



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

August 27, 2013

Michael Sullivan, Superintendent  
Gill-Montague Regional School District  
35 Crocker Avenue  
Turners Falls, MA 01376

Dear Superintendent Sullivan,

I write to inform you that I have decided to remove Gill-Montague from Level 4 status. The Department will disclose the district's new accountability level (either Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3) when we release publicly the spring 2013 school and district MCAS results in mid September.

The district has now met the two conditions for removal from Level 4 status I described in my January 18, 2013 letter. The district has met the first condition; it has named a permanent superintendent with the execution of your three-year contract that began on July 1, 2013. Gill-Montague met the second condition; the district has verified School Committee adoption of the operational plan to execute the district's 2013-2014 *Accelerated Improvement Plan* with fidelity.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) has formally accepted the Gill-Montague Regional School District 2013-14 Accelerated Improvement Plan, and I have reviewed and I am accepting the operational plan you submitted on August 14, 2013. With these plans, the district and school committee have committed to a path of continuous improvement, goal alignment, the effective implementation of high-leverage initiatives, and self-monitoring and adjustments in response to data about adult practice and student learning.

Gill-Montague has come a long way since the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (then Board of Education) voted to designate it an underperforming district (Level 4) in June 2007. As recently as 2011, the district continued to face challenges in uniting stakeholders to address systemic weaknesses, improve governance practices, allocate resources effectively, provide sufficient support for schools and teachers, develop aligned and useful curriculum and assessment tools, and provide sufficient professional development. Gill-Montague's member towns were also unable to agree on a budget for years and were under fiscal oversight by the Department until November 2010. These issues threatened to undermine the school system, and impacted instructional quality, and district capacity to address its ongoing challenges deeply concerned me.

Over the past two years, though, I have been encouraged by the district's progress. I have kept

track of the district's progress described through the *Quarterly Progress Reports* provided by my Office of District and School Accountability and visited GMSRD last fall. I heard for myself that teachers, administrators, and school committee members were working collectively to make the right changes urgently.

On January 29th, 2013 I signaled to the Board that I was considering removing the Level 4 designation because it met the first condition for release as described in the April 2012 regulations for underperforming schools and districts. Specifically, the district had demonstrated satisfactory achievement of the goals and benchmarks of its Accelerated Improvement Plan. However, the second condition had not been met at that time. The district still needed to demonstrate the capacity to continue making progress without the accountability and assistance provided under the Level 4 designation. My primary concern at that time was the need to continue the momentum generated by the Accelerated Improvement Plan. Strong, stable leadership at all levels with a demonstrated commitment to continuing the improvement trajectory was still necessary.

At this point, I am confident in the district's overall district performance, the presence of stable leadership, and your assurances of continued accelerated improvement. With the effective implementation of the 2013-2014 Accelerated Improvement Plan and operational plan, a new path for improvement has been established for Gill-Montague. The Department will establish the district's new accountability level based on the level of its schools alone.

Gill-Montague, like many school districts across the Commonwealth, still has much work ahead to improve student achievement, strengthen district systems, refine district and school practice, and support leaders and teachers in becoming more effective educators. I congratulate you, your staff, and the school committee for the progress made to this point. I also acknowledge and support your written commitment to ensuring that Gill-Montague remains focused on results for students, educators, and leaders.

Sincerely



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

cc: Joyce Philips, Chair, Gill-Montague School Committee  
Senator Rosenberg  
Representative Kulik  
Representative Andrews  
Maura Banta, Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Alan Ingram, Deputy Commissioner  
Lynda Foisy, Senior Associate Commissioner for Accountability and Assistance  
Eva Mitchell, Associate Commissioner for District and School Accountability  
Lise Zeig, Associate Commissioner for the State System of Support