



# Write the Vision and Make It Plain: The Case for an Explicit Focus on Equity & Racial Equity to Accelerate Outcomes in Schools

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Write the Vision and Make it Plain: The Case for an Explicit focus on Equity & Racial  
Equity in Massachusetts's Turnaround Practices to Accelerate Outcomes in Schools

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)  
Capstone

Submitted by

Des Floyd

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education Leadership.

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## Dedication

*To my father who taught me equity warrior-ship,  
To my mother who taught me compassion,  
To my grandmother who taught me resilience;*

*You were my first teachers in this life.*

*Ali, Maggie, and Emma-  
I love you.*

## Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful to my immediate family. My father, Ali, was an early model for social justice leadership and activism in the community (Rest in Peace). My mother, Maggie, you are the hardest working and most loving individual that I have ever known. You are a model for compassion and good will toward others through your acts of service. Grandma Blue, you endured a great deal of racism and sexism in your professional career but persisted over the years despite the hostilities and cruelties you endured. When you retired, you were granted the key to the city in honor of your excellence and devotion to your work with the State Department of Agriculture and Food Safety. I would also like to thank my many nieces and nephews who fuel my passion to champion educational opportunity especially for those who are marginalized.

To my former school leaders and students, I would not be who I am without you. You have shaped my views of educational equity over the years and you never stopped challenging me to grow. To my advisor, Elizabeth City, thank you for the gentle ‘pushes’ and words of encouragement when I needed them most. You have continued to help me see more expansively both myself and the world around me. I would also like to thank Deborah Jewell-Sherman (DJS). I don’t know anyone else who can cut to the core of my soul and regenerate my soul at the same time. I appreciate your realness and your dedication to equity and racial equity leadership. Pamela Mason, I thank you too! You have been a steady and strong force in my time here at Harvard. You made room for me as a teacher in your classroom and presented me with opportunities to lead in real time. You also re-centered my focus on equity at times when there was too much *noise* around me.

To the many people I met along the way during my residency experience at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a huge thank you for welcoming me as a regular staff member. You reminded me that even the largest systems are made up of real people with real passions and genuine purposes.

And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my colleagues in Cohort 7. Without knowing it, you all gave me license to learn by serving as a mirror during times of reflection and a resting chair during times of stress.

I appreciate every one of you.

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## I. Abstract

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Educational equity has two primary dimensions: fairness (OECD, 2008) and opportunity.

In the last 20 years, Massachusetts has consistently performed at or near the top of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and by comparison to the performance of leading countries on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). Despite such record of high overall academic achievements, stubborn gaps in achievement loom large. Achievement gaps in education correlate largely with race, disability, English language learner classification, and socio-economic status (Cepa.stanford.edu, 2018). While there has been some progress, twenty years of education reform has not produced significant gains for traditionally underserved populations. The goal to drastically improve outcomes in the state's underperforming schools has not yet been realized although recent emerging evidence of educational equity in some Massachusetts schools show signs of promise in accelerating outcomes, especially for marginalized populations.

This capstone is an attempt to break the surface of traditional bodies of turnaround research and school improvement interventions to uncover equity and racial equity-based interventions that are not a part of the state's current version of the Turnaround Practices. The state has four (4) research-based practices (American Institutes for Research, 2016) and the practices do not include an intentional focus on equity and racial equity factors.

**Turnaround Practice #1: Leadership, Shared Responsibility, and Professional Collaboration**

**Turnaround Practice #2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction**

**Turnaround Practice #3: Student-Specific Supports and Instruction to All Students**

**Turnaround Practice #4: School Climate and Culture**

I recommend that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) prioritize its research agenda by focusing on educational equity and growing its existing evidence-base as well as revise its current research-based turnaround practices to include an explicit focus on the following:

1. Administrative observations and coaching to support teachers in providing culturally-responsive and high quality feedback to students;
2. Professional learning to improve teachers' understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles with a focus on valuing diversity, identify and deconstructing implicit bias/expectations, and best practices in inclusion; and,
3. Administrators and teachers actively work to foster safe schools through the development of trusting adult-student relationships and positive identification with school to promote a healthy school climate and culture.

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## II. Introduction: A Call to Respond

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My first call was to medicine. For almost ten years, I split my time between a research laboratory, a rehabilitative center, and a teaching hospital world renowned for its trauma unit. Late one night, I witnessed something in that emergency room that has stuck with me to this day.

A young African-American woman had been in a horrific automobile accident. Her clothes were first torn as a result of being ejected from her vehicle and later by first responders in an attempt to prevent cardiac arrest. I watched them zip her through the double doors into a space that had been prepared for her as medical personnel descended upon what appeared to be a lifeless body. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2017), there were 137 million visits to the emergency room last year. Out of all those who passed through the emergency room doors, approximately .08% of them did not make it out alive. Meanwhile, the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reports that roughly 414 million compulsory visits will occur this year by Black students enrolled in America's public schools, grades 9-12. One quarter of all African-American students will not graduate high school (Johns Hopkins, 2018), a mere 1 in 3 of those who do are likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution (Digest of Education Statistics, 2017), and as little as 4 in 10 will earn a degree from a 2 or 4 year college within 4-6 years (Inside Higher Ed, 2017).

Likening school attendance to emergency room trips might seem jarring, especially since trauma wards are essentially acute care centers designed for life threatening situations. But millions of youth leave home each day for school backpacking the promises of a successful future. Unfortunately, if you are black, brown, an English language learner, or a student with a disability you have a far less chance of successfully completing high school



than your white peers. Lack of opportunity and low quality educational experiences have lasting negative consequences not only on the students themselves but also for the generations that will follow them.

Despite years of research to determine what works in turnaround, DESE is not satisfied with the pace at which the number of turnaround schools have exited since 2010. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) together with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) have worked to identify practices that characterize successful turnaround schools (AIR, 2014). These practices would become what is known as the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (AIR, 2014). The practices do not have an explicit focus on equity and this is unfortunate since turnaround schools often include high concentrations of students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, and low-income students. In Massachusetts, persistent outcome disparities impact the most vulnerable student populations. Black students in the state are suspended at a rate that is three times what it is for their white peers (Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership [MEEP], 2018); a quarter of the Latino student population will not graduate within the expected four (4) years upon entering high school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016); only 20% of low income students in the state are performing on grade-level in Mathematics according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2017); less than one-third of all Black and Latino students are college ready in Reading and Math according to the SAT (Cowen et al, 2017); and 64% of all Black and Latino students who decide to go to college will be required to take remedial coursework before taking credit-bearing courses that count towards a degree (DESE, 2017).

## **A. Massachusetts's Rapid Response**

**Massachusetts has demonstrated the ability to overcome some of the most pressing challenges to improving outcomes for youth. Now, the state is entering a new chapter and educational equity is emerging as one of the most significant factors to combatting inequality.**

This is not the first time the State of Massachusetts has confronted longstanding challenges in education head-on. Efforts to overhaul its system in years past have proven successful in improving the quality of education and its impact on children, teachers, and families. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1991, a committee appointed by the chairman of the board of education charged three leaders in Massachusetts with reviewing reports on the conditions of the schools in Brockton, Chelsea, Holyoke, and Lawrence (Distressed School Systems and School Reform, 1991). In addition to their initial tasks they were also charged with analyzing national reports on education reform, systemic reform, and the “Every Child a Winner” proposal by the Massachusetts Business Alliance. The group found that persistent neglect over time made it increasingly difficult to provide a high quality education across the state. Namely, the most pressing problems were due to overcrowded classrooms that typically averaged more than 40 students per class, local funding cuts that hurt public education the most, and a lack of funding by the state in support of the highest-needs areas had the potential to underfund public schools altogether (Kaplan, Reville, & Rowe, 1991). A perceived reduced commitment to equity and excellence in education shed light on the need for the state department to assume a new role in reversing the negative effects of education inequality for all, not just a few. Two years later, the Education Reform Act of 1993 served as a response to the fiscal crisis with hopes of reforming a ‘deficient’ state system (Chester, 2014). The 1993 Education Reform Act pushed for higher standards, increased

accountability, and more rigorous assessments (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2012).

In January of 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation to drastically reduce the persistent achievement gap in Massachusetts through expanded school choice options, increased access to innovation, and robust interventions to turnaround underperforming schools (An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1J, 2010). [An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap Process for 'Underperforming Schools'](#) requires districts and schools with schools designated as turnaround to accelerate improvement within three (3) years (An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1J, 2010). Section 1J specifically requires that districts with underperforming schools develop a turnaround plan and follows a process for plan development and implementation, one which will be described later in this capstone document (An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1J, 2010). DESE partnered with AIR to learn quickly from evidence of success in turnaround. DESE also refocused its funding efforts to support accelerated improvement in underperforming schools. The state had received approximately \$59 million from the federal government to carry out its competitive School Redesign Grant (SRG) program (doe.mass.edu, 2010). SRG grants are federally-funded, competitive grant opportunities to help districts improve their lowest performing schools (doe.mass.edu, 2010). Grants are used to fund high impact school improvement strategies such as increased learning time, professional development, and enrichment opportunities for students (doe.mass.edu, 2010). Eligibility is determined by the state's accountability system (doe.mass.edu, 2010). Schools and districts work together to submit an application to the state for funding (doe.mass.edu, 2010). Schools that are awarded the funding have three (3) years to spend the funding with the goal of rapid school improvement (doe.mass.edu, 2010). An essential component of the SRG process is the development and implementation of a turnaround plan. The turnaround plans must be updated each year the school receives

funding (doe.mass.edu, 2010). The turnaround plans are grounded in research-based practices and DESE, together with its research partners, continues to learn and apply learnings derived from turnaround schools that have succeeded in demonstrating sufficient improvement enough to exit turnaround designation (See **Appendix B: Exit Decisions for Underperforming Schools**) (doe.mass.edu, 2010). Districts were required to develop plans outlining exactly how they would use the awards to accelerate performance in underperforming schools. Twelve schools were awarded over \$27 million in funding to implement plans to dramatically improve student achievement. The 12 schools selected in the first round served more than 7,000 students - 88 percent were low income, 26 percent were limited English proficient and 20 percent were students with disabilities (doe.mass.edu, 2010). There were additional stipulations. This was simply was the first phase of funding.

Over the next few years DESE, in partnership with AIR, conducted a research study (AIR, 2014) to examine and compare the practices and school conditions that spurred rapid improvement in achievement gains versus schools that did not and published a report entitled, *How to Succeed in School Turnaround: Strategies that Characterize Successful Turnaround Schools in Massachusetts* (AIR, 2016). The results showed that implementing the Turnaround Practices were observed in schools that demonstrated significant achievement gains (WestEd, 2017). DESE made revisions to its turnaround planning tool, school redesign grant (SRG) application and renewal process, and its monitoring site visit (MSV) protocol (WestEd, 2017). As a result of the changes over time, Massachusetts saw a 57% reduction in the number of turnaround schools, improvements in the way dollars are spent to support students, and a positive impact on English language learners in schools receiving SRG funds (AIR, 2016). DESE didn't stop there. The state decided to deepen its analysis of how to sustain rapid improvements by determining which aspects of the Turnaround Practices the exited schools prioritized (AIR, 2016). In addition to examining 10 schools that were in turnaround status, researchers (AIR, 2016) examined the MSV data from eight previously

exited turnaround schools to study the common strategies implemented by those schools as well.

The 2014-2015 MSV research report correlated each school's area of improvement to the most pressing challenges that the schools identified (AIR, 2016). Nine (9) specific areas of the Turnaround Practices emerged as having the most significant impact on outcomes (AIR, 2016):

- Strategic use of staffing and scheduling autonomy
- Culture of open, two-way communication
- Establishment of clear, consistent, and aligned instructional foci and expectations
- Regular use of classroom observations to improve instruction
- Consistent implementation of a well-defined multi-tiered system of support
- Provision of non-academic student supports, including social-emotional supports
- Consistent implementation of a schoolwide student behavior plan
- Focus on offering expanded learning opportunities
- Commitment to engaging families in student learning

Learning about past efforts to achieve educational equity in Massachusetts is an important first step in developing more equitable solutions today. A state-level historical perspective helps to deconstruct how child-serving systems may either slow or exacerbate disparities and disproportionalities in student outcomes (Finley, 2019). This certainly includes turnaround policies and practices and the impact of turnaround interventions on student outcomes in schools. In the last 20 years, Massachusetts has consistently performed at or near the top of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and by comparison to the performance of leading countries on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). Despite such record of high overall academic achievements, stubborn gaps in achievement loom large. Achievement gaps in education correlate largely with race, disability, English language learner classification, and socio-economic status (Cepa.stanford.edu, 2018). While there has been some progress, twenty years of education

reform has not produced significant gains for traditionally underserved populations. Sure, low income students and students of color in Massachusetts perform better than low income students and students of color in most other states (Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, 2018). But what pride can be taken in that statistic when the gap between low income students and students of color is also greater here than it is in most other states when the same groups are compared to their peers in Massachusetts? (Stanford CEPA, 2018) As former US Secretary of Education, John King, shared at a talk prepared for the Rennie Center on Education Research & Policy, “The achievement gap holds Mass. back.” (King, 2018) Leaders both within and outside of DESE recognize the disparities in outcomes and are looking for ways to improve upon its past to serve its marginalized students better than ever before. It is now time for another wave of change predicated on opportunities and educational equity for all, not just some, students in Massachusetts.

If underperformance in schools was caused by the lack of programs, up-to-date technology, and teacher PD then surely underperforming schools would not exist today especially in areas where millions of dollars in resources have devoted to such interventions. Getting to the heart of the problem in turnaround will not only require shifts in the language of the turnaround practices, it will require shifts in how state education agencies and education leaders respond to the adaptive nature of turnaround change. There are ways to identify adaptive challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009).

- Solving the problem requires you to change.
- Solving the problem requires you to develop new capabilities.
- Solving the problem requires you to ‘lose’ something of importance to you.
- Solving the problem requires experimentation.
- Solving the problem takes time.
- Solving the problem requires you to put your values and beliefs on the line.

President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law on December 10, 2015 (ESSA, 2015) replacing the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). According to the Massachusetts Consolidated State Plan Under ESSA (2017), the state's accountability system rested largely on student achievement, growth, and graduation rates with an emphasis on closing gaps for historically low performing students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2017). The state decided to expand its accountability measures to get a more comprehensive picture of opportunities and outcomes as well as an increased emphasis on excellence and equity for high needs students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2017). Additional measures now include chronic absenteeism, grade 9 passing percentages, and the number of students taking challenging courses in schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2017). Early last year, DESE sent out the *2018 Accountability School Leader's Guide* to describe the state's new accountability system (doe.mass.edu, 2018). As a part of the change each district would soon be classified based not only on the overall achievement results of its students but on the progress of its lowest performing students (doe.mass.edu, 2018). In many Massachusetts schools, the lowest performing students happen to fall in one or more of the following reporting groups:

- African-American or Black
- Hispanic/Non-Hispanic or Latino
- Economically disadvantaged
- Students with disabilities
- English language learners

In addition to making the progress of its lowest performing groups a part of each district and school's evaluation criteria, the accountability system now includes indicators such as progress towards English language proficiency and chronic absenteeism (doe.mass.edu, 2018). This created an explosion in the number of schools identified as needing 'Broad/Comprehensive Support' (doe.mass.edu, 2018) which resulted in the

number of schools increasing threefold from nearly 50 to almost 150 (DESE Comprehensive Data File, 2018).

## **B. Turnaround to Improve Schools**

**Massachusetts has a comprehensive turnaround process and has demonstrated levels of success surpassing most other states in the nation. The state has reached a plateau and is exploring how the Turnaround Practices and turnaround planning procedures can be improved to support schools and districts in reaching greater heights in educational achievement. A Theory of Action is proposed.**

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) may designate a school underperforming based on student performance data and criteria set by the board of education. The state considers multiple indicators such as academic achievement, attendance, graduation and promotion rates, as well as a lack of significant improvement in the aggregate or by one or more of the following subgroups:

- Special education
- Low income
- English language proficiency
- Race/ethnic classifications

Underperforming schools are considered the state's most struggling schools based on an analysis of trends in growth, achievement, and academic improvement (doe.mass.edu, 2016). A school identified as underperforming is required to submit a turnaround plan that follows the department's guidelines for setting, selecting, and monitoring progress toward achieving goals in an effort to improve performance and exit turnaround school status (doe.mass.edu, 2016). The turnaround plan guidance and template was designed to meet federal requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) and the Massachusetts Achievement Gap Act (An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap,



M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1J, 2010). According to DESE guidance documents (2018) outlining specifications for plans in schools requiring assistance or intervention, “template guidance is aligned to research-based evidence of best practice in high performing Massachusetts turnaround schools and the turnaround practices” (pg. 1). The turnaround planning template (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*) has seven (7) sections:

1. **Section I: Executive Summary** - a brief profile of the school, its vision, and key improvement strategies for each turnaround practice as well as how those goals will be measured.
2. **Section II: Stakeholder Engagement** - identify and recruit a diverse set of stakeholders to champion and offer feedback on turnaround planning efforts.
3. **Section III: Envision the Future** - clearly defining the vision to articulate the school’s aspirations for students.
4. **Section IV: Analysis of Assets and Challenges** - analyze district and school-related assets and challenges aligned to the turnaround practices.
5. **Section V: Strategic Objectives and Initiative** - using the vision, assets/challenges, turnaround practices research, and contextual knowledge of evidence-based practices, select key objectives and initiatives that are likely to lead to rapid performance gains.
6. **Section VI: District Systems** - the district describes how it will utilize statutory flexibilities and identify how key policies and autonomies will support school-level turnaround efforts.
7. **Section VII: Goals, Benchmarks, and Progress Monitoring** - determine annual goals and interim benchmarks to help schools and districts answer “What changed?”

