

Partnering for Student Success: How States and School Districts Collaborate to Innovate



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Executive Summary

More than ever before, state education agencies across the nation are advancing bold and ambitious reform agendas that aim to ensure that more students graduate high school ready to succeed in college and careers. In this work, state leaders are balancing the need to develop effective strategies to improve reading and math proficiency, close achievement gaps, and help more students succeed after high school, while also working to build a strong infrastructure within their agencies to effectively lead change. These growing demands require that state education agencies (SEAs) embrace innovative ways of working in order to be successful.

System leaders can maximize the impact of their efforts by creating strong, collaborative relationships with school leaders throughout their states. These kinds of relationships may represent new roles for many SEAs, which have traditionally focused their efforts on monitoring and compliance matters. The challenge of building these effective relationships is a substantial one, but one many states are embracing to ensure that their systems experience real, lasting change.

The U.S. Education Delivery Institute (EDI) partners with K-12 and higher education systems as they set and strive to reach ambitious goals for student success. EDI helps SEAs employ a set of proven tools and processes—called *delivery*—to implement critical elements of their overall improvement strategies. The delivery model ensures that public sector systems will be able to make progress and achieve sustainable results in student outcomes.

Faced with heightened demands for outcomes, many of our partner states have taken innovative approaches to communicating with their school districts and collaborating with them as they collectively work to raise student achievement. This publication provides case studies of promising practices that some of our partner states are using to strengthen these relationships and drive change—from the SEA to the classroom.

These practices include:

DEFINING ASPIRATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM AND SHARING THEM BROADLY

A system's aspiration sets the vision for what it is seeking to achieve. When shared broadly, an aspiration can become a catalyst for change and a powerful force to effectively drive its reform efforts. This case study highlights how the Kentucky Department of Education used its aspiration for college and career-readiness to build statewide momentum for its student success agenda.

MAKING THE PLANS FOR CHANGE CLEAR AND ENGAGING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

SEAs often spend great amounts of time focused on developing plans and strategies to improve student outcomes. Systems can take this work to the next level by engaging school and district leaders in their reforms in meaningful ways. Stories drawn from Delaware and Kentucky demonstrate ways that systems can strategically collaborate with school and district leaders to strengthen their planning and implementation efforts.

CREATING AN INDEPENDENT UNIT TO MONITOR PROGRESS AND DRIVE IMPLEMENTATION

In order for an organization's implementation efforts to be successful, there must be a team of individuals that monitors the complex scope of work that is underway. Without this internal capacity, systems often lack the ability to monitor performance to ensure that they are producing sustainable results for students. The Delaware Department of Education's Delivery Unit provides a strong example of an SEA that has built this important capacity and leverages it to lead change throughout the system.

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO PROGRESS AND DEVELOPING POLICIES, FINANCIAL RESOURCES, AND OTHER SUPPORTS TO ADDRESS THEM

In building momentum for their reforms, SEA leaders must aim to identify and eliminate any barriers school districts may face in their work to raise student achievement. These barriers could be legal or regulatory in nature, or may involve the need to provide districts additional information or resources to help them implement their reforms effectively. Louisiana and Massachusetts provide two examples of systems that have identified barriers to success and addressed them head on.

DIFFERENTIATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND PROVIDING TIERED SUPPORTS BASED ON THEIR NEEDS

In today's economic climate, finding the financial and human resources needed to maintain progress over time can be an uphill battle. In the face of this challenge, SEAs must identify effective ways to target their resources to ensure that their investments will pay off. Massachusetts and Louisiana have embarked on this critical work, and provide two approaches for how states can turn the tide of low performance in their most struggling schools.

Each of the SEAs highlighted in this publication demonstrate a willingness to push past the traditional boundaries of the SEA role and embrace innovation to ensure that state-level reforms lead to real improvement in student outcomes. They prove that true collaboration between state and local education leaders can challenge the status quo and pave a path to successful outcomes for *all* students.

Introduction

Across the nation, state education agencies are facing more challenges than ever before: increased accountability requirements, stubborn achievement gaps, expanding human capital needs, and shrinking budgets are just a few of many. In their work to address these challenges, many state education leaders find themselves at a crossroads between embracing innovative approaches to dramatically increase student learning, and operating within agencies that are structured to focus on monitoring and oversight alone.

This complicated landscape offers state leaders the chance to embrace these challenges as opportunities, by leveraging resources and structuring agency operations in new ways to ensure that outcomes are achieved. To do this work well, state education agencies (SEAs) must shift away from their traditional compliance roles and transform their systems to achieve dramatic results for students.

The U.S. Education Delivery Institute (EDI) works with K-12 and higher education systems that have established ambitious student outcome goals requiring the implementation of large-scale reforms to ensure their success. Our mission is to partner with these systems and invest in their leaders' capacity to deliver results. By employing a proven approach, known as *delivery*, we help state leaders maintain the necessary focus to plan and drive change.

This publication highlights several of our K-12 partner states that are implementing innovative approaches to improving student outcomes by creating strong, collaborative relationships with school district leaders throughout their states. These systems demonstrate that state leaders can maximize the reach of their efforts, and increase their likelihood of success, if such partnerships become cornerstones of their daily work.

Stories drawn from Delaware, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Louisiana highlight promising practices for building state and school district partnerships to drive reform. These practices include:

- Defining aspirations for the system and sharing them broadly
- Making the plans for change clear and engaging school districts in meaningful ways
- Creating an independent unit to monitor progress and drive implementation
- Identifying barriers to progress and developing policies, financial resources, and other supports to address them
- Differentiating school districts by student performance and providing tiered supports based on their needs

This publication is structured to provide SEA leaders concrete ideas on how they can strengthen their collaborative efforts with school districts, so that together, they can make lasting change for students.

The Delivery Framework

The innovative practices that are highlighted in this publication reflect key components of the delivery framework. Delivery is a systemic process through which education system leaders can drive progress and produce results. It incorporates proven practices from management disciplines across the public and private sectors to help education system leaders answer four essential questions:

1. What is our system trying to do?
2. How are we planning to do it?
3. At any given moment, how will we know whether we are on track to succeed?
4. If not, what are we going to do about it?

These questions require that a system clearly articulate its goals, its plan to achieve its goals, and how it will sustain improvement over time. Systems that are able to answer these questions consistently have the foundation needed to make a measurable impact in student achievement.

EDI's support helps systems answer these questions consistently in the following ways:

1) What is our system trying to do? EDI's work with a system begins with the system identifying its goals and summarizing them into metrics that can be shared widely and monitored over time.

2) How are we planning to do it? Most SEAs and school districts have launched broad and multi-faceted reform agendas and have created plans to implement those reforms. Delivery takes this work one step further, by helping education leaders translate their activities into a coherent strategy—or a delivery plan—that tells a clear and compelling story about how they will carry out the plan's activities and achieve the desired outcomes.

