March 3, 2025

Dear colleague,

I hope you are well, and that you are finding ways to remain hopeful and steadfast in your commitments to your communities, amid a very challenging landscape in our nation right now. In terms of your district’s ongoing improvement efforts, I hope you are encouraged by what you are seeing in your district’s instructional practices and student outcomes as you implement and monitor your priorities for the remainder of the year.

As you know, all schools identified as ‘requiring assistance or intervention’ by the [MA Accountability System](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/default.html) must develop improvement plans aligned to state and federal regulations. For the fourth consecutive year, the Statewide System of Support (SSoS) is providing guidance designed to address these school-level planning and reporting requirements through a single district-level instructional prioritization plan that aligns to the district’s broader strategic plan and to DESE’s [Educational Vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2023/2023-05/item7.1-educational-vision.pdf) and [District Standards and Indicators](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/district-review/district-standards-indicators.docx).

The success of this district-level approach requires that district leadership teams lead the implementation of the district’s instructional vision and monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in each school. We believe this approach will improve student outcomes in the schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention, while also strengthening instructional systems across the district.

Once again, we ask that districts engage in a collaborative planning processto articulate an instructional priority you will focus on in the coming year to close equity and opportunity gaps in schools requiring assistance or intervention, promote excellence, and ensure that all students, particularly students who have been historically underserved, have equitable opportunities to excel. Guidance for your planning is provided below and will be [posted online here](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/guidance.html?section=sustainable). ***This instructional prioritization plan will serve as the focus for SSoS support to your district.[[1]](#footnote-2)***

On **Thursday, March 13, from 3-4:00 p.m.**, we will host anoptionalwebinar (district leaders have received calendar invites and the webinar link) to discuss this guidance, our theory of change, and lessons we are learning as we monitor our work.The webinar will be recorded and posted on our website shortly after.

As a reminder, schools designated as [Underperforming](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/about.html) will also need to renew their Sustainable Improvement Plans (SIPs) as per M.G.L. Chapter 69 1J. These school plans must align to the priorities outlined in the district’s Instructional Prioritization plan. Please reference the [Sustainable Improvement Plan](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/guidance.html) guidance for details. **Both the district instructional prioritization plans and the Underperforming School renewal plans (if applicable) for the 2025-2026 school year should be shared with DESE by Monday, June 30, 2025 via email to** [**ssos1@mass.gov**](mailto:ssos1@mass.gov).Your regional SSoS Leadership Consultant team is available to support your development and refinement of these plans over the course of the coming months.

*We remain grateful for our continued partnership.*

Sincerely,

Charmie Curry, EdD

*Associate Commissioner, Statewide System of Support*

**Statewide System of Support (SSoS)**

**FY26 District Instructional Prioritization Planning Guidance**

*“The aim of strategic thinking is to create a sense of purpose that can enable everyone in the system to develop a sense of efficacy, possibility, and commitment to contribute in positive ways. Organizational systems and structures without*

*clarity of purpose and a sense of possibility provide an empty shell, a busy organization that lacks meaning.”*

*(Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching, by Rachel E. Curtis and Elizbeth A. City)*

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| **Background & Purpose** |

All schools identified as ‘requiring assistance or intervention’ by the [MA Accountability System](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/default.html) must develop improvement plans aligned to state and federal regulations. For the fourth consecutive year, the Statewide System of Support (SSoS) is providing guidance designed to address these school-level planning and reporting requirements through a single district-level instructional prioritization plan that aligns to the district’s broader strategic plan and also aligns to [DESE’s Educational Vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2023/2023-05/item7.1-educational-vision.pdf) and [DESE’s District Standards and Indicators](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/district-review/district-standards-indicators.docx).

*Please note that schools identified as* [*Underperforming*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/about.html) *per M.G.L. Chapter 69 1J are still required to renew their plans annually, using the* [*Sustainable Improvement Planning guidance.*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/guidance.html)

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| **Overview** |

***Planning Requirements:*** Addressing the components outlined below will not only support an evidence-based approach to school and district improvement planning, but it will also meet state and federal planning and reporting requirements for schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention.

