



Guidance for Level 4 Districts: Focused Planning for Accelerating Student Learning

Updated June 2013



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For more information on the Accelerated Improvement Planning process,
contact districtassist@doe.mass.edu
or visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/default.html>

1. State Intervention in Level 4 Districts: Background, Purpose, and Theory of Action

In April 2010, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) adopted regulations to define the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (ESE) approach to engaging with school districts to improve student performance (see [Appendix O](#)). In alignment with the regulations, *Guidance for Level 4 Districts* defines the roles and responsibilities for districts formerly declared "underperforming" by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) and districts designated as Level 4 based on the findings of a district review. The designation of a Level 4 district based on a district review signals that the district is "at risk" of a chronically underperforming designation. At Level 4, the district is still fully responsible for its programs and services, but will be monitored closely by ESE to ensure that district systems of support and student performance are rapidly and measurably improving.

When the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts a review of district practice and concludes that a district's systems of support are not delivering the necessary educational services for its students, ESE is obligated to intervene as necessary to ensure that students' needs are met. The regulations clarified the process for a district in Level 4 to be monitored, periodically reviewed and considered for removal from Level 4, either to Level 3 if systems and practices were substantially improved, or to Level 5 if the district required substantially more intense intervention – in the form of receivership – to improve its systems and student achievement. The Framework for District Accountability and Assistance (see [Appendix A](#)) defines the roles and expectations of the district and ESE based on the performance of the district's schools.

The content of this guidance provides details about the process for monitoring and supporting districts currently designated Level 4, as well as those that may be designated in the future. The guidance defines a process and template for ambitious improvement planning with a rigorous focus on measuring implementation and outcomes. The theory guiding the Department's approach is: *if* a Level 4 district can **define a narrow set of strategic objectives** to accelerate student learning, **execute well-defined initiatives** with a relentless focus on implementation, and **systematically monitor the impact of those initiatives** to inform mid-course corrections, *then* outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed.

2. Core Principles of the Accelerated Improvement Planning Process

The District Accelerated Improvement Process represents a new approach to supporting districts in transforming their work and dramatically increasing student learning outcomes. It is designed to add maximum value to districts while also meeting ESE's responsibility to provide increased accountability and assistance for underperforming school districts. There are several fundamental principles underlying this approach to District Accelerated Improvement Planning:

1. **Students cannot wait** for incremental improvement in their educational conditions.
2. The process must be **grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement**, informed by data, driven by results, with a laser-like focus on implementation of a few high-lever strategic objectives.
3. The process **requires time, attention, and commitment** and should be a central part of district leaders' daily work.
4. Monitoring of progress must **focus on outcomes**, results, and how the activities outlined in the Plan are serving the best interests of students.
5. **Collaboration** between and among stakeholders is essential for accelerated and sustained improvement.
6. The process requires a **willingness to challenge and be challenged**, to honestly assess progress and confront difficult issues, and to make the necessary mid-course corrections based on a robust analysis of evidence.
7. **Regular monitoring and accountability** is designed to focus and accelerate the improvement process by providing ongoing feedback.

3. The Accelerated Improvement Process as a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Every district should be on a path of continuous learning and improvement. Key characteristics of an improvement process are that it is thoughtful, data driven, reflective, and adaptive. The Accelerated Improvement Planning process is designed to scaffold and support a district with embedding a cycle of improvement into its way of doing business.

- **Self-Assessment:** The district review and ESE data can support a district's self-analysis of key strengths the district can build on, and key challenges it wants to address.
- **Analysis, Goal Setting and Plan Development:** Accelerated Improvement Plans have 3-5 **Objectives**. Each Objective has 2-4 **Initiatives**. For each initiative, there are concrete **activities** and measures (**benchmarks**) of success.
- **Implementation of the Plan:** This is the most important work: execution. The research shows that relentless attention to **project management** and follow-through is critical.

Most plans fail because they lack that follow-up (plans sit on a shelf). The design of the AIP is designed to be a tool to support effective project management.

- **Formative Assessment/Evaluation:** District leaders should frequently self- monitor action steps and outcomes. ESE also monitors district progress and provides support for problem-solving. Monthly Highlight Discussions and Quarterly Progress Reports (described in this document) are key elements of the district's system for formatively assessing progress on the Plan.
- **Summative Evaluation:** For Level 4 districts, ESE prepares an annual report summarizing progress and challenges, including an analysis of annual performance data.

4. Core Principles of the Accelerated Improvement Plan

- A. The plan must **target and transform instructional practices at all levels within the district** in a way that is tangible to all students, teachers, and families. All stakeholders should feel that something is different about how the district is approaching the business of educating students.
- B. The plan must **focus on outcomes and results**. The plan must focus on *performance* more than *processes* to determine whether activities are improving teaching and learning and making a difference for students. The activities in a plan must be viewed as the means of achieving the strategic objectives and outcomes identified in the plan.
- C. **The whole must be greater than the sum of the parts**. The activities, initiatives, and strategic objectives outlined in the plan must work together to strengthen and reinforce each other. Alignment and coherence of activities will help maximize effort and resources and focus the district on key priorities.
- D. The plan must be **easily understood by all affected audiences**. The plan must capture in plain language the critical issues that must be addressed in the district to bring about accelerated improvement: *what will be done and why*. The priorities for the district must be evident to parents, teachers and the community.
- E. The plan must be a **useful tool to those who must implement it**. The plan should be a living document, embedded in ongoing conversations about improvement, used and referenced daily by those responsible for its success.

5. Criteria for Exit

Accelerated Improvement Plans are required when a district is identified for Level 4 status based on concerns identified by a comprehensive district review. It can be helpful to know in advance the criteria that will be used to determine a district is ready to exit Level 4 status (note that districts with Level 4 schools cannot fully exit Level 4 status until those schools meet the exit criteria outlined in MA regulations (603 CMR 2.05(12))). By considering these criteria in addition to relevant data and other contextual information, a district can create a robust plan that will dramatically shift practices in order to accelerate the pace of improvement in student learning.

These criteria align to the district standards and indicators as well as to a theory of continuous improvement, and represent key student learning outcomes and district practices that demonstrate district systems, structures, and practices are in place to sustain improvement over time. They are outlined in detail in [Appendix N](#). Broadly, they are:

- Demonstrate improved student achievement
- Define a narrow set of strategic objectives to accelerate student learning
- Execute well-defined initiatives with relentless focus on implementation
- Monitor systematically the impact of the initiatives
- Modify initiatives to achieve greater impact

By demonstrating these exit criteria a district can give stakeholders confidence that it has addressed the areas of concern from the district review.

Evidence that a district is making progress toward these criteria will emerge from the monthly discussions of the plan (Highlight Discussions – see [Section 7](#)). Therefore, as a district develops its plan, it will want to reflect on the degree to which the work it has planned and the benchmarks it plans to monitor address these key areas.

Further discussion of moving toward exit can be found in [Section 8](#).

6. Creating the Level 4 District Plan

The purpose of the District Plan is to provide a structured and transparent approach that evaluates what the key issues are in a district and what will be done to bring about accelerated improvement. (See [Appendix C](#) for the Accelerated Improvement Plan template.)

Section 1: Explanation of key issues and how the district will address them – explaining to the community what needs to be done and why

The first requirement is to present what needs to be done and why. This written statement should use language that parents and community members can easily understand. The summary statement should be a maximum of 1,000 words.

This section summarizes the core issues and challenges that must be addressed in order to rapidly improve student outcomes. These core issues and challenges should be drawn from the district review report, along with other analyses of quantitative or qualitative data, and should be aligned to ESE District Standards and Indicators. Effective use of data is critical in identifying these core issues and challenges and monitoring progress towards goals. The issues should focus on the impact on student learning and achievement gains and the quality of educational services delivered. It should also provide a brief overview of the District Strategic Objectives and Initiatives (see below) that will address these core issues. Conclude this section with a theory of action that explicitly connects the Objectives to the district's vision of success for students, specifically an if-then statement that explicitly stipulates what goals will be realized if the district successfully carries out its objectives.¹

Having stated what the core issues are and how addressing them will realize a vision of student success, this section then lists the key **Strategic Objectives** that will serve as the overarching areas of focus for the plan. When faced with challenging circumstances, there is a temptation to create a long list of possible solutions. The Objectives for improvement must succinctly describe three to five overarching areas of focus. These **Objectives** should take into account the District Review and other evidence and should align with ESE's District Standards and Indicators.

The plan also lists the specific Strategic Initiatives that comprise each strategic objective. These initiatives will enable the district to achieve its objectives. There should be no more than five **Initiatives** for each objective. The initiatives can be prioritized in a logical sequence of implementation to ensure that the most urgent areas are addressed quickly. The sequence will be identified through the rank order of the initiatives in the plan and the timelines for the activities. These initiatives may include the implementation of programs, shifts in policy, establishment of partnerships, or changes in organizational structures. The plan should also describe the expected **early evidence of change** and the expected **short-term outcomes** that will serve as indicators and success criteria for each **Initiative**.

¹ See Chapter 5 in Curtis and City, *Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching* (2010) for additional information, including examples, on theories of action.

Section 2: Initiative Strategy Sheet – the heart of the planning tool

Each Initiative is illustrated using a Strategy Sheet (one sheet per Initiative). The Strategy Sheet includes: the overall lead for the Objective and Initiative; the early evidence of change indicators and short-term outcomes (see below) that will be used to assess progress for that Initiative; the key resources necessary to implement the Initiative effectively; and the key Activities that will occur, along with timeframes and persons responsible.

Early evidence of change indicators establish the effectiveness of an initiative before the short-term outcomes can be measured. Focusing on early evidence of change helps ensure each initiative is accelerating improvement by flagging areas where barriers need to be addressed. Early evidence of change could relate to a measurable difference in practice that is taking place either in the classroom or in leadership and management. It could also reflect a shift in commitment and understanding by stakeholders that the initiative is essential to make much needed improvement.

The plan should also track **short-term outcomes** as well as the desired **final outcomes**. The former might be captured by an annual performance goal that shows incremental improvement, while the latter could be measured by achieving the outcome as it is defined in the plan. Short-term outcomes could be, for example, benchmark assessment performance targets by the grades and subgroups that would be impacted by the introduction of the strategic initiative. The final outcomes in this example would then be annual MCAS performance targets to be achieved as a result of Plan implementation. (See [Appendix B](#) for more information about effective benchmarks).

The **Activities** spell out what steps must be taken to implement each strategic initiative, who will get the job done, and in what timeframe. It is the place to map out and sequence the steps that need to take place to implement each strategic initiative. The appropriate “grain size” for the **Activities** should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district’s daily work.

The plan should embed activities that help monitor the effectiveness of the plan’s implementation. For example, there should be activities that establish the process and structures for documenting early evidence of change.

At every stage the plan must focus on expected outcomes. The evidence that will be used to document outcomes should be clear and apparent in the plan, and the plan must clearly define **who will do what and by when**.

Reflecting on the Plan

In [Appendix E \(Guiding Questions\)](#), there are a series of questions designed to promote debate and to clarify thinking. They can be used as the plan is being prepared or as a framework for evaluating its effectiveness. These questions provide a check and balance to support coherence and purpose and are part of ensuring that the plan is well understood and works as a living document. The questions are based on the Level 4 Accelerated Improvement Plan Rubric ([Appendix D](#)), which the Department uses to formally assess districts’ plans and which contains additional information about key aspects of the plan.

7. ESE Support for Developing and Implementing the District Plan

Level 4 Plan Managers

In order to support the development and implementation of a District Plan, ESE provides funding for a portion of a staff position to serve as Level 4 Plan Manager. The Plan Manager assists with defining the priorities in the District Plan, and supports the planning, controlling and monitoring of tasks and resources to meet the deadlines specified. Specifically, the Level 4 District Plan Manager is responsible for:

- Convening and facilitating district staff to ensure production of the district's Level 4 District Plan;
- Managing the implementation of the Level 4 District Plan to ensure that deadlines are met; and
- Ensuring that monthly Plan Highlight Reports are produced.