3) At any given moment, how will we know whether we are on track to succeed? During the planning process, it is important that education systems not only identify measurable goals, but also develop a way of knowing whether they are on track to achieve those goals. This process involves identifying targets for a system's performance and, based on evidence, projecting the anticipated path of the target metric over a period of time.

4) If not, what are we going to do about it? Routines create opportunities for system stakeholders to review performance on a regular basis to identify and address early warnings or risks. Effective delivery routines typically involve a variety of meetings, formal and informal reports, and focused reviews of specific challenges, all with the goal of ensuring that the organization's priorities are being met.

In organizing how to answer these questions, EDI has developed a framework of 15 essential elements that enable a system and its leaders to address these issues rigorously. This

framework is our systematic approach for ensuring that a focus on delivery becomes embedded in the way the system does business. Our theory of action is simple: A system that faithfully implements each element of the delivery model will achieve visible and measureable results in student outcomes. The 15 elements of delivery are outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The 15 elements of delivery



To develop this framework, EDI adapted and applied the practices created by the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU), founded in 2001 under Prime Minister Tony Blair, and led by Sir Michael Barber. Blair organized the PMDU for a single purpose: to make certain that the promises he was making to the British people about improvements in core government services would be kept. To address this need, the PMDU developed a set of routines and problem-solving techniques which were quickly recognized as a new and radically different approach to delivering results. Taken together, these techniques comprise the delivery framework.

The results of the PMDU’s efforts were clear: By the end of Blair’s second term (2005), approximately 80 percent of the administration’s ambitious goals had been achieved, and performance had improved in almost all of the remaining cases. Blair concluded that the Delivery Unit was the best reform of the government machine he ever made.

Delivery at the state level is most powerful when it helps an SEA drive these practices to districts and schools. Since EDI’s work began, a number of our K-12 partner systems have focused on this aspect of delivery in particular. Their work has resulted in a series of innovative

approaches that state leaders are taking to collaborate with their districts to drive results for students. The systems that have pioneered these approaches are on the leading edge of reform in a critical area of implementation. This publication captures their stories and the lessons they have learned.

Delivery is being implemented in more than a dozen of K-12 and higher education systems across the nation, with strong early outcomes. Ultimately, our goal is for all state education systems to embrace the delivery approach.

1. Define aspirations for the system and share them broadly

For most SEAs, change is the norm. As election cycles pass and state leadership changes, it is all too common for key stakeholders in education policy decisions—such as SEA staff, school leaders, teachers, and parents—to lack a clear understanding of an SEA’s priorities and what it is trying to accomplish at any given time. Very often, SEAs employ communications staff to lead the effort to get the word out about the agency’s initiatives, but time and resource constraints often require that such efforts rely heavily on using the traditional news media and leaning on a select group of stakeholders to help lead outreach efforts. As a result, critical stakeholders may remain unaware of the SEA’s efforts and what leaders are seeking to achieve.

This lack of clear, consistent communication has direct implications for a state leader’s ability to lead an effort to create true change in schools and classrooms. After all, if an SEA seeks to transform its education system for the long term, isn’t it important for everyone involved in the transformation to know what the end goal is?

This kind of communication effort begins with the creation of a clear aspiration. An aspiration is a leader’s answer to the question: What would success look like for our system? It is a system’s articulation of its goals and the specific outcomes it is seeking to attain. When shared widely, a system’s aspiration can become a catalyst for change and a powerful force to effectively drive its reform efforts.¹ It sets the vision for what the system is seeking to achieve.

There are a number of states that are taking bold and innovative steps to communicate their aspirations. We have chosen to highlight one state leader who successfully built momentum throughout the state for the department’s college and career-readiness goal.

KENTUCKY’S DISTRICTS COMMIT TO A COLLEGE AND CAREER-READINESS AGENDA

In recent years, education leaders and elected officials in Kentucky have worked to ensure that more students are prepared for college and careers in order to guarantee the commonwealth’s future competitiveness and the ability of its young people to succeed after high school. There was a clear need for improvement: based on 2008-09 ACT results, only 33 percent of Kentucky’s public high school students were ready for college or careers.

In that same year, state legislators passed Senate Bill 1, a law that required leaders from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to collaborate with the state’s higher education

¹ See *Deliverology 101* for more information on aspiration-setting (Section 1A) and communication plans (Section 5B).

system to produce a plan for reducing the college remediation rates of high school graduates by fifty percent by 2014 and increasing the college completion rates of students enrolled in one or more remedial classes by three percent annually from 2009 to 2014. The passage of this law helped increase the number of stakeholders committed to the college and career-readiness agenda and strengthened statewide focus on the issue as a priority.

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday recognized the importance of engaging schools and districts in the state's efforts to increase college and career-readiness, as their participation would be critical to ensure that true change would occur in Kentucky's schools for the long term. In February 2011, the Commissioner chose a meeting of the Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA) to kick off his outreach. At the meeting, Commissioner Holliday publicly asked all superintendents and school board chairs to pledge their commitment to increase the rates of college and career-ready graduates by 50 percent by the year 2015—a goal created by KDE leaders. To demonstrate their commitment, Commissioner Holliday asked that they sign a "Commonwealth Commitment to College and Career Readiness" that articulated the district's pledge to reach the goal. To make each district's contribution to the goal clear and concrete, each superintendent also received a customized spreadsheet that specified the number of students that would need to be college and career-ready by 2015 in his or her district in order to reach the goal.

In the weeks following the speech, Commissioner Holliday and KDE leaders utilized a number of strategies to communicate the importance of this goal. The Commissioner used his weekly e-mail updates to superintendents to provide up-to-date counts of the number of districts that had signed on to the Commitment. The department also published a map online, which was updated regularly to show which districts had pledged their commitment (shaded in blue) and which had not (shaded in red). See Figures 2 and 3 below.

Figure 2: Early map of districts signed on to the Commonwealth Commitment

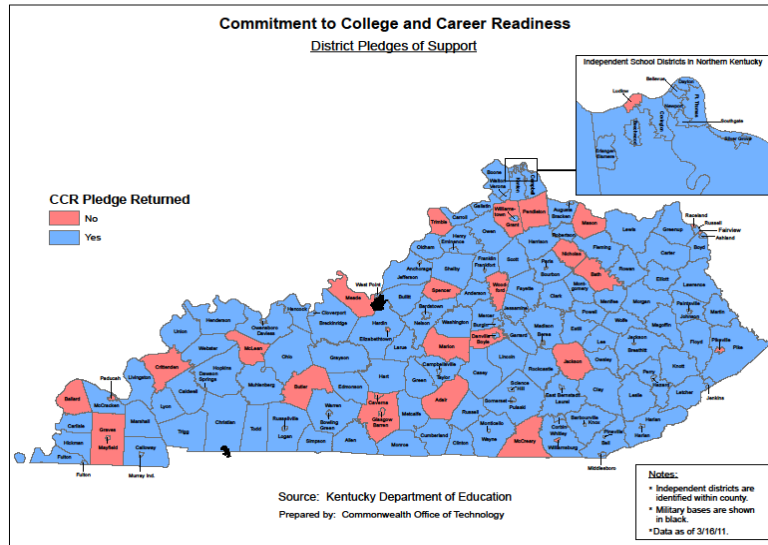


Figure 3: Final map of districts signed on to the Commonwealth Commitment



This public outreach, coupled with attention from the news media, helped to build momentum in school districts statewide to sign on to the commitment. By early April of 2011, all of the state's 174 school districts that provide high school programs, plus the Kentucky School for the Blind and the Kentucky School for the Deaf, had signed on to the Commonwealth Commitment.

