

# ESSA and Research Evidence

## Opportunities and Challenges for States

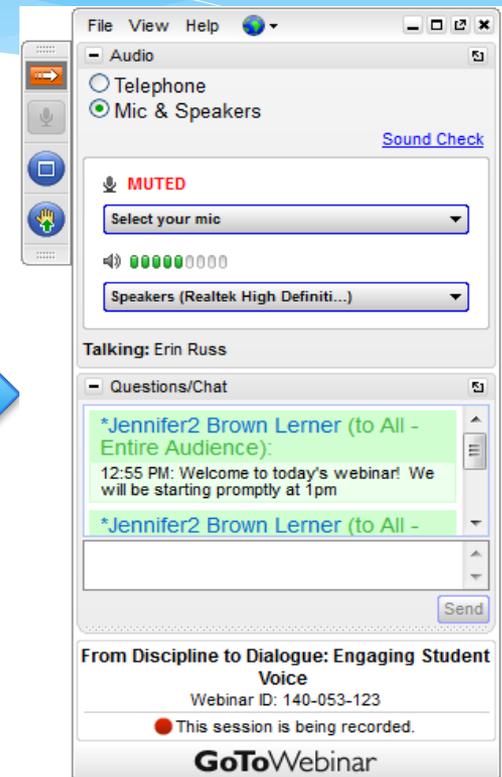
March 7, 2017



American Youth  
Policy Forum

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# Today's Presenters

## **Framing Remarks**

- Dr. Marty West, Associate Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

## **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

- Carrie Conaway, Chief Strategy and Research Officer
- Dr. Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner

## **Michigan Department of Education**

- Dr. Venessa Keesler, Deputy Superintendent, Division of Educator, Student and School Supports
- Karen Ruple, Manager, MI Excel Statewide System of Support

## **Tennessee Department of Education**

- Dr. Nate Schwartz, Chief Research and Strategy Officer
- Rita Fentress, Director of School Improvement

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# Opening Remarks



**Dr. Marty West**

Associate Professor of Education  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

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# ESSA and Research Evidence: Opportunities and Challenges for States

Martin R. West\*

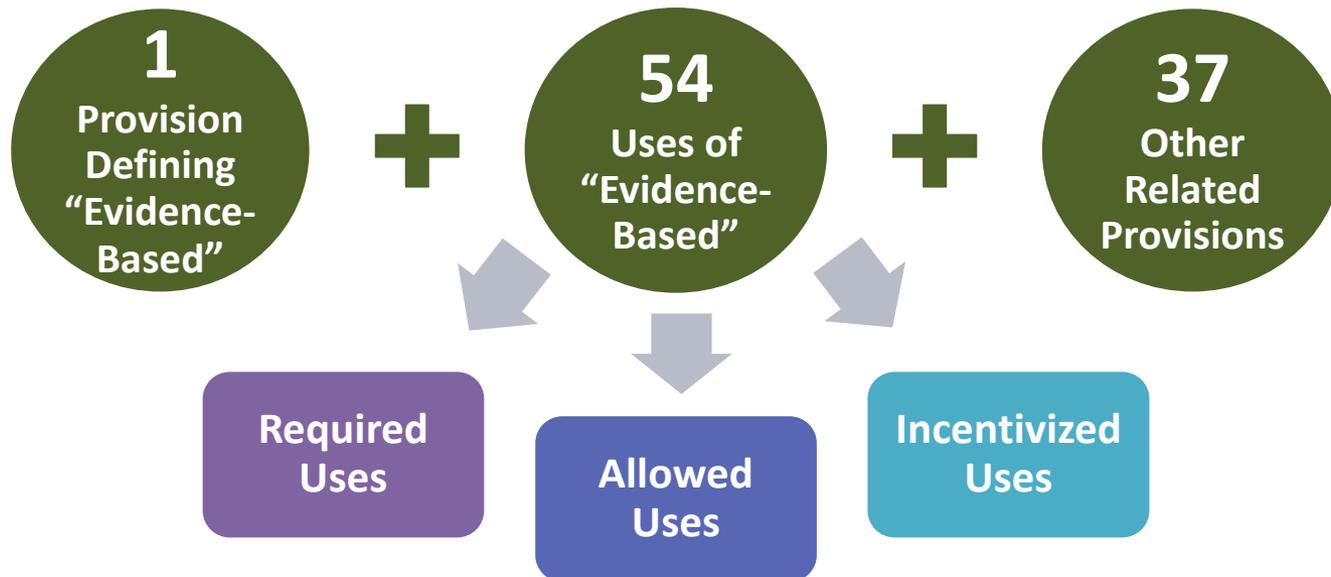
Harvard Graduate School of Education

\* Slides developed in collaboration with Results for America



## Overview of ESSA's Evidence Provisions

ESSA defines “evidence-based” and then applies that term 54 times, ranging from required uses (e.g., school improvement interventions) to allowable uses (e.g., class size reduction) to incentives in several competitive grants (e.g., preference points for evidence-based proposals). Furthermore, ESSA includes 37 other provisions that have the potential to promote better use of evidence, data, and evaluation (e.g., Pay for Success; evaluation funds).

