

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Strategic Plan

Office of Planning and Research

January 2018

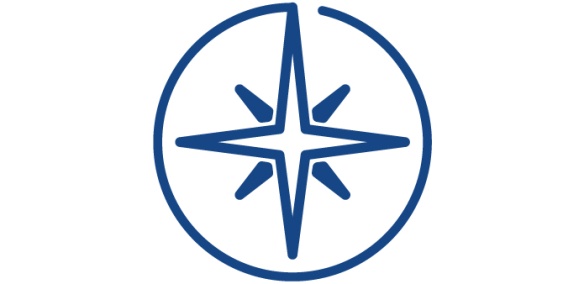
*(Revised February 2019)*

The strong public school system in Massachusetts today is the result of the Commonwealth's centuries-old belief in public schools. Since the nation’s first public school opened in Boston in 1635, Massachusetts has been recognized as a national leader in public education. This commitment to public education has brought us to a point where, compared to national and international standards, our students fare extremely well.

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

We are guided by our mission to strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and engage in their communities, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps. We are working to ensure that all students have the requisite knowledge, skills, and experiences in the academic, workplace readiness, and personal/social domains to successfully navigate to completion an economically viable career pathway in a 21st century economy. Put more simply, we aim to prepare all students for success in the world that awaits them after high school.

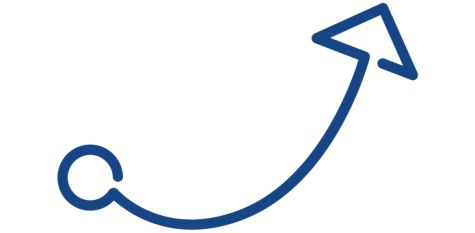
To that end, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is currently organized around five core strategies. Rather than standing in isolation, these strategies intentionally overlap with one another in a coordinated system that drives continuous improvement for educators and students alike.



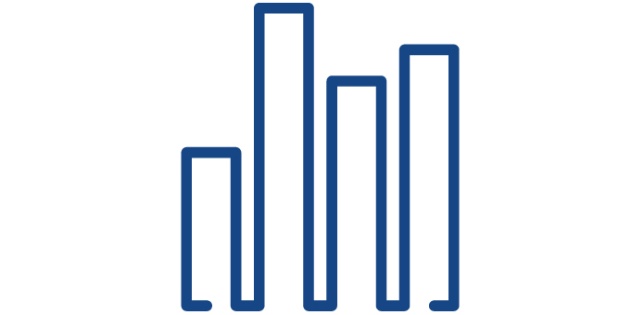
Massachusetts is **strengthening its standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments** by creating tools and resources to support the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and providing a support system for improving classroom practice and instruction.

Massachusetts is **promoting educator development** by improving educator preparation programs, setting high standards for entry to the profession, intentionally working to increase educator diversity, and promoting a system of continuous improvement and development for all educators.





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



Within each of these strategies, DESE focuses on increasing equity for historically underperforming groups of students, so that Massachusetts can close persistent achievement gaps.

Massachusetts is **supporting the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families** by improving school culture and climate; enhancing social and emotional competencies; strengthening family and community engagement; and promoting health, wellness, and safety.

Massachusetts is supporting districts to **enhance resource allocation and data use** by producing relevant data and reports and enabling districts to make the best use of their resources to meet state and local goals.

**K-12 Students**

Including disaggregation by:

* School/district
* Turnaround schools
* Racial/ethnic subgroup
* Economically disadvantaged students
* Students with IEPs
* English learners
* Former English learners
* Homeless/ foster students

*Increase in…*

* Reading, mathematics, and science performance on state and national assessments for all students
* Four- and five-year graduation rates
* Rigorous high school program of study (MassCore) completion rate
* Student participation in high quality college and career pathways
* Inclusion rates for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
* Daily attendance rates
* Advanced course taking
* Student perception of school culture and climate

*Decrease in…*

* Annual dropout rates
* Chronic absenteeism rates
* Discipline rates

*Increase in…*

* The racial and ethnic diversity of our educator workforce
* Retention of effective educators
* Readiness of novice educators

*Decrease in…*

* Equity gaps in student access to educators who are experienced, effective, and teaching in-field

Including a breakdown for urban districts

*Increase in…*

* Rate at which districts report that:
  + DESE is effective in its efforts to improve the overall quality of K-12 education.
  + DESE provides services in a coherent, well-coordinated fashion.
  + DESE’s interactions focus on assistance versus compliance.

