

Safe and Supportive Schools Commission – Sixth Annual Report

This report provides updates and recommendations related to safe and supportive schools. The 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).

December 2020

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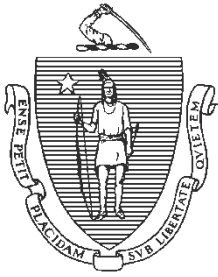
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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

December 31, 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 - Sixth 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.”

Now more than ever, it is essential for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department), schools, and partners to work together to create and strengthen safe and supportive learning environments that keep the health and well-being of students, staff, and families front and center. As we all grapple with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize the especially difficult and disparate impact on communities of colors and on economically disadvantaged communities, as can be seen in [disproportionate rates of illness, hospitalization, and death](#), as described in reports from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and the [APM Research Lab](#). We are also concerned about LGBTQ youth and others with historically marginalized identities, who can face potentially amplified discrimination and barriers to education and healthcare access, as noted in a [Society for Research in Child Development Statement of the Evidence](#). We know there is a distressing increase in the mental health and wellbeing challenges our students, staff, and families are facing. For example, in an October 2020 report, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) noted an [increase in the proportion of child emergency department visits for mental health-related reasons, which has remained elevated through the fall](#). Feelings of isolation and disconnection among our students are a contributing cause to this growing mental health crisis, as well as grief for too many, and the effects may persist for years.

To help mitigate the significant mental health and wellbeing challenges facing our students, staff, and families, the Department is taking a multi-pronged approach. This has included issuing guidance, providing professional learning, and offering grant opportunities over the course of the year to help address students’ mental health needs. For example, the Department created this

summer a reopening resource document, [Creating Positive Learning Environments: Recommendations and Resources to Support the Social Emotional Well-being of Students, Staff, and Families \(Summer 2020\)](#). Other examples of resources are highlighted on the Department's COVID-19 [Mental and Behavioral Health resources](#) page. In addition, through the recently amended (December 15, 2020) Student Learning Time (SLT) regulations (603 CMR 27.00), the Department is requiring [minimum standards for live instruction](#) (which includes in-person and synchronous remote learning) in districts and schools using remote or hybrid models.

Moreover, we are grateful to the Commission for informing updates to the revised [Framework and Implementation Guide](#) and [Self-Reflection Tool](#), which are available for use by all interested schools. These updated resources are being [piloted](#) by this year's 31 Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, through Fund Codes [335](#) and [337](#), as detailed further in this report. The associated [Essential Elements](#), woven throughout the resources, describe a foundation upon which to create a safe and supportive learning environment for students, staff, families, and the wider community that is based on local context, needs, available resources, and capacities. These elements focus on supporting all students, deepening understanding, advancing equity, exemplifying cultural responsiveness, and continually reflecting and adapting.

This legislative report outlines Commission and Department activities related to safe and supportive schools efforts in 2020, and includes recommendations that focus on continuing to fund the safe and supportive schools line item; advancing racial and ethnic equity efforts; and communicating about and promoting safe and supportive schools. This work is of great importance to the success of students in the Commonwealth, and is deeply aligned with the themes in my [Our Way Forward](#), including but not limited to *Holistic Support and Enrichment*, as well as with the Department's strategic priorities, including but not limited to [supporting students' social and emotional learning, health and safety](#). I continue to embrace and encourage increased collaboration where helpful and feasible across the Department and with and between external 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 I 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 Sixth 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...”¹

As noted in the Commissioner’s cover letter, now more than ever it is essential for the Department (DESE), schools, and partners to work together to create and strengthen safe and supportive learning environments that keep health and wellbeing of students, staff, and families front and center. This past year has brought a heightened attention to ever-present need for racial justice and all forms of equity, in the wake of highly publicized, deeply disturbing, and violent deaths of Black Americans and people of color across our country. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated racial/ethnic and other disparities, and has highlighted the dire need to support schools and districts in working towards creating safe and supporting learning environments that focus on health, wellness, respect, support, engagement and learning. These needs and themes are described further throughout most sections of this report.

Safe and supportive school environments are also 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

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

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.²

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

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.⁴ 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 2018.⁵

² 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.

³ 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.)

⁴ 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.”

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

Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool: The Department is pleased to share that an updated version of the framework and tool are now available for any interested school to use, and for Safe and Supportive Schools grantees to pilot.

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 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 and culture; family engagement; professional learning opportunities; access to resources and services; teaching and learning that fosters safe and supportive environments; and policies and procedures.*

Building upon and adapting the original BHPS Framework (and associated tool) drafted by the BHPS Task Force between 2008-2011,⁶ the Department, in consultation with the Commission, posted an updated version of the framework (and tool, referenced below) in the fall of 2020. Updates are further described in the Department Activities section later in the report.