We encourage districts to use one of our templates ([document](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/prioritization/fy26-prioritization-plan-template.docx) or [PPT](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/prioritization/fy26-prioritization-plan-ppt-template.pptx)) to ensure all parts of the guidance are addressed. However, districts may modify the template if doing so is more authentic and useful for your work.

***Due date:*** Please share your final FY26 instructional prioritization plan with SSoS by emailing [ssos1@mass.gov](mailto:ssos1@mass.gov) by **Monday, June 30, 2025**. SSoS will provide precise, actionable feedback in August to inform the launch of your school year and will support implementation and monitoring throughout the next school year.

***Tips & Reminders:***

* **District Instructional Priorities must directly impact all schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention** **by the MA accountability model**. In some cases, a district may need two priorities to address the different contexts of the identified schools.
* Priorities should be specific enough that the district can expect to see progress in one year, while also while also strengthening systems that support teaching and learning and address identified inequities.
* We anticipate that most SSoS districts will maintain the same or similar priorities from FY25 into FY26 and will use this planning process to refine implementation and systems based on what you are learning this year.
* However, based on local conditions, some districts may need to change direction to address more pressing instructional needs. If this is the case, we encourage districts to include a compelling data narrative that clearly communicates this need to stakeholders.
* Collectively, a district’s various plans should align and send a clear, cohesive message to all stakeholders regarding the district’s vision for education, and its approach to achieving this vision.

***Planning and Implementation Support:*** Your regional SSoS Leadership Consultant (LC) team is available to support this process and help you strategically refine key components of your plan, including how the district will address key actions outlined in the [SSoS-District Partnership Overview](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/ssos-district-partnership-overview.docx). This LC team will also provide actionable feedback to strengthen your plan and will support your implementation and monitoring of the plan in the coming year. Please note that any district accepting [Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/redesign/default.html) funds agrees to engage with this SSoS Assistance.

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| **Information to be Addressed** |

**Status of HQIM adoption in your district**. [High-quality instructional materials (HQIM)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html) provide a strong foundation for all students, particularly students from systematically underserved groups and communities, to have "equitable opportunities to excel at grade level (or beyond)" and support teachers to do what they do best: make learning relevant and interactive for students while also providing data-informed, targeted individualized supports.

* **Please confirm that what is reported on** [DESE’s School and District Profiles](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/Curriculumdata.aspx) **is accurate**. If it is not, or if nothing is reported, please work with your district administrator to [update the information](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/impd/data-collection.html).
* If any curricula are not [high quality as defined by DESE](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2024/165/#:~:text=Fund%20Code%3A%20165,mathematics%2C%20ELA%2C%20or%20science), please list the grade(s) and subject(s) and briefly describe the status of the district’s efforts to implement HQIM in those areas (learning and preparing, investigating and selecting, or launching), with particular focus on implementing HQIM in any schools requiring assistance or intervention.
* See DESE’s [Implement MA](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/impd/implement-ma.html) framework for more information on HQIM adoption and implementation.

1. **Instructional Priority: What is your district’s highest leverage instructional priority for SY25-26?** What subject, grade(s) and student group(s) will be the primary focus for this priority? What is the desired impact on instruction and student learning? Which specific equity and opportunity gaps will this priority address? What will be the same or different about the focus for the Instructional Priority this school year, and why?

**TIP:** Think of this as your ‘elevator pitch’ that you will share and reinforce with all stakeholders.

**Please provide additional insights by responding to the prompts below.**

1. **Analysis of Strengths and Challenges**

* **Student Outcomes: Based on your analysis of quantitative and qualitative student outcome data,** which student groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by current practices? Where are you seeing the greatest disparities? What data tells you this? Please summarize what you learned and be sure to include themes for the district as well as for specific schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention.
* **Systemic Factors Contributing to Inequitable Outcomes: Based on your analysis of classroom practice, common planning time, etc.,** how would you assess the effectiveness of the district’s current instructional support systems and practices, and how they impact teaching and learning? What is their impact for the highest priority schools, grades, and/or student groups? Share 2-3 headlines related to adult practice. Of these, which ***one*** system or practice will the district prioritize as part of implementation of this Priority this year, and why?