**Educators**

*Increase in…*

* Postsecondary enrollment and persistence
* Adult measurable skill gains

*Decrease in…*

* Enrollment in postsecondary developmental courses

**Postsecondary and   
Adult Students**

**DESE Support to Schools   
and Districts**

K—12 Students

DESE seeks to ensure that all Massachusetts students are prepared for success after high school. To attain this goal, we work to provide individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and experiences in the academic, workplace readiness, and personal/social domains to successfully navigate to completion an economically viable career pathway in a 21st century economy. DESE, working in collaboration with a variety of interagency and state level partners, provides professional development, technical assistance, and grant funding to promote strategies that help all K-12 students and adult learners become college and career ready.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Promote rigorous programs of study**

**Encourage MassCore adoption**

[MassCore](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/masscore/) is the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (Board) minimum recommended program of study intended to align high school coursework with college and workforce expectations. The program of study includes the successful completion of four units of English, four units of mathematics, three units of a lab-based science, three units of history, two units of the same foreign language, one unit of the arts, and five additional "core" courses. Certain computer science courses can substitute for either a mathematics course or a laboratory science course. The agency encourages districts to provide students with the opportunity to complete this rigorous course of study in preparation for success after high school. Current work to promote MassCore includes:

* + Dissemination of best practices for increasing MassCore completion rates;
  + Collaboration across units to enhance student access to rigorous coursework; and
  + Improved data collection and analysis regarding MassCore completion.

**Objective 2. Support students at risk of dropping out**

**Provide tools and resources to support local dropout prevention work**

DESE’s graduation worksupports statewide and local efforts for high school [dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dropout/reduction.html). DESE collaborates with schools to assist them in implementing the highest quality, proven interventions through technical assistance, training, and the exchange of promising practices. Key levers for this work include:

* Dropout Prevention and Recovery Working Group
* MassGrad Promising Practices Grants

**Promote development of career and academic plans**

DESE collaborates with schools and districts to implement college and career plans, called My Career and Academic Plans (MyCAPs). These online tools serve as an instrument to empower and engage students in their own education and future planning. DESE has created curricular materials and a series of statewide trainings to support schools and districts in implementing college and career plans.

**Help schools and districts identify students most at risk**

The [Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dropout/reduction.html) helps to identify those students who are most at risk of not reaching certain academic milestones. Traditional early warning systems are implemented at the high school level to help predict which students are most likely to drop out, but Massachusetts, in order to identify students as early as possible, developed an EWIS that is connected to relevant academic goals throughout a student’s entire K–12 and postsecondary career.

**Objective 3. Prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce**

**Increase access to high quality college and career pathways**

The Commonwealth has launched a [High Quality College and Career Pathways](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/hqccp/) initiative, which serves as an overarching strategy to expand student access to postsecondary pathways. DESE has designed an annual process to designate two new types of pathways—Early College Pathways and Innovation Pathways—anchored in the guiding principles of equitable access, guided academic pathways, enhanced student support, connection to career, and effective partnerships. Students in a designated early college pathway will have the opportunity to complete at least 12 college credits by graduation, and students in a designated innovation pathway will complete a 100-hour internship or capstone in an industry sector.

DESE is also making strides to increase access to secondary and postsecondary [career/technical education programs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cte/) and strengthen its [adult education programs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/). With the 2018 re-authorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, DESE is developing a new state plan to guide its career/technical education work.

