



Massachusetts Profile¹

Basic Background Information²

Elementary and Secondary Education Characteristics and Finance

Total Number of District & Schools: 402 Districts, 1,854 Schools (2015-16)

Approximate Number of Schools Previously Identified for Improvement: 65 schools total since 2011, 57% have exited.

Total Students: 953,758 (2015-16), 17% SWD, 9.5% ELL, 45% “High Needs,” 30% Economically Disadvantaged

Total Title I Allocations from FY 2015: \$231,735,292

Evidence-Based Practices Information

General Approach to Evidence-Based Practices

Massachusetts has a history of investing in research to see if their programs work, e.g. DESE funded two third party, external turnaround evaluations that showed positive gains. The practices described in this work (general principles for what works in turnaround like focus on instruction, safe supportive climate, etc) will continue to be pursued. Massachusetts’ Framework for District Accountability and Assistance classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, with the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. [State law](#) requires that districts with a Level 4 school develop a Turnaround Plan for the school. A Turnaround Plan requires Level 4 districts and schools to identify priority areas and strategic initiatives at both the school and district level, aligned to the research-based findings in the [Turnaround Practices in Action](#) report ([see also info at state’s website on their framework for accountability and assistance](#)). This plan takes the place of any existing school improvement plan and becomes the basis for any federal grant funding. Level 5 is the most serious category in Massachusetts’ accountability system, representing receivership. District Turnaround Receivers are individuals or non-profit organizations that manage and operate chronically underperforming (Level 5) districts.

Planned Support for LEAs and Schools

Broadly speaking, they will take a similar approach to targeted/comprehensive schools as they did for turnarounds previously; they created a highly competitive funding process involving (for example) multiple readers of proposals, plus facilitators to reconcile readers’ proposal scores. The idea was to target significant amounts of funds to schools that are both Level 4 and ready for a significant turnaround effort.

Not sure exactly what they will require of LEAs in terms of applications and in terms of EBPs yet, but are working toward including clear requests for EBPs in any Federal allocation grants where ESSA EBPs

¹ This document was prepared in spring 2017, and data and information does not reflect updates made since that time.

² Based on info from SEA website and ED website

language applies and state RFPs and documentation. Not sure what “pre-application” supports may look like yet exactly.

The state’s supports to identified schools will include direct support from ESE staff and also external partners, who ESE vets on behalf of districts; other structural changes such as Innovation Zone schools as well (and direct state takeover in extreme cases).

Massachusetts has a set of data and tools they encourage districts to use to support performance monitoring (including a new set around budget).

Biggest Challenge with Evidence-Based Practices

One challenge is a strategic one about how to organize the work of the agency to support EBPs outside of school turnaround/school improvement. They plan to try to work within the agency to make sure any competitive grant programs include research and evaluation that would result in more documentation of EBPs. MA has a research office and some capacity to internally manage work. They won’t necessarily fund other big studies like the previous ones they did on turnaround because they have limited funds for evaluation and findings of the last evaluation were positive, and in the words of the external evaluators, “so conclusive.” ESE is focused instead on developing and executing a strategic plan to build infrastructure for agency internal and district facing EBPs work on an ongoing basis. There is some question about how best to do this – for example, recent blog by Kane talks about an external approach through partnerships with researchers; another piece (by D. Harris) talks about a more internal approach – building capacity within agency.