# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | October 22, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | District and School Accountability Decisions |

At the regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on October 29, 2024, I will provide you with an overview of 2024 district and school accountability determinations, including decisions made for certain underperforming schools and chronically underperforming schools and districts. These determinations are based in part on the 2024 MCAS results for districts and schools.

**Background on the Accountability System**

State and federal laws require all states to implement an accountability system for schools and districts. The purpose of Massachusetts’ accountability system is twofold: to provide clear, actionable information on school and district performance for families, community members, and the public, and to guide the Department of Elementary and Secondary’s (DESE’s) resource allocation and assistance efforts. The system helps DESE identify schools that require support or intervention, as well as those demonstrating success.

Massachusetts' accountability system combines two components: (1) a normative component that measures student performance at a school relative to others statewide and (2) a criterion-referenced component that assesses a school or district’s progress toward improvement targets. Based on these components, schools are classified into two categories: schools requiring assistance or intervention, and schools not requiring assistance or intervention.

Consistent with state law and regulations, when improvement in these school stalls, DESE may designate schools as underperforming or chronically underperforming, while the Board may designate districts as underperforming or chronically underperforming. (M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1J and 1K, 603 CMR 2.05, 2.06). The two tiers of state designation result in different levels of accountability and assistance, as described in 603 CMR 2.05 and 2.06.

At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, nineteen schools in Massachusetts continued to be designated as underperforming; three schools continued to be designated as chronically underperforming; and three districts continued to be designated as chronically underperforming. No additional schools or districts were designated as underperforming or chronically underperforming. The list of underperforming schools and chronically underperforming districts and schools is provided at the end of this memo.

The eligibility criteria and processes for designating schools or districts as underperforming or chronically underperforming are described in M.G.L. c. 69, §§ [1J](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1j) and [1K](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1K) and the associated regulations at [603 CMR 2.05 and 2.06](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr2.html?section=all).

**Support for Schools Requiring Assistance or Intervention**

DESE, through its Statewide System of Support (SSoS) and the Office of Strategic Transformation (OST), provides direct assistance and accountability to schools and districts. For example, DESE provides funding, evidence-based resources, and preferred access to professional development to districts with schools designated as in need of focused/targeted support or broad/comprehensive support. These efforts are designed to enhance school and district capacity to effectively and proactively use proven instructional and supportive practices to boost and sustain rapid gains in student achievement.

**Exit Decisions**

As provided in the regulations, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education may remove a designation of underperforming or chronically underperforming from a school or district at any time, if the Commissioner determines that the school or district has made sufficient progress and that existing conditions will support continued improvement without the additional state assistance afforded by the designation. 603 CMR 2.05(10)(c), 2.06(10)(c) and 2.06(12)(c).

The Commissioner receives periodic progress updates throughout the school year from DESE’s SSoS and OST offices on each of the underperforming and chronically underperforming schools and districts. Each academic year, these progress updates culminate in a careful, collaborative review of data, including the summative outcomes published in the annual accountability reports in the fall. The data that the Commissioner incorporate into his exit decisions include both quantitative measures of student outcomes and qualitative data on the conditions for continuous improvement at the school and/or district. The qualitative data are generated throughout the year by DESE’s progress monitoring activities, which include periodic site visits, classroom observations, external evaluations, stakeholder focus groups, and meetings with school and/or district leadership.

**Transitional Period**

To assist schools and districts in successfully transitioning out of DESE’s most intensive levels of technical assistance, state law authorizes the Commissioner to retain measures adopted in the turnaround plan for a transitional period, if in the Commissioner’s judgment, the measures would contribute to the continued improvement of the school or district. If, two years after the removal of the school or district from its designation as underperforming or chronically underperforming, any such measure remains in place, the Commissioner must conduct a review of the school or district to determine whether the measure should remain in place or be discontinued.

At the Board meeting on October 29, Lauren Woo, Acting Chief of Staff and Michelle Ryan, Acting Chief of Schools, will be available to answer your questions.

Underperforming Schools as of October 2024

Athol-Royalston: Athol Community Elementary School​

Boston​: Brighton High School​, Dearborn 6-12 STEM Academy, Excel High School, Madison Park Vocational Technical High School​

Fall River​: Fonseca Elementary School

Lawrence​: Oliver Elementary​ School, Oliver Middle School

New Bedford​: New Bedford High School​

Springfield: Forest Park Middle School​, High School of Commerce, High School of Science & Technology, Impact Prep, John F. Kennedy Middle School,​ Kiley Academy, Kiley Prep​, RISE Academy at Van Sickle​, Springfield Legacy Academy, Van Sickle Academy

Chronically Underperforming Schools as of October 2024

Boston: Paul A. Dever Elementary School, UP Academy Holland

New Bedford: John Avery Parker Elementary School

Chronically Underperforming Districts as of October 2024

Holyoke Public Schools

Lawrence Public Schools

Southbridge Public Schools

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