

## Summary of State ESEA Flexibility Request

### STATE: Massachusetts

**Purpose:** The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of key aspects of state waiver requests made under the U.S. Department of Education's ESEA Flexibility initiative. This summary recognizes that states continue to work to refine and enhance these systems which will continue to evolve and improve over time.

### Introduction. This section summarizes some overarching issues important to the state's overall NCLB waiver request.

1. What is the state's **clear vision and comprehensive integrated plan** to raise the bar on college and career-readiness? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

In its request, Massachusetts presents a clear and comprehensive vision and strategy for advancing student achievement toward college and career-readiness for all students with a goal that the state's proficiency gap be reduced by half by 2017.

The request – in which the state will promote standards aligned with college and career-readiness, address performance gaps, require continuous improvement of schools and districts with targeted supports and interventions, and aggressively address low-performing schools – is largely based on the state's current reform efforts and its current state accountability system. For example, Massachusetts plans to build on its current work on educator evaluation systems that are based in part on student achievement (mandated in new state regulations), its current development of curriculum frameworks aligned with the CCSS, and its aggressive turnaround strategies for schools and districts (required by 2010 state legislation). Using these existing reforms as leverage, Massachusetts will set new annual targets for the state and each district, school, and subgroup to reduce proficiency and achievement gaps.

2. How does the state **define college and career-readiness**? [See Overview; full request]

Massachusetts defines college and career-readiness as being able to enter college without the need to take remedial coursework. In addition to its discussion of CCR standards in English language arts and math, the state notes the development and implementation of CCR standards for students with disabilities and English language learners, evincing the state's deliberate consideration and inclusion of all students in its requested framework. Massachusetts also describes its existing efforts to cultivate CCR students, including its introduction of the MassCore curriculum (in 2007), a recommended high school program of studies that requires a more rigorous and demanding course load as well as additional learning opportunities such as a senior

project and service- or work-based learning. The state also notes that in the future, it will consider additional accountability measures linked to college and career-readiness including success in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses.

3. How does the state's request articulate a commitment to **innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement**? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Massachusetts's request acknowledges and embraces continuous evaluation and improvement as necessary components for its proposed system of school and district accountability, with state supports and interventions targeted toward the goal of college and career-readiness. The state will evaluate districts, schools, and student subgroups against annual measurement objectives on a variety of indicators, including student achievement and student growth for all students and for a high-needs student subgroup. In keeping with the state's recognition and value of continuous improvement, the state will grant partial credit on certain indicators where a school or district demonstrates significant progress. Depending on their performance rating, schools and districts will receive varying degrees of state intervention and oversight in an effort to ensure that all schools and districts commit to and demonstrate continuous improvement.

4. How does the state's request provide evidence to indicate the state has the **capacity to implement** its proposed policies within the given timelines? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Massachusetts provides ample evidence of its capacity to implement its proposed policies within the given timelines. Its three state education agencies – the departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Early Education and Care, and Higher Education – and the Executive Office of Education (established in 2008 to coordinate the departments' efforts) will enable the state to transition to college and career-ready standards as a birth-to-20 initiative. Inter-department collaboration is evidenced on several current initiatives including the development and maintenance of a streamlined P-20 data system to assist educators with identifying the students who are off track and tracking student progress throughout the educational career; an online college planning tool; an enhanced flow of data back to high schools about the college success of their graduates; and stronger preschool/K-12 alignment in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (if Massachusetts is awarded a RTTT Early Childhood grant, the agencies will collaborate to develop kindergarten readiness assessments aligned to the new state standards).

Massachusetts also will use its regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) to support schools in the accountability process. A regional approach, DSACs assist schools

and districts with self-assessment and planning; offer opportunities to learn about and share effective practices; and train, model, and facilitate the use of SEA resources and tools. Each DSAC is led by a Regional Assistance Director, a recently retired superintendent.

Finally, as part of its state accountability work, DESE's accountability office has recently undertaken 27 comprehensive district reviews regarding systems and practices and will use the lessons learned through this process as guideposts for the activities proposed by the state in this request.

### **Principle 1: Standards and Assessments**

1. Describe the state's plan for transitioning to and implementing **college and career-ready standards and assessments**. [See Section 1B]

Massachusetts's request evinces substantial commitment to and a high-quality plan for transitioning to and implementing college and career-ready (CCR) standards and assessments. For a state that has led the nation on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) four years in a row, Massachusetts's request is strengthened by the state's preexisting standards and assessment framework, including its rigorous requirements for a minimum program of high school studies (recently amended to require four years of math for admission to the state's four-year colleges and universities, for example).