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** What input did the district receive from students, families, educators, and community members, and how did that inform this priority and the design of this plan? What input did you get from stakeholders in schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention? How will stakeholders be continuously, authentically involved implementation and monitoring?

**TIPS:**

* Per USDOE **“***To develop a* ***high-quality sustainable improvement plan****, schools should gather* ***meaningful input*** *from an* ***array of key stakeholders****,* ***incorporate that input*** *into their plan, and* ***continue to regularly share progress with and elicit input from stakeholders*** *as the plan is implemented.”*
* Prioritize talking with a handful of students from the school(s) and student population(s) your priority is focusing on. How would they describe their experience in the classroom? What advice would they give on how to improve teaching and learning?

1. **Outcomes: What annual targets will the district use to demonstrate progress on this priority?** At minimum, please identify which specific [Accountability](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/default.html) targets will be met as a result of focusing on this priority (for example, MCAS achievement targets). In addition, identify any other annual outcomes that the district expects to achieve by focusing on this priority. Please name both the measure and the specific target, for the aggregate and for the prioritized student group(s), and for each school identified as requiring assistance or intervention, so all your stakeholders are clear on the district’s goals.

1. **Role Clarity:** It is critical that all stakeholders are clear on their roles and the roles of others related to implementation of the priority and are clear how they will receive support and accountability for these actions. Please describe, at minimum, the key actions for district, school, and classroom educators.

**TIPS:**

* We recommend focusing on doing a few things well. *Less is more.*
* Each action at the teacher/classroom level should be clearly supported and monitored by both school- and district-level actions.

1. **Monitoring Implementation:** What 2-4 high-leverage interim benchmarks will you track throughout the year at the district, school and classroom level to know if your collective actions are resulting in the desired changes in adult practice and student learning? What would you expect to see in your data on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis that would signal that your efforts were on track, or that they need adjustment? Who will monitor those? When, and how?

**TIPS:**

* Get as precise as possible about what it would look like to be ‘on track’ at midyear to reach the annual goals and targets - what midyear benchmarks would you need to reach?
* *Less is more*. We recommend identifying just a few high-leverage data points that will help the district focus attention and understand if instructional systems are having the desired impact on student learning.

1. **Resources:** What partnerships, programs, or resources will the district leverage to implement this priority? These could include external resources (e.g., support offered by DESE or other partners) as well as internal resources (e.g., staffing, funding from TAG, ESSER, M3, etc.). Briefly describe any inequities in resource allocation discovered during the district’s review of local district and school budgeting data, as required by ESSA and SOA planning guidelines, and describe how the district will address these inequities as part of this prioritization plan. Please identify and address any resource inequities impacting schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention.

1. **Targeted Support for Priority Schools:** Presuming all the actions outlined in the Role Clarity and Progress Monitoring sections are in place districtwide, what additional actions will district leaders take to support instruction and accelerate improvement in schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention, and any other schools that the district determines need more support with this priority? Please list the schools that will receive targeted support and briefly describe what specific actions will be taken and how they will advance implementation of the instructional priority.

**TIPS:**

* Examples of differentiated targeted support include flexibility with staffing and/or scheduling; additional PD, coaching, and/or CPT; more frequent progress monitoring.
* Districts will be asked to update this portion of their plan if additional schools are identified as requiring assistance or intervention in the fall of 2025. In some cases, it may be necessary to adjust other aspects of the district’s Instructional Prioritization Plan or even add a 2nd Instructional Priority if new schools identified as requiring assistance or intervention are not currently addressed by the district’s plan (for example if a newly identified school is in a different grade span than the district priority is focusing on).
* As noted previously, schools identified as Underperforming must also submit a Sustainable Improvement Plan, and schools applying for the Intensive Assistance Grant (IAG, formerly School Redesign Grant) must also submit a school plan. For these schools, please include a link to that plan and briefly summarize the differentiated assistance they will receive relative to the Instructional Priority.

1. Any district accepting Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG) funds agrees to engage with this SSoS Assistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)