

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

February 11, 2010

Superintendent Carl Ladd
Gill-Montague Regional School District
35 Crocker Avenue
Turners Falls, MA 01376

Dear Superintendent Ladd,

Congratulations on being one of the 256 district leaders to commit to participation in Massachusetts' Race to the Top initiatives. As you know, we delivered our application to the U.S. Department of Education on January 19, and Massachusetts is now anxiously waiting alongside 39 other states and the District of Columbia to see who will be awarded funding.

The development of our application took more than six months and involved the frequent input of educators, business leaders, parents and other stakeholders across the Commonwealth. We are particularly grateful to our participating districts, where the superintendent, School Committee chair and union president had to agree collectively to sign on. We recognize the leadership and willingness to tackle the tough issues that this required. We thank you for your commitment to participating in this critically important work, and look forward to working together.

Statewide, 257 districts and charter schools – more than two-thirds of the state – ultimately committed to implementing the initiatives outlined in our application. Of that total, 147 were cities and towns, 58 were charter schools, 31 were regional school districts and 20 were vocational-technical schools. In all, these LEAs represent 72 percent of K-12 students across the Commonwealth and 86 percent of the state's low-income students.

Each of these communities have committed to participating in efforts to:

1. Develop and retain an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce
2. Develop curricular and instructional resources that support educator effectiveness with all students
3. Concentrate great instruction and supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools
4. Increase our focus on college and career readiness for all students.

The U.S. Department of Education plans to invite finalists to D.C. for in-person interviews in mid-March, and to announce the winning states in early April. We are confident in the strength of our application and are hopeful that Massachusetts will be selected. If we are not successful in this first application round, we will reapply for the second round in June. Regardless of whether we are funded, we expect that the RTTT objectives will frame our work going forward. To that end, we have already begun implementation planning and urge you to do the same in your community. We will be holding a summit for participating LEAs in early March to provide additional guidance and details. Once the date and location of that summit is set, we will let you know.

I have attached the executive summary of our application and encourage you to review it and share it with members of your community. We believe this makes a compelling case for how the initiatives we have outlined will help to close achievement gaps, better support our teachers and principals, and ensure that every student graduates from our schools prepared for college, career and success in the 21st century.

None of this could have happened without your support, encouragement and input. I am grateful for the time you put into this process and look forward to our continued collaboration in the coming months and years.

My very best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mitch D. Chester".

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education



Background

Massachusetts has worked tirelessly to earn its reputation as one of the nation's leaders in school reform and innovation. With the Education Reform Act of 1993, Massachusetts embarked on a bold course for change, developing rigorous academic content and performance standards, strong assessments, an accountability system, and a revamped school finance system that increased levels of funding while addressing fiscal inequities.

The results are evident: Our students ranked first against their peers nationally on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics assessments in 2005 and 2007. On the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), they ranked second (4th grade) and first (8th grade) in science, and third (4th grade) and sixth (8th grade) in mathematics, against their international peers.

But while every student has benefited from education reform, troubling achievement gaps remain. On the 2009 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests, across all grades, 64 percent of white students scored proficient or advanced in mathematics, compared with 33 percent of their African American peers. Statewide, 87 percent of white students graduate in four years, compared with 58 percent of their Hispanic and 68 percent of their African American peers.

The job that began in 1993 is unfinished. The root causes of the variation we see in student outcomes must be addressed, recognizing that raising standards and conducting assessments are not good enough. We must provide more meaningful opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop professionally, with a focus on supports that help them individualize instruction and accelerate learning for every student. We also must recognize that teachers cannot teach a child who is distracted or absent because of issues outside the classroom. We need to better understand students' non-academic challenges and give them the physical, social, and emotional supports they need to focus on learning.

The next chapter of reform

These issues are what drive Massachusetts' second phase of reform, which kicked off in 2008 with Governor Patrick's Education Action Agenda. This robust plan was the final product of the Commonwealth Readiness Project, which developed goals that aim to individualize learning, develop and retain effective teachers, heighten focus on college and career readiness, and unleash innovation and systemic change. These goals and the specific recommendations of the Education Action Agenda are the foundation for Massachusetts' Race to the Top (RTTT) proposal. They are also the cornerstone of the groundbreaking January 2010 state legislation, which expands charter school caps, provides additional authority and strategies to intervene in the lowest performing districts, and creates Innovation Schools to foster greater experimentation and collaboration within districts.

