

Race to the Top Coalition

INVESTING IN OUR STATE'S CHILDREN



Toward Closing the Achievement Gap: A One-Year Progress Report on Education Reform in Massachusetts

From the Race to the Top Coalition

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About the Race to the Top Coalition

The Race to the Top Coalition, an alliance of business, community, civic and education leaders and advocates, was convened by the Boston Foundation to support education innovation and secure the Commonwealth's share of \$4.35 billion in federal Race to the Top stimulus money. In 2010, Massachusetts, which, according to U.S. Secretary for Education Arne Duncan ranked first among the 10 winning competitors, received \$250 million in federal funds to promote education reform. As a result, Massachusetts has an unprecedented opportunity to provide all children with the quality education they deserve.

Members of the Race to the Top Coalition include:

Black Leaders for Excellence in Education

The Boston Foundation

Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children, Inc.

Boston Leaders for Education

Boston Municipal Research Bureau

Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation (Springfield)

Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

Leaders for Education

Massachusetts Charter Public School Association

Mass High Tech Council

Mass Insight

Metrowest Chamber of Commerce

Metro South Chamber of Commerce

Progressive Business Leaders Networks

Stand for Children

Strategic Grant Partners

Contents

I. Introduction	3
II. Summary & Recommendations	7
III. About the Achievement Gap Act	9
IV. Turnaround Schools	13
V. Charter Schools	29
VI. Innovation Schools	37
Endnotes	42



Dear Members of the Massachusetts Community:

On behalf of the Race to the Top Coalition, I am pleased to share this progress report on the implementation of the Education Reform Act of 2010. The Coalition came together to advocate for reforms that will help to close achievement gaps in our state and will improve student outcomes for every graduate of the Massachusetts public school system.

The year 2010 was a remarkable one for education. In January, Governor Patrick signed historic legislation that put powerful new tools in the hands of school districts with struggling schools, and created new options for families, including new charter schools and in-district charters known as innovation schools.

Just a few months later, Massachusetts was the highest scoring state in the Obama Administration's Race to the Top Competition, securing \$250 million in new resources to support a redesign of our system, with particular emphasis on human capital, standards, assessments and school turnaround. Altogether, 276 districts signed onto the plan and began to rework the scaffolding of their system, including educator evaluation, data systems, curriculum and assessments.

As you will see in this report, the swift implementation of both the reform act and Race to the Top has yielded promising change. Thirty four schools were designated as turnaround schools, and with the help of new tools and resources, in just one year we have begun to increase student performance as measured by academic proficiency and growth rates. Sixteen new charters were awarded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, creating thousands more seats in schools with a track record of success. And, educators in 13 early adopter districts have opened innovation schools to test out new programs, models and structures—all designed to help students achieve.

But the work is far from done. Despite progress made in the 34 turnaround schools, the infrastructure is not yet in place to sustain these gains once the turnaround period is over. And there is a large cohort of schools that appeared to lose ground last year in English and math. Responding to that disappointing news may require turning around entire systems, which has never been done before.

The Race to the Top Coalition will continue its work as an outside advocate and critical friend until the promise of the reform law and the resources of Race to the Top have helped all children to fulfill their potential and graduate from Massachusetts high schools well positioned for success in post-secondary pursuits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul S. Grogan".

Paul S. Grogan
President and CEO
The Boston Foundation

I.

Introduction

2010 was a watershed year for education reform in Massachusetts. In January, Governor Deval Patrick signed *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* into law. With the stroke of a pen, this sweeping reform legislation ushered in a new generation of reform, and shifted the landscape of schooling in the Commonwealth. The law provided educators with new “rules and tools,” including the power to intervene in turnaround schools, to open new high performing charter schools in the lowest performing districts, and to innovate through in-district charter schools. These reforms were designed to create a renewed sense of urgency around the need to close persistent achievement gaps by expanding proven strategies for reform. In addition, they were designed to position Massachusetts to qualify for federal Race to the Top stimulus funds.

A few months later, buoyed by this reform momentum, Massachusetts submitted a proposal to the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top competition. In doing so, the state proposed to pair the immediate action agenda created through the legislation with a four part systems change strategy: ensure every student is taught by a great teacher and every school and district is led by a great leader; provide every educator with the curricular and instructional tools they need to promote student achievement; turnaround the lowest performing schools; and prepare all students for success in college and career.

A total of 276 school districts signed on in support of the application, representing 88% of the state’s students who live in poverty. On August 24, 2010, Massachusetts was awarded \$250 million in Race to the Top funds, and was recognized as the highest scoring state among the twelve winning states. Reviewers commended the application’s broad buy-in and the state’s track record of implementing bold reforms as contributors to the selection.

Since then, Massachusetts has committed itself to a reform agenda designed to reinvent public schooling across the Commonwealth. The reform act created new parameters and a hybridized set of school structures, sending the message that there is no “one size fits

all” model for effective schools. If implemented with fidelity, Race to the Top will, over four years, recreate the human capital pipeline by addressing teacher and administrator preparation, evaluation and professional development, and will redesign the standards and assessments so that all of Massachusetts’ high school graduates are prepared for college or career. In time, reforms launched through Race to the Top will be felt in every school across the Commonwealth and will be visible to the general public.

At the moment, however, much of the reform has been embedded within the education community, and outside stakeholders have begun to wonder: What has changed? When will we see improvements in student performance, especially among our most vulnerable students?

The good news is there has already been promising change to school structures and to student outcomes. While this work is incomplete, districts and schools across the state have developed and begun to implement turnaround plans for the state’s 34 lowest performing schools, and new school operators have opened charter schools in some of those same districts. The 2011 MCAS results show early promise in most of the turnaround schools, and confirm that replicating charter schools achieve impressive results with their students. In addition, an “innovation” movement has begun to take hold, with educators in 13 districts opening 18 in-district “charter like” schools called innovation schools that are designed to serve students better and unleash and expand the creative efforts inside of school districts.

There is much more to be done to fulfill the spirit of reform legislation and the Race to the Top. Level 3 schools, which are one level above “turnaround schools,” have continued to struggle, with large numbers appearing to lose ground on the 2011 MCAS. In fact, 88 of the 269 Level 3 schools increased the percentage of students scoring “Warning/Failing” on the 2011 MCAS in both English Language Arts and math. No attempt has been made in this report to understand the cause of these troubling results; further

analysis will be needed. However, as the state prepares to identify another round of turnaround schools, some of these schools will undoubtedly be placed into Level 4 and charged with the development of a turnaround plan.¹ (More than half, 51%, of the Level 3 schools are located in the nine districts where the current turnaround schools are, raising capacity questions about the ability of the districts to support their turnaround.)

And, across the state, achievement gaps persist. New data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which acts as the “nation’s report card,” confirmed that while Massachusetts 4th and 8th graders outscored their peers in every other state for the fourth consecutive year, there continue to be significant achievement gaps between white students and African American and Hispanic students, and between low-income and non-low-income students.² While there has been progress toward closing those gaps over the last 19 years, the pace of that progress is slow. Gaps between white and African American and Hispanic students average 27.5 percentage points on the reading and math assessments in grades 4 and 8.³ Low-income students lag behind their non-low-income peers by an average of 26.25 percentage points.⁴ None of these gaps have narrowed significantly since the last administration of NAEP, in 2009.

Achievement gaps are apparent in MCAS scores and in high school and college graduation rates. They can also be seen in Advanced Placement participation and performance rates. According to the College Board, in 2010, 33.2% of seniors in Massachusetts left high school having taken at least one Advanced Placement exam in their senior year (23.1% scoring a passing grade or higher). Yet, only 2.4% of African American students left high school having scored a passing grade on an AP exam. For Latino students, the numbers are slightly better: 4.9% scored a passing grade. For white students, 75.6% scored a 3 or better.⁵

In terms of excellence and academic rigor, Advanced Placement participation and performance are some of the most commonly recognized indicators, and are often used as a proxy for college readiness.

Closing these achievement gaps will be critically important if Massachusetts is to prepare all of its students for post-secondary success.

This report takes an in-depth look at the three primary strategies of the Achievement Gap Act: turnaround schools, charter schools and innovation schools, and asks three questions:

- What has happened since the passage of the reform act?
- Are there early signs of progress or challenge?
- Does the implementation appear to be fulfilling the intent of the law: strategically connecting students with high performing schools and rapid school improvement, while unleashing innovation in school districts statewide?
- What have we learned from the last year and where are there opportunities to accelerate reform?

To answer those questions, first we considered the ‘theory of change’ behind *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*. We then reviewed publicly available data, and interviewed key stakeholders, including staff from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, district level staff, and a sampling of external partners, including union representatives.⁶ Information gathered from stakeholder interviews helped to shape the questions for additional consideration and recommendations; no comments are individually attributed.

Passing legislation and winning the national Race to the Top (RTTT) contest will not be significant if our state fails to close the achievement gap and prepare all of our students for success in their post-secondary pursuits. The road ahead is likely to be challenging. Schools will need advocates and pressure to sustain the work. As a critical friend to the reform effort, the Race to the Top Coalition is committed to keeping the data in the public eye and developing reports and tools that focus on the pace and progress of reform. By doing so, we hope to sustain political will and public support for reform.

This is the first review of the dramatic reforms that have taken place over the last year. The goal is to set a baseline against which improvements and system redesign can be assessed.

A review of Race to the Top implementation will follow this publication, which will attempt to describe the building blocks of reform that have been launched since winning RTTT funds, and will seek to create tools to help stakeholders understand and track the progress of Race to the Top in Massachusetts. We will select

key intermediate metrics and long-term outcomes that point to broad changes in student performance. Potential metrics to track include:

- 75% of the state's lowest performing schools turning around by 2014;
- 85% of high school graduates across the state completing a college-ready curriculum by 2014;
- closing racial, ethnic, and income-based achievement gaps by 2014;
- district and state implementation of key reforms to drive and sustain long-term systems change.

Further analysis will be required to establish whether the pace of the Massachusetts reform agenda is leading or even keeping pace with other states.

Ultimately, the success of these systems change efforts will be measured by our students' success in the Commonwealth's knowledge economy. The stakes are high for students, and the time to prepare them is now.

II.

Summary & Recommendations

Turnaround Schools

Summary: Early progress can be observed in the Level 4 schools, especially as measured by student growth. Concerns persist about state and district capacity to meet turnaround goals and prevent Level 3 schools from becoming Level 4.

Recommendations:

1. Build or recruit internal and external capacity to support and sustain the turnaround work in districts, especially for those districts with large numbers of turnaround schools.
2. Build long-term capacity in school districts for turnaround schools by addressing today's challenges, including human resources and staffing turnarounds and forming partnerships with lead and supporting turnaround partners. Ensure that external partners are skilled in turning schools around, have a track record of doing so and are accountable to school districts for improving student performance in schools.
3. Work with districts and partners to deepen strategies to address conditions in Level 3 schools, before they fall to Level 4.
4. Work with districts to develop plans for "post-turnaround." Consider creating incentives for turnaround schools to become innovation schools so that they can preserve their autonomies and sustain their improved performance. Explore costs associated with models for sustaining improvement and turnaround.
5. Commission and publicize research about what is working, including the impact of autonomies, extra time and effective partners.

Charter Schools

Summary: In one year, the state has identified high performing "proven providers" and has approved a dramatic expansion of charters, especially in Boston. There is continued need to connect high performing charters to students in the Gateway Cities. The replication in Boston fulfills the spirit of the legislation by replicating in one of the neediest districts, but the promise of attracting proven providers to operate high performing charters in other low-performing urban districts has not yet been fulfilled.

Recommendations:

1. Create incentives for proven providers to open charters in cities with excess room under their charter caps (including Springfield and Worcester), and support the development of a human capital pipeline of prospective charter leaders.
2. Identify strategies to connect charters to unused school facilities.
3. Review the statutory language related to Horace Mann Charters and ease barriers to start up and amendments to and renewal of charters. Consider strategies to provide incentives for the creation of new Horace Mann Charters.
4. Review state capacity to support a rigorous application and accountability process for charter schools.

Innovation Schools

Summary: 18 schools have opened as innovation schools, and another has recently been approved in 13 districts. The Innovation Plans focus on serving specific populations of students, implementing new programming, and altering structures for teachers. While most of the schools have been initiated by district level leaders, it appears the Achievement Gap Act's goal of sparking innovation within districts is gaining traction.

Recommendations:

1. Support ongoing growth by brokering partnerships with innovation schools.
2. Urge turnaround schools to consider innovation school status as a long-term strategy for sustaining the turnaround.
3. Provide support to large districts with significant interest in the model.
4. Continue providing planning and implementation support.
5. Continue efforts to publicize the model.

III.

About the Achievement Gap Act

Theory of Change & Implementation Highlights

An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap sought to rapidly improve student performance across the state, by strategically addressing the greatest needs in our public education system: closing persistent achievement gaps that can be seen in nearly every district. The law created new “rules and tools” as well as new school, district and state-level responsibilities for improving the Commonwealth’s lowest performing schools.

The Act also sought to create a 21st century system of public schools that would give families and students across the state multiple options for excellent public schools inside and outside school districts. Drawing on core principles of autonomy and flexibility, the Act expanded seats in high performing charter schools and created a new type of in-district charter, innovation schools.

