

## **Safe and Supportive Schools Commission – Fifth Annual Report**

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This report is submitted pursuant to Chapter 284 of the Acts of 2014, An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence. This Act was signed into law by the Governor on August 13, 2014 (House Bill 4376). Provisions within this Act relating to safe and supportive schools are codified as Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 69, Section 1P (G.L. c. 69, § 1P).

February 2020

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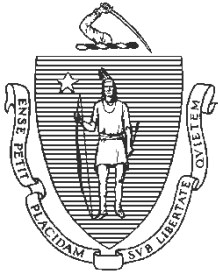
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# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

February 17, 2020

Dear Governor and Members of the General Court:

On behalf of the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission (Commission), I am pleased to submit this *Safe and Supportive Schools Commission - Fifth Annual Report* pursuant to section 6 of Chapter 284 of the Acts of 2014 (the Act), and Massachusetts General Laws (G.L.), chapter (c.) 69, section (§) 1P (g) that reads in part:

*“There shall be a safe and supportive schools commission to collaborate with and advise the department on the feasibility of state-wide implementation of the framework... The commission shall prepare and submit an annual progress report concerning the commission’s activities with appropriate recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out such recommendations, if any, not later than December 31.”*

Creating and maintaining safe and supportive schools offers a key lever towards engagement and success for students, families, and staff in districts across the Commonwealth. In service of academics as well as other forms of learning and growth, it is crucial to ensure teachers and other educators are equipped with the tools to support and promote their students’ individual and collective needs. Preparing all students for success in school, the workplace, and civic life includes developing students’ social and emotional competencies and attending to their health and wellbeing. Moreover, academic skills and social and emotional competencies (including those in the realm of self-awareness and self-regulation, social awareness and relationship skills, and responsible decision making) are mutually reinforcing, and are most effectively developed in environments that are safe and supportive. These environments focus on high expectations for all students and on building the capacity to support teachers and staff as they engage in this process. These environments implement culturally responsive systems of support that help all students experience success and growth; these environments value the social and cultural experiences of their students, staff, families, and partners; and these environments actively address bias related to race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) is committed to closing gaps in achievement and opportunity, so that all students in the Commonwealth have access to a great education. In service of that commitment, one of the four themes in my [Our Way Forward](#) report is *Holistic Support and Enrichment*, which is based on the premise that if we are to provide equitable access to deeper learning for all (the core theme in Our Way Forward), we need to ensure that all students receive strong foundational supports and

enriching experiences beyond core academics. As a part of this, all students need appropriate mental and physical health supports, grounded in safe and supportive school cultures, so they can engage in and beyond the classroom, ready to learn.

Furthermore, one of the Department's five core strategies to help prepare all students for success is to [support students' social and emotional learning, health and safety](#). Explicitly aligned with the focus of the Commission and Safe and Supportive Schools Framework law (G.L. c. 69, § 1P), the Department's goal within this strategy is to promote systems and strategies that foster safe, positive, healthy, culturally competent, and inclusive learning environments that address students' varied needs in order to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Additionally, the Department's [District Standards and Indicators](#) include a focus on safe and supportive school climates and cultures. Additionally, numerous agency initiatives and guidance documents align with the Department's [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool](#) (framework and tool), including, but not limited to, the [Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training Guidance, Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Emotional, Learning Curricula K-12](#), and [Policies and Protocols for Truancy Prevention Programs](#). This framework and tool provide a foundation for the Commission's work, as described in this report.

In the fall of 2019, aligned with the Commission's work, the Department competitively awarded 17 Safe and Supportive Schools Grants for action planning and peer support efforts through [Fund Code 335](#). The Department also awarded 22 continuation grants through [Fund Code 337](#) for districts in the second year of two-year grants, to support implementation of action plans created the prior year. More details on these grants can be found in this report, and the efforts of these grantees will help to further inform Department and Commission work related to effective processes for developing and implementing safe and supportive school action plans, as well as networking opportunities that help build a community of safe and supportive educators.

This work is of great importance to the success of students in the Commonwealth, and I continue to encourage collaboration where helpful and feasible between stakeholders interested in safe and supportive schools, because aligned and integrated efforts often offer the best chance for our collective success.

I wish to acknowledge Commission members and others with whom the Commission has consulted for their dedication and contributions, and to thank the Governor and Legislature for their continued commitment to improving the education of students in our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## Purpose and Context

The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission (Commission) was created by [An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence](#). The Commission respectfully submits this Report to the Governor and Legislature: *Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Fourth Annual Report* pursuant to Chapter 284 of the Acts of 2014, An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence. This Act was signed into law by the Governor on August 13, 2014. Provisions within this Act relating to safe and supportive schools are codified as Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 69, section 1P (G.L. c. 69, § 1P), the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework](#) law.

*“...The commission shall prepare and submit an annual progress report concerning the commission’s activities with appropriate recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out such recommendations, if any, not later than December 31. The commission shall submit such annual report to the governor and the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives, who shall forward the same to the chairs of the joint committee on education, the chairs of the joint committee on mental health and substance abuse, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, and the house and senate committees on ways and means...”<sup>1</sup>*

Safe and supportive school environments are essential in order to reach high academic standards and other important educational reform goals, including diminishing the use of suspension and expulsion as an approach to discipline, preventing bullying, preventing substance use and misuse and providing support for addiction recovery, closing proficiency gaps, and halting the school to prison pipeline. These environments raise the achievement of all students, by valuing and empowering each student to feel a sense of competency and agency in each student’s learning. These environments also help students to self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, support them to form positive relationships with adults and peers, and support their health and wellbeing. In order to address proficiency gaps, safe and supportive environments act in an inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive way to provide access to opportunities for all students. In passing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework law, the Legislature recognized that addressing these needs together with actions to make schools physically safe were also integral to avoiding acts of violence that have devastated other school communities.<sup>2</sup>

Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P, in subsection (a), defines safe and supportive schools as schools that foster safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive whole-school learning environments. These environments recognize the connections between academic success and students feeling safe enough to make friends, form strong relationships with adults, and take risks in the classroom (e.g., speaking up) in order to succeed. Safe and supportive schools teach students to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and attention so that it is possible for them to focus and learn. Such

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<sup>1</sup> The full legislative charge and links to the full text of the statute can be found in Appendix B of this report.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of this law’s passage, many in the state were particularly concerned about ways to avoid the kind of violence that had occurred at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. In addition, Commonwealth students have suffered from other kinds of violence, such as bullying, suicides, and substance abuse. Many felt that creating safe and supportive school cultures were needed to address safety, social, emotional, and academic needs holistically. These concerns and beliefs are still relevant today, across and beyond the Commonwealth.

schools also strive to address physical, mental health, and disability-related needs that may interfere with learning.<sup>3</sup>

However, creating such environments while addressing the needs of individual children is not easy. Many children come to school having experienced significant adversity. In addition, schools are often challenged because important policies and laws designed to create positive school cultures can be narrowly focused (for example, some efforts aimed solely at bullying prevention, truancy reduction, or behavioral health supports), such that the common skills and approaches that underlie all such initiatives are not integrated and do not necessarily work together to provide a solid foundation for safety and learning.

Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P, includes in part (ii) of the definition, that safe and supportive schools are also ones that align initiatives in an effective, efficient, and holistic way.<sup>4</sup> The line-item language in the fiscal year 2018 state budget (line-item 7061-9612) related to the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission additionally called for the Commission to “make recommendations to the board of elementary and secondary education regarding ways to include in the self-assessment tool and framework principles of effective practice for integrating student supports not later than December 31, 2017.” Thus, the Commission developed recommendations to address the need for integrating services into the school culture, ensuring that students receive appropriate services at school and connect to community resources outside of school. These recommendations outlining principles of effective practice were shared through a memo to the Board in January 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P also asks the Commission to propose steps for improving schools' access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services. As described later in the report, one of primary focus areas of this year's Commission work (2019) was on hearing stakeholders from multiple vantage points (e.g., superintendents, nurses, counselors, social workers, and more) for their perspectives on strategies and challenges related to students' access to services.

