Emerging Practices in Rapid Achievement Gain Schools

An Analysis of 2010-2011 Level 4 Schools to Identify Organizational and Instructional Practices that Accelerate Students' Academic Achievement

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Advancing Innovation and Transformational Change

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

The *2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* provided districts with increased flexibility to directly address many of the challenges that have stymied traditional school improvement efforts, with the goal of accelerating learning in the state's lowest performing schools. Correspondingly, the *Act* provided the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) with new, and more importantly, significantly stronger, policy levers to hold districts accountable for "turning around" the lowest performing schools in the state. Building upon the foundation of increased flexibility and strengthened autonomy, as provided by state law, in 2010 ESE established the **Framework for District Accountability and Assistance** and formally incorporated the **Conditions for School Effectiveness** into state regulations. The **Framework** links the state's accountability and assistance activities with districts based on need and places schools on a five-level scale. The **Conditions for School Effectiveness** set expectations for districts and schools, especially those engaged in school turnaround.

In the summer of 2010, ESE designated 34 "Level 4" schools as the state's most persistently struggling schools. Once designated, each school, with support from its district, was required to engage in a formal turnaround process, as specified in state law, and submit a turnaround plan for approval by the Commissioner. The 34 Level 4 schools begin implementing turnaround efforts in the fall of 2010. All Level 4 schools were afforded the opportunity to apply for federal and state support to implement prescribed turnaround initiatives. [1]

Rapid Achievement Gains: Why and How?

A review of the 2010-2011 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results identified a number of Level 4 schools *that made significant early rapid gains[2] in student achievement and decreased the achievement gap*. However, more than half of the other Level 4 schools did not evidence gains at a similar rate. Upon this finding, ESE commissioned an external analysis of available documents to better understand why and how certain schools had been able to dramatically improve student achievement over the course of one school year.

> ### *Guiding Question*
>
> *Are there particular strategies or practices observed in the rapid achievement gain schools that could explain how schools have been able to accelerate students' academic growth?*

The goal of this analysis was to identify and then provide a detailed report of any significant common characteristics in school turnaround practices and/or structures between the Level 4 schools making rapid achievement gains in 2010-2011 versus those schools that made little if any gains. The result of this analysis was subsequently reported to ESE and is detailed in this document.[3]

Important Caveat: It is important to note that this analysis does not suggest a single best approach to accelerated improvement or packaged programs for turning around schools; rather, this analysis highlights a selection of specific school-based practices[4] that may, when combined strategically, implemented well, and supported by leadership, significantly contribute to rapid achievement gains in the state's lowest performing schools.

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[1] For more information about the Massachusetts Framework for District Accountability and Assistance, see http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/framework/default.html.

[2] Rapid achievement gain schools were identified as those with at least a 10% school-wide increase in the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced in ELA or Math. Seven of these ten schools had at least 10% increases in both ELA and Math.

[3] The methodology for this analysis is provided in Appendix A.

[4] A subsequent report will detail emerging district practices that contribute to effective and sustainable school-level turnaround.

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to share the distinguishing practices of rapid achievement gain schools as identified through a comparative analysis of Level 4 schools. The literature on school "turnaround" is growing but is still in its infancy. What is known, however, is that turning around persistently underperforming schools is difficult work for schools and districts and even more difficult to replicate at scale. Moreover, dramatic and rapid improvement does not happen by accident; it is strategic, planned and requires strong leadership.

> *If there are practices that appear to be working in some Level 4 schools, then it is important that this information be shared with other schools in the spirit of collective inquiry and joint problem solving. Similarly, Level 4 schools having early success should receive confirmation that other schools are using similarly effective practices.*

Through this comparative analysis, our goal is to provide evidence-based and timely information regarding a set of emerging practices that can be used by ESE, by districts, and by schools—current and future Level 4 schools and other schools striving to close the achievement gap—to carefully reflect upon current practice and subsequently accelerate implementation efforts.

As confirmed through this analysis and by the 2011 Monitoring Site Visit (MSV)[5] reports, there are a number of Level 4 schools that are struggling to implement planned turnaround efforts. Their potential failure to engage in successful turnaround should not be considered an option. It is crucial that all Level 4 schools have access to information and supports that can assist them as they grapple with the real challenge of implementing strategies designed to lead to rapid changes in school culture, instruction, professional learning, and student achievement.

We invite districts and schools to reflect on the practices depicted in this report from their own vantage point and to consider the potential value of the implementation of such practices in their own context. Each school and district should assess the degree to which they are or are not already implementing each of these practices *as specifically communicated* in this document. Then each school and district should *carefully consider the degree to which these practices can be adapted to inform and contribute to their own strategic improvement efforts.*

The primary data sources[6] for this analysis were the spring 2010 monitoring site visit reports and the School Redesign Grant (SRG) renewal applications for cohort I SRG funded schools. State-mandated Turnaround Plans were also examined to corroborate and inform the analysis. As the purpose of this document is support and guidance and not identification (i.e., informative as opposed to evaluative), specific schools and districts are not identified.

Organization of the Report

The distinctive features of the emerging practices are presented in a one-page summary, *Emerging Practices in Brief*, and then separately, as three two-pagers that provide additional detail and a bulleted comparison of the practices in the top 10 rapid achievement gain schools relative to the comparison little or no-gain schools, in 2010-11.