To support districts as they embarked upon this work, the KDE also created a set of state-supported, research-based strategies to help educators strengthen their college and career-readiness efforts. These strategies included providing educators professional development on

effective interventions for struggling students, helping districts create college and career-readiness pipeline programs, providing curriculum to prepare students for STEM careers, creating Early College programs, and several others.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

The communication strategies used by the Commissioner and his team garnered statewide support from school and district leaders and helped build a strong foundation for the effort. As a result, stakeholders from throughout the state are unified around one aspiration and actively collaborate with KDE officials to implement high-impact college and career-readiness strategies.

Just two years after the passage of Senate Bill 1, Kentucky has seen a strong gain in the percentage of students who are college and career-ready—from 33 percent in 2009 to 38 percent in 2011. Education officials credit the collaboration and hard work of school leaders and educators statewide for these outcomes and for the continued momentum toward improvement.

2. Make the plans for change clear and engage school districts in meaningful ways

State education systems often spend great amounts of time focused on developing plans and strategies to improve student outcomes statewide. Very often, this work includes engaging superintendents, principals, teachers, and community members as part of the planning process and as communications about the SEA's initiatives are shared with the public.

However, many systems miss important opportunities to take their efforts a step further by meaningfully engaging school districts in their reform efforts.² Systems can take a variety of approaches to this kind of engagement. They may require that school districts implement certain reforms in a "top down" manner; they may provide support or incentives for school districts to participate in priority activities; or they may simply make the system's goals clear and allow districts to determine the ways they will meet the goals. Regardless of the approach, SEAs should aim to make these activities relevant to district leaders and responsive to their particular contexts and needs. Two examples of SEAs taking different approaches to school district engagement can be found in Delaware and Kentucky.

DELAWARE PROVIDES SCHOOL DISTRICTS A BALANCE OF SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR PLANNING EFFORTS

Delaware was one of the first states to receive federal Race to the Top (RTTT) funding in March 2010. As a small state with 19 school districts, Delaware has the advantage of being able to convene all of its districts regularly to engage in deep and long-term planning. While most states do not have the ability to bring together their school districts in this manner, helpful lessons can be learned from Delaware's efforts and applied to any state's unique context. These lessons can be particularly insightful for SEAs that are targeting certain districts for improvement, as is discussed in Section 5.

An important first step to Delaware's RTTT effort was for each school district to create implementation plans within a short 90-day period, as was required by the U.S. Department of Education. After releasing its first plan template to districts and receiving their feedback, officials from the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) decided to revise the template so that RTTT elements were incorporated into the existing planning tool called the "Success Plan." The resulting template was a more streamlined planning tool that included each district's goals, objectives, strategies, and reform activities in one document.

² See *Deliverology 101* for more information on engaging system stakeholders (Section 2B, pages 65-73) and capacity-building approaches (Section 5A).

Districts were required to receive approval on their plans in order to receive continued RTTT funding at the end of the year. DDOE officials were up front with a promise to not play “gotcha” when funding decisions were made at the end of the year, but committed to make all expectations for the plans clear and explicit from the beginning.

The “top-down” approach Delaware took to this planning effort was coupled with additional support via the DDOE’s Local Education Agency (LEA) Support Program. Coordinated by the DDOE’s Deputy Chief of Staff, Rebecca Taber, the LEA Support Program was designed to provide districts more time and resources to develop high impact, outcome-focused plans while also developing the capacity to implement the plans successfully using the delivery approach. To help structure the program, Education Secretary Lillian Lowery convened an Advisory Council that included representatives from school districts, Delaware’s teachers union, the DDOE, and Vision 2015, a cross-sector group of leaders dedicated to improving educational outcomes in the state.

The program included a number of components:

- “Chiefs” meetings targeted to district teams comprised of school district superintendents and one or two key district leaders. These meetings focused on strengthening participants’ content knowledge and skills. Examples of meeting topics included developing effective teachers and leaders, increasing teacher collaboration, principal recruitment and selection, and family and community engagement.
- County-based workshops targeted to each district’s RTTT teams, which included school district staff, school board representatives, and teachers. The content covered in these meetings mirrored the chiefs meetings, and also focused on helping teams develop specific components of their Success Plans.
- The provision of trained liaisons and facilitators from the DDOE to meet with district planning teams to review and provide feedback on draft plans.
- Other resources such as readings and visits to high-performing schools, which focused on topics aligned with those addressed in the chiefs meetings and county workshops.

An outline of the program calendar is provided in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Calendar for the Support Program

Support Program Calendar		
Date	Activity	Focus & Follow-up work
September 23	Chief meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focus: Program overview • Skill focus: Understand the “delivery” challenge • Follow-up work: Conduct LEA needs assessment
October 11, 12, or 13	County workshop	
October 28	Chief meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focus: Effective teachers and leaders • Skill focus: Plan for delivery • Follow-up work: Revise Goal 3 of plans (Obj. 4-7)
November 16	Chief meeting	
December 6, 7, or 8	County workshop	
December 14	Chief meeting	
January 28	CSO Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focus: Rigorous standards, curriculum, and assessments • Skill focus: Plan for delivery • Follow-up work: Revise Goals 1 & 2 of plans (Obj. 1-3)
February 7, 8, or 9	County workshop	
February 24	Chief meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focus: Family and community engagement • Skill focus: Drive delivery • Follow-up work: Revise Goal 4 (Obj. 8-9) <i>[Not Collected]</i>
March 7, 8, or 9	County workshop	
March 24	Chief meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focus: Resource allocation and sustainability • Skill focus: Create a delivery culture • Follow-up work: Revise remaining parts of plans
April 11	Revised Success Plans Due	
April-June	Plan refinement	

OUTCOMES TO DATE

By May 2011, drafts of district plans were submitted to the DDOE for review. Each district participated in a “plan review meeting” to identify ways their plans could be strengthened, and each had a call with Secretary Lowery to discuss their plans and the feedback that had been provided. After these conversations, districts submitted revised plans for the DDOE’s approval. By June, all of the plans and funding amounts were approved.

As the program was implemented, the DDOE solicited feedback from participants about the content of the meetings and workshops and the quality of the resources provided. Overwhelmingly, participants regularly agreed that the support provided was valuable and helpful to their teams. For those areas flagged as problematic, DDOE officials worked to address

them. All feedback and resulting program adjustments were posted on a public website dedicated to the program.³

Since this time, the LEA Support Program has transitioned to focus on providing ongoing support and oversight to districts as they implement their plans. Section 3—about Delivery Units—provides more detail about how the program continues to operate and the role the Delivery Unit plays.

