



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Strategic Plan

Office of Planning, Research, and Delivery Systems
May 2015

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu

OUR GOAL AND OUR STRATEGIES TO GET THERE



The strong public school system that exists in Massachusetts today is the result of the Commonwealth's centuries-old belief in public schools. Since the first public school was opened in Boston until this very day, Massachusetts has been recognized as a national leader in public education. Indeed, this commitment to public education has brought us to a point where, compared to any standard both national and international, our students fare extremely well.

Massachusetts has achieved this position by focusing its efforts and resources in the right areas. We have set high standards and expectations for all, and we hold ourselves to those high standards and expectations. And while we celebrate our successes, we know full well that gaps and inequities persist, which gives us a constant sense of urgency that we can always be doing better on behalf of our nearly one million children.

Our goal is to ensure that **all** students have the requisite knowledge, skills, and experiences in the academic, workplace readiness, and personal/social domains to successfully navigate to completion an economically viable career pathway in a 21st century economy. Put more simply, we aim to prepare **all** students for success in the world that awaits them after high school.

To that end, Massachusetts has identified four core strategies. Rather than standing alone in isolation, these strategies intentionally overlap with one another in a coordinated system that drives continuous improvement for educators and students alike.



Massachusetts will **strengthen its standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments** by creating tools and resources to support the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, providing a support system for improving classroom practice and instruction, and organizing an assessment system that provides valuable, actionable information to all stakeholders.



Massachusetts will **develop all of its educators** by improving educator preparation programs, setting high standards for entry and persistence in a diverse workforce, and promoting a system of continuous improvement and development.



Massachusetts will **turn around the lowest performing schools and districts** by supporting schools in their implementation of improvement strategies with a variety of proven and context-specific interventions.



Massachusetts will **use data and technology to support teaching and learning** by providing data in an effective and efficient manner, producing relevant data and information, and promoting a culture of effective data-informed decision-making.



Massachusetts will **support students' social and emotional health** by providing high quality programming and promoting and building awareness of proven strategies in the non-academic domain.



HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS



K-12 Students

Increase in:

- ★ Four- and five-year graduation rates
- ★ Rigorous high school program of study (MassCore) completion rate
- ★ Reading, mathematics, and science performance on state, national, and international assessments
- ★ English language learner and special education performance on state, national, and international assessments
- ★ Achievement and growth in Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts
- ★ Student participation in career awareness, immersion, and exploration activities

Educators

Increase in:

- ★ High quality and diverse educators in Massachusetts districts and schools
- ★ Performance on state assessments among students taught by teachers in their first years
- ★ Retention of highly effective educators

Decrease in:

- ★ Number of teachers on license waivers

Postsecondary and Adult Students

Increase in:

- ★ Postsecondary enrollment
- ★ Adult learning gains

Decrease in:

- ★ Developmental coursework enrollment, i.e. remedial courses



PREPARE ALL STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



Our Core Values

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education seeks to ensure that all Massachusetts students are prepared for success after high school. To attain this goal, ESE works to provide individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills and experiences in the academic, workplace readiness, and personal/social domains to successfully navigate to completion an economically viable career pathway in a 21st century economy. The [College and Career Readiness](#) unit, working in collaboration with a variety of interagency and state level partners, provides professional development, technical assistance, and grant funding to promote strategies to help all students become college and career ready.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Prepare students academically

Promote rigorous standards and programs of study

[MassCore](#) is the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's recommended program of high school studies, which includes four years of English and mathematics (including Algebra II), three years of history and social science, three years of lab sciences, two years of foreign language, a year of the arts, physical education and other additional learning opportunities e.g., work-based and community service learning. The agency encourages districts to provide students with the opportunity to complete this rigorous course of study in preparation for success after high school. Current agency work to promote MassCore includes:

- Dissemination of best practices for increasing MassCore completion rates;
- Work internally with licensure, digital learning, and curriculum and instruction units to enhance student access to rigorous coursework; and
- Improved data collection and analysis regarding MassCore completion.