Complementing the two-page descriptions is a one-page synthesis of how the emerging practices work together to accelerate improvement, framed by the Conditions for School Effectiveness.

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[5] Monitoring Site Visits are annual progress monitoring on-site visits for all Level 4 schools centered on the Conditions for School Effectiveness

[6] Data sources include: 2011 MCAS data, SRG applications, 2011 MSV reports, and 2011 year 2 SRG renewal applications.

Emerging Practices in Brief

Level 4 schools exhibiting rapid achievement gains in the first year of implementation come from different districts, serve students from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and have taken different approaches to school turnaround (e.g., some schools made dramatic changes in staffing and leadership while others chose not to do so.) While there are no discernible trends (at least after one year) with respect to the turnaround model used by schools (e.g., turnaround, transformation, restart), specific educational programs, or even with respect to the use of additional funding, ***the analysis did identify three significant commonalities among Level 4 schools with rapid achievement gains.***

Emerging Practices Among Level 4 Rapid Achievement Gain schools

1. The school has an instruction- and results-oriented principal who has galvanized both individual and collective responsibility for the improved achievement of all students through a variety of deliberate improvement structures, expectations, practices, and continuous feedback.

2. The school has created instruction-specific teaming and teacher-specific coaching for pursuing ongoing instructional improvement.

3. The school has developed a well-orchestrated system of ongoing data collection and analysis that informs a continuously responsive and adaptive system of tiered instruction directly attentive to students' specific academic needs.

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*While each of these strategies or practices may have been implemented in different ways across each of the rapid achievement gain schools, **the degree to which they were employed and the sophistication with which they were employed were observed to be substantively different than those schools with little or no immediate achievement gains.***

Setting the Foundation for Accelerated Improvement

Many of the Level 4 schools have made significant progress in **developing robust systems for assessing and analyzing data** and **in improving school climate and culture**. Our analysis suggests that these two practices (or collection of practices) are pieces of the foundation necessary to accelerate students' academic achievement. They are necessary but not sufficient to trigger rapid improvement. The capacity of a school to actively build upon these practices is, in part, what distinguishes rapid achievement gain schools.

Active Use of Data and Assessments: In rapid achievement gain Level 4 schools, teachers and coaches are <u>actively</u> using a wide array of formative and summative assessments to inform the instructional strategies employed in their classrooms, and to provide responsive Tier II and III interventions. Low achievement gain schools have data, but are not using the data nearly as effectively.

Safe and Respectful School Climate: Improving, rapid achievement gain Level 4 schools are predominately characterized by a safe, orderly, and respectful school environment for students and teachers. Some comparison L4 schools continue to have significant challenges in developing a safe and respectful climate to the extent that school climate has undermined positive efforts to improve classroom instruction.

Emerging Practice 1: Having an Instruction- and Results-oriented Principal

The school has an instruction- and results-oriented principal who has galvanized both individual and collective responsibility for the improved achievement of all students through a variety of deliberate improvement structures, expectations, practices and continuous feedback.

The Principal:

- Creates and communicates an explicit focus on the continuous improvement of instruction _using regular structures for collecting and analyzing data that directly informs teacher-specific instruction_;
- Regularly visits classrooms providing _positive and useful feedback to teachers (as perceived by them)_; and
- Models and supports the creation of _a safe, orderly, and engaging learning environment for both teachers and students_.

In early rapid achievement gain schools…	**In contrast…**
The principal actively creates a strong collective focus on results and a shared responsibility for the implementation of turnaround efforts.	Many of the comparison, low achievement gain schools were characterized by a lack of common expectations regarding high-quality instruction, insufficient prioritization of goals, and an absence of leadership actions, such as classroom visits, to hold teachers accountable for improving instructional strategies.
The principal's actions, such as visiting classrooms daily or inviting teachers to take on leadership roles, and the deliberate use of professional learning structures involving focused discussions on improving classroom instruction, work in tandem to reinforce collective responsibility.	Comparison schools did not exhibit the same level of urgency or laser-like focus on improving instruction and student achievement.
The principal's leadership decisions regarding the hiring of staff, organizing and managing the school, and changes in instructional practice, are driven by a focus on improving instruction and cultivating shared responsibility.	In some comparison schools, leadership was not yet acting purposefully to establish a focused and coherent vision-driven improvement strategy. As a result, staff lacked clearly delineated roles and responsibilities and some teachers reported that they did not fully understand why certain strategies were being used, contributing to a lack of buy-in among staff.
Additional components of the turnaround plan, such as having access to formative assessment data and using an agreed upon set of tiered instructional practices and interventions, also reinforce collective responsibility	

