



Mental Health Supports and Wraparounds: **Developing a Birth - Higher Education Framework for** **Mental and Behavioral Health**

This report describes activities related to funds allocated in line item 1596-2436 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025 budget.

The overarching goal of this project is to develop a birth through higher education framework to help inform and guide state efforts to strengthen mental and behavioral health supports available for infants/toddlers to adult learners through the public education and licensed childcare system in Massachusetts, and to support coordination between schools, students, families, and the Commonwealth's systems of community-based services and providers.

August 2025

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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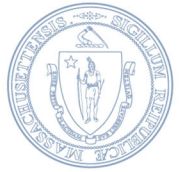
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August 1, 2025

Dear Members of the General Court:

A new cross-agency birth through higher education framework is under development through a partnership between the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Early Education and Care (EEC), and Higher Education (DHE); and in consultation with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Departments of Mental Health (DMH) and Public Health (DPH). The framework will support EOE and its agencies to be able to articulate a common understanding of mental and behavioral health challenges and strengthen our collaborations with health and human service agencies and other key stakeholders, to align collective efforts, assess key metrics, and address mental and behavioral health wellness needs.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me or Kristen McKinnon, Assistant Director of Student and Family Support, via Kristen.A.McKinnon@mass.gov, or Rachelle Engler Bennett, Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support via RachelleEngler.Bennett@mass.gov. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pedro Martinez".

Pedro Martinez,
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: Mental Health Supports and Wraparounds: Developing a Birth - Higher Education Framework for Mental and Behavioral Health, pursuant to [Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024, line item 1596-2436](#):

“For the development of a statewide birth through higher education framework for mental and behavioral health which may include, but shall not be limited to: (i) guiding principles and strategies related to providing social emotional supports; (ii) mental and behavioral health supports; (iii) suicide prevention; and (iv) relevant professional development in educational settings; provided, that the framework shall be developed in collaboration with the executive office of health and human services and the department of mental health, experts in childhood mental health, educators including those from early education and care programs, elementary and secondary public schools, and public institutions of higher education, students, families, and other stakeholders as appropriate; provided further, that funds may be expended to implement the framework and relevant mental and behavioral health supports for students; and provided further, that not later than May 30, 2025, the department of secondary and elementary education shall submit a report on (i) the implementation of the framework; and (ii) the number of districts implementing framework findings.”

This report summarizes activities to date supported by funding from this line item. The overarching goal of this project is to develop a birth through higher education framework (the Framework) to inform and guide state efforts to strengthen mental and behavioral health supports available for infants/toddlers, students from Pre-K-12 to adult learners through the public education and licensed childcare system in Massachusetts, and to support coordination between schools, students, families, and the Commonwealth’s systems of community-based services and providers.

In partnership with the Executive Office of Education (EOE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with the Education Development Center (EDC) to lead the first phase of the project. The responsibilities of EDC included conducting a landscape analysis of current programs, gathering stakeholder input, developing guiding principles and strategies, and recommending metrics and data collection methods.

All activities are being, and will continue to be, conducted in collaboration with EOE, the Departments of Early Education and Care (EEC) and Higher Education (DHE), the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Departments of Mental and Public Health (DMH and DPH); experts in mental and behavioral health; educators from early education and childcare programs, elementary and secondary public schools,

adult education, and public institutions of higher education; students and caregivers/families; and other stakeholders as appropriate.

The first phase of this project was completed on June 30, 2025. Activities during phase 1, and deliverables completed, will inform additional work, pending funding availability, in phase 2 during the fiscal year 2025-2026 (FY26). This additional work will include finalizing the Framework and planning for a pilot grant program to implement Framework recommendations and conducting relevant professional development.

Framework Development Activities to Date

This section describes activities that the contractor EDC, with guidance from a Steering Committee, has taken since the start of the project on April 17, 2025. The work includes a focus on equity in all project activities, and all aspects of the Framework itself are expected to integrate and reflect equity principles.

Convening of the Steering Committee

With guidance from EOE and DESE, EDC convened a Steering Committee composed of leaders from key state education and health agencies. Participating agencies included EOE, the Departments of Early Education and Care (EEC) and Higher Education (DHE), and EOHHS DMH and DPH. The Steering Committee worked closely with EDC to align priorities, guide the landscape analysis, facilitate input from key state and community stakeholders, and review guiding principles and strategies. During phase 1, the Steering Committee convened four times. Members have also provided supplemental information and feedback between meetings.

Key takeaways from Steering Committee meetings and other communications include the following:

- **The Framework should align with and connect to existing systems and models.** Members emphasized that the proposed framework should foster a shared vision for mental and behavioral health across educational settings and enhance communication, service delivery, progress monitoring, and transitions across systems. To do so, the framework will align with and bolster existing frameworks and models that are currently in use, rather than replace these existing frameworks and models.
- **The Framework should serve as a conceptual umbrella** that integrates the many existing models and activities currently implemented in Massachusetts agencies touching mental and behavioral health in public education systems. It should offer a unified vision—specifically, it should articulate common values and strategies across diverse ages, settings, and systems; enable a shared understanding of core principles and best practices; and facilitate cross-

pollination and innovation. This approach will maximize past and current state investments in building capacity to implement existing models among individuals working in, and in partnership with, early childhood, K-12, adult education, and higher education settings. Relatedly, local educational partners and constituents are more likely to be receptive to this approach, which will support and build upon what they already value, know, and do.