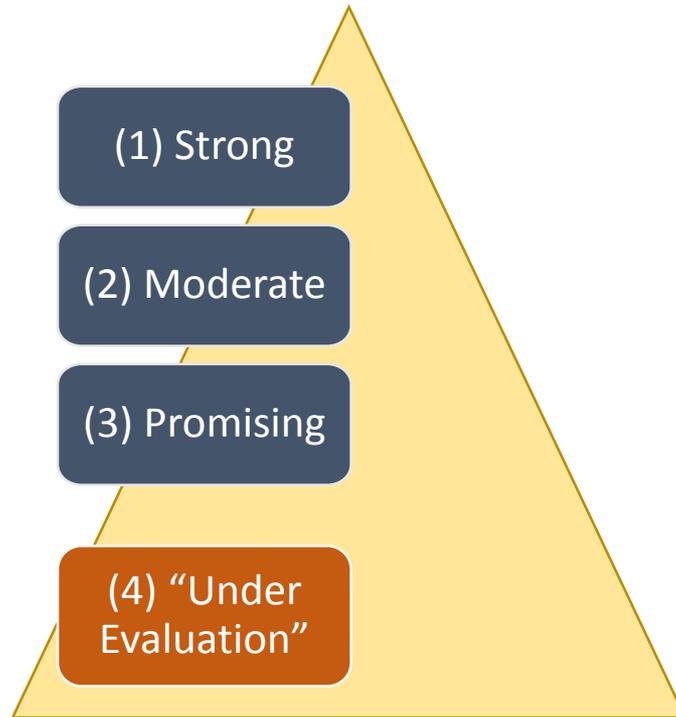


# Agenda

1. **Definition** of “evidence-based” in ESSA
  2. Evidence-based **provisions** in ESSA
  3. **Opportunities** and **challenges** for states
    - Capacity
    - Culture
- Guiding question should be “How can evidence help us improve student outcomes?”
- Not: “How can we comply with ESSA’s evidence provisions?”

## Unpacking the Definition of “Evidence-Based” in ESSA: **Overview**

ESSA's definition of “evidence-based” includes 4 levels of evidence. Together, they create a framework to develop an increasingly rigorous evidence base.



Although there are areas already supported by a robust body of evidence, there are others where the field is still testing new ideas.

ESSA's different levels of evidence acknowledge this important variation.

## Unpacking the Definition of “Evidence-Based” in ESSA: Levels 1-3

The top 3 levels require findings of a **statistically significant effect** on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:

### (1) Strong

- At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented **experimental** study

### (2) Moderate

- At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented **quasi-experimental** study

### (3) Promising

- At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented **correlational** study with statistical controls for selection bias

#### Issues to Consider

- ESSA does not define all the terms in its definition of “evidence-based” (e.g., “well-implemented,” “quasi-experimental,” or “correlational”).
- States and districts may consider other aspects of evidence beyond what is in the definition (e.g., effect size, sample size, site(s), absence of conflicting evidence, and cost-effectiveness).

## Unpacking the Definition of “Evidence-Based” in ESSA: Level 4

The 4<sup>th</sup> level of evidence in the definition is designed for ideas that do not yet have an evidence base qualifying for the top 3 levels. Given the second requirement, to examine the effects of these ideas, this evidence-*building* level can thus be referred to as “under evaluation.”