The Level 4 Plan Manager reports to the superintendent. The Manager has strong project management skills, as specified by the ESE, in order to provide comprehensive and focused support in the district for the development and implementation of the District Plan. In addition to supplemental funding for the position, ESE provides ongoing support and training for the Level 4 Plan Managers across the state and facilitates a network of Level 4 Plan Managers. To ensure that the Manager has the confidence of both the district and ESE, the appointment of each Level 4 Plan Manager is decided on jointly by the ESE's Center for Targeted Assistance and the district. The Level 4 Plan Manager will support problem solving and have the ability to collaborate, negotiate, interact and influence people associated with the District Plan. **(See [Appendix K](#) for the Plan Manager job description.)**

Level 4 Plan Monitors

In order to provide transparency for the AIP process, ESE provides funding for a Plan Monitor who is assigned to each Level 4 district. All Plan Monitors have extensive district leadership experience, which allows them to learn and accurately report about district progress. Using the AIP as a grounding document, Plan Monitors review evidence provided by the district to determine the extent to which the district is meeting the targets in the plan, and to learn about the midcourse corrections the district is making as it implements the plan. Specifically, the Level 4 Plan Monitor is responsible for:

- Providing a fresh perspective on each district's work, and using that perspective to observe progress in the district as well as critical gaps that should be addressed, as outlined by the AIP;
- Using the AIP as a framework to ask questions that allow the monitor to learn about the district's work and which also encourage the district to approach its work in new ways;
- Reporting to district stakeholders and to the public about the district's work (progress and concerns) directly and clearly; and

- Through the initiatives above, continually promoting further district growth and helping to make the cycle of continuous improvement an embedded, sustainable district practice.

(See [Appendix L](#) for the Plan Monitor job description and [Appendix I](#) for a description of the role of each stakeholder in the AIP process.)

8. Ongoing Reflection and Monitoring: What Brings the Plan Alive

In order to keep the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) a living document that focuses work across the district, it must be referenced and reflected upon frequently. Therefore, the AIP process includes several components designed to support ongoing reflection and communication about the district's progress and challenges related to implementing the AIP. In other words, the process provides a way to engage in a Cycle of Continuous Improvement, accelerating student learning district-wide by working as a leadership team to plan, monitor, and adjust the work on a regular basis.

The main monitoring and reflection components of the AIP process are:

- Monthly Highlight Discussions
- Quarterly Progress Reports
- Annual Summative Reports

HIGHLIGHT DISCUSSIONS

Purpose

Highlight discussions are monthly meetings designed to focus on what has occurred the preceding month, based on the work outlined in the Accelerated Improvement Plan. The discussion should be firmly focused on the specific activities and outcomes listed in the AIP; over the course of a three-month period, highlight discussions should address all aspects of the district's accepted Plan. For this reason, it is essential that a district's Accelerated Improvement Plan represent agreed-upon vision and benchmarks for the district, as the activities, early evidence of change, and short-term outcomes will serve as the basis for these monthly discussions. While the Highlight Discussion for a Level 4 district is supported by Plan Managers and Plan Monitors, we hope it serves as a model practice that districts might embed into their work and continue after the formal AIP process ends.

Highlight Discussions are designed to support the district in accelerating student learning by pausing to reflect on whether activities and initiatives are having impact. Grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement, the specific goals of a Highlight Discussion are to:

- Keep the Plan a living document that focuses and guides the district's work
- Use evidence and artifacts to reflect on the progress and impact of AIP initiatives

Evidence

Just as we want teachers to ground their discussion of students with artifacts and data of a student's learning progress, the monthly Highlight Discussion should be grounded with specific and tangible evidence of the district's progress in implementing the Plan. The benchmarks outlined in the AIP represent agreed-upon data and artifacts that will be referenced regularly at these meetings:

- Are activities being implemented as planned, and with fidelity?
- Are Early Evidence of Change benchmarks being met as expected?
- Are Short-Term Outcomes being met?

Districts should come to a Highlight Discussion prepared to discuss select benchmarks. This involves assembling relevant data and artifacts ahead of time, as well as spending some time reflecting and analyzing the evidence so the Highlight Discussion can focus on what the district has learned. To ensure the usefulness of Highlight Discussions for all involved, the specific evidence to be presented and plan elements to be discussed at each meeting should be agreed upon in advance. This identification of evidence should be a regular part of each Discussion, so that there is a shared understanding of what data and artifacts most clearly represent the district's progress.

When identifying the best evidence to collect and share, consider:

- What are the most important process and performance benchmarks to reflect upon and discuss, and which of these will be at least partly accomplished in time for the next Highlight discussion?
- What evidence would most clearly and concisely show the district's progress and challenges at this stage of Plan implementation?
- What is the best *type* of evidence for the identified benchmarks? (E.g., a document/artifact? Interviews/focus groups? A survey? Observations?) Why is this? Do all Highlight Discussion participants agree that this is the most effective and efficient medium for representing the district's work?

The content of these monthly discussions form the basis for the Quarterly Progress Report (discussed further below). Likewise, as elements of the AIP are addressed during Highlight Discussions, supporting evidence for those elements should be provided to the Plan Monitor. In this way, Plan Monitors can develop a deepening understanding of the district's progress over time. Evidence submission should not be viewed as a compliance activity, but as an organic part of ongoing discussions about the district's implementation and outcomes. Therefore, all evidence submitted should be what the district would use to reflect on its work, and should not be something created only for the purpose of reporting. For example, if the Plan indicates that common planning time discussion minutes will demonstrate that teachers are using data to create individual action plans, the district could submit examples of minutes that show the data analysis and planning in which teachers have engaged.

Team Member Roles in Highlight Discussions

Superintendents are responsible for ensuring that the Highlight Discussion captures the full picture of the district's progress on their Accelerated Learning Plan. With the support of the

Plan Manager they plan and ensure leadership for the meeting, including preparing a specific agenda and determining who should be present and what supporting materials are needed.

Plan Managers are responsible for supporting Superintendents in preparing for and leading a Highlight Discussion that fulfills the goals outlined above and, over the course of 3-month period, addresses all aspects of the accepted Plan. Plan Managers are also responsible for advising ESE Assistance and Accountability staff of the date, time, and location of each Highlight Discussion at least one week in advance of each discussion, and for submitting Highlight Reports (see below).

Plan Monitors are responsible for listening carefully to district stakeholders and for encouraging a collegial, reflective discussion with the district. Plan Monitors will ask questions as district personnel reflect on their work in order to check their understanding and determine with confidence whether or not progress is indeed accelerating. In many cases, Plan Monitors' questions are also designed to help support districts' reflection about their work. Over the course of three months, Plan Monitors will ensure they prepare questions that address all aspects of the Plan's work for that period and that are directly related to the benchmarks the district plans to discuss at each Highlight Discussion.

ESE Staff from the office of accountability and/or state system of support may also attend a Highlight Discussion in order to gain insight on the work of the district, or to learn how to better support Plan Managers and Monitors in their work.

Documenting the Discussion

The key content of each Highlight Discussion is documented in the Minutes, which serve a variety of uses. The Minutes provide a record of what was communicated and agreed to during the discussion.

A district may choose to use the Minutes as an internal communication tool for stakeholders who were not present at the discussion. They may also choose to reference it on a weekly basis until the next Highlight Discussion, to ensure their work stays focused on key areas. The Minutes are also a tool for ESE staff to learn about the ongoing progress of each district, as well as to surface themes emerging from all districts engaged in the Accelerated Improvement Planning process. This information helps shape both assistance and accountability efforts and informs the continual improvement of the AIP process.

For these reasons, Minutes for Highlight Discussions must be clearly written so that individuals who did not attend the Highlight Discussion can understand what transpired. The report should follow the established format. (See [Appendix F: Suggested Agenda & Template for Meeting Minutes](#).)

The *Plan Manager* is responsible for taking notes during the Highlight Discussion, finalizing the Minutes, and sending a draft to the superintendent and the Monitor within three days of the Discussion. The Monitor and superintendent are responsible for reviewing the draft and notifying the Plan Manager of any discrepancies or questions within three days of receiving the

draft. The Plan Manager should then send the final Minutes to the superintendent, the Monitor, the ESE Targeted Assistance contact, and the ESE Accountability contact within one week of the discussion. ESE staff will review each report and contact the Plan Manager with any questions.

Suggested Themes for Highlight Discussions

August:

- Discuss and reflect on work accomplished over the summer
- Reflect on final MCAS/PPI and other summative data from previous school year.
 - Why do you think the district saw the results it did?
 - What are the implications for the work going forward this year?
- Reflect on where the district is in the stages toward exit. Possible questions to discuss include:
 - What is your perception of where the district is on the continuum toward exit, and why?
 - What specific roles/responsibilities might make the most sense for the district to begin to take on in the coming year? How do you see the Plan Manager and Monitor role shifting in order to support the district's capacity in those areas?
 - What do you want the Monitor to focus on most as they give the district feedback in the coming year?

September/October:

- Discuss the district's baseline data, as outlined in the Early Evidence of Change and Short Term Outcomes in the Accelerated Improvement Plan
- Discuss and reflect on accomplishments, challenges, risks, and key modifications.
- Identify next steps for the coming month, including the specific benchmarks/topics to be addressed at the next Highlight Discussion.

November-June:

- Discuss and reflect on accomplishments, challenges, risks, and key modifications.
- Identify next steps for the coming month, including the specific benchmarks/topics to be addressed at the next Highlight Discussion.

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

Purpose

Three times a year, Plan Monitors prepare a formal Quarterly Progress Report (QPR) that is a formative assessment of the district's progress on accelerating and sustaining improvement in the prior three months. The QPR is shared with the School Committee as a means to keep them informed of the work.

The QPR includes:

- A narrative summary of overall progress based on monthly Highlight Discussions, collected evidence and interviews with stakeholders
- A narrative of progress on specific strategic objectives and initiatives
- Ratings for each initiative along with supporting evidence. Ratings are provided for both **Process** and **Performance** based on a predefined rubric ([Appendix G](#)).

The content for the QPR is drawn primarily from the monthly Highlight Discussions and related evidence. Evidence supporting the topics addressed at each Highlight Discussion should be provided to the Monitor during each Discussion; a separate meeting should not be necessary for the purpose of the QPR.

Plan Monitors may request additional evidence (in the form of documents or interviews with selected stakeholders) to address lingering questions about progress on the Plan and/or to triangulate various sources of evidence. Likewise, Plan Managers and district leaders may choose to submit additional evidence to support Quarterly Progress Reports beyond what is discussed in Highlight Discussions. However, these should only *supplement* the information shared during Highlight Discussions, and should be in keeping with the evidence that is pre-identified at ongoing Highlight Discussions. Additional evidence/monitoring activities should not require a burdensome amount of time for district leaders or Plan Managers to collect/coordinate, or for Monitors to review/conduct. In all cases, additional evidence or activities should be requested or scheduled at least 3 weeks in advance.