**Promote work-based learning experiences**

[Connecting Activities](http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/) provides high quality work-based learning experiences that are connected to classroom teaching and learning for high school students across the Commonwealth. The primary goal of Connecting Activities is to design and implement brokered “work and learning” experiences during the school year and summer to support career development education.

**Provide opportunities for no-cost adult basic education**

Through both federal and state grants, DESE’s [Adult Community Learning Services (ACLS)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/default.html) team funds a broad network of education programs to provide adults with opportunities to develop literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.

We aim for every student in Massachusetts to have access to a safe and supportive school environment that cultivates their academic curiosity and confidence. Schools should provide an excellent education that involves reading meaningful texts across content areas, working on complex real-world problems, and sharing ideas through speaking and writing using evidence, all in an effort to understand the world and their roles in it. To support standards-based learning, we believe that every student should engage:

* + with grade-appropriate text every day,
  + with meaningful real-world problems every day, and
  + in scientific conversations using data every week,

in a school environment that supports social-emotional learning, health, and safety.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Increase the quality of instruction so that it is aligned to the high expectations of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks**

**Set high expectations for content knowledge and pedagogy**

Guided by input from a wide range of stakeholders, the latest set of [Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/) improve the coherence, clarity, and rigor of standards in English language arts and literacy; mathematics; science, technology and engineering; history and social science; and digital literacy and computer science, and emphasize connections across subjects and grades.

DESE is currently revising the Arts and Comprehensive Health Curriculum Frameworks to ensure that educators, and ultimately students, are accessing content that is aligned with current research and developments in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in these disciplines.

**Improve access to high-quality curricular materials**

Expanding access to high-quality, standards-aligned curricular materials can significantly improve student outcomes, especially when teachers have the professional learning opportunities they need to make the most of those materials. DESE is committed to ensuring that all students in Massachusetts enjoy the many benefits of a strong curriculum. [CURATE](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/curate/) is a nascent project that brings together panels of educators to review evidence of curricula’s alignment to standards and usability. To support cross-district collaboration around common curricula, DESE has begun publishing [curriculum heat maps](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/). DESE also issues grants to districts to catalyze curriculum audits, adoptions, and refinements.

**Create tools and resources to support effective implementation**

DESE currently makes available a wide range of resources to districts to support effective implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. For example, [family-friendly guides to the standards](http://www.doe.mass.edu/highstandards/#guides) support meaningful dialogue between parents and educators about grade-level learning expectations and the [Standards Navigator](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/search/) helps educators make connections between learning standards and to instructional resources. DESE convenes educator [instructional support networks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/networks.pdf) across the state in English language arts, mathematics, science, and history. Networks focus on specific content from the Frameworks, and many support integration across subjects and alignment across grades. DESE also supports a cadre of math and science curriculum leaders to create resources for educators on topics related to the Curriculum Frameworks. In partnership with these networks and other educator advisory groups, DESE publishes [Quick Reference Guides](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/) that highlight and describe specific instructional strategies and additional guidance on the Frameworks.

DESE coordinates an [Early Grades Literacy](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2018/734/) competitive grant program to support school teams to implement standards-aligned literacy instruction across subjects and strands, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. DESE is also expanding programming to support educators in middle grades math instruction.

**Objective 2. Increase student access to supports needed to attain the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks**

**Strengthen instruction for English learners**

DESE is supporting multiple opportunities for educators to enhance their instruction of English learners. Many educators obtain [endorsements in Sheltered English Immersion](http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/) by completing approved classes at institutions of higher education or with external vendors. DESE also provides technical assistance to districts through networks and direct support.

Signed in 2017, the [Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK) Act](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/look-act.html) allows flexibility for schools and districts in implementing language instruction education programs for English learners but requires them to establish benchmarks for English learner success in becoming proficient in English. The new law also encourages language learning for all students by allowing districts to implement the Seal of Biliteracy, a means of recognizing students who seek to become bilingual and biliterate by the time they complete high school. DESE is developing guidelines and regulations to support districts in implementing the legislation.