### (4) Under Evaluation

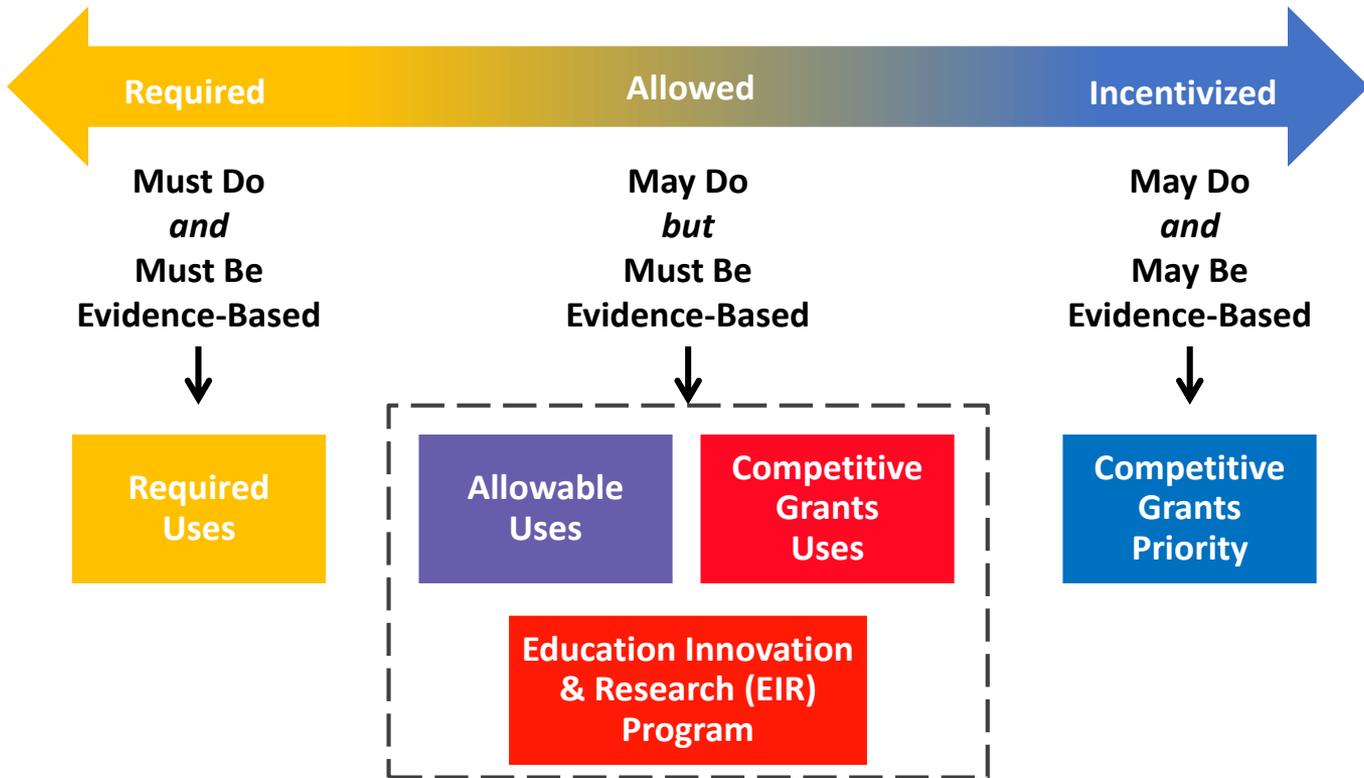
- **Demonstrates a rationale** based on high-quality research or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes
- Includes **ongoing efforts to examine the effects** of such activity, strategy, or intervention

#### Issues to Consider

- ESSA does not define all the terms in its definition of “evidence-based” (e.g., “high-quality research,” “is likely to,” or “ongoing efforts to examine the effects”).
- States must decide if they will define these terms, and if so, how high to set the bar on both requirements included in the 4<sup>th</sup> level of evidence.

# Unpacking the Evidence Provisions in ESSA

ESSA applies its “evidence-based” definition in different ways across 54 provisions. These evidence provisions fall along a continuum from required uses of evidence to allowed uses to incentivized uses.



## Unpacking the Evidence Provisions in ESSA



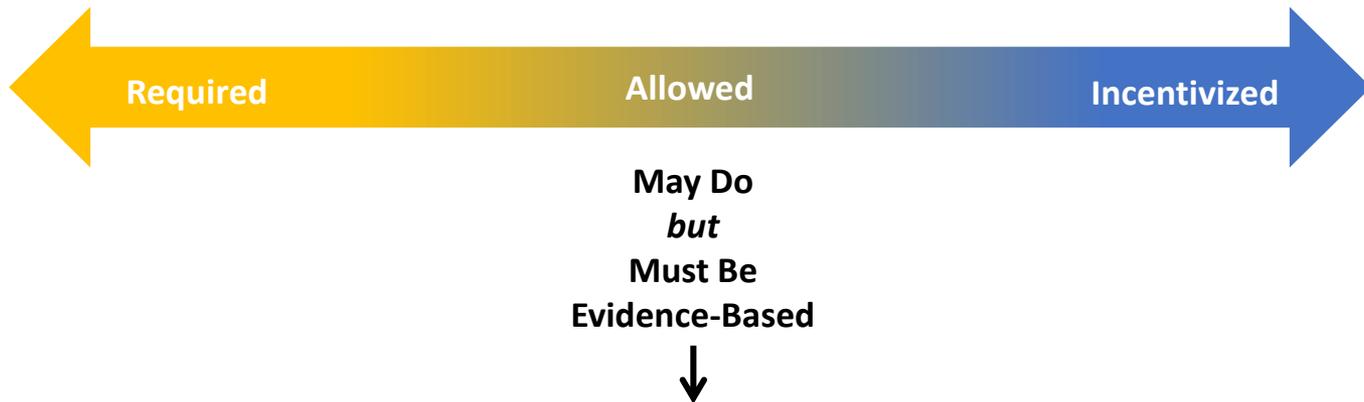
**Must Do  
and  
Must Be  
Evidence-Based**