The new system, articulated in the Act will ultimately require a different kind of partnership between schools, districts, and the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In particular, the DESE will need to transform itself into an agency that is able to provide guidance and differentiated supports, as well as rigorous accountability.

Turnaround Schools

The Act sought to dramatically and quickly improve student performance in the lowest performing schools by giving Superintendents: new tools to intervene quickly and change policies and practices within the underperforming school; new authority to require staff to reapply for their positions in turnaround schools, including the ability to limit, suspend, or change provisions within the teachers’ contract (as they apply to the school); and a new expedited process for bargaining work rules in the turnaround schools with local teachers unions.

Implementation Highlights: 34 Level 4 schools in nine districts. Thirty-five of the lowest performing schools in nine districts were identified as Level 4 (or turnaround schools), resulting in changes in the staffing, partners, school day and budgets of each school.⁷ These turnaround schools and their districts enroll a much higher concentration of low-income students than the state average: 87% among the schools and 78% among the districts compared to the statewide average of 34%. Turnaround schools also enroll higher percentages of Limited English Proficient students, 29%, compared to 22% in the nine districts in which the turnarounds are located and 7% statewide.

Turnaround schools received new resources from Title I and Race to the Top. They also hired new staff from inside and outside the school district, lengthened their school day for students and teachers, brought in new partners and programs, and focused in a laser like way on student performance data. As a result, many of these schools already are beginning to show progress on the state’s MCAS exams.

Charter Schools

The best charter schools in Massachusetts have demonstrated that low-income students and students of color can achieve at the highest levels. However, because of charter caps, these public schools still serve only a fraction of the students who need them. The Act sought to connect these high performing schools with the neediest students by expanding the number of seats available in the lowest performing schools districts and by holding charters accountable for serving the most vulnerable subgroups of students.

Implementation Highlights: 16 new Commonwealth and Horace Mann Charters. In February 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education awarded a historic 16 new charters, which represented the highest number of charters ever granted in a single year and means that over the next few years, thousands of additional students in the state’s lowest performing districts will have access to charter public

schools, providing families with a high quality option for their children. Thirteen of those charters were Commonwealth Charters, which will create more than 6,500 new seats in charter schools in Boston, Chelsea, Holyoke, Springfield, Lawrence and New Bedford over the next few years. Three Horace Mann charters were granted; those in-district charters will enroll 1,200 students.

Innovation Schools

The law created a new type of in-district charter school that operates with autonomy and flexibility in key areas: curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing, professional development, and school district policies. The innovation school model acknowledges that in every district there are successful educators and schools. With access to this new model, educators will be able to serve students better and implement new strategies, which will maximize gains in student learning. Innovation schools can be a vehicle to accelerate growth in every district. This tool—unlike the turnaround model or the smart cap lift on charters—can be used by a broad range of districts.

Implementation Highlights: 18 operating (and 19 approved) innovation schools. Thirteen districts have authorized innovation schools, providing teachers in Revere, Boston, Worcester, Springfield and Cape Cod with tools historically available only to charter operators to reimagine and redesign their schools. In some of these communities, central office staff has begun to identify district level systems changes that can support and grow a portfolio of innovative schools and schools with autonomies.

Interventions, Innovations and Improvements

The Act Relative to the Achievement Gap in Massachusetts can be organized into three broad categories: interventions, innovations and improvements.

Interventions

- Authorizes the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to designate up to 72 schools, or no more than 4% of all schools, as either “underperforming” (Level 4) or “chronically underperforming” (Level 5) based on student achievement and improvement measures.
 - These schools may be selected from a pool of the lowest 20% performing schools.
 - Student achievement and improvement measures will be determined largely by MCAS scores.
- Enables the Commissioner to designate no more than 2.5% of all districts as “chronically underperforming” districts. Districts may be selected from the lowest 10% of districts.
- Targets schools and districts for aggressive intervention through a turnaround plan developed in collaboration with the superintendent, the school committee, the local teachers’ union, administrators, teachers, community representatives and, most importantly, parents. The plan is expeditiously implemented by the district superintendents and the Commissioner.
- Intervention powers include the ability to more expeditiously dismiss or replace poor performing teachers and administrators, as well as the authorization to reopen and amend collective bargaining agreements in order to drive rapid improvement.
 - In both Level 4 and Level 5 schools, teachers may be dismissed for “good cause” with the right to arbitration.
 - In Level 4 schools, collective bargaining agreements may be reopened without arbitration, but with the option of a dispute resolution process featuring a panel of three members, including one representative each from labor and management, and a third from the American Arbitration

Association, all of whom shall have an education background, with unresolved issues to be settled by the Commissioner.

- In Level 5 schools, the Commissioner shall resolve any disputes.
- In underperforming district intervention, the Commissioner may elect to trigger dispute resolution in which case the three person panel either must act unanimously or any disputes will be settled by the Commissioner.
- Allows for expedited turnaround plans for schools that have been previously designated as underperforming and where the district has a turnaround plan that has had a public comment period and approval of the local school committee. Only Boston qualified under this language to do things more quickly than other districts.

Innovations

- Allows up to 14 new Horace Mann schools to be established under a new process that removes the requirement of union approval, a current barrier to growth. This type of in-district public school, approved by the local school committee and superintendent, provides additional local control over innovative educational programs and the ability to retain educational dollars within the community. The City of Boston is allowed to establish no fewer than four of these schools.
- Establishes new innovation schools, which are in-district public schools with increased autonomy and flexibility to operate. These unique schools, through collaboration with teachers and parents, will promote high levels of student achievement through an innovation plan and represent an in-district alternative to other types of charter schools.

Improvements

- Raises the state spending cap for charter schools from 9% to 18% of new school spending in the lowest 10 percent performing districts.
- Also streamlines current charter school caps by eliminating the cap that limits the state's total charter school population to 4%. Preserves current caps of no more than 72 Commonwealth Charter Schools and no more than 48 Horace Mann Charter Schools.
- Establishes new requirements on charter schools to develop recruitment and retention plans, "back-fill" student vacancies in half of the highest grades (rounding down and not beyond the ninth grade), and provide greater transparency and accountability in the approval process.
- Maintains charter tuition and facilities funding formulas, and stipulates that in FY11 and thereafter, reimbursements shall not be less than the FY10 per pupil amount.
- Increases and extends reimbursement to school districts affected by charter school growth (from 100/60/40 percent reimbursement over three years to 100/25/25/25/25/25 over six years). This reimbursement reform will allow for a greater recognition of the fixed educational costs districts face.
- Requires charter operators to be "proven providers" if they open in the lowest performing districts (and the cap is at least at 9%).
- Enables municipalities to sell excess properties to charter schools.

IV. Turnaround Schools

Theory of Change:	Dramatically improve performance in the lowest performing schools, and address achievement gaps head-on by giving the state and districts expedited intervention authority. The state will identify turnaround schools and will transform itself into an agency that provides guidance, differentiated supports and accountability. Establish a finite timeline within which schools need to make improvements. The new flexibilities, paired with new funds for school turnaround, will help schools improve. Through Race to the Top, the state will build supports for and capacity in districts to support school turnaround.
Funding:	Funding from the Federal Government’s Title I School Improvement Grants (1003a and 1003g) and funds from Race to the Top will support the turnaround in the lowest performing schools.
Progress:	Early progress can be observed in the Level 4 schools, especially as measured by student growth. Yet concerns persist about state and district capacity to meet turnaround goals and prevent Level 3 schools from becoming Level 4.
Fidelity of Implementation:	<p>Level 4 schools enroll large numbers of low-income, Latino, and African American students. Focusing on these schools begins to fulfill the law’s intent of targeting the most persistent achievement gaps.</p> <p>Thirty-five schools were identified as Level 4; one school has closed. The 34 Level 4 schools each adopted one of 4 models of school turnaround. The schools addressed staffing flexibility differently, some requiring teachers to reapply for their positions, others did not. All have extended the school day, including some combination of increased instructional and professional development time.</p>
Summary:	<p>Nearly all of the Level 4 schools made strides on the 2011 MCAS in either English Language Arts or Math, or both, with nearly every school increasing proficiency rates. Leaders in districts with Level 4 schools identified the longer day and the staffing flexibilities as key contributors to implementing the turnaround plan. Further analysis is needed to determine what’s working, what’s not, and in particular how the schools’ new autonomies contributed to these gains.</p> <p>As the state prepares to identify another cohort of Level 4 schools, districts will face capacity and human capital challenges. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is rethinking its strategy of an external intermediary to support turnaround and should identify a new support strategy to develop internal district capacity and new external partners who can support them as quickly as possible.</p>
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build or recruit internal and external capacity to support and sustain the turnaround work in districts, especially for those districts with large numbers of turnaround schools. 2. Build long-term capacity in school districts for turnaround schools by addressing today’s challenges, including human resources, staffing turnarounds and forming partnerships with lead and supporting turnaround partners. Ensure that external partners are skilled in turning schools around, have a track record of doing so and are accountable to school districts for improving student performance in schools. 3. Work with districts and partners to deepen strategies to address conditions in Level 3 schools, before they fall to Level 4. 4. Work with districts to develop plans for “post-turnaround.” Consider creating incentives for turnaround schools to become innovation schools so that they can preserve their autonomies and sustain their improved performance. Explore costs associated with models for sustaining improvement and turnaround. Commission and publicize research about what’s working, including the impact of autonomies, extra time and effective partners.

Key Provisions

Turning around the lowest performing schools is a central tenet of both *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* and the Massachusetts Race to the Top proposal. Both recognize the urgent need to improve outcomes for students who attend these schools.

The education reform law signed in 2010 created a new framework for school turnaround, granting new powers to superintendents and creating a sense of urgency around the need for dramatic improvement. As part of the law, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is authorized to designate one or more schools in a school district as “underperforming” (Level 4) or “chronically underperforming” (Level 5). Multiple indicators of school quality must inform the underperforming or chronically underperforming designation, including student performance data, school or district review indicators and other factors outlined in regulations adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Once a school is designated as Level 4, the law gives superintendents the ability to reassign or replace teachers and administrators in those schools and dismiss those with a track record of poor performance, as well as authority to reopen and renegotiate (on an expedited timeline) collective bargaining agreements as they pertain to the school. The new law lowered the standard for dismissal of teachers with professional teaching status (more commonly referred to as tenure) from “just cause” to “good cause.”

The legislation reset the clock on turnaround efforts. The state had been engaged with districts on school turnaround previously, and schools already in turnaround restarted their turnaround timeline, to be on the same three-year trajectory as the new Level 4 schools.

Turnaround schools have three years to improve their students’ growth and performance, through a turnaround plan that is developed in collaboration with the superintendent, the school committee, the local teachers’ union, administrators, teachers and community stakeholders, including parents. The turnaround plan sets the working conditions for the school during its turnaround (Level 4) designation. If, after three years, these schools have not met the improvement goals set for them by the DESE, the schools could be declared

“chronically underperforming.” Level 5 schools may be put into state receivership. Massachusetts does not currently have any schools identified as Level 5.

If a school exits Level 4 status and moves up to become a Level 3 school, the negotiated provisions of the turnaround plan can be extended at the Commissioner’s discretion. According to the Accountability and Assistance Regulations for Schools and Districts, *The superintendent may propose to continue and the commissioner may allow to continue more than one such feature of the turnaround plan.* Under the Regulations, two years after the school’s removal from Level 4, the commissioner shall conduct a review to determine whether to continue the provisions.⁸

This turnaround agenda was a foundational component of the state’s Race to the Top plan. As part of RTTT, the state committed to turning around 75% of the lowest performing schools within three years.

Through the School Redesign Grant program (part of the federal Title I grant program) districts are eligible to apply for turnaround funds on behalf of each of its Level 4 schools. The first cohort of schools to receive funding included 12 schools in three districts which received a total of \$27,510,901 (paid out over 3 years). The second cohort of funded schools included 18 schools in eight districts which received \$24,798,188.⁹ In total the state’s lowest performing schools have received \$52,309,089.

Schools receiving this funding were required to choose one of four intervention models and must demonstrate their capacity to implement that model effectively over three years. The models have different requirements for the percentage of the staff that may retain their positions. Districts home to nine or more turnaround schools (Boston and Springfield) were required to use the “turnaround” or “restart” model in at least half of the schools, which meant that in those buildings, no more than 50% of the original staff could return to the turnaround school—or school management would have to be handed over to a charter management organization or education management organization.

At the national level, reformers are watching turnaround efforts and results closely. Some have begun to question what happens if the 12 RTTT states don’t show improvement in student achievement as early as 2012. In Massachusetts, one year’s worth of data

from turnaround schools and early indications from in-district charter and innovation schools are already demonstrating promising results.