The state adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 and has added unique state standards for pre-kindergarten. In 2010-2011, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed instructional modules, in collaboration with professional development providers, to align coursework with the state's standards in English language arts (ELA) and math. In spring 2011, DESE launched a professional development initiative focused on the design of these model curriculum units as well as on performance assessments based on the new standards.

Beyond ELA and math, plans are underway to revise the state's other curriculum frameworks (science/engineering, history/social science, arts, comprehensive health, foreign languages). The state also is working to realign its English language proficiency standards, in part through a memorandum of understanding with the 27-state World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium. In spring 2012, the state plans to begin providing professional development for teachers of English language learners (ELL) on the curriculum frameworks and the WIDA standards. Also, Massachusetts is assessing the learning and accommodation factors necessary so that students with disabilities will have the opportunity to meet and exceed the state's standards and will engage in an alignment project with other states and university

research centers through the alternate assessment consortium, the National Center and State Collaborative.

Massachusetts already has begun to transition its state assessment (MCAS) to reflect the new ELA and math standards. This school year, MCAS will include some items based on the new standards; in 2012-13, the majority of items will reflect the new standards; and in 2013-14, all items on the ELA and math assessments will be based on the new CCR standards. Additionally, DESE is developing curriculum-embedded performance assessments in ELA, math, science, and history/social studies, which will be piloted between 2012-13 and 2014-15.

## **Principle 2: Differentiated Accountability and Supports**

1. Describe the **measures and metrics** the state proposes to use to make accountability determinations (including AMOs) to drive college and career-readiness. [See 2A and B]

Massachusetts's request for a college- and career-ready system of accountability and supports goes beyond current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements by requiring deeper analysis of the existing NCLB measures (student test scores and graduation rates), by establishing new measures for school and district accountability (incorporated in a Progress and Performance Index (PPI)), and by setting annual measurable objectives (AMOs) related to gap closure for each school. Through this accountability system, the state will identify schools and districts with large gaps in proficiency and achievement to differentiate interventions by accountability status.

The proposed PPI measures examine a school's progress on gap-closing, student performance at the Advanced and Warning/Failing levels, student growth, and graduation and dropout rates for high schools. Specifically, Massachusetts would examine schools against the following four indicators:

- Testing participation (require 95% participation on state assessment or ELL assessment)
- Student achievement, which includes:
  - Closing proficiency gaps in English language arts (ELA), math, and science,
  - Reducing the percentage of students in Warning or Failing categories on the ELA and math assessments, and
  - Increasing the percentage of students in the Advanced category on the ELA and math assessments
- Student growth
- For high schools, graduation and dropout rates

Data from the previous four years is incorporated into a school accountability determination, with the most recent year's data being weighed most heavily. Currently, the lowest performing 20% of schools in the state are designated as Level 3/Focus, and the lowest performing, slowest improving schools statewide (up to 4%) are designated as Level 4/Priority schools. As new assessment data becomes available, Massachusetts will identify additional Level 4/Priority schools to meet the requirement that Priority schools equal 5% of the state's Title I schools. Districts will be classified at the level of their lowest-performing school.

The methodology for calculating overall school and district annual measurable objectives is based on a model of continuous improvement in which all schools and districts are expected to cut in half their proficiency gaps by 2017. This means that lower-performing schools must demonstrate greater improvement under this accountability system. The state will assign credit in the PPI based on how close the district, school, or subgroup comes to meeting the AMOs in ELA, math, and science. Full credit will be given to those that meet the target, as well as to schools that have a Composite Performance Index (based on student performance in ELA, math, and science) that meets the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher for the group when comparing statewide results.

2. To what extent is **student growth** included in the accountability system? How is it used to advance college and career-readiness? [See 2A and B]

Massachusetts incorporates student growth into its accountability system as one of the major measures in its school and district accountability system. Massachusetts plans to measure growth in English language arts (ELA) and math for grades 4-8 and grade 10. Indeed, Massachusetts has annually reported a measure of student growth on its statewide assessment (MCAS) since 2008. The state will assign credit, for accountability purposes, to schools and districts that meet one of the three targets for student growth:

- Attain a student growth percentile (SGP) (measuring how much student changed relative to other students statewide with similar scores in previous year) of at least 10 points over median student growth percentile (SGP) for relevant group,
  - Increase group's median SGP by 15 points over previous school year, or
  - Reduce percentage of non-proficient students by at least 10%
3. How is the state including and advancing **subgroup accountability and closing achievement gaps**? [See 2A, B, and E]

Massachusetts will continue to issue and report AMOs for students in the aggregate, low income students, students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), and major racial and ethnic subgroups. For accountability purposes, however, the state will

address subgroup accountability through the creation of a non-duplicated "high-needs" student subgroup, composed of students who are low income, have a disability, or are ELL or former ELL. The state notes that using this "high-needs" subgroup will enable the state to hold nearly 200 more schools accountable for subgroup proficiency gaps because the subgroup will meet the minimum N-threshold of 40 students. Ultimately, schools (and districts) will be held accountable for the achievement and growth of two student groups: the aggregate student population and the high-needs student subgroup. Elsewhere, Massachusetts notes that it will work to identify discrete student groups to prioritize at schools needing state intervention.

