Frequently Asked Questions about

Michigan's State School Reform/Redesign Office

Priority Schools

1. **What is a Priority school?**
   Priority schools are those schools in the bottom 5% of a complete top-to-bottom (TTB) list of schools. This placement is often indicative of minimal student outcomes in a number of subject areas over time, poor achievement coupled with declines in student performance or substantial achievement gaps, or all of these factors. Schools carry the Priority School status designation for four years regardless of progress.

2. **What does it mean to be a Priority school?**
   Priority schools are required to develop and implement a reform/redesign plan based on one of four intervention models, as a means for rapid turnaround in student achievement. These schools are given a number of supports from ISDs, MDE and the SRO to result in rapid turnaround.

3. **Why do we have a Priority school list? Is it required by legislation?**
   Yes, the Priority school list (bottom 5% of schools on the TTB ranking) is mandated in MCL 380.1280c.

4. **How were Priority schools identified?**
   Schools identified in the bottom 5% of the TTB list are Priority Schools. This includes a school that was identified as a Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) school in 2010 or 2011 (i.e. all previous PLA schools are classified as Priority schools while they are developing or implementing a reform plan per their original placement on the PLA list. Schools stay in this category for four years.)

5. **What are the components of the Top-to-Bottom rankings?**
   The calculation methodology and supporting information are explained in detail in documents on the MDE's website (www.mi.gov/ttb). In summary, the TTB ranking uses achievement scores (scale scores converted to z-scores, not proficiency rates); improvement scores based on student level two-year performance level change for students in grades 3-8, and cohort slopes of scores at the high school level; and achievement gaps. Up to five subject areas are included (math, reading, writing, science, and social studies), and these are averaged together to determine an overall standardized score for a school. For schools with a 12th grade, graduation rate is included into the overall score along with these subject areas. In short, the three main categories for the TTB are below:

   - **Achievement** in each of the five tested areas (math, reading, writing, science and social studies)
   - **Improvement** in each of the tested areas, and
   - **Achievement gap** in each tested area.

6. **Are all schools included in the list?**
   Any school that has at least 30 Full Academic Year (FAY) students in each of the last two years in at least two tested content areas is ranked. Students are included for accountability purposes in a school's results only if they were FAY students—as determined by pupil count days.

7. **What are the intervention models that a Priority school can select for the reform plan?**
Schools can select from one of the four following intervention models identified by the U.S. Department of Education. These are specifically mentioned in legislation.

a. **Transformation Model**
   i. Developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, which includes ensuring that the school has a principal with school turnaround competencies;
   ii. Implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies;
   iii. Extending or repurposing time for instruction and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and
   iv. Providing operational flexibility and sustained support.

b. **Turnaround Model**
   i. This would address similar issues to those mentioned above in the transformation model, and include other actions such as:
   ii. Ensure the school has a principal with demonstrated school turnaround competencies and replace at least 50 percent of the school's staff;
   iii. Adopting a new governance structure; and
   iv. Implementing a new or revised instructional program.

c. **Restart Model**
   i. Districts would close the school and reopen it under the management of a charter school operator, charter management organization, or educational management organization selected through a rigorous review progress. A restart school would be required to enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.

d. **Closure Model**
   i. Districts would close the low-achieving school and enroll the students who attended that school in other high-achieving schools in the district.

8. **Who submits the plan and when does the plan have to be submitted?**
According to 1280(c)(2), within 90 days after a public school is placed under the supervision of the state school reform/redesign officer, the school board or board of directors operating the public school shall submit a redesign plan to the state school reform/redesign officer. According to 1280(c)(3), the SRO officer shall issue an order approving, disapproving, or making changes to the redesign plan. If the order makes changes to the redesign plan, the school board or board of directors has 30 days after the order to change the redesign plan to incorporate those changes into the redesign plan and resubmit it. Once a plan is approved, a school can request a change in the plan at any point.