Our RTTT dollars will be spent on work that will accelerate our Education Action Agenda, with the goal of transforming teaching and learning in every classroom and every school across the state in a way that will continue to pay off long after RTTT grant funding ends. These activities will be focused on achieving four objectives:

1. Developing and retaining an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce
2. Providing curricular and instructional resources that support teacher effectiveness and success for all students

3. Concentrating great instruction and supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools
4. Increasing our focus on college and career readiness for all students

These initiatives resonated statewide and garnered widespread support: 256 LEAs signed on to Massachusetts' Race to the Top proposal (65 percent of the 392 LEAs eligible to sign). These LEAs represent 1,336 schools, 72 percent of K–12 public school enrollment, and 86 percent of students in poverty.

Our initiatives

1. Developing and retaining an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce

A pillar of the state's reform plan is to develop an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce. We will transform the entire career continuum and licensure system for both principals and teachers by emphasizing effectiveness as the key barometer of progress. Reaching this goal will require rewarding practices that work, changing practices that do not, and connecting consistent, high quality feedback to supports in the school and to opportunities to advance.

- **Embed educator effectiveness into the culture and professional processes of every school and district:** Massachusetts will develop an approach to differentiate educator effectiveness using multiple measures, including student growth data, and align these measures of effectiveness with decisions along the educator career continuum. We will pursue this work in collaboration with participating LEAs and union partners, developing new approaches to measurement and evaluation with 10 pilot LEAs and engaging regional networks to pursue this work in all participating LEAs so we can achieve statewide implementation by the end of the grant. Measures of effectiveness will inform local evaluation, professional development, career pathways, and the removal of ineffective educators. The state will incorporate effectiveness measures and performance-based components into a redesigned, tiered licensure system.
- **Ensure all educators receive high quality support to improve instruction and reach their professional potential:** For principals and administrators, ESE will focus its professional development efforts on strengthening instructional leadership and improving working conditions to better support staff. For teachers, ESE will focus on programs and activities that support individualized instruction for each student, including use of the PreK–12 teaching and learning system and strategies to proactively close achievement gaps. For example, ESE will be able to provide expanded opportunities for teachers to complete ESL category training and coursework in math content.

2. Providing curricular and instructional resources that support teacher effectiveness and success for all students

Massachusetts is widely regarded for its high quality academic standards and student assessments, but we have not provided adequate capacity and expertise to ensure that these resources inform day-to-day teaching and learning. Few schools or districts have the capacity to develop curriculum resources or instructional approaches powerful enough to sufficiently meet the learning needs of every student.

The state will take the lead, collaborating with LEAs, in developing a statewide PreK–12 teaching and learning system that will provide teachers and leaders with a unified system of standards, curricula, assessment tools, and online resources designed to support individualized instruction in every classroom and school. The anchors of our teaching and learning system are:

- **Build a new suite of diagnostic assessments to ensure timely, actionable information on student learning for teachers:** The teaching and learning system will make interim, formative, and curriculum-embedded assessments available to every educator in the Commonwealth. ESE will provide intensive support through courses, supports for professional learning communities, and other modes of delivery to ensure these tools and the information generated from them inform daily classroom practice. Teachers need this information to improve instruction and individualize learning; leaders need it to help teachers in their schools develop; and districts need it to understand which curricula, training, and supports for teachers are most effective.
- **Make high quality curriculum materials, model units, and instructional resources accessible through a Digital Library:** The PreK–12 teaching and learning system will include model curricula units and lesson plans based on common standards that are aligned within and across grade levels. These will be cross-linked to a Digital Library of instructional resources, to the interim and formative assessments mentioned previously, and to a data system for accessing timely information to address individual student needs and improve programs. The system will also connect teachers to resources helpful to educators in other districts and states who have successfully served students with similar challenges.