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 refers to the tool as the self-reflection tool. Aligned with 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.⁷ To date, the tool has been used (all versions combined) by a total of approximately 255 schools in 130 districts, including FY2014-FY2020 Safe and Supportive

⁶ 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](#).

⁷ 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."

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

The Commission will continue to learn from the work of schools that have utilized the prior and current versions of the tool. Information has been gleaned by reviewing data and feedback, and information from those piloting the current version will to inform recommendations on further refinements to the framework and tool, and on the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework. The [2018](#)¹⁰ and [2019](#) grant evaluation reports¹¹ also provided useful information on these topics. More details are provided in the Commission Activities Undertaken in 2020 section below.

Recommendations

Through this annual report, the Commission offers three key recommendations. The recommendations are outlined briefly and then elaborated on in more detail.

Note that the second and third recommendations align with, and would expand upon, the content of the first recommendation. Taken as a whole these recommendations are particularly salient now, in light of the current challenges for all across the Commonwealth (and globe) related to COVID-19, as well as the disturbingly disparate impacts of the pandemic across communities by race/ethnicity, income level, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more – associated with vast pre-existing inequities.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

CONTINUE TO 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 2022 (FY2022) budget.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

ADVANCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY

The Commission recommends the Department continue efforts to advance, strengthen, and prioritize racial and ethnic equity in the realm of safe and supportive learning environments. Specifically, the Commission supports Department efforts to continue to increase its focus on dismantling systems of oppression in schools; and highlight districts making strides and committing to anti-racist efforts including in practices related to professional development, discipline, family engagement, and curriculum. Additionally, the Commission supports Department efforts to increase workforce diversity (including a focus on racial and ethnic

⁸ 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.

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

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

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

diversity) and build educator and administrator as well as agency staff capacity through professional learning opportunities that are grounded in racial and ethnic equity goals.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

COMMUNICATE ABOUT AND PROMOTE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

The Commission recommends the Department continue to communicate about, promote, and provide opportunities to enhance and recognize safe and supportive learning environments. These efforts can include grant opportunities, strengthening guidance and resources available to schools, professional development opportunities, grant coordination activities, and more. These efforts can also include helping districts and schools learn about the resources available through the revised Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool. As part of this, the Commission also recommends the Department continue efforts to further identify ways to promote and increase student voice and family engagement, to help develop the capacity of schools and districts to offer equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments.

More details on each recommendation are outlined below.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

CONTINUE TO 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 2022 (FY2022) budget. It will be important and helpful for funds to continue to support efforts including the following:

The Commission is very appreciative that Governor Baker and the Legislature have supported the work of this line item over the past six years (FY2016-FY2021). The funding in FY2021 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 with vendor organizations to assist with updating the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool (framework and tool), and professional learning for administrators and other educators related to safe and supportive learning environments. The Commission looks forward to supporting efforts funded through the FY2022 budget as well.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

ADVANCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY

The Commission recommends the Department continue efforts to further advance, strengthen, and prioritize racial and ethnic equity in the realm of safe and supportive learning environments. Specifically, the Commission supports Department efforts to continue to increase its focus on dismantling systems of oppression in schools; and highlight districts making strides and committing to anti-racist efforts including in practices related to professional development, discipline, family engagement, and curriculum. Additionally, the Commission supports Department efforts to increase workforce diversity (including a

specific focus on racial and ethnic diversity), and build educator and administrator as well as agency staff capacity through professional learning opportunities that are grounded in racial and ethnic equity goals.

Racial and ethnic equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial and ethnic identities no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. This includes work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race and ethnicity, or fail to eliminate them.¹² Using a racial and ethnic equity lens means paying close attention to race and ethnicity while analyzing problems, looking for solutions, and defining success.

As outlined in the America's Promise Alliance's [How Learning Happens Messaging Framework](#), racial, cultural, and individual identities play an important role in social, emotional, and cognitive development; and discrimination and oppression affect young people's well-being and can interfere with healthy development and learning. Furthermore, adults' implicit and explicit beliefs about and reactions to discrimination and oppression affect their interactions with young people; and adults have the opportunity to challenge long-held mindsets and approaches and enable healthy, supported development.

Note that while the Commission is choosing to highlight the importance of racial and ethnic equity in this recommendation, we are also deeply committed to equity for all marginalized identities, including but not limited to gender identity and sexual orientation; and it is important to note that the experiences of each individual's multiple identities intersect and can layer in compounding ways that are critical to recognize in this work.