Support those students at risk of dropping out

[Academic Support programs](#) are designed for secondary school students who have not yet met the Competency Determination required for high school graduation. A state line item provides funding for grants that the Department distributes to districts, institutions of higher education, and workforce partners that provide academic support programming and remediation services to students scoring in *Warning/Failing* and *Needs Improvement* on the mathematics, English language arts (ELA) and science/technology and engineering (STE) MCAS.

The [MassGrad Initiative](#) supports statewide and local efforts for high school dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery. ESE collaborates with schools to assist them in implementing the highest quality proven interventions through technical assistance, training, and the exchange of promising practices. The project targets the 133 high schools (76 districts) that exceeded the statewide dropout rate of 2.9 in the 2008-09 school year. These high schools are eligible to participate in networking, technical assistance, training, and competitive grant opportunities. Key MassGrad levers include:

- Dropout Prevention and Recovery Working Group
- Implementation and Planning Awards
- MassGrad Coalition Challenge Awards
- Gateway to College Start-Up Awards

The [Early Warning Indicator System \(EWIS\)](#) helps to identify those students who are most at risk of not reaching certain academic milestones. More information on EWIS is included in the Data/Technology section.



PREPARE ALL STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



Objective 2. Prepare students for the workplace

Ensure students have the knowledge, skills, and experiences for workplace success

Based on recommendations from the BESE's Integration of College and Career Readiness (ICCR) Task Force, ESE is implementing a number of strategies to improve career readiness in the Commonwealth.

[Connecting Activities](#) provides quality work-based learning experiences that are connected to classroom teaching and learning for high school students across the Commonwealth. The primary goal of Connecting Activities is to design and implement brokered "work and learning" experiences during the school year and summer to support career development education and academic achievement for all students.

The Department, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education (DHE), the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and with support from Jobs for the Future (JFF), works to promote [early college designs](#)—programs that incorporate credit-bearing college coursework, academic supports, and career development activities into the high school experience.

The agency is also making continuous improvements in secondary and postsecondary [career/technical education programs](#), as well as with [adult education programs](#).

Objective 3. Support students' social and emotional needs

Promote family and community engagement

ESE is implementing an initiative to incorporate **family and community engagement** strategies into ESE grants, policies, services, and resources from across state agencies and stakeholders, and to strengthen and expand the capacity of educators to support family and community engagement. The [Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals](#) supports high expectations for such partnerships with the goal that coordinated, comprehensive, and systematic supports will create opportunities for all students to achieve academic proficiency and beyond.

The [Wraparound Zone](#) initiative connects children and their families with services that actively address non-academic barriers. More information on Wraparound Zones is included in the Turnaround section.





Our Core Values

The Center for Curriculum and Instruction seeks to help schools, districts, and organizational partners build capacity to engage all students in learning to meet rigorous expectations. The following core beliefs guide our work:

- All students can learn at high levels and achieve success after high school.
- All educators in our districts and schools can provide high quality instruction that enables students to learn at high levels.

Our theory of action holds that:

- If we set high academic standards;
- If we support educators to implement rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessments that align to our standards;
- If we coordinate our support with our colleagues across the agency, especially those in educator effectiveness and district and school assistance;

Then students will have access to high quality curriculum and instruction, which will prepare them for success after high school.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Support the implementation of the curriculum frameworks

Set a high bar and implement a strong, challenging curriculum

The [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy \(MA Frameworks\)](#), based on the Common Core State Standards, were adopted by the Boards of Elementary and Secondary Education and Early Education and Care in July 2010. ESE is building a strong knowledge base about the new standards among pre-K to 20 educators, helping districts align their curriculum and instruction to the shifts, and helping preschools and educator preparation programs adapt to the demands of the new standards.

