



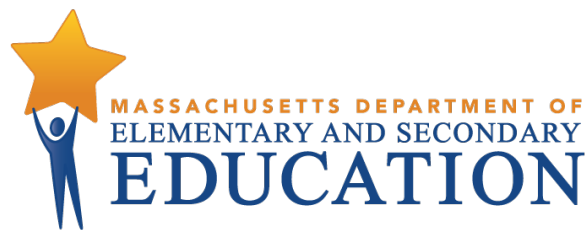
## **Safe and Supportive Schools Commission – Seventh Annual Report**

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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).

February 2022

This report was prepared with assistance from the staff at





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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](#). On behalf of the Commission, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) respectfully submits this Report to the Governor and Legislature: *Safe and Supportive Schools Commission - Seventh 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>*

As noted in the cover letter to this report, we have seen the pervasive impact that the pandemic has had on the mental health of students, staff, and family members. It is essential for the Department, schools, families, and partners to work together to create and strengthen safe and supportive learning environments that keep the health and wellbeing of students, staff, and families front and center. Over the last several years, we have witnessed a heightened attention to an ever-present need for racial justice and all forms of equity, in the wake of highly publicized, deeply disturbing, and violent deaths of people who identify as Black Americans, people of color, and/or people who identify as LGBTQ across our country. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to exacerbate racial/ethnic and other disparities, and has highlighted the dire need to support schools and districts (and collaboratives)<sup>2</sup> in working towards creating safe and supporting learning environments that focus on health, wellness, respect, support, engagement and learning for all. These needs and themes are described further throughout 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 and opportunity gaps, and halting the school to prison pipeline. These environments raise the

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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 D of this report.

<sup>2</sup> NOTE: When schools and districts are referenced to in this report, generally this includes charter schools, regional schools, vocational technical schools, educational collaboratives, and virtual schools.

achievement of all students, by valuing and empowering each student to experience a sense of competency and agency in their own learning. These environments also help students and staff to develop and feel a sense of belonging, self-regulate emotions and behaviors, form positive relationships among and between adults and students, and strengthen health and wellbeing. In order to address proficiency and opportunity 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 and funding associated efforts through the state budget's safe and supportive schools line item (7061-9612), 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 too many school communities.<sup>3</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 model and teach students to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and attention so that it is easier to focus and learn. Such schools also strive to address physical, mental health, and disability-related needs that may interfere with learning.<sup>4</sup>

Creating such environments while addressing the needs of individual children is not easy. Many children come to school having experienced significant adversity. Furthermore, as noted in the EdTrust report, *Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through an Equity Lens*, without ensuring students' learning environments are supportive of all students and do not perpetuate inequities, social-emotional [and related] learning efforts that exclusively focus on changing student behavior may do more harm than good by placing the burden on students of color to respond positively to systemic injustices.<sup>5</sup>

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.

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<sup>3</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.

<sup>4</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>5</sup> EdTrust report, *Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through an Equity Lens*. P. 4 and 8. <https://edtrust.org/social-emotional-and-academic-development-through-an-equity-lens/>

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>6</sup> The line-item language in the fiscal year 2018 state budget (line-item 7061-9612) related to the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission also 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>7</sup> Further work of the Commission and Department outlined [Essential Elements](#)<sup>8</sup>, to help school communities consider underlying approaches that can support a myriad of initiatives designed to strengthen learning, health, and wellness for all.

***Safe and Supportive Schools Framework (framework) and Self-Reflection Tool (tool):*** The Department is pleased to share that the most recent (fall 2021) updated version of the framework and tool are now available for any interested school to use, and for Safe and Supportive Schools grantees to further pilot. As can be seen in the [At-A-Glance](#)<sup>9</sup> document (Appendix A), and as briefly described below, the framework and tool offers a comprehensive process for school teams to use in collaborative reflection, planning and implementation efforts.

***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 and community 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,<sup>10</sup> the Department, in consultation with the Commission,

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6 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.”

7 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>.