Emerging Practice 1: Having an Instruction- and Results-oriented Principal

Examples from the Level 4 Schools in 2010-2011

Schools with early rapid achievement gains …	In contrast, schools showing little or no gains…
Regularly collected and analyzed data that directly informs teacher-specific instruction (whole group, small group, and individual).	*Had not established formal expectations and procedures for actively using data to inform instruction.*
• The Principal, with school leadership and staff, **created multiple collaborative structures for the ongoing collection and analysis of data**. Meetings were **focused on improving classroom instruction** and provided for frequent review of data (e.g., weekly). • Analysis occurred **in grade level teams and with the assistance of school staff or consultants** dedicated to the improvement of instruction.	• Expectations and clear routines for collecting and analyzing student data had not been fully established among teacher teams so that teachers could use data to directly inform their daily practice. • Instructional leaders (e.g., coaches and administrators) were not using formal routines or setting clear expectations related to the collection and analysis of data with the explicit purpose of informing instruction.
Had a principal that frequently visited classrooms and provided specific, positive, and useful feedback to teachers (as perceived by them.)	*Had less frequent and qualitatively less useful classroom visits, by the principal or administrative staff.*
• The principal **dedicated the majority of his or her time to visiting classrooms** and providing immediate, positive, and useful feedback to teachers. • The principal **organized administrative staffing so that they would have a great deal of time (as much as 50%) to visit classrooms.** • **Teachers perceived principal feedback as usable, useful, and supportive** of teachers' instructional development.	• Principals visited classrooms on an infrequent basis, and when classroom visits were made feedback to teachers was not considered to be sufficiently targeted or useful to directly inform teachers' practices. • Principals did not prioritize their daily actions around the ongoing observation of classroom practice and provision of feedback to teachers.
Created and supported a safe and orderly school learning environment for both teachers and students with a collective focus on student achievement.	
• The principal created a culture of shared responsibility for the success of the school through positive interactions in the classroom, team meetings, and school-wide communication.	

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Emerging Practice 2: Employing instruction-specific teaming and coaching practices

> **The school is actively using instruction-specific teacher teaming and teacher-specific coaching and professional development for pursuing ongoing instructional improvement.**
>
> **Specific practices include:**
> - Pervasive and ongoing coaching _to individual teachers informed by classroom observations, student assessments, and teacher need_; and
> - Weekly if not daily common planning time, typically among grade-level teams, for _ongoing teacher collaboration with a focus on students' specific academic needs_ through ongoing analysis of data and the provision of instructional strategies in direct response to these needs.

In early rapid achievement gain schools…	In contrast…
School leaders and teachers engaged in a focused effort to improve teacher-specific instructional strategies. Professional teaming structures (e.g., grade-level teams, common planning time, data teams) were created and are being used to ensure continuous attention to the improvement of instruction in the classroom. Professional teaming structures are intentionally organized—through common agendas, protocols, and shared expectations—to focus conversations on the actual classroom practices of specific teachers and the impact of instructional practices on student performance, based on student data, student work, and direct observations of instruction in the classroom.	Many of the comparison, low achievement gain schools have implemented teaming structures. However, the activities and discussions that occur during meeting times is not as intentional or as focused on instruction as that observed in the rapid achievement gain schools. When data is available, comparison schools are less capable of analyzing the data to directly inform teachers' instruction.
Instructional coaches work one-on-one with teachers in and out of the classroom, modeling instruction and providing targeted classroom-based support based on their specific observations of classroom practice and identified teacher or student needs. Examples of best practice in instructional coaching include Murkland's use of the 9-day coaching cycle and J.F. Kennedy's Collaborative and Coaching Learning (CCL) cycle.	The professional development employed in comparison schools is "generic" and school-wide rather than classroom- and teacher-specific. Individualized teacher professional develop is infrequent and not systematically driven by data and observations.

Coaching and instructional support in comparison schools is sporadic and less structured, with teachers reporting that coaches provide little directly useful feedback. When school leaders were in the classroom, their presence was sporadic and oftentimes not perceived as providing meaningful feedback. |

Emerging Practice 2: Employing instruction-specific teaming and coaching practices

Examples from the Level 4 Schools in 2010-2011

Schools with early rapid achievement gains …	In contrast, schools showing little or no gains…
Ensured that coaches provided teachers with ongoing, differentiated coaching that was informed by classroom observations, student assessments, and teacher need.	*Provided teachers with professional development opportunities, <u>however</u>:*
• **Job-embedded professional development**, such as instructional coaching, modeling of instruction in the classroom, and peer-review (e.g., instructional rounds), **was directly linked to teacher and classroom-specific observations and teachers' instructional goals**.	• Professional development was not specific to teachers' instructional needs, goals, or based upon teachers' observed teaching practice observations and informal classroom visits conducted by instructional leaders.
• Instructional leaders and coaches grounded their ongoing support and assistance to teachers' **classroom-specific practices** based on teacher-specific goals, observations, and student assessments.	
Used weekly and sometimes daily common planning time and other teaming structures for ongoing teacher collaboration focused on attending to students' academic and social-emotional needs through ongoing analysis of data and the provision of instructional strategies in direct response to these needs.	*Typically had access to data and meeting structures that could be used to analyze data, <u>however</u>:*
• **Formal common planning time was used to assess student's instructional and socio-emotional needs**, grounded in assessments and teacher experience.	• Data was not collected frequently enough to inform the revision or refinement of whole group, small group, and individual instruction on a weekly or daily basis.
• **Common planning time and other teaming opportunities** (e.g., whole school meetings, data meetings) **were used to plan for specific student needs and instructional responses** at the whole group, small group, and individual level.	• Common planning time was not used for the specific identification of individual student needs based on relevant and applicable student data.
• Data used during teaming included standard formative and summative assessments, such as DIBELS, but also included a variety of computer- or web-based assessments and classroom assessments. These assessments **were given *and* analyzed frequently, as often as weekly, for the explicit purpose of immediately informing instruction (whole class, small group, and individual.)**	• Revisions and refinement of whole-class instruction and small group and individual interventions was not made through a careful and deliberate analysis of individual student need via a careful examination of student work and multiple assessments.