Timeline

The process for a Quarterly Progress Report is as follows:

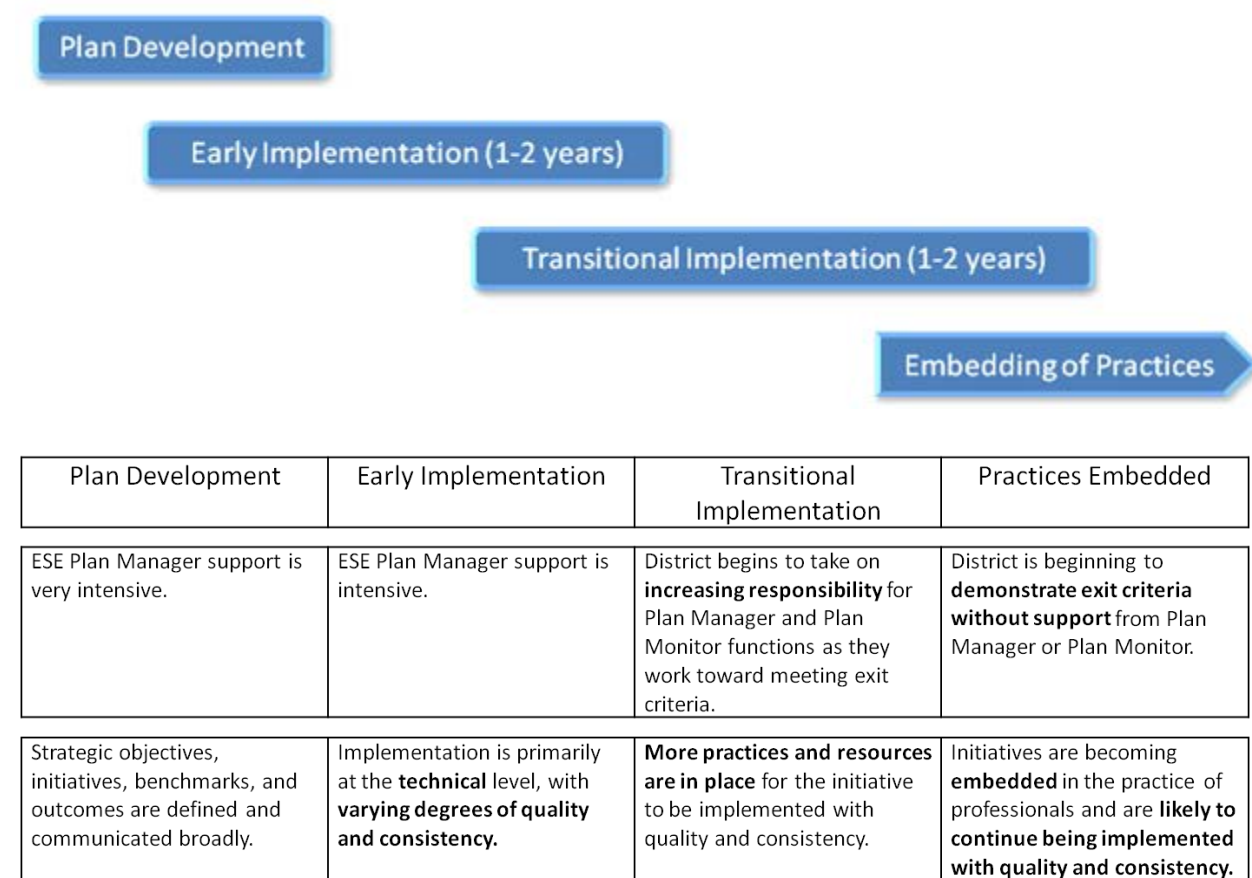
- Plan Monitor reflects on Meeting Minutes and evidence from the Highlight Discussions for that quarter
- Plan Monitor informs superintendent and Plan Manager of additional follow-up, if needed
- Plan Monitor drafts QPR outlining the district's progress over the preceding months since the last QPR
- Draft QPR is reviewed by ESE Accountability staff and all other Monitors
- Revised draft is shared with superintendent for factual corrections
- Plan Monitor and ESE Accountability staff publish QPR
- Final QPR formally shared with the superintendent and discussed with the School Committee
- Final QPR posted on ESE website as evidence of progress toward addressing key findings in the district review

Expected months of QPR publication:

- January (for months September – November)
- March (for months December – February)
- June (for months March – May)
- September (for months June – August)

9. Moving Toward Sustainable Improvement and Exit from Level 4 District Status

The Accelerated Improvement Planning process is designed to help districts develop greater capacity to implement a continuous cycle of improvement that prompts all stakeholders to continually evaluate and modify systems, structures and practices that contribute to improved teaching and learning across the district. While the process begins with districts receiving intensive support from a Plan Manager and Plan Monitor, ultimately the district must take on the project management and monitoring functions. This transition can take multiple years, and is likely to happen sooner in some areas of work than in others. The graphic below and the associated chart demonstrates how a district can transition from early implementation, to having more practices in place, to having practices embedded in the practice of professionals across the district, with the roles of the Plan Manager shifting along the way. The overlap of the phases demonstrates how the implementation may begin before the plan is fully developed, or how some practices may be at a transitional stage while others are still in early implementation.



A district can get insight on its progress toward exit based on the Quarterly Progress Report (QPR). The rubric ratings for this report align with these four phases, providing concrete feedback on where the district is in the process. (See [Appendix G](#) for the QPR rubric.) Because QPR ratings factor in the degree to which the Plan Manager or Monitor have been supporting

or intervening in the work, these ratings reflect both the quality of the work being done and the degree to which the district can function without this level of intensive ESE support.

ESE has created a tool ([Appendix M](#)) to provide concrete examples of how responsibilities can shift over time from the Plan Manager or Monitor to the district. This tool is intended as a starting point for conversation among stakeholders about the degree to which the district itself has taken on the roles of Plan Manager and Plan Monitor, and what might be the next piece of work in order to move closer to exit.

Districts may want to set aside time once or twice a year to reflect with their Plan Manager and Monitor on where they think they are in this continuum. Possible questions to discuss include:

- *What is your perception of where the district is on the continuum toward exit, and why?*
- *What specific roles/responsibilities should the district to begin to take on in the coming year? How should the Plan Manager and Monitor role shifting in order to support the district's capacity in those areas?*
- *What would you like the Monitor to focus on most as they give the district feedback in the coming year?*

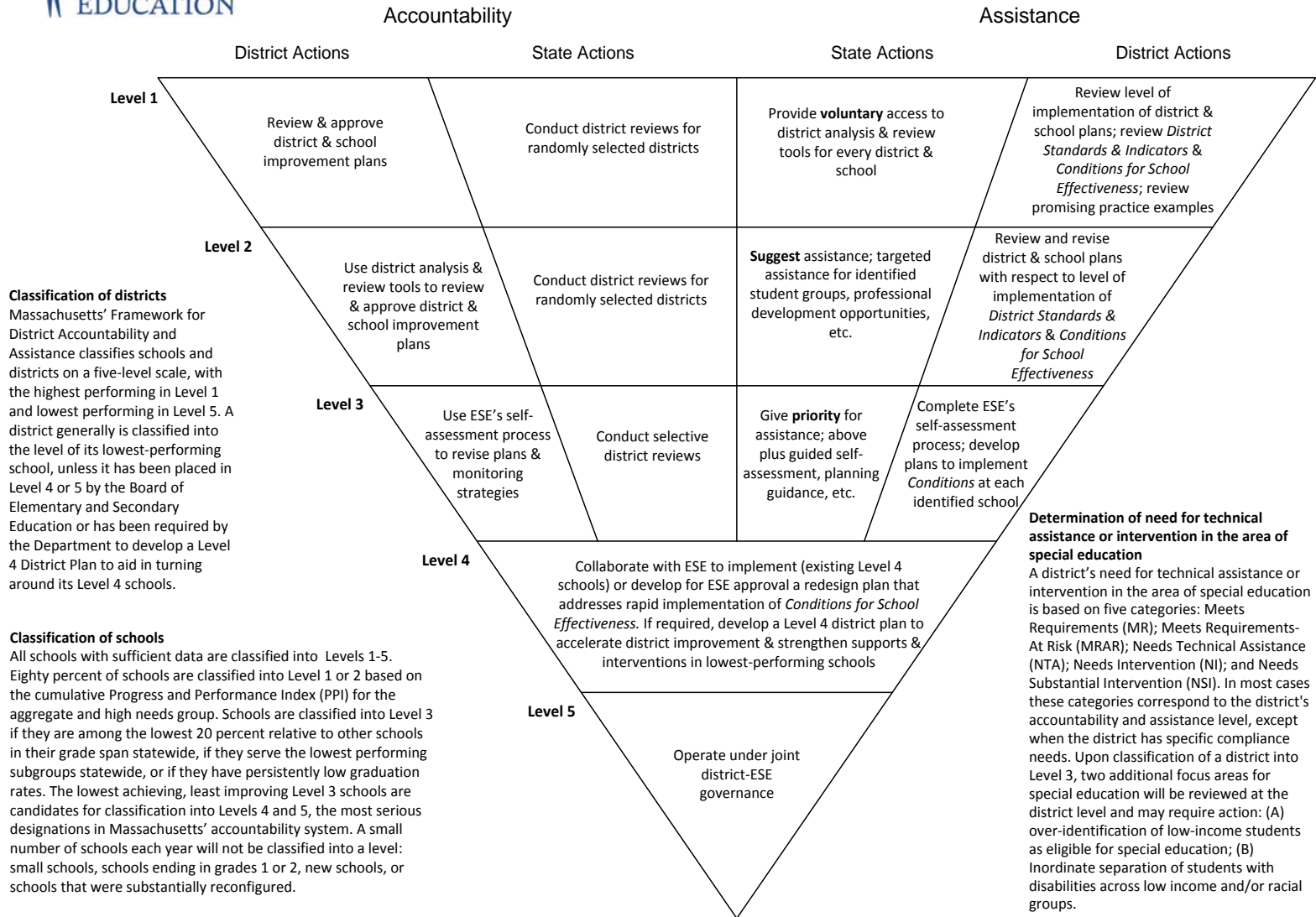
Prior to this meeting, managers and monitors may want to have a pre-meeting to share how each of them feels they can shift their roles/responsibilities in the coming year to help the district build more capacity. ESE representatives from accountability and/or assistance can be available to join that conversation by request.

Appendix A: Accountability and Assistance Framework



Framework for District Accountability and Assistance

August 2012



Appendix B: Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks

Center for District and School Accountability

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)

What are Benchmarks?

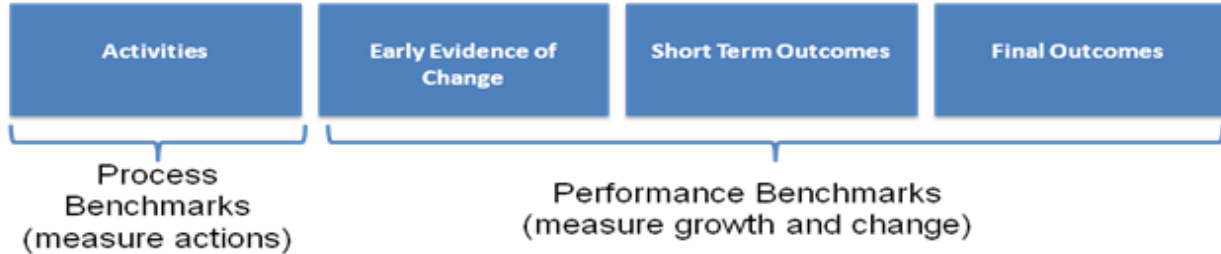
Once a Plan is developed, its implementation must be monitored and reflected on regularly in order to determine if progress is being made, and if mid-course corrections are necessary. The foundation of this process is the articulation of effective benchmarks that are agreed upon in advance by key stakeholders involved in the work. These predetermined “proof points” of progress provide targets for improvement that become opportunities to celebrate accomplishments and/or to reflect on how practice can be improved.

The Accelerated Improvement Planning process has four types of benchmarks:

Benchmark	Description	Helps answer the question...	Frequency
Activities	Steps to be taken to implement the strategic initiative: <i>who will do what by when?</i>	<i>How will we know if we're doing what we said we would do?</i>	<i>Daily, weekly, monthly</i>
Early Evidence of Change	Indicators of effective implementation of the Activities. Capture <i>changes in actions, discourse, beliefs, expectations, and instructional practice</i> . State clearly how the indicator will be measured.	<i>What will we see if what we are doing is beginning to make a difference? And how will we know it is making a difference?</i>	<i>Monthly, quarterly</i>
Short Term Outcomes	Changes in results that are expected to predict Final Outcomes. State clearly how the outcome will be measured.	<i>How will we know we have been successful in the short term?</i>	<i>Monthly, quarterly</i>
Final Outcomes	Annual targets for student outcomes.	<i>How will we know we have been successful in the long term?</i>	<i>Annual</i>

Clearly articulated benchmarks can help communicate expectations to educators and students involved in the work, and make it easier to gain agreement about whether or not progress is being made. Ideally, the evidence for each benchmark will be generated by the regular work of educators. If the benchmark requires a new form of evidence that has not previously been collected, it should be clear how the addition of that evidence reinforces the type of changes the district is seeking in skills, practices, mindsets, and discourse.

Types of Benchmarks



Activities outline the key actions the district will take to implement the initiatives in order to reach the final outcomes. Activities articulate *who will do what, by when*. For this reason, Activities demonstrate that the *process* used to implement the plan is effective. The activities should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district’s daily work. All Activities with a long timeframe (Sept – June) should include information regarding how and when the district will monitor progress in the interim. For ongoing Activities, specify the frequency (e.g., weekly; monthly). For time bound projects, indicate what the discrete components are and when they will be completed.

Grade level teams of classroom teachers meet weekly to analyze student data and plan instructional changes to core instruction as part of the data inquiry cycle.

Administrators provide feedback to each teacher monthly based on administrative observations and review of lesson plans.

Convene an Administrative Leadership Team that meets weekly with all curriculum directors, ELL, SPED, and student services directors to share information and identify areas where collaboration is needed to implement the AIP.