***Safe and Supportive Schools Framework:*** To assist schools to align and integrate initiatives and services, the law called for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to develop a safe and supportive schools framework to provide a structure and a guiding resource to help each school develop school-wide action plans that efficiently align initiatives in a way that fits with the school's (and district's) own culture and

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<sup>3</sup> G.L. Chapter 69, Section 1P specifically defines safe and supportive schools, in part, as “schools that foster a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning environment that: (i) enables students to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being.” (See footnote 4 for the second part of the definition.)

<sup>4</sup> Part two (ii) of the above referenced safe and supportive schools definition states that these schools also “integrate services and align initiatives that promote students' behavioral health, including social and emotional learning, bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's mental health, foster care and homeless youth education, inclusion of students with disabilities, positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions and other similar initiatives.”

<sup>5</sup> The Board Memo and attachment outlining principles of effective practice for integrating student supports can be found on <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/FY2018/2018-01/item10.html>.

locally identified priorities. The topic areas of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework are aligned with those in the Behavioral Health and Public Schools (BHPS) Framework (created by the BHPS Taskforce in collaboration with the Department pursuant to Chapter 321 of the Acts of 2008). These topics address the following areas of school operations: *leadership, infrastructure, and culture; professional learning opportunities; access to resources and services; teaching and learning that fosters safe and supportive environments; policies, procedures, and protocols; and family engagement.*

Building upon and adapting the original BHPS Framework (and associated tool) drafted by the BHPS Task Force between 2008-2011,<sup>6</sup> the Department, in consultation with the Commission, posted an updated version of the framework (and tool, referenced below), in the fall of 2019. As described later in the report, the Department is in process of finalizing a contract to hire a vendor in support the work of the Department, in consultation with the Commission and others, to further update and refine the framework and tool.

***Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Reflection Tool:*** Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P recognizes that the framework must be flexible and embody a process of collaboration among educators, parents, and students in order for schools to create supportive school-wide environments that avoid the use of punitive approaches while recognizing the inextricable connections between students' social, emotional, and educational needs. Thus, the law called for the Department to create the safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool. To more accurately convey the process used with the tool, the Department now refers to the self-assessment tool as the self-reflection tool. Like the framework, the tool is organized according to the topic areas of the framework (that are consistent with the one created by the BHPS Task Force), and these can help prompt a collaborative process at each school to identify and address urgent local, district, and/or school-wide priorities related to creating a safe and supportive school culture.<sup>7</sup> As noted above, in consultation with the Commission, the Department is working on drafting updates, improvements, and refinements to both the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool. The tool is accessible through the Department's website, and with all versions combined it has been used by approximately 255 schools in 130 districts, including the fiscal year 2013-2014 (FY2014) through FY2020 Safe and Supportive Schools grantees,

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<sup>6</sup> Since the creation of the BHPS Framework, reference to it has been inserted into numerous state laws and Department guidance documents, including but not limited to G.L., c. 71, § 370 (An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools); G.L., c. 240, (An Act Regarding Families and Children Engaged in Services); and G.L., c. 69, § 1P the Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence that created this Commission); as well as the Department's [District Standards & Indicators](#), [Conditions for School Effectiveness](#), [Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#), [Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training Guidance](#), [Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Curricula K-12](#), and [Policies and Protocols for Truancy Prevention Programs](#).

<sup>7</sup> Per G.L., c. 69, § 1P(d), "The self-assessment tool created by the department consistent with the recommendations of the behavioral health and public school task force created under said section 19 of said chapter 321 shall be organized according to the elements of the framework established under subsection (b), and (if adopted pursuant to c. 69§1P(c)), shall be used by schools to: (i) assess the school's capacity to create and sustain safe and supportive school environments for all students; (ii) identify areas where additional school-based action, efforts, guidance and support are needed to create and maintain safe and supportive school environments; and (iii) create action plans to address the areas of need identified by the assessment."



approximately one-third of the Gateway Cities districts,<sup>8</sup> five demonstration schools that work on trauma sensitivity through the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative,<sup>9</sup> and others.

The Commission will continue to learn from the work of schools that have utilized the current version of the self-assessment tool. Information has been gleaned by reviewing data and feedback, and this will continue to inform recommendations on revisions to the framework and self-assessment tool, and on the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework. The [2018](#)<sup>10</sup> and [2019](#) grant evaluation reports<sup>11</sup> provided useful information on these topics, and more details are provided in the Commission Activities Undertaken in 2019 section below.

Informed by feedback on strengths and areas for growth, Commission members are continuing to hone further recommendations on ways to streamline the tool, so that educators and others can focus more of their available time on working together to analyze their school culture and tailor local solutions. While numerous districts have found the current version helpful, there is a call to continue to make the self-assessment tool technologically easier to use, and provide more guidance for schools that are creating and implementing action plans on effective and flexible ways to best meet their local needs.

The Commission continued to collaborate with the Department throughout 2019 to investigate selected topics through interviews and focus groups. Through this work, the Commission continues to consider how to best integrate and synthesize core learning into the draft revised framework and tool, and how to streamline the information so that it is most useful and user friendly. This work will continue into 2020, with the goal of the Department posting an updated framework, and a further refined self-assessment tool, for use by schools during 2020-2021.

## Recommendations

Through this annual report, the Commission offers five key recommendations, set forth below.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 1 – FUND THE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS LINE ITEM***

**The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission (Commission) recommends continued funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools line item ([7061-9612](#)) in the fiscal year 2020-2021 (FY21) budget.**

The Commission is very appreciative that Governor Baker and the Legislature have supported the work of this line item over the past five years (FY16-FY20). This funding in FY2020 is being used to provide grant opportunities for school districts, grant program evaluation efforts, coordination efforts at the Department, administrative support for the Commission, contracts

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<sup>8</sup> Forman, Ben; Bourvier, Sonia, and Citino, Christina (September 2015). “[Building Community-Wide Social and Emotional Support Systems in Massachusetts Gateway Cities: Assessing Progress from the Perspective of Local Educators](#),” MassInc and the UMass Donahue Institute.

<sup>9</sup> The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative is a collaboration between Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School. <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> 2018 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/2018-sssp-repoort.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> 2019 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2019-sssp-report.pdf>.

with vendor organizations to assist with updating the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool (framework and tool), and professional learning for administrators and other educators related to safe and supportive learning environments. The Commission recommends that funding in FY2021 continue to be available to support these efforts, as follows. Note that the second through fifth recommendations align with, and would expand upon, these efforts.