New [science standards](#), based on the Next Generation Science Standards, have been released to educators. The Commonwealth will also be embarking on a project to create standards for computer science. Our agency will support the implementation of both new sets of standards over the coming years.

For our English language learner population, ESE has adopted the [WIDA](#) standards, which align with our Curriculum Frameworks. WIDA promotes academic language proficiency in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. WIDA provides a host of resources educators can use to differentiate instruction for English language learners and promote their academic language development.

Create tools and resources to support effective implementation

The development of [Model Curriculum Units \(MCUs\)](#) supports the effective implementation of the MA Frameworks by giving teachers access to lesson plans, unit plans, assessments, and an array of other content for immediate use in their classrooms. MCUs have been developed in mathematics, English language arts, history/social science, science, and CVTE. In addition, these resources will address the unique needs of English language learners, advanced learners, and students with disabilities through models of differentiated instruction.



Objective 2. Improve classroom practice and instruction

Strengthen instruction for English language learners

[Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners \(RETELL\)](#) will transform the teaching and learning of English language learners. RETELL combines a new system of curriculum standards and assessments, endorsement and licensure requirements, professional development, and related supports for core academic teachers of English language learners.

Coordinate professional networks in literacy, mathematics, science, and ELLs

Statewide networks are multi-district organizations that meet on a regular basis for the purpose of increasing instructional leadership capacity. They are developed and facilitated statewide by ESE or regionally by District and School Assistance Centers (DSAC) staff and are responsive to the identified needs of participants.

PROMOTE EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT



Our Core Values

Excellent teachers and leaders are critical to improving student achievement.

- Whereas the **teacher** is the single most important school-based factor in determining whether students sink or soar
- Whereas the **principal** is critically important in setting up a culture and the structures within which teachers will find success, leading to improved outcomes for students
- Whereas the **superintendent** is critically important in setting up the systems and structures within which educators will find success, leading to improved outcomes for students

Therefore **all** students should have equitable access to great educators.

If we engage in continuous improvement (set high standards, evaluate based on those standards, collect evaluation information, and provide support based on that data) then all educators will become more effective, all students will have more equitable access to great educators, and student outcomes will improve.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Prepare, assess, and license educators

Improve educator preparation programs

ESE is making improvements to the [state educator preparation programs](#) that include a **revised program approval process**, a **teacher performance assessment**, and updated **professional standards for teaching** that are fully aligned to the educator evaluation system. ESE also issued *Guidelines for Program Approval* for programs seeking state approval. ESE publishes annual reports that include information for each sponsoring organization and approved preparation program.

Improve the system of licensure

ESE is exploring a [redesigned licensure system](#) that would reduce some of the cumbersome nature of the current system and be more meaningful for educators.

ESE will continue to ensure that teachers have the required content knowledge they need through the [MTEL](#), and will develop a teacher performance assessment for initial licensure to ensure those entering the profession have the teaching skills necessary to be successful. For administrators, ESE is developing a [Performance Assessment for Leaders \(PAL\)](#) as one component of principal preparation and licensure. This assessment is aligned to the [Professional Standards for Administrative Leadership](#) and the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Administrative Leaders*. PAL includes performance assessment tasks that closely reflect the authentic work of school leaders and can be completed as part of the preparation pathway.

PROMOTE EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT



Objective 2. Recruit and hire educators

Foster diversity in our workforce

ESE is implementing a [Diversity Initiative](#) to identify action steps to increase the effectiveness, diversity, and cultural competence of our educators. ESE created and convened the Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education Task Force, charged with using current ESE data to highlight ways in which the Commonwealth can employ targeted approaches and strategies to meet this goal. The MADE Task Force Report outlines ten recommendations to support the ESE in reaching two specific targets around diversity; increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce and decreasing the disproportionate number of suspensions for students of color.