For whom? By how much? And when?” (DESE Turnaround Planning Guidance Document, 2018) as a result of actions taken by the school and district.

#### Law Governing Underperforming Schools

*In order to assess the school across multiple measures of school performance and student success, the turnaround plan shall include measurable annual goals including, but not limited to, the following: (1) student attendance, dismissal rates and exclusion rates; (2) student safety and discipline; (3) student promotion and graduation and dropout rates; (4) student achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System; (5) progress in areas of academic underperformance; (6) progress among subgroups of students, including low-income students as defined by chapter 70, limited English-proficient students and students receiving special education; (7) reduction of achievement gaps among different groups of students; (8) student acquisition and mastery of 21st-century skills; (9) development of college readiness, including at the elementary and middle school levels; (10) parent and family engagement; (11) building a culture of academic success among students; (12) building a culture of student support and success among school faculty and staff; and (13) developmentally appropriate child assessments from pre-kindergarten through third grade, if applicable.” (M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1J, 2010)*

### **C. The Massachusetts Turnaround Practices**

**The Turnaround Practices were borne out of an analysis of best practices in Massachusetts turnaround schools that demonstrated high achievement. The practices are also research-based and serve as the basis for turnaround planning guidance to districts and schools.**

In February of 2012, the Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning (INSTLL) prepared a report for DESE that detailed the actions taken by underperforming schools in Massachusetts that were successful in rapidly accelerating achievement gains in schools (Lane, Unger, & Rhim, 2012). The authors identified three (3) areas to accelerate learning and these practices served as a basis for what would eventually evolve into the current iteration of the turnaround practices.

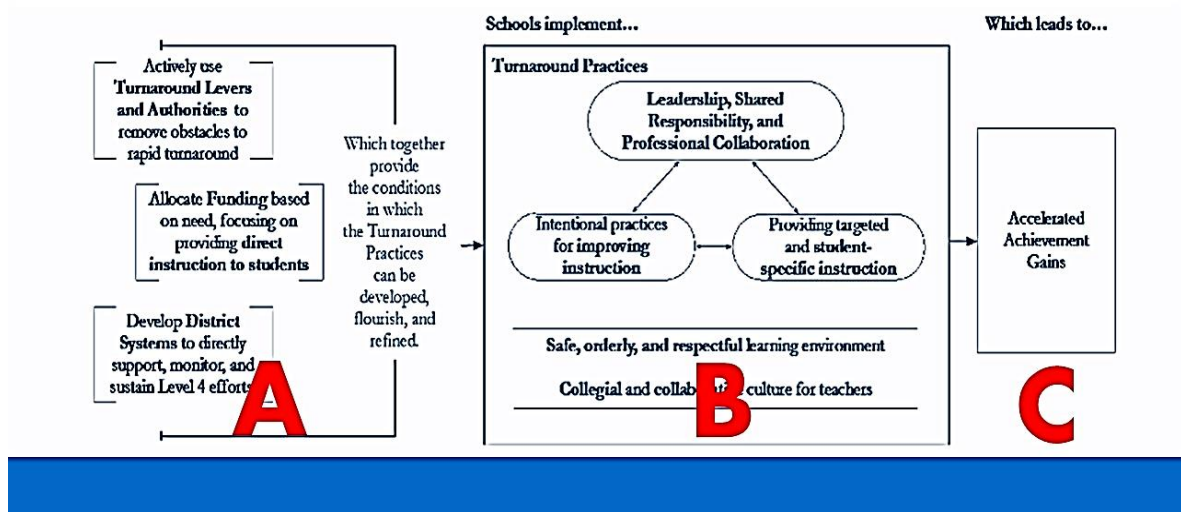
After a three-year analysis of Massachusetts policy, practice, and systems, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) released *Turnaround Practices in Action* (Lane, Unger, & Souvanna, 2014). [This report](#) served to describe the policy and practice environment needed for the turnaround practices to produce accelerated achievement gains. The roadmap tells a

turnaround story in three (3) parts: the conditions needed for the practices to thrive (Section A), the Turnaround Practices (Section B), and achievement gains (Section C) (See **Figure 1: Roadmap to Sustainable Improvement**). There are 3 primary conditions: that leaders use levers and autonomies to remove any barriers to improved performance, funding allocations with a focus on direct support to students, and the development of district systems to support, monitor, and sustain turnaround efforts (AIR, 2014). The conditions were cited as necessary *environmental* elements for the Turnaround Practices to be effective. I would argue that while the conditions are necessary they are not sufficient and that a roadmap that includes a more direct focus on equity and racial equity is necessary to for the state to achieve its desired outcomes.

**Figure 1:** Roadmap to Sustainable Improvement (AIR, 2014)

## Roadmap to Sustainable Improvement

Turnaround Practices in Action Report, Fig. 1 (2014)



By 2016, AIR released a mixed-methods study to report on how some underperforming schools used School Redesign Grants (SRGs) and the effects of this money on accelerating achievement (Impact Study *Executive Summary*, 2016). By this time, the

current iteration of the research-based turnaround practices were in full effect in Massachusetts. Since the inception of turnaround in Massachusetts, several underperforming schools have improved enough to exit but the pace of the progress has been much slower than anticipated.

#### **D. The Relationship between Turnaround Practices and Turnaround Planning**

**Turnaround planning is informed by the Turnaround Practices along every step of the way.**

Massachusetts turnaround practices are the driving forces for turnaround planning. The connections between turnaround planning and the Turnaround Practices are evidenced by the suggested steps for completing the turnaround plans. Each of the following sections of turnaround planning listed below draws upon one or more turnaround practices which, in turn, affect other major areas. Schools and districts must communicate fidelity to the Turnaround Practices as they engage in turnaround planning to compete for grant funding applications whereby schools must outline how they will adhere to the practices, monitoring and evaluation of schools, and the practices also shape the feedback schools receive from DESE on their efforts to improve their schools. The influence of the turnaround practices on each stage of the planning process is clear:

**Section I** – Schools identify improvement strategies for each **turnaround practice** (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*)

**Section II** – Engage in shared leadership as a best **turnaround practice** to organize stakeholders and galvanize collective responsibility for improved achievement (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*)

**Section III** – There exists a direct relationship between school leadership’s practice of envisioning the future and **Turnaround Practice I** which encourages schools to determine a focus for increasing achievement (Turnaround Practices Digital Resource, 2016)

**Section IV** – Analyze assets and challenges aligned to the **turnaround practices** (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*)

**Section V** – Use the vision, assets/challenges, **turnaround practices** research, and contextual knowledge to select objectives (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*)

**Section VI** – Identification of which key policies and autonomies will support school-level turnaround efforts to improve teaching and learning is a **Turnaround Practice I** indicator (Turnaround Practices Digital Resource, 2016)

**Section VII** – Schools/districts must determine Measureable Annual Goals (MAGs) and interim benchmarks for achievement for each **turnaround practice** (Appendix A, *Revised Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template*)

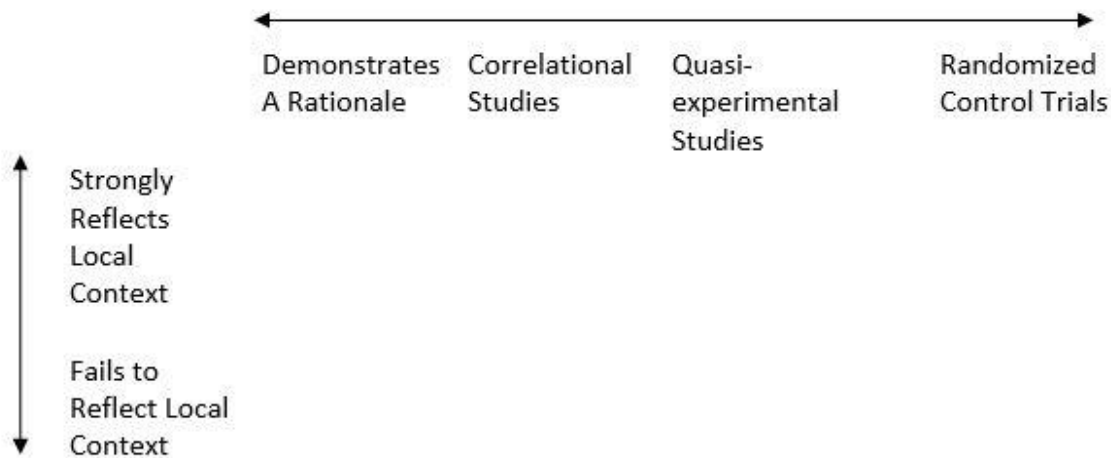
### **E. Research-Based or Evidence-Based?**

**The turnaround research-base is strong but the strength of the relationship between research findings and accelerated outcomes is weak. Since 2015, Massachusetts has been working hard to help schools and districts implement stronger interventions and practices to accelerate performance in turnaround schools.**

The Massachusetts research-base for turnaround may be strong but the national evidence-base to support the most commonly implemented turnaround interventions in schools has been low as there is [‘minimal evidence’ that the following interventions work](#) to turnaround low performing schools. And since the Massachusetts turnaround research base builds upon the traditional canon of effective school practices around the nation and includes best practices in Massachusetts’s exited schools, there is a move underway to strengthen the state’s evidence-base of interventions to accelerate outcomes in underperforming schools (US Department of Education, 2016). “Evidence-based and research-based are not the same thing” (Evidence-Based Practice and Massachusetts Turnaround Plans Training, Slide 4, 2019). Evidence-based interventions are practices or programs that have been shown to have a positive effect on outcomes such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and student literacy (Office of Planning and Research, 2018). Evidence-based practices are likely to have a positive effect only if implemented in a similar

context and with fidelity (Office of Planning and Research, 2018). All evidence-based interventions are research-based but not all research-based interventions and practices are evidenced-based. The words *research-based* are used broadly to define any program or intervention that is based on scientifically-based research (Elementary & Secondary Education Act, 2002). Arguably subjective, many programs and interventions can be considered research-based by that definition. This left local education agencies (LEAs), state education agencies (SEAs), and schools vulnerable to weak practices and programs promoted because they were simply research-based but for which there was no strong evidence of its effectiveness in improving outcomes. On the other hand, evidence-based research defines four standards or levels of research and requires that underperforming schools select at least one intervention that falls within the first three levels considered the strongest tiers (ESSA, 2016). ESSA raised the bar on research evidence. Federal regulations require schools to base state plans to accelerate improvement upon at least one statistically significant intervention or practice rated strong by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) standards. (US Department of Education, 2016). The medical field was amongst the earliest of professions to adopt standards of “evidence-based practice” (Evidence-Based Practice and Massachusetts Turnaround Plans Training, Slide 8, 2019). ESSA provides a useful way to think about the strength of evidence by presenting the strength of evidence along a spectrum. The following illustration (**Figure 2: Using Statistical Significance and Context to Determine the Strength of an Intervention**) identifies two necessary factors (statistical significance, context) for determining the strength of any proposed evidence-base (ESSA, 2015):

**Figure 2:** Using Statistical Significance and Context to Determine the Strength of an Intervention



Practices that are supported by research and have an effort underway by a local education agency (LEA), state education agency (SEA), or outside research organization to determine their effectiveness rests along the left-hand side of the continuum; on the other hand, the strongest evidence comes from “well designed and well implemented” (doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow, p. 1) randomized control experimental studies which appear along the far right-side of the spectrum. The evidence must also match the context of the local school or district for which the study was shown to be statistically significant (ESSA, 2016). The setting (e.g., elementary, secondary) and population (e.g., English language learners, students with disabilities) are just as important when considering evidence-based interventions as the standard or strength of the evidence (ESSA, 2016).

**(US Department of Education Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments, 2018)**

**Tier 1 - Strong Evidence:** Supported by one or more well designed and well implemented randomized control experimental studies.

**Tier 2 - Moderate Evidence:** Supported by one or more well designed and well implemented quasi-experimental studies.

**Tier 3 - Promising Evidence:** Supported by one or more well designed and well implemented correlational studies (with statistical controls for selection bias).

***Tier 4 - Demonstrates a Rationale:*** Practices that have a well defined logic model or theory of action, are supported by research, and have some effort underway by an SEA, LEA, or outside research organization to determine their effectiveness.

ESSA strongly encourages the use of “evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions” (US Department of Education, 2016) in underperforming schools. In fact, ESSA now requires that all school turnaround plans include at least one (1) evidence-based practice that falls within tiers 1 - 3. Tier 4 interventions do not meet the criteria for interventions or programs that have been proven to demonstrate a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes (Evidence-Based Practice and Massachusetts Turnaround Plans Training, 2019). While there is evidence that the Turnaround Practices have worked for some schools over the years, the pace at which turnaround schools have demonstrated and sustained considerable improvements has been slow.

#### **F. Theory of Action (ToA)**

**The ToA is driven by three (3) questions: What do we need to know about equity and racial equity? What is missing from our existing educational equity and racial equity evidence-base? What impact might a change in Turnaround Practices that factor-in equity and racial equity have on student outcomes?**

I developed a Theory of Action based on the request by leaders of the Center for District Support to learn how equity and racial equity might live in the Turnaround Practices to more rapidly improve outcomes for marginalized youth.

IF...

- DESE focuses its internal and external partnership research agenda to gather more evidence of educational equity in its schools and districts,  
and



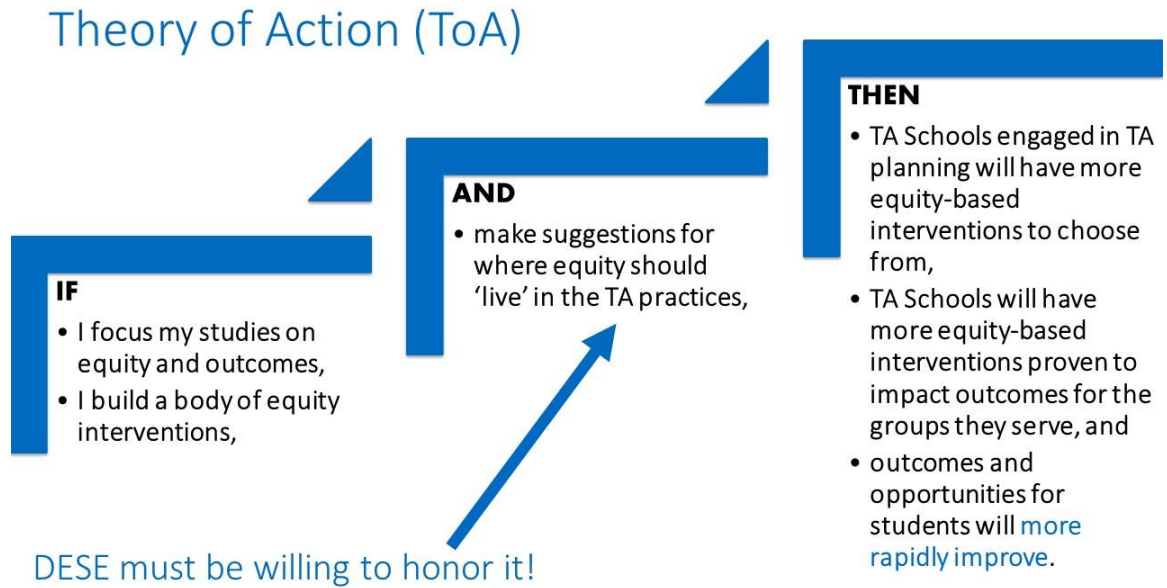
- ❑ DESE identifies and builds a body of tier 1 -3 level interventions that meet the gold standards for evidence-based (ESSA, 2016) practices by working closely with and being responsive-to leaders and teachers in underperforming schools, and
- ❑ DESE infuses new tier 1 - 3 educational equity-based practices and interventions that meet the gold standard into its current set of Massachusetts Turnaround Practices,

THEN...

