MASSACHUSETTS

Overview

In 1993, via a grand (and bipartisan) bargain in which lawmakers supported an increase in education funding in exchange for staunch accountability measures, the Massachusetts legislature passed its Education Reform Act and kicked off almost two decades of accountability provisions in its education system.[59] In addition to establishing an accountability system driven by district intervention and action, the law introduced curriculum standards, linked them to student assessments, and required all high school students to pass those assessments in order to graduate. From the beginning, Massachusetts made it clear that districts—not the state—were to be responsible for improving low-performing schools, but that students were to have a stake in their individual performance as well.

Today, Massachusetts's standards and assessments are the bedrocks of a system regarded as one of the best in the land. The state is well known for setting high bars for its exams and for ensuring that students are held to those lofty expectations. Massachusetts has seen great success as a result: Students in the Bay State routinely score at the top of the heap on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and also outperform many of their international peers—even in high-performing Asian countries—on assessments such as PISA.[60]

Over the last decade, Massachusetts has continued to tweak its accountability system in order to meet shifting federal policy and broaden the system's purview. In 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap into law, considered to be the most significant education legislation in Massachusetts since the 1993 law. Better known as the Achievement Gap Act, this legislation shifts responsibility for the lowest-performing schools onto the shoulders of both the district and the state (instead of relegating it to districts alone). In doing so, the legislation aims to provide those entities with additional tools and support for turning around the lowest-performing schools.

In addition, Massachusetts strengthened educator accountability in the system through June 2011 legislation that overhauled educator evaluation requirements.

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[59] As described by a *New York Times* editorial at the time, the bargain "[cast] a generous supply of crumbs for the pack of special-interest mice scurrying around." Editorial, "New state law is a starting point," *New York Times*, June 20, 1993. For more on the provisions of the Education Reform Act, see the Education Reform Progress Report published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education here: http://www.doe.mass.edu/edreform/edreformreport/erprogrpt597-1.html.

[60] See the National Assessment of Educational Progress at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/; and Eric A. Hanushek, Paul E. Peterson, and Ludger Woessmann, "Teaching Math to the Talented," *Education Next* 11, no.1 (2011): 10-18, http://educationnext.org/teaching-math-to-the-talented/.

Evaluations must now include objective measures of student performance. The state did not, however, tie evaluations to employment decisions or compensation, leaving teacher accountability in the state somewhat shallow.

Below, we map Massachusetts's progress against six key components of strong state accountability systems.

1) Adoption of demanding, clear, and specific standards in all core content areas, and rigorous assessment of those standards

Massachusetts boasts some of the nation's best standards—what the state calls "curriculum frameworks." The state was celebrated for its reading and mathematics standards long before the Common Core in 2010—which is, in fact, why the decision to adopt the Common Core proved so controversial in the state. Massachusetts's U.S. History and science standards are also exemplary.[61]

In addition, Massachusetts prides itself on its high cut scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, which are required for reading and math in third through eighth grades and again in tenth grade; for writing in grades four, seven, and ten; and for science and technology/engineering in grades five, eight, and ten.[62] (Due to budgetary constraints, Massachusetts suspended its history and social science tests in 2009.) To receive a high school diploma, students must "pass the MCAS." This means they must achieve proficiency on the state's tenth-grade reading and math MCAS tests, as well as meet a lower standard of performance on a subject-specific high school science assessment. (See page 72 for a more detailed discussion of the state's high school graduation requirement.)

[61] In reviews by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Massachusetts received an A-minus for its U.S. History standards in 2011 and an A-minus for its science standards in 2012. The Common Core standards for reading and math, which Massachusetts adopted in 2010, earn grades of B-plus and A-minus, respectively. Previously, Massachusetts's state reading and math standards had earned grades of A-minus and B-plus, respectively. See *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011*, *The State of State Science Standards 2012*, and *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*, at www.standards.educationgadfly.net/.

[62] When states' proficiency cut scores are mapped onto the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Massachusetts's cut scores are found to be the most rigorous in fourth-grade reading, fourth-grade math, and eighth-grade reading. (Massachusetts finds itself near the middle of the pack in eighth-grade reading.) Massachusetts is the only state to exceed the rigor of the NAEP cut scores in any grade or subject, doing so in both fourth- and eighth-grade math. See National Center for Education Statistics, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Variation and Change in State Standards for Reading and Mathematics, 2005–2009* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, August 2011), http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011458. As Massachusetts has adopted the Common Core standards and currently sits on the governing board of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment consortium, it will likely replace its MCAS tests with CCSS assessments in 2014-2015.