Objective 3. Evaluate and help our educators in their continuous development

Promote a system of continuous improvement for all educators

ESE is committed to ensuring the success of the statewide [educator evaluation framework](#) by providing educators with training materials and resources, meaningful guidance, and timely communications. Educator evaluation is a continuous, 5-step improvement process beginning with self-assessment and concluding with summative evaluation. Data from the summative evaluation become an important source of information for the educator's subsequent self-assessment and goal setting. Rubrics are designed to help educators and evaluators develop a consistent, shared understanding of what proficient performance looks like in practice, develop a common terminology and structure to organize evidence, and make informed professional judgments about formative and summative performance ratings on each standard and overall. ESE actively engages educators in the development and ongoing refinement of the framework.

Improve quality of and access to educator development opportunities

In order to improve the quality of professional development offered across the state, ESE developed [professional development standards](#) that define high quality, high impact learning experiences for educators. The standards describe the characteristics of high quality professional development in terms of content, process, and context. ESE is also systematically coordinating the delivery of state-sponsored professional development in a way that advances high priority objectives and initiatives. This [enhanced professional development delivery system](#) is intended to make it easier for Massachusetts educators to access a wide range of offerings.

Schools striving to increase their effectiveness ensure that teachers have structured time for authentic professional learning and growth of all educators. [Professional Learning Communities \(PLCs\)](#) are one way to sustain implementation of professional development. ESE has creating numerous resources for educators to create PLCs that embed professional development in regular professional practice.

TURN AROUND THE LOWEST PERFORMING DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS



Our Core Values

Our mission is to turn around underperforming schools and districts by supporting dramatic and sustained improvement so that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities that prepare them for successful futures. We know that we can:

- Assist underperforming districts in establishing the capacity and robust systems of support necessary to improve teaching and learning in all their schools
- Enable districts and schools on the cusp of underperformance to strategically access professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for all students

If the agency supports districts to use a continuous cycle of improvement to turn around their lowest performing schools, then districts will strengthen their systems of support to continuously improve all schools, as well as the district's performance.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Support school turnaround strategies

Catalyze dramatic turnaround in the lowest performing schools

The Commissioner is charged with identifying the schools and districts in most need of support. State law requires the district superintendent, in consultation with a local stakeholder group and school leaders, to develop a **turnaround plan** for each underperforming ([Level 4](#)) school. State law provides superintendents and districts with considerable flexibility to make changes to policies, conditions, and school-level practices to drive improvement and close the proficiency gap. ESE monitors all Level 4 schools through site visits, assessing school progress made on Measurable Annual Goals (MAGs), and setting clear expectations about Level 4 exit criteria.

Appoint receivers for chronically underperforming schools

If, after three years of intervention, a Level 4 school does not turn around, the Commissioner may place a school in [Level 5](#) and may appoint an external receiver (**Level 5 Operator**) to manage it. The receiver has full managerial and operational control over the school and is responsible for meeting the goals of a new turnaround plan. ESE has developed detailed guidance to set clear expectations about roles, responsibilities, and processes for designating Level 5 schools, appointing Level 5 school receivers, monitoring progress in a Level 5 school, and building local school committee capacity to exit Level 5 status.

Support schools in their implementation of improvement strategies

[School Redesign Grant](#) funding is available to some of the lowest performing Massachusetts schools to engage in school turnaround work that dramatically redesigns and re-envision the way they operate. Schools that are awarded the funding choose from among four broad intervention models and then, with parents, community members, and other important stakeholders at the table, design and implement specific improvements that best fit their most pressing needs.

Objective 2. Support district turnaround strategies

Rapidly accelerate district improvement

Underperforming districts often lack the capacity to carry out their improvement efforts, implement their plans with consistency, or monitor the results in ways that lead to greater accountability and swift mid-course adjustments. Therefore, select Level 4 districts are supported in developing and implementing an [accelerated improvement plan](#) to rapidly improve instructional practices that lead to better student achievement. ESE



TURN AROUND THE LOWEST PERFORMING DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS



provides the district with a team to conduct monthly formative check-ins and quarterly progress monitoring to assess the degree of implementation, the impact of the implementation on adult practices, and the extent to which short- and long-term benchmark goals have been achieved.