- ❑ schools engaged in turnaround planning will have a larger toolkit of evidence-based strategies and interventions to choose from that have been proven to positively impact student outcomes especially for marginalized and underserved student populations, and
- ❑ schools that serve higher concentrations of marginalized and underserved student groups can implement plans that include interventions and practices that have a stronger evidence-base, and
- ❑ Outcomes and opportunities for marginalized groups and underperforming student groups will improve.

In other words,

**Figure 3:** A Theory of Action Summary



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### III. Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)

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#### A. What are *Equity* and *Racial Equity*?

**Educational equity and racial equity are dimensions of fairness and opportunity. The effects of inequity and inequality impact ALL groups including but not limited to persons with disabilities, ethnic/racial groups, LGBTQ and language proficiency as well as the intersections of such group identities.**

Educational equity has two primary dimensions: fairness (OECD, 2008) and opportunity. That race, gender, disability, language, socio-economic status, and/or sexual orientation do not serve to disadvantage any individual or group are demonstrations of fairness toward others. The other dimension, opportunity, is what results when acts of fairness become visible and are experienced by individuals and groups who have been historically marginalized (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016). Unfairness to any group often results in a lack of opportunities for the same group. For example, there exists over five decades of research evidence to prove that students with disabilities have not been provided the same opportunities to learn as other students in this country. Despite aggressive policy measures such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is proof today that many students with disabilities in this country are still receiving low exposure to high quality educational material and poor instruction (Elliott & Barlett, 2016). An act of educational equity towards students with disabilities includes treating this group with fairness regardless of their disabilities and providing them frequent opportunities to learn through exposure to engaging, standards-aligned, and rigorous experiences in schools. Racial equity can be defined as the practice of ensuring fairness and opportunity to racial/ethnic groups who have been negatively impacted by

economic, political, psychological, social, and structural inequality (NPESF, 2018). It represents the point at which we cannot predict an outcome based on racial factors (Race Matters Institute, 2014). For example, if we take a local high school and examine its 10<sup>th</sup> grade student achievement results we might notice there exists differences in overall achievement levels by race. In fact, those differences may not only be pronounced but they may represent a trend for the school. In cases such as these, racial equity is not achieved because race is likely to be a factor in predicting the student proficiency results.

## **B. Explicit and Implicit Bias in Schools**

**Most state agency and district observations tools measure teachers' explicit expectations of students. The research says that implicit expectations are a greater predictor (Haywood Burns Institute, 2019) of teacher behaviors than explicit behaviors but most observation tools are not designed to measure implicit behaviors.**

Education is but one of several structures (e.g. economic, healthcare, housing, justice) in our society (Amadeo, 2018). Structures are complex systems that function through feedback, both explicit and implicit, which help to create them (Quereshi and Okonofua, 2017). If education structures are in part made up of the exchange of explicit and implicit information, then acknowledging and deconstructing bias is a critical step in countering the negative effects of systemic inequities that are rooted in biases. Bias is a preference-for or an aversion-to an individual or group (Unconscious Bias Project, 2017). Implicit biases are thoughts and feelings that we are not consciously aware of while explicit biases are visible (Perception Institute, 2017). Biases about people are the result of accepting and believing stereotypes about others (Perception Institute, 2017). Stereotypes are often reinforced when we make associations such as black men and criminality or incompetence. A stereotype is a belief that members of certain groups (black, elderly, women and poor) have certain traits or

attributes (Oxford Bibliographies, 2019). Stereotypes are cognitive in nature but have an affective component (prejudice) which is how stereotypes manifest in observable and visible ways (Oxford Bibliographies, 2019). Stereotypes and prejudices can be positive or negative and can be explicit or implicit (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2009). Since people are unaware of their unconscious thoughts and feelings, problematic deeply held beliefs can be allowed to function without correction. According to the Haywood Burns Institute, "...implicit biases are a stronger predictor of our behavior than our consciously-stated values." (Racial and Ethnic Disparities Presentation, February 11, 2019). Schools and those who monitor schools most often use tools to measure explicit expectations as opposed to tools that surface implicit biases as is evident in DESE monitoring tools that track whether or not "specific or precise expectations for high-quality instruction are communicated" (Monitoring Site Visit Indicator 2.1, 2016).

Implicit biases can affect the way school staff treat children. In four (4) studies (Goff & Jackson, 2014) (Leonne, 2014) (Culotta, 2014) (DiTomasso, 2014) including a mixed methods study, researchers concluded that Black boys are seen as less childlike than their white peers and thereby characteristics associated with childhood are applied less when Black boys are concerned relative to their White peers (Goff et al., 2014). These characteristics are exacerbated when Black boys are implicitly dehumanized (Goff et al., 2014). As a consequence, Black boys are disproportionately and often more severely disciplined as they are viewed as less innocent compared to their White peers.

"White boys are typically suspended for concrete and observable violations such as smoking, fighting, or obscenity; Black boys tend to be suspended for violations such as disrespect, noisiness, or defiance, which are more abstract and subjective in nature and therefore more likely to be influenced by stereotyping and bias." (perception.org, p.10)

It is much easier to spot inaccuracies in our judgements once we understand better perception and how our brains work (American Values Institute, 2014). Most of our actions

occur without conscious awareness and through socialization we create schemas through which we categorize others (American Values Institute, 2014). Sometimes our inaccurate judgements are wrong but they are meaningless such as mistaking a pencil for a pen; other times, these inaccurate judgements can be life-threatening such as when a police officer mistakes a cell phone for a gun. If a classroom teacher perceives a student's facial expression as a threat to do harm this can have consequences that not only lead to disciplinary action but can create additional mistrust between the teacher and other students. I believe that such mistrust can destroy the fabric of relational trust over time creating an irreversible pattern of negative interactions between the teachers and students.

Uncovering implicit biases in systems requires a concerted effort by LEAs, SEAs, and schools to understand deeply the impact of their decisions on students and families. It necessitates a focus on outcomes (consequences of inputs) rather than the inputs (programs, school autonomies, teacher quality) and the actions of well-intended adults in schools. One example of this is when teachers' feedback to students is altered by their perceptions of the group to which the students belong. The teacher may choose to withhold information and give less warning about the potential negative consequences of submitting a term paper riddled with errors out of fear that it would discourage a Black student perceived as ambitious (Crosby & Monin, 2007) further exacerbating differential outcomes as byproducts of differential treatments (Burns Institute, 2019). LEAs and SEAs are rarely engaged with schools in ways that surface and deconstruct adults' decision-making and the impact of their decisions on outcomes. To simplify the process some, tap into an existing capability such as disaggregating state, district, and school-level data and work backwards to get to the underlying causes that lead to outcome disparities and disproportionalities. Identify whether and to what extent outcome disparities exist albeit gender, race, or disability-based. Become

grounded in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principals and engage groups most affected (AECF, 2014) before digging deeper to learn more about the policies, practices, and procedures (routine ways of working together) that give rise to outcome disparities (Finley, 2019).

### **C. High Expectations, Low Performance**

**Students are highly sensitive to teachers' perceptions of themselves and their performance. Teachers' expectations of students have a sizeable impact on student outcomes even when controlling for race/ethnicity.**

The student body in public schools started to become increasingly more diverse in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Education Research: A Century of Discovery, 2016). With this came an upward trajectory in scholarship on culture, identity, and race as well as vast differences in perspectives on the causes of underperformance as it relates to minority groups (Education Research: A Century of Discovery, 2016). A primary critique was that most literature reflected a deficit perspective of minority groups and that differences in outcomes were largely due to differences in the norms and practices of the families that students belonged to (R. M. Clark, 1983; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Jones, 1991). These differences, some argued, made their way into the classrooms where they were not well received by teachers who did not identify racially or socio-economically with their students in what they perceived as 'struggling schools' (R. M. Clark, 1983; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Jones, 1991). Students are exceptionally sensitive to teachers' expectations. One study found that students were extremely perceptive and could accurately identify whether or not teachers held high or low expectations of them based upon nonverbal cues they observed in video clips (Babad & Taylor, 1992). A more recent study confirmed earlier findings. In 2016, the results of a randomized control trial found that teachers' implicit expectations of non-white students

had significant adverse effects on academic achievement (Peterson et al, 2016). Teachers formed different expectations due to stereotypes and prejudices they had about ethnic student groups (Peterson et al, 2016). While the average effect size of teachers' explicit expectations are modest ( $d=.43$ ) across all student groups (Hattie, 2009), evidence suggests that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students of color are more susceptible to the impacts of teacher expectations (Peterson et al, 2016). An effect size is a measure representing the size of the impact of an intervention on student achievement (Hattie, 2008). They typically range from -0.2 to 1.2 (teachit.so, 2019). A program or intervention with an effect size of 0.6 is said to be strong while effect sizes 0.4 and 0.2 are thought to be modest and small in size, respectfully (teachit.so, 2019).

There is strong evidence that a positive relationship exists between socioeconomic status and the opportunities students are given to learn (Schmidt et al., 2015). One third of the social class related gap in performance can be explained between socioeconomic status and opportunities to learn in literacy and math (Schmidt et al., 2015). Low income students are more likely to be exposed to weaker mathematics content. Holding low income students to higher expectations by providing them with challenging content does not appear to make up for the disproportionalities in outcomes if negative perceptions of students remain unchecked (Smith, 2007). These relationships hold both across and within countries and across and within schools (OECD, 2015). The effects are compounded when students are tracked or placed in classrooms with students who have similar characteristics (Schmidt & Burroughs, 2013). Researchers have noted significant differences in how students are tracked (Schmidt & Burroughs, 2013). Structural inequality is perpetuated by the belief systems held by individuals who make up school staff. Such actions add to the negative perception of students' abilities and affirm adults' deeply ingrained beliefs. In an effort to account for the

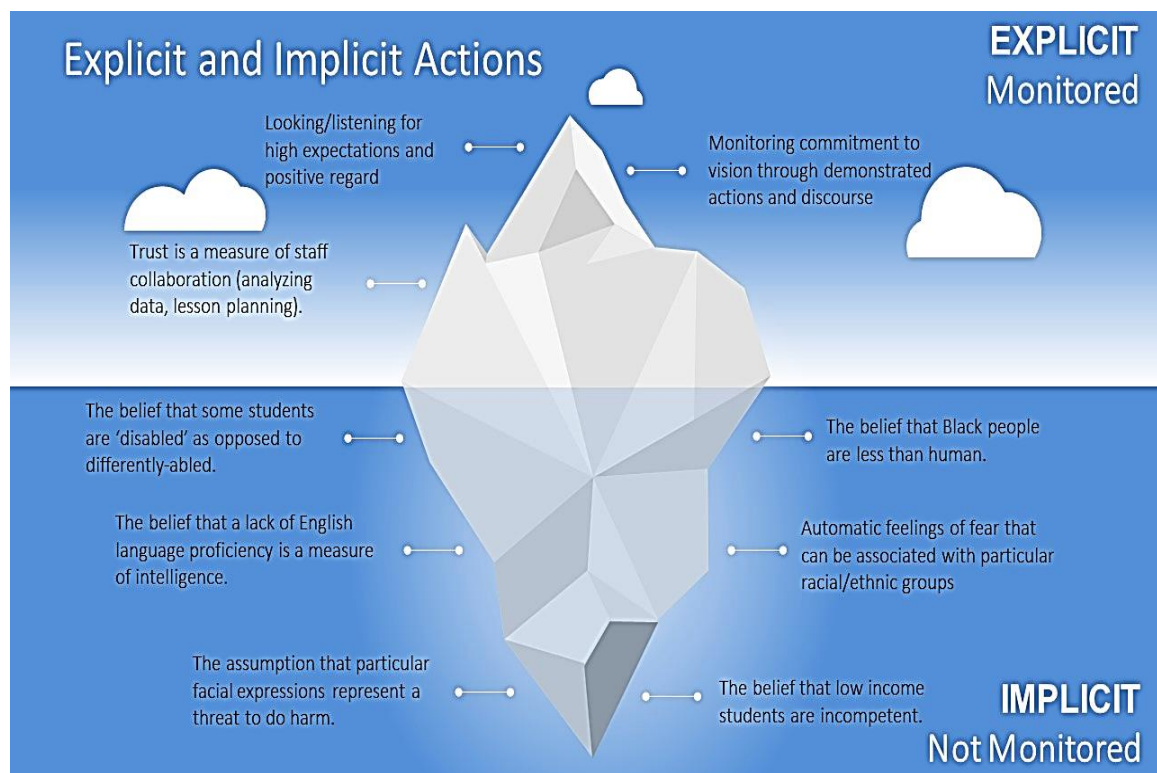


differences in outcomes between some turnaround schools that exited turnaround status and those that did not under similar conditions, AIR notes in its *Turnaround Practices in Action* (2014) report that it might be most beneficial to study adult belief systems as a potential lever for change. Authors of the study claim, “The right leaders and teachers are professionals who actively believe that they can make a difference.” (p. 7) Richard Huoang, co-author of the Michigan State University study (Schmidt et al., 2015) stated, “I am struck by the fact that more than a third of the inequality in performance comes from an opportunity gap, suggesting that schools in America appear to not believe that poor kids can achieve.” (p. 2)

Classroom observation tools ([Standards of Effective Practice](#), 2019) used by schools that are not designated turnaround are designed to capture and organize data on explicit expectations of students such as monitoring students’ abilities to list the lesson objectives (Standard II, Indicator E) and use technical language appropriately (Standard II, Indicator E). Observation feedback informs professional development and training opportunities in schools. This practice is no different in turnaround schools where feedback from tools like the Monitoring Site Visit (MSV) observation informs turnaround planning which describes the training opportunities that will be prioritized (doe.mass.edu, 2018). If implicit teacher expectations go unchecked and there are no processes for teachers to examine their own implicit biases, it is possible that well-intended teachers and leaders in schools can hold negative stereotypes of the students they serve and these can be perceived by students. Ultimately, students who feel their identities (race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.) are not valued by the adults in the building will find it harder to thrive. Explicit expectations of teachers such as the push for more rigor or the desire to get students to read more are not likely to cancel out the effects of negative implicit expectations and biases on students. In a

research study entitled, *Teachers' explicit expectations and implicit prejudiced attitudes to educational achievement* (2007), authors determined that low teacher expectations are problematic for student outcomes. Teachers who have low expectations also tend to provide low-quality and quantity feedback to students (Rubie-Davies, 2007). A culture of low expectations negatively impact school climate and culture (Rubie-Davies, 2007).

**Figure 4:** Explicit Versus Implicit Actions in State and District Monitoring Systems



This illustration (**Figure 4**) depicts what is captured and what is missed by many state monitoring or observation systems. SEAs often look-for and listen-for high expectations and positive regard by describing dialogue exchanges between teachers and students. Trust is a measure of staff collaboration as evidenced by teachers' lesson planning structures and shared data analyzation practices. However, the actions that have been proven to impact educational outcomes the most are the drivers that largely go unnoticed. These actions are

implicit and manifestations of adults' assumptions and beliefs about students and most monitoring systems do not have a way of surfacing and deconstructing these beliefs so that they do not adversely affect positive student outcomes in underperforming schools.

#### **D. School Climate & Culture**

**The importance of trust in schools cannot be overstated. Teacher-student and student-student relationships that are affirming, positive, and trusting are requisites for ensuring safer and richer school environments.**

Students who have trusting relationships with their teachers and feel safe in school are more likely to identify with the schools they attend (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Student identification with school refers to their sense of belonging and whether or not they value school and school-related outcomes (Voelkl, 1996). While researchers have disagreed some about the roots of student identification and conceptions of identification with school, evidence is clear that dis-identification with school has observable negative effects such as behavior problems, absenteeism, low academic achievement, and dropout rates (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Student identification with school is largely the result of the kind of relationship students have with teachers in the school (p. 3). It is grounded in emotional bonding with school and the relationships that take shape not the more distant indicators such as paying attention in class and doing more classwork/homework than is assigned as was first reported in a popular study decades ago (Finn, 1989). The strength of the bonding is dependent upon the students' perceptions of safety, support from adults in the school, and the norms governing peer-peer and teacher-peer behaviors (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Identification with school is more than an individual characteristic. It is just as much a collective property as well

(Ashmore & Mclaughlin-Volpe, 2004). How students come to value school is partly an asset that most bring to school and is partly dependent on the context and experiences at the school. Students shape within schools common belief systems about the importance of being in school and they forge stronger collective and social identities (Ashmore & Mclaughlin-Volpe, 2004). “How representative and inclusive the school is perceived to be by [student groups] or how trustworthy teachers are perceived to be can influence the formation of this collective sense of identity.” (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, p. 3). Trust in schools (teacher-teacher, teacher-student) is another key characteristic of healthy school culture. Trust in schools is the willingness of an individual or group to take risks with the confidence that others are competent, kind, reliable, open and sincere (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189). The research on trust in schools offers as key benefits increased teacher collaboration (Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Mitchell, Ripley, Adams, & Raju, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), collective teacher efficacy (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001), teachers’ continuous learning (Kensler, Caskie, Barber, & White, 2009), and it enables school structures (Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Just as it is important for teachers to form trusting bonds with the principal, colleagues, parents, and students, the perceptions of trust students have of their teachers is just as important. Turnaround Practice #1 includes as part of the description the importance of adults forming a trusting and collaborative culture (AIR Implementation Study, p. 17). While it is important for adults to form trusting relationships in the spirit of bonding and sharing struggles, there is ample evidence that the trust students have for teachers and other adults in the school shapes the culture and climate of the school (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Students’ perceptions of trust enable stronger school structures such as advisories and mentorship programs, not the other way

around. Students who trust their teachers are more likely to report unsafe situations thereby giving teachers and administrators an opportunity to intervene early (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Trust and safety are necessary conditions for students' identification with school and positive identification leads to a healthy school culture and climate.