- a. Continue to provide funding for at least a full-time staff person to provide capacity for the Department to carry out its duties set forth in the law [G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f)].<sup>12</sup> These responsibilities are extensive and include coordinating the Safe and Supportive Schools grant program; hosting statewide and regional trainings and leadership sessions; updating the online framework and tool; overseeing the grant evaluation; providing technical assistance and developing and disseminating practices related to coordinating with community service providers and implementing the framework, tool, and action plans; and providing administrative support to the Commission.
- b. Continue to provide grant funding to school and district teams to help them use the framework and tool to take on a self-reflection process, create action plans, and implement associated safe and supportive schools practices.
- c. Continue to support a contract with one or more external vendors/organizations to assist with upgrading and updating the framework and tool, and to help develop related guidance and materials to assist school districts with reflecting on their needs, developing associated action plans, and implementing the plans to address areas that they determine are most relevant based on the data for their schools and districts.
- d. Continue to hold and evolve statewide and regional convenings and partnering with other organizations where appropriate, for teachers, school and district leaders, and other school personnel and partners, across the Commonwealth. These offerings disseminate information and share promising practices from school districts on how to create safe and supportive schools that are culturally responsive and focus on equity including racial equity.
- e. Continue to expand ways to hear from and partner with students and statewide student leadership groups to inform the Commission's and schools'/districts' work.
- f. Continue to evaluate and gather feedback from grantees on the grant program. This may include feedback on aspects of the grant program such as the needs of school and district leaders, examples of promising leadership practices, the revised tool, and the technical assistance and professional development provided. Furthermore, this work could also help to compile lessons learned and promising practices to disseminate with others, and to further inform tool and program improvements throughout the year.

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<sup>12</sup> Department responsibilities outlined in G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f) are listed in the second paragraph of this report's section below on "Department Activities Related to G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f)."

## ***RECOMMENDATION 2 – OFFER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES***

**The Commission recommends the Department and other agencies continue to build professional learning opportunities and technical assistance to support schools and districts in developing safe and supportive learning environments that foster positive school cultures and address systemic and implicit bias and inequities.**

It is important to include in these learning opportunities efforts that help build leadership capacity to create safe and supportive school environments. The Commission is interested in helping the Department explore further ways to support effective leadership efforts amongst superintendents, principals, and other school and district leaders.

It would also be helpful for learning opportunities to be available for stakeholders that may include but not be limited to: educators (general classroom and special education teachers, school guidance and adjustment counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses, etc.); school committee members; community service providers; staff from the Department and other state agencies; and others invested in creating safe and supportive schools.

These opportunities can help stakeholders further invest in this work and focus on developing the knowledge and skills needed to recognize, design, and implement plans to create safe and supportive schools. This can potentially be accomplished through already existing conferences run by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), and Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA), as well as through additional Leadership Summits, Workshops, and Regional Roundtables.

The professional learning opportunities could be on topics including but not limited to the following:

- The role of school and district leadership in the context of safe and supportive schools, including:
  - understanding what it means for schools to be safe and supportive for all students and subgroups of students;
  - identifying barriers to developing safe and supportive schools, along with strategies and promising practices to address the barriers;
  - involving stakeholders including staff, students, families, and community partners, in a school/district improvement planning and implementation process that uses the framework and tool as resources; and that informs the creation of school and district improvement plans that include goals that focus on implementing safe and supportive schools; and
  - developing budgets that help enable safe and supportive schools.
- Promising models for utilizing Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISPs, who include school counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and adjustment counselors), classroom educators, and others as part of a comprehensive, multi-tiered system of support.
- Promising models for implementing universal behavioral and mental health screening efforts and behavioral threat assessments that inform promotion efforts for all students, as well as early intervention and more intensive quality services for others.

- The importance of paying explicit attention to high-quality, strong, coherent core curriculum and practices as the foundation upon which supplemental learning experiences can be built (and that reduce the need for supplemental and intensive supports). Resources offered can help promote curricula and practices that engage students with culturally-responsive and inclusive content and strategies, and that support all students in accessing that content (e.g., through multiple means of accessing and demonstrating learning).

The Commission encourages the Department to consider and support feasible time frames for school and districts to implement and act on the content and strategies learned through professional learning, in terms of participation and implementation efforts.

As a part of these efforts to develop additional professional learning offerings and/or enhance technical assistance opportunities, the Commission recommends that the Department continue to strengthen both internal coordination (across Department offices and initiatives) as well as external partnerships (with other state agencies and professional organizations). State agencies to further engage with could include other education and health and human services departments such as the Departments of Early Education and Care, Higher Education, Children and Families, Mental Health, Public Health, Youth Services, and Transitional Assistance, etc. Professional organizations with which to partner might include but not be limited to MASC, MASS, MSAA, and other statewide associations represented on the Commission.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 3 – PROMOTE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL EFFORTS***

**The Commission recommends the Department continue to provide opportunities to enhance, promote, and recognize safe and supportive schools.**

It is essential that schools and school districts recognize, and that state leaders validate, the importance of creating safe and supportive schools and districts. The Commission recommends that the Department continue to explore ways to recognize the work of safe and supportive schools, and to further disseminate promising practices. Examples of these practices can be embedded into the updated framework and tool, and shared during professional learning opportunities, as described in recommendation #2. These practices could be related to efforts such as the following:

- Ways that schools and districts incorporate goals related to safe and supportive learning environments in their School and District Improvement Plans, including ways the framework and tool resources can be used to help inform this work.
- Ways schools and districts ground improvement efforts in the [Essential Elements](#)<sup>13</sup> noted in the framework and tool (*deepening understanding, student safety, whole student, student connectedness, culturally responsive practices, equitable access, teamwork, and adapting*).
- Ways schools and districts can use available data [e.g., Views on Climate and Learning (VOCAL) student climate survey data, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) state or local

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<sup>13</sup> These can be found in the Introduction to the framework and tool: <http://bhps321.org/viewframework.asp>.

data, Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) data, School Safety and Discipline Report (SSDR) suspension data, and any additional local data collection efforts such as universal mental health screening data, or student, family, and staff survey data, the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) survey, etc.] to inform root cause analysis efforts that in turn inform safe and supportive school efforts that improve student experiences and outcomes.

The Department is encouraged to partner with statewide organizations, including those represented on the Commission from a wide range of educational stakeholder roles, to help promote and distribute information about resources and promising practices in the realm of safe and supportive schools.

The Commission also recommends that updates to the framework and tool make more clear the alignment of those resources with other agency initiatives; with the [Principles of Effective Practice for Integrating Students Supports](#); and with the Commissioner's [Our Way Forward](#) themes that promote *deeper learning, holistic supports and enrichment, innovation and evidence based practices, and the state serving as a partner.*

Additionally, the Commission recommends the Department further consider how the accountability system could evolve to include additional measures related to creating safe and supportive learning environments. Questions to consider include:

- Are there valid and reliable ways that can appropriately measure the impact of school and district's support services and efforts that strengthen climate and culture?
- Are there other ways to measure school and district leaders' efforts that build comprehensive, integrated, multi-tiered systems of support that are grounded in access and equity, including racial equity, and that lead to greater student engagement and academic, social, and emotional development and success?
- Are there ways to better measure whether students are becoming independent learners?
- What can students tell us about ways the accountability system impacts the ways they are taught and the degree to which they are learning?

The Commission recognizes this is a challenging arena and will continue to reflect on any additional explicit suggestions it can make in this regard.

Moreover, the Commission recommends that the Department consider ways to help schools and districts further support the health and wellbeing of all staff and administrators, and especially those who work on a regular basis with students. Efforts in this realm not only benefit the adults, but contribute to retention efforts, and to adults' capacity to effectively educate and support students' growth and wellbeing.

#### ***RECOMMENDATION 4 – INCREASE ACCESS TO SERVICES***

**The Commission recommends that the Legislature, Department, and interested stakeholders consider the following strategies to increase availability and effectiveness of mental and behavioral health services for students.**

These recommendations are designed to increase the degree to which schools and districts are implementing comprehensive, integrated, multi-tiered systems of support that are grounded in access and equity, including racial equity. These recommendations are informed by Commission presentations and discussions, and by core themes echoed in focus groups conducted for the Commission by the Department and by Massachusetts Advocates for Children (which appoints a Commission member). Focus group participants from a range of stakeholder roles included superintendents, nurses, social workers, counselors and other mental health professionals, parents, advocates, students, and more. These recommendations are also informed by additional sources of information from administrators, students, and other agencies and partners.<sup>14</sup> The Commission and Department are extremely grateful to all who participated in focus groups and discussions that help informed these recommendations and future considerations.

