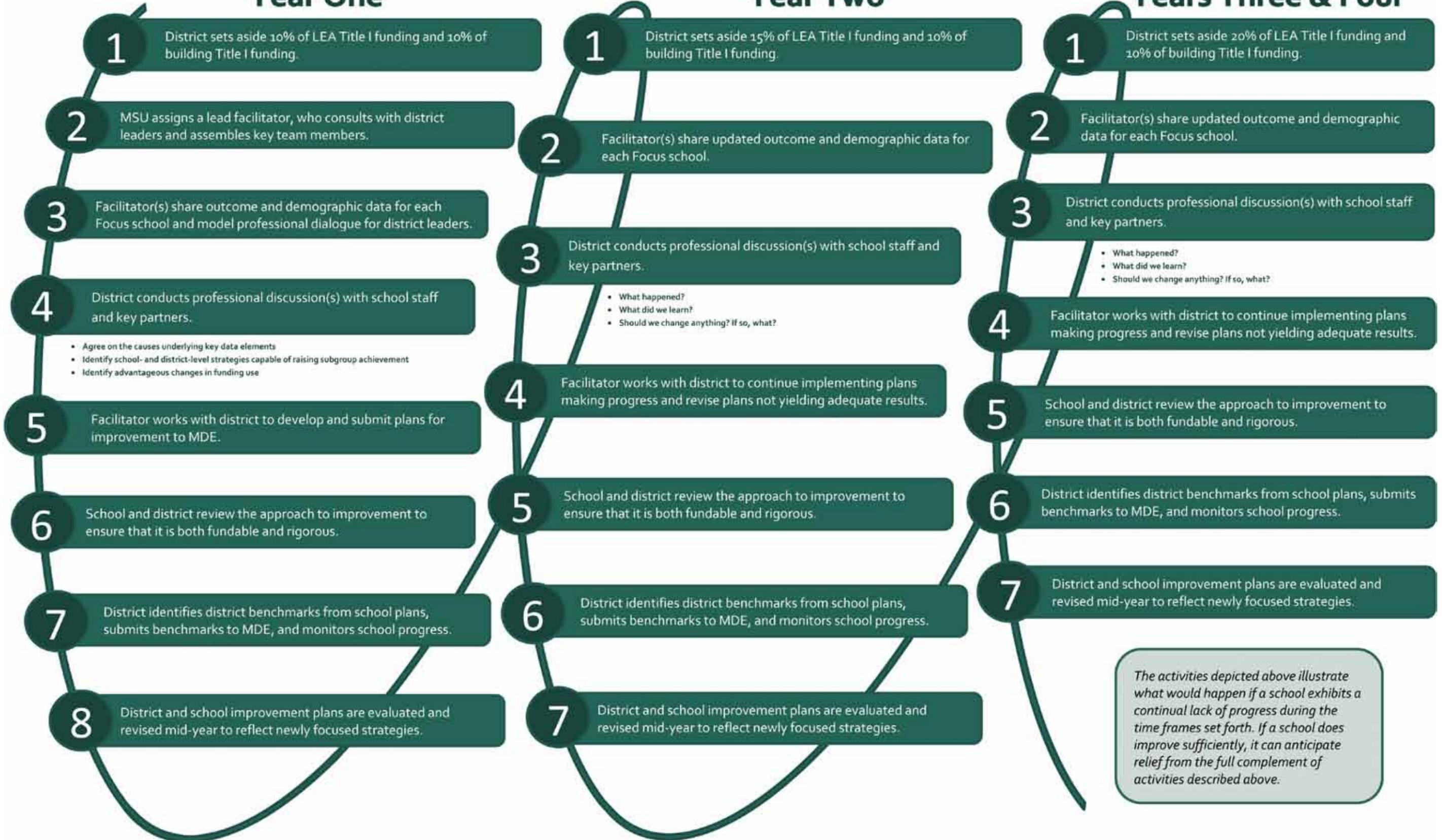


# Focus School Activities

## Year One

## Year Two

## Years Three & Four



*The activities depicted above illustrate what would happen if a school exhibits a continual lack of progress during the time frames set forth. If a school does improve sufficiently, it can anticipate relief from the full complement of activities described above.*