Turnaround Schools: By the Numbers

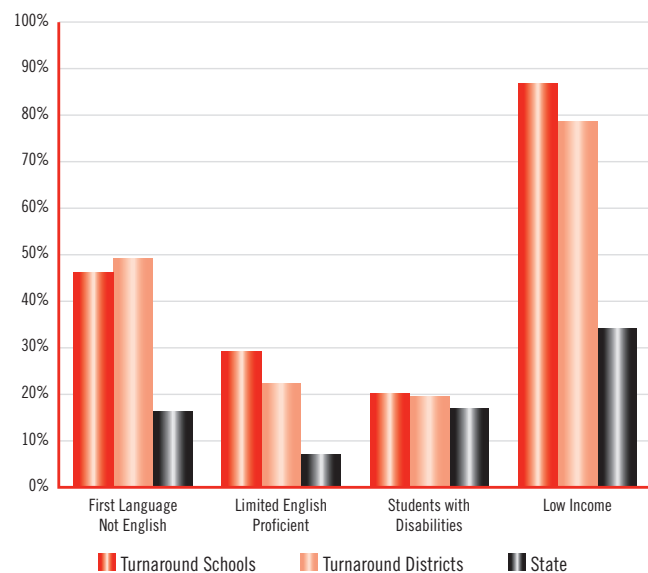
- **January 2010:** *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* gives new authority to superintendents to intervene in low performing schools.
- **March 2010:** The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identifies 35 schools as “Level 4” schools, located in nine urban districts.¹⁰ These schools enroll a higher concentration of low-income students, and the schools and their districts disproportionately enroll Massachusetts’ Latino students. Furthermore, these schools enroll twice the number of African American students as the other schools in their district.
- A total of 269 schools were identified as Level 3 schools; 139 of these schools are in the same nine districts as the 35 Level 4 schools.
- In April 2010, the BESE adopts new regulations for turnaround schools.
- In September 2010, the DESE awards the first round of School Redesign Grants to support the turnaround process. A total of 12 schools from three districts received grants. In March 2011, a second cohort of schools receive SRG grants; 18 schools in eight districts receive funds. The schools include Level 4 schools and low performing Level 3 schools.

Context: who are the students in turnaround schools?

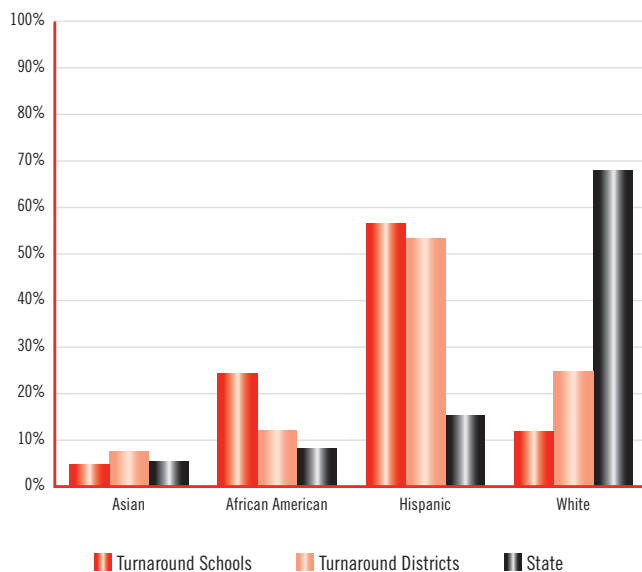
- **First Language Not English or Limited English Proficient Students:** 46% of students at turnaround schools and 49% of students within the nine districts are English Language Learners compared to 16% statewide. At the turnaround schools, a larger percent of these students are Limited English Proficient, 29%, compared to 22% among the nine districts and 7% statewide.
- **Students with Disabilities:** Turnaround schools and their districts enroll a slightly higher percentage of Students with Disabilities than the statewide average: 20% and 19.5% compared to 17% statewide.

- **Low Income:** Turnaround schools and their districts enroll a much higher concentration of low-income students than the state average: 87% among the schools and 78% among the districts compared to the statewide average of 34%.
- **Race/Ethnicity: The 34 turnaround schools and their districts disproportionately enroll Massachusetts’ Latino students:** 56.5% of students enrolled in turnaround schools and 53% of students in the districts are Latino compared to the 15% statewide average Latino enrollment.
- **Turnaround schools enroll African American students at twice the concentration of their district average:** 24% of students enrolled in turnaround schools are African American compared to a 12% average enrollment among their districts. Statewide, 8% of students are African American.
- **Turnaround schools enroll a smaller percentage of Asian students than the district’s average and the state:** on average, 5% of turnaround students are Asian compared to 7.5% across the nine districts. Statewide, 5.5% of students are Asian.

**Enrollment Characteristics:
Turnaround Schools, Districts, State, 2011**
First Language Not English, Limited English Proficient,
Students with Disabilities and Low-Income Students



Enrollment Characteristics: Turnaround Schools, Districts, State, 2011 Race/Ethnicity



- **The average enrollment of white students in turnaround schools is less than half the district’s average enrollment:** on average, 12% of students in turnaround schools are white compared to 25% of their districts average. Statewide, 68% of students are white.

Noteworthy Accomplishments

The results of the 2011 MCAS suggest that students in turnaround schools are beginning to demonstrate improved outcomes. Anecdotally, superintendents and principals attribute this to a new school culture, heightened focus on student data and (in some cases) a handpicked team of experienced and new faculty members.

Nonetheless, schools cannot be expected to fully “turn-around” in only one year. The pace of improvement, as well as the number of students scoring proficient and advanced, are part of the story of improvement. For that reason, our analysis of turnaround performance is based on three key indicators of turnaround success:

- Decrease in the percent of students who score warning/failing

- Increase in Composite Performance Index
- Progress toward target—measured by Student Growth Percentile

Staff of the Boston Indicators Project analyzed student performance data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and produced a detailed analysis of school-by-school performance and growth.¹¹

Some of the performance gains include:

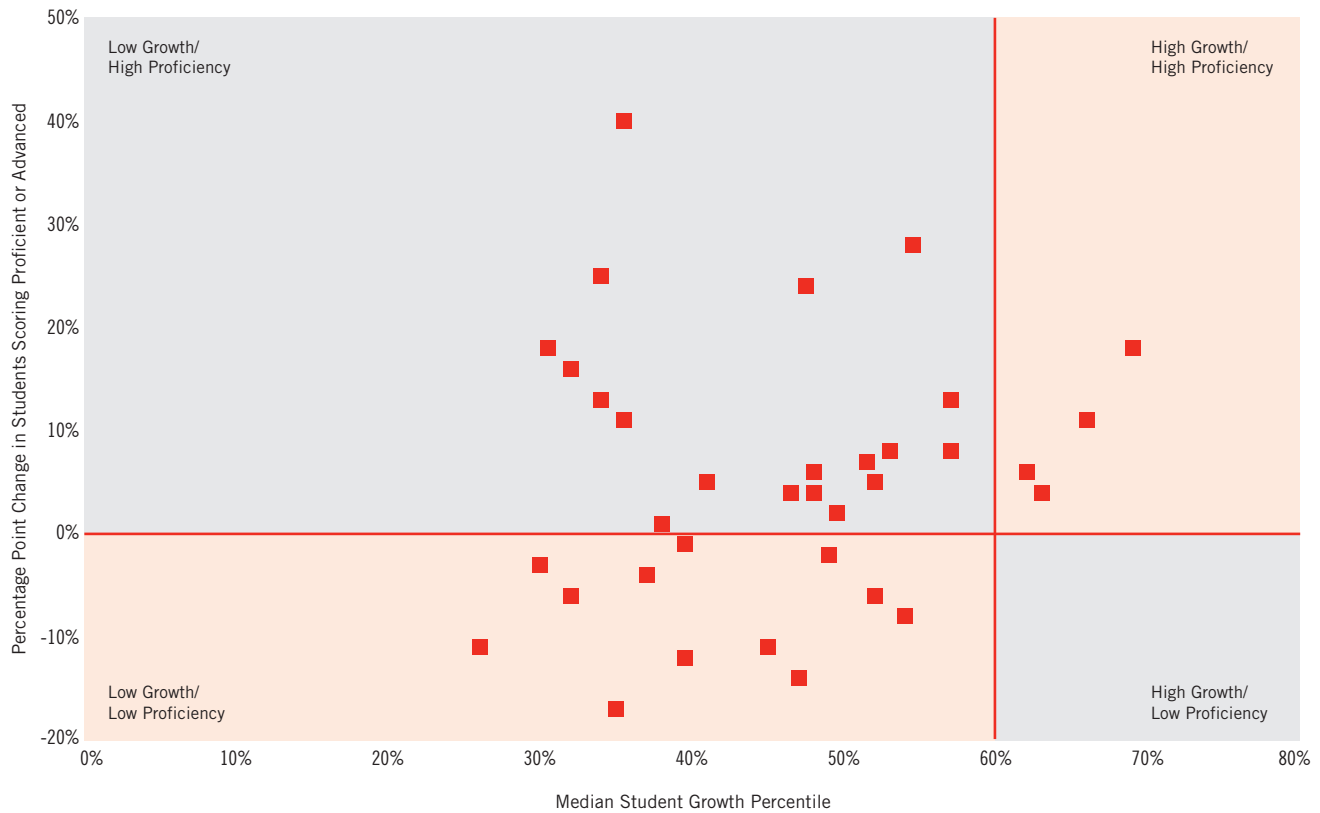
- Three (or almost 9%) of the Level 4 schools are making gains in student performance, meaning that they reduced the number of students scoring warning or failing on the MCAS, increased the number of students scoring proficient or advanced and (perhaps most significantly) their students progressed faster than 60% of like students across the state.
- Seven schools (almost 21%) reduced the number of students scoring warning or failing on the MCAS, increased the number of students scoring proficient or advanced, and had students who demonstrated about as much growth as like students statewide.
- Three schools reduced the number of students scoring warning or failing on the MCAS, and increased the number of students scoring proficient or advanced but showed less growth than like students statewide.
- Four schools showed progress in either ELA or math and demonstrated comparable growth.
- Only three schools appeared to be stalled, meaning they did not make progress in any of the key indicators of turnaround.¹²

Highlights of the 2011 MCAS data are on page 17. These results appear to suggest that the Level 4 schools are on a growth and improvement trajectory. Most of the charter schools had roughly the same rate of growth when compared to their academic peers statewide. (Student growth in the 40–60% range is considered average.) But importantly, turnarounds appear to be focused on increasing the percentage of their students who score Proficient or Advanced on the MCAS.

Additional analysis will be required to better understand the causes of these results.

Indicators of Progress for Turnaround Schools

Change in the Percent of Students Scoring Proficient & Advanced 2010–2011, 2011 Student Growth Percentile English Language Arts



This chart shows both growth and a change in Proficiency and Advanced in English Language Arts. Growth in the 40%–60% range is considered average growth.

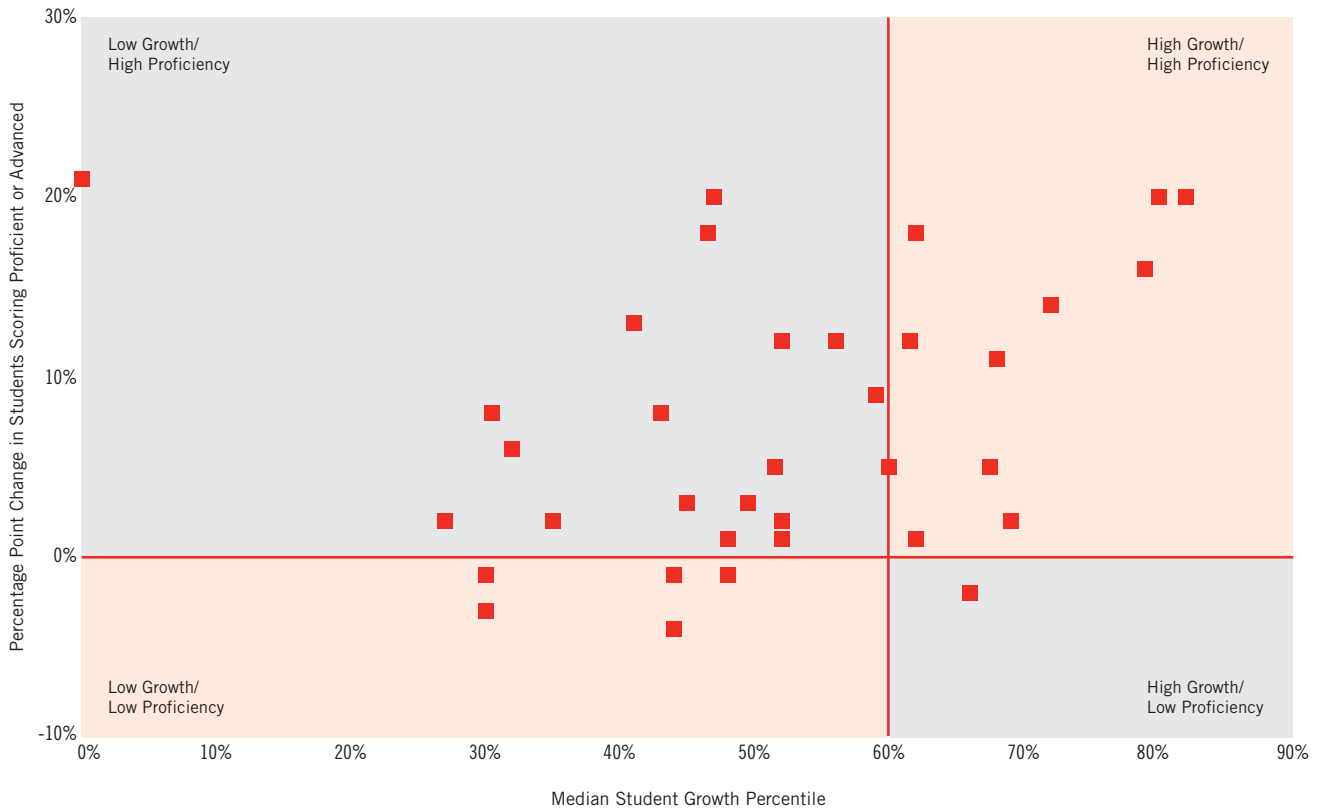
Highlights from the 2011 English Language Arts MCAS

- Twenty-three turnaround schools increased their rates of students scoring Proficient or above in English Language Arts.
- Four turnaround schools demonstrated “high growth” in English Language Arts: Orchard Gardens in Boston, John J. Doran School in Fall River, E.J. Harrington in Lynn, and the Alfred G. Zanetti school in Springfield. This means their student growth rate was better than 60% of their academic peers statewide. Most turnarounds fall into the 40–60% growth percentile, which means the student growth was about the same as their academic peers around the state.