- **Use of state funding** –Districts can use state funding to reduce barriers for access to social, emotional, and behavioral health by supporting the hiring and training of school-based professional personnel, particularly in regions or content areas that have the greatest gaps in availability of services. In light of the passage of the school finance bill, *An Act relative to educational opportunity for students, S. 2142 (Chapter 132 of the Acts of 2019)*,<sup>15</sup> also known as the Student Opportunity Act, districts are encouraged to consider using Chapter 70 and other increases they receive to better support efforts in the realm of increased access to services and other efforts that promote safe and supportive learning environments. Among many notable things in the recently enacted law, the updated per pupil cost rates<sup>16</sup> (that factor into districts’ foundation budget amounts) for guidance and psychological services will increase, for at least elementary and middle school students. The law also includes requirements for districts to develop 3-year plans that include a description of the evidence-based programs, supports, and interventions that will address persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups, and describe efforts that include but not are limited to offering social services to support students’ social-emotional and physical health; hiring school personnel that best support improved student performance; increased or improved professional development; and diversifying the educator and administrator workforce, to name just a few components.

Additionally, a number of state line items can help districts pilot and scale up efforts that the state can learn from and help disseminate, and continued funding is recommended for these. In addition to the safe and supportive schools line (7061-9612), examples of other potential funding sources include the \$7.5M [2018](#) and \$2M [2019](#) supplemental budgets’ line that focused on strengthening school partnerships with community based providers: (7061-0010), and the 2020 budget line focused on supporting healthy alliances reinforcing education (SHARE): (7061-9650). Other potential funding sources that can support children’s well-being can be found in a [Massachusetts Fiscal Mapping Tool](#) resource recently [released](#) by the Harvard Graduate School’s Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign).

In general, the Commission encourages the Legislature and Department to continue to support school funding that is appropriate, helpful, ongoing, consistent, and matched to district needs.

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<sup>14</sup> Focus Group Summaries are posted on <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/commission.html#reports>.

<sup>15</sup> The full text of the law can be found on <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2019/Chapter132>.

<sup>16</sup> More information about foundation rates can be found on: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/chapter70/>.

- **Support school and community-based behavioral and mental health staff workforce development opportunities** – The hiring of key personnel and availability of services, in both schools and community-based entities, requires a pool of highly qualified school-based behavioral health professionals. National reports and Commission focus groups suggest that there are labor shortages in these fields. The Commission recommends that the Legislature, Department, and districts devote resources to support additional pre-service and in-service training, led by higher education institutions and other alternative/practice-based licensure programs, to build a cadre of licensed and qualified professionals, with a unique focus on efforts to diversify the workforce. It is essential to ensure professional support personnel are adequately trained and supported to provide any services they are asked to do (e.g., if they are asked to offer early intervention focused small group cognitive behavioral therapy), and at the same time, it is important for the health and well-being of students (and staff) to support staffing models that utilize the training and expertise of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel and find ways to avoid a common practice of having them spending a substantial amount of their time getting other school tasks done (that don't require their level and type of training). Additionally, more efforts are needed by districts, with support from the Department and other partners (including state agencies), to retain professionals and reduce turnover, as well as provide professional learning related to family engagement practices and cultural sensitivity awareness, so that available services can be clinically, ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate. Effectively utilizing Specialized Instructional Support Personnel can not only help improve students' health and well-being, but can help teachers and administrators spend less time responding to behavioral and mental health crises in the classroom and school.

The Commission recognizes and supports the Department's broader efforts to build a [culturally responsive and diverse](#) educator workforce, as one of the Department's priority strategies to address educational inequity. As described at the [May 2019 Board meeting](#), these efforts include but are not limited to a teacher diversification pilot program grant, an InSPIRED fellowship (In-Service Professionals who are committed to Increasing the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of our teacher workforce), Influence 100 focused on racial and ethnic diversity of superintendents, and the Commissioner's visits to colleges to speak with students about the teaching profession and the need for a racially and ethnically diverse workforce. The Commission encourages the Department to continue to expand these efforts, and to consider ways to partner with schools, districts, higher education institutions, and others, to further broaden this work to include efforts to diversify (through efforts related to recruitment, retention, and professional learning opportunities) Specialized Instructional Support Personnel. It is also important to consider ways to further diversify the workforce that include other aspects of identity, such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, etc. Additionally, the Commission encourages schools/districts to reflect on the [Student Learning Experiences](#) reports that compare the rates at which groups of students have been assigned to different types of teachers), and consider ways to address inequitable experiences, as well as ways to reduce the impact on students when educators are absent (for example through considering how substitutes are prepared and supported, etc.).

- Promote comprehensive, integrated, equitable, multi-tiered systems of support in schools and districts, that address bias and inequities and foster safe and supportive learning environments** – In addition to having qualified school behavioral health staffing, an essential key to fostering these environments is the implementation of multi-tiered prevention and intervention systems that are focused on equity, including racial equity; grounded in safe and supportive schools [Essential Elements](#) (*deepening understanding, student safety, whole student, student connectedness, culturally responsive practices, equitable access, teamwork, and adapting*); guided by [Principles of Effective Practice for Integrating Students Supports](#) (*whole school, whole child, mindset, confidentiality, collaboration, coordination, access to services, and partnering with families*); and aligned with the [MTSS Blueprint](#). These models allow school professionals to complete screenings, implement interventions, and monitor progress for students in need of services. Additional guidance, examples, and clarity about which of the above and additional Department resources can be helpful for what purpose (e.g., when to use the framework and when the MTSS Blueprint) and how they can be used in an aligned and complementary manner can be developed and informed by the Commission and the partner vendor/organization noted in recommendation #1. These resources can help districts and schools make changes over time that better utilize community partners as well as existing educators, Specialized Instructional Support Personnel, and other staff (e.g., school resource officers, paraprofessionals, etc.).
- Expand behavioral health partnerships between schools and community agencies** – Schools cannot do this work alone and partnerships can assist in meeting the needs of students and families. Blended funding resources from the Legislature, the Department and other state agencies (e.g., in Health and Human Services), and local sources, can support coordination of efforts; and the development of behavioral health partnerships between districts and community agencies can expand access to services and enhance the capacity of schools. Areas of focus can include but not be limited to behavioral and mental health supports; supports for substance use and addiction prevention, intervention, and treatment; efforts to further support students in foster care; efforts that focus on understanding the impact of trauma on learning and the brain, ways to implement trauma sensitive strategies and approaches, and ways to support both students and adults experiencing trauma. Moreover, one focus of this work can be on structures for coordination across entities, including a school-based coordination role as well as ways to strengthen or create local or regional structures to regularly bring together entities supporting children and youth, including but not limited to local [Systems of Care Committees](#) (charged with supporting the Children’s Behavioral Health Initiative’s Community Service Agencies service area efforts to create and sustain collaborative partnerships among families, parent/family organizations, traditional and non-traditional service providers, community organizations, state agencies, faith-based groups, local schools, and other stakeholders), as well as other locally created structures to reduce risk in a community, such as the [Hub model](#) in a number of communities.