**Reduce disparities in educator effectiveness**

Through the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act*, districts are required to create plans to address inequities in access to educators. DESE has created a Student Learning Experience (SLE) report for district and school staff that uses data to examine student access to teachers and determine whether differences in teacher characteristics exist for historically disadvantaged groups, such as students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students. The reports draw attention to disparities in student assignment to out-of-field, inexperienced, or ineffective educators. DESE is working with districts to support the use of the report and to implement practices that eliminate inequitable assignment of students to teachers. The annual [Equity Plan](http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/equitableaccess/2017equityupdate.pdf) update provides a summary of the agency’s strategies to address these gaps.

**Support high-quality professional development for educators to accelerate student learning by tailoring the instructional environment –what, when, how and where students learn—to address the individual needs, skills and interests of each student**

Through strategic partnerships, DESE helps districts and schools pilot personalized learning projects. Technology is necessary to implement personalized learning effectively, affordably, and at significant scale. Key levers for this work include:

* The [Massachusetts Personalized Learning Edtech Consortium (MAPLE)](http://learnlaunch.org/maple/), a public-private partnership between DESE and the nonprofit LearnLaunch Institute, which connects K-12 school districts across the innovation spectrum; enables districts to learn more from each other; provides resources that strengthen local models; and nurtures the discovery of new ideas to transform learning and teaching.
* [New England Secondary Schools Consortium (NESSC)](https://www.newenglandssc.org/), a regional partnership that promotes innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across New England.

**Objective 3. Develop and administer assessments to improve teaching and learning**

**Develop and administer the Next Generation MCAS exam**

DESE has upgraded learning expectations over the years through revisions to the curriculum frameworks, and in November 2015, the Board voted to develop a new assessment built for the next generation of students. The [Next Generation MCAS](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/nextgen/default.html) builds on the best of the MCAS assessments that have served the Commonwealth for the past two decades, while adding innovative items and items specifically created to assess Massachusetts learning standards. The new MCAS was offered for the first time in grades 3 to 8 in the spring of 2017 and will be offered for the first time in grade 10 in the spring of 2019.

Excellent teachers and leaders are critical to improving student achievement, and all students should have equitable access to effective educators. We are working to enhance the quality and improve outcomes of educator preparation and set high standards for entering the profession so that educators can enter the profession ready to have a positive impact on students from their first days in the classroom. By improving the depth and quality of preparation for our new teachers, we can narrow the impact gaps between new and experienced teachers, improve retention rates for school districts, and improve student outcomes, particularly for our most vulnerable and underserved populations. By supporting continuous improvement, we can help all educators become more effective so that all students exhibit improved outcomes by virtue of having more equitable access to great educators. Additionally, we know that our students benefit from a diverse educator workforce, one that reflects the rich diversity of the Commonwealth. A growing body of research indicates that increasing teacher diversity is an important strategy for improving learning for students of color and for closing achievement gaps. Therefore, the Department has engaged in a number of initiatives to diversify the Massachusetts educator pipeline, from classroom teachers to superintendents.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Increase the effectiveness of first-year educators to have an impact on students on day one; accelerate teacher effectiveness in years two and three**

**Improve the licensure system**

DESE continues to streamline state licensure requirements, clarify regulations, and improve processes for obtaining licenses. DESE also maintains and updates the Subject-Matter Knowledge Requirements (SMKs) that define what content educators should know in each license field and that align to the curriculum standards for students outlined in the Curriculum Frameworks. Massachusetts licensure tests (MTEL) are based on SMKs, and educator preparation programs rely on SMKs to guide their programming.

**Support and evaluate educator preparation providers**

DESE [reviews the quality of programs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/pr.html) offered by educator preparation providers. Over multi-year cycles, trained evaluators [review sponsoring organizations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/guidelines.html) (including higher education institutions, non-profits, and districts) and examine outcome data for the preparation programs. They also consider survey data [collected from a range of program stakeholders](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/surveys/), including principals who hire their completers, program completers themselves, and supervising practitioners. Furthermore, DESE provides organizations with formative feedback based on data on the performance of the candidates they prepare and shares data tools with educator preparation providers to improve the educational experience of candidates.