2) Reporting of accessible and actionable data to all stakeholders, including summative outcome data and other formative data to drive continuous improvement

Massachusetts provides a wealth of publicly available data on its department of education website. Through its school and district profiles database, users can access grade-level MCAS results, four- and five-year graduation rates, AP performance and participation rates, SAT results, mobility rates, and more, all disaggregated by subgroups including ethnicity, special education, English language learners, and low-income status. Further, the state reports the percentage of students at each of four proficiency levels for each school and district: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Warning/Failing. ("Warning" applies to students in grades three through eight, and "Failing" applies to high school students.) It also calculates Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) to complement the MCAS proficiency scores. The SGPs measure individual student achievement over time rather than grade-level achievement results in a given year. SGPs are aggregated and reported by school and district as well. In addition to data on students, Massachusetts presents teacher information on licensing status, age, gender, race, and program area (general education, special education, English language learner, etc.).

Overall, while the database does not allow users to make easy school-to-school or district-to-district comparisons, for most indicators it does present individual school data next to results for that school's district and the entire state. For those who are willing to dig, the state does provide a separate tool with which users can make school and district comparisons. The state provides the District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) to help districts, schools, and stakeholders meet accountability requirements. It allows users to compare schools and districts across a number of different indicators. The tool is publicly available—so any parent or community member may access it—but it is not prominently presented on the homepage of the website, as the school and district profiles are. Users must venture into the "accountability, partnership, and assistance" section of the website to find it; we may assume, then, that many don't.

3) Annual determinations and designations for each school and district that meaningfully differentiate their performance

Massachusetts analyzes school, district, and subgroup MCAS data according to its Composite Performance Index (CPI). The CPI is a 100-point index that attaches a score to the percentage of students achieving Proficient in a given year. Consecutive CPI scores serve as the basis for determining a school or district's AYP status, along with attendance, graduation rates, and test participation rates. This structure allows for relatively seamless integration of the state and federal accountability systems—a rarity across the states.

Based on CPI, AYP proficiency targets are set for each district, school, and student group indicating the amount of gain needed to stay on track toward 100 percent proficiency by the 2013-14 school year. Schools and districts can make AYP by meeting either the state's ELA and math proficiency targets (which were CPI scores of 95.1 and 92.2 in 2011, respectively) or their individual-group improvement targets. Individual targets are calculated by subtracting the district, school, or subgroup's current CPI from 100 (the ultimate CPI goal), and dividing by the total number of years remaining until 2013-14.[63] The establishment of differentiated gain targets sets Massachusetts apart from the many states that set uniform targets for all of their schools and districts. Superintendents report a sense of "fairness" at the local level since improvement targets are based on the prior performance of each school, rather than a "one size fits all" approach. Still, one superintendent noted that while the individual targets have traditionally allowed urban schools that fall short of state benchmarks but make progress to make AYP, an increasing number are now missing these individual benchmarks as well.

In addition, Massachusetts uses these data to assign schools and districts "Improvement Ratings" based on a comparison of consecutive years' CPI results. Ratings indicate whether a school or district is Above Target, On Target, Improved, Below Target, Made No Change, or Declined. While inherently tied to AYP, these ratings are descriptive only (i.e., they alone require no action toward improvement).

As described in more detail below, schools and districts are also assigned to School and District Accountability and Assistance Levels—from Level 1 (highest-performing) to Level 5 (lowest-performing)—that entail state-required improvement actions beyond those required by NCLB. These designations are based on consideration of both objective measures of AYP/test scores and subjective state reviews.

Ultimately, then, schools and districts are scored against three different rating systems: AYP status, Improvement Ratings, and School and District Accountability and Assistance Levels. While Massachusetts's integration of state and federal accountability eliminated much redundancy and confusion inherent in other states' systems, superintendents report that these overlapping labels are confusing to parents.

[63] District-level CPI calculations are issued separately for elementary, middle, and high school grade spans. Under this approach, districts are only identified for improvement when they fail to make AYP in the same subject area in all grade spans.

4) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the school and district levels

Rewards

Budget cuts have recently led Massachusetts to eliminate programs that monetarily reward high-performing and/or improving schools. Previously, the state recognized schools demonstrating significant improvement in reading and mathematics by designating them as Commonwealth Compass Schools and providing them with financial awards. Through a similar program, Sustaining Success Grants, the state financially rewarded schools that made AYP for two consecutive years. These funds were intended to support the continuation of strong instructional practices and initiatives in individual schools.

At this time, no incentive programs exist to recognize or promote school improvement other than additional Commendation Designations on the school's accountability report. These note that a school is "commended for" narrowing proficiency gaps, achieving high growth, and/or exiting NCLB accountability status. As one mid-size district superintendent said, "Our high school [achieved] substantial success and all we got was an 'atta-boy.' The system is all stick and no carrot."

Sanctions

To determine required improvement actions, Massachusetts assigns each school and district to an Accountability and Assistance Level, with the highest-performing in Level 1 and the lowest-performing in Level 5. For both schools and districts, Levels 1-3 are based on objective measures of student performance; Levels 4 and 5 also include measures of student performance, but schools are ultimately assigned to them based on state discretion.

It is important to note that undergirding the school and district Accountability and Assistance Levels is the state's *Framework for District Accountability and Assistance*. The framework requires particular actions on the part of the district and the state depending on the Accountability and Assistance Level to which a *district* is assigned. So while *schools* are also assigned to Accountability and Assistance Levels, those are primarily used to identify low-performing schools in order to determine district Accountability and Assistance Levels. Thus, school designations are not tied to school-driven accountability actions. Instead, the state places districts in the driver's seat of accountability, with the state primarily building district capacity and only playing a more direct role in the improvement of the state's very worst districts.

School Accountability and Assistance Levels are assigned as follows:

- Level 1: Schools making AYP or in their first or second year of improvement.
- Level 2: Schools in NCLB corrective action or restructuring.
- Level 3: The lowest-performing 20 percent of all schools statewide, based on the percentage of students scoring at the Warning/Failing level on MCAS tests, CPI, median Student Growth Percentile (SGP), and for high schools, dropout and graduation rate.
- Level 4: Schools among the lowest-performing 4 percent of all schools statewide (based on the measures above) that require intensive intervention, **as determined by the state**; these are otherwise known as "turnaround schools."
- Level 5: Those turnaround schools for which Level 4 status did not yield sufficient improvement, **as determined by the state**.

District Accountability and Assistance Levels are similarly defined. Level 1 includes those districts with no schools or subgroups in NCLB corrective action or restructuring, while those with at least one school or subgroup in corrective action or restructuring are placed into Level 2. In both of these Levels, districts must review and revise their own improvement plans, while the state may only provide voluntary improvement tools (Level 1) and suggest improvement strategies (Level 2). Level 3 includes those districts with at least one school among the lowest-performing 20 percent of schools in the state (i.e., at least one school in Level 3). Here, districts must use the state's self-assessment process to review and revise their improvement plans, while the state must offer priority—but again voluntary—assistance to districts.

At each of these District Accountability and Assistance Levels, the state conducts "random" (Levels 1 and 2) or "selective" (Level 3) district reviews. Based on the results of these audits, the state can choose to place a district into Level 4, if it determines that at least one of the district's schools should be a Level 4 turnaround school, or if it determines the district as a whole requires state intervention. Here, the district must work with the state (as well as teachers, administrators, local stakeholders, parents, and teacher unions) to develop an improvement plan for the district as a whole, including turnaround plans for any schools in Level 4.

If the district fails to meet progress benchmarks outlined in the improvement plan, or if the state determines that the district requires further intervention, the state may place the district into Level 5. Here, the state requires that a third party, or "receiver," appointed by the state share "co-governance" of schools with the district and jointly determine major budgetary, personnel, and policy decisions. The receiver, however, may be granted powers up to and including those of the superintendent, and thus in some cases may exercise full governance of the

district. No more than three districts can be designated Level 5 at any one time; for 2011-12, only one district was designated Level 5.

According to one stakeholder, the state review process ensures that schools and districts are identified for intervention (i.e., placed in Levels 4 and 5) based on more than just student test scores, as the reviews also examine finance, governance, professional development, and so on. But at the same time, the subjectivity of the process allows the state to identify only as many Level 4 schools as it has the capacity to assist—and it caps that total at the worst-performing 4 percent of schools. As a result, many low-performing schools that should be identified as Level 4 wind up in Level 3, and many other low-performing, but slightly better, schools go unnoticed.