Moreover, the Commission urges continued funding for [Family Resource Centers](#) (FRCs). The FRCs are a statewide network of community-based providers offering multi-cultural parenting programs, support groups, early childhood services, information and referral resources and education for families whose children range in age from birth to 18 years of age. The Commission commends recent state support for additional centers as well as efforts



to expand micro centers into full centers, and recognizes the extremely helpful and challenging role they have been asked to play in response to a number of natural disasters over the past few years. Furthermore, the Commission encourages the Department to look for ways to help encourage schools across the Commonwealth to increase communication and collaboration with FRC school liaisons in order to help students and families benefit from available services where helpful.

- **Family engagement** - The Commission recommends the Department continue to intentionally promote and support efforts to build capacity at the state and local levels to help schools more actively and effectively engage families in ways that are meaningful to students and families and that help improve outcomes for students (including but not limited to students of color, students with disabilities, students who are English learners, and students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ)).

As a part of this, the Commission recommends considering ways the state’s cross-agency prenatal to grade 12 Family Engagement Framework, that is in final stages of development, can inform updates to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool – in particular in the collaboration with families sections.

Additionally, the Commission recommends the Department continue to increase efforts to help schools broaden their ability to communicate in a way that considers the cultural and linguistic needs of all students and their families. This includes but is not limited to increasing the availability and use of trained interpreters where needed. These efforts are an essential component of effectively engaging families and partnering to support student success and achieve mutual goals. The Commission looks forward to reviewing the recommendations from the state’s School Interpreters Task Force, and considering whether any appropriate actions might be helpful in response.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 5 – INCREASE STUDENT VOICE***

**The Commission recommends the Department continue efforts to further identify ways to increase student voice to help develop the capacity of schools and districts to offer equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments.**

The Commission believes that schools across the Commonwealth can benefit from increasing the degree to which students are helping inform ways to maintain strengths and address challenges. Consider data from the statewide student perception survey, [Views of Climate and Learning](#) (VOCAL), taken in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10. In [2019](#), the majority of student respondents indicated it was *mostly untrue* or *never true* that students have a voice in deciding school rules (62 percent in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 59 percent in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 77 percent in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 71 percent in 10<sup>th</sup> grade). Moreover, while 11 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders reported it was *mostly untrue* or *never true* that *teachers give students a chance to explain when they do something wrong*, a total of 21 percent of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 46 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 47 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders indicated it was *mostly untrue* or *never true* that *teachers give students a chance to explain their behavior when they do something wrong*.

Furthermore, to help inform Commission work, this year more than 70 secondary school students participated in student focus groups across the state (led by Massachusetts Advocates for Children and the Harvard Law School's Education Law Clinic, which is part of the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, a joint program of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School), in partnership with the Department of Public Health's Primary Violence Prevention and Youth at Risk Grant Program. All of their thoughts shared helped inform the thinking of this year's Commission recommendations. The Commission is grateful to all who participated in and facilitated this work, and will continue to consider ways to learn from and work with these students and others, including but not limited to the State and Regional Student Advisory and GSA Leadership Councils.

As noted in the [focus group report](#), students spoke to the importance of comfortable, calm, energizing environments, as well as the impact (positive and negative) to which they feel school environments are physically and emotionally safe for them. They spoke about the importance of relationships with adults at school (with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and more), the need to feel respected and to have their upbringing and racial and ethnic backgrounds and identities valued (particularly when their background or racial and ethnic identities differ from that of most of the adults on the school) and shared when possible (speaking to the need for increased racial and ethnic diversification of the workforce). They spoke about the negative impact of high teacher:student ratios, and about educational challenges that stem from high staff turnover and repeated substitutes. The students indicated they are often stressed by challenges or problems happening outside of school, and that it helps when adults at school understand this and when needed can help them navigate these challenges. Students also spoke about how much they appreciated social workers, guidance counselors, afterschool staff, and others, who cared and were helpful. Some students also spoke about how tracking students into different ability level classes can be unintentionally damaging and limiting to students and among other things can result in low expectations, minimal challenges, and not enough helpful supports and learning opportunities for some students. They also spoke about a desire for more hands-on, relevant, and meaningful learning, and to feel more engaged and empowered to be part of their own learning. They also spoke about the value and importance of arts, athletics, and experiential learning, and about the impact of having, or not having, resources such as technology that works, new sporting equipment, and more. Some students indicated wanting to have a say in school accountability, and to have the system determine better ways to assess whether students are genuinely learning, and doing more than just trying to pass the tests.

All of the thoughts shared by students helped inform the thinking of the Commission recommendations, and provide support for this year's Commission recommendations that as a whole aim to help schools and partners foster safe and supportive learning environments through comprehensive, integrated, culturally-responsive and equity-focused (including racial equity), multi-tiered systems of support that lead to deeper, more genuine learning, and better educational outcomes for all students.

Additionally, in light of the value of students' perspectives, the Commission recommends that the Department continue to promote and expand efforts that incorporate student voice. This includes:

- Ensuring the revisions to the framework and tool include explicit language, concrete examples from schools and districts, and specific guidance on practices for incorporating students' voices into school decision-making protocols. For instance, examples can be provided related to ways students can help inform everyday classroom and curricular experiences; school culture; disciplinary policies and practices, codes of conduct, and school handbook updates; district and school improvement plan creation and implementation, the process for hiring new staff; professional learning opportunities for staff; and ways to effectively engage families.
- Creating resources (e.g., materials that contain promising practices shared by grantee schools, and conference and/or webinar presentations by grantee schools and others) that can help encourage and guide district and school administrators as well as educators on engaging students, listening to their voices, and having their perspective inform planning, decision-making, implementation, and further reflection efforts. In particular, guidance may be particularly helpful regarding ways to effectively engage and listen to students who are not already or who are not typically engaged in informing the way schools are run.
- Finding ways to increase the degree to which student voice is informing a broad range of Department initiatives, including but not limited to implementation of the Student Opportunity Act.

## Future Directions

The Commission's goal is to help with efforts that assist school communities with creating safe and supportive learning environments for *all* students. Safe and supportive schools support the whole child in forming positive relationships with adults and peers, self-regulating their emotions and behaviors, achieving high academic standards, and being physically and emotionally healthy. Safe and supportive schools value the expertise of educators to engage in a process that integrates the many initiatives necessary to create safe and supportive school cultures. Safe and supportive schools actively work to eliminate bias related to race, ethnicity, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and other forms of identity in all school-wide activities and throughout all school operations. They value the social and cultural experiences of students, staff, families, and partners, and ensure that culturally responsive systems of support are fully integrated into the culture of schools.

To best prepare for a productive year ahead, the Commission plans to deliberate and decide upon goals for the year at the first 2020 Commission meeting. Below are examples of some of the wide-ranging potential directions that have been discussed, and are among those that will be considered for prioritization later this winter. These topics are among those that the Commission, within its capacity, is considering engaging in further during this upcoming year and beyond:

- Providing input to the Department during efforts to further update and refine the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool. The Department is in process of hiring an external vendor, who will engage with the Commission and other stakeholders to inform the updated versions of the framework and tool that are expected to be available for use during the 2020-2021 school year.

- Making additional recommendations regarding schools' access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services. Among other efforts, to help inform this work the Commission is interested in reviewing the School Interpreters Task Force recommendations on translation services, and considering any helpful next steps.
- Collecting additional information on barriers to creating Safe and Supportive Schools. This information can help guide the Department as it develops or refers to professional learning materials, workshops, institutes, and other opportunities.
- Informing the Department's efforts to build leadership capacity for Superintendents, Principals, School Committee members, and others to prioritize effective efforts that help create and maintain safe and supportive environments.
- Seeking opportunities for students and educators to give their input and feedback on how schools can be more safe and supportive, based on their experiences.
- Gathering information, offering proposals, and participating in discussions with the Department related to possible ways to increasingly use safe and supportive schools measures as indicators of school quality and student success.
- Looking for ways to increase the degree to which the Commission's work is informed by diverse perspectives, including but not limited to racial and ethnic diversity.
- Considering ways to further efforts related to effective collaboration with families, possibly including utilizing as resources the cross-agency Family Engagement Framework and associated guidance as resources.
- Promoting possible staffing models for schools/districts to consider related to most effectively using behavioral and mental health practitioners, through a safe and supportive schools lens.