KENTUCKY’S LEADERSHIP NETWORKS EMPOWER EDUCATORS TO REACH HIGHER STANDARDS

In 2009, the Kentucky legislature voted unanimously for the passage of Senate Bill 1, a groundbreaking bill that called for a range of reforms focused on preparing young people for success after high school. As outlined in Section 1 of this publication, this bill paved the way for education leaders statewide to advocate for more policy and programmatic attention to the college and career-readiness agenda. The reforms outlined in the legislation included more rigorous academic standards, an effective assessment system to monitor student learning, and greater collaboration among Kentucky’s K-12 and higher education systems to support students’ college and career-readiness.

In February 2010, Kentucky became the first state in the nation to adopt the Common Core State Standards. These internationally-benchmarked standards—now adopted by nearly every state in the nation—provide teachers, parents, and young people a clear understanding of what students must know and be able to do in order to succeed in postsecondary education and employment.

Following the adoption of the standards, leaders at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), in partnership with higher education leaders, teachers unions, school board associations, and other education support organizations, recognized the need to support Kentucky’s educators to understand the new standards and their impact on teaching, learning, and assessment. The Leadership Networks were developed to systematically address this need.

The networks were modeled after Kentucky’s existing Science Support Networks, which work to connect educators to best practice in science education. The expanded networks focus on English/language arts and math, and aim to provide participants opportunities to meet regularly to develop their content, instructional, and assessment competencies based on the new standards. The vision of the networks is to ensure that each school district has a “knowledgeable and cohesive” leadership team to build the capacity of its educators to make the necessary shifts in practice to improve student learning outcomes. The networks are housed

³ For more information, see the References section.

in KDE's Office of Next Generation Learners under the leadership of Felicia Cumings Smith, Associate Commissioner.

Network convenings are structured to help participants deeply understand the standards, understand what counts as acceptable forms of student success based on the standards, and create learning experiences for students that are aligned to the standards. KDE leaders intentionally structured the networks as capacity-building resources, wherein participants work to develop their own skills and knowledge so they can later create and implement plans based on their district's needs. This approach is much different than a "train-the-trainer" model, which trains individuals to replicate a structured professional development experience without any attention to local context or needs. Instead, the network experience builds participants' capacity so they can meaningfully plan how to implement the new standards in their districts and ultimately improve teaching and learning.

All 174 of Kentucky's school districts voluntarily participate in the networks via teams comprised of classroom educators, district-level instructional supervisors or professional development coordinators, building-level administrators, and superintendents. Two networks were established to reach each level of school district systems:

- **Content Leadership Networks** targeted to educators—called "teacher leaders." There are a total of 16 networks of this kind: English/language arts (eight) and mathematics (eight). Participants meet eight times per year in eight regions across Kentucky.
- **Instructional Support Leadership Networks** targeted to district-level leaders and school building administrators. Eight networks exist for district-level leaders, which meet eight times per year in eight regions across the state. Networks for school building administrators are folded in to the meetings of Kentucky Leadership Academy, which provides support to administrators on leadership development more broadly.

The Leadership Networks are coordinated by Karen Kidwell, Director of Program Standards at the KDE, in partnership with other KDE staff. This team also works closely with regional content specialists, who are highly-skilled educators on loan from their home districts to provide direct support to the networks over a three-year period. These content specialists represent a crucial link between the KDE and Kentucky's schools and educators. Their leadership within the networks ensures that the SEA understands the local contexts of school districts and is responsive to it.

To ensure that planning across each network is consistent, this team of KDE staff and content specialists meets each month to create lesson plans and structure upcoming network convenings. Their work is also supported by higher education faculty who help facilitate convenings. This collaboration with higher education has two important benefits: network

participants benefit from faculty's knowledge and expertise, and faculty become better equipped to prepare their pre-service educators to understand the standards.

In a typical convening of a Content Leadership Network, one might find facilitators beginning the session with a presentation on a new teaching strategy or learning tool. This session could be followed by facilitated conversations across district teams, organized by grade level to provide educators opportunities for sharing and capacity-building across districts. The day might close with mini-breakout sessions that cover a range of topics from which participants can choose. Teacher-leaders often lead these groups, and may focus their discussions on a particular aspect of the standards, an effective classroom practice, or a range of other relevant topics. This face-to-face collaboration during network convenings is also supplemented by an online community for participants, where teacher-leaders can share information and materials with one another on an ongoing basis.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

In the first year of the networks, participants focused primarily on developing a clear understanding of the standards and how they translate into effective teaching. Participants are currently working to deepen their understanding of the standards by learning how to organize reading and writing across all subject areas and how to adjust their teaching practice to better meet students' individual learning needs.

As a result of their participation in the networks, many districts have made substantive changes in the ways they support educators to teach the Common Core. For example, some have changed their professional development offerings so their teachers are more prepared to teach the standards, and others have re-structured their school days so teachers have more time to plan together.

Moving forward, networks will focus on ensuring that their efforts translate into improved classroom practice, particularly by strengthening district-based teams so they can fully support effective teaching and learning within their districts.⁴

⁴ For more information, see the References section.

3. Create an independent unit to monitor progress and drive implementation

In order for an organization's implementation efforts to be successful, there must be a team of individuals that monitors the complex scope of initiatives that are underway to ensure that the system is producing real, sustainable results for students. This work is led by a Delivery Unit. The Unit is the person or small group of people who are responsible for driving the achievement of the system's goals.⁵ The purpose of this Unit is to know, at any given moment, whether the system is on track to reach its goals.

The Delivery Unit works as an independent unit that functions outside of the line management chain. With the system leader's backing, this Unit is responsible for keeping the leader informed about progress, identifying problems early, and helping build the system's capacity to deliver on its goals. Equally important, Delivery Unit staff must become champions in the belief that the system's goals can be achieved.

The role a Delivery Unit plays is different from a system's chief accountability officer, who is responsible for school and district accountability, assessment, evaluation, and broader research matters within the department. While the work between these two offices must be coordinated, they play very different roles in the department's functions.

There are certainly other approaches that systems can take to ensure that they deliver on their goals. Some systems may engage a consultant to help SEA staff create a strategic plan and build structures to monitor its implementation. Others may even create a project management unit to lead this work internally. While these approaches are promising in many ways, they often lack close connections between the projects being managed and the actual outcomes the system is seeking to achieve. For many, this disconnect can be a fatal flaw in execution, resulting in well-meaning officials wondering why, with all of the effort, time, and resources expended, progress is not made or sustained over time.

Delivery Units can make the difference. EDI works with many K-12 education systems to help them establish Delivery Units to serve these important purposes.