9. **What supports are available for Priority schools?**
Priority schools receive a wide variety of supports to assist with the development and implementation of the reform plan. The range of services and supports varies depending on the Title I status of the school, and the number of years the school is identified as a Priority school including the following:

The MDE's supports from its Office of Education Innovation and Improvement (OEII) include, but are not limited to the following:

- Access to online professional learning resources specific to school turnaround and improvement,
- Participation in technical assistance professional learning events and conferences, including networking meetings, leadership academies, and targeted resources,
- Access to the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum for all core teachers in the school,
- Participation in the Superintendent's Dropout Challenge,
- Access to data tools and supports to analyze progress,
- Access to district resources such as the District Toolkit and Educational Resource Survey

The MDE's supports/requirements from its Office of Field Services (OFS) include, but are not limited to the following for Title I eligible Priority Schools:

- An Intervention Specialist (IS), who can facilitate various aspects of plan development, as well as provide technical assistance using customized data tools provided to the school,
- Access to the Statewide System of Support, which includes supports from OEII and ISDs, including School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs), to help guide instructional and school-wide components of the reform plan,
- Data packets on school achievement outcomes, demographics, and other data resources to support the school in consideration of the various reform efforts,
- Access to Title I specific events such as networking meetings and the School Improvement Conference.

The DTMB's supports from its State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO) include, but are not limited to the following:

- Access to training relative to standards in a cohesive and easily accessible format to target and customize the individual unique needs of each Priority School. The SRO's formatting helps superintendents, school leaders and teachers engage in practices that determine which standards were taught and which students have mastered those standards.
- Streamlined superintendent-led communication and involvement for established expectations, transparency and clarity.
- Real-time school-wide, student-level data every 6-to-8 weeks to target core challenges in time for midcourse corrections with customized supports for individual students in a variety of data collection categories not collected by any other state agency.
- Response to Intervention (RtI) and Special Education tools and trainings to address gaps and immediate supports for students in Tiers I, II, and III.
- Access to national practices in Massachusetts and Tennessee that have shaped school reform.

Priority School Status Release, the SSRRD, and Exit Criteria

10. How does a Priority School exit Priority status?

To exit Priority School status, the Top-to-Bottom ranking must be above 5%, ninety-five percent of students must participate in the statewide test, and the school must meet all Annual Measurable Objectives/academic targets in the all students categories.

11. **What is the SSRRD?**
According to 380.1280(c)(6), the state school reform/redesign school district is created. The state school reform/redesign school district is a school district reserved as one of many last resort options for chronically failing schools. To date, the SRO has not placed any schools in the SSRRD. The Education Achievement Authority (EAA) was originally designed to be the state's school reform district but lost its exclusivity rights under the former superintendent of public instruction.

12. **Does the state have other options besides placing a school in the SSRRD if the school fails to make satisfactory progress?**
Yes, the law allows the SRO to place a Priority school under the management of a CEO if the SRO determines that "better educational results are likely to be achieved" under this model. The CEO must implement one of the four intervention models.

General Question & Answers

13. **What has the SRO been doing since the E.O. took effect in May?**
    a. Planned and executed release-retention protocol for eligible schools identified in cohort 2011
    b. Launched new informative website to increase access to knowledge of national reform efforts and local state Priority School processes with data
    c. Implemented performance information system
    d. Compiled reform learnings from Massachusetts and Tennessee trips
    e. Met with superintendents and their teams regarding current status and next steps
    f. Wrote business plan and SSRRD operations
    g. Successfully transitioned to DTMB, Romney building
    h. Built curricular and RTI (response to intervention) system tools for districts' free and full access
    i. Submitted budget and academic plans to Governor
    j. Collaborated with ISDs to support long-term reforms
    k. Reconstituted team to diversify expertise in urban education, RTI, curriculum, technology, data, community, and charters schools
    l. Considering all information (student proficiency and growth data, specific circumstances at the school, and other factors) when determining which schools would most likely benefit from placement in the SSRRD or under CEO management.