3. Concentrating great instruction and additional supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools

To close the achievement gap and dramatically improve dropout and graduation rates, we must transform our lowest performing schools. This will require an infusion of additional supports to address the challenges faced by these schools. We plan to concentrate RTTT funds on investments to achieve the following goals:

- **Develop a specialized corps of educators prepared to tackle the challenges of low achieving schools:** The state will work with LEAs to accelerate the flow of highly effective educators into these schools. We will recruit, train, support, and retain experienced teachers and leaders to take on this unique challenge. Working with established, Massachusetts-based experts, we will design and implement a model to attract highly effective educators, provide them with the tools and training they need to succeed, and retain them in the low achieving schools where they are most needed.
- **Provide targeted supports to meet the needs of low income students:** Low income students and families often need additional supports to help students focus on learning and to foster school readiness among early learners. Massachusetts has identified three key supports (social, emotional, and health supports; expanded learning opportunities; and effective use of data about student learning) and will ensure that they are more broadly available to the districts with greatest need.
- **Build district capacity to prevent low achievement and sustain progress:** Massachusetts' new accountability system has improved the state's ability to identify the lowest performing schools and the conditions they need support to implement, but many districts still lack the infrastructure and skills to actually create these conditions. We will use this new system to provide targeted assistance and to increase training, consultation, and direct service through proven partners. In addition to building district capacity, we will also create a nonprofit turnaround intermediary to manage lead partners and school turnaround operators.

4. Increasing our focus on college and career readiness for all students

State policy requires proficiency on rigorous grade 10 tests to graduate from high school, but grade 10 proficiency is not a robust indicator of college and career readiness. Graduation requirements vary between districts, and half of our high school dropouts each year had already met state requirements for graduation. The implications are significant: more than one-third of public high school graduates who enroll

in Massachusetts public colleges take at least one remedial course in their first semester, and nearly 20 percent of those who started out as first-time, full-time, degree-seeking candidates drop out by their second year. We must develop middle and high school pathways that keep students on track for high school graduation and ensure students arrive at college with the experience and skills they need to advance and succeed.

- **Promote high achievement by leveraging existing policies and programs:** Massachusetts will make MassCore—currently a recommended program of high school studies—the default curriculum for the Commonwealth. The state will also strengthen two existing state programs that promote college and career readiness: the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship program and the Certification of Occupational Proficiency—by explicitly linking them to Common Core standards and providing incentives for their attainment. We will also build an Early Warning Indicator System to identify students at the highest risk of dropout and develop school and district capacity to successfully intervene early and keep students on the path to graduation.
- **Embed rigorous curriculum in low performing schools:** We will provide funding for LEAs with struggling schools to scale proven, rigorous college and career pathways such as International Baccalaureate and Early College High School programs focusing on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. We will also engage Massachusetts Readiness Centers to work with secondary schools, colleges, and businesses to ensure alignment between core standards and the requirements of first-year college-credit-bearing courses.

Achieving our four ambitious objectives hinges on the development of a robust state data and information infrastructure. Through RTTT we will transform our data systems so that they can efficiently deliver comprehensive, accessible, actionable, and timely data to all Massachusetts K–12 educators and key stakeholders; invest in technology to support the PreK–12 teaching and learning system and associated assessments and a more effective educator workforce; and strengthen and expand training and supports so that educators can use data effectively to inform instructional decisions.

Budget

Massachusetts' proposed RTTT budget totals **\$287 million**. Half will be distributed directly to LEAs so that they can access resources and services made available through the initiatives identified above. Half will support the state-level work needed to launch and evaluate these initiatives, ultimately benefiting all participating LEAs. The state half includes \$24 million in supplemental funding for participating LEAs to help them implement several of the most critical initiatives.

We're ready

Massachusetts is ready and eager to embark on the next generation of reform. We have used the RTTT planning process to mobilize stakeholders to agree on and launch new efforts; funding will enable us to accelerate these efforts and broaden their reach statewide. With our strong foundation, history of successful implementation, and longstanding nonpartisan political commitment to education reform, Massachusetts has what it takes to create a public education system that will prepare all students for success. We have traveled a great distance since 1993, and as we look ahead, we still have much to learn. That said, we believe Massachusetts can serve as a national model, and that our RTTT work will help propel both the state and our nation into the next generation of education reform.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) is entered into by and between The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“Massachusetts” or the “state”) and Gill-Montague Regional School District (“participating LEA”). This agreement establishes a framework of collaboration, roles and responsibilities in support of Massachusetts in its implementation of an approved Race to the Top grant project.