A focus on dismantling systems of oppression and focusing efforts and resources to create anti-racist safe and supportive environments is imperative for the wellbeing of all students across the Commonwealth. As stated in Commissioner Riley's [Our Way Forward](#), while Massachusetts is ranked top in the nation on many educational measures, for virtually all metrics, large achievement gaps persist for our students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. For example, while Massachusetts ranked 8th in the country in 2016 for our four-year graduation rate for white students, we ranked 43rd for Latinx and 19th for black students for African American/Black and Latinx student groups.

This past year has brought a heightened attention to racism and racial justice needs and concerns across the nation, with injustices perpetrated on Black Americans and people of color across our country highly publicized. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated racial and ethnic disparities and highlighted the dire need to support schools and districts in working towards creating safe and supportive learning environments. In this context, the Commission intensified

¹² Adapted from [Embracing Racial Equity: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization](#), Annie E. Casey Foundation, January 8, 2015, and www.racialequitytools.org, a site created by Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates, and Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, in 2009 with contributions from many individuals and organizations working on racial equity.

our explicit focus on systemic racism and what role we can play as individuals, as a leadership body, and as members of organizations we represent, as described further in the Commission activities section of this report.

The Commission offers the following examples of specific efforts that can contribute to wide-scale racial/ethnic equity goals and dismantling systems of oppression:

- a. Continue to provide interactive professional development on topics that build and strengthen safe and supportive learning environments through a racial equity lens. Furthermore, ensure the professional development's goals include ways to build educators' and agency staff capacity to engage in reflecting on our own biases and identify ways to improve student, staff, and family experiences, informed by research, learning, and practice.
- b. Continue to embed into revisions of the framework and tool, and accompanying materials and resources, language and approaches that can assist schools and districts in analyzing and strengthening priorities and efforts that further racial and ethnic equity goals.
- c. Continue to increase student, family, and community voice in Commission related activities – intentionally including multiple racial and ethnic perspectives. Consider Commission meetings, focus groups, and other efforts to inform Commission and Department resources, e.g., framework and tool revisions. Where appropriate and possible, find ways to compensate or otherwise acknowledge and appreciate contributions from students, families, and community partners.
- d. Provide Commission members with capacity building opportunities on these topics by continuing to invite facilitators at Commission meetings to help support ongoing reflection and efforts. Additionally, include dedicated time and space at Commission meetings to discuss this topic and reflect on efforts related to the Commission's goals for the year. Also, communicate with member appointing entities when there is membership turnover, to help increase the racial and ethnic diversity of Commission membership.
- e. Build and support a diverse educator workforce at the Department and in school districts, including recruiting and supporting retention of staff of color. Continue to support the Department's hands-on, technical support and professional development to educators, and other mechanisms for support of these efforts. The [Commissioner's Goals for the 2020-2021 school year](#) include expanding ongoing efforts to diversify the educator workforce, and [examples](#) of such Department efforts led by the Department's [Center for Strategic Initiatives](#) include:
 - o *Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies for a Diverse Massachusetts Teacher Workforce* – a recently released guidebook, intended to support school and district efforts to increase and retain a diverse Massachusetts teacher workforce. The guidebook was developed, in collaboration with [TNTP](#), and reflects current research and promising practices from the pilot program described below.

- [Teacher diversification pilot program](#) – a grant program designed to support local school district efforts to strengthen and diversify existing teacher recruitment and retention programs.
 - [Influence 100](#) – an initiative which includes a fellowship program for qualified educators who desire to move into the superintendent role within the next five years, and also support for school districts to become more culturally responsive and to develop intentional strategies around diversifying their educator workforce (teachers, principals, staff, senior district leaders) to better serve all students.
 - [InSPIRED Fellowship](#) (*In-Service Professionals who are committed to Increasing the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of our teacher workforce*) – an initiative that provides an opportunity for current educators to recruit students and young adults from underrepresented communities at the high-school, community college, or undergraduate level into the teaching profession. The goals of the fellowship are to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce in Massachusetts, and to increase the retention rates of current educators committed to a diverse workforce by creating a network of like-minded, committed educators that can persist beyond the fellowship period.
 - **Diversity Network Year 2** — a two-year professional development series for school districts, educator preparation program, and community organizations centered on the identification of best practices to recruit and retain a racially diverse and culturally responsive teacher workforce. The Network is led by the Center for Strategic Initiatives and TNTP and includes approximately 180 participants.
- f. Promote the goals of the cross-sector family engagement framework, [Strengthening Partnerships: Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement Framework](#). These goals 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). These goals align with the aforementioned [Commissioner’s Goals for the 2020-2021 school year](#), which include an emphasis on the need for schools and districts to strengthen and build upon supports to students and families to address opportunity gaps. Additionally, these goals speak to support for districts to implement the new [Interactive Blueprint for English learners](#) which includes a vision essential for English Learners and important for all students: *attending schools in which all educators share responsibility for their success, engage effectively with their families, and value and nurture their linguistic and cultural assets.*

***RECOMMENDATION 3:
COMMUNICATE ABOUT AND PROMOTE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS***

The Commission recommends the Department continue to communicate about, promote, and provide opportunities to enhance and recognize safe and supportive learning environments. This includes helping districts and schools learn about the resources available through the revised Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool, which are now available for school use. As part of this, the Commission also recommends the Department continue efforts to further identify ways to promote and increase student voice and family engagement, to help develop the capacity of schools and districts to offer equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments.