8 Found on SaSSMA.org: <http://sassma.org/essentialelements.asp> and shown in Appendix B.

9 Found in Appendix A and on SaSSMA.org: <http://sassma.org/SaSSFrameworkAndSRT.docx>

10 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

posted an updated version of the framework (and tool, referenced below) in the fall of 2020, and then a further refined version in the fall of 2021. The revisions process is described in more detail 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.<sup>11</sup> To date, the tool has been used (all versions combined) by a total of approximately 290 schools in 130 districts, including FY2014-FY2021 Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, approximately one-third of Gateway Cities districts,<sup>12</sup> five demonstration schools that work on trauma sensitivity through the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative,<sup>13</sup> 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 inform recommendations on further refinements to the framework and tool, and on the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework. The [2018](#)<sup>14</sup> and [2019](#) grant evaluation reports<sup>15</sup> also provided useful information on these topics. More details are provided in the Commission Activities Undertaken in 2021 section below.

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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](#).

11 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.”

12 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.

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

14 2018 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2018-sssp-report.pdf>.

15 2019 grant evaluation report: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/grants/2019-sssp-report.docx>.



## Remembering Susan Cole

It is with great sadness that we share that Susan Cole, Founder and Director of the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative passed away on May 1, 2021. Ms. Cole was one of the original Commission members (and a member of the prior associated Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force), and served as the first member-selected Commission Co-chair for several terms. In addition to being Founder and Director of the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, Ms. Cole was the Director of the Education Law Clinic and a Lecturer on Law at Harvard Law School; and a Senior Project Director at MA Advocates for Children. Ms. Cole was a champion in many ways for trauma-sensitive schools where all students, including those who have been impacted by trauma, can succeed at their highest levels in school and in life. At the May 10, 2021, Commission meeting, space was created for any Commission member and any participant who wanted to share thoughts and memories about Susan Cole and her legacy.

On May 18, at the end of the state's formal House of Representatives session, a moment of silence was shared to honor Susan Cole, along with a tribute. An excerpt is below, and the full text can be found in Appendix E.

*"...Susan's imprint was felt most when the House's drafted its historic 2014 law An Act to Reduce Gun Violence, which created a permanent commission to ensure schools continue to foster a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive learning environment one that went beyond academics. As the state recovers from the pandemic and students return to school—students we know who have been impacted by multiple stressors over the past year—Susan's work and influence addressing children's social and emotional needs will no doubt continue. The state owes Susan Cole a debt of gratitude for her expertise and commitment to this work, which for her, was a labor of love. The members are asked to please stand for a moment of silence for Susan Cole."*

More information about Ms. Cole can be found on the [TLPI website](#). Her impact was deep, far, and wide, and she will be greatly missed.

## Recommendations

Through this annual report, the Commission offers three recommendations that can be considered by the state legislature as well as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, local school districts, and other education focused organizations. The recommendations focus on efforts for the upcoming 2023 fiscal year and beyond that can help schools become more safe and supportive. The three recommendations are outlined briefly in the next few pages, and then elaborated on in more detail in the remainder of this section of the report.

As a reminder, safe and supportive schools as defined by the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law (G.L., c.69, §.1P), are *schools that foster a safe, positive, healthy & inclusive*



*whole-school learning environment that:*

- 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; and
- integrates services and aligns 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.

**A few notes about the recommendations:** Taken as a whole these recommendations are particularly salient, in light of the current COVID-19 related challenges seen across the Commonwealth (and globe), as well as the disturbingly disparate impacts over the past two years of the pandemic across communities by race/ethnicity, income level, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more – associated with vast pre-existing inequities. Schools across the Commonwealth and nation are grappling with how best to accelerate student learning while attending to health and wellbeing needs of students and families, as well as staff and partners. Concurrently, many school districts have a significant amount of increased funding available through a number of federal and state sources, such as [ESSER](#). The recommendations in this report can be used to help inform how available funding at a local and state level can be used most strategically to help create safe and supportive schools as defined above.

The **first recommendation** (*CONTINUE TO FUND THE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS LINE ITEM*) focuses on why continued funding is needed through the Safe and Supportive Schools 7061-9612 state line item, and what that funding has and will make possible. That line-item is intimately connected to the goals of the Commission, and the recommendation for at least continued funding is the most concrete recommendation included.