### **E. Power and Authority**

#### **Without the authority to act, people feel powerless to change.**

According to Ronald Heifetz, "...children in many of our American cities grow up internalizing a deep distrust of societal authority and the norms it represents. The distrust then reinforces the subculture of disconnection, fueling a vicious cycle." (Heifetz, 1994, p. 63). Dominance and authority are two sides of the same coin. If authority can be defined as 'conferred power to perform a service', (p. 57) then dominance is the deliberate exertion of that power through coercion or similar tactics to oppress others (Wilson, 2017). What Heifetz makes clear in *Leadership Without Easy Answers* is that, for some in society, the path to effective leadership is at least in part rooted in exercising authority over others. What is missing from this particular narrative is the role white male dominance plays in enacting and reproducing these structures as well as how these actions often negatively impact marginalized groups. Social Dominance Theory (SDT) asserts that dominant groups in society maintain power over subordinate groups and this reproduces inequality (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). SDT is not solely about race. According to the theory, societies form group-based hierarchies that are age-based, gender-based, and/or based on socially-constructed hierarchies such as race or ethnicity (Wilson, 2017). Dominant groups gain a disproportionate share of items that are of high social value such as political authority, power, wealth, and social status (Wilson, 2017). Subordinate groups are left with a

disproportionate share of items of negative or low value such as poor healthcare, modest or impoverished homes, and high-risk/low- status occupations (Wilson, 2017). The hierarchies are dynamic and ‘adapt based on the contours of the dominant group’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 148). Schools with high numbers of youth from groups that are subordinated are most often reminded of their status in society through the use of labels and terms that undermine their true and inherent value. Categorizations such as *disadvantaged*, *at-risk*, *underperforming*, and *subgroups* are constant reminders that such groups do not have power. The approaches taken by those in positions of formal authority to combat barriers to achievement and higher outcomes are often technical in nature. Technical approaches are responses to what can be perceived as technical problems that can be solved by experts, are often solved by individuals in authority or who serve as leaders in the organization, and have clearly defined solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). Instead, they require adaptive solutions because the toughest problems require the mobilization of people using adaptive tools (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). Technical problems can be clearly understood, have cut-and-dry solutions, and usually the people closest to the problem have full authority to address the problem (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). On the other hand, adaptive problems and solutions cannot be easily defined and require learning (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). Often, the locus of control or authority does not rest with those closest to the problem. Instead, individuals and groups may need to negotiate for power and authority to get closer to the root causes of the challenge. Many challenges have both technical and adaptive aspects (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). The important thing to note, however, is that an adaptive problem cannot be resolved using technical tools (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). The core drivers of adaptive problem-solving are very similar to the core problem-solving methods employed by schools and school systems to overcome challenges in education. The practice of adaptive leadership involves

three main steps: 1.) observe, 2.) interpret, and 3.) intervene (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). The process begins by observing patterns and events, interpreting and forming hypotheses based on those patterns, and designing an intervention to address the specific challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). Individuals and organizations engaging in work around diversity, equity, and inclusion are usually confronted with adaptive challenges. Unfortunately, the tendency is to believe that complex matters of race, equity, and student-teacher belongingness in schools can be resolved with technical remedies such as a new literacy program, technology, or professional training alone.

There are several important pre-conditions to adaptive leadership but the primary conditions are to differentiate leadership from authority, engage above and below the neck, and connect to purpose (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009). DESE has begun the process by establishing a vision for equity and redefining its core values and objectives (Personal Communication, Center for District Support Core Values, September 2018) to better serve districts and schools. The following represents the Statewide System of Support's values and core objectives. In addition to traditional values espoused by the organization over the years, the new set of core values includes a greater focus on equity and racial equity, inclusivity, and the strengthening of the organization's ability to solve and be responsive-to adaptive challenges as well as technical difficulties that may arise.

### **Statewide System of Support (SSoS), February 2019 (doe.mass.edu, 2019)**

**Values:** Accountable | Adaptive | Equity and Racial Equity | Inclusive | Student-Centered  
**Core Objectives:**

- Provide support for the lowest performing schools and districts across the state
- Furnish meaningful data and information to schools and districts for improved decision making
- Increase the capacity of CDS staff, schools, and districts to positively impact equity and outcomes for the most historically marginalized students

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#### IV. Description and Evidence

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The Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) has a contract with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to support New England and the territories in accelerating outcomes in underperforming schools. I was charged to help uncover which equity and racial equity-related Turnaround Practice contributions could potentially make a meaningful difference in accelerating student outcomes. The Turnaround Practices do not explicitly name equity and racial equity conditions. However, DESE has named educational equity as an agency goal and is increasingly becoming more aware of the important role equity can play in improving its guidance and support to underperforming schools. To that aim, I worked to uncover which critical aspects of equity and racial equity had been excluded and this required a literature review of the evidence-base for educational equity-related factors as well as an understanding of the Massachusetts turnaround processes and procedures. I also had to conduct a thorough review of completed turnaround plans to study how districts and schools chose to implement turnaround strategies and which disparities in student outcomes are most prominent before meeting with principals, teachers, and parents who have children in turnaround schools.

There does not exist a substantial amount of research that is causal in nature on educational equity and its impact specifically on student outcomes. At best, the research theorizes and correlates that educational equity is likely to lead to improvements in outcomes (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). The research also provides suggestions on which areas of educational equity should be explored further in hopes that the body of statistically significant evidence available to educators and education leaders can grow. For instance, two key areas suggested for further study are determining what is considered adequate versus



equal in terms of providing support to underperforming schools (Educational Equity Research Initiative, 2018) and effective spending strategies as some districts and schools do a much better job at determining how dollars are spent (Center for Public Education, 2019). For the purposes of this strategic project, I relied primarily upon statistically significant studies where causal inferences can be made as opposed to relying upon research evidence with low evidence of impact on student outcomes. The basis for my recommendations to the Turnaround Practices rely heavily upon school/district turnaround plan data, focus group interview data, and three (3) core bodies or evidence of educational equity and its relationship to positive student outcomes:

1. A randomized control trial on teachers' explicit expectations and implicit prejudiced attitudes and their effects on educational achievement (Peterson et al., 2016);
2. A mixed-methods study on the consequences of dehumanizing children of color (Goff et al., 2014);
3. A study proving a positive and statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic status, opportunities to learn, and student performance (Schmidt et al., 2015).

#### **A. An Overview of Exited Schools**

**I developed profiles for each exited school to organize the evidence and help me draw parallels across exited schools. Four of the schools exited last year (2018) while one of the schools exited a few years prior.**

I began the process of uncovering what was happening by looking for evidence of educational equity-related practices and interventions in turnaround schools that exited turnaround status over the last nine years with a focus on schools that most recently exited. In other words, I generated a list of all the schools that exited turnaround in Massachusetts

and then focused my analysis on the schools that most recently exited (2018). There were four (4) schools: Chestnut Talented and Gifted Middle School, Elm Park Elementary School, John Winthrop Elementary, and Milton Bradley Elementary School. After reviewing the turnaround plans of 32 schools that have exited, I developed a detailed turnaround school profile for the four schools that most recently exited and decided to include Jeremiah Burke High School, the only high school to exit turnaround in Massachusetts. I created profiles for each school modeled after the state's Turnaround Plan Guidance Tool. In addition to the sections that already exist in the guidance tool, I created 2 new sections. One new section was a field I created for capturing any evidence of cultural responsiveness or cultural proficiency trainings happening at the school. This section might also include activities related to equity and racial equity that went beyond broader cultural proficiency efforts. The second new section was a field to document areas that warrant further investigation. The information that I used to complete the profiles were drawn from each school's turnaround plans. All profiles included the following sections:

- Executive summary
- Cultural competence/responsiveness training and learning
- School-identified assets and challenges
- School-identified strategic objectives aligned to turnaround practices 1 – 4
- Which turnaround practices should be explored more deeply to consider the possible links between equity/racial equity and academic success in schools

**Table 1** includes the schools that exited in 2018. It also includes the percentages of students that fall within each subgroup. For example, 71% of the student body at Jeremiah Burke High identified as African-American while 59.3% of the student body at Winthrop identified as African-American (See **Table 1: Subgroup Profiles**).

**Table 1:** Subgroup Profiles, 2018 Exited Schools (DESE District Profiles, 2018)

School	African-American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American	White	Native Hawaiian/PI	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	First Language not English	English Language Learner	Students w/Disabilities	High Needs	Economically Disadvantaged
Chestnut Accelerated Middle	23.1	2.2	59.2	0	13.6	0.3	1.6	25.3	7.3	19.6	75.6	73.1
Milton Bradley Elementary	18.2	0.6	77.8	0	2.4	0	1.1	30.8	30.2	20.7	94.1	92.5
Elm Park Elementary	15.3	2.1	58.9	0	20.8	0	2.9	71.9	56.2	15.5	93.5	78
John Winthrop Elementary	59.3	1.8	33.3	0.3	1.8	1.2	2.1	32.5	24.5	11	86.5	75.8
Jeremiah Burke High (2016 exit)	71.0	0.6	24.4	0.2	1.9	0.2	1.7	52.3	37.5	12.5	84.7	65.0

## B. Monitoring and Feedback to Schools

Schools and districts use feedback from the Monitoring Site Visit (MSV) tool to determine which interventions and practices to implement in their schools.

Next, I reviewed the state’s observation data. Much of the information in the turnaround plans is based upon feedback received from MSV reports. The purpose of the MSVs is to provide schools with feedback to support their turnaround efforts (MSV Process Guide, 2018). It is intended to help schools and districts “understand the status of their implementation of their turnaround plans.” (MSV Information Protocol, p.3, 2016). MSVs are 2-day visits of schools conducted by two vendors, AIR and SchoolWorks. The data gathered are used to help schools determine if they are making progress towards improving student outcomes. The MSV process includes classroom observations, staff surveys, focus groups, and interviews (doe.mass.edu, 2018). MSV evaluation rubrics (see **Appendix C**, Massachusetts Monitoring Site Visit Secondary Schools Practices and Indicators Continuum)

are organized according to the Turnaround Practices and each practice contains several indicators.

I analyzed the MSV data comparisons across school accountability levels for each Turnaround Practice and indicator (Massachusetts MSVs, 2014-2017). In all, there were 49 schools that received MSVs and 32 of those schools had turnaround plans on file as they were underperforming schools as this is a statutory requirement (ESSA, 2015). In the area of leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration (Turnaround Practice #1) chronically underperforming scored higher on average (2.5) than underperforming schools (2.3) and schools that were one level above (non-turnaround) underperforming (1.8) fared the worst by comparison (AIR MSV Data Comparisons, 2014-2017). The scores range from 0 to 4 (0=Limited evidence, 1=Developing, 2=Providing, 3=Sustaining, 4=Coherent implementation) (AIR MSV Data Comparisons, 2014-2017). A look across years by Turnaround Practice (1, 2, 3, and 4) revealed an unusual pattern. Whenever there was an increase in one Turnaround Practice area the same trend appeared across-the-board. The same held true for decreases although differences could be noticed across schools. A deep dive into the turnaround plans revealed that schools were more likely to derive their goals and strategies for improvement from the MSV feedback and they usually prioritize the goals based on their lowest or weakest areas as identified by MSV reports. Thus, if the MSV evaluation tool does not include equity and racial-equity related indicators then it is not likely that schools will prioritize educational equity-based interventions nor will their turnaround plans reflect equity strategies to accelerate improvement. Also, I found that the Turnaround Practices are based on research of what worked and best practices in turnaround schools (AIR MSV Practices and Indicators Continuum, 2018).

What underperforming schools have in common is the challenge to rapidly accelerate outcomes but this does not necessarily mean that best practices in turnaround that worked for one school will work just the same for another. So what makes the push for interventions based in educational equity any different? For one, schooling inequity happens to be another common factor across most if not all underperforming schools. Employing a single strategy, intervention, and adding new inputs to combat chronic underperformance is not the same thing as combatting structural or systemic inequity. An educational equity intervention is a misnomer because it suggests a single practice can improve outcomes. Truth is, educational equity interventions are as complex as the systems that created educational inequity. They are multilayered. What is clear is that, in order for equity to prove effective in improving outcomes, they must be woven into DESE's processes and procedures. This includes the MSVs and how to structure feedback to schools.

### **C. Equity in Exited Schools**

**Without matching the interventions with the schools mentioned earlier in the capstone, the following is a description of the equity-based interventions implemented in exited schools. A review of 5 schools that demonstrated achievement gains and thereby exited turnaround revealed that educational equity was not only present but a priority.**

A review of the student group profiles for schools that exited in 2018 illustrated just how much variation can exist across turnaround schools. Why then do turnaround plans across schools apply such similar interventions across all of its schools without much adaptation to its own context? It goes back to Systems which reproduce after themselves. If accountability tools measure implementation of Turnaround Practices and both requests for grant funds and turnaround plan mandates must include a plan for utilizing the practices to improve

performance, then school and district interventions to improve outcomes will not be any different. This presents a major adaptive challenge for any state agency. The state must provide support to underperforming schools in a way that honors each school and district's unique challenges while also holding schools and districts accountable for results. If the state is not careful, it could 'force the hand' of underperforming schools preventing them from exercising the flexibility and room they need to grow. One possible strategy the Statewide System of Support could employ is to look for evidence of equity in schools that have exited turnaround and overcame the odds and look for evidence of equity in schools that are on the move.

There is emerging evidence that some schools have been operating differently. My inquiries revealed that schools that recently exited have each implemented to varying degrees some version of a structural, not a single-shot, educational equity intervention. For anonymity sake, I will refer to 4 out of 5 of the schools listed in the table above as Schools A, B, C, and D when discussing the schools' specific strategies.

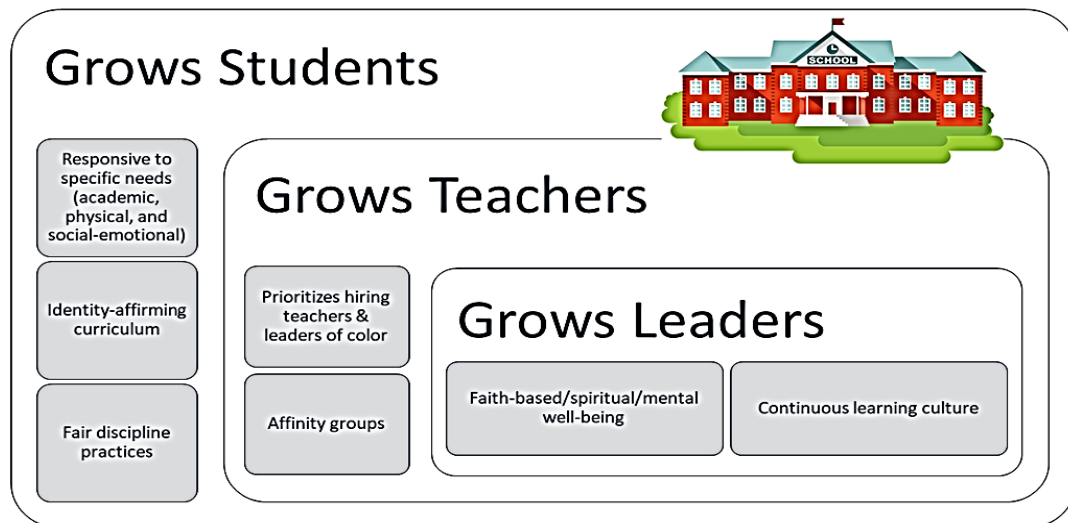
School A uses its MSV feedback to identify and build upon its greatest assets as opposed to starting with its weaknesses in its turnaround plan. In fact, the school does not name its areas of weakness according to the MSV report but identifies a weaknesses by calling attention to disparities in student performance between students with high needs and their higher performing peers. As a part of their effort to build teachers' expertise in trauma-informed pedagogy, teachers at School A received training in how to unpack stress as well as de-escalation training. This seems to have benefited the teachers just as much as it did the students. Over time, teachers began to understand better how their own actions and inactions impacted the climate in their classrooms and in the school. I believe that, without knowing it, teachers were simultaneously engaging in professional learning to the benefit of

themselves and their students. A consequence of the training, albeit intentional or unintentional, supported teachers in changing their perceptions of their students. School B partners with organizations to provide wrap-around services to support students' social, mental, and emotional health. The school is also staffed with an individual whose primary task is to monitor outcomes and interventions for English language learners, special education, and students with higher needs. The individual in this role engages in frequent data analysis student-by-student and by classroom and is also responsible for training teachers to support them in meeting the needs of student groups in their classrooms. The role is quasi-administrative but teachers in the school view this individual as support personnel. School C has an extremely high population of students who are economically disadvantaged. The school leverages third-party vendors to help students and their families have access to much needed resources so that students can better focus on learning when in school. School D has demonstrated the greatest achievement gains of all 5 schools. So far, students in the school have been able to achieve at high levels while also serving large populations of students of color, higher needs students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Since this school was the only high school that exited turnaround I included this school in my list of focus group schools. This gave me the opportunity to go beyond what was in the turnaround plans to uncover the equity and racial equity interventions that supported accelerated improvement.

