Massachusetts' Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness

Massachusetts' Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness articulate the key elements of school governance, curriculum, instruction, finance, training and student services—elements that the State believes every school needs to have in place for all students to succeed. For Massachusetts, these conditions are more than just a wish list for school reform. In 2010, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness into State regulations. As a result, the conditions serve not only as benchmarks against which schools can gauge their practices in key areas, but they also serve as a set of required practices guiding school improvement planning, school accountability and technical assistance across the State.

Massachusetts' Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness

- Effective district systems for school support and intervention

- Effective school leadership

- Aligned curriculum

- Effective instruction

- Student assessment

- Principal's staffing authority

- Professional development and structures for collaboration

- Tiered instruction and adequate learning time

- Students' social, emotional and health needs

- Family-school engagement

- Strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority

The principles included in Massachusetts' Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness are consistent with a body of research extending back to the 1970s that supports the premise that all children can learn and that how schools work is critical to student results.

According to Massachusetts' Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness, schools need effective leaders with appropriate authority over staffing and budgeting to make decisions consistent with a schoolwide, results-oriented focus on teaching, learning and student success. In effective schools, teachers have working knowledge of standards and tools, materials, and instructional strategies to ensure that they help students reach proficiency. Effective teachers provide high-quality, challenging core instruction for all students and use time wisely toward that end. Effective schools use a range of student assessments and have well-defined processes to collect, analyze, review and report results of assessments of student learning. In effective schools, professional development is aligned with standards and staff members hold one another accountable for

implementing what is learned and for the improved student performance that should result from its implementation. Effective schools also create a safe and supportive learning environment and engage families and community in service of the school's learning goals.

In cooperation with the Regional Educational Laboratory-Northeast and the Islands, Massachusetts has developed an *Essential Conditions Research Guide* that explores supporting research for each of these effective school reform principles.

Massachusetts uses these correlates of effective schools to describe the school conditions necessary to ensure student mastery of the State's core curriculum. The conditions also are critical to how Massachusetts organizes its efforts to engage districts to improve student performance and turn around the State's lowest performing schools. The State also uses the conditions to inform the process for approving external partners who want to work with schools to implement school turnaround strategies—to be approved, providers must demonstrate that their strategies align with, and that they have been successful in promoting, the conditions of effectiveness. Massachusetts has also aligned its School Improvement Grant local educational agency (LEA) sub-grant application to the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness.

School-level Self-Assessment Tool

Massachusetts has developed a *school-level self-assessment tool* that any State, district or school can use to examine effective school practice; the self-assessment was designed to be used by school leaders, those responsible for day-to-day instruction and key stakeholders to conduct a scan of current practice.

For each element, the self-assessment asks schools to consider whether they are demonstrating little or no progress in implementing an element (little evidence); have some emerging policies, practices and procedures to support the condition (developing); have practices in place that support the condition and are implemented consistently with fidelity

(providing); or have in place aligned, integrated and self-sustaining practices consistent with the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness that are supported and reinforced by district policies (sustaining).

For each condition, the self-assessment includes a detailed rubric of practices and policies that illustrate each implementation level, as well as a set of resources that schools can use to explore the condition in more detail. An example of the rubric for the essential condition related to professional development and teacher collaboration follows.

Massachusetts is currently developing a self-assessment tool for districts that aligns with the school-level tool and lays out the essential supports that districts need to have in place to ensure school-level effectiveness.

Massachusetts' Self-Assessment Tool on the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness: Professional Development
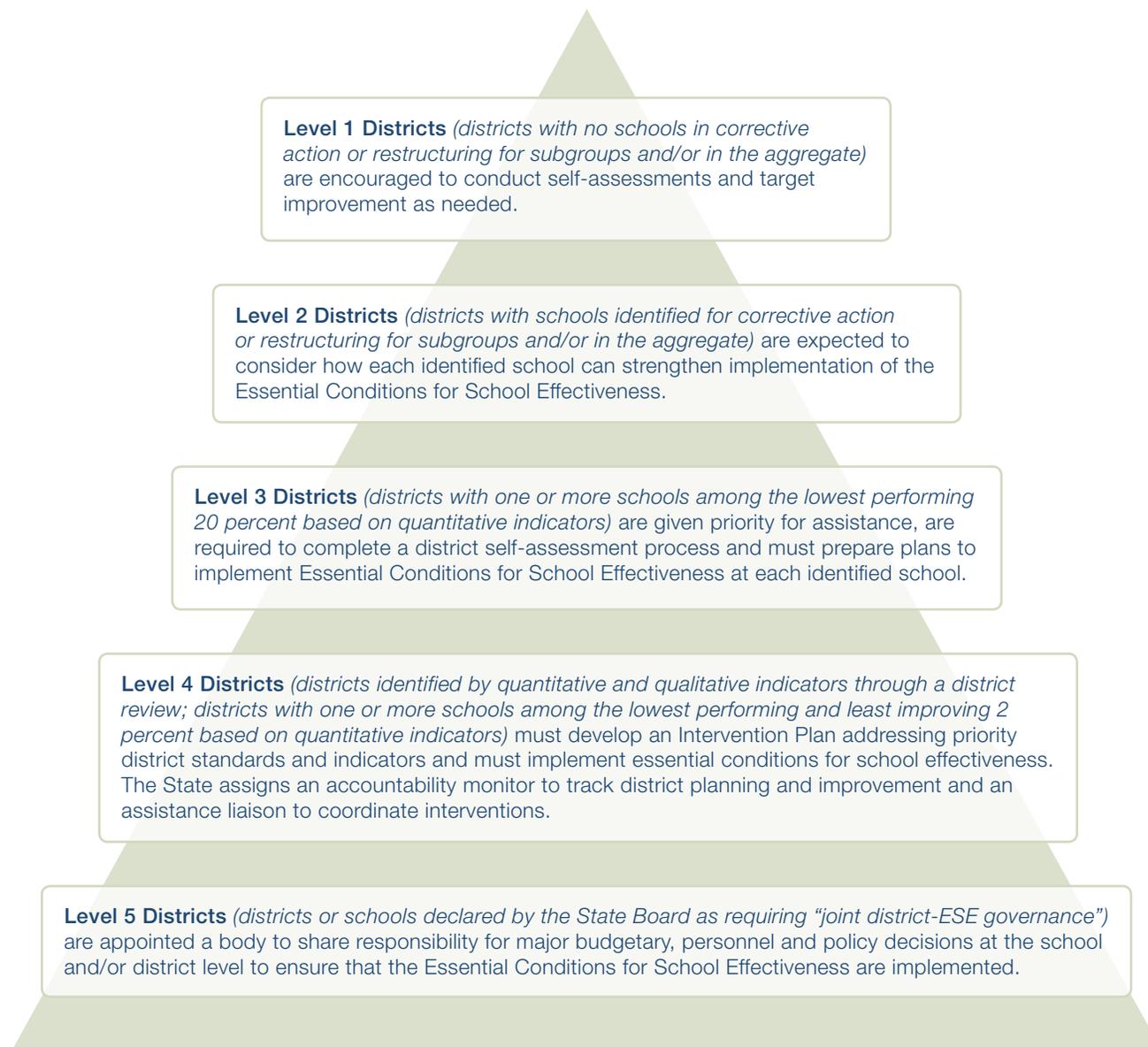
Professional Development and Structures for Collaboration: Professional development for school staff includes both individually pursued activities and school-based, job-embedded approaches such as instructional coaching. It also includes content-oriented learning. The school has structures for regular, frequent collaboration to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice. Professional development and structures for collaboration are evaluated for their effect on raising student achievement.