Highlights from the 2011 Math MCAS

- Twenty-five turnaround schools increased their rates of students scoring Proficient or above in Math.
- Twelve turnaround schools demonstrated “high growth” in Math, which means their students’ growth was better than 60% of their academic peers statewide.
- Eleven turnaround schools demonstrated high growth and increased rates of Proficiency.

Indicators of Progress for Turnaround Schools
Change in the Percent of Students Scoring Proficient & Advanced 2010–2011,
2011 Student Growth Percentile
Math



This chart shows both growth and a change in Proficiency and Advanced in Math.

Superintendent Reflections on Year One of Turnaround:

In September and October of 2011, Superintendents who lead districts with at least one Level 4 school were invited to participate in either an interview or a survey designed to capture their experience with the first year of turning around one or more schools. All nine districts that are home to Level 4 schools participated, and responses were collected from either the Superintendent or his/her senior level designee.¹³ The survey questions can be found in the sidebar on page 25.

In general, Superintendents had positive comments about the new intervention tools provided by the legislation, and the initial signs of progress in the 34 turnaround schools. Nearly all of the surveyed

Superintendents indicated that the tools were “the right ones,” “were very helpful,” and “really provided the leverage needed to start the change process.”

Districts reported that the tools provided allowed them to extend time (learning time and professional development time for teachers), form professional collaboration teams, create incentives for individuals and teams, and grant principals decision-making authority over schedules and school policies.

Bargaining Agreements

In particular, Superintendents identified the ability to reopen collective bargaining as critical to the work. “Having the authority to request that the school committee and any union can bargain or reopen a collective bargaining agreement in order to alter the

compensation, hours and working conditions of the administrators, teachers, principal and staff at any underperforming school” was noted as being particularly helpful. As another district noted: “The most important part of the legislation was the conciliation process that led to the flexibilities necessary to accelerate the reform work. The Level 4 reform work was dramatically enabled through this process.”

Another district noted that the Superintendent’s authority to request that the school committee and any union can bargain or reopen a collective bargaining agreement resulted in a new agreement around compensation, hours and working conditions of the administrators, teachers, principal and staff in the underperforming schools.

Related to that, having to bargain changes to collective bargaining agreements based on the Joint Resolution Committee Agreement was cited as a key contributor to securing these agreements.

One district summed up the general reaction to these authorities: they “facilitated the lengthening of the school day, increased time for professional development and teacher collaboration, established the instructional leader position, increased principal authority to establish the workday or work year, and provided hiring and staffing flexibility. However, each of these elements had to be bargained, resulting in approximately half of our school redesign dollars being dedicated for more time and in some cases more than half of these funds needing to be used to support additional time.”

One Superintendent noted that the legislation’s focus on Level 4 schools may have represented a missed opportunity to intervene in Level 3 schools and prevent them from becoming Level 4. “Why do we need to wait for a school to be in trouble before acting? The law is good on intervention, but less so on prevention.”

Human Capital

All of the Superintendents identified human capital as core to their strategy and a challenge in the Level 4 schools. Having the discretion to require that the principal and all administrators, teachers and staff reapply for their positions in the school, following consultation with applicable local unions, was cited as very helpful.

In most cases, as required by federal turnaround requirements, the principals were replaced, and in most of the districts with a small number of turnarounds, principals were hired from within the district. Two districts with large numbers of turnarounds noted that they recruited principals from outside the system. Several districts noted that replacing the principal was a “difficult but necessary step.” When asked to describe what they were looking for in a principal, Superintendents described “experienced leaders,” “someone who knows academics,” “someone who can be a change agent.”

Not every principal appointment was successful, and at least one district has already seen changes in the leadership of turnaround schools. “We selected a great team of experienced turnaround leaders but there were changes during year one. We are confident that the replacements selected will be effective. The district worked with parents and staff in the affected schools to select and introduce new school leaders midyear. This helped transform what might have been an obstacle into an opportunity for collaborative school improvement.”

Districts expressed confidence in the leadership abilities of the turnaround leaders, though several noted that the district itself needed to “develop internal capacity to train our current leaders to meet the demands of turning around persistent low-performing schools.” Several felt the expertise existed within the district, though many noted that the current workforce—in schools and in the central office—is not trained for turnaround work. One district said: “It is difficult to imagine that we can develop the capacity in the short time required for turnaround.”

Whether teachers were asked to reapply for their positions was treated differently across districts. In the majority of surveyed districts, the district reported that most of the teachers with professional teaching status (more commonly referred to as tenure) found placements elsewhere in the district.¹⁴ A July 5 *Boston Globe* story on turnaround teachers in Boston suggests this may not have been the case in Boston, with a number of teachers leaving the district. Further analysis is warranted to determine the percentage of teachers with professional teaching status who did not return to each district.

Districts with more than one or two Level 4 schools noted that while the principals of those schools enjoyed greater flexibility in hiring than their non-level four counterparts, it was a challenge to fill the large numbers of teaching vacancies that were created by the turnaround, and to move large numbers of teachers into other buildings. One principal noted that he had been able to fill his vacancies, because he started early and was able to identify specific teachers to recruit, or networks to tap into. But “what happens when those teachers start to leave? When I think about sustaining the turnaround, where does my pipeline of good teachers come from?” Also, districts noted the need to recruit experienced math and science teachers.

Depending on the turnaround model used, schools retained between 10% and 85% of their instructional staff over the first two years of turnaround, with an average staff retention rate of 55%. One district noted: “The principals hired teachers who shared their vision for dramatically improving student achievement. The teachers that replaced the excessed teachers understood the urgency in these schools, believed that students can and should be successful and wanted to be part of the transformation.”

Another referenced the changed culture among the veteran teachers, reporting “we used to think we had to look out the window; now we know [that] we need to look in the mirror” when seeking both the challenges and the solutions related to improving student learning.

Superintendents agreed that it may be too early to say how staffing changes are contributing to the turnaround process, noting that the number of interventions put in place at each Level 4 school are numerous and address each of the conditions for effective schools identified by DESE and in the district’s own redesign plan (such as effective leadership, cultures of teacher collaboration, student assessment, social-emotional support for students, tiered instruction, family and community engagement, etc.). Superintendents felt more confident in stating that over a nine-month period there is evidence that most of the school redesign plans have been implemented with some success. More qualitative research across turnaround schools will help to identify the school and classroom practices, as well as partnerships, that are most effective across all the Level 4 schools.

Nonetheless, the flexibility to hire and add additional staff was cited in nearly every interview. Putting together the right team has resulted in schools in which “everyone is incredibly focused on what kids need.” Noted another Superintendent: “It wasn’t that the teachers in the turnaround school were all bad. But the culture in the building needed to change.”

One Superintendent reported that the staffing autonomy means that teachers in Level 4 schools “cannot be ‘bumped’ out of their positions. This has stabilized the staff at our turnaround schools. This means the staff is now able to pick up in September where they left off in June with minimal changes to the team.”

Unrealistic Timelines

Despite the mostly positive comments on the turnaround process, nearly all of the Superintendents noted that the timeline for developing and implementing turnaround plans—as well as the magnitude of change, including the new teacher evaluation system—was overwhelming. Nearly every district noted that it was difficult to meet key deadlines given the very short timeline between schools being designated as turnaround and the start of the new school year.

One noted: “It’s been like drinking from a fire hose.” Another said, “We’re building the plane as we’re flying it.” Nonetheless, a third district acknowledged: “the timelines that were outlined to complete important steps in the turnaround process seemed short and unreasonable at the time. Having completed the process I understand that we would not be where we are in the implementation stage if we did not have these timelines.”

In response to the aggressive timelines, there was not unanimity on the part of the Superintendents about whether the tools equipped them to make changes quickly enough. One Superintendent noted: “Our conversations with the union returned often to the spirit of the legislation: whatever reforms we were discussing needed to be guided by what’s in the best interest for students.” Another noted that by requiring districts to negotiate with the union, the process was slower than it needed to be, given the aggressive timeline for turnaround. At least one district commented that the process would be more efficient without the need to bargain new agreements.

Partners

Several districts noted that partners were core to the development and implementation of their turnaround plan. Some of the key partnerships cited include:

- Achievement Network
- Center for Collaborative Education
- City Connects
- City Year
- The District Management Council
- Focus On Results
- Mass 2020
- Teach Plus¹⁵

These are strong organizations with varying expertise, but shared track records of success. No distinction was made (in the interview questions or in the responses) about the role of these partners as lead or supporting partners.

One district noted: “Our partners have worked collaboratively to align their work with the district’s goals and expectations. Each partner has a specific and unique function but only one goal: improve student achievement.”

National research articulates a role for lead partners, including performance contracts through which the partner is accountable to the central office in a district. Often those partners are managed by a special unit within the central office.

Further analysis will be required to determine the most effective partnerships. In addition, a deeper review of the turnaround process will be necessary to track the partnership contract and funds expended, which this report does not attempt to do.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

All of the Superintendents referenced assistance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and referred to the support from staff as “invaluable.” “Having a former superintendent [Dr. Karla Baehr] leading the turnaround work made all the difference.” Staff members in the turnaround office were repeatedly cited as “going the extra mile” and

“working hard to get information to us as early as possible.”

Another Superintendent noted: “The state is working to determine how best to balance the partnership and collaboration role with their compliance and monitoring responsibilities.” The Level 4 Network appears to be widely viewed as an important network of resources and support. In addition, the state’s list of “Essential Conditions” for turnaround was referenced as being an important contributor to the gains made by turnaround schools.

One district noted that the DESE is working to develop cross-functional work within the agency. Of particular urgency, noted this leader, was the need to connect oversight and management of turnaround efforts with the work to implement Common Core, the pre-AP training for teachers and the Massachusetts Model for School Counseling. Building a new culture within the DESE is one of the goals of the state’s RTTT application.

Turnaround Plans

A review of the agreements for turnarounds revealed that they included the following common elements:

- **A longer school day:** Districts added between 30–90 minutes to the school day, and that time was used to implement the turnaround plan through either student contact time or through additional planning and professional development time. In some cases, this additional time was phased in over the course of the first year.
- **Additional pay for the additional time:** Teachers earn a stipend for the additional hours. In some cases this is annualized toward retirement; in other cases, it does not contribute to their retirement earnings. In addition, several districts offered performance pay for teams of teachers (or in some cases, the entire school staff) based on increases in student achievement.
- **Professional Development:** Turnaround school staff receive additional professional development hours throughout the year. Oftentimes, the agreement identified specific professional development content. Most common was a requirement for additional training in Sheltered English Immersion or instruction for English Language Learners.

-
- **Evaluation:** Agreements on evaluation link teacher and administrator evaluation to indicators of student learning and, in some instances “turn-around indicators.” In several instances, the agreement is to use the state’s new evaluation framework and model system.

Challenges that Remain

1. Level 3 schools

Several Superintendents raised the issue of Level 3 schools, and indicated that meeting the needs of the Level 4 schools may have come at some cost to the Level 3 schools. (The nine districts with Level 4 schools are home to 50% of the Level 3 schools.) One noted: “The district pooled resources to ensure that our Level 4 schools had everything they needed. This has put a burden on the district and has caused some resentment in other schools not identified for improvement.” Districts with large numbers of turnarounds indicated that the focus on a large number of Level 4 schools diverted focus from Level 3 schools.

While additional study of the Level 3 schools is needed, the 2011 MCAS data show that 135 Level 3 schools increased the percentage of students scoring Warning or Failing on the 2011 ELA MCAS and 138 increased the Warning/Failing percentages in Math. Eighty-eight Level 3 schools (almost 33%) had an increase in the percentage of students scoring Warning or Failing on the MCAS in both ELA and math and had growth percentiles at or below the average (60%).

Only 2.6% of the Level 3 schools demonstrated high growth in ELA, and 6.3% demonstrated high growth in Math.

The state should consider how implementing its Race to the Top plan will address the concerns raised by Superintendents about the need to prevent Level 3 schools from falling into a Level 4 designation. The investments in the District and School Assistance Centers and the recent award of Wraparound School planning grants was designed to address whether that kind of investment can prevent Level 3 schools from becoming Level 4, but a larger, more systemic response is needed, particularly in the lowest performing Level 3 schools.