### Required Uses (Title I)

- All Title I school improvement plans (comprehensive and targeted) must include evidence-based interventions, aligned with results of schools' needs assessments. Schools receiving Section 1003 funds (i.e., Title I 7% set-aside) must include interventions in the top 3 levels of the definition.
- Title I parent & family engagement provisions also require evidence-based strategies
  - All 4 levels of evidence apply
  - Requirement applies after annual evaluation of current strategies, so implementation timeline may differ across localities

## Unpacking the Evidence Provisions in ESSA



### Allowable Uses (in formula grant programs)

- States and districts choose how they will spend their federal formula funds, but under ESSA many key allowable uses must be evidence-based
  - E.g., district-funded professional development; class size reductions; Pay for Success initiatives
- Of these, most apply only if the state first determines that evidence for that use is "reasonably available"
  - All 4 levels of evidence apply; "reasonably available" is not defined

## Unpacking the Evidence Provisions in ESSA



### Competitive Grants Priority

- In 7 competitive grant programs under ESSA, evidence-based applications will receive competitive preference points
  - Top 3 levels of evidence apply
  - The 7 programs include: SEED; Statewide Family Engagement Centers; LEARN; School Leader Recruitment and Support; Full-Service Community Schools; Promise Neighborhoods; and Supporting High-Ability Learners and Learning

## Opportunities in **2017** for State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to Implement Evidence Provisions

Establish a learning agenda and a vision for using evidence in state and local **plans**

Clarify the role of evidence in **school improvement** policies and plans

Determine the state's approach to "**reasonably available**" determinations

Determine the state's approach to "**ongoing efforts to examine the effects**" of 4<sup>th</sup> level approaches

Prepare for **competitive grant** applications

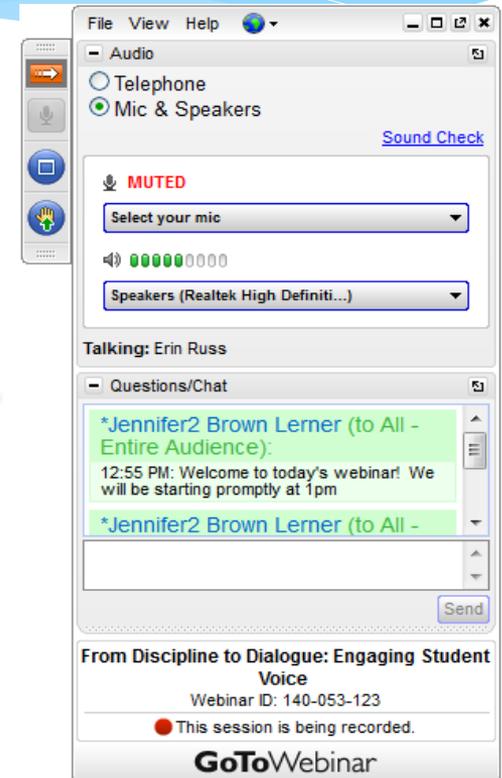
Identify existing **capacity** (e.g., people, processes, data), gaps, and sustainability plans

# Challenges

- Capacity:
  - Limited analytic capacity and scale in most school districts means that states have an essential role to play in building infrastructure to increase evidence use
- Culture:
  - Half of state/district policymakers reported in 2016 that they “never” or “rarely” use the What Works Clearinghouse, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Regional Educational Laboratories
- Consider creating efficacy networks of local education agencies committed to subjecting any major initiative to a local pilot before full-scale implementation
  - See Thomas J. Kane, “Making Evidence Locally: Rethinking education research under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” *Education Next* (2017).

# Audience Q&A

To submit live questions, please use the “Questions” box on the control panel



# Michigan Department of Education



**Dr. Venessa Keesler**  
**Deputy Superintendent, Division of**  
**Educator, Student and School Supports**



**Karen Ruple**  
**Manager, MI Excel Statewide System of Support**

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# Michigan's Approach to the Every Student Succeeds Act Top 10 in 10 Years