Emerging Practice 3: Using a well-orchestrated assessment system to drive tiered instruction

> **The school has developed a well-orchestrated system of ongoing data collection and analysis that informs a continuously responsive system of tiered instruction directly attentive to students' specific academic needs.**
>
> **This system includes**:
> - Ongoing identification and placement of students throughout the school year into flexible groupings *directly attentive to the specific needs of students in Tier I instruction as well as Tier II and Tier III interventions*;
> - *Application of Tier II and III responses that are attentive to the specific needs of students*, not a general response to perceived needs of the larger group; and
> - The allocation (or reallocation) of staff, including coaches, support staff, and interventionists, and time to *provide a continuously responsive system of tiered instruction for all students*.

In early rapid achievement gain schools…	**In contrast…**
School leaders have developed an organized process, or system, for implementing tiered instruction in an ongoing and deliberate fashion.	The comparison, low achievement gain schools had a markedly different understanding of what tiered instruction meant for students and teachers.
Coaches and/or teacher teams use assessment data to (a) place students in appropriate and fluid groups and (b) accurately target interventions to small groups and individual students. Professional collaboration structures, such as common planning time and professional learning teams, provide a forum for analyzing data and making decisions regarding groupings and interventions. Teachers assess the effectiveness of the instructional strategies employed for each student. Understood as a way to provide an adaptive continuum of services to all students, a well-structured tiered instruction system involves:	When data was used to place students into groups or interventions, the placement typically occurred at the beginning of the school year with little re-evaluation of groups or interventions over the course of the year. When students were regrouped, the decision to do so was based on the needs of groups rather than individual students.

In early rapid achievement gain schools…

1. Frequent and continual (e.g., weekly) collection and analysis of data;
2. Time for teachers and staff to make decisions about student placement, interventions, and instruction;
3. Flexibility in grouping, scheduling, and staffing; and
4. Ongoing access to interventions and support, as needed.

In contrast…

Differentiation of instruction was not observed in most classrooms and tended to be teacher-led with a great deal of assigned individual student work indicative of whole-group instruction.

In schools that did provide support to students outside of the classroom or during a longer school day, the support tended to be generic in nature; there was little evidence that the specific intervention or support was differentiated to meet the identified needs of students as determined by ongoing assessments.

Emerging Practice 3: Using a well-orchestrated assessment system to drive tiered instruction

Schools with early rapid achievement gains …	**In contrast, schools showing little or no gains…**
Had a system in place to constantly identify and place students into flexible groupings attentive to the specific skill needs of students in Tier I instruction as well as Tier II and Tier III interventions.	*Did not have a system in place to assess and regroup students during the year.*

Had a system in place to constantly identify and place students into flexible groupings attentive to the specific skill needs of students in Tier I instruction as well as Tier II and Tier III interventions.

- **A wide variety of assessments were used to determine the specific needs of each individual student**, and based on this need, identified the Tier I, II, or III instruction or intervention that addressed the need of each student specifically.
- This analysis and response **occurred weekly and sometimes daily**, wherein teams of teachers and/or coaches frequently reassigned kids to small group or individual interventions based on need.

Applied Tier II and III responses that were directly attentive to the specific needs of students, not a general response to perceived needs of the larger group.

- **Frequent reassessment of students** in response to small group and individual interventions **to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention** and the need for revision or refinement of the intervention.

Allocated (or reallocated) staff, including coaches, support staff, and interventionists, and time to provide a continuously responsive system of tiered instruction for all students.

- **The school schedule afforded frequent opportunities for student assessment and interventions**, such as increased literacy and math blocks, and flexible blocks of time that could be used for multiple purposes.
- **Deliberate allocation of staff**, such as increased use of "interventionists" to provide one-on-one support, or additional Special Education or ESL teachers, **so that students received appropriate instruction and targeted Tier II and III interventions.**

Did not have a system in place to assess and regroup students during the year.

- General assessments were given at the beginning of the year and/or only semi-frequently throughout the year.
- In some schools, initial, beginning of the year assessments placed students in groups for the entire year, with little or no changes in grouping or targeted interventions.
- Interventions or changes to instruction were based primarily on large or small-group needs, rarely on the specific, individual needs of students.

Employed Tier II and III interventions and groupings as a generic response to a group of students' perceived needs.

- Tier II and III interventions were not in direct response to student-specific needs.
- Students were initially placed in small groups based on early or infrequent assessments but rarely moved into different Tier II or Tier III interventions as needs changed.

Schedules and staffing patterns were not used effectively or were not structured in a manner that was conducive to an ongoing system of tiered instruction.

- The school schedule and professional collaboration structures did not allow for frequent assessments informing the ongoing revision of student interventions and instruction.
- Staffing and interventions were geared toward "generic" responses to generic/commonly identified student needs, not individually identified needs.

Maximizing the Conditions for School Effectiveness to Accelerate Improvement
How the emerging practices work together to accelerate improvement, framed by the Conditions for School Effectiveness.