2. Capacity

Districts cited ambitious timelines, and voiced concerns over the looming prospect of adding Level 4 schools. This seemed to stem from human capital challenges, and district and state capacity to support school turnaround without compromising the work in other schools.

The state’s Race to the Top plan calls for the development of a cadre of skilled partners with the capacity to support turnarounds, and support district efforts to improve all schools. Given the timing of the first round of turnaround, the state’s ability to broker these partnerships was limited, and informal. By now, however, the state has built a set of approved vendors and partners.

The state has not yet established a mechanism to connect turnaround partners with schools in need. The original Race to the Top proposal called for the establishment of a turnaround intermediary. However, concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of such an organization have led the DESE to consider alternatives to establishing that external intermediary. The DESE should further develop strategies for building turnaround capacity within districts and should ensure that there exists an ability to attract and develop a cadre of external “lead” turnaround partners and to successfully connect schools and expert partners.

Building the capacity of external partners to support districts in this work could help alleviate this tension. The DESE should identify its strategy for building the turnaround function, including growing and recruiting turnaround partners.

3. What happens next?

Level 4 schools have three years to turnaround (defined as meeting growth and proficiency goals set by the state). If, at the end of three years, schools have not improved enough, they may be identified as Level 5, which could result in state receivership. What that means, and how that process will be managed (including who the external receivers might be) is not yet clear. The DESE is working on its Level 5 strategy, and that will become critical within the next year as schools potentially move closer to Level 5.

Conversely, if a school improves enough to move out of turnaround status, it runs the risk of losing the autonomies that contributed to its improvement. State regulations give the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education the authority to identify and continue working conditions in the former Level 4 schools for two-year cycles. Schools that are showing gains are already beginning to ask whether being on track to turnaround means that they lose the ability to sustain these hard won gains. (A number of turnaround agreements with the districts note that the agreements cease when the turnaround period ends.) Clarity on this issue and options for schools (e.g. conversion to innovation school status) would be helpful to the Level 4 schools.

4. Additional study

As the DESE prepares to identify another round of Level 4 schools, learning what’s working in the current cohort of schools will be critical. Several districts indicated that they wish there had been an opportunity

to learn from districts that were “ahead” on the turnaround effort. The state should look at districts’ vision and strategy for turnaround, and ensure that this next round of Level 4 schools can benefit from that experience.

In particular, further analysis should be conducted to determine the link between staffing flexibility and the pace of turnaround. The current sample size is too small to draw any firm conclusions, and with only one year of data it would be difficult to definitively identify staffing as a key contributor to the turnaround. However, given that nearly all interviewed Superintendents, and an anecdotal sampling of principals indicated that this autonomy was critical to them, it merits further study. If staffing flexibility can be linked to accelerated turnaround, the state should partner with districts to develop new staffing policies in partnership with their local teachers unions.

Detailed Performance Results from Turnaround Schools

Note: not every turnaround school is listed in this section, though this analysis is followed by a detailed chart that includes every Level 4 school. All schools were included in the aggregate analysis. Here, groups of schools are highlighted.

Making Progress: Three of the 34 turnaround schools showed progress on all key indicators of turnaround success for both English Language Arts and Mathematics with a reduction in the percent of students scoring warning/failing, an increased in Composite Performance Index (CPI) and a Student Growth Percentile of 60 or higher, showing the students at these schools progressed at a faster rate than 60% of their academic peers statewide.

		English Language Arts			Math		
		Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile	Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile
Springfield	Alfred G. Zanetti	-8	+9	66	-21	+17	82
Lynn	EJ Harrington	-7	+7	69	-13	+11	72
Boston	Orchard Gardens School	-5	+5	63	-17	+14	79

An additional seven turnaround schools reduced the percent of students scoring Warning/Failing in both ELA and Math and increased their Composite Performance Index, which captures the growth toward Proficiency and had a median SGP between 40 and 60, meaning their progress was about the same as academically-similar students statewide.

		English Language Arts			Math		
		Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile	Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile
Worcester	Chandler Elementary Community	-14	+8	51.5	-17	+11	52
Worcester	Union hill School	-14	+7	49.5	-14	+12	56
Springfield	Elias Brookings	-10	+8	47	-12	+13	46.5
Springfield	Gerena	-10	+6	46.5	-27	+13	59
Boston	Dearborn School	-9	+6	54	-7	+4	60
Boston	Elihu Greenwood School	-7	+7	52	-10	+7	43
Springfield	White Street	-5	+4	45	-8	+5	48

Uncertain: Three schools showed progress on some key performance indicators, but had lower growth compared to students statewide.

		English Language Arts			Math		
		Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile	Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile
Springfield	High School of Commerce	-5	+9	35.5	-4	+1	30
Springfield	Brightwood	-4	0	30	-20	+11	32
Springfield	John F. Kennedy Middle	0	-1	34	0	0	35

An additional four schools—all in Boston—showed progress in one subject or the other, but not both and demonstrated average relative growth.

		English Language Arts			Math		
		Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile	Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile
Boston	Harbor School	-9	+6	54.5	+2	-1	44
Boston	The English High	-1	+3	47.5	+2	-1	45
Boston	John P. Holland School	+2	-1	35	-6	+3	48
Boston	Paul A. Dever School	+3	-4	48	-15	+10	68

Stalled: Three turnaround schools were stalled to show progress in either ELA or Math, with the exception of the Henry Lord Middle School, which showed high growth in Math.

		English Language Arts			Math		
		Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile	Change in % Failing	Change in CPI	Student Growth Percentile
Fall River	Henry Lord School	+3	-2	49	+2	-2	66
Springfield	The English High	+3	-3	26	+3	-1	27
Springfield	John P. Holland School	+3	-3	32	+2	-3	30

School Turnaround Questions

District Superintendents were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Were the tools provided by the 2010 Education Reform Legislation helpful to you in developing your turnaround plan? Were they enough or the right tools?
2. When you started the turnaround process, did you replace the principals of the Level 4 schools?
3. When you started the turnaround process, did you have the human capital you needed to staff the turnaround schools, and support them? Do you have that now?
4. What happened to the teachers who were not rehired at the Level 4 School: were they re-assigned within the district, or dismissed?
5. In schools using the *transformation* model approximately what percentage of teachers chose to return or was asked to return?
6. In schools using the *turnaround* model approximately what percentage of teachers chose to return or was asked to return?
7. Have you observed a difference in the pace of turnarounds that may be linked to the model of turnaround (e.g. turnaround, in which no more than 50% of teachers are rehired or transformation, which offers greater flexibility in retaining/ rehiring staff)?
8. In the schools where there were observable student performance improvements, does it appear as though staffing flexibilities played a role? If so, could you generally describe the impact?
9. How will the new educator evaluation system accelerate the turnaround process (or will it)? Will there be any immediate impact on the other schools in your district?
10. How would you characterize the technical assistance you or your team has received from the DESE? Do you have any comments to share about the future of that support?
11. How will the turnaround gains be sustained after the school improvement grant funds are gone?
12. Looking back over the last year, if you could restart the clock, what do you wish had been handled differently (by the state, your district, the schools, etc.)?
13. Do you have other comments on the RTTT work that we should include (e.g. about educator evaluation? Data systems and tools? Common Core?)

District	School Name	English Language Arts					
		2010			2011		
		W/F %	CPI	SGP	W/F %	CPI	SGP
Lynn	E J Harrington	28	61.0	42	21	67.5	69
Springfield	Alfred G. Zanetti	18	71.9	62.5	10	81.3	66
Boston	Orchard Gardens School	33	58.7	52	28	63.9	63
Fall River	John J. Doran	38	54.5	36	30	60.2	62
Lowell	Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary	31	57.5	22	19	65.7	57
Lynn	Connery	35	61.1	45.5	29	69.8	57
Boston	Harbor School	21	72.3	41	12	78	54.5
Boston	Dearborn School	34	58.8	45	25	64.5	54
Holyoke	Morgan Elementary	47	49.0	44.5	30	56.9	53
Boston	Elihu Greenwood School	28	57.2	27	21	64.6	52
Boston	William Monroe Trotter	26	62.6	64.5	23	60.7	52
Worcester	Chandler Elementary Community	45	50.9	33.5	31	59	51.5
Worcester	Union Hill School	32	57.0	40	18	64.3	49.5
Fall River	Henry Lord Middle	13	79.1	52	16	77.3	49
Boston	Paul A. Dever School	31	58.4	59	34	54.4	48
Fall River	Matthew J. Kuss Middle School	12	82.5	49	8	83.1	48
Boston	The English High	17	73.1	39	16	75.7	47.5
Springfield	Elias Brookings	47	54.5	41.5	37	62.2	47
Springfield	Gerena	56	44.9	41	46	50.8	46.5
Springfield	White Street	34	55.4	45	29	59.7	45
Boston	UP Academy (formerly Patrick F. Gavin Middle)	32	71.5	31	33	71.8	41
Lawrence	Arlington Elementary School	26	64.1	39	22	61.6	39.5
Springfield	Homer Street	40	51.9	22	22	63.1	39.5
Boston	Blackstone School	36	53.5	39	38	52.6	38
Lawrence	South Lawrence East Middle	21	73.7	47	23	71.3	37
Holyoke	Wm. J. Dean Vocational Technical High School	27	68.4	29	20	72.3	35.5
Springfield	High School of Commerce	19	72.4	26	14	81	35.5
Boston	John P. Holland School	35	56.2	33.5	37	55.3	35
Chelsea	Chelsea High School	13	76.6	40	10	81	34
Springfield	John F. Kennedy Middle	21	70.2	37	21	69.4	34
Boston	John F. Kennedy School	22	63.2	40.5	22	65.9	32
Springfield	Chestnut Street Middle	29	68.6	41	32	65.8	32
Boston	Jeremiah E. Burke High School	21	65.3	28	16	71.9	30.5
Springfield	Brightwood	43	50.8	32	39	50.9	30
Springfield	M. Marcus Kiley Middle School	24	66.3	33	27	63.3	26
Median Turnaround School		29.0	61.1	40.0	23.0	64.6	47.0

Math						Change from 2010 to 2011					
2010			2011			ELA			Math		
W/F %	CPI	SGP	W/F %	CPI	SGP	W/F %	CPI	SGP	W/F %	CPI	SGP
35	57.0	49	22	68.2	72	-7	7	69	-13	11	72
36	56.9	59	15	74.2	82	-8	9	66	-21	17	82
50	50.4	63	33	63.9	79	-5	5	63	-17	14	79
39	54.7	47	35	58.8	52	-8	6	62	-4	4	52
29	60.4	31.5	14	74.8	80	-12	8	57	-15	14	80
36	59.5	50.5	37	67.3	61.5	-6	9	57	1	8	61.5
46	52.3	49	48	51.4	44	-9	6	54.5	2	-1	44
52	48.3	58	45	51.8	60	-9	6	54	-7	4	60
67	35.6	53	48	45.3	67.5	-17	8	53	-19	10	67.5
39	55.4	37.5	29	61.9	43	-7	7	52	-10	7	43
42	51.1	64	34	55.1	69	-3	-2	52	-8	4	69
51	46.2	49	34	56.9	52	-14	8	51.5	-17	11	52
40	51.3	54	26	63.2	56	-14	7	49.5	-14	12	56
24	68.9	73	26	66.7	66	3	-2	49	2	-2	66
38	56.1	58.5	23	65.7	68	3	-4	48	-15	10	68
25	72.1	68	23	71	62	-4	1	48	-2	-1	62
25	66.6	37	27	65.6	45	-1	3	47.5	2	-1	45
53	48.6	31	41	61.3	46.5	-10	8	47	-12	13	46.5
80	32.3	30	53	45.7	59	-10	6	46.5	-27	13	59
33	57.4	52.5	25	62.5	48	-5	4	45	-8	5	48
43	64.9	60	48	61.6	52	1	0	41	5	-3	52
32	59.4	48	28	61.6	44	-4	-2	39.5	-4	2	44
53	43.6	24.5	28	59.9	47	-18	11	39.5	-25	16	47
			32	57.7		2	-1	38			
47	54.1	34	48	57.2	30.5	2	-2	37	1	3	30.5
40	62.9	31	35	62.8	49.5	-7	4	35.5	-5	0	49.5
42	59.9	26	38	60.6	30	-5	9	35.5	-4	1	30
40	57.0	51	34	59.8	48	2	-1	35	-6	3	48
25	67.8	32	18	73.8	41	-3	4	34	-7	6	41
57	44.3	28	57	44.5	35	0	-1	34	0	0	35
27	65.2	51	13	78.9	62	0	3	32	-14	14	62
58	50.3	31	60	47.1	30	3	-3	32	2	-3	30
26	60.8	20	21	65.8	51.5	-5	7	30.5	-5	5	51.5
66	37.1	8	46	48.4	32	-4	0	30	-20	11	32
56	43.5	29.5	59	42.3	27	3	-3	26	3	-1	27
40.0	55.8	48.5	34.0	61.6	51.8						
						ELA			Math		
						-6	3	7	-6	6	3

V. Charter Schools

Theory of Change:	Scale what works and connect the highest performing charter schools with the neediest students by lifting the cap in the lowest performing districts and monitoring their efforts to recruit and retain the most vulnerable subgroups.
Progress:	In one year, the state has identified high performing “proven providers” and has approved a dramatic expansion of charters, especially in Boston. Yet there is continued need to connect high performing charters to students in the Gateway Cities. ¹⁶
Fidelity of Implementation:	The replication in Boston fulfills the spirit of the legislation by replicating in one of the neediest districts, but the promise of charters in other low performing urban districts has not yet been fulfilled.
Summary:	<p>Charter school students continue to outperform their peers in district schools, including on the 2011 MCAS exams. Sixteen new charters have been approved and thousands more students are enrolling in charter schools, mostly in Boston.</p> <p>Critics of charters have long contended that charters do not enroll the most challenging students, and the education reform law put a number of processes in place to ensure that English Language Learners and Special Education Students can access and succeed in charter schools across the state. Enrollment data (available in November 2011) will demonstrate enrollment patterns for charter schools. In the meantime, there has been a move to serve English Language Learners (notably from the Match Community Day School, which will specialize in serving ELL students in grades K-12).</p>
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create incentives for proven providers to open charters in the Gateway Cities, and support the development of a human capital pipeline of prospective charter leaders. 2. Identify strategies to connect charters to unused school facilities. 3. Review the statutory language related to Horace Mann Charters and ease barriers to start up. Consider strategies to incent the creation of new Horace Mann Charters. 4. Strengthen state capacity to support a rigorous application and accountability process for charter schools.