## Commission Activities Undertaken in 2019

Commission areas of top priority focus in 2019 included evaluating the new Safe and Supportive Schools Grantee mentorship program, beginning the process to hire an external vendor to update and revise the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, and continuing to investigate where strengths and challenges exist for schools to access services that are clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. Below is a brief summary of activities conducted during this fifth year of the Commission.

- Convened **six full Commission meetings** in 2019, including a summer retreat. Meeting dates and locations in 2019 were as follows: January 7 (Shrewsbury), February 11 (Shrewsbury), April 4 (Shrewsbury), May 8 (Shrewsbury), July 24 retreat (Cambridge), (October 7 in Malden did not have a quorum), and November 18 (Malden). The

Commission is grateful to the Shrewsbury Town Hall and the Harvard Law School for generously allowing their space to be used for Commission meetings.

- Welcomed four new Commission members, appointed by the organizations cited in the legislation authorizing the Commission that had vacancies in their member spots.
  - Laura Stevenson, Principal of Holbrook Middle/High School, starting with the February 11, 2019 meeting, representing the Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA).
  - Colleen Galvin Labbe, AFT-MA/BTU Member; Social Emotional Learning Instructional Coach, Office of Social Emotional Learning and Wellness, Boston Public Schools, representing the American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-MA and Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA).
  - Cathy Riccio, Nurse Leader, Newburyport Public Schools, starting with the April 4, 2019 meeting, representing the Massachusetts School Nurses Organization (MSNO).
  - Dr. John Salovardos, Director of Pupil Personnel Services of Narragansett Regional School District, starting with the November 18, 2019, meeting, representing the Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education (ASE) and replacing Richard Whitehead, Director of Student Services at Wayland Public Schools.
- The Department and Commission are extremely grateful for the years of generous and helpful contributions of the members they replaced: Tara Kohler (MSAA), Angela Cristiani (AFT/MTA), Judith Styer (MSNO), and Richard Whitehead (ASE).
- Continued with Commission Co-Chairs Dr. John Doherty (selected by the Commission in the fall 2018), Superintendent of Reading Public Schools, and Rachelle Engler Bennett (Department's Commissioner's designee since winter 2015), Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support.
- Discussed and deliberated on recommendations to include in this fifth annual report to the Legislature.
- Learned from and discussed with three Safe and Supportive School mentor grantees, during two commission meetings, about their experiences of using the tool in their schools and districts and some of the success and challenges they have encountered in building safe and supportive learning environments.
- Participated in a discussion regarding a Commission member's work at the Birch Institute regarding access to services, school mental and behavioral support staff across the Commonwealth, and potential recommendations related to the findings.
- Engaged in conversations with Department staff related to safe and supportive schools grants, evaluation work informed by the [2018](#)<sup>17</sup> and [2019](#) grant evaluation reports<sup>18</sup>, leadership breakout session, and other professional development efforts. Additional topics of discussion included the Systemic Student Support Academy, the Comprehensive Health Curriculum

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<sup>17</sup> 2018 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/2018-sssp-repoort.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> 2019 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2019-sssp-report.pdf>.

Framework revisions, school report cards, VOCAL student climate surveys, and accountability.

- Informed and learned from a series of focus groups about “student voice” generously conducted by seven Harvard Education Law Clinic graduate school students guided by the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI), a joint program of Massachusetts Advocates for Children (who has a representative on the Commission) and Harvard Law School. The eight focus groups were held with middle and high school students across the state. The students wrote a [Memorandum on their Focus Group Findings](#) (April 2019), and presented this information for discussion at the April 4, 2019 Commission meeting. This work informed Commission discussions, include two follow up sub-committee meetings. The findings resonated with many members and meeting participants.
- Held four focus groups on access to services with [superintendents](#), the [Massachusetts School Mental Health Consortium](#), [nurse leaders](#), and [social workers](#). These focus groups were informed by a [Memorandum on access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services](#) written by 2017 Harvard Education Law Clinic graduate school students (guided by TLPI). The Commission is grateful to the organizations representing those stakeholders who agreed to arrange and support the focus groups. The focus group findings helped inform the recommendations included in this report, and will also help frame discussions during subsequent focus groups, and inform considerations for future recommendations.
- Informed the Department’s efforts to write a Request for Response to hire an external vendor to assist with updating and revising the **Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self- Assessment Tool**. The vendor will be selected in the late fall/early winter of 2019-2020 and will start immediately in gathering background knowledge and input of Commission members and external stakeholders. A version ready to pilot by grantees is anticipated to be drafted during 2020 and be ready for use during school year 2020-2021.
- Coordinated a session titled “Developing Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: Learning from Leaders” at the 2019 Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Executive Institute, led by a mentor grantee (Melissa McGuire, Director of Student Services, from Monomoy Regional School District).
- Maintained the **Commission website**<sup>19</sup> with information on reports, responsibilities, members, meetings, and contact information.

## Department Activities Related to G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f)

The statute calls for many actions to be taken on the part of the Department, all of which are subject to appropriation. A brief update on Department work to date and plans for the balance of the fiscal year are also noted below.

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<sup>19</sup> Commission website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/?section=commission>.

*“(f) Subject to appropriation, the department shall facilitate and oversee the implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework in schools that vote to develop and implement the framework. The department shall, subject to appropriation: (i) provide technical assistance to schools on using the self-assessment tool and developing school action plans and to districts on coordinating with community service providers and developing strategies to facilitate the district-wide implementation of the framework; (ii) develop and disseminate model protocols and practices identified in the framework; (iii) establish a safe and supportive schools grant program, through which grantees shall pilot and share with other schools an effective process for developing and implementing school action plans; (iv) update its website to include the framework, the self-assessment tool, best practices and other information related to the implementation of the framework; (v) host regional trainings for schools and districts; and (vi) provide administrative support to the safe and supportive schools commission established under subsection (e). Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting the ability of the department to contract with individuals, external partners or other entities to support the functions established under this section; provided, however, that the department shall consider opportunities for education collaboratives or other regional service organizations to coordinate and disseminate training, technical assistance and information to school districts on the implementation of the framework.”*

**Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program:** In July 2019, the Department posted two FY2020 Safe and Supportive Schools Grant opportunities, through [FC 335](#) for Safe and Supportive Schools Competitive Grants and [FC 337](#)<sup>20</sup> for Safe and Supportive Schools Continuation Grants. Both applications were due August 16, 2019. Information about this opportunities was sent to prior applicants and also included in the July 19, 2019 [Commissioner’s Weekly Update](#).<sup>21</sup>

Informed by feedback from the field, Commission meeting discussions, and the evaluation, the **competitive grant (FC 335)** offered up to \$20,000 per selected district (for up to \$10,000 per selected school) for one of two options. Districts that had not used the framework or self-reflection tool in the past were able to apply through grant *Option One* (Action Planning) to develop action plans that organize, integrate, and sustain school and district-wide efforts to create safe and supportive school environments and coordinate and align student support initiatives. Selected schools in grant recipient districts are creating action plans this year based on all the sections of the online framework and self-reflection tool. Grantee districts will also create district action plans that support the selected schools. Additionally, districts that had used the tool to create action plans in the past could apply through grant *Option Two* (Implementation/Mentoring) to help them with implementing school-based action plans (and associated district-support plans) that were created in prior year(s). These Option Two grantees are also serving as mentors and support for others, including for Option One (Action Planning) grantees, for other districts interested in using the self-reflection tool, for districts beginning to implement action plans created previously, and for other stakeholders interested in safe and supportive schools. A total of 38 applications were submitted for this competitive funding and 17 entities (16 districts