Emerging Practices Contributing to Rapid Achievement

1. Having an instruction- and results-oriented principal

2. Employing instruction-specific teaming and coaching practices

3. Using a well-orchestrated assessment system to drive tiered instruction

Foundational Elements

Robust systems for assessing student progress and analyzing student data

Developing and maintaining a safe and respectful school climate

Effective school leadership. Principals in the rapid achievement gain schools galvanized individual and collective responsibility for the achievement of all students AND created deliberate systems to mobilize each school's pursuit of achievement. Such systems include teacher-specific coaching, instruction-specific teaming, and a well-articulated system of tiered instruction using the frequent collection and analysis of data.

Effective instruction. A laser-like focus on instruction was mediated through the ongoing collection and review of student data, instruction-focused teaming, teacher-specific coaching, and a system of tiered of instruction that was continuously adapted to the specific needs of students.

Student assessment. A school-based and balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments, administered on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, is used to ensure that students are placed in appropriate groups and receive student-specific interventions.

Principal's staffing authority. Principals reorganized the use of their staff to ensure that Tier I, II, and III instruction and interventions and the time for tiered instruction of whole group, small group, and individual students were well resourced and effective. New hires were based on teachers' ability to attend to the specific needs of students.

Professional development and structures for collaboration. Each principal established structures for ongoing instruction-focused teacher-specific coaching, feedback, and teaming. Teacher collaboration foregrounded the review of data and student work as well as the design and modification of instructional strategies, which were then immediately applied in support of student-specific learning.

Tiered instruction and adequate learning time. The school schedule, including the use of additional learning time, was intentionally designed so that a well-articulated and fully staffed system of tiered instruction could employed to meet the specific needs of students based on a variety of assessments throughout the school year.

Strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority. Principals reorganized their staff, time, and other resources to enact new systems of continuous data collection and ongoing review, tiered instruction, and job-embedded, instruction-focused professional development (via coaching, teaming, and frequent principal observations.)

Additional Analysis

Re: Data Systems and Assessments
Improving, rapid achievement gain Level 4 schools are characterized by teachers' and coaches' active use of a wide array of formative and summative assessments to continuously inform the specific instructional strategies to be employed in their classrooms to meet the needs of their students as well as provide responsive Tier II and III interventions.

Discussion: Improving Level 4 schools have used the strong data systems and formative assessments that are instituted in all Level 4 schools in a more timely fashion. These schools use data systems to develop knowledge and skills among teachers and administrators so they can inform instruction with student data. Having a strong assessment system is necessary but not sufficient to improve instruction. Many of the comparison Level 4 schools have access to data, but do not yet understand how to effectively use assessment data, how to organize common planning time to look at student data, and perhaps most importantly, do not yet have strategies in place that allow them to use that data to directly inform instruction.

Re: The Importance of a Safe and Respectful School Environment and Climate
A safe, orderly, and respectful school environment for students and teachers is critically important for turnaround efforts to be successful. Improving Level 4 schools are predominately characterized by a safe and respectful school climate, which is actively managed by clear behavioral expectations and deliberate attention by leadership. Many, but not all, of the comparison schools were observed to have a difficult and challenging learning environment evidenced by a lack of behavioral expectations, a cogent system for dealing with misconduct, and student behaviors in keeping with a focus on learning, in and outside of the classroom. In some of the comparison schools, negative school climate has undermined positive efforts to improve classroom instruction.

Discussion: The initial analysis did not find a relationship between the specific programs used to address school climate and behavioral issues and the extent to which a school has been able to cultivate a positive school climate. The focus on "positive behavior management" was a nearly universal theme across schools, with schools having varying levels of success in implementing different approaches to behavioral management. There is evidence, however, that points to the importance of a strong leader able to set expectations for behavior and model respectful interactions.

Re: Specific Strategies Attentive to English Language Learner Needs
It was difficult to ascertain the extent to which schools were directly addressing the needs of their English language learners (ELLs). The MCAS data suggests that schools that implemented a responsive tiered instructional system, combined with extensive teaming structures that bring together ELL teachers and regular education teachers, were able to make significant gains in ELL academic performance. This approach may have had more impact than the general application of ELL strategies across classrooms. However, this observation is offered with limited data as the monitoring site visit reports and renewal application do not probe deeply into how ELLs are being served.

Appendix A: Method of Analysis

MCAS data from the 2010-2011 school year was used to identify the 10 Level 4 schools having made the largest combined increase in the percent of students attaining Proficient and Advanced (referred to as **improving L4 schools**) and the 10 Level 4 schools with the least achievement gain (referred to as **comparison schools**). The following data sources were used to identify practices contributing to the initial success of the improving L4 schools: 2011 MCAS data, School Redesign Grant (SRG) applications, 2011 Monitoring Site Visit Reports (MSVs), and 2011 Year 2 SRG Renewal Applications. A thematic and iterative analysis of the listed documents was employed to identify trends, characteristics, and specific practices used by improving L4 schools.

To maximize the available date, INSTLL used an iterative analysis process, comprised of the following steps:

1. **Identification of high and low achievement gain schools (Improving and Comparison schools)**: Schools' achievement data was first used to identify schools that in the 2010-2011 school year made significant achievement gains or little or no gains at all, which included an analysis of achievement gains and differences across subpopulations in ELA and mathematics.