The second and third recommendations are more directional in nature, with examples provided, and draw upon major themes discussed by the Commission throughout 2021 (and prior years). They expand upon ways that broader efforts from the Department, school districts, and other organizations can help advance efforts that strengthen safe and supportive learning environments for all students.

The **second recommendation** (*ADVANCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY*) in particular focuses on the need to advance racial and ethnic equity in education, in order for learning environments to have high expectations and high levels of support for all students to thrive, including students of color, and students with identities and experiences that have been historically marginalized.

The **third recommendation** (*PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS*) speaks to the need for active efforts from the Department, school districts, and other

organizations to further opportunities that value and advance safe and supportive learning environments. It includes examples of additional efforts (beyond but interrelated to what is written in recommendations 1 and 2) that can help move forward this realm of work throughout the upcoming year and beyond.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – SUMMARY VERSION

### 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 (SaSS) line item ([7061-9612](#)) in the fiscal year 2022-2023 (FY2023) budget. **It will be important for funds to continue to support efforts as described below, through this line-item with at least the current funding levels, as well as any other available and appropriate funding sources.** These funds will assist with carrying out the intent of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework legislation passed in 2014 and will *strengthen guidance and resources available to schools - including professional development opportunities, grant coordination activities, and more.*

As described in more detail in the Department Activities section of this report, the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework law asks the Department to carry out a number of responsibilities, including supporting implementation of the framework in communities across the Commonwealth, providing technical assistance and hosting professional development sessions, disseminating promising practices, coordinating a grant program, and maintaining the online versions of the framework and tool.

### 2: ADVANCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY IN EDUCATION

The Commission recommends that the Department continue efforts to advance, strengthen, and prioritize racial and ethnic equity in the realm of safe and supportive learning environments – keeping in mind that the pandemic has only exacerbated inequities across the Commonwealth in the arenas of health and wellbeing, education, economics, and more. In this vein, the Commission supports Department efforts to continue to focus on dismantling systemic inequities in schools; and highlight districts **and communities that partner with schools making strides and committing to anti-racist and other equity focused efforts related to professional development, school climate and culture, family engagement, curriculum, and more.**

**Additionally, the Commission commends Department efforts to support promising strategies for recruitment, selection, and retention of a highly skilled, diverse workforce (including a focus on racial and ethnic diversity). The Commission also supports Department efforts to build capacity for educators and administrators as well as agency staff, through professional learning opportunities that are grounded in racial and ethnic equity goals.**

Moreover, the Commission recommends that the Department support local school districts in their communication about and advancement of racial and ethnic equity as integral to efforts to build safe and supportive learning environments in their communities. One part of this work

could include exploring a partnership with other educational organizations in Massachusetts (such as those represented on the Commission – e.g., Massachusetts associations of administrators, teachers, counselors, students, etc.) to develop a common or aligned message about what racial equity and anti-racist education is and what it is not, and/or to share messages among organizations and with communities across the Commonwealth, including with school and district leadership, where appropriate and helpful.

While the Commission is highlighting the importance of racial and ethnic equity in this recommendation, we are also deeply committed to equity for all students, including students with all marginalized identities and experiences. For example, we are invested in supporting equitable learning environments for students with marginalized experiences related to gender identity and sexual orientation, and to disability and English learner status, and to housing instability and food insecurity. It is important to note that identities and experiences can be sources of pride, strength, and resilience as well as relate to experiences of being marginalized and excluded. It is also critical to recognize that each individual’s multiple identities (e.g., race and gender) intersect, and experiences can layer in compounding ways that are critical to recognize in this work.

As outlined in the America’s Promise Alliance’s [How Learning Happens Messaging Framework](#),<sup>16</sup> 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.

### **3: PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS**

The Commission recommends that the Department continue to create, increase awareness of, and promote opportunities that strengthen, 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 Self-Reflection Tool and the associated grant program, and other efforts that support aligned goals.
- Prioritizing, where appropriate, communication with communities experiencing the greatest inequities and the greatest readiness to engage in cycles of inquiry and improvement related to strengthening equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments - for students, staff, and families from all racial/ethnic identities, cultural backgrounds, and experiences.
- Making a connection between the need for and value of safe and supporting learning environments that can both prevent and address pressing concerns about behavioral and behavioral health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

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16 See [https://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/inline-files/HLH%20Messaging\\_FINAL10.29.pdf](https://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/inline-files/HLH%20Messaging_FINAL10.29.pdf).