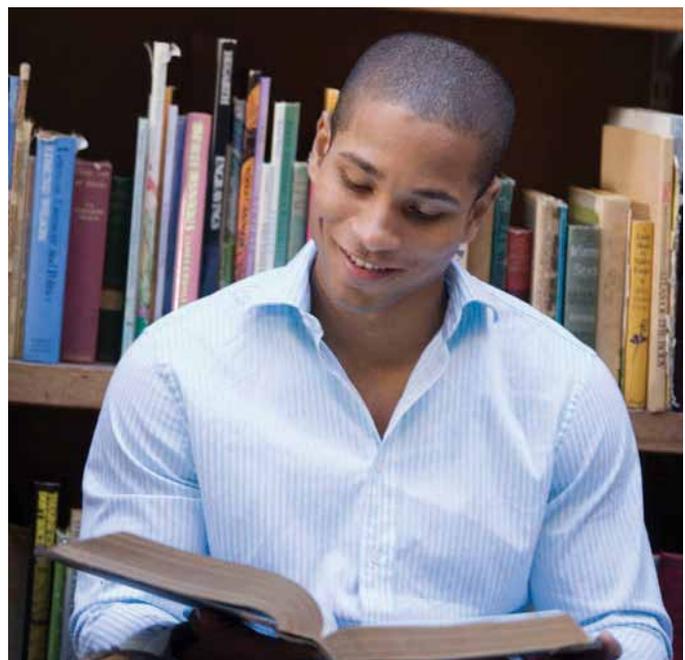


# Reward Schools

Reward schools include those schools that are achieving or improving at the highest levels throughout the state. The Reward school designation is intended to recognize these achievements and offer these schools as models for other schools throughout the state to follow.

Four designations are used to identify Reward schools in Michigan. These include:

- **Highest Performing**, as demonstrated by a school's inclusion in the top five percent of Michigan's Top-to-Bottom list.
- **Beating the Odds**, as shown by a school's outperformance of its most comparable peers. This measure comes from a school-to-school comparison that is done among groups of 30 schools. Each of the 30 schools used for this analysis are compared as relative equals due to the composition of these groups using demographics, location, grade level, and other means to compare schools with relatively similar student populations. The Beating the Odds schools are those that perform best among their school group using the Top-to-Bottom metric.
- **Exceeding 85%**, as demonstrated by having at least 85 percent of all students achieving at the "proficient" level for all subjects on state assessments.



- **Highest Progress**, as shown by achieving in the top five percent in terms of overall improvement rate.

If a school has been designated as either a Priority or Focus school during a given year, it is not eligible to be a Reward school during that year.

### *What a Reward school can expect*

Although financial incentives are currently not available to Reward schools, MDE has identified other types of incentives, as described below.

- Every school in Michigan is required by state statute to complete an online Annual Education Report (AER). The AER for Reward schools includes their Reward status and spotlights their high achievement.
- MDE provides local media recognition with information on Reward schools and encourage coverage telling each school's unique story.
- Reward schools have their practices highlighted at MDE's annual school improvement conference and receive other conference and event recognition through our partner organizations.
- Reward schools receive certificates and banners for display in buildings. The banner, for example, includes the year of their recognition and the criteria met (i.e., Beating the Odds, Highest performing, Highest Progress, or Exceeding 85%).
- As funding allows, the top 20–40 Reward schools designated as Beating the Odds are featured in their own audio or video documentary that highlights the practices used that resulted in this recognition. Educators from these schools are identified in the credits of these documentaries. These are placed on the MDE website and provided to the school for inclusion on its own website. Other similar schools are encouraged to review these documentaries and contact the school to learn how to implement effective practices leading to high achievement.
- Representatives from Reward schools are invited to attend networking meetings with demographically similar lower-performing schools. These sessions focus on sharing promising practices and practical experience.
- MDE also uses social networking applications to allow schools with similar issues to join in conversations, ask and answer each other's questions, and expand their learning communities to improve timely implementation.
- A number of Michigan colleges have committed to recognizing Reward schools by inviting students in grades 9–12 for college and career days and inviting students graduating from a Reward school to campus for special functions.
- All Title I–eligible Reward schools are invited to participate in Michigan's school-wide consolidation project, which offers increased flexibility in the use of federal grant funds.
- MDE is seeking corporate and philanthropic organization support for Reward school recognition. MDE seeks specific incentives such as financial support, material support (e.g., supplies, technology), or other resources.



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