

Level 4 Schools Overview

With passage of *an Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* and significant federal funding to target struggling schools, Massachusetts has an unprecedented opportunity to turn around the Commonwealth's 35 lowest performing schools. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is announcing a process to support nine districts to intervene successfully in 35 "Level 4 Schools" and ensure that the 17,000 students the schools serve graduate ready for college and career success. The following describes the new law and federal grant, and explains how these schools were identified and what it means for the students in them.

The New Law – Closing the Achievement Gaps

On January 18th of this year, Governor Patrick, Senate and House leaders enacted landmark education reform legislation to intervene in underperforming (Level 4) schools.

- Level 4 schools will be targeted for aggressive intervention through a plan developed in collaboration with the superintendent, the school committee, the local teachers' union, administrators, teachers, community representatives, and parents. The plan is implemented by the district superintendent with support and assistance from the Commissioner.
- Intervention powers include the ability to reassign or replace teachers and administrators and dismiss those with a track record of poor performance, as well authority to reopen and amend collective bargaining agreements.

Federal School Turnaround Grants

In February, the US Department of Education (USED) finalized regulations for the use of competitive grants to intervene in each state's lowest performing schools. Massachusetts will be awarded \$76 million over three years to provide competitive grants to districts.

- A district will be eligible to apply for \$500,000 or more per year for up to three years on behalf of each of its Level 4 schools
- A district applying for a School Turnaround Grant will be required to choose one of four prescribed intervention models and demonstrate its capacity to implement that model effectively over three years.

ESE has been working with a wide range of stakeholders including superintendents, school committee members, union representatives, and state legislators to determine how to identify the lowest performing schools that are showing the least improvement. Selection is being based on four years of student achievement and trends in academic improvement. At its January meeting the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved and released for public comment regulations to guide the identification process. The Board this month reviewed modifications recommended by key stakeholders and will take a final vote on regulations to identify Level 4 schools at its March 23rd meeting. In order to give districts adequate time to take meaningful action for next school year, we are releasing the names of the likely Level 4 schools now.

This announcement marks the beginning of a several-month process of work to engage stakeholders in redesigning these 35 schools to promote rapid improvement in learning for all students. Per the law, the superintendents and Commissioner will set rigorous but realistic annual goals that each school must meet. If, after three years, these schools are not improving rapidly, ESE will intervene to ensure that all students achieve at high levels.

With clear authorities, stronger accountability, and real funding to support the work, this announcement marks a historic opportunity for Massachusetts children.