(PTSD), Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE),<sup>17</sup> substance-use disorder (SUD), and co-occurring disorders among children and adolescents.

- Continuing efforts to further identify ways to promote and increase student voice and family engagement, and to use data to inform decisions - to help develop the capacity of schools and districts to offer anti-racist, equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments.

**More details on each recommendation are outlined below.**

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS – DETAILED VERSION</b>
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***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 2023 (FY2023) budget. It will be important for funds to continue to support efforts as described below, through this line-item with at least the current funding levels, as well as any other available and appropriate funding sources.**

The Commission is very appreciative that Governor Baker and the Legislature have supported the work of this line item over the past seven years (FY2016-FY2022). The funding in FY2022 is being used to provide grant opportunities for school districts; grant program evaluation efforts; coordination efforts at the Department; administrative support for the Commission; and professional learning for administrators and other educators related to safe and supportive learning environments.

***Notes on current FY2022 7061-9612 fund use:*** The 7061-9612 FY2022 funding also supports staff time to coordinate the grant program and professional development opportunities and to help facilitate and support administrative efforts related to Commission meetings. Funding also supports content updates as well as online changes to the online Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, and it supports evaluation efforts that help inform continuous improvements to grant program, professional development, and the framework and tool. Given the increased need of supports due to the transition back to in person learning after 18 months of hybrid and remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission looks forward to helping inform and learn from efforts funded through the FY2023 budget as well.

The following examples illustrate what this funding supports, and this work builds upon previous Safe and Supportive Schools Commission recommendations:

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<sup>17</sup> As described by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, the experience of Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE) can be a function of experiencing inequities in our social systems, institution such as school or government, and living conditions. Dr. Ginwright is a leader of the Healing-Centered Engagement model, a strength-based approach that promotes a collective view of healing – an ongoing process that must also focus on restoring and sustaining the practitioners who work with and support youth.

- 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>18</sup>

*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 Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool (framework and tool); overseeing the grant evaluation; providing technical assistance 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 plans that embed anti-racist efforts and safe and supportive schools practices.

*In FY2022, eight districts and one charter school received the competitive Fund Code (FC) 335 grant. Similarly, 12 districts, one charter school, and one collaborative received the continuation FC 337 grant. The grantees serve approximately 33,022 students in [60 communities](#).*

- c. Continue to support a contract with one or more external vendors/organizations to assist with upgrading and refining the framework and tool. Also continue to develop related guidance and materials to assist school districts reflect on their needs, develop associated action plans, and implement the plans to address areas that they determine are most relevant based on the data for their schools and districts.

*During summer 2021, the Department completed its contract with the BlueScope Group, which coordinated a multi-year process to update the framework and tool. The updated versions were made live in fall 2020, and feedback on those versions informed further refined versions made available in fall 2021.*

- d. Continue to hold and evolve statewide and regional convenings, and partner with other organizations, to provide support 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, integrated student support systems, 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.

*In FY2021, 30 hours of professional development on topics related to anti-racist practices in the realm of safe and supportive schools, were provided to approximately 300 participants*

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<sup>18</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)."

*from over 70 districts, collaboratives, or charter schools. Additional hours are planned for FY2022 on similar topics.*

- e. Continue to expand and promote ways to listen to students at state and local levels, specifically, students not often enough viewed as leaders and top of their class including students who have relatively low attendance and/or academic achievement in school, students of color, students with disabilities, students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ), immigrant and/or undocumented youth, and English Learners. Additionally, continue to partner with and promote ways statewide student leadership groups and other interested stakeholders, including local parent and youth organizers, to inform the work of the Commission and schools/districts.