DELAWARE'S DELIVERY UNIT DRIVES PROGRESS

The State of Delaware began to adopt the delivery approach in 2010 as it embarked on the work to implement its Race to the Top (RTTT) plan. As outlined in Section 2, the Delaware

⁵ See Section 1C in *Deliverology 101* for more information on building a Delivery Unit.

Department of Education (DDOE) developed a comprehensive LEA Support Program that was key to helping the state's districts create plans to implement their RTTT efforts.

In September 2011 the program, now coordinated within the DDOE's Delivery Unit, turned to other important functions: monitoring implementation and progress. Instead of the program focusing on helping districts plan their work, it evolved to concentrate on implementing routines to drive performance throughout the state. Using the delivery framework to move this work forward, the Delivery Unit established a set of accountability routines to track progress.

Routines must be part of any system's day-to-day operations if it plans to make lasting, sustainable improvements in student outcomes. To illustrate it simply, if a system seeking to make change were a jet plane, routines would be the engine. They provide opportunities for system leaders and other key officials to review performance, discuss challenges, and make plans to drive the work forward.⁶

Two of Delaware's accountability routines—progress reviews and performance evaluations—focus on tracking implementation progress and performance. Other accountability routines involve districts submitting financial reports to ensure that RTTT funds are being spent appropriately.

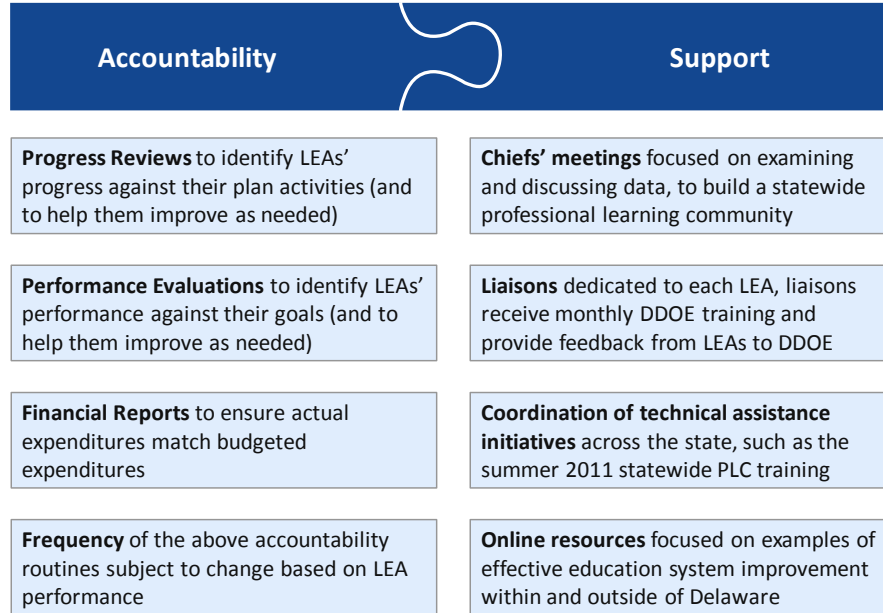
The accountability routines are complemented by the ongoing support the DDOE has provided since 2010 via its LEA Support Program. This support program includes Chiefs' meetings with district leadership, dedicated SEA liaisons to support district implementation efforts, and other resources. For more information on the program, see Section 2.

An overview of the DDOE's implementation support is provided in Figure 5 below.

⁶ See Section 4A in *Deliverology 101* for more information on routines.

Figure 5: Overview of implementation support

Implementation Support Overview

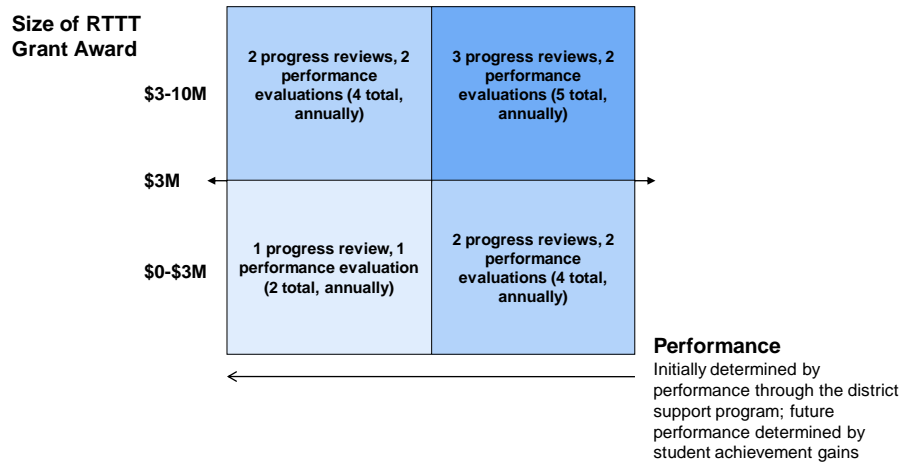


District Accountability Routines

During progress reviews and performance evaluations, district representatives meet with DDOE staff to discuss work-to-date, challenges faced, assistance needed from the DDOE, and next steps. The DDOE targets districts for these routines based on the size of the RTTT award and district performance: Districts with large awards and struggling performance meet with the DDOE more often than districts with smaller grants and strong performance. The matrix in Figure 6 below outlines this differentiated approach. Regardless of size or performance, however, each district participates in each routine yearly.

Figure 6: District monitoring matrix

District Monitoring Matrix



District Support Routines

On the support side, Chiefs’ meetings are structured as professional learning communities during which district leaders examine and discuss their data (e.g., AP enrollment and success rates, educator hiring and retention, etc.), and delve deeply into particular topics, such as dropout prevention or college readiness. In addition, dedicated DDOE liaisons provide on-site support to districts as they implement their plans and serve as critical elements of DDOE’s feedback loop to ensure that implementation is on track and that districts receive the support they need.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

In the fall of 2011 all districts participated in progress reviews, which provided district and state leaders a high-level understanding of early successes and challenges in the first year of implementation. The reviews did not include a formal evaluation component; rather, they primarily served as “learning journeys” for DDOE staff to better understand what was happening in the field, identify strengths, and share best practices across the state.

The DDOE recently completed its first round of mid-year performance evaluations. Twelve of the 19 districts were reviewed based on grant size and performance-to-date. The evaluations

provided leaders useful opportunities to review data and have honest conversations about strengths and opportunities to improve implementation and outcomes moving forward.⁷

⁷ For more information, see the References section.

4. Identify barriers to progress and develop policies, financial resources, and other supports to address them

In building momentum for their reforms, SEA leaders should identify and aim to eliminate any barriers school districts may face in their work to raise student achievement. These barriers could be legal or regulatory in nature, or may involve the need to provide districts additional information or resources to help them to implement their reforms effectively. As schools are being held to higher and higher standards, SEAs must be skillful about the roles they can play in helping to effectively remove any obstacles to improvement.⁸

Two of our partner states have taken different approaches to playing this role for all of their local education agencies (LEAs), including school districts and charter schools. Louisiana has focused on helping LEAs identify the resources needed to advance their efforts, and Massachusetts has worked to increase stakeholders' access to data.

