

## **NCLB WAIVER SUMMARY: ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **PROMISING ASPECTS OF THE PLAN:**

- Ambitious but achievable goals are at the core of the accountability system. Schools get targets for increasing the percent of students (including a “high needs” subgroup) performing at the proficient level, and also for improving performance at the advanced level and at the lowest level. Schools earn points on an index based on the extent to which they meet or exceed each of their targets. A school’s accountability determination is based on its performance on the index overall and on each of the individual indicators (such as achievement and graduation rates).
- The state has a strong accountability system for school districts, which is important since districts play a critical role in establishing conditions for school success. In Massachusetts, a district’s performance designation is based on the designation of its lowest performing school. What’s more, districts with a Priority (Level 4) school have to demonstrate they have the capacity to support that school’s turnaround efforts, including how they will modify any district policies and practices that are likely to stand in the way of the turnaround plan.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN:**

- Massachusetts has pledged to require districts to take action in Level 3/Focus schools, which include those that score particularly low on the state’s index for any group of students. But schools with slightly higher, but still low or mediocre, performance for a given group may not have sufficiently strong incentives to improve if the high-needs group is improving.
- Massachusetts has not guaranteed students even in its lowest performing schools the right to choose to attend a higher performing school.

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### **What indicators are used to measure school performance?**

- Math, English-language arts (ELA), and science performance as measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI)
- The percent of students at the Advanced level and, separately, at the Warning/Failing level in ELA and math
- Student growth in ELA and math:
  - The growth measure (student-growth percentiles, or SGP) looks at how much growth students are making relative to other students with similar academic histories.
- For high schools: four-year and five-year graduation rates and dropout rates
- Participation in state assessments

### **What are the expectations for performance on these indicators?**

- Reduce the difference between the current CPI and 100 by half in six years, overall and for each group.
  - Schools can also meet this goal by achieving the CPI of the 80th-percentile school for each group.
- Increase the percent Advanced by 2.5 percentage points annually, overall and for each group.
- Decrease the percent Warning/Failing by 10 percent annually, overall and for each group.
- Exceed median SGP or increase SGP from prior year by at least 10 points, overall and for each group.
- Reach a four-year graduation rate of 75 percent or a five-year rate of 80 percent, overall and for each group.
- Reduce the dropout rate by half in six years, overall and for each group.
  - Schools can also meet this goal by achieving the dropout rate of the 80th-percentile school (ranked in descending order) for each group.

- A school cannot reach its CPI goals without achieving a 95-percent participation rate. This applies to students overall and each student group.
- Schools earn points on the Progress and Performance Index (PPI) based on the extent to which they meet or exceed their goals on each indicator. The PPI is calculated separately for students overall and for groups. It is based on four years of data, with the latest year carrying the most weight. The Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) for each group is a PPI of 75.

### **How are student groups included?**

- The groups for which a PPI is calculated are low-income students, English-language learners, students with disabilities, students from each major ethnic and racial group, and a high-needs student group, which includes low-income students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.
- Any school with particularly low performance on PPI indicators for any student group may be identified as a Level 3/Focus school.
- Only all-student and high-needs student PPIs are considered when assigning schools to Level 1 (on track to college and career readiness) or Level 2 (not meeting gap-closing goals).

### **How are overarching school determinations made?**

- Schools are assigned to Levels 1-4 based on their performance on PPI indicators for students overall and for groups.
  - Level 1 schools are on track to college and career readiness (schools with a PPI of 75 for all students and the high-needs group).
  - Level 2 schools are those not meeting gap-closing goals (schools not reaching a PPI of 75 for all students or the high-needs group).
  - Level 3 schools are Focus schools.
  - Level 4 schools are Priority schools.
- Level 4 schools that do not improve sufficiently may be placed in Level 5, chronically low performing.

### **How are Priority Schools identified?**

- Priority schools include 40 schools that Massachusetts already identified as Level 4 based on low performance and improvement on PPI indicators. The state will continue to identify Level 4/Priority schools based on PPI indicators out of the pool of Level 3 schools. According to Massachusetts law, the total number of Priority schools cannot exceed 4 percent of all schools in the state. The commissioner may use additional indicators, such as resource availability, when classifying schools as Level 4.