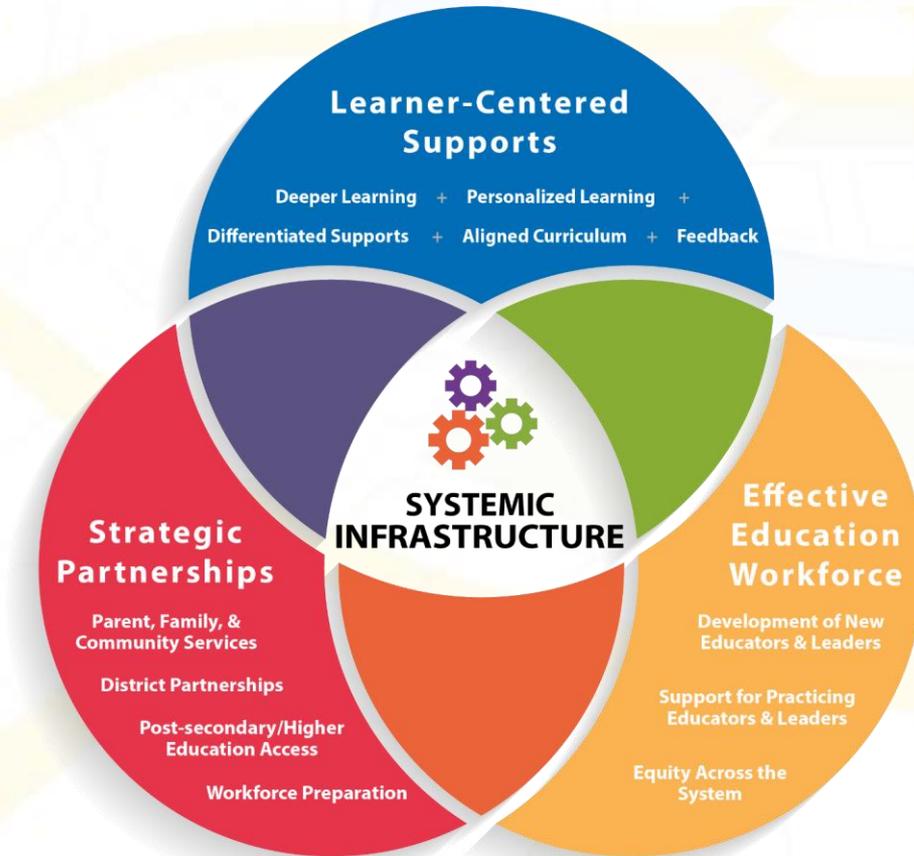
Venessa A. Keesler, Ph.D., Deputy Superintendent  
Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports

# Top 10 in 10 Years



- Beginning in 2015, State Superintendent Brian Whiston worked with stakeholders across the state to identify what Michigan needs to do to be a top 10 state within 10 years. This resulted in Michigan's Top 10 in 10 plan, which can be found here:  
[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/10\\_in\\_10\\_Action\\_Plan\\_543856\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/10_in_10_Action_Plan_543856_7.pdf)
- This is not only a plan for the MDE, but for Michigan as a state in terms of our education system and opportunities for our students. The ESSA plan has been built to enact key components of this larger strategic plan
- The graphic in the next slide summarizes the key focus areas

# Focus Areas Components



# Vision for Making Michigan a Top 10 State in 10 Years

When you talk to parents and/or the business community, and you ask them what they want—they all say:

In support of becoming a Top 10 state in 10 years, we want our students/employees to:

- Be curious
- Be problem solvers
- Be able to work independently and in teams
- Be able to communicate well
- Set and achieve goals
- Be critical thinkers

To do this, we need **CLASSROOMS** that create these types of learning opportunities; **EDUCATORS** who are prepared to support students in learning those skills; and **ASSESSMENTS** that measure whether or not those students are ready for success in those areas



# **Key Components of Supports for Districts and Schools in Michigan's ESSA Plan**

High-Level Overview

## Partnership Model

- Partnership districts are a concept/structure of support that is not required by ESSA, but one that aligns with key pieces of Michigan’s ESSA work. Michigan intends to use ESSA as one vehicle to support this work.
- Partnership districts are those with low academic performance, as well as other areas of need.
- The MDE will provide intensive supports to LEAs with at least one “F” school (as identified by the state’s accountability system) and may work with LEAs with “D” schools on an early warning basis.

# Partnership Districts

- Partnership districts will:
  - Identify holistic needs using the whole-child comprehensive needs assessment; craft a plan with all partners at the table (the ISD, the board, tribal education departments, the education organizations, community organizations, foundations, other state agencies).
  - Include clear benchmarks for 90 days, 18 months, and three years.
- We want to move beyond labeling and into **collective accountability and supports**.
- The purpose of accountability is not to simply label schools or LEAs, but instead to drive supports to those most in need, and to hold all of us accountable for the outcomes of all of Michigan's children. When schools are failing, we are all responsible for changing that situation.

# Supports for Districts and Schools



- Using ESSA to focus on the whole child → revising our Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA)
- Driving districts toward evidence-based 10 in 10 practices, while allowing space for innovation
- More flexibility for districts, based on the results of the CNA
- Reduced reporting and administrative burden for districts
  - One comprehensive CNA that happens less frequently
  - Less frequent submission of school and district improvement plans
  - Revised and streamlined grant processes