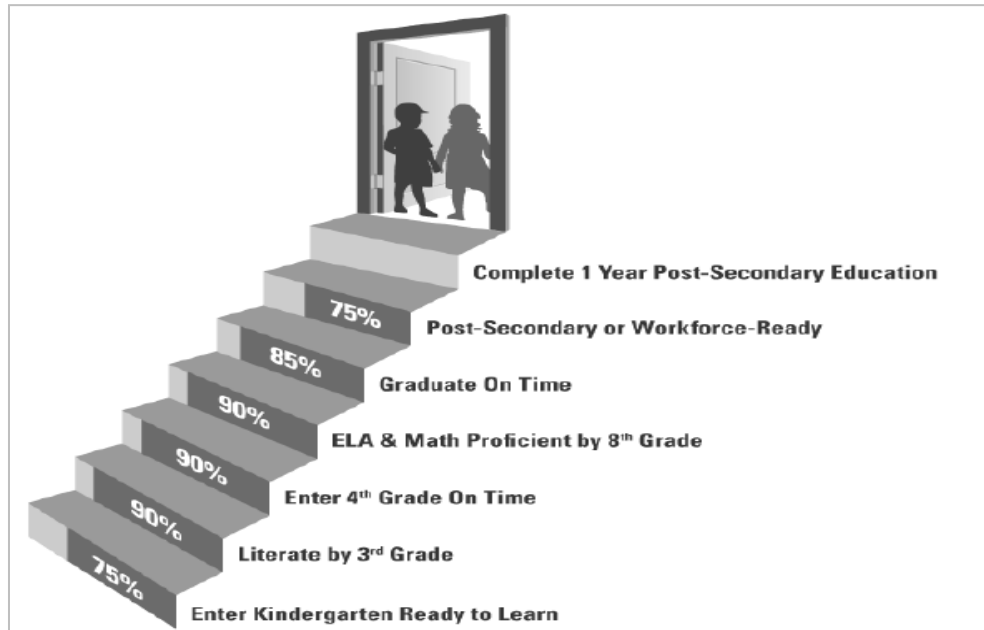
LOUISIANA HELPS LEAS LEVERAGE THEIR FUNDS TO MEET CRITICAL GOALS

In today's challenging economic environment, it is particularly difficult for SEAs to provide more financial resources to LEAs to lead new or expanded work, or for LEAs to stretch their thin resources to fund them on their own. However, there are a number of approaches states can take to equip their LEAs with the tools they need to be successful. The Louisiana Department of Education has taken an approach that helped its LEAs understand how they can leverage their financial resources to better support their reform efforts.

In the summer of 2009, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) became the first system in the United States to begin utilizing the delivery approach to drive improvement in student outcomes. Focusing on its mission to increase student achievement, eliminate achievement gaps, and prepare students for the global economy, the department laid out "Critical Goals" for its work, outlined in Figure 7 below. The department also underwent a complete reorganization to focus its efforts and resources on achieving its goals.

⁸ See Section 4B in *Deliverology 101* for more information on problem-solving approaches.

Figure 7: Louisiana's Critical Goals



As they worked to implement this agenda, state leaders recognized that many LEAs would likely struggle to identify the resources they needed to implement the identified strategies well. This challenge led the department to create the Fiscal Model Training Module to help LEAs integrate federal, state, and local funds to support effective strategies to improve student outcomes. The module was created with the dual purposes of helping LEA staff identify promising initiatives that could serve as best practices and assess how federal, state, and local funding sources could be used together to implement those initiatives. The targeted audiences for the module were superintendents, federal program staff, business managers, and school administrators.

To create the module, a state work group comprised of program and finance staff met from August 2009 to January 2010 to identify best practices and funding sources to support each goal area. The resulting module provides an overview of effective practices that LEAs can implement to meet Louisiana's goals, gives examples of how different funding sources can be used to support each initiative across budget categories, and describes the rules governing major funding sources. Some examples are provided in Figures 8 and 9 below.

Figure 8: An overview of an effective practice aligned to Louisiana’s goals

After School Interventions

LDOE Critical Goals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Purpose To improve student achievement and provide students and their families with academic and enrichment opportunities during out-of-school hours.

Possible Funding Sources NCLB Title I, IVA (Safe and Drug Free Schools), IVB (21st Century Community Learning Centers), VI (REAP), IDEA

Targeted Population K-12 students and their families

Detail how this LDOE initiative supports academic achievement Department of Education after school programs are required to align curricula with the Department’s Literacy and Numeracy initiatives and BESE adopted After School Standards. All LDOE funded after school program providers are evaluated on the academic performance of participating students. Failure to show academic improvement among participating students will lead to sanctions up to termination as a provider.

Figure 9: A breakdown of the funds that can be used to support the after-school intervention strategy

AFTER SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS														
State Initiatives		No Child Left Behind									Perkins	Individuals With Disabilities Education Act		
		Title I			Title II		Title III	Title IV	Title VI	Title X		Part B	Early Intervening	Preschool
Budget Code	Activity	Part A		Part C	A: Teacher Quality	D: Tech	LEP	B	B: REAP-RLIS	McKinney-Vento				
		1003A	1003G	Migrant										
100	Salaries													
	School Site Coordinator	X	X	X				X	X					
	Teachers for After Hours													
	Instruction	X	X	X				X	X		X	X		
	Recreation							X						
	Enrichment							X		X				
	Stipends for Content Specific PD	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X		
200	Employee Benefits													
	Coordinator	X	X	X				X	X			X		
	Teachers	X	X	X				X	X					
	Stipends for PD	X	X	X		X		X	X					

After developing the module, the department held four regional training sessions in March and April 2010. LEAs were asked to send key staff to the session, including the superintendent, chief academic officer, director of federal programs, business operations directors, and Title I and IDEA directors. The sessions focused on Louisiana’s student outcome goals, addressed federal funding guidelines, and provided an overview of best practices.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

With this module, the LDOE gave LEA leaders the information they needed to fund their priorities in a more integrated and coherent manner while still heeding state and federal guidelines. According to LEA leaders, the module and its implementation dispelled many myths and fears about how funds could and could not be used. Many have been extremely positive about the module and have used it to re-think how they can fund their priority initiatives in more focused and strategic ways.⁹

MASSACHUSETTS MAKES SCHOOL DATA MORE ACCESSIBLE

In the face of increasing federal and state accountability requirements, SEAs are developing innovative ways to use school data more effectively to target resources and drive improvement. However, some states are not stopping there, but are pushing the envelope to translate effective data-use practices to their LEAs as well.

As the Deputy Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE), Karla Baehr was determined to build a culture of data-driven decision-making throughout the LEAs of Massachusetts. However, like many states, Massachusetts has many disparate data systems and as a result, it often took considerable time and effort to obtain a comprehensive picture of an LEA or school.