By October 1, 2012, each school will develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that are focused on instructional improvement and are aligned to the district Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).

By November 1st, inventory current academic interventions and documents outlining policies and services for students and families.

For the start of SY12-13, redesign High School’s Guidance Department to have a Student Success Team (2 guidance counselors, 1 attendance specialist, 1 SpEd facilitator, 1 graduation facilitator and 1 crisis counselor) in order to enhance supportive services to students identified as at-risk for dropping out of school.

By January 2013, develop a plan for a bridge program for “at-risk” eighth grade students as they transition to gr. 9 and obtain approval for program and budget needs in order to begin implementation for the 2013-2014 school year.

More important than monitoring *process*, a district will want to know if these activities are amounting to any meaningful change and improvement in the *performance* of educators and students. The

following three types of *performance benchmarks* specify targets for different types of change the district expects to see.

Early evidence of change benchmarks outline *changes in actions, discourse, beliefs, expectations, and instructional practice* that suggest the action steps are adding up to meaningful new ways of serving students in the district, not just business as usual. Early Evidence of Change may be the most important benchmarks for providing clarity about how particular adult actions matter for improving teaching and learning. They can also be the hardest to articulate. It is these changes in practice that will result in the subsequent improvement in short-term and final outcomes. **We cannot just will our way to improved outcomes; we have to actually *change* what we are doing on a daily basis** as we engage in teaching and learning. Early Evidence of Change focuses primarily on adult practice, either at the classroom or administrative level, but can capture shifts in student behavior as well.

Early Evidence can be identified for any time of the year, but is most effective when it is measured a short time after the implementation of the relevant Activity. For example, if professional development takes place in January, you might look for changes in practice beginning in February, continuing to measure the same practice over time to show improvement.

By November, 60 percent of staff will use sheltered instruction techniques in each class on a daily basis, measured through lesson plans, learning walks and unannounced classroom visits. January target = 80 percent; May = 90 percent.

35% of classrooms are at least “Providing” in Indicator 4: Student Ownership of Learning (Students ask, “What do I do when I haven’t learned it yet, or already know it?”) by January, and 50% by May based on documented District Learning Walks

Each month, all principals improve in the quality of their feedback to teachers regarding differentiated instructional strategies, standards-based lesson plans and curriculum maps as evidenced by monthly ratings on the district developed rubric .

By October 2013, every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new district-wide academic-intervention identification protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports collected by the principal and reported to the Assistant Superintendent on Form A, Percentage of students at each school on Tier I, II, and III.

By January 2013, every school will be able to report on the interventions provided to each student with chronic attendance issues, as evidenced by monthly written principal reports to the Assistant Superintendent on Form B, “Interventions for students with chronic attendance issues.”

Short-term outcomes provide districts concrete targets for improved outcomes that can serve as indicators that they are on track toward their final annual outcomes, ideally predicting performance on MCAS and other final outcome measures. For example, while improving MCAS scores may be an important final goal, a district will need periodic indicators to know if it is on track to help students get to proficiency and beyond. While short-term goals most often reflect student learning targets, they can also reflect adult outcomes as well.

Benchmark data shows increased student performance of 10 percentage points over baseline upon each administration in Math and ELA at all grade levels (Fall-to-Winter; Winter-to-Spring).

80% of students demonstrate improvement on interim assessments through each 6 week cycle /DRA/Common unit assessments.

High performing schools (95%+ attendance rate for Gr. K-8, 92%+ for Gr. 9-12) will maintain their attendance rate monthly, and lower performing schools will show monthly improvement to reach target attendance by June.

Quarterly progress reports analysing walkthrough data by principals and directors show at least a 30 percentage point increase each quarter in the effective implementation of the district's instructional expectations.

Final Outcomes define the student achievement gains the district plans to accomplish that year, given the Initiatives and Activities that are instituted. Final Outcomes include, at minimum, the district's Progress and Performance Index (PPI) targets outlined by ESE for aggregate and high needs students. If the strategic initiatives outlined in the AIP impact specific schools, grades, or subgroups, the AIP should include final outcomes specific to those populations. A district may opt to include additional student outcome measures above and beyond those included in the PPI targets either to present a fuller picture of progress, or to show the impact of initiatives that do not directly influence the PPI targets. For example, district-determined assessments, student attendance, promotion and/or discipline data, to name a few.

Examples of PPI targets:

The district will demonstrate a 10-point improvement in Student Growth Percentile (SGP) from the prior year.

The district will demonstrate a 2.5 point improvement on Composite Performance Index (CPI) throughout grades 3-5.

Examples of non-PPI targets:

The number of students scoring proficient on a district-wide writing sample will increase from <X> in spring of 2012 to <Y> in the spring of 2013.

Each school will decrease their percentage of chronically absent students to 10% or less.

The percentage of seniors attending college will increase 5% by July 2013.

Criteria for an Effective Benchmark

Each of the four types of benchmarks should adhere to the following criteria:

- 1. Helps a district monitor effective implementation of its Plan** by answering the following questions:
 - a. *How will we know if we're doing what we said we would do? (Activities)*
 - b. *What will we see if what we are doing is beginning to make a difference? (Early Evidence of Change)*
 - c. *How will we know we have been successful in the short term?*
 - d. *How will we know we have been successful in the long term?*
- 2. Leaves little room for interpretation.** All stakeholders should be able to read a given benchmark and have the same understanding of what the target is, when it is expected to be reached, and how we will know if it has been reached.
- 3. Outlines targets and evidence that are meaningful.** It is important for the benchmarks to capture the aspects of the district's improvement work that will most likely lead to meaningful conversation and problem-solving and that will suggest progress. Consider what comprises the best type of evidence for the identified benchmark. Would all stakeholders agree this is the most effective and efficient means for representing meaningful work in the district? For example, measuring attendance at a professional development session might motivate people to attend; however measuring the *application* of professional development helps educators reflect on and modify their practice.
- 4. Outlines evidence that is reasonable to collect.** Benchmarks are more meaningful when they prompt the collection of evidence that adds value to, rather than negatively impacts, the district's improvement work. This can only be determined by considering the perspective of the person(s) collecting the evidence. If the time and effort needed to collect the evidence outweighs the value gained from reflecting on it, there is likely a better way.
- 5. Are focused and aligned.** Together benchmarks should represent a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, and should show that schools are on a trajectory for rapid improvement. Together, and over time, the benchmarks and related evidence should tell a clear, causal story about how transformation was accomplished. A strong Plan will have a few strategic benchmarks rather than an overwhelming list.
- 6. Are SMART:** Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic and Results-focused; and Timed. Example:

It's Specific and Strategic	= 10 pounds, 1 mile
It's Measurable	= pounds, miles
It's Action-oriented	= lose, run
It's got the 3 R's	= weight loss and running distance
It's Timed	= 10 weeks

(For more information about SMART goals, see *What makes a Goal "SMARTer"?* handout and related guidance created for the Educator Evaluation Framework, available online at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/>)

How do we go about creating effective benchmarks?

There is no right way to go about generating the benchmarks for your district. Here are some options:

Option 1: After outlining your Strategic Objectives and Initiatives, brainstorm the Activities needed to get those done. Then think about how you would know if those Activities worked, and brainstorm your Early Evidence of Change and Short-Term Outcomes.

Option 2: After outlining your Strategic Objectives and Initiatives, begin backward mapping – think about the evidence that would suggest you were close to reaching your Objectives and Initiatives – the Short-Term Outcomes and the Early Evidence of Change that would clearly demonstrate the intended impact of each distinct Initiative. Then continue backwards to identify the key Activities that will be necessary to reach those targets.

In terms of crafting the benchmarks themselves, it can be hard to ‘get it right’ the first time. Often benchmarks are strengthened in an iterative process as stakeholders engage with the evidence and reflect on whether it is helping the district show progress, or show where it is stuck.

To write a given benchmark, one approach is the following:

- First generate the basic idea – what will we see and/or experience that shows we are on the right track? Don’t worry about the specific measure, target, or timeline.
- Second, once you have brainstormed all of your benchmarks, go back and begin to refine them and make them SMARTer, focusing on **meaningful measures** and **precise targets**.
- Revisit a third time to ensure all benchmarks have **specific dates/timeframes** so all parties are clear when this benchmark can be measured.

The following examples show the evolution of some benchmarks for Early Evidence of Change:

ORIGINAL	FIRST REVISION	SECOND REVISION
<i>100% of teachers participate in SMART goal training</i>	<i>100% of teachers develop and use SMART goals aligned to SIPs as evidenced by... (more meaningful)</i>	<i>By Oct 15th, 100% of teachers develop and use SMART goals aligned to SIPs as evidenced by... (Specific timing)</i>
<i>K-2 teachers will use the academic intervention protocol...</i>	<i>Every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new district-wide academic-intervention identification protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports. (more measurable)</i>	<i>By October 2013, every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new ... protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports. (Specific timing)</i>
<i>Administrators will provide feedback on Indicator 2</i>	<i>60% of classrooms are at least “Providing” in Indicator 2 (more focused on teacher practice)</i> <i>Administrators will complete weekly classroom observations to collect data and provide feedback.... (focuses on administrator practice)</i>	<i>By November, 60% of classrooms are at least “Providing”.... This will increase at least 5 points in each subsequent month.</i> <i>Each month, all principals improve in the quality of feedback to teachers, as measured by ratings on a district rubric ...</i> <i>(Specific timing for performance and measurable improvement)</i>

Appendix C: Accelerated Improvement Plan Template

Level 4 District Accelerated Improvement Plan Template

District: _____

Date: _____

Section 1: Explanation of key issues and how the district will address them (Maximum 1,000 words)

In this section, summarize the key issues arising from District Review findings and recommendations, Monitoring Reports, external or internal evaluations, and any other pertinent available quantitative and qualitative evidence. Note which issues you are prioritizing and why.

Create the Theory of Action that will drive the development of the Plan.

Next, identify the Strategic Objectives and Initiatives upon which the Plan will focus and why they are important.

Objective 1:

- Initiative 1
- Initiative 2
- Initiative 3

(etc.)

Describe the specific, measurable, final end-of-year outcomes the district aims to achieve by implementing the Plan. Include dates for each outcome.

Section 2: Initiative Strategy Sheet

(There is one Strategy Sheet for each Initiative under an Objective; duplicate as necessary)

A. District Strategic Objective 1:	B. Overall Lead for this Objective (one person):
C. Initiative Number and Description:	D. Lead for this Initiative (one person):
E. Short-term outcomes for the Initiative, with dates/frequency for each:	
F. What are the key indicators for this Initiative to show early evidence of change? By when?	
G. Key resources (e.g., other leaders/supporters of the Initiative, funds, external partners, time, staffing, materials, etc.):	

(continued on next page)

Quarter	H. Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative (Action Steps)	I. Who will Lead?	J. When will it Start?	K. When will it be Complete?
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Jan-March				
Jan-March				
Jan-March				
Jan-March				
Jan-March				
April-June				
April-June				
April-June				
April-June				
April-June				
July-Aug				
July-Aug				
July-Aug				
July-Aug				
July-Aug				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				
Sept-Dec				

Appendix D: Level 4 District AIP Rubric

Rating	Developing	Emerging	Ready to implement	Strong
Definition	The plan does not closely follow criteria outlined in “Guidance for Districts” or key evaluation criteria. The plan lacks clarity, coherency and focus. The plan is unlikely to lead to accelerated and sustainable improvements in teaching, learning and student outcomes.	Meets most basic criteria outlined in “Guidance for Districts.”	Meets basic criteria in “Guidance for Districts” and addresses key evaluation criteria. The plan may need further refinements during implementation to ensure intended improvements in teaching, learning and student outcomes are met and sustained.	Fully meets the criteria outlined in “Guidance for Districts” and key evaluation criteria. Represents most promising plan given currently known data. The plan is coherent and focused and lays down a pathway for success that is likely to lead to accelerated improvements in teaching, learning and student achievement. Plan clearly identifies capacity building measures to promote sustainable improvement.
Next Step	Revise	Strengthen some key areas to maximize potential impact on improving student outcomes and teaching and learning.	Implement, but continue refining during implementation.	Implement. Refine as needed to make mid-course corrections.
CRITERIA				
Provides Focus	The plan lacks a focus or coherency that is easily understood by district, teachers, parents and community members. The plan does not succinctly describe three to five overarching areas of focus and concrete initiatives under each focus area which are specifically targeted to raising student achievement and improving the quality of education. Areas of focus are not ranked in an appropriate order.	The plan is generally clear and coherent and in the main makes clear to stakeholders what will be done to bring about accelerated improvements. Some aspects of the plan need further clarification or coherency. The three to five focus areas for improvement are ranked in an appropriate order. Some focus areas and initiatives need greater clarity and alignment to help secure expected outcomes.	The plan is focused and coherent and written in a manner that is accessible and easy to understand for all stakeholders. Some minor aspects of the plan need greater clarity. Areas of focus are ranked in an appropriate order but together with identified initiatives need further minor refinements and alignment to help ensure best possible impact on student achievement and learning.	The plan is well written because it is clear, concise and coherent and easily understood by all stakeholders. It is clearly evident what the core issues are and what will be done to address them. The objectives are ranked appropriately and there is strong alignment between the objectives and initiatives with a clear focus on bringing about accelerated and sustained improvements in student achievement and teaching and learning. The Plan provides a strong focus on improvement efforts on the 3-5 objectives.