**Objective 2. Support educators in their continuous development**

**Improve professional learning experiences for early-career educators**

DESE is working to offer resources and professional learning opportunities to enhance educator effectiveness for early-career educators, including resources for pre-service candidates and resources for in-service educators. For example, at the pre-service stage, to complete educator preparation candidates must demonstrate skills and dispositions reflective of high-quality teaching through the [Candidate Assessment of Performance](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/cap/) (CAP). DESE convenes a series of workshops for educator preparation organizations and school districts to help CAP evaluators provide high-quality feedback based on classroom observations and a review of teachers’ lesson plans. DESE highlights effective practices for [Induction and Mentoring](http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/reports.html) based on an annual statewide survey of local education agencies. DESE has invested in supporting districts to implement the [Educator Evaluation Framework](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/) to provide teachers and administrators with meaningful feedback and to continuously improve their practice in service of student learning. DESE is also leveraging innovative technologies and effective pedagogical approaches to design, develop, and implement E-learning experiences for all educators.

**Objective 3. Increase the diversity of the educator workforce**

**Develop and pilot initiatives to increase workforce diversity**

The Department is engaged in multiple efforts to diversify the educator workforce, from classroom teachers to superintendents. DESE has developed [a teacher diversification pilot program](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2019/216/), which supports districts in strengthening and diversifying existing teacher recruitment and development programs—such as programs that support paraprofessionals to become certified teachers and “grow your own” programs that encourage local high school graduates to become educators in their community. The Department has also launched the [INSPIRED fellowship](http://www.doe.mass.edu/amazingeducators/diversity.html), a highly selective opportunity for current in-service teachers to recruit students from target communities at the high-school, community college, or undergraduate level into the teaching profession. DESE has also created a multi-year pilot program aimed at increasing the diversity of senior leadership in Massachusetts school districts.

To thrive in childhood and beyond, students should attend schools where they can focus on learning and where they can develop social-emotional skills such as self-management and responsible decision-making. DESE is working to support students’ social-emotional learning, health, and safety by promoting systems and strategies that foster safe and supportive learning environments.

Through a collection of connected initiatives across our agency, DESE is working to improve outcomes in four interrelated areas: school culture and climate; social and emotional learning; family and community engagement; and health, wellness and safety. Though several projects are described below, this focus extends throughout many more areas of the agency’s work.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Improve school culture and climate**

**Promote safe and supportive learning environments**

DESE offers professional learning opportunities to equip educators to better cultivate safe and supportive learning environments. The Department provides several [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) academies](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/prof-develop/), which include three years of professional development, coaching, and technical assistance to support educators in implementing key dimensions of the MTSS framework. Additionally, the Department partners with national experts to provide districts with professional development, coaching, and grants around cultural proficiency and culturally responsive teaching.

DESE also coordinates competitive grants and additional professional development opportunities that support improvements in school culture and climate. The [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1P), outlined in state law, anchors the development and implementation of this work. Through the [Systems for Student Success Initiative](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/), DESE offers grants, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to districts to identify and address the systemic barriers to student learning. The [Safe and Supportive Schools Grant](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/?section=fc335) provides funding to help districts ensure that each school creates a safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive whole-school learning environment. Through the [Rethinking Discipline initiative](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/), DESE identifies cohorts of schools and districts with disproportionate or excessive discipline practices and provides professional development for educators and administrators on alternative approaches to school discipline.

**Measure school climate**

Students in selected grades complete optional [school climate surveys](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/vocal/2018/) about their experiences at school, including safety, bullying, discipline, relationships with peers and adults, and other topics. Each year, participating districts and schools receive reports with aggregated responses and statewide comparison data. DESE encourages districts to use the survey results in combination with other sources of information available locally or from the state to build on strengths and address any areas of concern.