*At 2021 Commission meetings, Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) staff and Harvard Law Clinic students shared insights learned from high school students about what they need in order to do well in school, and resources for further learning. The TLPI is a joint initiative between MA Advocates for Children (who appoints a Commission member) and the Harvard Law School. These resources included a [student focus group report](#), and a website <https://students-speak.org/>, focused on student voice in educational decision making.*

*The FY2022 line item also newly added the component “that grant awards shall be prioritized to applications that include a process for developmentally appropriate input from students who are reflective of the school population”.*

*Furthermore, the Commission is grateful for the opportunity to continue to learn from students on the State Student Advisory (SSAC) and GSA Leadership (GSA) Councils, through student participation in Commission meetings as members or guests, and through Commission member and other Department staff participation SSAC and GSA meetings, and through other communications with students who are and are not on the councils.*

- f. Continue to evaluate and gather feedback from grantees on the Safe and Supportive Schools grant program. This may include information and feedback on aspects of the grant program such as the needs of school and district leaders, examples of promising leadership practices, the impact of grant-support efforts, experiences using the revised framework and tool, and technical assistance and professional development provided. Furthermore, this work could include compiling lessons learned and promising practices to disseminate with others, and further informing framework and tool and program improvements throughout the year.

*FY2022 evaluation reports produced through a contract with the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES), provided insights into school district participants’ experiences of the professional development offered, and offered ideas for ways the Department would strengthen supports to school leaders.*



**RECOMMENDATION 2:  
ADVANCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY**

**The Commission recommends that the Department continue efforts to advance, strengthen, and prioritize racial and ethnic equity in the realm of safe and supportive learning environments – keeping in mind that the pandemic has only exacerbated inequities across the Commonwealth in the arenas of health and wellbeing, education, economics, and more. In this vein, the Commission supports Department efforts to continue to increase its focus on dismantling systemic inequities in schools; and highlight districts and communities that partner with schools making strides and committing to anti-racist and other equity focused efforts related to professional development, school climate and culture, family engagement, curriculum, and more.**

**Additionally, the Commission commends Department efforts to support promising strategies for recruitment, selection, and retention of a highly skilled, diverse workforce (including a focus on racial and ethnic diversity). The Commission also supports Department efforts to build capacity for educators and administrators as well as agency staff, through professional learning opportunities that are grounded in racial and ethnic equity goals.**

Moreover, the Commission recommends that the Department support local school districts in their communication about and advancement of racial and ethnic equity as integral to efforts to build safe and supportive learning environments in their communities. One part of this work could include exploring a partnership with other educational organizations in Massachusetts (such as those represented on the Commission – e.g., Massachusetts associations of administrators, teachers, counselors, students, etc.) to develop a common or aligned message about what racial equity and anti-racist education is and what it is not, and/or to share messages among organizations and with communities across the Commonwealth, including with school and district leadership, where appropriate and helpful.

While the Commission is highlighting the importance of racial and ethnic equity in this recommendation, we are also deeply committed to equity for all students, including students with all marginalized identities and experiences. For example, we are invested in supporting equitable learning environments for students with marginalized experiences related to gender identity and sexual orientation, and to disability and English learner status, and to housing instability and food insecurity. It is important to note that identities and experiences can be sources of pride, strength, and resilience as well as relate to experiences of being marginalized and excluded. It is also critical to recognize that each individual’s multiple identities (e.g., race and gender) intersect, and experiences can layer in compounding ways that are critical to recognize in this work.

*As noted in the Commission’s [sixth annual report](#), racial and ethnic equity can be considered the condition that would be achieved if one’s racial and ethnic identities no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares – for example in terms of social, economic, and educational outcomes.<sup>19</sup> As described by the [Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) this includes work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This*

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<sup>19</sup> See Commission’s Sixth Annual Report, Recommendations section, p.6: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2020/12ssscommission-6th.docx>.



*includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race and ethnicity or fail to eliminate them.<sup>20</sup> 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](#),<sup>21</sup> 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.