With this in mind, the MA DESE created the District Analysis and Review Tool (DART). This system enables policymakers, parents, and the public to assess and monitor the performance of all public schools and LEAs, hold school leaders accountable for that performance, and identify where intervention is needed.

While there was an immediate need for a quick and easy resource that provided clear and concise data, there were several challenges in implementing the system, including identifying which data points would convey the “health” of a school/LEA and determining how to present the data effectively.

Dr. Baehr and her team began this work by using ongoing stakeholder meetings (e.g., Urban Superintendents Network, meetings with partner organizations, etc.) and outreach to other stakeholder groups to determine what information beyond No Child Left Behind data was considered vital to the “health” of an LEA. From these discussions, a number of high priority indicators were identified. This list was narrowed down to 30 data elements which covered a

⁹ For more information, see the References section.

wide range of LEA and school information including demographics, assessment data, post-secondary data, educator data, and financial data.

The team soon realized that identifying the key indicators for the tool was only part of the work. It was also critical that the tool present the data in a manner that was straightforward and easy to understand, so users could draw clear conclusions about the facts. To address this need, state officials turned to the work of statistician and expert in the presentation of informational graphics, Edward Tufte. Using Tufte’s techniques, the MA DESE was able to present LEA comparisons and multiple years of data in a simple, easy-to-read format. After choosing a school or LEA to analyze, the user is provided a list of comparable LEAs or schools based on student enrollment and demographics. Any LEA or school can be selected for comparison. See Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: LEA comparisons in DART

	2011 NCLB Accountability Status				District Assistance Level				
	English Language Arts		Mathematics						
Burlington					Level 2				
Billerica	Corrective Action - Subgroups		Improvement Year 2 - Subgroups		Level 2				
<small>*Districts are most similar to your district in terms of grade span, enrollment, and special population. Orange-shaded row: Your district Blue-shaded row: Highest performing of the other 10 districts in 2010 and 2011 .</small>									
Comparable Districts Overview	Grade span	2010-11 October Enrollment				2011 MCAS % Advanced/Proficient		2011 MCAS Growth	
		Total Enrollment	Low Income	SPED	LEP	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Ashland*	PK - 12	2,624	10.2	13.7	3.1	79%	70%	56.0	62.0
Belmont*	PK - 12	3,928	7.5	10.0	2.7	90%	81%	64.0	58.0
Burlington*	PK - 12	3,652	9.9	13.3	2.0	77%	66%	53.0	52.0
Canton*	PK - 12	3,218	11.3	15.1	1.3	83%	71%	56.0	48.0
Dudley-Charlton Reg*	PK - 12	4,275	14.9	12.4	1.5	78%	65%	45.0	50.0
Nashoba*	PK - 12	3,495	7.9	11.1	0.7	84%	77%	53.0	59.0
North Andover*	PK - 12	4,638	11.8	13.5	1.2	78%	66%	56.0	54.0
Scituate*	PK - 12	3,276	6.6	12.2	0.8	88%	81%	57.0	56.0
Sharon*	PK - 12	3,435	7.2	15.1	1.7	89%	79%	57.0	55.0
Walpole*	PK - 12	3,961	9.4	14.7	2.3	84%	70%	58.0	48.0
Westborough*	PK - 12	3,513	7.5	13.4	6.8	85%	77%	59.0	54.0

OUTCOMES TO DATE

It is clear that DART has been used by schools and LEAs to inform their planning and oversight activities. As professional development for DART was provided, state officials regularly heard from school and LEA leaders that the tool would be immediately useful for their planning and implementation efforts. Officials also heard from local school board members who appreciated the user-friendly format and believed that the data would assist them in their decision making. These benefits have helped the MA DESE to build a stronger rapport with its LEAs.

The tool has also helped LEAs learn from each other. In one instance, a charter school used the DART tool to identify a comparison school that was achieving better outcomes for similar students. The charter schools' leaders contacted the school and asked if they could visit to learn more about their educational program during a "learning day."

Since its initial launch, LEAs have provided suggestions for enhancements to the tool, and the MA DESE has released two new versions of DART, one focused on finance and staffing and one focused on English Language Learners. In addition, there are currently plans in place to create a DART that will include data on college and career-readiness indicators.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more information, see the References section.

5. Differentiate school districts by student performance and provide tiered supports based on their needs

As SEAs lead ambitious reform across their states, many are identifying ways they can target their resources to the most critical areas of their agendas to ensure that their investments will pay off. Two of our partner states—Louisiana and Massachusetts—used data to identify the schools that needed the most support and reorganized the SEA’s structure to effectively meet those schools’ needs.

LOUISIANA TARGETS HIGH PRIORITY SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES

At the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), state leaders outlined a bold reform agenda with “Critical Goals” and aligned strategies that spanned from early childhood to postsecondary education, as described in Section 4. Several of the goals were directly tied to the department’s efforts to increase the number of students who are college and career-ready, including the goal for 80 percent of students to graduate on time by 2014. While Louisiana has always had a number of initiatives in place to increase graduation rates, state leaders began to pay increased attention to ensuring that the strategies put in place would lead to improved graduation rates. State leaders recognized that there was a real need to move away from the “cookie cutter” approach to supporting schools, wherein all schools received the same support despite their individual differences. Instead, the LDOE sought to create a menu of options that would allow schools to receive the services that would meet their distinct needs.

An early step in this approach was for the LDOE’s Delivery Unit and the College and Career Readiness office led by Deputy Superintendent Debbie Schum to identify the initiatives that were most effective at helping students graduate. As a result of this analysis, officials identified 14 strategies that would comprise the office’s approach to increasing graduation rates and an owner for each strategy who would be accountable for its implementation.

To help them target their efforts effectively, state leaders used performance trends to identify the most struggling schools. As a result of this analysis, the LDOE identified 52 schools that had a high percentage of students who began their freshmen year at grade level, but did not progress and graduate four years later. These schools—dubbed High Priority Schools—were the schools that could turn the tide for Louisiana’s graduation rate if their rates improved.

Using the LDOE’s regional team structure, state leaders focused the attention of these teams on the High Priority Schools first, ensuring that each school had an action plan and a direct connection to the LDOE if assistance was needed in the implementation of its key strategies. In

addition, members of the regional teams visited the High Priority Schools twice each month. The purpose of these visits was not to simply monitor the schools and report back to department officials, but to provide schools tailored, on-the-ground assistance and hands-on support as they implemented their strategies.

Teams helped schools monitor a number of leading indicators to measure their progress over the course of the school year, including quarterly student attendance rates, student behavior trends, and course failure rates (known as the “ABC’s”). This quantitative data analysis was complemented by qualitative data collected during school visits and via other reporting mechanisms. Collectively, this information allowed the regional teams to engage in effective, data-driven conversations with school leaders focused on student outcomes.

Each region was also equipped with a graduation rate goal coordinator who spent time in school buildings getting to know staff, meeting with leadership teams, and helping schools set a direction for the future.