2. **Identification of themes and practices contributing to achievement gains**: Using the Conditions for School Effectiveness as a guide, the Monitoring Site Visit reports of the top and lowest achievement gain schools were analyzed to identify common and discrepant themes and practices across schools, with a particular eye toward identifying key practices that appear to be contributing to rapid achievement gains in the improving L4 schools.

3. **Confirmation of themes and practices, based on school renewal applications:** Once an initial set of potential themes and practices differentiating the improving and comparison schools was identified, Cohort 1 SRG Renewal applications were reviewed to determine whether schools' self-reported successes, challenges, and priority actions could confirm, affirm, and/or inform the first analysis of key themes and significant practices. Instances of confirmation or discrepancy were noted, and when applicable, key themes and identified significant practices were refined.

4. **Refinement of themes and practices as "emerging practices" contributing to accelerated improvement:** Once the significant themes and practices were identified and subsequently refined through an additional analysis of SRG applications, each Monitoring Site Visit report was once again reviewed to test the assumption that each identified practice played a significant role in the rapid achievement gains in the identified improving L4 schools. In this iterative process, the articulation of themes and practices was further refined to include connections among various practices that could enhance the explanation of why certain L4 schools are having success and other not, yielding the findings as presented in this report. Specific examples supporting the emerging practices and observations are provided at the end of the report.

Appendix B: Supporting Research

The following resources provide additional information related to recent school turnaround efforts and are presented here for your review.

Brinson, D. & Rhim. L.M. (2009). *Breaking the habit of low performance: Successful school restructuring stories*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement

Fullan, M., Hill, P., & Crévola, C. (2006). *Breakthrough*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Institute for Education Sciences. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education

Public Impact. (2007). *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement

Rhim. L.M., (2011). *Learning how to dance in the Queen City: Cincinnati public schools' turnaround initiative.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia

Rhim, L.M. & Redding, S. (2011). *Fulcrum of Change: Leveraging 50 States to Turn Around 5,000 Schools*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement

Kim, W.C., & Mauborgne, R. (2003, April). Tipping point leadership. *Harvard Business Review (80).* 60-69.

Appendix C

Massachusetts' Conditions for School Effectiveness

These 11 essential conditions are necessary conditions for schools to educate their students well; they guide the actions taken by both districts and the Department at all levels of the accountability and assistance system. Districts at Level 3 of the system will be required to conduct a self-assessment developed by the Department and use the results to inform their improvement planning. This self-assessment available for use by districts at Levels 1 and 2 on the Department's web site at http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/. Districts at Levels 4 and 5 will be required to implement all of these conditions in their Level 4 or 5 schools or provide a compelling rationale for alternative approaches designed to achieve comparable or superior results. The commissioner will determine whether the rationale is sufficiently compelling to warrant an exception to any of the specific requirements of these essential conditions.

1. *Effective district systems for school support and intervention:* The district has systems and processes for anticipating and addressing school staffing, instructional, and operational needs in timely, efficient, and effective ways, especially for its lowest performing schools.

2. *Effective school leadership:* The district and school take action to attract, develop, and retain an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a clearly defined mission and set of goals.

3. *Aligned curriculum:* The school's taught curricula are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and the MCAS performance level descriptions, and are also aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course.

4. *Effective instruction:* Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs; the school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.

5. *Student assessment:* The school uses a balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments.

6. *Principal's staffing authority:* The principal has the authority to make staffing decisions based on the School Improvement Plan and student needs, subject to district personnel policies, budgetary restrictions and the approval of the superintendent.

7. *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.

8. ***Tiered instruction and adequate learning time:*** The school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.

9. ***Students' social, emotional, and health needs:*** The school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.

10. ***Family-school engagement:*** The school develops strong working relationships with families and appropriate community partners and providers in order to support students' academic progress and social and emotional well-being.

11. ***Strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority:*** The principal makes effective and strategic use of district and school resources and has sufficient budget authority to do so.

Appendix D

Additional Detail and Examples of Practices for Each Emerging Practice

1. **Improving L4 schools are characterized by an instructional- and results-oriented principal that galvanizes individual and collective responsibility for the improved achievement of all students.**

> *The principal reported that delegating responsibility to teachers was intentional, stating, 'The work is not going to get done unless you let go and let others share in the leadership.' Teachers voiced appreciation for the responsibility delegated to them, felt motivated by the confidence the principal has shown in them, and felt accountable to one another and to the school.*
>
> *The <school> has undergone a significant change in faculty under the transformational leadership turnaround model. Approximately 60% of staff, as well as the principal, are new this year. Without exception, staff members reported that the tenor of professional collaboration has improved substantively. There was widespread agreement that under the current leadership, the school is moving in the right direction.*

Highlights from several of the site visit reports included the following:

- Every week, the principal sends out a Week Ahead message to staff with the motto, "Ain't no stopping us now…we're on the move." On the backside of each message is an article or summary of an article related to teaching or school improvement. - Murkland
- School leadership has communicated the importance of individual and collective responsibility for school improvement in an ongoing and consistent manner – Murkland
- "We're all here to monitor that data. It's not just one person's responsibility." – Murkland
- The principal reported that delegating responsibility to teachers was intentional, stating, 'The work is not going to get done unless you let go and let others share in the leadership.' Teachers voiced appreciation for the responsibility delegated to them, felt motivated by the confidence the principal has shown in them, and felt accountable to one another and to the school. – Greenwood
- Teachers, instructional coaches, and community partners described the climate of the school as open and supportive; all of them credit the new leadership with this positive change. – Chandler
- A review of hiring documents provided to the site visit team indicated that the school utilized a thorough, detailed, structured and focused system of recruitment. … For example, candidates were asked to bring examples of how they used data, as well as student work samples that both did and did not meet their expectations. They were then asked to describe strategies for working with students to improve the work sample that did not meet expectations. – Orchard Gardens