### **How are Focus Schools identified?**

- Among all schools in the state, 20 percent are identified as Level 3 or Focus Schools. These include:
  - Any high school where the graduation rate for any student group has been less than 60 percent for the previous four years
  - Schools with the lowest performance on PPI indicators for any student group (up to 10 percent of Title I schools). The state will “select schools proportionately within grade spans” and “ensure that any low performing student group ... is represented.”
  - Schools with the lowest overall performance on PPI indicators (to get to 20 percent of all schools, per state law)

### **What happens to Priority Schools?**

- Supports and Interventions:
  - Districts with Level 4 schools have to create a redesign plan for the school aligned with the 11 Conditions for School Effectiveness, identified by the state, which include effective school leadership, principal staffing authority, strategic uses of resources and adequate budget.

- Before determining interventions, districts “must demonstrate that they have the capacity to plan for, implement, and monitor school-level redesign efforts, including the effective allocation of resources (people, time, materials, and fiscal, including all ESEA funds).”
  - Districts may receive a state liaison to help leadership teams reexamine support activities.
  - Districts will also have to set aside up to 25 percent of Title I funds and will be eligible for 1003(g).
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
    - Criteria for exiting Priority Status: Within three years, Level 4 schools must improve their CPI and decrease the percent of students at the Warning/Failing level (gains needed are benchmarked against high-improving schools in the state). They must also reach and maintain a Student Growth Percentile of 40, and reach the state’s graduation-rate target for that year. In addition, the state will ensure that both the district and school have the capacity to maintain improvement.
    - Schools that do not meet exit criteria are subject to state receivership, at the commissioner’s discretion.

### **What happens to Focus Schools?**

- Supports and Interventions:
  - Districts with a Level 3 school receive priority assistance from a regional District and School Assistance Center and work with the DSAC to conduct a needs assessment based on the Conditions for School Effectiveness and identify priority interventions. Their improvement plans must be approved by the state, which “may require district to implement specific interventions” based on findings from the needs assessment and analysis of student performance data.
  - Districts have to set aside up to 25 percent of Title I funds to implement interventions and the state will monitor how these funds are spent.
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
  - Criteria for exiting Focus School status include meeting the AMO (PPI = 75) for the student group that triggered the identification. Meeting the AMO may not be enough to get the school out of Focus status if it is still one of the lowest performing for that group.
  - It’s unclear what happens to Focus Schools that do not improve.

### **What happens to schools that are not Priority or Focus? Does underperformance against goals trigger action?**

- Schools that do not meet their AMOs for all students or high-needs students are Level 2. Districts with Level 2 schools (but no Level 3 or 4 schools) must perform an annual needs assessment based on the Conditions for School Effectiveness, but have autonomy in deciding which interventions to implement. They also have to set aside up to 25 percent of Title I funds for interventions, proportional to the scope of the problem.

### **Will the state continue to require public school choice?**

- No. Massachusetts plans to allow funds previously reserved for choice and supplemental education services to be used for other interventions.

### **How are Reward Schools identified, and what incentives are provided?**

- Level 1 schools may receive commendation if they are improving the CPI for all groups and meet any of the following sets of criteria:
  - *High achievement* means ranking in top 10 percent on PPI achievement indicators for all students and high-needs students, and having a five-year graduation rate of 94 percent or more.
  - *High progress* means ranking in top 10 percent of schools on PPI improvement and growth indicators, and improving the five-year graduation rate or having a graduation rate of 94 percent or more.

- *Narrowing proficiency gaps* means ranking in top 10 percent of schools on PPI improvement and growth indicators for high-needs students. The school must be improving its five-year graduation rate of the high-needs group or have a graduation rate of 94 percent for this group.
- Commendation Schools will be recognized at a state event. If funds are available, they also will be eligible for “promising practice” grants to share best practices and partner with lower performing schools in their region.

**Is there a system of district accountability?**

- Each district’s accountability designation is based on the status of its lowest performing school. For example, a district with a Level 5 school is automatically a Level 5 district. A district may also be designated as Level 4 or 5 via a district accountability review process not directly related to its schools’ performance.
- Level 1 districts receive a lot of autonomy and are subject to minimal state requirements. Level 2-4 districts are subject to increasing state requirements, interventions, and supports. Depending on each district’s portfolio of schools, Level 2-4 districts may be required to set aside up to 25 percent of Title I funds for interventions in their low-performing schools. Level 3 districts will get assistance from the regional DSAC; Level 4 districts may be assigned a liaison from the state. Finally, Level 5 districts are those placed in state receivership, with an appointed receiver retaining full operational and managerial control of the district.