4. Describe the state's general system of **supports and interventions** for all schools and those designated as Priority, Focus or Reward schools. How does the state incorporate deeper analysis of school performance such as through diagnostic review? [See 2A, D, E, F, G]

Massachusetts envisions a statewide system of supports and interventions that are differentiated and tailored to school (and district) needs, with the extent of necessary intervention correlated to the scope of a school's problems. Under the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support, districts that have only Level 1/On Track or Level 2/Off Track (only moderately off-track) schools will enjoy relative autonomy to select any needed interventions; districts with Level 3/Focus Schools must seek Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) approval for the interventions that are selected through consultation with a regional District and School Assistance Centers (DASC); and districts with Level 4/Priority Schools will receive high levels of engagement from DESE including a district liaison and accountability monitor. Finally, districts with Level 5 schools will be placed under a receiver who will oversee management.

Supports and interventions for schools and districts will be aligned to the state's *Conditions for School Effectiveness*. This document will serve as a blueprint for school design with schools and districts examined against each condition, such as the following: effective school leadership and principal's staffing authority; professional development and structures for teacher collaboration through school-based learning communities; tiered instruction and adequate learning time; social, emotional, and health needs of students; family-school relationships; strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority; aligned curriculum; and effective instruction.

Level 2/Off-track schools require relatively low state engagement and must perform an annual needs assessment. Level 3/Focus schools may implement more targeted interventions after consulting with a regional DASC and receiving state approval. A Level 4/Priority school must implement multiple interventions aligned to all 11 of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and must receive the Commissioner's approval of its redesign plan. The state no longer will mandate No Child Left Behind school choice and

supplemental education services as currently described; instead, supports and interventions may include other focuses, including expanded learning opportunities, including tutoring, for struggling students; teacher training; differentiated staffing models; social/emotional/health supports; and professional development related to productivity goals.

Massachusetts indicates that it has the capacity to provide schools and districts in need with supports and intervention. For example, following 2010 legislation, the state identified 35 schools as Level 4/Priority schools. These schools were provided with a state liaison and an accountability monitor and received targeted assistance from DESE. Results from 2011 MCAS show that two-thirds of these schools made substantial improvements in student achievement on both English language arts and math.

5. Describe how the state will address priority schools utilizing the USED **turnaround principles**. [See 2D]

Massachusetts plans to address priority schools, generally utilizing the Department's turnaround principles and building on an existing state law mandate. Under 2010 state legislation (an Act Relative to the Achievement Gap), Massachusetts requires that if a school is placed in Level 4/Priority, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) must notify the district and the school to begin a process to involve the community in school turnaround, resulting in a redesign plan approved by the Commissioner. The district must solicit recommendations of a local stakeholder group (including representatives of the district school committee; school's administration and faculty; local social service, health, and child welfare agencies; local workforce development agencies; parents; community members) before creating the redesign plan. The redesign plan must address district capacity, provide a blueprint for school intervention, and set annual measurable goals. DESE must approve the plan and will provide an assistant liaison and an accountability monitor to the district, define exit criteria, and provide targeted assistance.

As noted above, the state identified 35 schools as Level 4/Priority schools in spring 2010. These schools were provided with a state liaison and an accountability monitor and received targeted assistance from DESE. Results from 2011 MCAS show that two-thirds of these schools made substantial improvement in student achievement on both English language arts and math.

6. How will the state build **capacity of schools and districts** to improve student achievement? [See 2G]

In its request, Massachusetts presents a comprehensive picture of how, through its accountability system, it will provide targeted supports and interventions to schools and

districts in an effort to build their capacity to improve student achievement. To guide this work, the state developed two tools – the *District Standards and Indicators* and the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* – which include an examination of district and school capacity. The district-facing tool includes standards on leadership and governance; oversight of human resources, professional development, curriculum, assessment, and student support; and financial and asset management. Likewise, the first condition listed in the school-facing tool is "effective district systems for school support and intervention." Indeed, Massachusetts expressly embraces the principle that the district is the entry point for the state's accountability and assistance work, rather than the school; the state views its role as building district capacity. As such, the state requires that districts with Priority Schools submit a redesign plan that includes a focus on district capacity to plan for, implement, and monitor school-level redesign efforts. The district must analyze district needs and challenges and describe its systems for planning, supporting, and monitoring implementation of the school redesign elements.