2. Improving L4 schools are characterized by a well-orchestrated and deliberate system of continuous data collection and analysis that directly informs a continuously responsive and adaptive system of tiered instruction

> *Teachers and leaders reported that small group instruction has provided students with opportunities to receive targeted instruction around reading strategies. The school has also hired three retired teachers to provide reading intervention to small groups of students. These teachers work with approximately 20 children per week in groups of four or five ... Teachers reported that the focus on small group instruction has had "the greatest impact on student learning." Students confirmed this by stating, "We read better."*
>
> *Teachers and leaders reported that students are matched with an array of support services, including: placement in the Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) class, with one SEI and two general education classes at each grade level; grouping according to mathematics proficiency level for the end-of-day targeted mathematics lessons for the grades 4-5 students and extra tutoring from two retired teachers in grades K-1 for students who need extra reading support.*

Highlights from several of the site visit reports included the following:

- A system of interventions allows students to move along a continuum of services and change placements according to identified progress or needs. – Murkland
- Flexible tiers of interventions supplement, enhance, and provide access to the core curriculum for students needing additional support. – Zanetti
- Based on results [using multiple assessments], teachers and leaders reported that students are matched with an array of support services, including:

    o Placement in the Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) class (There is one SEI and two general education classes at each grade level.)

    o Grouping according to mathematics proficiency level for the end-of-day targeted mathematics lessons for the grades 4-5 students

    o Extra tutoring from two retired teachers in grades K-1 for students who need extra reading support. – JFK Elementary

- The school has deployed personnel to support tiered instruction. … The school also employs part-time teachers to work with identified students. - Greenwood
- Teachers and leaders reported that small group instruction has provided students with opportunities to receive targeted instruction around reading strategies. The school has also hired three retired teachers to provide reading intervention to small groups of students. These teachers work with approximately 20 children per week in groups of four or five ... Teachers reported that the focus on small group instruction has had "the greatest impact on student learning." Students confirmed this by stating, "We read better." – Harrington
- Through restructuring and re-allocation of the staff … the principal increased the intervention staff from one to eight. – Zanetti

3. Improving L4 schools are characterized by purposeful teaming structures and deliberate, teacher-specific practices for pursuing ongoing instructional improvement

> *Multiple opportunities for teacher collaboration exist in the schedule. Teachers in the same grade have one-to-two common planning periods per day, and most, though not all, of the grades reported that they use this time to plan together, share resources, and/or support each other with issues in the classroom. In addition, cross-grade teams (K-1, 2-3, and 4-5) meet weekly for 90 minutes. The principal, as well as the mathematics coaches, reported attending each of these meetings. In addition, two outside consultants who help the team with literacy (grades K-2) and mathematics (grades 3-5) attend the meetings approximately once per month.*
>
> *Both literacy and mathematics coaches conduct nine-day coaching cycles with classroom teachers and special education teachers. In focus groups, the majority of teachers reported having completed at least one coaching cycle this year. Teachers choose their own goal for instructional improvement, and plan and conduct a series of lessons with the coach, receiving feedback and consultation.*

Highlights from several of the site visit reports included the following:

- Both literacy and mathematics coaches conduct nine-day coaching cycles with classroom teachers and special education teachers. In focus groups, the majority of teachers reported having completed at least one coaching cycle this year. Teachers choose their own goal for instructional improvement, and plan and conduct a series of lessons with the coach, receiving feedback and consultation. – Murkland
- As outlined in the SRG, teachers reported that they are beginning a process of peer observation for the purpose of providing collegial feedback and having a common frame of reference to strengthen collaborative planning. Leadership reported that the T3 (Turnaround Teacher Team) teachers – a group of teacher leaders participating in the Teach Plus program – began to model peer observation in each other's classrooms. – Orchard Gardens
- Outside consultants and coaches support teachers' instructional practices. Specifically, the school has two full-time mathematics coaches, as well as two outside consultants – one for mathematics and one for literacy – who work with the staff 4-to-5 days per month. According to teachers and leaders, the mathematics coaches provide push-in, pull-out, and coaching support to teachers. The consultants attend selected cross-grade meetings, provide in-class coaching to teachers (including demonstration lessons), and help facilitate the CCL cycles. - JFK
- The coaching cycle is individualized and reflective. In focus groups, teachers stated that the coaching cycle includes a reflective component for both teachers and the coach. The site visit team reviewed documents related to the coaching cycle. The Lesson Observation Sheet included a scripting of the teacher's lesson, along with questions, celebrations, and ideas for revision. In turn, sample Coaching Reflection Sheets required that teachers provide feedback to the coach regarding how the coaching cycle helped the teacher accomplish an instructional goal, as well as suggestions for what would have made the coaching more effective. – Murkland
- Instructional coaches provide support to some teachers on classroom practice. Coaches reported working more intensively with some teachers to organize classrooms, model lessons, review data, and help plan differentiated instruction. At the time of the site visit, a teacher provided a tiered mathematics activity for two groups at different instructional levels that she had planned with the coach. – Chandler
- The principal reported spending 75% of his time observing in classrooms or attending instructional meetings. This was corroborated by the leadership team and by teachers... – Orchard Gardens
- The walkthroughs by the leadership described in the SRG are established routines. Students and teachers reported that the principal, vice principal and academy directors are highly visible in classrooms, and that

each of them visits classrooms at least once a week. Leadership reported that they used frequent classroom visits to support new and struggling teachers and as a way to commend sound practice. – Orchard Gardens