Supports

Massachusetts's *Framework for District Accountability and Assistance* places primary responsibility for improvement efforts on the shoulders of districts; that said, the state provides direct and indirect support to districts, increasing in substance through each of the five Levels.[64] For Levels 1-3, the state offers voluntary tools and resources for districts to use in self-assessment, professional development, and improvement planning. For example, the online District Analysis and Review Tool allows districts, schools, and stakeholders to make quick district and school comparisons across indicators of student performance, graduation and dropout rates, discipline violations, leadership turnover, finances, and more.

In addition, districts in Levels 3 and 4 are given priority access to six regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) that aid districts in self-assessment, data analysis, and improvement planning, as well as in identifying/sustaining effective practices and utilizing state-provided tools. (Districts in Levels 1 and 2 may also work with these regional networks, to the extent that enough resources are available.) District superintendents highlighted the value of the assistance centers at the local level and found their support to be very helpful, noting that these organizations are clear that their primary role is to assist schools and districts and not to *direct* improvement efforts.

Also for districts in Level 4, the state appoints an "accountability liaison" to each district to coordinate implementation of the intervention actions outlined above. In addition, these districts can apply for School Redesign Grants for each of their

[64] While not technically components of the state's accountability system, nonprofits such as Mass Insight and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education have also provided much support to districts and schools over the last few decades, offering field services and promoting standards-based reform and leadership development. Nonprofits have also played a role in helping to develop many of the state's current accountability provisions.

Level 4 schools; these grants are competitive, however, and are distributed based on the quality of the schools' turnaround plans. State support for schools in Level 5 comes in the form of the assigned "receiver."

Finally, the state has identified ten "Commissioner's Districts," which are generally large, urban centers with high poverty levels and low-performing students. The state provides additional resources and tools to these districts to target and improve their lowest-performing schools and support their remaining schools.

5) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual student level

Through its well-regarded state assessment system, Massachusetts aims to hold its students accountable for their own performance. That said, specific provisions aimed at students are somewhat limited in scope, and Massachusetts offers no rewards for students who perform at high levels. Further, by establishing "safety nets" to ensure that every student can demonstrate proficiency in some way, the Bay State potentially weakens what would otherwise be strong student-level accountability.

To receive a high school diploma, students must ostensibly pass the MCAS by meeting or exceeding the Proficient level (a score of 240) on the tenth-grade English language arts (ELA) and math MCAS tests, as well as meeting or exceeding the Needs Improvement level (a score of 220) on a subject-specific MCAS science test (Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering).[65] But in reality, as one stakeholder put it, these requirements are "aspirational": In 2006, the Board of Education voted to raise the MCAS cut scores for ELA and math from 220 to 240, as many students were meeting the 220 thresholds in tenth grade and then not continuing on in their coursework (particularly in math); thus the decision was an attempt to push more students to take additional courses in core subject areas even after they'd met the state requirement. But, along with that decision, the board introduced an alternate path to graduation—the Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP). If a student meets or surpasses a score of 220 in both ELA and math, but fails to achieve the 240 cut score in those subjects, he is placed on an individual EPP, which is developed by the district and specifies the courses that he will be required to pass in eleventh and twelfth grades, as well as the assessments the school will use to monitor his progress toward proficiency. These assessments include the ELA MCAS retest, the mathematics MCAS/EPP test, or a

[65] The state plans to fold history and social science assessments into the graduation requirement once those tests—which were suspended in 2009, due to budgetary constraints—are reinstated in the future.

locally designed assessment.[66] Thus, in reality, students on EPPs who have failed to reach 240 on the MCAS once are technically not required to take it again, and can graduate without ever meeting that specific provision. While the EPP process outlines other requirements that students must meet, one superintendent noted that the EPP process is "tough to do with fidelity without time and money." Without proper attention paid to ensuring that it upholds a high bar, the EPP process *could* be an easy graduation loophole for low-performing students—and one stakeholder concurred that many students who never achieve the rigor of the 240 cut score continue to receive diplomas.