It is essential that schools and school districts recognize, and that state leaders validate, the importance of creating safe and supportive schools and districts grounded in anti-racist and equity focused values. A key component of this work is building and strengthening relationships, as 7th grade math teacher at the Ferryway School in Malden and the 2021 [Teacher of the Year](#) Jennifer Hedrington emphasizes, and the relationship building is important between and among students, educators, families, community partners, and more. As Ms. Hedrington shared at the [October 2020 Board Meeting](#), her philosophy as a teacher is to “teach in color through the lens of love”, and building relationships with students helps them be willing and open to engage in learning subject-matter content and strengthening skills for life. Furthermore, building relationships with colleagues and families helps set the stage for partnering in support of students, and navigating challenges and areas where learning is needed from all. 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, shared during professional learning opportunities, and included in student to teacher relationship building and family engagement strategies.

Examples that continue to build upon previous Safe and Supportive Schools efforts include the following:

- 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)].¹³ These responsibilities are extensive and relate to efforts described below, including coordinating the Safe and Supportive Schools grant program; hosting statewide and regional trainings and leadership sessions (virtually and/or in-person as appropriate); further 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, and create and implement action

¹³ 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).”

plans, that embed anti-racist efforts and safe and supportive schools practices.

- c. Continue to support a contract with one or more external vendors/organizations to assist with upgrading and refining 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 (virtually where appropriate) and partnering with other organizations where appropriate, for teachers, school and district leaders, and other school personnel and partners, across the Commonwealth. These offerings can focus on approaches to implementing safe and supportive school practices, leadership strategies, elevating student voice, and building meaningful family engagement practices that promote equity and anti-racist goals, including dismantling practices that perpetuate racially based outcomes and other inequities.
- e. Continue to expand ways to hear from and partner with students and statewide student leadership groups and other interested stakeholders to inform the work of the Commission and schools/districts.
- f. Continue to evaluate and gather feedback from grantees on the Safe and Supportive Schools 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 framework and 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 framework and tool and program improvements throughout the year.

Additional examples of efforts to communicate about and promote safe and supportive schools include the following:

- Encourage school and district efforts to incorporate goals related to safe and supportive learning environments into updates to [Student Opportunity Act Plans](#), Reopening Plans, and other School and District Improvement Plans, including ways the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool resources can be used to help inform this work.
- Support schools and districts in grounding improvement efforts in the [Essential Elements](#) woven throughout in the framework and tool (*support all students, deepen understanding, advance equity, exemplify cultural responsiveness, and continually reflect and adapt*).
- Assist schools and districts with tools and guidance on ways to gather and use available data to effectively inform root cause analysis efforts – that in turn inform safe and supportive school efforts that improve all students’ experiences and outcomes, and in particular students who identify as part of one or multiple marginalized groups. Such data sources may include but not be limited to the student [Views on Climate and Learning](#) (VOCAL); [state](#) or local Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBS); [Early Warning Indicator System](#) (EWIS); [School](#)

[Safety and Discipline Report \(SSDR\)](#); [restraint data collection tool](#); and any additional information from local data collection efforts. Local efforts might include universal mental health screenings; social-emotional competency assessment data; the Communities That Care (CTC) Risk and Protective Factor Youth Survey (also known as the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) survey; or additional student, family, staff, or community surveys or other data source.

- As previously noted, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities for students, families, and staff members throughout the Commonwealth, including specifically for students of color and those living in poverty. The Department is encouraged to continue to promote best practices and resources on how to best support student and family needs during COVID-19, including prioritizing relationship building, student well-being, and mental health needs. The Commission requests the Department further support implementation efforts informed by the Department’s resource document: [Creating Positive Learning Environments: Recommendations and Resources to Support the Social Emotional Well-being of Students, Staff, and Families \(Summer 2020\)](#).

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 their alignment 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*.

Moreover, the Commission recommends that the Department consider ways to help schools and districts further support the health and well-being of all staff and administrators, and especially those who work on a regular basis with students, especially considering the impact of the pandemic. 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 well-being.