- School leaders also regularly gather evidence on instructional practice and deliver constructive feedback to teachers in a timely manner. Review of teacher observations and evaluations showed evidence of both commendations and clear and constructive suggestions. Teachers reported that they received feedback quickly, often the same day, and that feedback is consistently positive in tone. In addition, records of all teacher observations and classroom visits are maintained in an organized binder system. – Orchard Gardens

Observation related to data systems and assessments

Observation: Improving L4 schools are characterized by teachers' and coaches' active use of a wide-array of formative and summative assessments to continuously inform the specific instructional strategies to be employed in their classrooms to meet the needs of their students as well as provide responsive Tier II and III interventions.

Highlights from several of the site visit reports included the following:

- In grades K-3, teachers reported that they rely primarily on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) to determine reading levels. They collect these data monthly and submit the data to both the principal and literacy coach. At their grade-level meetings, they use the data to assist them in re-grouping for reading lessons. Teachers reported that they create a graphic each month to represent student growth, so that they are able to notice patterns right away. – JFK Elementary
- Data are used to determine flexible groupings in classrooms, as evidenced by focus groups, observations of common planning meetings and review of grade-level and department planning meeting agendas and minutes. For example, on reviewing ANet data, a group of 6th – 8th grade students was identified as marginally close to proficient in mathematics. Targeted intervention groups were created with the goal of getting these students to the category of proficient on the mathematics MCAS. – Orchard Gardens
- Teachers and the ILS mathematics coach reported that each grade level administers nine unit tests from the TERC *Investigations* program and monthly mathematics assessments from the district. – Brookings
- Teachers reported using district benchmark assessments (Learnia), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS), Week in Review assessments, commercial tests, and running records to group students for targeted mathematics and language arts intervention. .... The team also observed teachers, during common planning time, reviewing assessment data and regrouping students for Tier II intervention in mathematics and language arts. – Greenwood
- Teacher focus groups reported that assessment results were used to regroup students, and to assign students to remediation programs such as Fast ForWord – a computer program that reinforces literacy skills. The site visit team observed the computer lab in continual use during the site visit with Fast ForWord groups. – Chandler
- Teachers use data to make instructional decisions and to improve their practice. – Murkland

Observation related to having a safe, orderly, and respectful school environment for students and teachers.

Observation: A safe, orderly, and respectful school environment for students and teachers is critically important for turnaround efforts to be successful. Improving L4 schools are predominately

characterized by a safe and respectful school climate, which is actively managed by clear behavioral expectations and deliberate attention by leadership. Many, but not all, of the comparison schools were observed to have a difficult and challenging learning environment evidenced by the lack of behavioral expectations, a cogent system for dealing with misconduct, and student behaviors in keeping with a focus on learning, in and outside of the classroom. In some of the comparison schools, negative school climate has undermined positive efforts to improve classroom instruction.

Highlights from several of the site visit reports included the following:

- Students universally reported feeling safe in the school. Students evidenced a clear sense of what happens in the school when rules are not followed, and teachers reported that the administrators always provide appropriate follow-up when students are sent to the office. – Murkland
- In focus groups, teachers reported that the school has a highly effective discipline system and consistent follow-through. In a focus group, students evidenced familiarity with the school's expectations for them and stated that there were consequences for their actions. – Zanetti
- The school has documented policies and expectations regarding student behavior. All stakeholders evidenced familiarity with these at the time of the visit. In focus groups, students were able to articulate school rules and consequences for breaking them. – Orchard Gardens
- Students and staff describe a dramatic change in school climate over the past year and a half, with a clear reduction in behavioral and disciplinary issues as outlined in the SRG. In focus groups, students stated that the school has changed from a place where fights were once common and students wrote all over the walls to a place where they all feel safe and can focus on academics. Staff similarly reported a dramatic change in school culture. – Greenwood
- All staff members, students, and community stakeholders described the school as a safe and cohesive place and attributed the positive climate to the leadership of the current principal. The principal was described as caring, a problem solver, fair and open to input from all, and an effective communicator. Teachers reported that when they ask for help specific to student behavior, support is immediately forthcoming. – Brookings
- Classrooms are well organized and characterized by a positive and purposeful tone. Classroom climate is characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. – Chandler
- In 95% of classrooms observed (n=22), classroom climate was characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. In many classrooms, students were observed being attentive, exhibiting positive and respectful behaviors, and demonstrating their knowledge of classroom routines. Other teachers were observed smiling, hugging students, giving praise, such as "Excellent," and "That's beautiful," and generally behaving in an observably nurturing manner toward students. – Harrington