**Objective 2. Enhance social and emotional competencies**

**Promote inclusive instruction**

With feedback from educators and other stakeholders, DESE has created resources to help teachers and administrators build systems to support all students in general education settings. The Department recently revised the [MTSS Blueprint](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/), which will be accompanied by a forthcoming toolkit to support implementation. The [Guidebook for Inclusive Practice](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/) highlights models of effective practice and provides tools that align to the Educator Evaluation Framework to help educators improve instruction in inclusive classrooms. DESE also offers [Foundations for Inclusive Practice](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/CourseOverview.docx) courses to educators and administrators and technical support for inclusive practice, as well as an MTSS academy on inclusive instruction.

**Support educators with integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into classroom instruction**

DESE partners with other states through the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL/) to support the development of social and emotional competencies in classrooms across the Commonwealth. With input from stakeholders across Massachusetts, DESE has developed [Guidelines on Implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/SELguide.pdf), which includes information about developing SEL competencies in classrooms.

In addition, attending to the development of students' social and emotional skills can help students, schools, and districts meet the expectations for teaching and learning that are described in the Massachusetts English Language Arts and Literacy, Mathematics, and History and Social Sciences Curriculum Frameworks. The latest set of [Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/) highlights the importance of SEL in standards-based teaching and learning. Specifically, the frameworks include guiding principles that emphasize that social and emotional learning can increase academic achievement, improve attitudes and behaviors, and reduce emotional distress. DESE encourages curricula and pedagogy that help students develop skills in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship building. Furthermore, as described in the [SEL for ALL](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL/sel-all.docx) guidance document, in order to support all students, it is essential to develop social and emotional competencies with an equity lens and in a culturally-responsive way that actively draws upon students’ diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges as a strategy to deepen learning.

**Objective 3. Strengthen family and community engagement**

**Promote family and community engagement**

Family and community engagement is a key component of many initiatives, and DESE continues to design new resources and pursue new areas of related work. In partnership with several other state agencies, DESE is developing a framework to define what family engagement looks like across children’s lifetimes from birth through grade 12.

**Objective 4. Improve health, wellness, and safety**

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

The Commonwealth coordinates the [school lunch and school breakfast programs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/nprograms/), along with a number of other programs intended to provide high quality meals to students after school and during the summer months. Through the School Breakfast Challenge, schools pursue statewide goals for increasing student participation in school breakfast programs. DESE also provides guidance and tools for schools to implement school breakfast models. The [Community Eligibility Provision](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/nprograms/cep/) (CEP) enables high-poverty districts to offer school breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost.

In addition, DESE partners with agencies such as the Department of Public Health to provide guidance and training for schools to improve the overall health, wellness, and safety of our students. DESE also provides guidance on effective policies to prevent substance use and abuse and provides oversight to the Commonwealth’s recovery high schools.

We aim to turn around underperforming schools and districts by supporting sustained improvement, so that all students have access to high quality, culturally relevant learning opportunities that prepare them for successful futures. By supporting our lowest performing schools in:

* Establishing a community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration,
* Employing intentional practices for improving instruction,
* Providing student-specific supports and instruction to all students, and
* Providing appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral supports in order to create a safe, orderly, and respectful learning environment for students and teachers,

all students in the Commonwealth, especially the historically marginalized, will learn in dynamic and responsive educational environments and graduate with the tools and agency to contribute as responsible members of their communities.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Gather data to inform DESE’s assistance framework**

**Implement DESE’s accountability system**

DESE’s [accountability system](http://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/) serves as the basis for the assistance provided by the Department. As such, the level of assistance provided to districts and schools is differentiated based upon the level of performance and the extent to which successful turnaround practices have been implemented. Having spent several years updating the state’s accountability systems through extensive stakeholder engagement, in school year 2018­­–19, the Department released the first version of its new accountability results.

**Research and disseminate effective turnaround practices**

Based on evidence gathered through site visits, as well as research findings from across the country, the Department publishes and disseminates information on [effective turnaround practices](http://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/howitworks/reports.html) from across the state and nation. DESE has created a clearinghouse of key research, resources, professional development opportunities, and partners that are aligned with effective turnaround practice and implementation.