I. PRELIMINARY SCOPE OF WORK

This Preliminary Scope of Work indicates which portions of Massachusetts’ proposed reform plans the participating LEA is agreeing to implement. The initiatives listed below track to the criteria in the federal RFP. See Attachment 1 for a draft summary of MA’s proposal for each of these initiatives, including the role of the LEA in each initiative.

The participating LEA is committing to implementing Massachusetts’ plan to:

- Improve teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: LEAs will:
 - In collaboration with ESE, design and implement evaluation systems that incorporate multiple measures of effectiveness including significant attention to student growth (see Attachment 3 for definition)
 - Conduct annual evaluations and use evaluations to inform professional development and decisions around compensation, promotion, retention, professional teaching status (tenure) and removal
 - Provide effective support to teachers and principals in the form of high-quality professional development, and measure the effectiveness of that professional development
 - Collect and report aggregate effectiveness data and submit to the state annually
- Ensure effective teachers and leaders in every school and classroom: The state will expand and strengthen a pipeline of diverse and highly effective teachers and leaders, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; special education, and English language learners. **LEAs will** work with the state to access this pipeline to help them achieve an equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders across their schools.
- Turn around the lowest-achieving schools (only for LEAs with level 4 or 5 schools): With support provided by the state, **LEAs will** implement one of four school intervention models:
 - Turnaround model (replace up to 50% of staff)
 - Restart model
 - School closure
 - Transformation model (provided that an LEA with more than nine level 4 or 5 schools may not use the transformation model for more than 50 percent of its schools)
- Use data to improve instruction: Integral to implementing all the initiatives in Massachusetts’ plan successfully, **LEAs will:**
 - Support educator access to timely data about student learning and professional development on use of that data to improve instruction
 - Cooperate with the state to make available appropriate data for research and program evaluation

The state also strongly encourages the participating LEA to commit to participating in Massachusetts’ plan to:

- Roll out statewide P-12 Teaching and Learning System: LEAs are encouraged to partner with the state to develop and implement a new P-12 Teaching and Learning System aligned to the Common Core of standards, including:
 - Summative, benchmark, formative assessments and curriculum-embedded performance tasks
 - Exemplar curricula and instructional units
 - Educator professional development
 - Innovative technology solutions
- Increase college and career readiness: LEAs are encouraged to partner with the state to develop and implement new programs, supports or incentives (such as International Baccalaureate middle and high schools, early college/dual enrollment programs, and an enhanced Adams Scholarship) to improve students’ preparation for college and careers

LEA participation (Y/N)

Y
Y

4. Will provide a Final Scope of Work to be attached to this MOU only if Massachusetts' application is funded; will do so in a timely fashion but no later than 90 days after a grant is awarded; and will describe the LEA's specific goals, activities, timelines, budgets, key personnel, and annual targets for key performance measures ("LEA Plan") in a manner that is consistent with the Preliminary Scope of Work and with Massachusetts' Plan; and
5. Will comply with all of the terms of the Grant, the State subgrant, and all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations, including laws and regulations applicable to the Program, and the applicable provisions of EDGAR (34 CFR Parts 75, 77, 79, 80, 82, 84, 85, 86, 97, 98 and 99).

IV. MODIFICATIONS

This Memorandum of Understanding may be amended only by written agreement signed by each of the parties involved, and in consultation with ED.

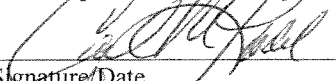
V. DURATION/TERMINATION

This Memorandum of Understanding shall be effective, beginning with the date of the last signature hereon and, if a grant is received, ending upon the expiration of the grant project period, or upon mutual agreement of the parties, whichever occurs first.

VI. SIGNATURES


Signed MOUs must be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education by no later than January 13, 2010.

LEA Superintendent (or equivalent authorized signatory) - required:

 1/12/10
Signature/Date


Carl M. Ladd, Superintendent
Print Name/Title

Chair of the Local School Committee (or equivalent, if applicable):

 1/12/10
Signature/Date

Mike LANGKNECHT Chairman
Print Name/Title


Local Teachers' Union Leader (if applicable):

 1/12/10
Signature/Date

Karl M Dziura
Print Name/Title

Authorized State Official - required:

By its signature below, the State hereby accepts the LEA as a Participating LEA.

 1/19/10
Signature/Date

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D. Commissioner DESE
Print Name/Title