The school leader has prioritized equity throughout all aspects of school structures. The principal at School D is responsive to the specific needs of students who come from the community the school serves. The principal realized that many of the school's students experienced trauma at home and in their communities so it was important that staff learn best practices in trauma-informed pedagogy. This need was recognized out of the leadership

team’s close analysis of data that extended beyond traditional metrics such as student tests scores and attendance. The school also considered culture as it relates to the curriculum. The belief was that students would be more likely to engage fully in curricula that affirms their identities and presents students of color in positive ways. The team used student perceptions data to learn about students’ interests and to capture students’ feelings of safety and belonging in the school. Teacher empowerment is cultivated in the school as well. In addition to hiring a larger number of teachers of color, the principal provides teachers with many opportunities to exercise power and authority throughout the school through teacher led affinity groups and profession learning backed by teacher autonomy. This strategy not only serves to attract high quality teachers to the school but it also keeps them there. Capacity-building and continuous learning are also prioritized. In addition to providing the leadership staff with regular opportunities to lead, the leader pursues their own professional learning to stay abreast of innovations in equity and inclusive practices in schools. I created a graphic to summarize my understanding of the school’s actions (See **Figure 5: A Place Where Everybody Grows**). Growth is baked-into all parts of its system.

**Figure 5:** A Place Where Everybody Grows (What One School Does to Accelerate Achievement Growth)





## D. Voices from the Field

I conducted focus groups at a small set of schools in Massachusetts. The focus groups included teachers, principals, and parents. I used the data collected to uncover any new connections that might exist between the educational equity evidence-base, actions taken by exited schools, and to deepen my understanding of the experiences of individuals and groups working in Massachusetts's turnaround schools.

I conducted focus groups involving three principals of color, nine teachers (white = 3, African-American = 3, Latina = 2, Asian = 1), and three parents whose children attend Massachusetts public schools. The schools are currently designated as turnaround schools. Principals and teachers were asked a series of questions: several questions served to help us get acquainted and several were designed to help me understand their strategic actions and their schools. The questions that were designed to help me understand their schools were structured to elicit specific information related to the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices.

### Focus Group Questions for Teachers and Principals

1. Tell me a little about yourself. What are your names, how long have you been here, and what do you teach?
2. Did you always want to teach/lead? How did you enter the profession?
3. Why teach/lead HERE?
4. If you could only name one thing, what would you say a school must have in order for you to thrive as a teacher/principal? What do you absolutely need as a teacher/principal? What must be true of any environment that you choose to teach/lead-in?
5. Would you say that you have power to make decisions at the school? What kinds of decisions? Do you have/exercise agency here at the school? **1.1 Autonomy**
6. How would you define trust (What is trust to you)? And if you could, give me some examples of trust between teachers, teachers and leaders, and teachers and students? **1.5 Trusting relationships**
7. Who decides what teachers will learn in this school? How is it decided what will be the topics of trainings/professional development? Can you give me some examples of professional development training topics? **1.6 Professional collaboration/development**

8. How would you describe the culture or ways of communicating at this school? Is it pretty open and transparent amongst all? **1.7 Communication w/staff**
9. How would you know that a student/students (or teachers) were experiencing challenges? What would be the signs and how might they communicate that, if at all? How might you respond to a specific challenge? Please provide an example of a challenge. **2.3 Identifying and addressing student (teacher) needs**
10. If you had to choose one, which would you say you prioritized most: schoolwide data or classroom data, and why? What are your general feelings about testing data? **2.5/2.6 Student assessment data for the school and for the classroom**
11. Which student group or groups do you feel are most excluded from opportunities to achieve (or do you feel this is even the case)? How have you attempted to counter this narrative? **3 Student-specific supports and instruction to all students**
12. How would you describe the relationship between students and teachers in this school? What about the relationship between students and administrators? **4 Culture and Climate – Establishing trust and respect**
13. Name one thing that you would like to see change at this school?
14. Any questions for me?

## Summary of Responses

### Principals

- 2/3 having served in their schools for less than 5 years and 1 served as a principal for 15 years;
- 2/3 were driven by the desire to accomplish what they felt had not been accomplished at scale in Massachusetts and that is the desire to produce higher outcomes across all student groups;
- All principals identified the need for additional staff and funds to enact interventions as the greatest needs;
- With one exception, principals felt constrained by district demands and did not feel they had the power to make decisions for the school. The principals who felt they did not have the power to make decisions felt as if they were more often limited in their options to choose from when important decisions needed to be made;
- With one exception, principals generally felt that there was trust amongst teachers, admin, and staff. One principal felt that initially there was a lack of trust between teachers and admin when the leaders were new to the school but this has been steadily changing over time;
- All principals reported that teachers communicated through traditional structures such as email or in person and that their appeared to be transparency amongst teachers in the school;
- All principals visit classrooms frequently and have a strong pulse on when teachers feel challenged in their roles;
- All principals prioritize using multiple forms of data and making data comparisons including disaggregating data by student group;
- One principal described Black and Latin-American students as having the greatest needs in the school while another described students who were economically

disadvantaged as needing to be prioritized. The remaining principal stated that it is difficult to prioritize any one group as it was their belief that all students in the school had critical needs. All principals believed that the hardest narrative to change is the perception of the students and the school. Two principals work on changing the perceptions by inviting families into the school to be a part of school-going activities while one principal feels challenged by the need to change the perception;

- Two principals felt there was general trust between teachers and students as well as trust between teachers and admin. One principal shared that there are issues of trust between the teachers and the students because many of the teachers are afraid to challenge students academically because they fear they will contribute to higher rates of student academic failure. This creates a culture of lower expectations for students who are already underachieving;
- Two principals would like to see the perception of the school change and one principal is in dire need of additional resources to support students in the school;

## Teachers

- Teachers had been there roles for 2.5 years on average with all but 2 having only taught in their current schools;
- About half of the teachers decided to teach because they were inspired by another teacher who they either had as a pupil or someone they knew personally; the other half had 1 or more parents who were teachers;
- Teachers identified the need for continued flexibilities in determining what to teach and when as well as more technology resources such as classroom computers;
- Most teachers felt they had the power to make decisions in their schools but the vast majority of the teachers in the focus group discussion were in teacher/instructional leadership roles. The principals put out a request for volunteers and I interviewed the first set of teachers who agreed to participate;
- Most teachers felt there was general trust between teachers but openly acknowledged the formation of teacher ‘cliques’ or groups. According to them, teacher groups formed based on power structures within their schools. Teacher leaders had more authority and were more likely to engage with other teacher leaders, for example;
- Even though they were not in the same room at the time of the interview, teachers echoed the comments of principals.
- Most teachers identified that students are open about sharing their academic challenges if they arise. Also, students are not allowed to ‘suffer in silence’ so it would be extremely difficult for students to hide their academic challenges;
- Teachers generally prioritized classroom and individual student data and had negative feelings about a reliance on test scores although they felt test scores were somewhat useful;
- Half of the teachers identified students of color as having the greatest needs while the other half described the needs with regard to discipline and essential resources typically provided by parents/guardians/caregivers. Most teachers did not identify specific strategies by student group but those who offered climate as a priority did share specific school-wide interventions to counter high discipline referral rates;
- All teachers stated that there was positive relational trust between teachers and students and that they generally trusted administrators in the school;

- Two-thirds of the teachers also acknowledged that there are persistent negative perceptions of students and teachers in the school and would like to see this change. The remaining group of teachers requested more time to plan as a team and develop curricula as a team.

Parents were not asked questions aligned to the Turnaround Practices but instead were asked questions to gauge their general sense of what is needed to deliver on a higher quality education for their children.

### **Questions for Parents**

1. How would you describe your child's school?
2. How would you describe your child's greatest assets/strengths?
3. How would you describe your child's performance in school?
4. How active are you in your child's education on a scale of 0 - 5, 0 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'Extremely active'?
5. What do you think your child needs to be successful?

### **Parents' Summary of Responses**

- Parents tended to describe their child's school as one staffed with a strong/good leader and teachers who care for the most part. One parent mentioned that the school needs to get a better handle on discipline issues in the school;
- Parents tended to describe their children as active, playful, sometimes talkative (1 parent) but generally a joy to be around;
- Parents tended to describe their children as academically successful;
- Parents rated themselves a '3' on average. One parent acknowledged a desire to do more in the school;
- All parents stated that their child needs teachers who care about their well-being. Parents also seemed to want teachers to academically push or challenge their children more.

I used this information, together with the small evidence-base for equity, to determine which Turnaround Practice areas should be examined more closely and possibly included into the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices. Since 2 out of 3 school leaders identified teacher-student trust as challenge areas and at least half of the teachers mentioned high discipline rates and negative perceptions of the school as challenges, my recommendations are to amend Turnaround Practices #2 and Turnaround Practice #4.

Additionally, parents' responses indicating that they prioritize safety and well-being support teachers' statements regarding the need for better strategies to reduce discipline issues at their schools. The lack of any evidence suggesting that teachers and leaders view cultural responsiveness or any DEI factors as being important lead me to think that professional learning in these areas might help improve relational trust between teachers and students if it is truly an area of needed growth for teachers and it might also support teachers and leaders in overcoming some of the other challenges they identified such as improving the perceptions of the school. Teachers and leaders who learn to lead for equity will be better equipped to combat negative perceptions of students in the school and are also more likely to recognize any school or district-based structural challenges that are hindering academic progress. They are also more likely to use tools to overcome them. This is especially true since the schools who participated in the focus group interviews have high numbers of students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

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## V. Implications for the Site

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**Implication: Revise the Turnaround Practices to include equity and racial equity-related conditions in Turnaround Practice # 2 and Turnaround Practice # 4**

Each of the proposed changes are based upon the strongest evidence of research that I could locate and are matched to the existing Turnaround Practices as well as data captured from teachers and principals in turnaround schools. The existing evidence-based strongly emphasizes adults’ implicit expectations and school climate/culture as the ripest areas for impacting student outcomes.

The suggested additions are in boldface type and are also underlined.

### Recommended Revisions to Turnaround Practices 2 & 4

TP # 2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction	TP # 4: School Climate and Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Defined expectations for rigorous and consistent practices</li> <li>b) Administrative observations leading to constructive, teacher-specific feedback, <b><u>culturally responsive feedback to students</u></b>, supports, and professional development</li> <li>c) Teachers and teacher teams use student data to adapt and improve instructional strategies</li> <li>d) <b><u>Teachers use their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles to improve learning</u></b></li> </ul> <p><i>Teachers learn about explicit and implicit bias, valuing diversity, and how to support students by promoting a sense of belonging in school.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Shared behavioral expectations that support student learning</li> <li>b) Targeted and effective social-emotional supports and expanded learning opportunities</li> <li>c) Establishing a collegial, respectful, and trusting environment for staff and families</li> <li>d) <b><u>Promoting a positive school identification</u></b></li> </ul> <p><i>Administrators and teachers actively work to foster safe schools through the development of trusting relationships with students and positive identification with school to promote a healthy school climate and culture.</i></p>

**Turnaround Practice 2:** Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction

The school employs intentional practices for improving teacher-specific and student-responsive instruction.

**ADD:** culturally responsive feedback to students.

**ADD:** Teachers use their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

**ADD:** Teachers learn about explicit and implicit bias, valuing diversity, and how to support students by promoting a sense of belonging in school.

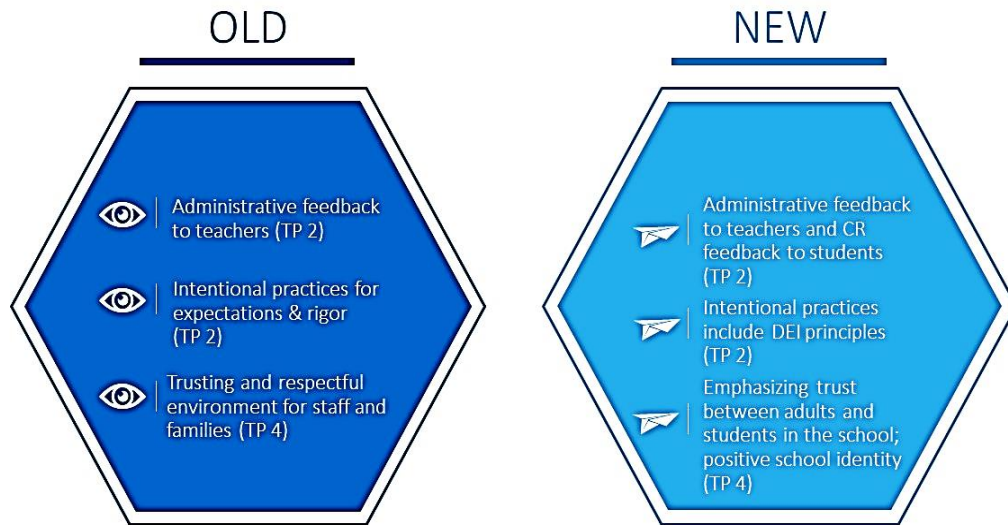
**Turnaround Practice 4:** School Climate and Culture

The school has established a climate and culture that provide a safe, orderly and respectful environment for students and a collegial, collaborative, and professional culture among teachers that supports the school’s focus on increasing student achievement.

**ADD:** Promoting a positive school identification

Administrators and teachers actively work to foster safe schools through the development of trusting relationships with students and positive identification with school to promote a healthy school climate and culture.

### Summary of Changes



### Additional areas to consider

- Turnaround Practice #1: The value of diverse perspectives in shared decision-making and leadership
- Turnaround Practice #2: Culturally-responsive decision-making to improve instruction
- Turnaround Practice #3: Equity-responsive data-driven decision-making
- Turnaround Practice #4: Tracking students' sense of belonging\* (project already underway at DESE)

#### Implication: **Use Asset-Based Language to Describe Students**

DESE's recent improvements to its turnaround planning guidance includes a greater emphasis on asset-based approaches to planning and attention to subgroup performance. In a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2003 report entitled *Subgroup Results for the Nation and States*, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian (including Alaska natives) were labeled racial/ethnic subgroups (p. 46). Fifteen years later,

the term subgroup is still being used to identify racial/ethnic groups as well as students with disabilities, English Language learners, and the economically disadvantaged (NCES, 2018). One important aspect of asset-based education is the use of asset-based language especially when referring to marginalized groups. Deficit-based language includes negative labels to describe students, categories that describe marginalized groups as persons to ‘be fixed’, words/phrases that depict students as less-than their more ‘typical’ peers, and phrases that connote dysfunction (Words Matter, 2016). Deficit-based language contributes to negative perceptions of students and families and this will hinder the effectiveness of asset-based approaches. Marginalized populations are most impacted by the use of such language (Bertolini and Renkly, 2018). That said, I aim to use the words *student group* in the place of the word *subgroup* when referring to African-Americans, Hispanics, English language learners, students with disabilities, and other demographic groups. It should be noted that the term *subgroup* is not a state-constructed term but a federal label frequently used to describe students. It appears in US Department of Education Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) accountability documents (ESEA section 1111(c)(4)(E)(ii), 2017).

**Implication: Prioritize equity by focusing research on educational equity to build upon the existing evidence base**

The state Office of Planning and Research has a specific research agenda (2018) and this agenda does not include educational equity and racial equity. As of October of 2018, DESE’s primary areas of research is to implement five (5) strategies aimed at meeting one goal: to prepare all students for success after high school ([www.doe.mass.edu/research](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research)).