Appoint receivers for chronically underperforming districts

The lowest level in the state's accountability system is Level 5, reserved for [chronically underperforming districts](#). The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education placed the Lawrence Public Schools in Level 5 in November 2011, the first district in the state to be so designated.

Objective 3. Provide additional supports for Level 3, 4, and 5 schools and districts

Provide targeted support through District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs)

ESE has established six regional [DSACs](#) to help districts and their schools strategically access and use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for all students. In collaboration with partner organizations, DSACs use a regional approach that leverages the knowledge, skills, and expertise of local educators to address shared needs through an emphasis on expanding district and school capacity for sustained improvement.

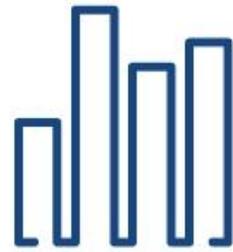
Address students' non-academic barriers to learning

The [Wraparound Zone](#) initiative seeks to strengthen district and school systems of support by connecting them and their families with services that actively address these non-academic barriers. To create a more positive climate and culture, each school participating in the Wraparound Zone initiative implements a proactive system of identifying student needs in key academic and non-academic areas, customizes interventions for high risk students by integrating a range of resources to tailor the student services from both within the school and the larger community, monitors school program effectiveness, integrates in-school social workers with school-wide practices, and connects families to the services of relevant agencies and organizations.

Partner with providers who have expertise and demonstrated effectiveness

ESE has created a list of approved [Priority Partners](#) who have been rigorously vetted and identified as having proven track records for catalyzing district and school turnaround, having familiarity with the Massachusetts context, and understanding the conditions for school effectiveness. ESE helps districts to capitalize on the expertise of these Priority Partners.

USE TECHNOLOGY AND DATA TO SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING



Our Core Values

Technology represents a powerful tool for facilitating student engagement and higher-level learning. Moreover, technological savvy has become increasingly essential for students as they enter college and the workforce. Empowering educators and leadership teams with data and instructional tools will enhance targeted decision-making designed to improve student outcomes.

If ESE integrates its data systems with school districts, promotes the effective use of data, instructional tools, and online resources to inform decision-making, and supports effective use of technology to improve student learning and engagement, then student achievement will improve and students will be better prepared for the world that awaits them.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Integrate Data Systems

Collect data efficiently and accurately

With demands for and uses of data escalating rapidly at the district and state level, districts have been asking for data collection and submission methods that are less costly, less staff intensive, more accurate, and more timely. To meet this need, ESE is implementing the [Schools Interoperability Framework \(SIF\)](#) infrastructure both at the state and district level. Adopting the SIF protocol will automate the data transfer process from the districts to ESE and provide near real-time data to all.

The [data quality curriculum](#) is a set of resources for educators to build their capacity to report accurate and timely data.

Objective 2. Reporting and Instructional Tools

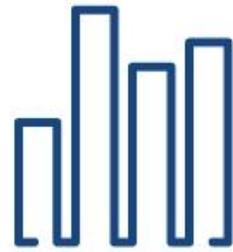
Produce relevant data and information

[Edwin Analytics](#) reports display information that span the entire education spectrum, from preschool to post-secondary. Edwin users will be able to access reports on state assessment results, college and career readiness, postsecondary readiness and success for Adult Basic Education graduates, classroom level reports for educators, school readiness reports for K-3 educators, educator evaluation reports, and district financial analysis reports, among many others.

Included in the college and career readiness Edwin Reports is the [Early Warning Indicator System \(EWIS\)](#) data. EWIS is a tool that systematically identifies students who may need additional attention in order to reach an upcoming academic goal. Traditional early warning systems are implemented at the high school level to help predict which students are most likely to drop out, but Massachusetts's EWIS is connected to relevant academic goals throughout a student's K-12 academic career.