Rating	Developing	Emerging	Ready to implement	Strong
Addresses Systemic Root Causes	The plan fails to accurately identify the core issues, focus areas and challenges to rapidly improve student outcomes. Outlined strategies to address weaknesses appear weak and lack rigor. Areas of focus and challenges are not drawn from the district review report, along with other quantitative and qualitative data and are not aligned to ESE District Standards and Indicators. It is unclear why areas of focus in the plan have been chosen. Plan does not address issues in the district review report that could seriously hinder Plan implementation.	The plan in general way identifies areas of weakness in student achievement and learning. It is mostly clear why priorities are chosen because they are generally consistent with the district review, other data and are aligned to ESE District Standards and Indicators.	The plan accurately identifies areas of weakness and it is clear why core issues and objectives were selected. The plan makes appropriate reference to the district review, other data and alignment to ESE District Standards and Indicators, to identify areas for improvement. A small number of identified strategies for securing improvement and addressing interdependencies and obstacles are in need of further consideration.	The plan uses the district review, other quantitative and qualitative data and ESE District Standards and Indicators well to accurately identify root causes of weakness. Strategies to tackle identified weaknesses are rigorous and analytical and are systematic in addressing interdependencies and barriers to success. The identified issues and strategies are firmly focused on impacting on accelerating student learning and achievement. Addresses key weaknesses in the district.
Quickly Targets the Instructional Core	The plan fails to make clear how the district it will bring about accelerated and sustained improvements in teaching and learning. The plan does not clearly and strategically identify how any of the three key elements are to be effectively met.	The plan provides a strategic and achievable outline for meeting one of the three key elements. Improvements and refinements are needed in the strategic planning for the other two key elements.	The plan provides a strategic and achievable outline for meeting two out of the three key elements. Improvements and refinements are needed in the strategic planning for the other key element.	The plan has the potential to impact on and bring about accelerated improvement in teaching and learning because it provides a strategic blueprint for tackling weaknesses and disseminating good practice. The plan systematically addresses the three key elements by ensuring: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are “<i>quick wins</i>” planned for students and/or teachers. 2. It makes clear the direct “through-line” between improvement activities and improvement in <i>teaching</i>. 3. It makes clear the direct “through-line” between improvement activities and <i>learning outcomes</i> for students.

Rating	Developing	Emerging	Ready to implement	Strong
Useful For Tracking the Sufficiency of Progress	To track the sufficiency of progress, benchmarks need to be strengthened. The plan meets less than two of the specified standard benchmarks.	The plan is in need of further refinement and modification to ensure its effectiveness in tracking progress. Two of the four standard benchmarks are met but two are not.	Additional refinement is needed in one of the criteria, as currently only three out of the four benchmarks, including final outcomes, meet the standard.	<p>All types of benchmarks sufficiently clear, measurable, aligned, ambitious, realistic:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Process benchmarks (“Activities”) are clear, measurable (there will be sufficient collectable data concerning the frequency/quantity and quality of activities), and likely to result in the district’s ability to meet its “Early evidence of change benchmarks.” 2. Early evidence of change benchmarks are clear, measurable (there will be sufficient collectable data concerning the frequency/quantity and quality of changes to adult practice and behavior), and likely to result in the district’s ability to meet its “interim outcomes”. 3. Interim outcomes are clear, measurable, and likely to result in the district’s ability to meet its “final outcomes.” 4. Final outcomes are clear, measurable, ambitious, realistic.

Rating	Developing	Emerging	Ready to implement	Strong
Builds Long-Term Capacity	The plan fails to clearly and strategically outline how identified and stated objectives and initiatives will lead to sustainable improvements in student achievement and teaching and learning. It is not clear how plan objectives and initiatives will lead to sustained improvement in teaching and learning.	The plan is in need of further refinement and modification to increase its potential to bring about sustained improvements in student academic outcomes and teaching and learning. Only one of the three elements of capacity building measures is adequately addressed in the plan.	Additional refinements and amendments are needed in one the three elements of capacity building. The other two have been clearly met.	<p>The plan fully meets requirements and expectations. The Plan includes system changes and capacity building measures that ensure that plan objectives and initiatives can be fully implemented and lead to sustainable improvement of teaching and learning because</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is do-able given the current capacity and/or capacity-building activities written in the Plan. 2. Plan sufficiently accounts for obstacles and interdependencies. 3. Plan is likely to lead to sustained change over time.

Appendix E: Guiding Questions (aligned to the *District Plan Evaluation Rubric*)

A. Provides Focus

1. When you read this plan, do you understand what needs to be done differently in the district and why?
2. What makes this plan likely to lead to rapid improvement in teaching, learning, and student achievement across the district this year?
3. How does this plan help communicate to stakeholders that it is a new day in the district, and that they have a role in making it happen?
4. Is this a plan that a district or school leader could easily articulate to others?
5. From the perspective of a teacher or student, to what extent do these strategic objectives and initiatives feel like one coherent, coordinated way of approaching teaching and learning?

B. Quickly Targets the Instructional Core

6. In what ways does this plan target and transform the core instructional practices that are used in every classroom across the district in order to accelerate improvement in teaching, learning, and student achievement?
7. What is different about this set of district and school-level strategies that will accelerate learning beyond what is currently taking place?
 - What exactly will be different for a **student** on a day-to-day basis a month (or two, four, six months) from now as a result of this work? Is it possible to do all this work and still have students doing what they have always been doing in class?
 - What exactly will be different for a **teacher** on a day-to-day basis a month (or two, four, six months) from now as a result of this work? What exactly would be different about the work they do and the supports they receive? How will you know?

C. Addresses Systemic Root Causes

8. Are you doing the right work at the right level, and how do you know?
9. Is it possible to do all this work and see no real and lasting change? If so, what else is needed to impact and dramatically shift adult skills, knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to teaching and learning?

D. Useful for Tracking Progress

10. Do the short-term outcomes and evidence of change:
 - Leave little room for interpretation and provide clarity about how adult actions matter?
 - Seem reasonable and meaningful to collect?
 - Demonstrate that the district is likely to achieve the desired outcome?
 - Seem focused and aligned, telling a clear, causal story leading to transformation?
11. Is it possible to complete all the activities and still not achieve the initiative or strategic objective? If so, what is needed to ensure the right activities are taken to have the desired impact?
12. Is it possible to meet all the ‘early evidence of change’ and ‘short term outcomes’ outlined in the Plan and still not achieve the final outcomes for student learning for the year? If so, what else is needed to have a better understanding of the impact the activities and initiatives are having on teaching and learning?
 - Are the measures rigorous enough to signal real changes in practice?
 - Are there other measures of adult practice and/or student learning that would be better indicators of progress toward the final outcomes?

E. Builds Long-Term Capacity

13. In what ways does the plan support the creation and/or modification of systems, processes, and policies to ensure the work can be fully implemented and sustained?
14. In what ways does the Plan shift and/or strengthen:
 - Central office responses to staffing, instructional, and operational needs of the schools
 - Proactive structures for supporting and monitoring district leaders, principals, and teachers and for holding them accountable for achieving ambitious goals
 - Decision-making processes
 - Resource allocation, including effective use of human capital
 - Operational and financial practices
 - Staffing, schedules, and governance
 - Identification of schools in need of support through a transparent process
15. What will prevent teachers, principals, and/or district leaders from seeing this as 'just one more fad' and going about their work the way they have always done it? What will it take to get all stakeholders to buy into the work?

Appendix F: Suggested Agenda and Minutes Template for Highlight Discussions

District:

Highlight Discussion date:

Meeting participants:

Submitted by (person and date):

Date of next Highlight Discussion:

*The following topics are suggested for each Highlight Discussion. However, districts may modify by adding or eliminating topics, as long as the **goals for a Highlight Discussion** are reached:*

- *Keep the Accelerated Improvement Plan a living document that focuses and guides district work*
- *Use evidence and artifacts to reflect on the progress and impact of the initiatives*

1. **Accomplishments and progress** with both processes and performance, based on Benchmarks outlined in the Plan (Activities, Early Evidence of Change, and Short-Term Outcomes)

-

1a. Please provide an inventory of specific evidence that supports these accomplishments (listed by initiative) – these will be the sources that will be referenced in the Quarterly Progress Report.

-

2. **Challenges** to implementation (if any). Please note any additional targeted assistance that may be needed.

-

3. **Risks** to successful implementation in the coming months (if any). Include an action plan for mitigating these risks.

-

4. **Next steps** for the coming month (if not articulated above).

-

5. **Key modifications to the plan** and the reasons for these changes (if necessary).

-

6. **Next Steps** on the part of the district, Manager and/or Monitor, such as specific benchmarks/evidence to be discussed at next meeting; clarity on when a given benchmark will be achieved; Monitor's request for specific evidence and/or experiences (such as meetings or school visits); and/or suggestions from participants for making future Highlight Discussions more effective.

-

Appendix G: Quarterly Progress Report Progress and Performance Ratings Rubric

Improvement Process Stages <i>Rating describes the phase of implementation for the initiative</i>	Performance Ratings <i>Rating describes the results to date</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Fully Embedded Stage</p> <p>Initiative is fully embedded in the practice of professionals so that it is likely to continue being implemented effectively with quality and consistency.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reached High Performance Goals Consistently</p> <p>There is strong evidence that the outcomes will continue to be met. The Plan's short and long term outcomes for this initiative were high. And, the outcomes were reached; or, substantial improvement and high levels of performance were consistent over time. There is strong evidence that there will be further improvement over time.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Practices in Place Stage</p> <p>Initiative is being fully and effectively implemented and practices and resources are in place for the initiative to be implemented with quality and consistency.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reached Performance Goals</p> <p>There is strong evidence that the outcomes are being met. The Plan's benchmarks for this initiative (early evidence of change benchmarks, short-term outcomes, and/or long-term outcomes) were met in this monitoring period. Or, there were high and improving levels of benchmark performance.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Technical Implementation Stage</p> <p>The stated activities have been completed. More work or time is needed for the initiative to be fully implemented with quality and consistency across the district.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Partially Reached Performance Goals</p> <p>There is some evidence of an impact on outcomes. The Plan's benchmarks for this initiative (early evidence of change benchmarks, short-term outcomes, and/or long-term outcomes) may not have been met in this monitoring period, but there was progress.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Problematic Implementation/At-Risk</p> <p>A number of activities have not yet begun or are in the early stages. Initiative is under-developed or inadequate steps have been taken to implement the initiative effectively.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Performance Goals Not Reached</p> <p>There is little evidence that there is early evidence of change or that outcomes are being met. The Plan's benchmarks for this initiative (early evidence of change benchmarks, short-term outcomes, and/or long-term outcomes) were not met in this monitoring period, and there was insufficient improvement in performance. This may be the case even when the process rating is further advanced.</p>

Appendix H: Phases of Accelerated Improvement Planning

Phases of the Accelerated Improvement Planning Process

Plan Development

Early Implementation (1-2 years)

Transitional Implementation (1-2 years)

Embedding of Practices

This intensive, strategic process can take 3-4 years before Plan Manager and Monitor supports are removed:

Plan Development	Early Implementation	Transitional Implementation	Practices Embedded
Strategic objectives, initiatives, benchmarks, and outcomes are defined and communicated broadly.	Implementation is primarily at the technical level, with varying degrees of quality and consistency .	More practices and resources are in place for the initiative to be implemented with quality and consistency.	Initiatives are becoming embedded in the practice of professionals and are likely to continue being implemented with quality and consistency .
ESE Plan Manager support is very intensive.	ESE Plan Manager support is intensive.	District begins to take on increasing responsibility for Plan Manager and Plan Monitor functions as they work toward meeting exit criteria.	District is beginning to demonstrate exit criteria without support from Plan Manager or Plan Monitor.