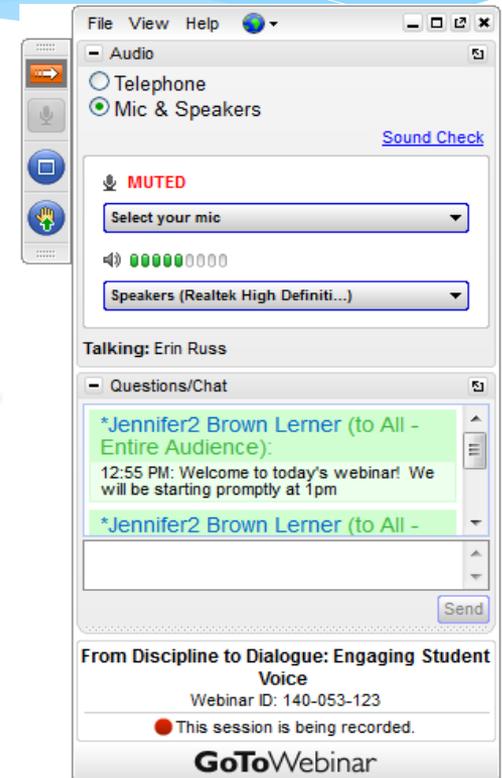
# Partnering with Researchers



- Creating the Michigan Education Research Initiative (MERI), a collaboration between University of Michigan and Michigan State University.
- MERI will partner with the state to:
  - Enact a strategic research agenda keyed to strategic goals (both by doing research directly and helping find other research partners) and
  - Handle data requests from researchers
- Want to leverage this collaboration and the work of MERI to find research partners to help establish evidence-base where needed for key practices.

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# Tennessee Department of Education



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**Chief Research and Strategy Officer**  
**Rita Fentress**  
**Director of School Improvement**

# Key Evidence-based Levers

- Key evidence-based levers for school improvement
  - Strong leadership
    - Leadership development, training, and support
  - Effective Instruction
    - Selecting, retaining, and supporting highly effective teachers
    - Development of high quality evidence-based curriculum and materials
  - Student Support
    - Strong family engagement
    - Safe and secure school and learning environment
    - Student physical and mental health
    - Community support

# Self-Examination

- What research informs our practices as a department?
- What is our capacity to support the key levers?
- What changes must be made?

# District Empowerment

- How can we empower districts to move from former practices that have not moved the achievement needle?
- How can we ensure districts have the capacity and resources to accept greater autonomy in selection, development, and implementation of evidence-based practices?

# State Role

- Assist districts and schools in development of School Improvement Plan
  - Assist in analysis of school level data
  - Provide training in needs assessment and root cause analysis
  - Provide access to studies available through multiple clearinghouses and other relevant research
  - Support and monitor district's implementation of plans
- Partner with RELs, regional comprehensive center and Tenn. Education Research Alliance (TERA)



*Districts and schools in Tennessee will exemplify excellence and equity such that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully embark upon their chosen path in life.*

**Excellence | Optimism | Judgment | Courage | Teamwork**

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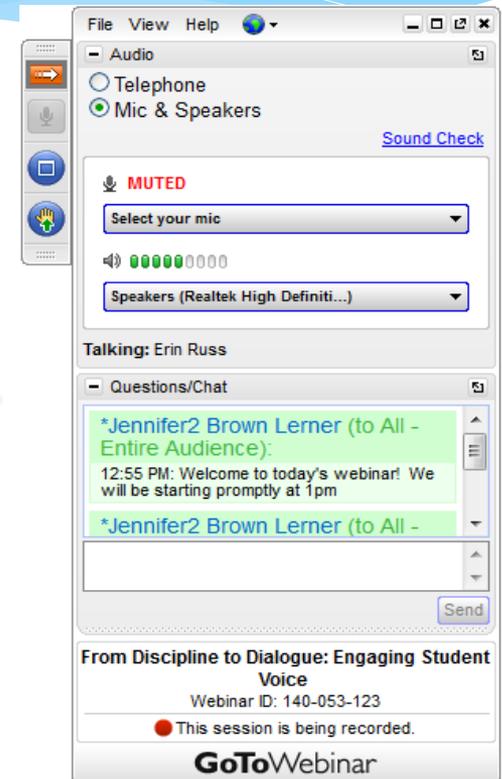
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# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education



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*Key Strategies, Practices,  
and Policy for Successful  
School Turnaround in  
Priority Schools*



# What works in Massachusetts?

## Our turnaround practices



**1. Leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration**



**2. Intentional practices for improving instruction**



**3. Student-specific instruction and supports to all students**



**4. School climate and culture**



# Evidence of progress

- To date, 57% of MA turnaround schools have exited turnaround status.
- Many schools and districts use the state's research-based turnaround practices as an anchor resource.
- The practices provide common language and consistent expectations statewide.

*How did we get here?*



# Massachusetts context

- State law supported by School Improvement Grant (SIG)
- State education agency (SEA) turnaround office focused on building district capacity
- Agency research agenda tied to consistent, long-term progress monitoring of turnaround schools