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, especially considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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. In turn, undertaking a safe and supportive schools approach requires a plethora of support to adults to ensure adults feel prepared, equipped, and supported to work in this direction. 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 through an anti-racist lens to best support the wellbeing of *all* students, staff, and families. 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.

Considering the impact of COVID-19 and how to best prepare to support schools and districts in the year ahead, directions the Commission is considering focusing on during this upcoming year and beyond include the following. Note that 2021 priorities are expected to be further discussed and decided upon early in the new year, starting at the first 2021 [meeting](#) in February.

Focus areas under consideration for 2021:

- Providing input to the Department during efforts to further update and refine the **Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool**, to ensure an anti-racist and equity lens is embedded throughout, while the latest revised version is piloted by fiscal year FY2021 grantees.
- Considering ways to further safe and supportive school efforts in the **context of the COVID-19 pandemic**, taking into consideration modified protocols for in-person learning as well as hybrid and remote learning contexts, as well as disparate impacts on communities based on race/ethnicity, income, and more.
- Finding 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.
- Continuing to find ways to strengthen and promote **social emotional learning guidance** put forth by the Department and other external organizations.
- Considering ways to further efforts related to effective **collaboration with families**, specifically during the COVID-19 era. Some possibilities include, promoting resources such as the cross-agency [Family Engagement Framework](#) and associated guidance and training, and continue to support efforts in collaboration with Department staff working on family engagement initiatives.

Additional areas for consideration, for 2021 and/or beyond:

- 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.
- Making additional recommendations regarding schools’ **access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services**.
- Continuing to build the capacity for schools and districts to find opportunities to support **adult/staff social-emotional wellbeing**.

- 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**.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 2020

Commission areas of top priority focus in 2020 included taking into consideration the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and Commission activities, informing updates to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, and reflecting on ways to further advance racial equity and broader equity goals. Below is a brief summary of activities conducted during this sixth year of the Commission.

- Convened **seven Commission meetings** in 2020, including a two-part summer retreat. The first 2020 meeting was held on February 10 in Shrewsbury (thanks to the generosity of the Shrewsbury Town Hall). Per [temporary updates to the open meeting law](#) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, all subsequent 2020 meetings were held virtually on the following dates: April 2, May 11, July 22 and August 5 (the two-part summer retreat), October 5, and November 16.
- **Welcomed four new Commission members**, appointed by the organizations cited in the legislation authorizing the Commission that had vacancies in their member spots.
 - **Jordan Healy** and **Matthew Tibbitts**, starting with the February 10, 2020 meeting, representing the [State Student Advisory Council](#) (SSAC). Ms. Healy was a SSAC Member, and a student at Granby Junior/Senior High School and Mr. Tibbitts was the SSAC Chair and Board (BESE) Member, and a student at Ludlow High School. Both students graduated in June 2020.
 - **Catherine McCourt**, Senior Policy Manager, Executive Office of Education, who served at the April 2, 2020 meeting, representing the Secretary of Education (EOE Designee), and who served during several periods of time in prior years as well.
 - **Alexis Lian**, Staff Director, Massachusetts STEM Advisory Council, Executive Office of Education, starting with the May 11, 2020 meeting, representing the Secretary of Education (EOE Designee).

- **Joel Khattar**, Program Manager, starting with the October 5, 2020 meeting, representing the [Parent/Professional Advocacy League](#) (PPAL).
- The Department and Commission are also **extremely grateful for the years of generous and helpful contributions of the following members** who moved on from their work as members of the Commission this year:
 - **Henry Julio East-Trou**, Executive Director, Gandara Center, who served through the November 18, 2019 meeting, representing 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, and appointed by the Secretary of Education (EOE). The Department and Commission congratulates Dr. East-Trou on his retirement.
 - **Katherine Lipper-Garabedian**, General Counsel, Executive Office of Education, who represented the Secretary of Education (EOE Designee) through February 10, 2020. The Department and Commission congratulates Representative Lipper-Garabedian in her new role as State Representative for the 32nd Middlesex District.
 - **Catherine McCourt**, Senior Policy Manager, Executive Office of Education, as noted above, who served at the April 2, 2020 meeting, representing the Secretary of Education (EOE Designee), and who served during several periods of time in prior years as well. The Department and Commission wish Ms. McCourt the best in her new position outside of EOE.
 - **William Diehl**, MOEC Board of Directors Regional Representative, and Collaborative for Educational Services Executive Director, who represented the MA Organization of Education Collaboratives (MOEC) through November 16, 2020. The Department and Commission congratulates Dr. Diehl on his retirement.
- **Re-elected by Commission member vote** at the May 11, 2020 meeting **Commission Co-Chair Dr. John Doherty**, Superintendent of Reading Public Schools, representing the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, to serve a second 2-year term, starting in the fall 2020. Dr. Doherty serves alongside Co-Chair Rachelle Engler Bennett, Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support — the Department's/Commissioner's designee since winter 2015.
- The Commission heard several Harvard Education Law Clinic students at the April 2, 2020 meeting share about their experiences **supporting high school students prepare for presentations to the Legislature**. These efforts were an extension of secondary school student [focus groups](#) conducted in 2019 **under the guidance of 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 law clinic students described how they met with volunteer high school students who participated in the focus groups earlier in the year and coached them for presentations to the Legislature. **Seven high school students spoke and over 50 legislative offices were represented**. Students shared their thoughts with the legislators on what is needed to make schools more safe and supportive, and a principal also presented and connected what the students shared to the