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<sup>20</sup> FC 335: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2020/335/> and FC 337: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2020/337/>

<sup>21</sup> Weekly Update with grant information: <https://mailchi.mp/doe.mass.edu/commissioners-weekly-update-7-19-19-july-aid-payments-summer-learning-district-reviewers-sought>

and one collaborative) were awarded<sup>22</sup> grants to support efforts in 48 school or programs.<sup>23</sup> Option One (Action Planning) grantees were awarded \$8,000 each and Option 2 (Implementation/Mentoring) grantees were awarded \$6,500-7,500 each. In total, \$126,000 from line item 7061-9612 is being leveraged by grantees through this grant program to develop and implement action plans and provide support to others and share promising practices that will help create and maintain safe and supportive learning environments.

**The continuation grants** (Fund Code 337) are for districts in their second year of a two-year grant. These funds are supporting schools that received the FY2019 competitive grant, to implement items from the action plans they created using the self- assessment tool in the prior year (supported by the FY2019 grant). A total of 21 districts<sup>24</sup> were awarded continuation grants, for use in approximately 41 schools, supported by just over \$287,300 from line item 7061-9612.

**Professional development to support work related to safe and supportive schools:** During the 2018-2019 School Year, the Department created a yearlong professional development series that included webinars, in person regional networking meetings, and a statewide convening (planned with input from the Department of Early Education and Care [EEC]). The series was focused on using an equity lens to support all students in safe and supportive learning environments. Participants in the series had the opportunity to learn with and from grade-span colleagues (early childhood/elementary and middle/high school) and community-based partners.

As a part of this series of offerings, on March 27, 2019, the Department convened [FY2019 FC 335 grantees](#) and others from across the state, for a full-day conference titled, “Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: Using an Equity Lens to Support All Students”. The day started with a keynote presentation from Dr. Darnisa Amante-Jackson, President and Co-Founder of Disruptive Equity Education Project (DEEP) which set the stage for the day’s focus on equity. Participants then attended breakout sessions where presenters shared best practices around topics related to socio-emotional integration, positive behavior practices, and ways to create and implement safe and supportive environments and how to use the framework and self- assessment tool to help in the process of creating them. The conference also included community team planning time to share information learned, engage in vertical alignment of strategies and approaches, and strengthen working relationships. Participants completed a brief survey at the end of the conference. The keynote presentation was rated an average of 4.6 on a 5 point scale, for being “useful, informative, and/or relevant to my work”, and the breakout sessions were collectively rated as 3.8 on the same scale.

**Grant program evaluation:** The Department used approximately \$25,000 in 2019 from line item 7061-9612 towards an independent [evaluation](#)<sup>25</sup> conducted by Collaborative for Educational Services (CES). Hired through a competitive state procurement process, CES worked with the

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<sup>22</sup> FY2020 grantees (competitive): <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2020/awards/335.html>.

<sup>23</sup> FY2020 eligible districts included Collaboratives and their associated educational programs as well as Collaboratives supporting their member districts. The Collaborative grantee will be using the funding in its own student programs.

<sup>24</sup> FY2019 grantees (continuation) are listed in the eligibility section: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2020/337/>.

<sup>25</sup> 2019 grant evaluation: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2019-sssp-report.pdf>. The 2018 evaluation is available as well: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2018-sssp-report.pdf>.



Department and the grantees awarded [Safe and Supportive Schools Competitive Grants](#)<sup>26</sup> during the 2018-2019 school year. The focus of the evaluation was on best practices, facilitators, and barriers related to effective **mentoring**, and **action plan implementation and implementation monitoring**. Information was gathered through online surveys, focus groups, phone interviews, and in person conversations.

The major findings of the evaluation showed that grantees generally indicated positive impact of the Safe and Supportive Schools program on their schools and districts. Examples of themes included the following:

- The grant provides a valuable opportunity to work as a team and to identify the ways in which their schools and districts can promote social emotional learning.
- The grant funds provided time for research and planning, and in some cases outside consultation, to develop and implement their plans.
- Some districts were able to leverage grant funding into additional funding for continuing and expanding this work.
- Most grantees have been effective in linking their Safe and Supportive Schools action plans with districtwide improvement plans.
- In addition, several representatives from Option Two (Implementation/Mentoring) districts providing mentoring supports reported that the process of mentoring helped to strengthen their own implementation of their action plans.
- Some of the Option One (Action Planning) district representatives who interacted with mentors at Department-sponsored events reported that they benefitted from hearing from people who had done the work in prior years.

Some opportunities for areas of growth that this evaluation highlighted included:

- Increased clarity, on the part of both mentoring and mentee districts, on the roles and expectations around mentoring supports;
- Increased resources to support mentoring districts as they provide assistance to districts using the tool for the first time;
- A more extended timeline for the grants, to make it easier to build and sustain momentum; and
- Additional support with progress monitoring for districts implementing their action plans.

The Department incorporated changes where possible in the grant application and support for the 2019-2020 school year informed by the evaluation. For example, the grant program in 2019-2020 includes additional guidance for Option 2 (Implementation/Mentoring) grantees who are providing mentoring and support. The Department also continues to make efforts to post and award the grant earlier each year, to expand the timeframe for doing the work. The Department is in the process of awarding a vendor for the evaluation work in 2019-2020.

***Integrating Student Supports:*** The Department is coordinating and supporting efforts related to integrated student supports (now funded through line item 7061-9650, Supporting Healthy Alliances Reinforcing Education, or SHARE). This SHARE line will fund competitive integrated student wellness grants, to be awarded this winter through Fund Codes(FC) 336/613 *Supporting*

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<sup>26</sup> FY2019 competitive grantees: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2019/awards/335.html>

*Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness* later this winter.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, a portion of the SHARE line item is funding the Systemic Student Support (S3) Academy, which is run through a partnership between the Department, the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, and the Center for Optimized Student Support at the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development. The FY2020 SHARE line item allows for the expansion and improvement of the S3 Academy efforts that began in FY2018 and FY2019.

As a reminder, initial S3 Academy efforts in FY2018 and FY2019 were funded through an earmark in the safe and supportive schools line item 7061-9612, and are briefly summarized here. Efforts during FY2018 included drafting (winter 2018), posting (spring 2018), and reviewing submissions and selecting vendors (spring-summer 2018) related to a Request for Responses (RFR) through the state procurement system. In FY2019, the Department worked with the selected partners (the Rennie Center and the Boston College Center for Optimized Student Support) to facilitate an opportunity for nine district teams to participate in a series of professional development offerings with self-assessment (a landscape analysis) and action planning components (winter-spring 2018-2019), leading to action plan implementation (supported by the Department and partners) starting in FY2020 (beginning in the summer/fall 2019). This year (FY2020), the SHARE line item is supporting an expanded cohort of 15 districts to participate in professional development, action planning, and implementation support efforts.

The S3 Academy is deepening practitioners' understanding of the critical characteristics of a system that effectively and proactively identifies and addresses each student's strengths and needs. It is also helping district and school practitioners to identify next steps in developing and implementing a system of integrated student support. By the end of this school year, the goal is for participants to be implementing an approach to student support that can continue to be further embedded in the ongoing work of schools and districts, helping to create safe and supportive environments in which there is educational opportunity, access, and equity for all.