**Objective 2. Support school and district turnaround strategies**

**Provide targeted support to accelerate school and district improvement**

DESE’s regional assistance teams collaborate with leaders in the state’s lowest performing districts and their schools to develop and implement turnaround plans to accelerate improvements in student achievement. Regional assistance teams work with those districts with schools that are in the lowest 10 percentiles according to DESE’s accountability system either for all students or for a particular subgroup, high schools with low graduation rates, and schools with low assessment participation rates to develop and implement improvement plans.

**Support schools in their implementation of improvement strategies**

DESE provides financial resources to state and federally identified turnaround schools through a series of competitive and allocation grants. This funding supports schools in engaging in school turnaround work that dramatically redesigns and re-envisions the way they operate. Schools that are awarded the funding work with parents, community members, and other important stakeholders to design and implement specific improvements that best fit their most pressing needs.

**Catalyze dramatic turnaround in the lowest performing schools**

The commissioner is charged with identifying the schools in most need of support, called “underperforming schools.” State law requires a district superintendent, in consultation with a local stakeholder group and school leaders, to develop a turnaround plan for each underperforming school. State law provides superintendents and districts with considerable flexibility to make changes to policies, conditions, and school-level practices to drive improvement and close the proficiency gap. DESE monitors all underperforming schools through site visits, assessing school progress made on measurable annual goals, and providing targeted assistance to promote sustained improvement.

**Appoint receivers for chronically underperforming schools**

If, after three years of intervention, an underperforming school does not turn around, the commissioner may designate a school as chronically underperforming and may appoint a receiver to manage it. The receiver has full managerial and operational control over the school and is responsible for meeting the goals of a new turnaround plan. DESE has developed detailed guidance to set clear expectations about roles, responsibilities, and processes for designating chronically underperforming schools, appointing school receivers, monitoring progress in these schools, and building local school committee capacity to exit chronically underperforming status.

**Appoint receivers for Chronically Underperforming districts**

When a district is underperforming and showing no signs of substantial improvement over time, the Board can name the district “[chronically underperforming](http://www.doe.mass.edu/level5/districts/).” When a district is designated as chronically underperforming, the Commissioner appoints a receiver (an individual, or an entity such as a board) who reports directly to the commissioner and is empowered to initiate an ambitious and accelerated reform agenda. The receiver works with a group of local stakeholders to develop a turnaround plan to accelerate student achievement.

**Objective 3. Provide integrated supports for turnaround schools and districts**

**Address students’ non-academic barriers to learning**

The Systems for Student Success office provides support for schools and districts in designing and implementing tiered systems of academic and social emotional support. Through the Systems for Student Success Initiative, DESE provides more intensive support to a select group of districts and schools to create and implement an action plan for addressing students’ barriers to learning.

**Partner with providers who have expertise and demonstrated effectiveness**

DESE has created a list of approved [Priority Partners](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/partnerships/approved-priority-partners.html)who have been vetted and identified as having a proven record of catalyzing district and school turnaround, having familiarity with the Massachusetts context, and understanding the conditions for school effectiveness. DSE helps districts to capitalize on the expertise of these Priority Partners.

Education systems face a common challenge of delivering the best possible outcomes with limited resources. DESE aims to provide districts with data and tools to examine their local context and best practices so that they can make smart resource decisions to address their students' needs. Through technical assistance, guidance, and programming, our agency is committed to supporting educators in employing data and evidence effectively to continuously improve their work.

# Our Strategy

**Objective 1. Support districts to use resources and data effectively to improve student outcomes**

**Provide districts with reports and resources to make effective decisions**

DESE reports a wide range of data on students, educators, school climate, and school finance to inform statewide and local activities. Many of these data reports are available publicly on the [School and District Profiles](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) website, while others are housed within [Edwin Analytics](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/). For example, the [Early Warning Indicator System](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/ewi/) (EWIS), found within Edwin Analytics, identifies students who are at risk of dropping out of high school or not enrolling in post-secondary education. In partnership with the Executive Office of Education, DESE recently released a data tool that enables educators and other stakeholders to work with simulated reports in the [Edwin Analytics](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/) system. This online training environment masks student information to protect student confidentiality, allowing users to become familiar with DESE data resources in educator preparation or other training settings where access to real confidential student data is prohibited.