essential elements of a safe and supportive school. The participating students also had a tour of Harvard and the State House, and met with their legislators.

- Discussed and deliberated on **recommendations** and **future directions** to include in this sixth annual report to the Legislature.
- Engaged in two-hour session on ***Critical Hope and Equity, with a specific focus on racial equity***, for part one of the summer retreat, facilitated by Matthew Rodriguez from the [Equity Imperative](#). As described below in the Department Activities section of the report, the Department is contracting with the Equity Imperative to plan and facilitate a series of professional development offerings to Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, Rethinking Discipline initiative participants, and others.
- Informed updates to the **Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool** throughout the course of the year, and in particular during the meetings on February 10, April 2, and August 5 (part-two of the summer retreat).
- Engaged in numerous discussions related to experiences across the Commonwealth and Department guidance associated with the **COVID-19 pandemic**, in the context of school closings in the spring 2020 as well as schools re-opening with new protocols and guidance in fall 2020.

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

The statute [G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f)] calls for many actions to be taken by the Department, all of which are subject to appropriation.

“(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.”

Related department efforts are described below. These include information about efforts to update the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool, the Safe and Supportive Schools grant program and evaluation work, professional development offerings to further safe and supportive school efforts, and select additional student health and wellness initiatives.

Updates to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Tool:

Throughout 2020, the Department worked through a contract with the [BlueScope Group](#)¹⁴ to revise and update the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool. The BlueScope Group worked collaboratively with Department staff, the Commission, and other stakeholders to revise the existing framework in numerous ways.

The updated framework and tool are now available through [SaSSMA.org](#). The revised versions are designed to be useful in thinking through and strengthening equity-based (including racial equity) efforts to create safe and supportive learning environments for all students in all contexts. The [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Implementation Guide](#)¹⁵ also now includes more details regarding suggested phases of the work. The five phases are as follows, and each includes sub-steps in the guide:

1. Build a foundation and strengthen readiness.
2. Reflect on the current state of the school and identify priorities.
3. Action planning for a safe and supportive school.
4. Implement the action plan for success.
5. Develop a cycle of inquiry and continuous improvement.

The framework and guide also include a continuum map, or rubric, designed to help schools and districts reflect on where they currently are and plan for future directions. There are six topic areas, or [Levers](#), within the rubric that focus on:

1. Leadership and Culture.
2. Family Engagement.
3. Professional Learning Opportunities.
4. Access to Resources and Services.
5. Teaching & Learning that Fosters Safe and Supportive Environments.
6. Policies and Procedures.

Each Lever includes Indicators that correspond to what are framed as [Essential Elements](#) that lay the foundation for safe and supportive school efforts. Each Indicator includes one or more examples across a continuum of implementation, at varying levels of depth and complexity. This rubric can help school and district teams find appropriate entry points and identify priorities based on local context. When using this rubric, teams can identify tangible evidence of where on the continuum (Beginning to Excelling) the school or district is, and can inform a team's plans for building upon strengths and addressing challenges.

¹⁴ BlueScope Group website: <https://bluescopegroup.com/>

¹⁵ Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Implementation Guide: http://sassma.org/documents/Safe_and_Supportive_School_Implementation_Guide_Community_Vetting_Draft_12.11.20.pdf

An updated [Self-Reflection Tool](#)¹⁶ is also available, and is directly aligned with the revised framework. The tool now has a preliminary self-reflection option, as well as a deeper dive component. The goal of the preliminary stage (suggested during phase 1) is to help the school based (and district) teams to develop an early understanding of what components of a safe and supportive school they already may have in place and what areas may be considered for further exploration, and in what topic order the team wants to dig into the deeper dive. The purpose of the deeper dive (suggested during phase 2) is to allow for a more intensive process that yields important information the team can use to build out action plans.

