

## **Increasing Student Access to Behavioral and Mental Health Services**

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This report describes anticipated awarding of grants and contracts related to funds allocated from Chapter 142 of the Acts of 2019, line item 7061-0100, to assist public school districts in connecting students with community-based services to maximize coordination with service providers and establish more comprehensive continuums of care, and to support increased professional development opportunities for public school employees to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health support.

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**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906  
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  
[www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)



This document was prepared by the  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

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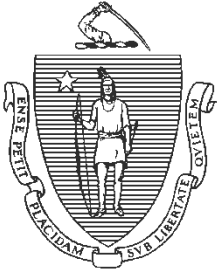
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# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

April 23, 2020

Dear Members of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means, and the Executive Office for Administration and Finance:

I am pleased to submit this report to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance and to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means, *Increasing Student Access to Behavioral and Mental Health Services*, pursuant to Chapter 142 of the Acts of 2019, line item [7061-0010](#) that reads in part:

*“...provided further, that, not later than March 5, 2020, the department shall submit a report to the executive office for administration and finance and the house and senate committees on ways and means on the awarding of grants and details of anticipated contracts, by school district.”*

This report supplements the information provided in the January 2020 [Supporting Healthy Alliances Reinforcing Education \(SHARE\) report](#) (pursuant to Chapter 42 of the Acts of 2019, line item 7061-9650), and further highlights the coordinated efforts supported through both line items. As noted in the January report, these two line items (7061-0010 and 7061-9650) have allowed the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to better align and coordinate resources for districts and communities to establish and improve systems of student support, and to increase access to the continuum of services needed. For example, both line items are making possible the competitive Fund Codes (FC) 336-613 [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness](#) grants, to be awarded this spring. In addition, the Department will continue to offer professional development (PD) supported by these line items, including PD to help school staff to identify students in need of services and connect those students to services. This report reflects an updated timeline and process resulting from the school closures related to COVID-19.

These line items help advance the Department's strategic priority to [support social-emotional learning, health, and safety](#), which aims to promote systems and strategies that foster safe, positive, healthy, culturally-responsive, and inclusive learning environments that address students' varied needs and improve educational outcomes for all. Furthermore, as noted in my [Our Way Forward](#) report, we need “systems of integrated student supports” to “free children up to engage in the type of critical thinking and deeper learning to which our schools and education

systems aspire.”<sup>1</sup> The work of this line-item and associated efforts include the state working in partnership with districts, professional development providers, and others, to help further innovation and evidence-based practices related to integrated student supports. Moreover, these efforts supplement and reinforce the recently passed [Student Opportunity Act](#) which encourages local districts to invest in “social services to support students’ social-emotional and physical health” as a strategy to “address persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups.”

The efforts funded through this and the SHARE line-item will help further the ability of communities across the commonwealth to maximize coordination with service providers and establish more comprehensive continuums of care. These funds will help to increase student access to behavioral and mental health services, delivered in partnership with community-based providers. In addition, the professional development coordinated by the Department will be offered to school staff to improve their ability to identify students’ behavioral and mental health needs as part of comprehensive, integrated, tiered approaches to promoting wellness for all students, and to addressing the needs of students requiring additional supports.

We look forward to continuing to facilitate and coordinate this work, and thank the Governor and Legislature for your commitment to the students of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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<sup>1</sup> Weiss, Elaine and Reville, Paul (2019). *Broader, Bolder, Better: How Schools and Communities Help Students Overcome the Disadvantages of Poverty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 4-5.

**Table of Contents**

---

**Introduction..... 1**

**Selection of Participating Districts ..... 1**

**Coordinated Professional Development ..... 2**

## Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: Increasing Student Access to Behavioral and Mental Health Services pursuant to Chapter 142 of the Acts of 2019, line item 7061-0100:

*“...For a grant program to assist public school districts in contracting with licensed community-based mental and behavioral health service providers for services in public schools; provided, that the program shall be administered by the department of elementary and secondary education in coordination with the executive office of health and human services; provided further, that the department shall make efforts to notify all public school districts of the program; provided further, that the department shall prioritize grant applications submitted by school districts with limited access to mental and behavioral health services and limited existing financial resources; provided further, that the department shall prioritize grant applications submitted by school districts that have created action plans based on the safe and supportive school framework or whose applications are consistent with infrastructure and coordination efforts linking schools to community-based resources in accordance with item 7061-9612; provided further, that grants may be expended to assist school districts in connecting students with community-based services to maximize coordination with service providers and establish more comprehensive continuums of care; provided further, that grants may be expended to support increased professional development opportunities for public school employees to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health support; and provided further, that, not later than March 5, 2020, the department shall submit a report to the executive office for administration and finance and the house and senate committees on ways and means on the awarding of grants and details of anticipated contracts, by school district...”*

This reports outlines efforts to date to establish grants with public school districts, and contracts to provide professional development pursuant to this line item.