	1 (Little Evidence)	2 (Developing)	3 (Providing)	4 (Sustaining)
Professional Development Plan/System	Very little to no progress in implementation	Some aspects of condition in place; inconsistent or low-quality implementation	▪ The Instructional Leadership Team designs a coordinated Professional Development Plan that aligns with State standards for school performance and student achievement as well as district and school priorities. ▪ The Professional Development Plan addresses the individual and collective needs of staff. (See National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) *Definition of Professional Development, http://www.nsdc.org/standfor/definition.cfm*). ▪ Professional development is embedded as an integral part of daily routines (for example, through coaching, staff meetings and/or collaborative time). ▪ Teams embedded in the school (see NSDC's *Definition*) take active roles in promoting, creating and leading professional development, leveraging internal expertise. ▪ When external trainers/partners are needed, leaders enlist their assistance. ▪ Job-embedded coaching and other supports provide follow-up on the implementation of what is learned through professional development. ▪ Coaches and teacher leaders are trained in effectively engaging/teaching adults. ▪ Staff members hold one another accountable for implementing what is learned through professional development and, ultimately, for the improved student performance that should result from its implementation (see NSDC's *Definition*).	Integrated, supported by district policies and practices and self-sustaining
Accessing Professional Development	Very little to no progress in implementation	Some aspects of condition in place; inconsistent or low-quality implementation	▪ All staff access relevant professional development (both voluntary and required) that is tied to specific professional learning goals. ▪ Time is built into the school schedule for staff collaboration, with collaboration serving as professional development. ▪ Collaborative time is focused on taking instruction/learning to the next level of development, and addressing the needs (health/behavior/family) of the whole child. ▪ Systems and protocols are in place to guide collaborative discussions.	
Impact of Professional Development	Very little to no progress in implementation	Some aspects of condition in place; inconsistent or low-quality implementation	▪ Leaders evaluate the quality and impact of professional development and collaborative time to ensure that they result in strengthened practice and student success. ▪ Promising practices for teaching and collaboration are identified and shared.	

Related Elementary and Secondary Education Resources:

▪ Professional Learning Communities Guidance: *http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/PLCguidance.pdf*

▪ Common Planning Time Self-Assessment Toolkit: *http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ucd/CPTtoolkit.doc*

The essential conditions and the school self-assessment tool are critical components of Massachusetts' *Framework for District Accountability* (see *http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/*) and the State's approach to engaging with districts to improve student performance and turning around the lowest performing schools in Massachusetts. The conditions are built directly into the State's school improvement process requirements.

Level 1 Districts *(districts with no schools in corrective action or restructuring for subgroups and/or in the aggregate)* are encouraged to conduct self-assessments and target improvement as needed.

Level 2 Districts *(districts with schools identified for corrective action or restructuring for subgroups and/or in the aggregate)* are expected to consider how each identified school can strengthen implementation of the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness.

Level 3 Districts *(districts with one or more schools among the lowest performing 20 percent based on quantitative indicators)* are given priority for assistance, are required to complete a district self-assessment process and must prepare plans to implement Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness at each identified school.

Level 4 Districts *(districts identified by quantitative and qualitative indicators through a district review; districts with one or more schools among the lowest performing and least improving 2 percent based on quantitative indicators)* must develop an Intervention Plan addressing priority district standards and indicators and must implement essential conditions for school effectiveness. The State assigns an accountability monitor to track district planning and improvement and an assistance liaison to coordinate interventions.

Level 5 Districts *(districts or schools declared by the State Board as requiring "joint district-ESE governance")* are appointed a body to share responsibility for major budgetary, personnel and policy decisions at the school and/or district level to ensure that the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness are implemented.

For more information on the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness, including 1) a detailed description of the conditions, 2) a publicly accessible review of the research underpinnings entitled *Essential Conditions Research Guide*, and 3) Massachusetts' *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment,* see:

http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/school/process.html