Further refinements to the action planning and tool reports section are under final development and will be available on the site later this winter. During the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year, the updated framework and self-reflection tool will be used by grantees and others as feedback continues to be gathered. The Department will be seeking and welcomes [feedback](#) on the updated versions, and plans to make further refinements informed by this feedback in spring 2021.

Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program:

In September 2020, the Department posted the FY2021 Safe and Supportive Schools Competitive Grant opportunity, Fund Code (FC) 335.¹⁷ Grant applications were due on October 15, 2020. Information about this competitive grant opportunity were included in both the September 21, 2020 [Commissioner's Weekly Update](#)¹⁸ and the September 2020 [Holistic Supports & Enrichment: Strengthening Social Emotional Competencies, Health & Safety newsletter](#).¹⁹

The Safe and Supportive Schools Continuation Grant, [FC 337](#)²⁰ was made available in August 2020, and grant applications were reviewed and approved on a rolling basis. Information about this continuation grant opportunity was sent to eligible applicants directly. Information about both grants can be found on the [Safe and Supportive Schools Grant website](#).²¹

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 informed by school team

¹⁶ Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Reflection Tool: <http://SaSSMA.org/>

¹⁷ FC 335: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/335/>

¹⁸ Commissioner's Weekly Update with grant information: <https://us14.campaign-archive.com/?u=d8f37d1a90dacd97f207f0b4a&id=ebab280f32#competitivefy>

¹⁹ Holistic Supports & Enrichment newsletter with grant information: <https://us14.campaign-archive.com/?u=d8f37d1a90dacd97f207f0b4a&id=9f9df3305a#Safe%20and%20Supportive%20Schools%20Competitive%20Grant>

²⁰ FC 337: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/337/>

²¹ Safe and Supportive Schools Grant website: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/>

reflections through 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 and Mentoring/Support)** 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, other districts interested in using the self-reflection tool, districts beginning to implement action plans created previously, the Department and Commission, and other stakeholders interested in safe and supportive schools.

A total of 27 applications were submitted for this competitive funding and 14 entities (including 3 regional school districts, 1 vocational technical school district, 1 charter school district, 1 collaborative,²² and 7 other school districts) were [awarded](#)²³ grants to support efforts in 36 schools or programs. Option One (Action Planning) grantees (11) were awarded \$10,000 each and Option 2 (Implementation/Mentoring) grantees (3) were awarded \$8,650 each. In total nearly \$136,000 from line item 7061-9612 is being leveraged by communities through this competitive 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 (FC 337) are for districts in their second year of a two-year grant. These funds are supporting schools that received the FY2020 competitive grant, to implement items from the action plans they created using the self- assessment tool last year (FY2020 Option 1 grantees) or to continue implementing action plans created previously and to continue to serve as mentor/support for others (FY2020 Option 2 grantees). A total of 17 districts²⁴ were awarded continuation grants, for use in approximately 47 schools, supported by \$126,000 from line item 7061-9612.

Grant evaluation:

Funded through the safe and supportive schools line-item 7061-9612, the Department contracted with Collaborative for Educational Services (CES) for continued work on an independent evaluation of the grant program, to complement and extend efforts described in their [2018](#) and [2019](#) reports. Much of the work planned for 2020 was put on hold due to pandemic-related school closures beginning in March 2020 and the school re-opening efforts in the fall 2020. CES was able to provide the Department with feedback on the [Action Planning template](#)²⁵ as well as a review of the use of the online Safe and Supportive Schools Self Reflection Tool. This work from CES will be used to help support the 2020-2021 grantees as well as the revisions of the Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Reflection Tool, and additional work through the contract will be confirmed and conducted during 2021 and described in the Commission’s next annual report.

²² FY2021 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.

²³ FY2021 FC 335 grantees (competitive): <https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/awards/335.docx>.

²⁴ FY2021 grantees (continuation) are listed in the eligibility section: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/337/>.

²⁵ Action Planning Guidance and Template: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/action-plan.docx>

Professional development to support work related to safe and supportive schools:

During the 2019-2020 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.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans for a statewide convening were shifted and reworked to provide virtual offerings. Virtual offerings were coordinated with partners across the Department including the following offerings, a number of which are still available as recordings on the [MA Tools for Schools COVID-19 Resources](#) page:

- Establishing District-Wide Systems to Support Students’ and Educators’ Mental Health Needs during COVID-19,
- Peer-Sharing Virtual Meetings to further support educators and student support staff across the Commonwealth to address students’ social, emotional, and mental health needs, and
- Supporting Students' Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Needs in the COVID-19 Era Webinar.