Key Provisions

An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap included a “smart cap lift,” doubling the number of charter school seats available in the lowest performing districts from 9% of district net school spending to 18%. New seats will be phased in between 2011 and 2012 (with the cap lifting to 12 percent in 2011 and increasing by 1% annually thereafter). Only “proven providers” with

track records of running successful schools are eligible to apply for the new charters. To address criticisms that charter schools do not recruit or retain the neediest students, new reporting provisions were included in the statute that require schools to report on their work to recruit and retain critical subgroups, including English Language Learners. If schools don’t meet their recruitment and retention goals, the Board can revoke

its charter. Finally, if a student leaves a charter school before completing the highest grade within that school, the school is required to “back fill” that seat, provided the vacancy occurs within the first half of the grades served.

Charter Schools: By the Numbers

- 42 charter school prospectuses were submitted in August 2010 and in September 2010; 25 of those 42 were invited by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to submit final proposals for consideration. 23 final applications were submitted in November.
- **On February 28, 2011 16 new charters were granted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the highest number of charters ever granted in Massachusetts in a single year.**¹⁷
- The 16 schools included Commonwealth Charters and Horace Mann Charter Schools. Commonwealth Charter Schools operate independently of the local school district. Horace Mann Charter Schools are developed and operated in close cooperation with the host school district, and require approval of the local school committee.

Noteworthy Accomplishments

- New regulations for charter schools were adopted, which defined proven providers and outlined new requirements for tracking student enrollments, as well as school recruitment and retention plans for sub-populations of students (including English Language Learners and Special Education Students).
- DESE began collecting policies and procedures related to English Language Learners from each school as part of the school opening process.
- DESE staff with expertise in English Language Learners have been a part of the chartering process, which means that charter schools now can get feedback on their plans to serve ELL students as part of the application process.
- All new and existing charter schools have submitted recruitment and retention plans to the DESE that describe their outreach to and support for student subgroups.

- Greater focus on English Language Learners prompted the Match Charter School to apply for, and successfully receive, a charter to open the Match Community Day School, a K-12 school designed specifically to serve English Language Learners that is operated in partnership and consultation with Community Day School in Lawrence, which has a track record of serving ELL students well.

Data

In 2010–2011, there were 63 Commonwealth and Horace Mann Charters across the state. Fifty percent of the students enrolled in charters are considered “low income,” compared to 34.2% statewide. The percentage of low-income students is significantly higher in the urban areas. In Boston, 72% of the students enrolled in charters are low income (compared to 74% in the Boston Public Schools district).

Although charters enroll a comparable number of students whose first language is not English (14.9% in charters, 16.3% statewide), charters do enroll fewer students who are classified as Limited English Proficient: 4.3% of charter school students are LEP, compared to 7.1% of the state.

Charter schools also tend to enroll fewer Special Education students: 13.5% of charter school students are students with special needs; statewide, 17% of students are classified as having special needs.

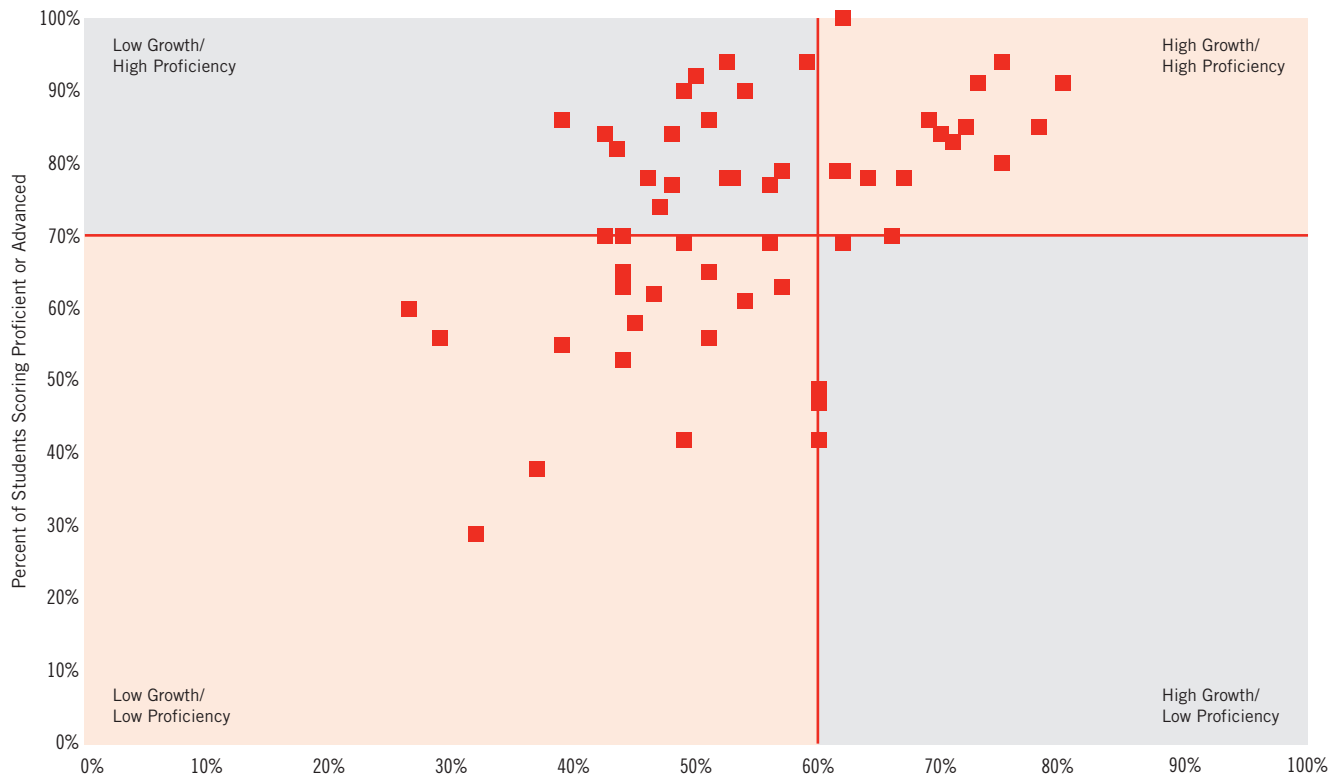
The new law required greater accountability for subgroup enrollment and retention. It also granted charters access—for the first time—to school district mailing lists, which may provide access to families with whom charters have struggled to connect in the past. When school enrollment data becomes available in late November of 2011, it will establish an important benchmark to determine whether charters are enrolling greater numbers of vulnerable subgroups.

The replicating charters enroll a higher percentage of English Language Learners than other charters. Community Day Charter Public School enrolls the highest percentage of Limited English Proficient, though both Excel Academy Charter School and KIPP Academy Lynn enroll large percentages of students whose first language is not English. All of the replicating charters enroll larger percentages of low-income students.

Selected Student Subgroups in Replicating Charter Schools¹⁸

School	% First Language Not English	% Limited English Proficient	% Students with Disabilities	% Low Income ¹⁸	% Free Lunch	% African American	% Hispanic
State Average	16.3	7.1	17	34.2	29.1	8.2	15.4
Community Day Charter Public School	82.5	35.3	16.3	69.8	54.1	1.2	89.4
Edward Brooke Charter School	12	0.2	7.3	78	61.6	72.2	22.4
Excel Academy Charter School	44.8	2.8	13.7	72.2	49.1	4.7	71.7
KIPP Academy Lynn Charter School	38.1	1.6	10.5	88.9	79.2	25.1	55.1
MATCH Charter Public School	15.7	0	15.9	77	62.2	61.1	32
Roxbury Preparatory Charter School	35.8	1.9	16.7	73.5	62.6	58.4	40.1

English Language Arts Growth & Proficiency for Charter Schools

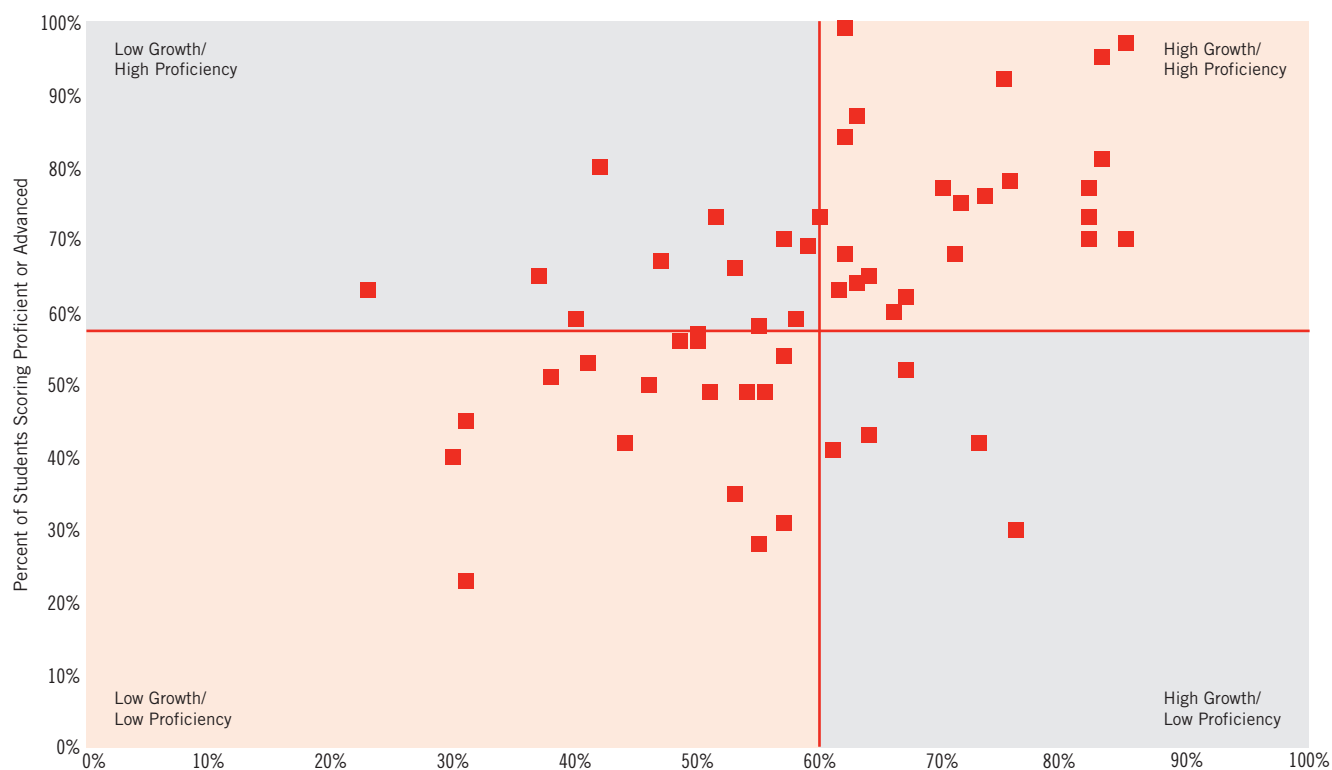


The horizontal line represents the statewide average Proficiency rate for ELA.
The vertical line represents a student growth percentile of 60%; anything above that is considered high growth by the DESE.

Highlights from the 2011 MCAS

- 46 charters demonstrate high rates of students scoring Proficient or above in English Language Arts. A high rate of Proficient or above is defined as exceeding the state average rate of 69%.
- 16 charter schools demonstrated “high growth” in English Language Arts, which means their students’ growth was better than 60% of their academic peers statewide.
- 16 charters demonstrated high growth and high rates of proficiency in English Language Arts, including the following replicators: Community Day in Lawrence and Boston’s Edward Brooke, Excel, Match, and Roxbury Prep.

Math Growth & Proficiency for Charter Schools



The horizontal line represents the statewide average proficiency rate in Math.
The vertical line represents a student growth percentile of 60%; anything above that is considered high growth by the DESE.