# Where did the turnaround practices come from?

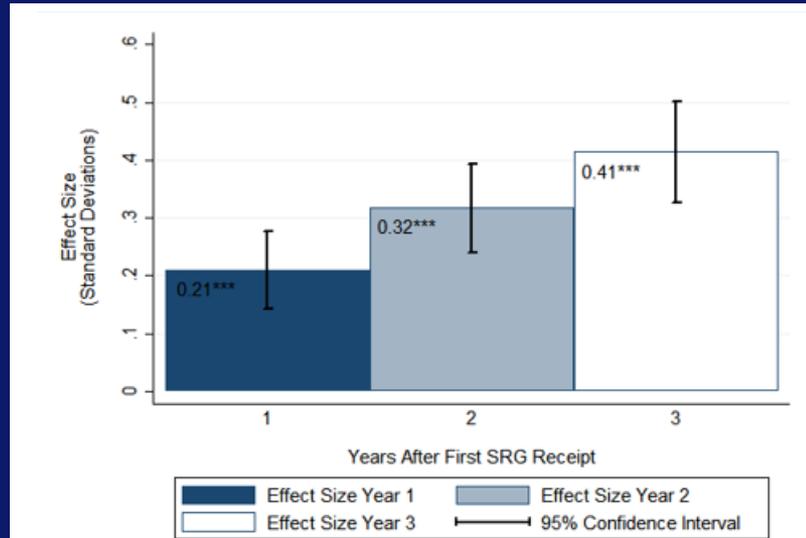
- Quantitative analysis of impact on student outcomes
- Qualitative study of variation in implementation



# Impact Study: Overall

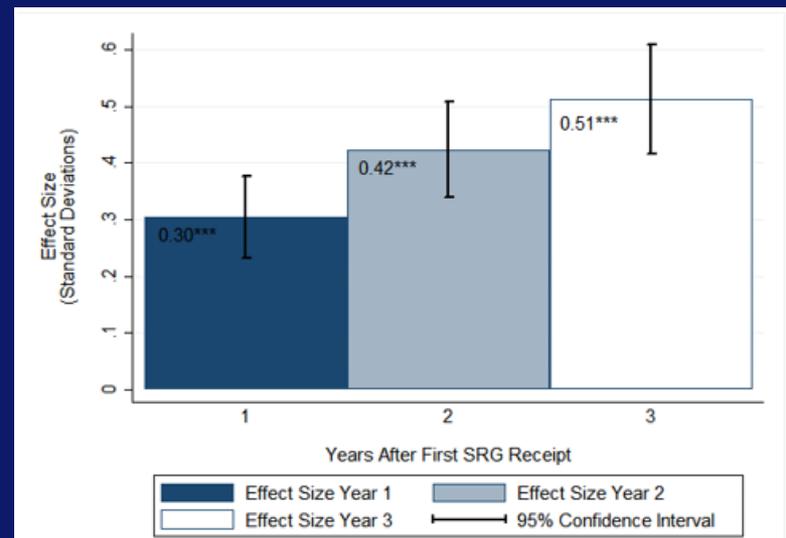
Equivalent to one additional year of schooling in both ELA and math after three years.

## ELA Achievement Score Effect Sizes



\* p < .01, \*\* p < .005, \*\*\* p < .001

## Math Achievement Score Effect Sizes



# Impact study: Achievement gap

- SIG was associated with a **decrease in the achievement gap** for:
  - **English language learner** (ELL) students and non-ELL students in ELA and mathematics for all three years
  - Students who did and did not have **free or reduced-price lunch** status for all three years
  - Students with **special education** status and students without special education status in Years 2 and 3 in ELA and only in Year 2 in math



# Implementation study

- Compared SIG schools that improved to those that did not improve
- Data sources
  - Annual monitoring site visits
  - Classroom observations using the CLASS
  - Interviews
  - Extant document review
  - Exited schools survey



# Successful turnaround in action

## Turnaround practices



**1. Leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration**—The school has established a community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration.



**2. Intentional practices for improving instruction**—The school employs intentional practices for improving teacher-specific and student-responsive instruction.