Educators are inundated with data but may not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to access and use it effectively. ESE is developing **professional development resources on data** for educators to help support their effective data use.





Objective 3. Technology Access and Blended Learning

Support the expansion of digital learning capacity and literacy

ESE is working to equip schools across the Commonwealth with technology tools and expertise to allow our educators and students to take advantage of 21st century learning opportunities. The [Digital Learning Initiative](#) is a tiered approach to readiness focused on the next generation classroom (online assessments, basic digital teaching and learning, and one-to-one personalized learning). The initiative will address issues of connectivity, infrastructure, devices, and policies.



Our Core Values

In order to have opportunities to be successful after high school, students need to have healthy social/emotional skills. Developing students' social and emotional competencies helps schools create safe learning environments that contribute to academic achievement for all.

If ESE provides strong definitions of what social and emotional learning means, promotes proven strategies for schools across the Commonwealth, integrates its practices with existing initiatives, and coordinates its non-academic services across multiple state agencies, then students will demonstrate improved social skills, improved pro-social behaviors, access more opportunities to learn, and improve their outcomes.

Our Strategy

Objective 1. Provide programming to meet non-academic needs

Address students' non-academic barriers to learning

The [Wraparound Zone](#) initiative seeks to strengthen district and school systems of support by connecting them and their families with services that actively address these non-academic barriers. To create a more positive climate and culture, each school participating in the Wraparound Zone initiative implements a proactive system of identifying student needs in key academic and non-academic areas, customizes interventions for high risk students by integrating a range of resources to tailor the student services from both within the school and the larger community, monitors school program effectiveness, integrates in-school social workers with school-wide practices, and connects families to the services of relevant agencies and organizations.

Provide students with comprehensive health, nutrition, and general wellness services

ESE coordinates the [school lunch and school breakfast programs](#) along with a number of other programs intended to provide high quality meals to students after school and during the summer months. In addition to nutrition and health programs, ESE partners with the Department of Public Health to provide hands-on training for schools to improve the [overall wellness](#) of our students. For those students most at risk, the agency provides support to those who may be [homeless](#) and/or [migrant](#).

Give students learning opportunities after school and out-of-school

ESE resources enhance a district's ability to provide comprehensive and [effective after-school and out-of-school time programming](#) for students in grades K-12. These programs support children's and youth's academic, social, and emotional development outside of the regular school day, for public and non-public school-age students during the school year and over the summer months.

Objective 2. Promote and build awareness of proven strategies

Help to build positive social skills programs and prevent bullying

ESE created a [Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#) in consultation with countless interested parties to help districts and schools with their efforts to curtail bullying. Furthermore, we have published guidelines for districts and schools on implementing [social and emotional learning curricula](#) to ensure children learn how to recognize and manage emotions, demonstrate empathy, establish positive relationships, make good decisions, and handle challenging social situations in a constructive manner.

Promote family and community engagement

ESE is implementing an initiative to incorporate **family and community engagement** strategies into ESE grants, policies, services, and resources from across state agencies and stakeholders, and to strengthen and expand



SUPPORT STUDENTS' SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH



the capacity of educators to support family and community engagement. The [Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals](#) supports high expectations for such partnerships with the goal that coordinated, comprehensive, and systematic supports will create opportunities for all students to achieve academic proficiency and beyond.

Promote the concept of tiered systems of support

The [Massachusetts Tiered System of Support \(MTSS\)](#) is a blueprint for school improvement that focuses on system structures and supports across the district, school, and classroom to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students. It was developed to help guide the establishment of a system that provides high-quality core educational experiences in a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and targeted interventions/supports for students who experience academic and/or behavioral difficulties and students who have already demonstrated mastery of the concept and skills being taught.