In terms of supports, Massachusetts does offer students stuck in low-performing schools a handful of opportunities to move to other schools. But the state does not adequately encourage students to do so. While it allows districts to participate in inter-district school choice—and while most districts in the state participated to some extent in 2011, either sending or receiving students—only about 1 percent of all students opted to transfer to schools out of their home districts in 2011-12. The state also allows districts to offer intra-district choice, but the extent to which districts choose to do so—and the extent to which students take advantage of this option—is questionable.[67] Finally, the state established the METCO program in 1966, allowing students in Boston (and later, those in Springfield) to transfer to nearby suburban districts. But this program is very small, with only about 3,000 participating students each year, despite its long waiting list. So while Massachusetts does have some transfer options on paper, one stakeholder bluntly replied that in practice, "no notion of student choice options" exists statewide.

Massachusetts does, however, have a growing charter school student population, particularly in its urban areas. More than 30,000 students were enrolled in charters at the outset of 2011-12 (more than double the number attending out-of-district schools), and over 35,000 more were on charter waiting lists.

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[66] Eleventh- and twelfth-grade students who have not yet scored 240 on the ELA MCAS test may take the ELA MCAS retest. For mathematics, only students who score below 220 may retake the MCAS in that subject. Those scoring above 220 must take the mathematics MCAS/EPP Test, which is aligned to the state's content standards but, unlike the mathematics MCAS, includes only multiple choice questions (no short answer or constructed response questions).

[67] The most recent data to our knowledge were published in 2003 by the Center for Education, Research, and Policy at MassINC. Analysts report that twenty-one districts provided intra-district school choice in 2003; however, many districts are constrained by the small number of schools within the district. Of the 184 districts serving middle school students, 142 had just one middle school; and of the 225 districts serving high school students, 206 had just one high school. See *Mapping School Choice in Massachusetts: Data and Findings 2003* (Boston, MA: MassINC, May 2003), http://www.renniecenter.org/research_docs/0305_SchoolChoice_report.pdf.

6) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual teacher and administrator level

As promised in the state's 2010 Race to the Top application, Massachusetts adopted new educator evaluation requirements—applying to teachers, principals, and superintendents—in June 2011. Evaluation systems are still collectively bargained at the district level, but Massachusetts has now established broad criteria that evaluation systems must meet, and the state offers a model evaluation system which districts can choose to adopt or adapt. Unfortunately, while the new provisions mark a step forward for adult accountability in the Bay State, the requirements don't go far enough toward linking educator and student performance and tying evaluations to employment decisions.[68]

Evaluation systems now comprise two separate ratings—an overall rating and an "impact on student learning" rating. Thus, while emphasis is placed on measures of student learning, those measures are not required to be the primary criteria of the overall evaluation.[69] Overall ratings differentiate performance across the following four categories: Exemplary, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory. Student-learning ratings designate whether an educator has had high, moderate, or low impact on student learning. Based on their overall and student-learning-impact ratings, educators are placed on different types of "Educator Plans" that are intended to provide feedback and specify actions to be taken toward specific goals. Any educator rated as Unsatisfactory must be placed on an "Improvement Plan."

Teachers are generally evaluated annually, with the exception of tenured teachers with Exemplary or Proficient ratings who also have moderate or high impacts on student learning; they may be evaluated every two years. Teachers are eligible for tenure after three years. To earn tenure, a teacher must receive ratings of Exemplary or Proficient on all evaluation categories—including student learning—as well as on the evaluation as a whole. A principal may confer with the superintendent if he or she wishes to award tenure to a teacher who does not meet these criteria.

Massachusetts does not tie evaluations to compensation. The state sets a minimum teacher salary, but allows districts to design their own compensation

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[68] Beyond evaluation and employment decisions, one stakeholder in Massachusetts said a key lever of education reform is the state's requirement that teachers pass rigorous licensing tests aligned with the state's content standards. But according to the National Council on Teacher Quality, the state leaves room for improvement in terms of ensuring its educators are well prepared because the licensing tests do not always score different subjects separately. Thus, a teacher could mask poor performance in one subject with strong performance in another. See the *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook—Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality, January 2012), http://www.nctq.org/stpy11/reports/stpy11_massachusetts_report.pdf.