Taken together, this approach aimed to build the capacity of schools so they had the tools and knowledge needed to drive real, sustainable improvement.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

It is clear that Louisiana’s investments have begun to pay off. Across the state, the graduation rate has increased by 3.7 percentage points from 2010 to 2011—an increase that is nearly three times the increases achieved during the previous three years combined.

The most notable increases were seen in the High Priority Schools, which averaged a 4.4 point gain from 2010-11, with ten of these schools demonstrating growth of 10 points or more. State leaders believe that the combination of LDOE’s statewide graduation rate strategies, coupled with the High Priority Schools’ hard work and the targeted assistance tailored to meet their specific needs, contributed to this significant progress.

MASSACHUSETTS STRENGTHENS ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS TO MEET INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY DEMANDS

In 2007-08, officials at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) initiated the Commissioner’s Districts program to target attention and resources to the schools that had the greatest history of academic challenges. These schools—360 in total—had the designations of “corrective action” or “restructuring” under the commonwealth’s accountability system. Since the 10 largest districts in the state were home to 80 percent of

these schools, state leaders decided to work with these districts directly to have an even greater impact. These districts were called the “Commissioner’s Districts.”

During the next two years, several contextual changes took place. A new law dissolved the independent agency that was in charge of overseeing school accountability, and shifted the responsibility to the MA DESE. As a result, the department became responsible for both keeping schools accountable for outcomes *and* providing assistance to schools that needed it. In addition, during this time another state law passed that provided a new sense of urgency: If any low-performing school failed to turn around its performance in three years, the school could be placed into receivership by the State Board of Education and be “taken over.” Taken together, these reforms added to MA DESE’s strengthened focus on supporting its most struggling schools.

To address these new demands, state leaders envisioned a stronger system for accountability and assistance and engaged stakeholders from throughout the state to help shape it. Officials wanted to ensure that whenever the MA DESE planned to intervene in a low-performing school or district, it had the resources and supports needed to provide effective assistance. For this reason, the previous list of 360 schools was trimmed down to 35 schools. These schools were identified based on four-year trends on absolute student achievement, student growth, and trends on the state’s standardized test. These schools were named “Level 4” schools, referring to the schools’ placement on the Massachusetts Framework of Accountability and Assistance. All of these schools were located in the original Commissioner’s Districts.

To support their work with these districts, state officials leveraged funds from the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) program and the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program to expand the SEA’s services via its newly-structured Office of District and School Turnaround. As they shaped their assistance to schools, staff members in this office aimed to develop strong relationships with district leaders and structured their efforts to focus on building trust. Using the concept of relational trust as conceptualized by Bryk and Schneider (2002), the team worked to create trust by fostering four conditions—respect, competence, personal regard for others, and personal integrity.¹¹ Bryk and Schneider’s longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools had found that schools with high levels of relational trust were much more likely to demonstrate improvements in student learning. For this reason, MA DESE staff sought to ensure that their interactions were shaped with these areas in mind so they could work in full partnership with district leaders.

Each targeted school was required to create a turnaround plan to accelerate student achievement over the following three years. During this time, assistance from the MA DESE was structured so that office liaisons could meet with district leaders three to four days a week to

¹¹ For more information, see the References section.

participate in learning walks, provide instructional support, join leadership team meetings, and help identify high-quality vendors. This assistance was provided in a manner that was completely separate from the MA DESE's accountability functions, so the liaisons were able to focus 100 percent of their efforts on providing assistance.

In addition, the MA DESE organized monthly network meetings for the superintendents of the Commissioner's Districts, district staff, school committee members, local union presidents, and others. These meetings focused on topics such as supporting English Language Learners, increasing learning time in the school day, and developing implementation benchmarks. The meetings provided another venue for the MA DESE to assist the districts and provided school leaders opportunities to learn together and share knowledge.

To support their internal planning, staff at the Office of District and School Turnaround met twice each month to talk about district progress and provide real-time feedback on department policy and guidance. These meetings ensured that the messages communicated to district leaders were clear and consistent.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

The majority of schools targeted within the Commissioner's Districts have demonstrated clear gains after one year of the restructured support model. From 2010 to 2011, the schools showed a level of improvement that exceeded the state's average in both English/language arts (exceeded by 3 points) and math (exceeded by 6 points). Based on these early outcomes, these schools are on track to meaningfully improve student outcomes for the long term. The turnaround team at MA DESE continues to provide ongoing support to these districts as they implement their strategies to accelerate student learning.

Conclusion

For years, state education leaders have worked to raise standards for students and expectations for schools within challenging political and economic landscapes. Despite their efforts, many of the resulting reforms—while well-intended—fail to result in sweeping, long-term change because of a critical and often neglected link: the connection between policy at the state level to practice in schools. As a result, America’s schools and districts have traditionally shouldered the work of improving student outcomes on their own.

This publication highlights SEAs across the nation that share a focus on ensuring that state-level reforms lead to real, lasting change in schools and classrooms. The leaders highlighted in these stories worked to identify barriers to successful implementation and developed effective routines, techniques, and approaches to overcome them. They are partnering with school districts in bold, innovative ways to build the capacity needed to transform their systems.

These stories provide strong examples of delivery in action, and how education systems can increase the likelihood that they will achieve their goals by pushing past the typical boundaries of the SEA role and embracing new approaches to their work. They prove that true collaboration between state and local education leaders can challenge the status quo and pave a path to improved educational outcomes for *all* students.

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SECTION 1: DEFINE ASPIRATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM AND SHARE THEM BROADLY

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SECTION 2: MAKE THE PLANS FOR CHANGE CLEAR AND ENGAGE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

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SECTION 4: IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO PROGRESS AND DEVELOP POLICIES, FINANCIAL RESOURCES, AND OTHER SUPPORTS TO ADDRESS THEM

- Louisiana's Fiscal Training Module:
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- Massachusetts' DART tool: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>
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Previously, Sharon worked as an Advisor to the Deputy Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, where she coordinated the implementation of a range of school reform initiatives and directed the School Services Unit, an office that provides legal, regulatory, and policy assistance to school administrators. She has also served as a technical assistance provider and adjunct professor, where she developed a strong background in training and facilitation. Sharon holds a Bachelor's degree from Rutgers University – New Brunswick and a Master's in Education Policy and Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania.



About the U.S. Education Delivery Institute

The U.S. Education Delivery Institute (EDI) is an innovative non-profit organization that focuses on implementing large-scale system change in public education.

EDI's mission is to partner with K-12 and higher education systems with ambitious reform agendas and invest in their leaders' capacity to deliver results. By employing a proven approach, known as *delivery*, EDI helps state leaders maintain the necessary focus to plan and drive reform.

EDI provides intensive on-the-ground support, data analytics, ongoing professional development, and a network through which state systems can collectively build their capacity. As a result of this work, EDI expects to increase the number of well-prepared students who graduate from high school, then enter and succeed in college. EDI emphasizes actions to close the gaps that too often separate low-income students and students of color from others. Our success is based entirely on whether our partner systems achieve their aspirations.