Progress toward grant disbursement during school year 2019-2020 includes continued inter-agency consultation between the Department, the Executive Office of Education (EOE), and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services agencies (EOHHS), including the Departments of Public Health and Mental Health (DPH and DMH), to leverage existing and planned initiatives and to promote complementary and supplemental activities.

## Selection of Participating Districts

Since the submission of the January [SHARE line-item report](#), the Department posted the fiscal year 2019-2020 (FY2020 and FY2021) integrated student wellness grant opportunity, through the Fund Code (FC) 336-613 [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals \(RFP\)](#). Massachusetts public school districts and collaboratives are eligible to apply. Applicants had the option to submit their proposal February

25, 2020 (for activities during FY2020 and/or FY2021) or May 4, 2020 (for activities during FY2021). The Department planned to complete the competitive review process and award grants by early spring 2020 (for those submitted by the February due date) and by late spring (for those submitted by the May due date),

**Due to the school closures related to COVID-19, the Department has adjusted the process and timeline for the FC 336-613 [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness Funding Opportunity RFP](#) as follows:**

- No awards will be made for FY20 activities and expenditures.
- Those that submitted applications for the February 25, 2020 deadline must resubmit their applications by June 12, 2020, for FY21 activities and expenditures only, if they wish to be considered for funding.
- The deadline for all FY21 applications has been extended to June 12, 2020. The Department will review applications and anticipates announcing awards mid- to late-July.

Applicants must propose activities to develop comprehensive, integrated multi-tiered systems for student support and establish infrastructure to facilitate integrated coordination of school and community-based resources, including but not limited to, social services, mental health, and behavioral health resources. Proposed activities could include contracting with licensed community-based providers, creating and/or implementing school and/or district action plans with goals related to improving student access to robust, culturally responsive multi-tiered systems of support, including access to behavioral and mental health service, and other activities in support of improving student access to services.

The Department anticipates making awards for FY21 from the SHARE line item (7061-9650), which currently has authorizing language to extend through August 31, 2021. The Department is exploring ways to make funding from 7061-0010 available for FY21.

## **Coordinated Professional Development**

Pursuant to this line item (7061-0010), the Department is coordinating and supporting professional development related to identifying students in need of mental and behavioral health support, as well as building capacity of school districts and community to develop integrated systems of support. Supported with line item [7061-0010](#) of Chapter 273 of the Acts of 2018, the Department and its contractor, Walker, an organization that collaborates with organizations to develop high-quality educational services and settings to support students' social, emotional and behavioral health needs, is offering a series of professional development offerings, *Sustainable Solutions: Applying a Systems Approach to Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Supports and Services* in Schools. This series includes statewide and regional sessions, and is designed to promote social emotional learning and increase awareness of and access to mental health supports and services in schools. Associated with this series, the Department is also sponsoring trainings (January and May 2020) for up to 32 individuals to become certified [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) (YMHFA) instructors. As an extension of this, throughout the spring 2020, the Department plans to coordinate up to five regional YMHFA trainings for school staff and other community partners who work with students. The YMHFA trainings are “designed to

teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or is in crisis.” The FC 336-613 grantees and others will be alerted to these opportunities as they are confirmed. Please note that the majority of the above described opportunities have been converted or adapted to be offered remotely during the school closures related to COVID-19, and additional opportunities have been developed to respond to the emerging needs of schools and districts during this time.

As noted in the January report, the Department will continue to identify additional professional development opportunities tailored to the identified needs of the selected FY2020/FY2021 FC 336-613 grantees. These will include opportunities for district and school teams to come together and learn from each other, and to self-assess and develop action plans to build comprehensive and integrated systems for student support. These opportunities will help address student barriers to success and assist with efforts to further engage students in deeper learning and efforts that promote health, wellness, and safety.