Strategy #1: Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Strategy #2: Promote educator development

Strategy #3: Support social-emotional learning, health, and safety

Strategy #4: Turnaround the lowest performing schools and districts

Strategy #5: Enhance resource allocation and data use



The specific areas related to turnaround, which is under the purview of the Office of District Support, are as follows:

- State accountability and support system
- Sustaining school improvement over time
- Labor market issues
- State systems improvements

While the state has supported research in the areas of teacher and leadership diversity and the potential impacts of diversity on student outcomes, DESE has yet to realize the sizeable impact it can have on accelerating outcomes by directing research to areas such as

1. What impact can addressing implicit as well as explicit bias in schools have on student outcomes and how might DESE build a stronger evidence-base for this to accelerate positive school outcomes?
2. What is the relationship between trust, safety, and positive student-to-school identity in engaging students and changing the narrative about underperforming schools?
3. What role can empowering teachers and leaders of color play in rapidly improving outcomes for marginalized groups in schools?
4. What role does identity-affirming curricula play in engaging learners and improving literacy rates in Massachusetts?
5. What does strong professional DEI learning look-like and how might DESE use what it learns about DEI to improve upon its own efforts currently underway like increasing teacher/leader diversity, cultural responsiveness training, and social-emotional learning?

The Office of Effective Practices in Turnaround also works with research partners to conduct research around the state's turnaround practices. To build upon existing research, the office should direct the research partner's attention to focus on issues of equity. Massachusetts is perfectly poised to lead the nation in building a strong evidence base to support rapid acceleration of outcomes and increase the likelihood of dramatic improvements across the state. Focusing the research on issues of equity is likely to permeate other areas of the department such as funding to turnaround schools, support, and monitoring/accountability.

**Implication: Leverage the turnaround planning process as an opportunity to support districts and schools in identifying, surfacing, and deconstructing implicit belief systems that may be getting in the way of higher outcomes in underperforming schools.**

The turnaround planning process provides several opportunities for DESE to assist underperforming schools and the process begins with gathering stakeholder input. Stakeholder engagement is the second section of the turnaround planning process but the first important step in setting the priorities for turnaround planning. DESE currently encourages districts and schools engaged in turnaround planning to identify key stakeholders early and DESE also offers guidance on where to look (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2018). I would suggest that, in addition to gathering and seeking input from stakeholders, DESE consider using this opportunity to inform stakeholders through questioning techniques and protocols to focus stakeholder attention on educational equity. The [Equity Inquiry Protocol](#) that I developed is one example of a tool that can be used to begin the process of surfacing and deconstructing adults' beliefs and assumptions about student groups in underperforming schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2019). The protocol is also useful for culturally-responsive asset-mapping, something DESE has shown a growing interest in over the years as it is doubling-down on the message to avoid deficit-based approaches to improvement. DESE provides an abundance of guidance tools to work with districts in assisting underperforming schools but equity and racial equity related guidance can easily get lost in the wealth of resources. Prioritize guidance tools that focus district and schools' attention on educational equity especially since underperforming schools more often include traditionally marginalized and vulnerable student groups. For example, in the [Guiding Questions Aligned to the Turnaround Practices](#) planning document, DESE provides thoughtful questions aligned to each Turnaround Practice to support schools and districts in their planning efforts

(doe.mass.edu, 2018). Consider the following two (2) questions which appear in section 1, Turnaround Practice 1 (pgs. 2-3):

1. What type of autonomies does the principal have to set and administer the school schedule, calendar, curriculum, assessments, and professional development?
2. In what ways do leaders in the school use autonomies to engage staff in uncommon professional learning experiences (i.e. implicit bias training, cultural responsiveness, restorative practices)?

The first question is an item drawn from the MSV rubric and it is also a question that schools seeking grant funding must answer as a part of the grant application process (School Redesign Grant [SRG], 2018); the second question is neither a monitoring look-for nor is it a grant requirement. If this question (and questions like this) became integral parts of DESE's systems (SRG funding, SSoS monitoring, SSoS support) then schools and districts will begin to hear a strong and clear message from the state that equity matters.

Last, consider inviting more equity strategists and organizations with expertise in equity and racial equity to support DESE in designing professional learning experiences for leaders within the organization. Facilitators who can support positive identity development, culturally responsive leadership practices, and learning across difference can build the agency's capacities to support others outside the agency and to do so even without the capacity to 'touch' all districts and schools directly. Generate a list of equity strategies just as the Center for District Support has a list of approved priority vendors. The list can consist of organizations large and small and of varying types (internal, external). The organizations can help shape the agency's vision for equity and impact on performance across the Commonwealth.

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## VI. Implications for the Sector

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### Implication: **Get granular about equity and racial equity.**

National efforts to achieve equity in education are certainly not new. Indeed, many state education systems have used equity to justify changes in the way they fund, monitor, and support districts and schools. And yet, there still exists a great deal of variation across states in defining and operationalizing equity to deliver on the promise of a high quality education for all students. There is a critical need for SEAs to get clear on what they mean by equity and racial equity and to also help employees make connections between equity and their streams of work. Add to that the increasing diversity of student populations in America's classrooms and all of a sudden diversity, equity, and inclusion are hot topics. It is important to ensure that these topics are not simply espoused but enacted and that SEAs are as clear as they can possibly be in identifying what it means to design, implement, and hold districts and schools accountable for more equitable systems in education. Examine the core drivers of your system and look for evidence of educational equity. This might mean reviewing your grant applications while paying close attention to the questions asked of schools and districts to determine if they center equity and racial equity-related strategies; it might also mean engaging-in and communicating professional learning to develop a stronger DEI culture and to learn better how to lead for equity. Nearly every state has its own version of underperforming schools. Underperforming schools are required by the federal government to devise plans for improving the performance of its schools. States can develop systems to review and provide feedback to schools in a way that emphasizes equity and racial equity so that schools struggling to large populations of rural, students with disabilities, and

English language learners for example can get closer to closing the achievement gap between these students and their higher performing peers.

Implication: **Share power with the people.**

With so much that usually happens in large organizations, it is easy to overlook employees who are not in positions of formal authority. Organizational equity and racial equity do not function well if they are solely top-down initiatives. Home grown diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives can be empowering for those without formal authority and also help many employees find true meaning in their work. When employees feel valued, they are more likely to stay. That said, employee retention also improves as a result.

Bureaucratic organizations can unknowingly reproduce structures of inequity by refusing to distribute power to women, people of color, and individuals whose sexual orientation are not representative of the majority in the workplace. SEAs and large educational organizations can begin by examining their own practices and asking questions like,

*What equity challenges are we reproducing? What do we need to stop doing as an organization? What do we need to start doing?*

## **In Conclusion**

“I’m pleased to see our national standing but we need to consider areas where we may have plateaued...Standing still will not help all of our students be prepared for opportunities after high school.”

-Jeffrey Riley, Commissioner (Framingham Source, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

Achievement gaps in education correlate largely with race, disability, English language learner classification, and socio-economic status (Cepa.stanford.edu, 2018). While 20 years of education reform has produced some measurable gains, the need for a sustained collaborative effort to support public schools is long overdue. By 2017, there were approximately 50 turnaround schools in Massachusetts. As a result of recent changes in DESE’s accountability system, the number of turnaround schools has tripled (Massachusetts Comprehensive Data File, 2018) while the amount of funding available to schools has decreased and the number of support staff has remained relatively the same. The Commonwealth is at a critical juncture that includes fresher efforts at school transformation, a whole-child approach to accountability, heightened responsiveness to individual student needs, and building the essential teacher/leader capabilities needed to tackle the most pressing challenges in education.

Today, DESE is at a critical juncture in its history. Longstanding systemic challenges cannot be undone by focusing on technical solutions to adaptive equity-based challenges. Inequality in education, built on disadvantaging individuals and groups because of their race, gender, language, and disability, will require more of us than we have ever given. We have years and years of research in turnaround schooling, leadership, and interventions to know there does not exist one set of strategies that will work equally well for all historically marginalized children and their families. Still, what is there to prevent us from building upon what you have already started in Massachusetts and relying more heavily on an even stronger equity evidence-base to get ahead of education’s common ills and equipping ourselves to

confront them? Nothing. There is absolutely nothing to prevent it. Many state education agency efforts have fallen short of increasing the levels of achievement, learning, and opportunities especially for those against whom the decks are woefully stacked. The good thing is that there are schools in Massachusetts who are proving that it can be done, that demography is not destiny where educational equity is prioritized. If we are to study anything, let us study this: equity. Then we will truly see the meaningful difference it can make in the lives of those who have continually been overlooked and for whom most efforts have failed.

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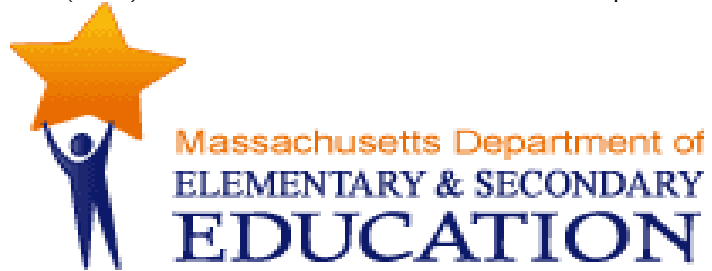
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Appendices

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**Appendix A:** Revised (2018) Massachusetts Turnaround Plan Template



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**Turnaround Plan Template COVER PAGE**

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**District:**  
**School:**  
**Date:**

### **Section I: Executive Summary**

The Executive Summary should summarize the essence of the turnaround plan in a way the average stakeholder would understand. (1-2 pages)

### **Section II: Stakeholder Engagement**

Briefly describe the district and school's process for receiving input from stakeholders throughout all stages of the turnaround process. (1-2 pages)

### **Section III: Envision the Future**

Briefly describe the 3-5 year vision for the school as a result of the turnaround process. (1 page)

### **Section IV: Analysis of Assets and Challenges**

Describe the key assets to build upon, and challenges that need to be addressed, that were identified as a result of a thorough root cause analysis. (2-3 pages)

### **Section V: Strategic Objectives & Initiatives Aligned to Turnaround Practices**

Describe the key strategies the school will implement, the rationale for selecting those strategies, and the plan to support them. If a strategy falls under multiple turnaround practices, list the strategy once, then reference it in subsequent practices. (Use as a general rule: 2-3 strategies, described in up to 3 pages per turnaround practice. Total page length for Section V is approximately 8-12 pages.)

#### **Turnaround Practice #1: Leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration**

The school has established a community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility for all students, and professional collaboration.

#### **Turnaround Practice #2: Intentional practices for improving instruction**

The school employs intentional practices for improving teacher-specific and student-responsive instruction.

#### **Turnaround Practice #3: Student-specific supports and instruction to all students**

The school is able to provide student-specific supports and interventions informed by data and the identification of student-specific needs.

#### **Turnaround Practice #4: School Culture and Climate**

A safe, orderly, and respectful environment for students and a collegial and collaborative culture among teachers.

### **Section VI: District Systems**

Districts describe changes in policies/autonomies, systems to support school-level turnaround plans, and a three-year financial plan for the school, including an analysis of resource inequities. (2-3 pages)

## Changes in Policy and Strategies to Consider under State Law

Districts are required to consider the following changes to policy and strategies for any school designated Underperforming, and are granted statutory flexibilities to enhance their efforts to address them. However all schools, even those without this designation, can benefit from considering these changes. Check all that apply and attach a copy of the revised collective bargaining agreement, Joint Resolution Committee decision, or Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement.

### Curriculum and Instruction

- Expand, alter, or replace curriculum:** The Superintendent may expand, alter or replace the curriculum and program offerings of the school, including the implementation of research based early literacy programs, early interventions for struggling readers and the teaching of advanced placement courses or other rigorous nationally or internationally recognized courses, if the school does not already have such programs or courses
  - Expand use of time:** The Superintendent may expand the school day or school year or both of the school
- Add Kindergarten or pre-Kindergarten:** The Superintendent may, for an elementary school, add prekindergarten and full day kindergarten classes, if the school does not already have such classes

### Financial and Asset Management

- Reallocate school budget:** The Superintendent may reallocate the uses of the existing budget of the school
- Reallocated district budget:** The Superintendent may provide additional funds to the school from the budget of the district, if the school does not already receive funding from the district at least equal to the average per pupil funding received for students of the same classification and grade level in the district. (If the school receives funding at least equal to the average per pupil funding, with the approval of the School Committee, the Superintendent can direct additional funds to the school.)

### Human Resources

- Attract and retain leaders and teachers:** The Superintendent may provide funds, subject to appropriation and following consultation with applicable local unions, to increase the salary of any administrator, or teacher in the school, to attract or retain highly qualified administrators, or teachers or to reward administrators, or teachers who work in underperforming schools that achieve the annual goals set forth in the turnaround plan

- **Make staffing changes:** The Superintendent may, following consultation with applicable local unions, require the principal and all administrators, teachers and staff to reapply for their positions in the school, with full discretion vested in the superintendent regarding his consideration of and decisions on rehiring based on the reapplications
- **Implement new systems:** The Superintendent may establish steps to assure a continuum of high expertise teachers by aligning the following processes with a common core of professional knowledge and skill: hiring, induction, teacher evaluation, professional development, teacher advancement, school culture and organizational structure
- **Leadership development:** The Superintendent may establish a plan for professional development for administrators at the school, with an emphasis on strategies that develop leadership skills and use the principles of distributive leadership

#### **Professional Development and Collaboration**

- **Embedded professional development:** The Superintendent may include a provision of job embedded professional development for teachers at the school, with an emphasis on strategies that involve teacher input and feedback
- **Expanded teacher planning time:** The Superintendent may provide for increased opportunities for teacher planning time and collaboration focused on improving student instruction

#### **Leadership and Governance**

- **Change Collective Bargaining and Policies:** The Superintendent may limit, suspend or change 1 or more provisions of any contract or collective bargaining agreement, as the contract or agreement applies to the school; provided, that the superintendent shall not reduce the compensation of an administrator, teacher or staff member unless the hours of the person are proportionately reduced
- **Change District Policies:** The Superintendent may limit, suspend or change 1 or more school district policies or practices, as such policies or practices relate to the school

#### **Additional Strategies**

- **Study best practices:** The Superintendent may develop a strategy to search for and study best practices in areas of demonstrated deficiency in the school
- **Address mobility and transiency:** The Superintendent may establish strategies to address mobility and transiency among the student population of the school
  - **Additional strategies:** The Superintendent may include additional components based on the reasons why the school was designated as underperforming and the recommendations of the local stakeholder group

## Section VII: Goals, Benchmarks, and Progress Monitoring

Describe the process the school and district will use to monitor the impact of the strategies as articulated in the benchmarks.

*Use the tables below to articulate the goals and benchmarks.*

### **Turnaround Practice #1: Leadership, shared responsibility & professional collaboration**

The school has established a community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility for all students and professional collaboration.

<b>Measurable Annual Goals (MAGs) for Student Achievement</b>	We will meet or exceed accountability targets as set by DESE for all students and the lowest performing students group.
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Teachers/Practitioners</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Students</b>	1. 2. 3.



**Turnaround Practice #2: Intentional practices for improving instruction**

The school employs intentional practices for improving teacher-specific and student-responsive instruction.

<b>Measurable Annual Goals (MAGs) for Student Achievement</b>	We will meet or exceed accountability targets as set by DESE for all students and the lowest performing students group.
<b>Other MAGs</b> 3 required by statute: 1. Student acquisition of twenty-first century skills 2. Development of college readiness 3. Developmentally appropriate child assessments from pre-kindergarten through third grade, if applicable	1. 2. 3.
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Teachers/Practitioners</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Students</b>	1. 2. 3.

**Turnaround Practice #3: Student-specific supports and instruction to all students**  
 The school is able to provide student-specific supports and interventions informed by data and the identification of student-specific needs.

<b>MAGs for Student Achievement</b>	We will meet or exceed accountability targets as set by DESE for all students and the lowest performing students group.
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Teachers/Practitioners</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>Interim Benchmarks for Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>

**Turnaround Practice #4: School Culture and Climate**

A safe, orderly, and respectful environment for students and a collegial and collaborative culture among teachers.

<p><b>MAGs for Student Achievement</b></p>	<p>We will meet or exceed accountability targets as set by DESE for all students and the lowest performing students group.</p>
<p><b>Other MAGs</b>  <u>7 required by statute:</u>          1. Parent and family engagement          2. Building a culture of academic success among students          3. Building a culture of student support and success among school faculty and staff          4. Student attendance, dismissal rates, and exclusion rates (a measure is needed for each of these three items)          5. Student safety and discipline          6. Student promotion and dropout rates          7. Graduation rates (high schools only)</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.</p>
<p><b>Interim Benchmarks for Teachers/Practitioners</b></p>	<p>1. 2. 3.</p>
<p><b>Interim Benchmarks for Students</b></p>	<p>1. 2. 3.</p>

## Guiding Questions Aligned to the Turnaround Practices

The following **guiding questions** are designed to help foster a discussion among all stakeholders to reflect on current school practices in order to identify assets to build on and core issues of concern that need to be addressed relative to the four Turnaround Practices. These questions can be used during the initial Assessment of Assets and Challenges to help a school or district identify areas to address in the school's turnaround plan. In addition, these questions can provide a helpful frame to reflect on a turnaround plan before it is finalized, in order to ensure the plan is as strong as possible.