5/22/13

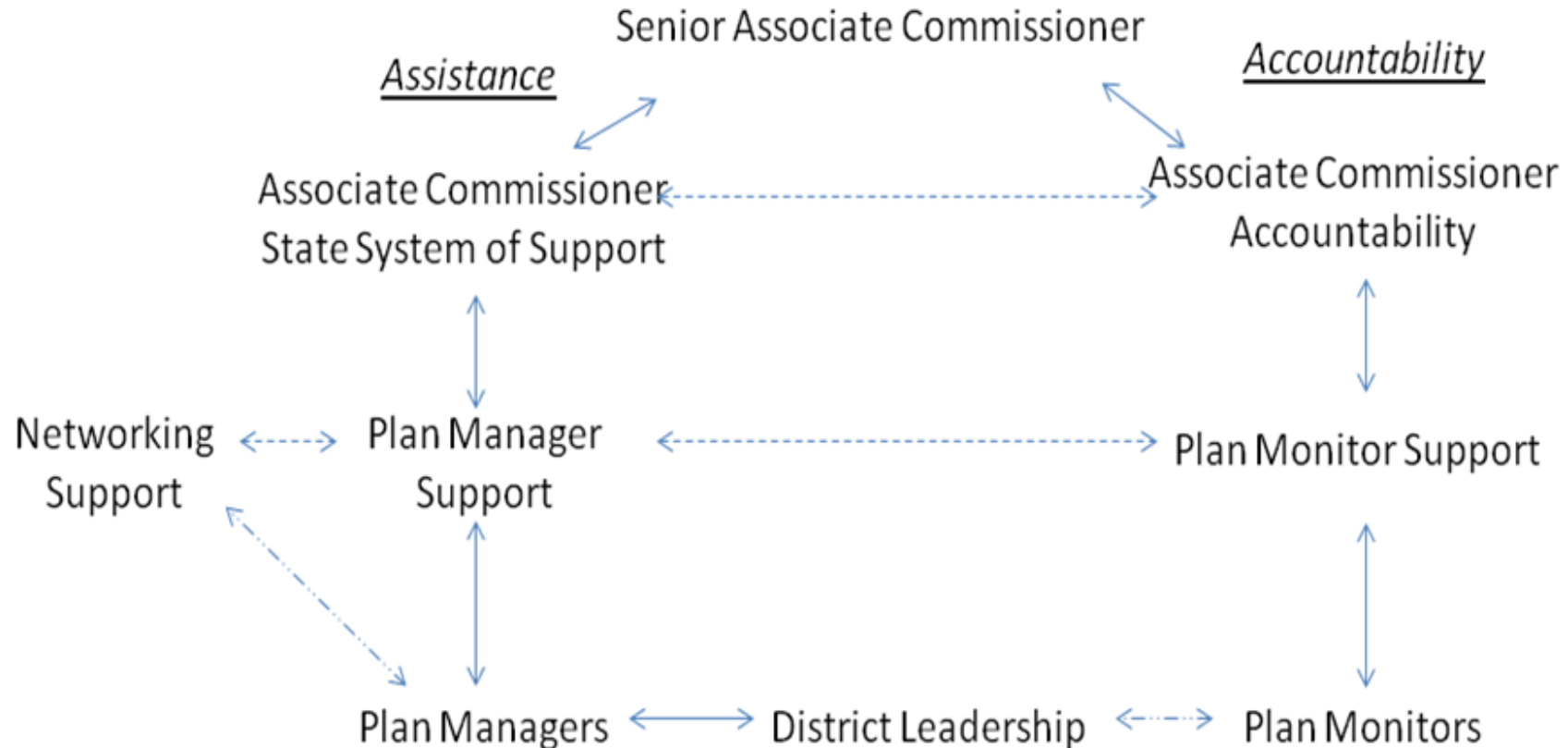
Appendix I: AIP Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholders	Ongoing Implementation	Highlight Discussions	Quarterly Progress Reports (QPR)	Annual Summative Reports
Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and use a Plan to focus all major work in the district, Coordinate and engage district staff to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the Plan, with support of the Plan Manager. Allocate and manage resources needed to support effective implementation. Connect with ESE for targeted assistance as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and ensure leadership for the Highlight Discussion, with the support of plan manager Discuss progress, changes to strategy, obstacles Use meetings as an opportunity to clarify AIP guidance and request Targeted Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support collection of relevant evidence Review draft QPR and provide factual changes and/or additional evidence as needed. Support presentation of QPR to School Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support collection of relevant evidence Review draft QPR and provide factual changes and/or additional evidence as needed. With ESE, present Summative Report to School Committee
School Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Superintendent in using the Plan to focus all major decisions for the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss progress report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss Summative Report
Plan Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist district with understanding and applying ESE Plan guidance Support Superintendent's coordination and engagement of district to ensure effective Plan implementation and monitoring Assist in overseeing achievement of benchmarks, including collection, reflection on relevant evidence of progress, and identification of any gaps in implementation or monitoring. Raise any concerns to the superintendent and/or ESE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notify ESE of each Highlight Discussion meeting date, time, and location at least one week in advance Support the superintendent in planning for and facilitating the Highlight Discussion Submit to Plan Monitor evidence that supports what was addressed during Highlight Discussions Write and submit Highlight Report to district, Monitor & ESE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with Superintendent, provide monitor with interview schedule and other pertinent support for monitoring activities as needed Support Superintendent in reviewing draft QPR and providing factual changes and/or additional evidence as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a
Plan Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a – Monitor has no ongoing role outside the formally structured meetings related to the Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask clarifying questions about the progress in implementation and the quality of the work Ensure all aspects of the Plan are discussed over the course of 3 months. Acknowledge progress and identify concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the district and Plan Manager, schedule interviews, school visits, and/or other additional evidence-collection to support the QPR. Use Highlight Discussions, Highlight Reports, evidence and interviews to write report with analysis of outcomes and ratings for each Initiative With ESE representative, present report to School Committee for discussion 	

Stakeholders	Ongoing Implementation	Highlight Discussions	Quarterly Progress Reports (QPR)	Annual Summative Reports
Office of State System of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing guidance and support to Plan Managers regarding structure, processes, and expectations for Plan implementation work • Supervise Plan Managers (jointly with superintendent) • Address individual pragmatic concerns from managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Highlight Reports to discern areas for targeted support and to assess effectiveness of Plan Managers and ESE Targeted Assistance efforts. • Periodically attend Highlight Meetings for the same purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodically attend meetings to assess effectiveness of Plan Managers, guidance materials for the AIP Process, and other ESE Targeted Assistance efforts. 	
Plan Manager Networking Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support/coaching for Plan Managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet regularly with managers to discuss district successes and challenges • Work with Accountability to troubleshoot as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support managers should challenges arise 	
ESE Assistance Liaison or DSAC support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with districts and Plan Managers in arranging for the delivery of ESE sponsored assistance for the implementation of specific aspects of the approved plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Optional) Attend meeting to share additional examples of progress and gain insight on areas for additional ESE targeted support. 		
ESE Office of Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet regularly with monitors to discuss district successes and challenges • Work with Targeted Assistance to troubleshoot as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Highlight Reports to discern areas for increased monitoring and to assess effectiveness of Plan Monitors and ESE Accountability efforts. • Periodically attend Highlight Meetings for the same purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the draft report with the district leadership team for factual review • Edit report based on feedback and publish final report • With Monitor, present report to School Committee for discussion 	
Senior Associate Commissioner for Accountability, Partnerships and Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring urgent issues to the Commissioner as needed • Meet monitors and managers on occasion • Support and trouble shoot Accountability and Assistance offices as needed 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present Summative Report annually to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

Appendix J: AIP Support Structure

Support structure for ESE's
Level 4 District Accelerated Improvement Planning
(AIP)



Appendix K: Plan Manager Job Description

The Plan Manager will:

A. Coordinate Key Aspects of the District Plan Development

1. Facilitate engagement of district staff to ensure involvement and ownership of the Plan development through overall coordination including, but not limited to, scheduling planning meetings, setting agendas, using tools and protocols to help staff identify key levers, and establishing a system for prioritization and follow up
2. Help district leadership in conducting initial assessment to identify human capacity, system and structural issues affecting student achievement that could be addressed in the District Plan
3. Assist district leadership in drafting a well-written District Plan easily understood by all stakeholders within the timeline established by the ESE
4. Work with district leadership to ensure that the drafted District Plan meets criteria established in the Level 4 District Plan Rubric: Providing Focus, Quickly Targeting the Instructional Core, Addressing Systemic Root Causes, Usefully Tracking the Sufficiency of Progress, and Building Long-Term Capacity

B. Coordinate Key Aspects of District Plan Implementation

1. Facilitate coordination and engagement of district staff to ensure the effective implementation of the Plan's objectives and initiatives. Activities include, but are not limited to, assisting administrators in scheduling pertinent meetings, conducting co-observations and learning walks, and conducting activities to build district capacity
2. Assist in overseeing the achievement of implementation timelines, raising any issues to the Superintendent
3. Assist district staff to ensure the delivery of high quality outputs as outlined in the District Plan
4. Assist Superintendent in attending to necessary resources set forth in District Plan, such as overseeing associated contracts with outside providers and liaising with assistance providers (i.e., DSAC or Assistance Liaisons)
5. Proactively raise issues to Superintendent and MA ESE as they arise

C. Coordinate Monitoring, Reporting, and Communication

1. Effectively facilitate monthly Highlight Discussions and submit robust and detailed minutes to Superintendent and Accountability Monitor according to ESE timeline
2. Collect and share with Accountability Monitor benchmarks mindful of deadlines established for Quarterly Progress Reports
3. Collect and provide evidence to inform Superintendent of ongoing improvement needs

D. Work Requirements

1. Establish effective ongoing communication and engagement with all key constituencies
2. Demonstrate excellent communication and interpersonal skills
3. Attend and participate in monthly Plan Manager Networking Support Meetings
4. Demonstrate ability to build and foster productive professional relationships

Appendix L: Plan Monitor Job Description

The purpose of Level 4 district monitoring is to:

- Provide a fresh perspective on each district's work, and use that perspective to observe progress in the district as well as critical gaps that should be addressed, as outlined by the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP)
- Use the AIP as a framework to ask questions that allow the monitor to learn about the district's work and which also encourage the district to approach its work in new ways
- Report to district stakeholders and to the public about the district's work (progress and concerns) directly and clearly
- Through the initiatives above, continually promote further district growth and help to make the cycle of continuous improvement an embedded, sustainable district practice

To accomplish these goals, the Monitor will:

- A. Develop a thorough understanding of assigned district(s). Knowledge of the district should include, but is not limited to:
 1. Roles of key district leaders
 2. Recent developments in the district
 3. Findings and recommendations from most recent District Review
 4. Content, structure, and status of the district's AIP, if applicable; Quarterly Progress Reports; and other formal communication between ESE and the district
 5. Major accomplishments by the district and challenges the district currently faces
 6. An understanding of key activities being implemented by the district that relate to the AIP (e.g., Educator Evaluation framework)
- B. Seek information strategically
 1. Participate in monthly Highlight Discussions with district leader(s) and plan manager, with the goal of learning about the district's progress and challenges in implementing the AIP.
 2. Conduct up to 2 days per month of ad hoc monitoring activities (e.g., observations of classrooms and/or of team meetings) with the goal of gathering information about the district's AIP implementation.
 3. Prepare thoroughly for interactions with assigned district(s); make use of information that is already available (e.g., Highlight Meeting notes, district website) to ensure that questions are focused and meetings are efficient.
 4. Ensure that time spent on-site at the district is used thoughtfully, in order to learn as much as possible about the implementation of the AIP and related factors without placing an undue burden on the district. Prioritize questions and evidence that focus on key AIP levers.
 5. Support effective evidence collection: encourage districts to identify evidence that specifically and directly supports the AIP.
- C. Report thoroughly and accurately about the district's progress
 1. Keep ESE informed on an ongoing basis about important developments within the district

2. Produce four reports per year: three Quarterly Progress Reports and one Summative report. Reports should provide a clear, thorough picture of the district's successes and areas of concern relative to the Objectives and initiatives in its AIP. Reports should be based on information and evidence collected throughout the quarter (and, in the case of the Summative Report, throughout the year).
 3. With ESE, present each report to the district's school committee clearly and concisely
- D. Coordinate effectively with Level 4 stakeholders
1. Communicate questions and plans regarding monitoring activities to district leaders and plan managers in a timely way
 2. Operate with sensitivity to each stakeholder's role in the AIP process. Be mindful that the AIP is the plan owned, directed and led by the *superintendent*. (For example, the monitor should ensure that the superintendent or other district representatives are included in all discussions, interviews, and site visits, and that questions in Highlight Discussions are directed to district leaders, rather than to plan managers.)
 3. Ensure that all meetings with districts are scheduled at least two weeks in advance and are communicated to ESE
 4. Adhere to agreed-upon start and end times for meetings
 5. Attend and participate in ESE-led meetings and calls
- E. General expectations
1. Maintain effective ongoing communication and engagement with district leaders and ESE
 2. Demonstrate excellent communication and interpersonal skills
 3. Demonstrate ability to build and foster productive professional relationships
 4. Provide feedback (both positive and constructive) that is helpful to districts
 5. Strategically communicate difficult messages that are important to district progress

Appendix M: Stages Toward exit - EXAMPLES of Shifting Roles and Responsibilities to Meet Exit Criteria

Theory of Action: *if a Level 4 district can **define a narrow set of strategic objectives** to accelerate student learning, **execute well-defined initiatives** with a relentless focus on implementation, and **systematically monitor the impact of those initiatives** to inform mid-course corrections, then outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed.*

A. Demonstrate improved student achievement

This exit criterion does not involve shifting roles.