DESE has created resources to assist districts with strategic planning. The [Planning for Success](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/) initiative helps district leaders with local improvement planning and monitoring for continuous improvement. Through the [“How Do We Know” initiative](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/), DESE promotes evidence-based practice across the Commonwealth. DESE designs resources to help districts develop improvement strategies by better accessing existing research and supports them to share evidence emerging from their own work. The initiative also provides local leaders with tools to measure implementation and impact.

**Promote the strategic use of resources to achieve state and local priorities**

DESE has created a series of [Resource Allocation and District Action Reports](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/radar/) (RADAR), to enable district leaders to compare their staffing, class size, special education services, school performance, and per-pupil spending data with other, similar districts. Through the [RADAR competitive grant program](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2018/110/), DESE is providing funding to district leaders to examine resource allocation in more depth using RADAR data and other sources of information, make meaningful changes in resource allocation to support best practice and district improvement strategies, and measure the impact of these resource shifts on desired outcomes.

DESE implements the Commonwealth’s [Chapter 70 Program](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/chapter70/), which in FY19 distributed approximately $4.9 billion in state aid for public elementary and secondary schools. The Chapter 70 formula determines an adequate spending level for each school district (the foundation budget) and then uses each community's property values and residents' incomes to determine how much of the foundation budget should be funded from local property taxes. Chapter 70 state aid pays for the remaining amount. Foundation budget rates are increased by inflation each year and in recent years the rates for health insurance and English learners were increased by more than inflation as part of a phase-in toward new goal rates established for these categories in response to the findings of the Foundation Budget Review Commission.

Districts have wide latitude in how they choose to allocate their resources, as long as they meet these minimum spending requirements. DESE collects district financial data annually in order to determine compliance with this requirement and has made increasing use of this data to support resource allocation analysis and tool development, including the reports referenced above.

DESE also coordinates the [Inter-District School Choice Program](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/choice-guide.html), which allows a parent to enroll his or her child in a district that is not the child’s home district.  Participating in Inter-District School Choice is one opportunity for districts to make efficient use of limited resources, by filling extra seats in a classroom that would not otherwise be filled by resident students.

In addition to foundation budget funding through Chapter 70, the Commonwealth invests in grants to support local school systems and oversees several forms of federal grant resources. DESE is redesigning its grant-making strategiesto encourage districts to make the best use of available resources to achieve state and local priorities. DESE has consolidated applications for several federal entitlement grants, starting with the Every Student Succeeds Act. The effort also includes grants offered through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act. This agency-wide initiative will streamline grant requirements and review processes across other agency grant programs.

Through the [Digital Connections](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2018/eotss/) grant program, DESE supports districts in upgrading their IT infrastructure. DESE partners with nonprofit organizations in the technology sector to connect districts with broadband service providers and negotiate costs. The goal is to ensure that schools are equipped to meet all their digital needs. DESE also provides technical assistance to help ensure that schools can obtain high-speed Internet access at affordable rates through their participation in the federal Schools and Libraries (E-rate) Program.

**Monitor district performance**

One of DESE’s key functions is to ensure districts understand and implement laws and regulations. DESE monitors district performance on a regular basis, providing an opportunity for districts to reflect on data and information to better understand strengths and challenges, and then use that information to inform resource allocation decisions. To promote a monitoring process that is more informed by data and leads to potential resource allocation decisions, DESE has launched a new tiered approach to district monitoring that tailors the intensity of program review technical support to districts with higher risk of failing to meet state and federal program requirements. DESE regularly monitors districts in several programmatic areas (special education, civil rights, English learner education, vocational/technical education) as well as a range of other areas, from finances and nutrition programs to charter schools and virtual schools.