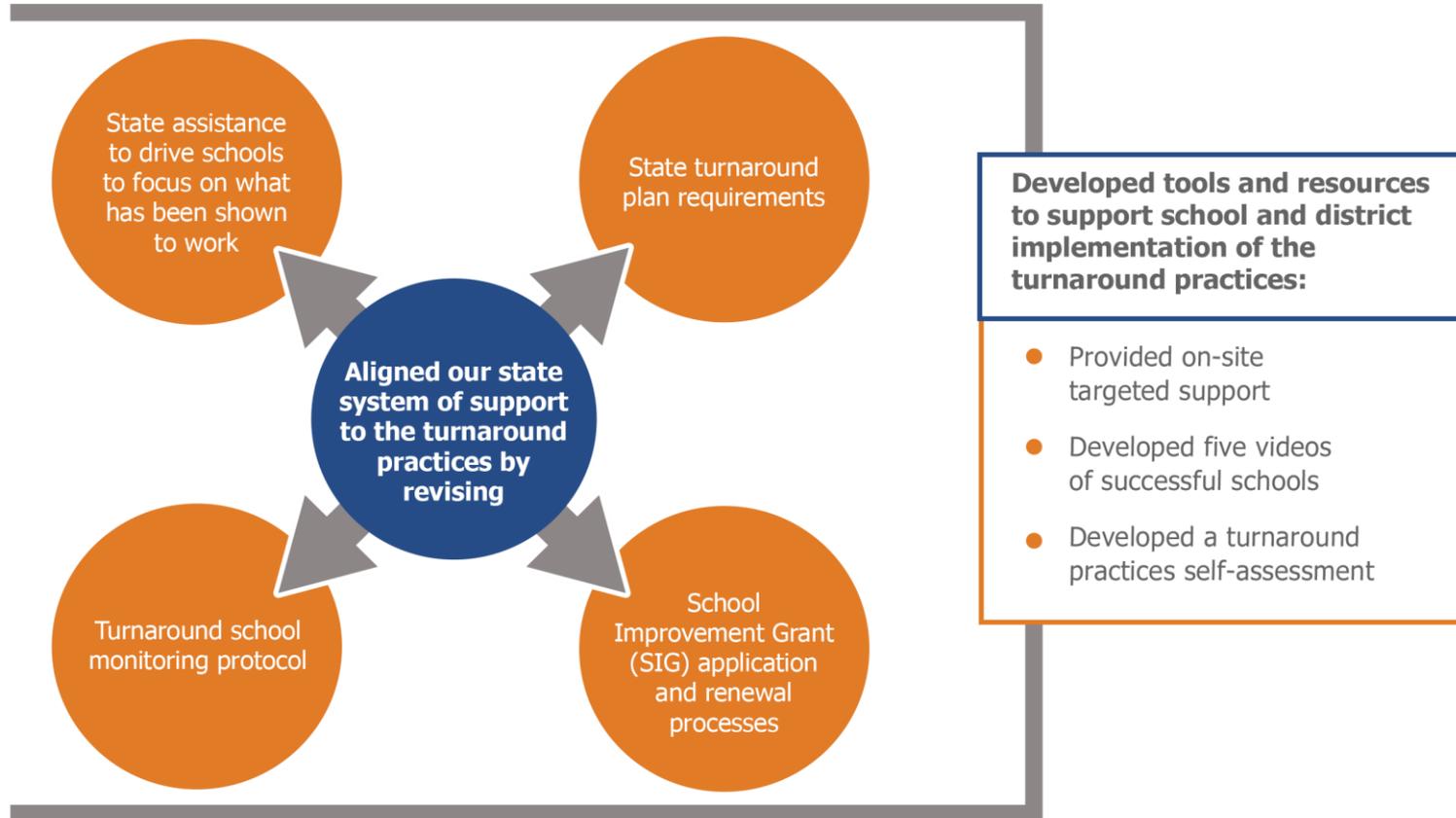
**3. Student-specific instruction and supports to all students**—The school is able to provide student-specific supports and interventions informed by data and the identification of student-specific needs.



**4. School climate and culture**—The school has established a climate and culture that provide a safe, orderly, and respectful environment for students and a collegial, collaborative, and professional culture among teachers that supports the school's focus on increasing student achievement.



# Using the practices in practice



# More information

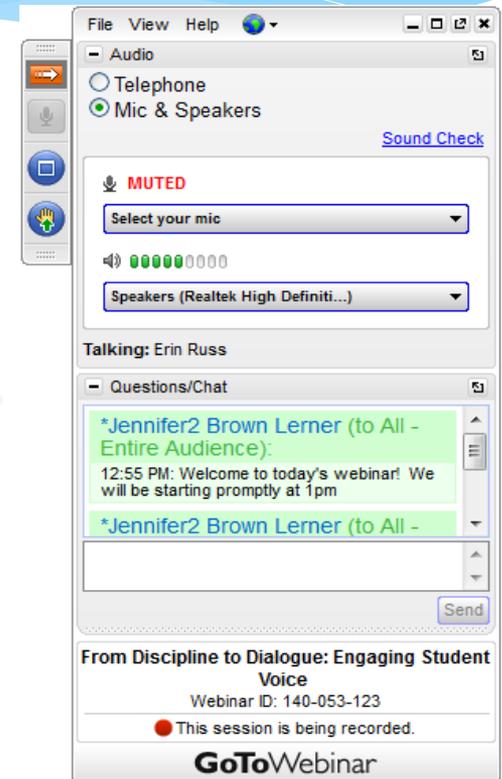
- All turnaround practices resources can be found on the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education website:

<http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/turnaround-in-massachusetts/turnaround-and-emerging-practices-reports.html>



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# Key Resources

## Featured Resource Pages



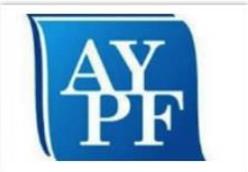
### Deeper Learning

In December 2014, AYPF hosted a study tour to Boston, MA and Providence, RI to highlight two schools that are incorporating deeper learning practices.



### Competency-Based Education

Want to know more about Competency-Based Learning?



### Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Learn more about AYPF's work around the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ESSA Resource Page:

<http://www.aypf.org/resources/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-resource-page/>

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# Contact Today's Presenters

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