To assist districts with capacity-building, Massachusetts proposes to use assistance liaisons and accountability monitors, employ its District and School Assistance Centers (discussed above), and provide other targeted assistance via partner providers, tools, and resources. The state will also compare implementation of interventions across schools, including schools with comparable demographics, to identify and disseminate best practices.

### **Principle 3: Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support**

1. Describe the state's plan for development of **guidelines** or, if the state is further along in development, the state's **plan and system for educator evaluation** and the extent to which it advances student achievement. [See 3 A and B]

In its request, Massachusetts describes its plan and current efforts to implement a system of educator evaluation based on student achievement. In 2011 regulations, Massachusetts formally adopted an educator evaluation system that requires annual evaluations. Educators are evaluated against two major elements – 1) a "professional practice" classification based on classroom observations, artifacts of instruction, the contribution to the professional culture, and student (for teacher) and teacher (for principal) feedback, and 2) the educator's impact on student learning.

An educator receives one of four ratings on the "professional practice" classification, and his or her impact on student growth is determined to be high, moderate, or low. The judgment on student growth is determined based on student growth on the state assessment and at least one district-wide measure of student achievement; where there is no statewide student growth measure, at least two district-wide measures of student achievement must be used. The state expects strong ratings on professional practice and at least a moderate

effect on student achievement. Where the rating on professional practice is less than Proficient, the educator is placed on a one-year improvement plan and then is subject to dismissal. A strong professional practice rating coupled with low impact on student achievement results in a one-year improvement plan that focuses on the discrepancy between the two judgments and requires the intervention of the evaluator's supervisor.

All Level 4/Priority schools and other early adopters (including schools with federal School Improvement Grants) are piloting the new evaluation system this year. In 2012-13, all districts participating in Race to the Top will implement the system, and the system will be implemented statewide in 2013-14.

By January 2012, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will publish a model evaluation system and rubrics defining four levels of performance. Districts may adopt the model rubrics, adapt them to meet local needs, or propose alternatives for DESE review. DESE also is developing other supportive materials for districts including overviews of the educator evaluation regulations, components, and timelines; a website with frequently asked questions; and a number of PowerPoint presentations.

Additionally, the state is developing program approval regulations for teacher preparation programs to ensure that the programs produce educators with a deep understanding of the content contained in the state's new curriculum frameworks. DESE plans to align its professional standards for teacher licensure with the new standards and indicators for teacher evaluation, which are linked to the state's curriculum framework.

#### **Principle 4: Administrative/Reporting Burden**

1. Beyond an assurance, each state is required to examine and **reduce as appropriate administrative/reporting burdens** on LEAs. While it is not clearly included in USED's waiver application, does the state's request address this issue? [See full request]

In its request, Massachusetts addresses the issue of and identifies a number of administrative/reporting burdens, and requests that the Department of Education waive them. First, it asserts that the state's three-year district improvement plans, annual action plans, and school improvement plans satisfy sections 1116(b) and (c) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) such that the additional ESEA requirements lack value for school districts. Next, Massachusetts requests to use its Parent/Guardian Report for the purposes of ESEA section 1116(c), rather than creating a duplicative school report card for federal purposes. Third, Massachusetts requests a waiver of the requirements in ESEA sections 2141(a), (b), and (c) regarding highly qualified teacher improvement plans and associated restrictions with the use of Title II-A and Title I, Part A funds; the state observes that flexibility from these requirements will allow districts to focus fiscal and staff resources on the development and quality

implementation of the new educator evaluation and support system. Finally, the state requests to use 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup>CCLC) funds to support expanded learning time during the school day, in addition to activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session.

Massachusetts also requests greater flexibility in the use of Title I, Part A funds for district and school improvement/accountability purposes. For example, the state proposes to require districts to reserve up to 25% of their Title I, Part A funds on a sliding scale to address identified needs. The state will improve its own fiscal accountability processes to monitor the quality and efficiency of district improvement efforts. Also, the state proposes to make some Title I, Part A, Title II-A, and 21stCCLC funds contingent on a district match for reform initiatives including extended learning time; teacher training; differentiated staffing models; social/emotional/health supports; and professional development related to productivity goals.