B. Define a narrow set of strategic objectives to accelerate student learning

Early Implementation	Transitional Implementation	Practices Embedded
<p>SELF-ASSESS Plan Manager facilitates district leaders in conducting initial assessment to understand the current context of the district and identify human capacity, systemic, and structural issues affecting student achievement.</p> <p>SET GOALS Plan Manager works with district leaders as they articulate a vision, theory of action, a few clear strategies and specific, measurable, rigorous, and time-bound student performance goals.</p> <p>CRAFT PLAN Plan Manager models and/or supports the writing of the plan and works with district to ensure that it meets the five criteria.</p> <p>Plan Manager models the self-assessment of the Plan using the guiding questions and rubric.</p>	<p>SELF-ASSESS District (re)assesses district context, including human capacity, systemic, and structural issues affecting student achievement with support of Plan Manager.</p> <p>SET GOALS District leads the process of (re)articulating a vision, theory of action, a few clear strategies and specific, measurable, rigorous, and time-bound student performance goals, with support from Plan Manager.</p> <p>CRAFT PLAN Plan Manager supports the district in writing the Plan to meet the five criteria.</p> <p>District self-assesses using the guiding questions and rubric, with support from the Plan Manager.</p>	<p>SELF-ASSESS District (re)assesses district context, including human capacity, systemic, and structural issues affecting student achievement without Plan Manager support.</p> <p>SET GOALS District leads the process of (re)articulating a vision, theory of action, a few clear strategies and specific, measurable, rigorous, and time-bound student performance goals, without support from Plan Manager.</p> <p>CRAFT PLAN District writes/ documents the Plan in a way that meets the five criteria.</p> <p>District self-assesses using the guiding questions and rubric.</p>

C. Execute well-defined initiatives with relentless focus on implementation		
Early Implementation	Transitional Implementation	Practices Embedded
<p>OWN THE EXECUTION Plan Manager may model coordination of district staff to ensure effective implementation.</p> <p>IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVELY Plan Manager works with district to develop and implement key systems, structures, tools, protocols, and supports needed to implement the plan.</p> <p>Plan Manager models and coaches district leaders in planning, facilitating, and documenting some key district meetings (e.g., highlight discussions, DILT, principal meetings).</p> <p>DEVELOP LEADERSHIP Plan Manager works with district to identify and involve qualified individuals to help implement key initiatives.</p>	<p>OWN THE EXECUTION District, with Plan Manager support, coordinates staff to ensure effective implementation.</p> <p>IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVELY District, with Plan Manager Support, develops and implements key systems, structures, tools, protocols, and supports needed to implement the plan.</p> <p>District leaders plan, facilitate, and document key meetings, with Plan Manager as coach when needed.</p> <p>DEVELOP LEADERSHIP District identifies and involves qualified individuals (gets the right people on the bus) to help implement key initiatives, with Plan Manager support.</p>	<p>OWN THE EXECUTION District, without Plan Manager support, coordinates staff to ensure effective implementation.</p> <p>IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVELY District, without Plan Manager Support, develops and implements key systems, structures, tools, protocols, and supports needed to implement the plan.</p> <p>District leaders plan, facilitate, and document key meetings without Plan Manager support.</p> <p>DEVELOP LEADERSHIP District, without Plan Manager support, has an established culture and systems for identifying people with skills needed to implement the work (chosen by skill rather than title).</p>

D. Monitor systematically the impact of the initiatives		
Early Implementation	Transitional Implementation	Practices Embedded
<p>COLLECT AND DISCUSS DATA Plan manager facilitates the collection and presentation of data for use at district and school meetings with input from the district, ensuring that data/evidence is carefully selected to show progress on key initiatives.</p> <p>Plan Manager and Monitor may tend to be the ones to raise discussions about unfavorable data.</p> <p>MANAGE TIMELINES AND ROUTINES Plan Manager facilitates and models management of implementation timelines, raising any issues to the Superintendent.</p> <p>Plan Manager may plan and/or facilitate monthly highlight discussions, with input from the district. Monitor drives the discussion with prepared questions.</p> <p>REPORT RESULTS Monitor writes Quarterly Progress Report (QPR); district provides factual corrections.</p> <p>Monitor presents QPR to School Committee.</p>	<p>COLLECT AND DISCUSS DATA District manages processes for ongoing collection and analysis of data to show impact of key initiatives, with support from Plan Manager.</p> <p>District and Plan Manager work together to make data public and engage stakeholders in discussing it openly, whether favorable or unfavorable.</p> <p>MANAGE TIMELINES AND ROUTINES District oversees implementation timelines with support from the Plan Manager, raising any issues to the Superintendent/DILT as needed.</p> <p>District plans and facilitates all aspects of monthly highlight discussions, including gathering evidence, preparing for the meeting, and presenting at the meeting, with the support of Plan Manager as needed. Monitor continues to ask questions as needed.</p> <p>REPORT RESULTS Monitor writes Quarterly Progress Report (QPR); district provides factual corrections.</p> <p>Monitor and Superintendent co-present QPR.</p>	<p>COLLECT AND DISCUSS DATA District manages processes for ongoing collection and analysis of data to show impact of key initiatives</p> <p>Frequent public discussion of data, including unfavorable data, is an accepted part of the district's culture.</p> <p>MANAGE TIMELINES AND ROUTINES District oversees implementation timelines without support from a Plan Manager.</p> <p>District asks itself hard questions at monthly highlight discussions. Monitor primarily listens.</p> <p>REPORT RESULTS Superintendent writes a report on plan progress at least quarterly, with support of the Plan Manager and feedback from the Monitor. Superintendent presents reports on progress to school committee and other stakeholders at least quarterly. Monitor observes and provides feedback after each presentation.</p>

E. Modify initiatives to achieve greater impact		
Early Implementation	Transitional Implementation	Practices Embedded
<p>MAKE MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS Modifications and mid-course adjustments to the plan may be driven primarily by suggestions from the Plan Monitor and/or Plan Manager.</p> <p>Plan Manager and Plan Monitor may tend to be the ones to identify barriers to the success of the plan.</p>	<p>MAKE MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS Modifications and mid-course adjustments to the plan are driven jointly by the district, Plan Manager, and Plan Monitor.</p> <p>District pro-actively identifies and responds to remove barriers to the success of the plan, with support from the Plan Manager and Plan Monitor.</p>	<p>MAKE MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS The district makes midcourse corrections systematically, thoughtfully, and effectively without significant support from the Plan Manager or Plan Monitor.</p> <p>District pro-actively identifies and responds to remove barriers to the success of the plan, without significant support from the Plan Manager or Plan Monitor.</p>

Appendix N: Criteria for Exit from Level 4 District Status

District Accelerated Improvement Planning - Criteria for Exit² (May 9, 2013)

*The theory guiding the Department's approach to Accelerated Improvement Planning is: if a Level 4 district can **define a narrow set of strategic objectives** to accelerate student learning, **execute well-defined initiatives** with a relentless focus on implementation, and **systematically monitor the impact of those initiatives** to inform mid-course corrections, then outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed.*

Districts can demonstrate their readiness to exit from Level 4 District status by meeting the following benchmarks aligned to the theory of action, without significant support from ESE. The order in which the benchmarks are met, and the pace with which they are implemented, will vary by district. The Commissioner reserves the right to consider other factors that contributed to a Level 4 determination and/or could impede sustained district improvement.

F. DEMONSTRATE improved student achievement as evidenced by one or more of the following:

- Meet targets for PPI (at least some CPI, SGP, extra credit, graduation, and/or dropout indicators)
- No longer in lowest 10% of districts

G. DEFINE a narrow set of strategic objectives to accelerate student learning

- **Self-Assess:** Analyze a range of data to fully understand the context, needs, and assets of the district.
- **Set Goals:** District articulates a vision, theory of action a few clear strategies, and student performance goals to target and transform core instructional practices at all levels of the district in a way that impacts students, teachers, and families.
- **Craft Plan:** District defines and operates with a clear and widely understood definition of effective instruction and what quality implementation of the initiatives looks like.

H. EXECUTE well-defined initiatives with relentless focus on implementation

- **Own the Execution:** District and school committee use the plan to focus and drive all major work at the district and school level, including decisions about policy, budget, hiring, and other resource allocation. School committee and educators at the district, school, and classroom level demonstrate ownership of the district's strategies and outcomes, and work with urgency to achieve them, holding themselves, colleagues, and students mutually accountable to high expectations.
- **Implement Effectively:** District, school, and classroom educators are provided with time, resources, support, and useful feedback to implement strategic objectives and related initiatives in order to reach the outcomes.
- **Develop Leadership:** District involves and builds the capacity of a sufficient number of qualified district and school personnel in order to establish a critical mass of individuals to drive the work forward. School Committee and district leadership recruit, hire, train, support, and retain quality staff, as well as plan for transitions and succession, so that the plan can be carried out effectively and sustainably.

² Districts with Level 4 schools cannot fully exit Level 4 status until those schools meet the exit criteria outlined in MA regulations (603 CMR 2.05(12)).

I. MONITOR systematically the impact of the initiatives

- **Collect and Discuss Data:** District has consistent, rigorous district-wide expectations for implementation of assessments, for dissemination of data, and for professional development and support for the use of data to inform instruction. Educators at all levels openly encourage discussion of data that may be off-target or unfavorable, seeing it as an opportunity to highlight areas for improvement and/or modification.
- **Manage Timelines and Routines:** District leaders, school leaders, and teachers regularly reflect on progress toward goals and benchmarks using a range of pre-determined, high-leverage evidence that includes regular observations of classroom instruction by district and school leaders, with a focus on outcomes.
- **Report Results:** Progress toward outcomes and modifications of priorities are communicated broadly to students, faculty, school committee, families, and community stakeholders frequently and through a variety of means.

J. MODIFY initiatives to achieve greater impact

- **Make Mid-Course Corrections:** District and school educators respond by making mid-course corrections such as: changing instructional practice; (re)prioritizing initiatives; re-allocating human and financial resources; initiating, modifying, or discontinuing programs and services; or responding proactively to remove barriers to success of the plan.

Appendix O: Excerpts from State Regulations (603 CMR 2.0)

2.05: Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 4

(1) Placement of districts in Level 4

(a) A district shall be placed in Level 4 if any of its schools has been placed in Level 4, pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05 (2).

(b) The Board may place a district in Level 4 upon recommendation of the commissioner based on findings from a district review, monitoring report, or follow-up review showing serious deficiencies, relating to one or more district standards, that are likely if they are not addressed effectively and in a timely manner to have a substantial negative effect on student performance in the district, putting the district at risk of being placed in Level 5.