Additional coordination occurred with other larger Department equity initiatives and in particular, a contract was established with the [Equity Imperative](#),²⁶ a portion of which is funded through the safe and supportive schools line-item 7061-9612. The Equity Imperative was selected to provide an in-depth professional development opportunity for Safe and Supportive Schools Grantees, Rethinking Discipline Initiative participants, and others. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the original plans were modified to accommodate the new remote work and school reality and the timeframe was adjusted to best meet the needs of schools and districts. The Equity Imperative provided a 2 hour webinar in May 2020 titled “Equity and Critical Hope in the Time of COVID-19” with the learning objectives of building trust and understanding with one another amidst the global pandemic of COVID-19, reflecting on participants’ own response to the “Stay at Home” Advisory during COVID-19, and imagining examples of what equity can look like in current student/scholar and family engagement, and planning for the return to school as a result of this crisis.

The Equity Imperative will also run five virtual learning pathways (each three-sessions), on topics related to equity and anti-racist practices in family engagement, instruction & curriculum, discipline, and other areas of school operations. These pathways are being offered throughout the 2020-2021 school year (two during 2020, and three during 2021).

Furthermore, the Equity Imperative is creating a comprehensive online course for Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, [Rethinking Discipline](#) initiative participants, and others. The course will address the following themes:

²⁶ Equity Imperative: <https://www.equityimperative.org/>

- Confronting the racist history of our schools, and society, learning how that history lives within ourselves and requires a commitment toward racial equity and a development of equity-based interactions.
- Confronting the history of deficit thinking, and developing a structural lens to situate the root of racially delineated achievement outcomes and create strategies to enhance the quality of relationships.
- Confronting the ways that racism manifests and is perpetuated in the regular day-to-day routines in schools in order to learn where best to interrupt this reality.
- Confronting the obstacles and roadblocks to leading equity work and the ways to best press forward on behalf of students and families.

These online modules will be available starting in January 2021 and will continue into the fall of 2021 for the first cohort. Additional cohorts will have access to the module in the future.

Select Additional Student Health and Wellness Support Efforts:

The Department is engaged in a series of coordinated initiatives intended to build capacity of public school districts and communities to:

- develop comprehensive, integrated multi-tiered systems for student support; and
- establish an infrastructure to facilitate integrated coordination of school and community-based resources, including but not limited to, social services, mental health, and behavioral health resources.

These efforts will be detailed further in subsequent legislative reports, including one forthcoming on Student Wellness School Supports funded through line-item [7061-9650](#), that supports efforts including but not limited to Fund Codes(FC) 336/613 *Supporting Students’ Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness* grants;²⁷ the [Systemic Student Support \(S3\) Academy](#); and extensions on the reach of the [Social Emotional Learning/Mental Health Academy](#), which is primarily funded through a [federal School Climate Transformation grant](#).

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.

²⁷ A portion of those integrated student wellness grants are funded through the through the [2019](#) supplemental budgets’ line 7061-0010, focused on connecting schools with community-based mental and behavioral health service providers.

APPENDIX A: Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Members

Amador	Andria	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA 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 (DESE)	Commission Co-Chair (DESE Designee); Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support
Brown	Donna M.	MA School Counselors Association (MASCA)	MASCA Immediate Past Executive Director
Burd	Sara	Arlington Public Schools, Practitioner of the Framework	Arlington Public Schools Director of Social Emotional Learning and Guidance
Cole	Susan	MA Advocates for Children (MAC)	MAC Senior Project Director, and Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) Director
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	Immediate Past Executive Director, and consultant to the Gándara 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 Health and Wellness, Boston Public Schools
Healy	Jordan	State Student Advisory Council (SSAC)	Student and SSAC Member, Granby Junior/Senior High School '20
Holmes	Ellen	MA Association of School Committees (MASC)	MASC Vice President; Ashburnham-Westminster Reg. School Committee Member
Khattar	Joel	Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	Program Manager
Lian	Alexis	Secretary of Education (EOE Designee)	Staff Director, Massachusetts STEM Advisory Council, Executive Office of Education, MA Executive of Education
Lipinski	Michelle	Representative of Mass. Recovery High Schools with expertise in adolescent substance use disorders	Principal, Northshore Recovery High School
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, and School Psychology Program Director, and MSPA Past President
Riccio	Cathy	MA School Nurse Organization (MSNO)	Nurse Leader, Newburyport Public Schools

Salvardos	John	MA Administrators for Special Education (ASE)	Director of Pupil Services, Athol-Royalston Regional School District
Stevenson	Laura	MA School Administrators' Association (MSAA)	Principal, Holbrook Middle-High School
Tibbitts	Matthew	State Student Advisory Council (SSAC)	SSAC Chair and Board (BESE) Member; Student, Ludlow High School '20

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.

NOTE: The full text of the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter284) (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>.