These questions do not need to be answered directly in the turnaround plan narrative; they are intended to prompt reflection on and analysis of the school's strengths and needs and put the school in a position to identify the highest leverage strategies to improve outcomes for students. Districts and schools should refer to the SRG Scoring Rubric, MSV or TSV rubrics, and exemplars of best practice highlighted in the [turnaround practices resources](#) when addressing any of these areas in the school's turnaround plan. References are made to these resources in parentheses throughout.

### Guiding Questions: Turnaround Practice 1

#### Leadership and the Use of Autonomy

- What turnaround leadership competencies and experiences do the principal and/or leadership team have? Is it sufficient to lead a successful school turnaround effort? (*Rubric Item 4, Grant Requirement 1*) (*This includes demonstrated results improving outcomes for English learners, students with disabilities, students in poverty, students who have experienced trauma, and other historically marginalized groups*)
- What type of autonomies does the principal have to set and administer the school schedule, calendar, curriculum, assessments, and professional development? (*Rubric Item 10, Grant Requirement 7*)
- To what extent does the principal have the staffing autonomy needed to effectively implement the turnaround plan? Does it include the ability to adjust “bidding and bumping” language to insulate staff selected to work at the school? Does the principal have the greatest amount of flexibility when hiring new staff? (*Rubric item 4, Grant Requirements 3, 4, and 5*)
- In what ways do school leaders (principal and other administrators) use their autonomies to focus work on implementing the school improvement plan to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the school? (MSV/TSV)
- What competencies and experiences do the instructional staff have? Are these sufficiently widespread (i.e., widespread enough to undergird a successful school turnaround effort)? (*Rubric Item 5*)
- To what extent are the most capable instructional staff in the appropriate positions to do the urgent turnaround work? (*Rubric Item 5*)
- Are robust recruitment and retention activities in place to ensure the right instructional staff are in the right positions to rapidly advance student achievement at the school? (*Rubric Item 5, Grant Requirement 4*)
- What strategic hiring and assignment practices are used to place English learners and students with disabilities in classrooms led by teachers who are certified and skilled at teaching these populations? (EL/SWD report) How effective are these strategies?

- In what ways do leaders in the school use autonomies to engage staff in uncommon professional learning experiences (i.e. implicit bias training, cultural responsiveness, restorative practices)?

### **High Expectations and Positive Regard**

- In what ways do school leaders demonstrate the importance of high expectations and positive regard between leadership, staff, and students and implement strategies or activities to ensure that these elements are in fact in place? (MSV/TSV)
- What proportion of staff believe leadership, the school staff, and students have high expectations and demonstrate positive regard? (*Rubric Item 18*)
- What strategies does the school use to ensure that every student has equitable access to the highest quality educational experiences?
- What evidence do you have that the school provides access to challenging, rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students? To what extent do students say they are being appropriately challenged? (*Grant Requirement 10*)
- What steps has school leadership taken to ensure the implementation of culturally responsive practices in the school? (*Grant Requirement 10*)
- In what ways does the school welcome and support students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences?
- For middle and high schools: in what ways do staff demonstrate high expectations for students in the areas of academics, personal-social and workplace readiness? (new) To what extent are high expectations held for every student in the school?

### **Vision/Theory of Action and Buy-in**

- In what ways does the school's current improvement plan focus explicitly on instructional practice and accelerated student outcomes? (*Rubric Item 16*)
- To what extent Is there a common understanding/vision of what instruction should look like in order to accelerate student learning? Do the majority of staff buy in to the school's vision? (*Rubric Item 16*)
- To what extent do staff share a common sense of urgency and ownership for the success of all students. What evidence supports this?
- What proportion of staff is familiar with the goals and benchmarks used to consistently monitor progress and identify and prioritize the next level of work? How often are these goals and benchmarks reviewed (e.g. monthly)?
- Are staff included in committees and decision making in ways that effectively ensure widespread buy-in and provide the opportunity for important feedback? (HS report)
- In what ways are students provided with structured, and regular opportunities to inform and reflect on the impact of school improvement efforts? (new)

### **Monitoring Implementation and School Progress**

- What processes do school leaders use to actively engage in monitoring implementation and outcomes of improvement efforts? Are these processes ad hoc, or do school leaders continuously and systematically monitor overall progress?
- In what ways is information from monitoring used to prioritize initiatives and strategies, communicate progress and challenges, and seek input from staff?
- Have school leaders create clear instructional expectations for staff? In what ways and how consistently are they communicated to staff? What is the process for

monitoring that these expectations are understood and acted upon appropriately by all staff? (*Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 23*)

- What mechanism(s) do the school and district instructional leaders use to regularly analyze evidence of instructional practice along with student achievement, professional development (PD), and other data? What mechanisms are there for making any necessary mid-course adjustments? (*Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 6*)

### **Trusting Relationships**

- To what extent do staff members share a relational, trust-focused culture with each other and their instructional supports (e.g., coaches)?
- In what ways is the school's culture solution-oriented and focused on improvement as exemplified by frequent collaboration in developing standards-based units, examining student work, analyzing student performance, and planning appropriate interventions? (*Rubric Item 11*)
- What mechanisms are there for educators to regularly share their strengths and struggles with each other, in the spirit of helping each other continually improve their practice?

### **Use of Time for Professional Development and Collaboration**

- To what extent does the school incorporate PD as an integral part of daily routines (e.g., through coaching, staff meetings, and/or collaborative time)?
- How well does the amount of time dedicated to PD meet the needs of the school staff? (*Rubric Item 10, Rubric Item 6, Rubric Item 11*)
- How much time does the schedule allow for staff to plan and collaborate on lesson plans, including with special education and ESL instructors and interventionists? (HS report, EL/SWD report)
- To what extent are special populations personnel regarded as fully integrated members of the school faculty? Are special populations personnel (such as special education and ESL teachers) members of grade level/department teams? (*Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item 17*)
- How often do general education and special populations teachers plan together? (*Rubric Item 11, Rubric Item 17*)
- What systems and protocols are used to guide collaborative discussions in Instructional Leadership Teams, Common Planning Time/Teams, Grade Level Teams, Vertical/Content Teams, or other ad hoc teams and committees? How does school and district leadership ensure that these meeting times are maximized to accelerate teaching and learning? (*Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item 11*)
- What access do teachers have to instructional coaching that provides them with guidance and feedback on how they can improve their instruction overall? For improving instructional strategies to better support English learners and students with disabilities? (EL/SWD report)
- What formal and informal learning opportunities focusing on concrete instructional strategies for English learners and students with disabilities do all teachers receive?(EL/SWD report)
- How does the school identify professional development needs for the school as a whole and for individual teachers? Is the process systemic or *ad hoc*? What steps does the school consistently take to measure the implementation and effectiveness of whole school and individual teacher professional development? What actions does

the school consistently take to revisit and reinforce professional development to reinforce previous learning and dive deeper into content? (HS report) *(Rubric Item 6, Grant Requirement 9)*

- Is professional development differentiated for teachers' needs as identified in their evaluation practice goals? *(Rubric Item 6, Grant Requirement 9)*
- What opportunities do teachers have to observe and learn from each other's practice? *(Rubric Item 11)*
- What steps does the school take to capitalize on the knowledge of existing staff by having them conduct whole-staff trainings or work with small groups of staff or teachers? (HS report)
- Is there a process in place for evaluating the schedule based on collected data to maximize opportunities for teacher professional development and ensure it helps all educators continually improve their practice (e.g. through targeted coaching, peer observations and collaboration time)?
- In what ways and how effectively does school leadership implement rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation and support systems for teachers and principal(s) that provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development in accordance with the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Frameworks requirements? *(Rubric Item 6, Grant Requirement 2)*

#### **Communication with Staff**

- What structures are in place to facilitate two-way communication across staff and school teams? Between administrators and staff?
- To what extent do staff view the communications shared through these structures as being open. Transparent and meaningful? *(Rubric Item 11, Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item 6)*
- In what ways do each school team foster staff input that influences school-wide decision-making? *(Rubric Item 9)*
- What strategies does the school use to ensure that the work of multiple teams is coherently integrated across the school? How effectively are these current strategies ensuring coherence? *(Rubric Item 9)*

#### **Sustainability**

- What strategies do school leaders currently implement to ensure that improvement efforts will be sustained over time or under new leadership? (e.g., succession plan, distributed leadership, new funding streams) *(Rubric Item 11, Rubric Item 24)*
- When the school works with external partners, what steps do school and district leader take to rigorously recruit, screen and select external partners to work with the school? Once selected, what steps are taken to hold external partners accountable for meeting agreed-upon implementation and performance benchmarks? *(Rubric Item 7, Grant Requirement 13)*

## Guiding Questions: Turnaround Practice 2

### Instructional Expectations

- What messages about expectations for high-quality instruction are communicated to staff? How specific and precise are those expectations? How well are they understood by most staff? (*Rubric Item 11*)
- What process do school leaders use to consistently monitor classrooms to observe whether these expectations are evident and provide feedback to teachers? (*Rubric Item 6, Rubric Item 23*)
- To what extent are these expectations consistently implemented by most teachers? (*Rubric Item 11, Rubric Item 16*)
- What does culturally responsive education look like in this school? To what extent do students have access to culturally responsive curriculum and teaching that includes references to their cultures in all aspects of their learning? (*Rubric Item 18, Grant Requirement 10*)
- How well are the curriculum maps/pacing guides used by instructional staff aligned to the state curriculum frameworks? (*Rubric Item 16*)
- To what extent is the taught curriculum the intended curriculum? (*Rubric Item 16*)
- To what extent is there a common understanding of what mastery looks like? What processes are in place for staff to align assessments and evaluate student work based on this common understanding? (*Rubric Item 16*)

### Lesson Planning and Preparation: (*Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 17*)

- What expectations for lesson planning are articulated by school leadership?
  - Are these expectations consistent across grade levels? How are they monitored?
- To what extent:
  - Are lesson plans based on curriculum maps/curricular guidance?
  - Do lesson plans reflect a common understanding of high expectations for all students?
  - Do lesson plans delineate in-class differentiation of core instruction to meet student needs?
  - Are lesson plans developmentally appropriate?
  - Do lesson plans engage students with content and address academic and social/emotional needs?
  - Do lesson plans promote higher-order critical thinking?
  - Do lesson plans designed for EL students consider their language proficiency levels?
  - Do lesson plans explicitly address students with disabilities and consider their IEP goals, modifications, and accommodations?
  - Do lesson plans address achievement gaps for low-income students?

### Instructional Schedule

- To what extent does the school schedule provide adequate time for core instruction and, as needed, additional academic and/or behavioral supports?



- What kind of flexibility and fluidity are built into the schedule so that necessary adjustments can be made based on formative data and feedback?
- What opportunities do staff have to collaborate/provide input into the schedule to ensure coordination and alignment across grade levels and content areas? Is there enough time built in to the schedule for ESL as needed for English learners? (*Grant Requirement 7, Grant Requirement 8, Rubric Item 10, Extra Credit Item 1*)
- To what extent does the schedule ensure that instructional support staff are coordinated and aligned across grade levels and content areas to provide students with differentiated access to high-quality core instruction?
- Is there an effective process in place for evaluating and adjusting the schedule based on collected data related to the quality of instruction and student needs across grade levels and content areas?
- *Additional question for secondary schools:* How easily can students access work-based learning or the pathway of their choice within the existing schedule?

### **Identifying and Addressing Student Academic Needs**

- What kind of training and support in identifying and addressing student academic needs have teacher teams had in the following areas:
  - Teaming collaboration strategies, processes, and protocols;
  - Effective data use;
  - Identifying action steps to address student needs
- To what extent are school teams consistently implementing teaming strategies and practices to address student needs? How are teams monitored and supported? (*Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item*)
- What processes are in place for communicating action steps among all staff and teams? To what extent are these processes helping the school to build and sustain a culture of learning?
- Is there a formal process for teachers to quickly and easily flag students whom they notice are struggling (e.g. online forms, frequently scheduled meetings)?

### **Classroom Observation Data Use**

- Is there a system of weekly/daily classroom observations that focus on strengthening teachers' instructional practices? (*Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 6, Grant Requirement 2*)  
To what extent do:
  - observers provide specific and actionable feedback on instruction?
  - the observational data inform instructional conversations and the provision of targeted and individualized supports/resources for teachers, as needed?
- In what ways do leaders regularly gather evidence on instructional practice (e.g., classroom observations, looking at student work, looking at student assessments)? How does this information help inform PD planning? (*Rubric Item 6, Grant Requirement 9*)
- How often do teachers receive formative feedback on instructional practice? How is it delivered, and by whom? What follow through measures are taken to ensure feedback results in improvement? (*Rubric Item 6*)

- To what extent are the feedback process and substance of the feedback delivered professionally valued by teachers? To what extent does it promote a school-wide mindset to collectively improve adult practice? (*Rubric Item 6*)

### **Student Assessment Data Use (for schoolwide decision making)**

- In what ways do teachers and other school staff use student results on benchmark assessments, common assessments, and state assessments to make decisions regarding schoolwide practices? How consistently is this done? (*Rubric Item 6, Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 23*)
- How do district and school level progress-monitoring systems function? How do data from this system drive instructional decisions in core instruction and throughout the tiered process? (*Rubric Item 22, Rubric Item 23*)
- What process do leaders and instructional staff use to monitor the effectiveness of the core curriculum/instruction? (*Rubric Item 6, Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 23*)

### **Student Assessment Data Use (for classroom instruction)**

- What types of assessment data do teachers use to determine progress in student learning outcomes?
- In what ways do teachers use data to determine appropriate action steps and monitor the results of those actions?
- What proportion of staff consistently use student assessment data in these ways?
- How often do teachers collaboratively reflect upon student data across content and grade levels to identify student needs and necessary support?
- Do teachers have protected time in their schedules to regularly review student data across content and grade levels to identify student needs and necessary supports?

### **Structures for Instructional Improvement**

- Does the school consistently implement structures, practices, and use of resources to support data-driven instruction, the use of research-based instructional strategies, and differentiation?
- Do these structures result in rigorous instruction, reflective of the shifts in cognitive demand for the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks?
- Does instruction meet the needs of each student?
- *Additional question for secondary schools:* To what extent are students actively involved in choosing their courses and activities within their classrooms?

### **Career Development Education/Contextual Learning (new)**

- What programs and practices are in place to prepare and promote college and career readiness (e.g. career-focused curricula, career and technical education courses or programs, career-themed small learning communities, and dual enrollment)? (EDIT when MSV is final)

### **Systems for Postsecondary Planning and Workplace Readiness (new)**

- Is at least one staff member dedicated to working with students to determine postsecondary plans? (EDIT when MSV is final)
- What kinds of supports do students receive throughout the college and employment application process? To what extent do these supports reflect best-practice? Does the school leverage community organizations to support this process? (HS report)

### Guiding Questions: Turnaround Practice 3

#### General Academic Context

- Do all students receive Tier I instruction and have access to universally designed academic, behavioral, and social emotional curriculum and instruction that integrates culturally responsive pedagogy that is linguistically appropriate?
- Is academic instruction engaging and personalized to allow all students to access grade-level standards in all content areas?
- Do all students have time to engage in rigorous academic work in their regular schedule? Are academic interventions implemented systematically during regularly scheduled school time and for all core content areas through a robust tiered system of support?
- *Additional question for secondary:* Do interventions support students in all grades beyond preparation for MCAS and graduation?
- Are students experiencing research-based academic interventions appropriate for their specific needs? (*Grant Requirement 11, Rubric Item 17*)
- What kind of in-class support options are provided for students with special needs (e.g., co-teaching, support facilitation, and the use of peers)? (*Rubric Item 17*)
- Do service personnel such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech pathologists provide services within the general education classroom when appropriate? (*Rubric Item 17*)
- In what ways do students receive specific feedback based on formative assessments/student work to continue to close gaps and reach grade level standards? (*Rubric Item 17*)
- How fluid is the tiered system of support? What processes are used to adjust intervention, enrichment, and support assignments throughout the school year, based on student progress and need? (*Rubric Item 17*)
- What kinds of resources that support a range of academic needs do staff have access to? How well utilized are these resources? (*Rubric Item 17*)

#### Teacher Training to Identify Student Needs (Academic and Nonacademic)

- In what ways are school staff trained and supported to ensure that they: (1) identify cues when students need additional assistance (both academic and nonacademic) and (2) respond appropriately to those cues? (*Rubric Item 17, Rubric Item 18*)
- How is instructional staff supported in identifying issues arising in the lives of students (e.g., poverty, mobility, etc.) and in working to address issues in order to minimize impact on learning? (*Rubric Item 17*)
- How do district staff and systems support and provide students with necessary assistance? (*Rubric Item 2*)

### **Determining Schoolwide Student Supports (Academic Interventions and Enrichment)**

- Is student learning and academic performance reviewed regularly throughout the school year, using a wide array of ongoing assessments to identify student-specific and schoolwide emerging needs? Who, or what team is responsible reviewing these data and developing and implementing strategies to address emerging needs? (*Rubric Item 17, Rubric Item 9, Rubric Item 16, Rubric Item 23*)
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Student Support Team?
  - Are instructional staff included on Student Support Teams along with guidance and mental health staff?
- In practice, is it functioning in the way it is intended? To what extent do all stakeholders understand this team's purpose and protocols? Do they know how to access the Student Support Team? (*Rubric Item 9*)
- What procedures are in place for Student Support Teams to follow up with referring teachers regarding supports provided to their students? Are teachers involved in discussions to determine whether the supports have been successful? (HS report)
- What processes and procedures does the school have for rapidly identifying and responding to the various needs of students in the school?