Participating schools and districts will implement best practices for integrated student support by *(1) assessing the strengths and needs of every student, across multiple developmental domains, resulting in a plan with tailored services for each student; and (2) developing and embedding systems of integrated student support that are sustainable*. Funding from the SHARE line is enabling the Department to contract with the S3 Academy partners to provide FY2020 S3 Academy participants with professional development, resources, tools, and supports that include four in-person workshops (September 23, November 6, and December 12, 2019 and February 6, 2020),

at least two webinars (September 11, 2019 and January 14, 2020), regular coaching tailored to the needs of each community (ongoing), and site visits (in May 2020). As noted above, 15 districts with teams from 50 schools are enrolled in the S3 Academy. Seven (7) districts are in their first year of participation (year 1), and eight (8) are in their second year of participation (year 2).

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<sup>27</sup> A portion of those integrated student wellness grants will also be funded through the through the [2018](#) and [2019](#) supplemental budgets' line 7061-0010, focused on connecting schools with community-based mental and behavioral health service providers.

These efforts are in support of the larger umbrella of creating safe and supportive learning environments, and build upon and will help further inform work related to the principles of effective practice, the framework, and the tool.

***Additional Department efforts:*** Additional funds enabled full-time staffing to support Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool related work. This staff work includes providing technical assistance and training to school districts; policy development and dissemination; project planning and implementation; grants and contract management; inter-agency collaboration; and coordination of and participation in information gathering efforts such as focus groups, and in research and evaluation activities.

## APPENDIX A: Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Members

Last Name (Alphabetically Listed)	First Name	District / Agency / Role Represented	Title
Adams	Brandon	State Student Advisory Council	Student, Norfolk County Agricultural High School
Amador	Andria	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA Immediate Past President; Boston Public Schools – Assistant Dir., Special Education & Related Services – Comprehensive Student Support Services
Bennett	Rachelle Engler	MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)	Commission Co-Chair (DESE Designee); DESE Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support
Brown	Donna M.	MA School Counselors Association (MASCA)	MASCA Executive Director
Burd	Sara	Arlington Public Schools, Practitioner of the Framework	Arlington Public Schools Director of Social Emotional Learning
Cole	Susan	MA Advocates for Children (MAC)	MAC Senior Project Director, Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
Daniels	Margie	MA Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers	Social Worker, and Executive Director, Middlesex Partnerships for Youth
Diehl	William	MA Organization of Education Collaboratives (MOEC)	MOEC Board of Directors Regional Representative; Collaborative for Educational Services Executive Director
Doherty	John	MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS)	Commission Co-Chair (Selected by Commission Members); Superintendent, Reading Public Schools
East-Trou	Henry Julio	Representative of a community-based organization (CBO) that provides services as part of the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI), and that provides mental health services in schools	Executive Director, Gandara Center
Galvin Labbe	Colleen	American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-MA / MA Teachers Association (MTA)	AFT-MA/BTU Member; Social Emotional Learning Instructional Coach, Office of Social Emotional Learning and Wellness, Boston Public Schools
Holmes	Ellen	MA Association of School Committees (MASC)	MASC Regional School Committee Chair; Ashburnham-Westminster Reg. School Committee Member
Lipinski	Michelle	Representative of Mass. Recovery High Schools with expertise in adolescent substance use disorders	Principal, Northshore Recovery High School
Lipper-Garabedian	Katherine	Secretary of Education (EOE Designee)	General Counsel, MA Executive Office of Education
Pearrow	Melissa	University of MA - Boston, Former BHPS Taskforce Member and Tool Developer/Evaluator	Associate Professor of Counseling and School Psychology, College of Education and Human Development
Riccio	Cathy	MA School Nurse Organization (MSNO)	Nurse Leader, Newburyport Public Schools
Salovardos	John	MA Administrators for Special Education (ASE)	Director of Student Services, Wayland Public Schools
Stevenson	Laura	MA School Administrators' Association (MSAA)	Principal, Holbrook Middle-High School

## **APPENDIX B: Legislative Charge for the Commission**

Massachusetts General Laws, c. 69, § 1P(g): There shall be a safe and supportive schools commission to collaborate with and advise the department on the feasibility of state-wide implementation of the framework. The commission shall consist of 19 members: 1 of whom shall be the commissioner of elementary and secondary education or a designee, who shall serve as co-chair; 1 of whom shall be the secretary of education or a designee; 1 of whom shall be a school superintendent appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a school committee member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a school principal appointed jointly by the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators' Association and the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association; 1 of whom shall be a teacher appointed jointly by the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the American Federation of Teachers-Massachusetts; 1 of whom shall be a director of special education or a director of student support services appointed by the Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education; 1 of whom shall be an executive director of an education collaborative appointed by the Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives; 1 of whom shall be a school psychologist appointed by The Massachusetts School Psychologists Association, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a school social worker appointed by the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a school adjustment counselor or guidance counselor appointed by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a school nurse appointed by the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be an advocate with experience in education, behavioral health and the impact of trauma on learning appointed by Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc. appointed by the Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.; 1 of whom shall be a student appointed by the department of elementary and secondary education's student advisory council; and 3 members to be appointed by the secretary of education: 1 of whom shall be a former member of the behavioral health and public schools task force who participated in the development and statewide evaluation of the self-assessment tool; 1 of whom shall be a former member of the behavioral health and public schools task force with experience implementing the framework; 1 of whom shall be a representative of Massachusetts recovery high schools with expertise in adolescent substance use disorders; and 1 of whom shall be a representative from a community-based organization that provides services as part of the children's behavioral health initiative and that provides mental health services in schools. The commission shall select a co-chair from among its appointees.

The commission shall: (i) investigate and make recommendations to the board on updating, improving and refining the framework and the self-assessment tool as appropriate; (ii) identify strategies for increasing schools' capacity to carry out the administrative functions identified by the behavioral health and public schools task force; (iii) propose steps for improving schools' access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services; (iv) identify and recommend evidenced-based training programs and professional development for school staff on addressing students' behavioral health and creating safe and supportive learning environments; (v) identify federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support statewide implementation of the framework; (vi) develop recommendations on best practices for collaboration with families,

including families of children with behavioral health needs; and (vii) examine and recommend model approaches for integrating school action plans, required under subsection (e), with school improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes.

The commission may collect and review data and feedback from schools as the schools complete the self-assessment tool and develop school action plans, and may convene stakeholders to facilitate solutions to challenges as such challenges arise during the implementation process. The commission may request from the department such information and assistance as may be necessary to complete its work.

The commission shall consult with and solicit input from various persons and groups, including, but not limited to: (i) the office of the child advocate; (ii) the department of early education and care; (iii) the department of children and families; (iv) the department of mental health; (v) the department of public health; (vi) the department of youth services; (vii) the department of developmental services; and (viii) any other parties or entities the commission deems appropriate.

The commission shall prepare and submit an annual progress report concerning the commission's activities with appropriate recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out such recommendations, if any, not later than December 31. The commission shall meet not fewer than 4 times annually. The commission shall submit such annual report to the governor and the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives, who shall forward the same to the chairs of the joint committee on education, the chairs of the joint committee on mental health and substance abuse, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, and the house and senate committees on ways and means. The first 3 annual reports shall include recommendations regarding: (i) federal funding sources that may support statewide implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework; (ii) training programs and professional development for school staff on creating safe and supportive learning environments; (iii) improving access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services; and (iv) addressing the administrative functions necessary to carry out the implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework.

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NOTE: The full text of the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law](#) (G.L. c. 69, § 1P), within *An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence*, can be found on <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter284>.