(c) A district may be placed in Level 4 pursuant to both 603 CMR 2.05(1)(a) and 603 CMR 2.05(1)(b).

(d) A district declared underperforming by a vote of the Board prior to April 27, 2010, shall remain in Level 4 until the commissioner makes the determination described in 603 CMR 2.05(12)(b) and it has no schools in Level 4, unless the Board has voted to remove the district from underperforming status.

(2) Placement of schools in Level 4

(a) A school shall be eligible for placement in Level 4 if it scores in the lowest 20% statewide of schools serving common grade levels on a single measure developed by the Department that takes into account at least:

1. school MCAS performance over a four-year period based on Composite Performance Index (CPI) in English language arts; CPI in mathematics; and percentages of students scoring in the "warning" or "failing" category on MCAS; and
2. improvement in student academic performance.

(b) The commissioner may place a school in Level 4 on the basis of quantitative data including but not limited to:

1. school MCAS performance over a four-year period based on Composite Performance Index (CPI) in English language arts; CPI in mathematics; and percentages of students scoring in the "warning" or "failing" category on MCAS;
2. improvement in school MCAS performance as represented by change in CPI (for years available, up to four);
3. annual growth in MCAS performance for students at the school as compared with peers across the Commonwealth (for years available, up to four);
4. in the case of high schools, graduation and dropout rates; or
5. other indicators of school performance including student attendance, dismissal, suspension, exclusion, and promotion rates upon the determination of each indicator's reliability and validity, or lack of demonstrated significant improvement for two or more consecutive years in core academic subjects, either in the aggregate or among subgroups of students, including designations based on special education, low-income, English language proficiency, and racial classifications; or on the basis of information from a school or district review performed under M.G.L. c.15, § 55A.

(c) Not more than 4% of the total number of public schools may be in Levels 4 and 5, taken together, at any given time.

(d) Any school designated by the Board as chronically underperforming prior to 2010 may be placed in Level 4.

(3) Notification The Department shall notify districts of the placement of any of their schools in Level 4. The notification shall be made to the school committee, superintendent, and local teachers' union or association president, and the principal and the parent organization of any school placed in Level 4.

(4) Appointment of assistance and accountability personnel Upon placement of a district in Level 4 the Department may make any or all of the following appointments:

(a) an assistance liaison:

1. to support the district in developing and carrying out a turnaround plan for each of its Level 4 schools, if any; and
2. to support the district in district improvement planning pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(8), if required;

(b) an accountability monitor to determine and report on:

1. whether the goals, benchmarks, and timetable in the turnaround plan for each of the district's Level 4 schools, if any, are being met; and
2. if the district has a Level 4 District Plan pursuant to 2.08(c), whether its goals, benchmarks, and timetable are being met; and

(c) an individual or team to conduct monitoring site visits to the district or its schools.

(5) Turnaround plans for Level 4 schools

(a) The turnaround plan developed for each school placed in Level 4 shall:

1. be authorized, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, s. § 1J(j), for a period of up to three years;
2. fulfill the other requirements of M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J;
3. provide for the implementation of the conditions for school effectiveness in 603 CMR 2.03(4)(b);
4. include benchmarks by which to measure progress toward the annual goals included in the plan pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J, and the conditions for school effectiveness, and a timetable for achieving those benchmarks;
5. include descriptions of the assistance to be provided by the Department in support of the action steps in the plan, as agreed on by the Department and the superintendent, subject to the availability of resources for the Department to provide the assistance; and
6. be prepared on a format provided by the Department.

(b) Once the superintendent has received the recommendations of the local stakeholder group under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(b), the superintendent may request that the school committee and any union bargain or reopen the bargaining of the relevant collective bargaining agreement, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(g). If necessary, the 30 days provided by M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(e) for the superintendent to submit a turnaround plan for modifications to the local stakeholder group, school committee, and commissioner shall be extended, without exceeding the time periods mandated by M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(g), to provide time for bargaining, ratification, a dispute resolution process, the submission of a decision by the joint resolution committee, or a resolution by the commissioner, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(g).

(c) Within 30 days of the issuance of the superintendent's final turnaround plan under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(e), the commissioner shall review the plan and may, in consultation with the superintendent, modify the plan if the commissioner determines that

1. such modifications would further promote the rapid academic achievement of students in the school;
2. a component of the plan was included, or a modification under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(e) was excluded, on the basis of demonstrably false information or evidence; or
3. the superintendent failed to meet the requirements of M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(b) to (e), inclusive.

(d) Within 30 days of the issuance of the superintendent's final turnaround plan under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(e), the school committee or local union may appeal to the commissioner one or more components of the plan pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(f). Within 30 days of the receipt of such appeal, the commissioner shall decide the appeal and may, in consultation with the superintendent, make one or more modifications to the plan based on the appeal if the commissioner makes any of the determinations in 603 CMR 2.05(5)(c)1 through 3. The commissioner's decision on the appeal shall be final.

(e) Within 30 days of the receipt of the last appeal made under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(f) and 603 CMR 2.05(5)(d), or, if no such appeal is received within 30 days of the issuance of the superintendent's final turnaround plan under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(e), at the expiration of those 30 days, the commissioner shall return the turnaround plan to the superintendent incorporating any modifications made under 603 CMR 2.05(5)(c) or (d), or both. Such return of the plan to the superintendent shall constitute the commissioner's approval, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(b), of the plan returned.

(6) Annual reviews of Level 4 schools Superintendents shall use a format provided by the Department for the reviews to be submitted to the commissioner and school committee at least annually pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(k).

(7) Receiver for a school in Level 4

(a) If the superintendent appoints a receiver for a school in Level 4 pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, s. 1J(h), the superintendent shall define the scope of the receiver's powers, up to and including all of the powers of the superintendent over the school, including all of the powers granted by M.G.L. c. 69, s. 1J. The superintendent may from time to time modify the scope of the receiver's powers based on conditions in the school. The receiver shall report directly to the superintendent.

(b) If the commissioner requires the superintendent to terminate the receiver for a school in Level 4 pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(k), the superintendent may, with the approval of the commissioner, select and appoint another receiver for the school in accordance with M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(h) and 603 CMR 2.05(7)(a).

(8) District improvement planning for Level 4 districts

- (a) The turnaround plan developed pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(5) for any school in Level 4 shall include, among its provisions pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(5)(a)(3) for the implementation of the conditions for school effectiveness, provisions for the improvement of district systems for school support and intervention in accordance with the condition for school effectiveness in 603 CMR 2.03(4)(b)(1).
- (b) If a district has been placed in Level 4 pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(1)(b), the Department shall notify the Level 4 district that it is required to develop a Level 4 District Plan in order to correct the serious deficiencies identified in the district pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(1)(b); if a district has been placed in Level 4 pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(1)(a), the Department may notify it that it is required to develop a Level 4 District Plan in order to aid in turning around its Level 4 school or schools.
- (c) Each Level 4 district notified by the Department pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(8)(b) shall develop a Level 4 District Plan that includes goals and benchmarks appropriate to the reasons it has been required to develop a Level 4 District Plan, along with strategies, action steps, and a timetable for achieving those goals and benchmarks. The Level 4 District Plan shall be prepared on a format provided by the Department.
- (d) A Level 4 district shall submit any required Level 4 District Plan and any successor Level 4 District Plan for approval by the Department. A district whose Level 4 District Plan is approved by the Department shall receive priority for Department assistance. From year to year, continued priority for Department assistance shall be dependent on the district's success in achieving the goals and benchmarks in the approved Level 4 District Plan or approved successor Level 4 District Plan in accordance with the approved timetable.
- (9) Annual report to Board The commissioner shall report annually to the Board on the progress made by districts and schools in Level 4.
- (10) Removal of school from Level 4
- (a) The commissioner shall define for each Level 4 school the academic and other progress that it must make for it to be removed from Level 4. Such progress may include:
1. an increase in student achievement for three years for students overall and for each subgroup of students, as shown by;
 - a. an increase in MCAS scores and an increase in median student growth percentile;
 - b. a reduction in the proficiency gap;
 - c. (for a high school) a higher graduation rate; and
 - d. (for a high school) a measure of postsecondary success, once the Department identifies one that is sufficiently reliable, valid, and timely; and
 2. (ii) progress in implementing the conditions for school effectiveness described in 603 CMR 2.03(4)(b).
- (b) The commissioner, in defining the required progress for each school, shall customize it to the particular reasons the school was placed in Level 4, defining it as any or all of the progress in 2.05(10)(a)1 and 2, or any other progress the commissioner determines appropriate.
- (c) After consultation with the superintendent, the commissioner shall remove a school from Level 4 when, at any time, the commissioner determines, based on evidence that may include evidence from a report from the accountability monitor appointed pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(4)(b), a review by the superintendent submitted pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § J(k), a review conducted by the commissioner pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(l), or a district review or a follow-up review, that:
1. the school has achieved the academic and other progress defined by the commissioner under 603 CMR 2.05(10)(a) and (b) as necessary to allow it to be removed from Level 4; and
 2. the district has the capacity to continue making progress in improving school performance without the accountability and assistance provided due to the school's placement in Level 4.
- (d) At the expiration of the turnaround plan, in conducting a review of the school pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(l), the commissioner shall consider whether the conditions described in 603 CMR 2.05(10)(c)1 and 2 exist. If the commissioner determines that both of these conditions exist, he or she shall remove the school from Level 4.
- (e) Notwithstanding the foregoing requirements of 603 CMR 2.04(10), the commissioner may remove from Level 4 any school for which he or she approves a proposal of closure.

(11) Effect of removal of school from Level 4; transitional period

(a) Upon the commissioner's removal of a school from Level 4 pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(10)(c) or (d), the provisions of M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J, for schools designated as underperforming shall no longer apply to it and the employment of any receiver for the school shall end.

(b) The district and school may continue their relationship with any external partner appointed to advise or assist the superintendent in the implementation of the turnaround plan and may continue to use the turnaround plan in order to continue to improve school performance, renewing or revising it as appropriate, provided that any feature of the turnaround plan that was adopted pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(d), in contravention of any general or special law to the contrary shall be discontinued unless:

1. no more than one year before the removal of the school from Level 4 the superintendent proposed to continue such feature of the turnaround plan for a transitional period after the school's removal from Level 4, supporting this proposal with a written explication of the reasons this continuation is necessary and providing the school committee, the teachers' union or association, and the parent organization for the school with a copy of the proposal and supporting documents; and
2. before removing the school from Level 4 the commissioner determined, after considering any opposition from the school committee, the teachers' union or association, or the parent organization for the school, that such feature of the turnaround plan would contribute to the continued improvement of the school and should continue after the removal.

The superintendent may propose to continue and the commissioner may allow to continue more than one such feature of the turnaround plan.

(c) Upon making a determination pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(11)(b)2 that such feature or features of the turnaround plan should continue, the commissioner shall define the progress that the school must make for each continuing feature of the plan to be discontinued.

(d) On determination by the commissioner at any time, based on evidence that may include evidence from a school or district review or a follow-up review, that the school has made the progress defined under 603 CMR 2.05(11)(c) as necessary to allow a continuing feature of the turnaround plan to be discontinued

1. such feature shall be discontinued; and
2. any powers granted to the commissioner or Board with respect to the school under M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J, that did not cease on removal of the school from Level 4 shall cease.

(e) Two years after the removal of the school from Level 4, if any of the continuing features of the turnaround plan has yet to be discontinued, the commissioner shall conduct a review of the school to determine whether such continuing feature or features should remain in place or be discontinued.

(12) Removal of district from Level 4

(a) A district placed in Level 4 because one or more of its schools has been placed in Level 4 shall be removed from Level 4 when the district no longer has a school in Level 4, unless the district has a Level 4 District Plan and the commissioner has not yet made the determination described in 603 CMR 2.05(12)(b).

(b) A district with a Level 4 District Plan shall be removed from Level 4 by the commissioner, unless it has a school or schools in Level 4, when the commissioner determines, based on evidence that may include evidence from a monitoring report or from a follow-up review, that

1. the district has satisfactorily achieved the goals and benchmarks of its Level 4 District Plan; and
2. the district has the capacity to continue making progress without the accountability and assistance provided by Level 4.

Regulatory Authority:

M.G.L. c. 69, § 1B; c. 69, §§ 1J and 1K, as amended by St. 2010, c. 12, § 3; c. 71, § 38G