Highlights from the 2011 MCAS

- 37 charters demonstrate high rates of students scoring Proficient or above. A high rate of Proficient or above is defined as exceeding the state average of 58%.
- 27 charter schools demonstrated “high growth,” which means their students’ growth was better than 60% of their academic peers statewide.
- 22 charters demonstrated high growth and high rates of proficiency, including the following replicators: Community Day in Lawrence and Boston’s Edward Brooke, Excel, Match, and Roxbury Preparatory.

Challenges that Remain

1. Replicating: Dramatic growth in Boston

Replicating high performing charters was central to the reform legislation which sought to connect successful schools with the neediest students. In response, some districts witnessed a virtual land-grab of open charter seats. In Boston, more than 4,500 seats were chartered (800 seats were chartered in Lawrence, 360 in New Bedford, and 324 in Springfield). In good faith, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education chartered out almost all available seats, including “provisional” or future seats. There are only roughly 1,000 unclaimed seats available for Boston; meanwhile, some of the city’s highest performing charters are growing into networks of two to four schools. The Boston replicating charters have an impressive track record of serving students of color and low-income students. All of the Boston replicating charters have high growth and high proficiency rates.

The scatter plots on the previous page show the proficiency and growth rates in English Language Arts and Math for low-income students in the public schools in Boston. The charters that have been approved to replicate in Boston are all in the “high growth/high proficiency rates” quadrant.²⁰

These charts suggest that the replicating charters are achieving impressive results with low-income students. Additional analysis should consider whether the proficiency and growth rates for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities are as impressive at the replicating charters.

Thanks to the legislation, low-income students in Boston now have more options, though demand still appears to be greater than supply. There were 11,000 entrants into the 2011 lottery for Boston charters, signaling tremendous unmet demand on the part of parents.²¹

Nearly all of the replication, however, was in Boston (which is again close to the new charter cap). Other urban districts, with the exception of Lawrence (which is within 500 seats of its cap) are not close to their caps, meaning there is room for new charters. DESE data suggests that there are large numbers of seats available in districts with Level 4 schools:

Available Seats

- Fall River: 1,143
- Lowell: 1,800
- Lynn: 1,700
- New Bedford: 1,348
- Springfield: 3,000
- Worcester: 2,800²²

These Gateway Cities have not enjoyed the same flood of interest from charter operators to launch new schools. Anecdotal conversations with charter operators suggest that this is (in part) attributable to the challenges related to opening a second school and wanting to remain in close geographic proximity to the first school. There are also issues related to human capital: Boston is home to, and perhaps better able to attract, social entrepreneurs and experienced educators interested in opening a new charter school. And finally, the more robust philanthropic base in Boston (including a new \$12 million charter replication fund launched by the New Schools Venture Fund) offers Boston charters the opportunity to access critical planning and supplementary funds that may not be available in other districts.

The state is currently awaiting full charter applications from groups proposing new charters. There has already been one level of screening, resulting in the founders of five Commonwealth Charters and two Horace Mann Charters submitting full charter applications. The applications were due November 7, 2011. Of the applicants for Commonwealth Charters:

- Two propose to locate in Springfield (potentially serving up to 1,630 students);
- One is a regional school (which would serve 500 students in Holyoke, West Springfield, Chicopee, Westfield, South Hadley and Northampton);
- One school would locate in Lowell (potentially serving 1,200 students); and
- One school would locate in Somerville (potentially serving 450 new students).

The Horace Mann applicants are applying for in-district charters in Boston.

(Note: the state did not accept applications for Boston this year because Boston is well above the 12% cap; the DESE has indicated that in future application

processes, seats that become available under Boston's 18% cap will be available to applicant groups.) None of the proven providers from Boston are among the applicants for the new charter schools.

Following an interview and public hearing process, applications will be voted on by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education at the February 28, 2012 meeting.

Even while the state proceeds with the current charter application process, it must consider strategies for attracting proven providers to other urban districts, especially districts with large numbers of Level 4 or low-performing Level 3 schools.

2. Facilities challenges for replicating charters

One of the greatest challenges for new charter schools is finding an appropriate facility that is affordable and can accommodate a school and its students. The reform act stated that districts may "prior to consideration of any other disposition of the identified excess capacity, make a good faith offer to sell or lease at fair market value the identified excess capacity to a Commonwealth Charter School."

Having access to unused school buildings is potentially very helpful to ensuring a successful school launch for new charter schools. In Boston, the signing of the Boston Public Schools & Charter School Compact has led to the possibility of the district leasing up to three buildings to Boston charters. This is a promising start, though will not fully meet the demand of charters in Boston.

Charter growth may be slowed if charters cannot access unused school buildings. To support charter growth, addressing the access to unused school buildings will be critical.

3. Increasing the numbers of in-district Horace Mann Charters

The reform legislation created a new type of Horace Mann Charter, or in-district charter school: 14 Horace Manns could be started without local union leadership sign-off. This seemed to be a promising strategy for opening an in-district charter without undue obstruction or delay from potentially recalcitrant union leaders. However, in practice, only three of these new Horace Manns have been chartered to

date: two in Boston (which will ultimately enroll over 1,000 students and one in Salem, which will enroll 125 students).²³ One Horace Mann is being operated by an organization from outside the district; the other two were developed by individuals inside the district. As part of the opening process, these new Horace Mann charters have negotiated waivers from the district's existing collective bargaining agreement which has slowed the planning and opening process. In addition, there is a provision in the legislation that will require the signoff of local bargaining unit leadership when the school applies for its second charter. Charters last for five years, and at the end of that time, when the school applies for renewal, the local union President will need to sign off on that proposal unless the language in the statute is changed.

In creating this new type of Horace Mann Charter School, there was an opportunity to do away with the requirement that amendments to Horace Mann charters be approved by local bargaining unit leadership. In the course of the five-year charter authorization period, it is common for schools to identify aspects of their charters that need to be amended; the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regularly reviews and authorizes such requests (related to minor and major changes to the original charter, including grade configurations, governance structure (i.e. adding a Chief Operating Officer), loan approval, changes to bylaws, enrollment policies, number of seats, etc.). For Horace Mann operators, the added step of gaining union approval of any proposed amendments represents an additional challenge, especially in relation to the charter renewal. Anecdotal discussions with outside operators indicate that the potential to lose their charter after five years because of union leadership resistance to the model is a barrier to expansion. Ultimately, this provision may serve as a barrier to outside operators considering opening a Horace Mann. If the state plans to grow the number of Horace Manns, it should consider moving forward legislation for both renewal and amendment of the charters, in order to attract outside operators into the districts.

Lastly, with the lifting of the cap on charter seats, those interested in operating charter schools have been able to go into the "smart cap" districts with new Commonwealth Charter Schools. Given the hurdles involved with opening Horace Mann Charters, there has been little incentive to pursue the Horace Mann

model, unless there is an explicit mission-driven interest in operating in-district schools. As Commonwealth charters expand and the new caps on seats are reached, Horace Mann charters may become increasingly sought by proven providers who currently operate outside of the school district.

4. Capacity of the authorizer to support the proliferation of charters

Massachusetts charter law is considered to be one of the strongest in the nation, in part because of the single state authorizer. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's process has, with few exceptions, been a transparent and objective process, and

has produced some of the highest performing charters in the country.

Capacity within the agency to support large numbers of new charter schools is limited, and the charter school office has taken on new responsibilities without dramatically increasing their staffing levels. In addition, the state no longer has support from a federal grant program that it historically used to support the development, planning and implementation of new schools. This resource was critical to newly forming schools and organizations seeking charters, especially for those schools outside of Boston.

The state should consider whether it has the capacity to manage growth and accountability of quality charter schools.

New Commonwealth Charter Schools

School	Location	Grades	Number of Students	Opening
Alma del Mar Charter School	New Bedford	K–8	360	Fall 2011
Bridge Boston Charter School	Boston	K1–8	335	Fall 2011
Community day Charter Public School - Riverside	Lawrence	K1–8	400	Fall 2012
Community Day Charter Public School - South	Lawrence	K1–8	400	Fall 2012
Dorchester Preparatory Charter School	Boston	5–12	600	Fall 2012
Edward W. Brooke Charter School 2	Boston	K–8	475	Fall 2011
Edward W. Brooke Charter School 3	Boston and Chelsea	K–8	475	Fall 2012
Excel Academy Charter School - Boston II	Boston	5–12	448	Fall 2012
Excel Academy Charter School - Chelsea	Chelsea	5–8	224	Fall 2011
Grove Hall Preparatory Charter School	Boston	5–12	600	Fall 2011
KIPP Academy Boston Charter School	Boston	K–8	588	Fall 2012
MATCH Community Day Charter Public School	Boston	K1–12	700	Fall 2011
Veritas Preparatory Charter School	Springfield	5–8	324	Fall 2012

Horace Mann Charter Schools

School	Location	Grades	Number of Students	Opening
Boston Green Academy	Boston	6–12	595	Fall 2011
Salem Community Charter School	Salem	9–12	125	Fall 2011
UP Academy	Boston	6–8	500	Fall 2011

VI. Innovation Schools

Theory of Change:	Empower districts to innovate by creating a new type of in-district charter school that gives schools flexibility over time, staffing, budget, curricula and governance.
Progress:	The first three Innovation Schools opened in September 2010. Since then, an additional 16 Innovation Schools have been approved by local school committees.
Fidelity of Implementation:	18 schools have opened as innovation schools, and another has recently been approved. The Innovation Plans focus on serving specific populations of students, implementing new programming, and altering structures for teachers. While most of the schools have been initiated by district level leaders, it appears the Achievement Gap Act's goal of sparking innovation within districts is gaining traction.
Funding:	\$1,500,000 from the Massachusetts Race to the Top fund and \$600,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have supported planning and implementation efforts for new or conversion Innovation Schools. In the first round of planning grants, \$350,000 was awarded.
Summary:	The state has awarded 24 planning grants to support 26 schools; another round of planning grants will be awarded in January 2011.
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the ongoing growth of school by brokering partnerships with Innovation Schools. 2. Urge turnaround schools to consider innovation school status as a long term strategy for sustaining the turnaround. 3. Provide support to large districts with significant interest in the model. 4. Continue providing planning and implementation support 5. Continue efforts to publicize the model.

Key Provisions

Innovation schools are a signature component of *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*. The creation of these schools provides educators and other stakeholders across the state with the opportunity to create new in-district and charter-like schools that can implement creative and inventive strategies, increase student achievement, and reduce achievement gaps while keeping school funding within districts. These schools operate with autonomy and flexibility in six key areas: curriculum; budget; school schedule and calendar; staffing (including waivers from or exemptions

to collective bargaining agreements); professional development; and school district policies. Innovation schools were modeled after Boston's pilot schools.

The first innovation school in Massachusetts was the Paul Revere School in Revere, which opened its doors as an innovation school in September 2010. Other innovation schools that opened in the first year of operation include the Pathways Early College Innovation School, sponsored by the Mahar Regional District in collaboration with Wachusett Community College, and the Massachusetts Virtual Academy in Greenfield.

Innovation schools can be established by teachers, school and district administrators, superintendents, union leaders, school committees, parents, parent-teacher organizations, colleges and universities, nonprofit community-based organizations, nonprofit businesses or corporations, nonprofit charter school operators, nonprofit education management organizations, educational collaboratives, consortia of these groups, or other nonprofit groups authorized by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Innovation schools operate according to an innovation plan, developed by a defined set of stakeholders and approved by local school boards. Innovation plans describe the areas of autonomy and flexibility and specific strategies that are to be implemented in the school; at least one of the six areas of autonomy and flexibility must be addressed in the innovation plan.

The plan must also include annual measurable goals that assess factors such as student achievement and school performance. In exchange for the authority to operate the school with increased autonomy, innovation school operators are held responsible for advancing student learning and meeting these annual benchmarks. Innovation schools receive the same per pupil allocation as any other school in the district, and its operators can also secure grant or other types of supplemental funding to implement the innovation plan.

Innovation schools must receive two of three votes from a screening committee to conduct the planning process: Superintendent, School Committee, Union President. Of the 18 established schools about three-quarters of them received the union's vote of approval in the screening committee vote. All of the schools that are conversions also required a two-thirds vote of the current teachers.

The vast majority of these schools were initiated at the district or school level. To date, most of the innovation schools have been initiated by either superintendents or principals.

Innovation Schools: By the Numbers

At the start of the 2011–2012 School Year, 18 innovation schools were in operation in 12 districts across the

state: Boston, Dennis-Yarmouth, Falmouth, Greenfield, Ralph Mahar Regional, Monson, North Middlesex Regional, Quaboag Regional, Revere, Springfield, West Springfield, and Worcester (which is home to five innovation schools). In October 2011 Salem became the 13th district to approve an innovation school, scheduled to open in 2012.

Innovation schools are either new schools or conversions of pre-existing schools; of the 18 innovation schools in operation, there are 14 conversions and four new schools.

District Response in Conversion Schools:

Discussions with a sampling of districts that have approved innovation schools revealed some common themes:

- Early and frequent communications and awareness building: District leaders report dedicating time to early discussions with school committee members, union leadership, teachers and parents. All respondents emphasized the importance of early, consistent communication with key stakeholders.