### **Implementing a Multi-tiered System of Supports for Student Intervention (Academic, Behavior, and Social Emotional)**

- What does the multi-tiered system of support look like in this school? To what extent does it meet the following conditions?
  - (1) staff members follow consistent rules and procedures when identifying students in need of additional assistance;
  - 2) a specific set of criteria and protocols are consistently used to identify students for interventions and enrichment;
  - (2) a team of appropriate staff and stakeholders makes decisions about needed interventions and supports; and
  - (3) staff members follow consistent rules and procedures when monitoring the delivery and effectiveness of interventions and supports.  
(*Rubric Item 17*)
- Do teachers regularly review a range of data sources, including discipline and social-emotional data in addition to academic performance and attendance data?
- When a student is referred based on one particular difficulty he or she is experiencing, is additional information routinely gathered to determine if the student is facing other challenges that may need to be addressed?

### **Academic Supports and Services for English Learners**

- To what extent are all English language learners experiencing research-based academic supports and services appropriate for their specific needs? (*Grant Requirement 11, Rubric Item 17*)

### **Academic Supports and Services for Students With Disabilities**

- To what extent are all students with disabilities experiencing research-based academic supports and services appropriate for their specific needs? (*Grant Requirement 11, Rubric Item 17*)

### **Planning for Incoming Students (new - update once secondary rubric is final)**

- What programs and practices are in place to support the transition to secondary school (e.g., summer bridge program, freshman academy, peer mentoring, and 4-year graduation plans)?
- Are leaders and teachers expected to actively review early warning indicator data (including performance, attendance, English language proficiency benchmarks, and discipline data) for all incoming students (both at the start of the school year and students entering mid-year)?
- What are the criteria and protocols for using early warning indicator data to identify needs and assign appropriate supports to get and keep students on track?
- In what ways do teachers plan their instruction and coursework to align with identified student needs?

### **Guiding Questions: Turnaround Practice 4**

#### **Safe and Supportive Learning Environments**

- In what ways do school staff model, promote, and practice behaviors that nurture respect, positive relationship building, and self-awareness?
- Do students participate in the development of behavioral expectations?
- Are there opportunities to reflect on and productively resolve issues that arise, to provide students with learning opportunities in addition to providing consequences? Are consequences non-exclusionary?
- To what extent do staff members respond to student behaviors consistently throughout the campus and school year?
- How is the school climate monitored through the lens of behavior or discipline data (at least twice annually)?
- How is time set aside and used both at the start of the year and periodically throughout the year to review schoolwide expectations with students?
- To what extent do schoolwide expectations focus on cultivating positive student characteristics?
- When counterproductive behaviors occur, are systems in place for staff to engage in conversations with students to get at the root of the behavior?
- How is discipline data examined for variations to identify teachers who have strong classroom management skills and can serve as exemplars for colleagues, as well as those who may need support?
- Is there a common understanding/vision of what a safe and supportive culture and climate should look like in this school? How is this vision embraced by all staff and students? (*Rubric Item 18*)
- What structure/systems/processes are in place to ensure that all classrooms create predictable environments and a climate that supports learning? (*Rubric Item 18*)
- Does the schoolwide behavior plan include a defined set of behavioral expectations? Are the systems and set of structures for positive behavioral supports aligned to those expectations? Do most (if not all) staff members consistently implement the

procedures outlined in the schoolwide behavior plan? Do leaders monitor implementation using data? (*Rubric Item 18, Grant Requirement 12*)

- What systems and practices are in place to encourage and support students to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior? (*Rubric Item 18*)

### **Adult-Student Relationships**

- What structures are in place (e.g., structured advisories, mentor programs) in place to support relationships among students and adults and deliver social-emotional supports?
- How are adult-student relationships developed and supported through culturally responsive classroom management?
- How are these supports monitored actively to determine whether they are meeting the needs of the school? (*Rubric Item 17, Rubric Item 18*)

### **Expanded Learning**

- What kinds of expanded learning opportunities, that are well defined and well supported, are available to students? Do all students have access to them?
- How are data analyzed and expanded learning opportunities developed to support high-need students?
- How are external partnerships used strategically to provide expanded learning opportunities to students?
- How are in-school and after-school instructional programs used to provide remediation and enrichment to students?
- What highly effective strategies are used to immediately and effectively improve student graduation rates, dropout rates and credit recovery for secondary students?
- Are students culture, race, ethnicity or personal interests considered and infused throughout expanded learning opportunities?

### **Wraparound Services and External Partners**

- What kind of wraparound services (e.g., health, housing referrals) and connections to external partners supporting these types of services are available through the school?
- Do leaders and staff share individual and mutual responsibility for building the capacity of families to support education through a systemic system of wraparound services?
- In what ways do leaders and staff assess the needs of students and families throughout the school year? (*Rubric Item 19*)
- Do all staff know whom to contact when a student needs wraparound supports?

### **Family and Community Engagement**

- What steps does this school take to ensure that all parents feel welcome at the school in a way that honors their linguistic, cultural, and racial identity? (*Grant Requirement 10*)
- Are families treated as an asset to the school and their child's learning?
- What regular activities are planned throughout the year to engage families and community members in planning for and collaborating in the implementation of academic and nonacademic supports?

- What communication system is in place among staff, families, and community partners that ensures coordination of services in support of learning? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 10, Grant Requirement 14)*
- To what extent are families involved in school life and the academic achievement of their students? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 10, Grant Requirement 14)*
- Are there interpretation and/or translation services available for families whose primary language is not English?
- Is there a Parent Advisory Committee focused on English Learners, if applicable to the school context? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 10, Grant Requirement 14)*
- Is there one or more staff members dedicated to the coordination of family and community engagement activities? Are regular events planned throughout the year to engage families and community members? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 14)*
- In what ways do staff members routinely reach out to families to communicate information about their children’s progress and needs? Are these routine or ad hoc communications?
- Are communications with families made available in multiple languages, as needed? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 10, Grant Requirement 14)*
- Which key stakeholders (e.g., parents, community members) engaged in the development of the school’s turnaround plan? Are they actively involved in the ongoing improvement efforts of the school? *(Rubric Item 19, Grant Requirement 14)*
- What steps does the school take to address the social service and health needs of students and families?
- Does the school need to take steps to improve or expand child welfare services, or as appropriate, law enforcement services in the school community to ensure a safe and secure learning environment? *(Rubric Item 18, Rubric Item 19)*
- If applicable to the school’s context, what types of workforce development services (meaningful employment skills and opportunities) provided to students at the school and to their families? *(Rubric Item 18, Rubric Item 19)*

**Guiding Questions - Cross-Cutting Themes**  
**(as described in the Turnaround Practices Field Guide)**

**Cross-Cutting Theme #1**

**Turnaround leaders who have a sense of urgency, expertise, and relational leadership skills.**

- **Urgency:** Does the principal and leadership team have a strong sense of urgency to change the lives of students in the school? To what extent are they willing to ‘do whatever it takes’ to improve? Does the principal have a mantra of high expectations and no excuses, and is this communicated clearly and consistently to staff?
- Do all staff demonstrate that they believe that they can directly impact their students achievement regardless of the students’ circumstances?
- **Expertise:** Do the principal and leadership team set a few key non-negotiables and expectations for instructional practices and student behavior?

- **Relational:** Does the principal build an organization where leaders and teachers share ownership of students and are empowered to learn from one another as colleagues?

### **Guiding Questions: Cross-Cutting Theme #2**

**An improvement mind-set that permeates all school behaviors, decisions, discourse, and actions.**

- Does the school have an ‘improvement mindset’ and a culture in which leaders and teachers work closely with one another to actively identify and address specific problems of practice?
- Does the school have a system of high-functioning teaming structures and communication channels that accelerate the ability to diagnose a problem; develop, implement, and test new practices; and then share and spread practices that work?

### **Guiding Questions: Cross-Cutting Theme #3**

**Highly consistent, aligned, and rigorous instructional practices.**

- Does the school have tightly aligned and consistent curricula, expectations instructional strategies and assessment tools?
- Are teachers working together to develop vertically and horizontally aligned instruction and strategies? For example, do teachers develop common units and lesson plans? Do teachers use similar prompts, note-taking techniques, and common strategies to help students access content?
- Is the school an effective learning environment for adults, with the infrastructure and know-how to quickly and effectively implement proven instructional and organizational improvements?
- How deeply have teachers analyzed curriculum standards? How well do they know precisely what students need to know and be able to do from one grade level to the next? Do teachers intentionally use standards-aligned key words, phrases, and essential questions to support students? Are these used within and across grades?
- Do students know exactly what to expect in each class, and can they employ the same tools to access and apply information?
- Do teachers have autonomy and ownership over the development of lessons, routines, and strategies?
- Are grade-level and team-developed strategies implemented across the school after testing, reflection, and evidence demonstrates that they have impact, so effective strategies can be scaled across the entire school?



Appendix B: Revised Exit Assurances Application & Exit Decisions for Underperforming Schools

**UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS (FOMERLY LEVEL 4) EXIT ASSURANCES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY APPLICATION**

<b>District Name:</b>		<b>LEA Code:</b>	
<b>School Name:</b>		<b>School Code:</b>	

The following application has been developed consistent with M.G.L. Chapter 69, Section 1J and 603 CMR 2.00 for districts to complete on behalf of Underperforming schools eligible to “exit” out of underperforming status. Section 1J (y) provides that ESE’s regulations should include: “provisions to allow a school to retain measures adopted in a turnaround plan for a transitional period if, in the judgment of the commissioner, the measures would contribute to the continued improvement of the school.” 603 CMR 2.05 sets out the process by which a superintendent may propose and the commissioner may allow one or more features of the turnaround plan to continue. **Please note that one application must be submitted for each Underperforming school that has qualified to exit out of underperforming status.**

**Upon completion of this application, please email an electronic copy to [mseymour@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mseymour@doe.mass.edu)**

State regulations require that this application and any supporting documents be provided to members of the school committee for the applying district as well as the local teachers’ union president, and school’s parent organization upon submission to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

**CONTINUED FLEXIBILITIES**

- 1. Briefly describe the flexibilities and/or authorities (obtained through the Underperforming Schools Status) that have contributed to the school’s improvement.**

<Insert Narrative>

- 2. Describe any flexibilities and/or authorities (obtained through the Underperforming Schools Status) that the school is *not* looking to continue and explain why they are *not* required for sustained improvement.**

<Insert Narrative>

3. Please fill out the following chart, detailing the specific Underperforming Schools flexibilities that the school seeks to continue and the mechanism for sustaining those flexibilities. For those districts seeking continued flexibilities by requesting them from the Commissioner, it is important to note that, for each requested flexibility, the Commissioner has to make a determination, after considering any opposition, that the feature would contribute to the continued improvement of the school and should continue in place.

Flexibility/Authority Category	Brief Description	Requesting Continuation from Commissioner	Innovation School Conversion	Horace Mann Charter	MOA with Local Union	Granted by District	Other Means
Budget Authority							
Staffing Authority							
Increase or Differentiate Salaries							
Expanded Time							
Increased Planning Time, Collaboration and Professional Development							
Authority Over Master Schedule							
Curriculum							
Strategies to Address Mobility and Transiency							
Student Policies							
Other							

**Note regarding continued flexibilities granted by the Commissioner:** In accordance with 603 CMR2.05(11)(c), upon making a determination that such feature or features of the turnaround plan should continue, the Commissioner shall define the progress that the school must make for each continuing feature of the plan to be discontinued.

- 4. Describe the top three components of the school’s turnaround plan that have been critical to its success and will be sustained after the school exits Underperforming status.**

<Insert Narrative>

- 5. Describe the systems of support and monitoring the district will leverage to ensure the school sustains improvement (including who will be monitoring, what they will be looking for, and how often. Also include a description of how the district will respond to monitoring findings to address identified needs or challenges).**

<Insert Narrative>

- 6. For flexibilities that require funding to implement, please describe the relevant costs and how the district will continue to pay for them.**

<Insert Narrative>

## **ASSURANCES**

The LEA must assure that it will—

- (1) Implement continued flexibilities consistent with the “Continued Flexibilities” section above.
- (2) Continue providing targeted support to the exited school to ensure that progress is sustained, effective practices are embedded, and the Conditions for School Effectiveness identified as “Developing” or “Not Present” in the most recent Monitoring Site Visit report become embedded into school practice;
- (3) In the case of an Underperforming School currently in a partnership with an education management organization, develop a formal agreement with the education management organization clearly defining authorities, terms, and responsibilities for the partnership once the school exits Underperforming status or include an explanation of how the school and the district will provide conditions that will lead to the continued improvement of the school without the involvement of the education management organization; and
- (4) Cooperate with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) in ESE’s continued efforts to assess progress in the exited school through site visits and interim benchmark assessment data requests;

<b>Typed Name of Superintendent:</b>	
<b>Signature of Superintendent:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

<b>Typed Name of School Committee Chair:</b>	
<b>Signature of School Committee Chair:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

Additionally, exit decisions are made based upon the following conditions. This information was derived from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) [Level 4 Frequently Asked Questions](#) web page.

**How does a school exit underperforming status?**

Underperforming schools have up to three full school years to implement their turnaround plans and show dramatic, sustainable growth in student achievement. At the end of the turnaround period, DESE reviews evidence on the school's progress and makes exit decisions based on three criteria:

- 1. Student Performance:** Has the school achieved its Measurable Annual Goals for student performance, including student performance for all students in the school, as well for subgroups of students (e.g., English language learners and students with disabilities)?
- 2. Conditions of School Effectiveness:** Is there evidence that conditions are in place at the school level to sustain continuous improvement?
- 3. District Systems of Support:** Is there evidence that the district has put systems in place to support the school going forward to sustain the school's turnaround and make continuous improvements?

**How will DESE assess a school's progress in meeting the exit criteria?**

A deep analysis of student performance on indicators in the state accountability system over at least three years will be conducted on each school eligible for exit consideration. Also, each underperforming school receives monitoring visits by an external evaluator. An outcome of the monitoring visit is a report that provides the district, school, and DESE with information on the progress of the school in implementing the turnaround plan. The reports also provide information for the school to use to refine its turnaround strategies for the coming year. Ultimately, the Commissioner considers a wide array of available data to determine, in his professional judgement, if the three criteria have been met to allow a school to exit underperforming status.

**When a school exits turnaround status, does it retain the authorities that came with turnaround status?**

State accountability law and regulations allow the Commissioner to approve a continuation of the authorities that come with turnaround status. Schools exiting turnaround status receive additional information about the process for requesting the extension of these authorities.

**What if the district and/or school is unsuccessful in meeting turnaround exit criteria?**

If the school has made little or no progress and is unable to meet the three exit criteria outlined above, the Commissioner may designate it as a chronically underperforming school. If the school has made progress but not met all benchmarks, the Commissioner may decide to keep the school in turnaround status for another school year. Schools remain in turnaround status if they have made insufficient gains in student achievement at the conclusion of their turnaround term. DESE recognizes that schools that do not meet turnaround exit criteria may be making progress within their current turnaround experience, and may benefit from additional time in implementation to make dramatic progress. The Commissioner may also determine that a school enter into a partnership with a state-approved turnaround operator to accelerate limited progress.

**Appendix C: [Monitoring Site Visits Continuum](#)**

The link (above) includes information on DESE monitoring site visits (MSVs) and turnaround site visits (TSVs) as well as information on the American Institutes for Research and SchoolWorks partnerships.