- **Clear messaging will be needed about what the Framework *is* and *is not*, to help counter any inaccurate perceptions** that its launch will require all settings to adopt an entirely new model. Rather, the Framework should be clearly and consistently presented as a guiding resource that will actively support and advance best practices and help measure the impact of state funding efforts in mental and behavioral health promotion from birth through higher education and adult education across Massachusetts.

Baseline Landscape Analysis

With guidance from the Steering Committee and other key stakeholders across Massachusetts, EDC conducted a comprehensive landscape analysis to inform the development of the Framework. EDC has conducted the following activities to date.

Current Strategies and Frameworks

To support the conceptualization of Framework components and guiding principles, including equity priorities, EDC has gathered and reviewed.

- **Existing frameworks, models, and related guidance are** currently being used in Massachusetts and nationally to guide mental and behavioral health initiatives from birth through young adulthood. As such, EDC has reviewed key frameworks, models, and guidance documents prioritized by the Steering Committee, as well as others identified through web searches and related EDC projects. This analysis has identified cross-cutting themes and core principles.
- **Existing mental and behavioral health programs and strategies** are currently being implemented across Massachusetts educational agencies and their partners. In light of this, EDC reviewed agency reports, board meeting presentations, program updates, grant solicitations, and other relevant documents provided by Steering Committee members and identified through web searches. This analysis focused on populations served, funding sources, gaps, challenges, successes, equity approaches, and specific metrics that are being used to measure progress.

EDC synthesized findings from these activities in a landscape analysis report.

Collection of Stakeholder Input

To complement the landscape analysis, EDC gathered input from a diverse range of stakeholders on current practices, guiding principles, strategies, and metrics. These stakeholders included individuals working in—and collaborating with—early childhood, K–12, higher education, and adult education settings. Insights from this engagement will inform the ongoing development of the Framework. This input was collected in two ways:

- **An online stakeholder survey** to collect data from leaders and members of stakeholder organizations (e.g., professional associations) across the Commonwealth representing education and/or mental and behavioral health in early childhood, K-12, including adult public education, and higher education spaces. Topics covered include how survey respondents are currently using existing mental and behavioral health frameworks, strategies, and programs; how they are currently centering equity in their work; their successes and challenges to date; and their top priorities for the Framework.

The confidential Qualtrics survey launched on May 28, 2025, and will remain open. Data up until June 30, 2025, was analyzed for this first phase of this work and, new data collected will be analyzed in FY26, pending funding availability. Organizational leaders were invited to complete the survey and share it with their members. In total, 30 statewide professional organizations received the survey—representing thousands of education leaders, educators, and mental and behavioral health professionals across multiple sectors. Steering Committee members also conducted targeted outreach to support participation.

- **Two listening sessions** with diverse stakeholders invested in mental and behavioral health among youth in educational settings, including those who are working directly with young people and/or their caregivers/families. These sessions gathered more detailed information on current experiences in the field, guiding principles, strategies, metrics, equity approaches, and gaps, as well as other critical perspectives and insights to help shape the Framework. Each session was facilitated by two experienced facilitators and note-taking. Key themes and illustrative quotes across both groups were identified, and key findings were summarized.

The Steering Committee was strongly supportive of gathering feedback from diverse stakeholders and suggested specific groups to engage. Due to the short duration of this initial contract, members agreed to focus on input from professional associations and thought leaders in this first phase of the project. Over 60 thought leaders representing individual experts as well as statewide organizations that lead the mental and behavioral health field in Massachusetts were invited to participate in listening sessions that took place in early June

2025. Additional input directly from students, caregivers/families, and other community groups will be incorporated in later phases, should funding allow.

Review of Existing Metrics and Related Recommendations

As mentioned above, EDC has been examining existing metrics currently being used by different agencies within Massachusetts, as well as broader best practices, to assess progress towards mental and behavioral health outcomes for individuals from birth through higher education. Through a close review of agency reports as well as stakeholder survey and listening session findings, EDC compiled and analyzed information on:

- Definitions and categories of metrics being used in Massachusetts to assess the impact(s) of mental and behavioral health programming in educational settings.
- Strengths, gaps, and challenges in existing metrics, including in gathering, analyzing, and reporting on relevant data.
- Alignment of current metrics and data sources with emerging guiding principles and components of the new Framework.
- Potential areas of focus in assessing the state's overall progress in supporting birth to higher education, including adult public education services' mental and behavioral health.

Based on this review, EDC developed initial recommendations for strengthening metrics and data sources in alignment with Framework principles and components.

Draft Guiding Principles and Strategies

Drawing on insights from prior activities, EDC is facilitating the Steering Committee's development of a shared vision for the Framework's core elements. Tools are being leveraged, such as virtual polling, group brainstorming, individual scoring/ranking, and iterative drafts, to ensure that all voices are heard and will be reflected in the guiding principles and key strategies that will make up the Framework.

Next Steps

This report describes the first phase of a comprehensive, statewide initiative—guided by evidence and grounded in equity—to advance best practices in mental and behavioral health promotion for individuals from infancy through adulthood in Massachusetts. If additional funding is available, EDC will continue working with the Steering Committee to develop and apply the Framework in FY26—including by gathering additional feedback from youth, caregivers/families, adult learners and other key stakeholders to

shape its development; conducting professional development to support its application, monitoring and evaluating the Framework and related activities to support continual improvement to inform grant programs to pilot implementation of the framework as well as strengthen metrics and data sources in alignment with Framework principles and components.