"We got the teachers' union and school committee involved at the very beginning and as a result we were able to avoid most of the typical conflicts. We met regularly throughout the process and kept the focus on the best interest of students."

"From the outset, we knew we had to lay the foundation with teachers and parents and get their buy-in... it took multiple conversations but the teachers came to see this was all about improving the school and eventually they became the biggest advocates for the innovation plan."

- Teachers unions: Several district respondents reported that union leaders viewed the opening of an innovation school with some skepticism, while teachers themselves and parents responded with curiosity. In addition, they reported that teachers and parents largely embraced the idea once they understood the purpose, benefits, and process involved. This suggests a need for wider dissemination of information about the model and its potential.

Innovation school planning can provide a morale boost to staff and build collaborative spirit within districts and schools.

“The whole process really re-energized the staff.”

“The best part of the innovation school process is that it brought rapid alignment among principals and teachers...a united focus on every child becoming college and career ready.”

- **Funding:** State funding in the form of planning (up to \$15,000) and implementation grants (\$25,000–\$75,000) has been vital for districts, particularly in the planning stages. Districts report that state-funded technical assistance also has been highly valuable.

Context: Who Enrolls in Innovation Schools?

The sample size of innovation schools is small, so it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the enrollment patterns. However, a preliminary analysis suggests the following enrollment characteristics of students in these schools. While this component of the Achievement Gap Act wasn't specifically targeted at the most vulnerable subgroup, the spirit of the act intended to connect the neediest students to opportunity and promote innovation statewide. If the innovation school model is a strategy for connecting students to new structures that can better serve them, enrollment patterns may be worth ongoing attention.

Enrollment characteristics of Innovation Schools in school year 2010–2011²⁴

First Language not English/Limited English Proficient: 30% of students enrolled at innovation schools and 20% of students in the 9 districts for whom enrollment data was available are students whose First Language is Not English, compared to 16% statewide.²⁵ At the innovation schools, 21% of those students are designated as Limited English Proficient, compared to 11% within their districts and 7% statewide.

Special Education: Innovation schools enroll a slightly lower percentage of Special Education students than their districts, with 13.5% and 18% respectively. Across the state, 17% of students are classified as Special Education.

Low-income: On average, innovation schools enroll the same percentage of low-income students as do their districts, with each at 54%; both are significantly higher than the state average of 34%.

Race/Ethnicity: Among African American students, innovation schools track closely to state averages: the schools have an average enrollment of 8.5%, while their districts are at 10%, and the state average is roughly 8%. Similarly, among Asian students innovation schools are nearly identical to the state, with the schools' average enrollment at 5.6% and the statewide average at 5.5%; districts with innovation schools have an average Asian student enrollment of 4%.

Enrollment of Latino students in innovation schools, however, is double the state average, at 30% to 15% respectively, with innovation school districts falling in the middle with an average Latino enrollment of 23%. A similar, though inverse, pattern is found in the enrollment of white students, with innovation schools at 52%, the state average at 68%, and the nine districts at 59%.

Noteworthy Accomplishments

In March 2011, the Executive Office of Education (EOE), in partnership with DESE, awarded 24 planning grants of up to \$15,000 to plan for 26 new or conversion innovation schools.

- 18 new and conversion innovation schools were approved by local school committees and opened across the state in September 2011. (14 conversions; 4 new.) A 19th innovation school was approved in October 2011.
- Nine other schools have received planning grants and are in the process of getting local approval.
- The Executive Office of Education has hosted a number of information sessions to help build awareness and understanding of the Innovation School Model.
- A second round of planning grants will be made in January 2012.

Recommendations

1. Support ongoing growth by brokering partnerships with innovation schools

The goal of the innovation schools movement is to unleash creativity and innovation within school districts in order to serve students better; it is not innovation for the sake of innovation. The first cohort of schools have built innovation plans that focus on specific groups of students (e.g. off-track, over-age, out-of-school) or include unique programming (e.g. comprehensive arts education, dual language, International Baccalaureate, environmental education) or a different structure for teachers (e.g. distributive leadership, staggered schedules, more common planning time). As the model grows, it will be critical to provide support to help founding school groups think broadly about different ways to change schools to use innovation to best meet the needs of their students. One strategy for doing so may be to build a bridge between innovation school planning groups and charters, who enjoy these flexibilities and who, in most instances, had the luxury of beginning their school from a blank page. Such collaboration may help to spark innovative ideas and an exchange of best practice between autonomous schools.

In addition, the state should think about strategies to partner with districts to recruit external partners for innovation schools. Massachusetts is home to world class cultural institutions and nonprofit organizations. The innovation school model holds the potential to open school districts and schools to partnerships that may not previously have existed. Intentional brokering of such partnerships may be needed to connect potential partners.

2. Urge turnaround schools to consider innovation school status as a long term strategy for sustaining the turnaround

Another strategy for increasing the number of innovation schools and connecting them to autonomous schools could be to urge existing Level 4 schools to consider converting to innovation schools when they exit Level 4 status (presumably into Level 3). The autonomies provided through the innovation school model could be a way to preserve the gains made as part of the school turnaround, and could sustain the autonomies and flexibilities that have contributed to

the student gains. At present, Level 4 schools are not eligible to apply for innovation school planning grants. The state should reconsider this policy, and instead send the message that all schools should consider whether the model is a good fit.

3. Provide support to large districts with significant interest in the model

For larger districts where several innovation school prospectuses are under development at a given time, the state should explore ways to provide additional capacity to support the planning and review process. These districts need to dedicate staff time and resources to ensure innovation planning teams receive adequate and meaningful support, but they are already stretched thin on administrative capacity; further, these are some of the very districts where students are most in need of more high quality school options.

4. Continue providing planning and implementation support

Dedicate ongoing financial resources to the initiative. School design planning is intensive, time-consuming, and requires high quality consulting and advising, as well as stipend pay for teachers and others engaged. Continue to make resources available for planning and implementation, as well as the provision of technical assistance.

5. Continue efforts to publicize the model

Finally, intensify efforts to inform educators and the general public on what innovation schools are, what they are not, and what the potential benefits are for staff and students. Include testimonies of teachers and parents to connect with these key constituencies.

Innovation Schools in Massachusetts

School	District	Grade Level	Model	School Enrollment	District Enrollment	% of District Enrollment	Current Status
Valley Virtual Global Academy	Belchertown, Ware, Granby, Easthampton	Grades 7–12	new school	500	1,446	35.0%	Initial Prospectus
Valley East Academy	Belchertown, Ware, Granby, Easthampton	Grades 9–12	new school	25	1,446	2.0%	Initial Prospectus
Roger Clap Innovation School	Boston	Grades K–5	new school	148	56,037	0.2%	Approved - Operating
Accelerated Learning Academy	Boston	Grades 9–12	new school		56,037		Initial Prospectus
Boston Arts Innovation School	Boston	Grades 9–12	conversion school	415	56,037	1.0%	Initial Prospectus
Charlestown High/Bird Street/Diploma Plus	Boston	Grades 9–12	conversion school	230	56,037	0.4%	Initial Prospectus
Haynes and Higginson-Lewis Schools	Boston	Grades PreK–8	conversion school		56,037		Initial Prospectus
Margartia Muniz Academy	Boston	Grades 9–12	new school	400	56,037	1.0%	Initial Prospectus
University High Innovation School	Boston	Grades 10–12	new school		56,037		Initial Prospectus
Dudley Street Neighborhood School	Boston	Grades K–5	new school	280	56,037	0.5%	Initial Prospectus
Marguerite E. Small School	Dennis - Yarmouth	Grades 4–5	conversion school	317	3,199	1.0%	Approved
Lawrence School	Falmouth	Grades 7–8	conversion school	556	3,710	15.0%	Approved
Wilson International School	Framingham	Grades K–5	conversion school	530	8,182	6.0%	Initial Prospectus
Discovery School at Four Corners	Greenfield	Grades K–3	conversion school	162	1,790	10.0%	Approved
Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield	Greenfield	Grades 9–12	new school	217	1,790	12.0%	Approved - Operating
Hadley Virtual Academy of Massachusetts	Hadley	Grades 3–12	new school	500	710	70.0%	Initial Prospectus
Monson New Century High School	Monson	Grades 9–12	conversion school	365	1,383	26.0%	Approved
New Bedford Leadership Academy	New Bedford	Grades 9–12	new school	500	12,538	4.0%	Initial Prospectus
Baccalaureate School of North Middlesex	North Middlesex	Grades 11–12	conversion school, school within a school		3,971		Approved

Innovation Schools in Massachusetts, *continued*

School	District	Grade Level	Model	School Enrollment	District Enrollment	% of District Enrollment	Current Status
Quaboag Innovation STEM Early College	Quaboag	Grades 11–12	conversion school, school within a school	30	1,446	2.0%	Approved
Quaboag Innovation Middle School	Quaboag	Grades 7–8	conversion school		1,446		Approved
Pathways Early College High School	Ralph C Mahar Regional	Grades 11–12	new school	40	821	5.0%	Approved - Operating
Paul Revere Innovation School	Revere	Grades K–5	conversion school	389	6,229	6.0%	Approved - Operating
Carlton School Continuous Progress Innovation School	Salem	Grades K–5	conversion school	260	4,565	6.0%	Initial Prospectus
Springfield Renaissance Innovation School	Springfield	Grades 6–12	conversion school	651	25,213	3.0%	Approved
21st Century Skills Academy	West Springfield	Grades 9–12	new school	200	3,932	5.0%	Approved
The Chandler Magnet School	Worcester	Grades preK–6	conversion school	460	24,192	2.0%	Approved
Goddard Scholars Academy at Sullivan Middle School	Worcester	Grades 6–8	conversion school	48	24,192	0.1%	Approved
Goddard School of Science and Technology	Worcester	Grades preK–6	conversion school	586	24,192	2.0%	Approved
University Park Campus School	Worcester	Grades 7–12	conversion school	241	24,192	1.0%	Approved
Woodland Academy	Worcester	Grades preK–6	conversion school	492	24,192	2.0%	Approved

Endnotes

¹ In order to be eligible for a waiver from the federal government's NCLB provisions, the state must identify additional Level 4 schools.

² <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012459>

³ <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/>

⁴ These averages are derived from the scaled scores of subgroups of students on the 2011 NAEP assessments in Grades 4 and 8 Reading and Math. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/>

⁵ http://apreport.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/downloads/pdfs/AP%20RTN%202011_StateReport_MA.pdf

⁶ Union representatives were the least represented in interviews. Additional focus groups and interviews likely are warranted to fully capture the perspective of local and state level union officials.

⁷ One of the turnaround schools has closed, so the original 35 is now 34.

⁸ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr2.html?section=05>

⁹ This total includes the lowest 20% performing schools in Massachusetts, including the Level 4 schools.

¹⁰ Boston closed one of its turnaround schools so while 35 were identified, there are currently only 34 Level 4 schools operating.

¹¹ The Boston Indicators Project, a partnership between the Boston Foundation, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the City of Boston, aims to democratize access to information, foster informed public discourse, track progress on shared civic goals, and report on change in 10 sectors, including education. More information about the Boston Indicators Project is available at: [<http://www.bostonindicators.org/Indicators2008/>].

¹² Performance gains are reported based on the change from 2010 to 2011 and are not tied to individual Annual Goals for Turnarounds. This is because this measure was estimated to be the most easily understood, especially in comparison to other schools. Each Level 4 school will have its own set of goals that it is also working toward.

¹³ The participating districts were: Boston, Springfield, Worcester, Lowell, Lawrence, Fall River, New Bedford, Holyoke, and Lynn.

¹⁴ Teachers who chose retirement or took a leave of absence are not included in this statement.

¹⁵ Note: this is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all of the partners.

¹⁶ Gateway Cities are a group of 24 former industrial Massachusetts mill cities, including Chelsea, Lawrence, Fall River, Holyoke, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield, Worcester, and others.

¹⁷ The replicating charters include: Community Day School in Lawrence, Edward Brooke Charter School, Roxbury Prep, Excel, Match School, and KIPP.

¹⁸ <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

¹⁹ Defined as students eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch.

²⁰ Low income students were used because all public schools in Boston enroll large numbers of low income students and therefore offered the most valid comparison group.

²¹ This does not mean there were 11,000 students applying to charters since students can participate in more than one lottery. The number of student participants is not known, though even if it is half that it is still greater than the 4,500,450 seats that were chartered.

²² <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/app/full.pdf>

²³ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=6042>

²⁴ Enrollment data is for SY10-11, during which time 2 of the 13 schools were operational; the other 11 became Innovation Schools at the start of SY11-12.

²⁵ In places where innovation schools were new, or are programs within schools, enrollment data was not available. innovation schools included in this analysis are located in Boston, Dennis-Yarmouth, Falmouth, Greenfield, Monson, Ralph C. Mahar Regional, Revere, Springfield, and Worcester. Schools not included are: Quaboag Innovation Early College (school-within-a-school, grades 11–12); Quaboag Innovation Middle School (school-within-a-school, grades 7–8); Baccalaureate School of North Middlesex (school-within-a-school, grades 11–12); 21st Century Skills Academy in West Springfield (school-within-a-school, grades 9–12); and Goddard Scholars Academy at Sullivan Middle School in Worcester (school-within-a-school, grades 6–8).