[69] Other measures of teacher performance must include administrator and student feedback, in addition to materials provided by the teacher. The state is currently examining the feasibility of including parent feedback in teacher evaluations as well.

systems. Further, the state only loosely ties evaluations to dismissal, by specifying that educators who fail to meet the conditions outlined in their Improvement Plans *may* be eligible for dismissal—but not requiring that persistent low-performers be dismissed. In addition, tenured teachers who are dismissed may appeal multiple times. Layoffs are also not linked to teacher performance—the state stipulates that districts may not lay off a tenured teacher if a probationary teacher within the same certification area could be laid off instead. In short, the state does not prohibit "last in, first out" policies—rather, it seems to encourage them.

Beyond consequences for low-performing educators, Massachusetts offers only limited rewards for high performers. The state's Improving Educator Quality grants provide funds to districts for additional pay for teachers who work in high-needs schools or certain subjects. But these funds are limited, and as mentioned above, the state does not require salary to be based on performance.

Finally, there's some attention to accountability for administrators—but not much. Building leaders in their first three years in a district must be evaluated annually. Administrators are hired on one-year contracts.

What are the strengths and limitations of Massachusetts's accountability system?

Strengths

Strong academic standards and rigorous cut scores. Massachusetts's academic standards are rated among the nation's best in all core subject areas. In addition, the state has not shied away from setting high cut scores on its assessments.

Integration of state and federal accountability systems. Massachusetts has integrated its state accountability system with federal NCLB requirements, and as a result has minimized confusion at the district and school level. Absent from district interviews were the negative comments and confusion heard from multiple insiders in other states that have bifurcated systems.

Differentiated progress targets. Massachusetts sets differentiated improvement targets for each school, district, and student group indicating the amount of gain needed to stay on track to 100 percent proficiency by the 2013-14 school year. Schools have the option of either meeting these differentiated improvement targets or the state proficiency target. District administrators report that, as opposed to the state proficiency target, the differentiated targets "feel relevant and achievable."

A district-driven framework for accountability and assistance. Massachusetts's Accountability and Assistance Levels delineate district and state responsibilities for high- and low-performing schools and districts. To the extent that the two entities share responsibility for low-performing schools, the framework makes clear that the district should remain, to the greatest extent possible, the driver of school improvement.

Accountability provisions for students. By setting high cut scores on the state assessment, and by requiring all students to pass the tenth-grade test in order to graduate, Massachusetts ensures that students have a stake in their own education. But as colleges in the state do not accept the graduation requirement as a measure of admissibility, Massachusetts would do well to ensure that its high school assessments are aligned with measures of college and career readiness.

Limitations

Limited indicators to inform performance designations. The indicators that Massachusetts employs to designate school and district performance are limited to measures of proficiency and attendance, graduation, and test-participation rates. While Massachusetts calculates and reports Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) to measure individual student achievement, these data only factor into the accountability system when the state is determining whether to rank a school or district in Accountability and Assistance Level 3, 4, or 5.

No concrete rewards for high-performing schools and districts. Recent budget reductions have eliminated all performance-based incentives except labels that designate a school or district as high-performing in a particular area.

Limited number of schools identified for intensive interventions. As Massachusetts only identifies for intervention as many schools for which it has the capacity to intervene, the percentage of all schools that are required to undertake robust improvement actions is extremely small—below 4 percent. Districts are largely left to attend to other struggling schools. While we can appreciate the reality of limited dollars, a system which lays out a more structured, increasingly extensive series of interventions—supported by the state, district, nonprofits, or other groups—might better address schools along the low-performing continuum.

Few policies to drive teacher and administrator performance. While Massachusetts took a big step forward in overhauling its educator evaluation requirements and ensuring that student performance factors

into them, the state does not require that such evaluations be used to inform compensation or employment decisions for either low or high performers. The Bay State should take a page out of its student policy playbook and ensure that teachers have a clear stake in their own performance—and in the performance of their students.

Final Word

Massachusetts's accountability system keeps much responsibility for performance at the local level—primarily holding districts and students accountable for low performance—but the state has done its share to ensure that both of those entities are held to high standards. A more robust structure for addressing low-performing—but not lowest-performing—schools, coupled with strengthened educator accountability measures, would go a long way toward making accountability in the Bay State a model for the nation.

Information on Massachusetts's education-accountability system was primarily drawn from interviews with state representatives, district representatives, and local stakeholders, as well as from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/, particularly the website's Accountability/Assistance page at http://www.doe.mass.edu/Assess/. Additional information was drawn from the National Council on Teacher Quality's *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*.