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 and continues to be a primary focus of the Commission. As referenced in Commissioner Riley's [Our Way Forward](#), and included in the [#1 for Some](#) Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership Report, 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 8<sup>th</sup> in the country in 2016 for our four-year graduation rate for white students, we ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> for Latinx (Hispanic/Latino) and 19<sup>th</sup> for Black (African American/Black) students.<sup>22</sup> Please note, these gaps continue to exist, and can be seen as manifestations of differing experiences in schools and communities by race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, and more. For instance, the 2020 four-year graduation rate<sup>23</sup> for white students was 93 percent, which was 10 percentage points higher than for African American/Black students (83 percent), and 16 percentage points higher than for Hispanic/Latino students (77 percent). Furthermore, when compared to the 2020 four-year graduation rate for all students (89 percent), economically disadvantaged students had a rate that was 8 percentage points lower (81 percent), and students with disabilities had a rate that was 14 percentage points lower (75 percent). Similarly, when looking at rates of student discipline (i.e., removal from class for suspension or expulsion), that gaps between student groups is deeply disturbing. While gaps have made important strides to shrink, in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino student rates of removal were approximately 2.7 and 2.2 times that of white students, respectively. This is an improvement from the 3.5 and 2.9 multiplier in 2015-2016, but continues to point to the need for rethinking discipline practices in schools across the Commonwealth,<sup>24</sup> an essential goal in the state's

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20 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](http://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.

21 See [https://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/inline-files/HLH%20Messaging\\_FINAL10.29.pdf](https://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/inline-files/HLH%20Messaging_FINAL10.29.pdf).

22 See <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2019/2019-06/item2.docx> and <https://number1forsome.org/>.

23 Source: DESE 2020 Graduation Rate Statewide Report. <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/gradrates.aspx.11.3.21>. For more about the data see: <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx?section=students#gradrate>.

24 12.12.21 School Safety and Discipline Report (SSDR), 2018-19 and 2019-2020 data from

<https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/ssdr.aspx>, and analysis of 2015-16 data from

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2017/2016-11/item8.html>

[Rethinking Discipline Initiative](#) and the 2012 [Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School](#) (Chapter 222).

The past two years have 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 highlighted and deepened ethnic and racial disparities and the dire need to support schools and districts in working towards creating safe and supportive learning environments, while also increasing people’s understanding and energy to engage in this work. In turn, the Commission has intensified an explicit focus on the impact of systemic racism and on 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. Related to these efforts, the Commission also seeks to increase the degree to which Commission meetings and documents are informed by diverse perspectives from multiple identities and experiences (including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, school and home community, and more).

*The Commission offers the following examples of specific Department 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. In the professional development’s goals, include ways to build educators’ and agency staff capacity to engage in reflecting on biases and identify ways to improve student, staff, and family experiences, informed by research, learning, and practice. Ensure that educators are able to help inform the design of the professional development experiences, so the experiences can be most effective.

Note that this learning helps support Model Rubric expectations, including but not limited to the Learning Environment Indicator (including Safe Learning Environment, Collaborative Learning Environment, and Student Motivation) and the Cultural Proficiency Indicator (Creates and Maintains a Respectful Environment) in the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation.<sup>25</sup>

- 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 to ensure that voices with diverse points of view in the educational system are informing Commission activities and decisions. Consider Commission meetings, focus groups, and other efforts to inform Commission and Department resources, e.g., framework and tool revisions. Where

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25 For more information on the Model Rubrics see <https://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/rubrics/>

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 equity focused topics, including racial and ethnic equity, 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 equity focused topics, including racial and ethnic equity, 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 diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity, among 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 initiatives with schools and districts and other partners, such as those described below that provide guidance, technical support and professional development to educators.

Also, for future workforce diversity initiatives across Department offices, the Commission encourages consideration of efforts that include a focus on Specialized Support Personnel (school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers/adjustment counselors).

The Department's [Center for Strategic Initiatives](#) provides [examples](#) of important, ongoing efforts to diversify the educator workforce which include:

- o [Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies for a Diverse Massachusetts Teacher Workforce](#) – a guidebook that supports 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.
- o [Teacher diversification pilot program](#) – a grant program designed to support local school district efforts to strengthen and diversify existing teacher recruitment and retention programs. This program embraces a number of strategies, such as tuition assistance to support enrollment into approved educator preparation programs, state tests for educator licensure (MTEL) preparation and examination vouchers, and other teacher recruitment and retention efforts (e.g., high school education pathways, loan repayment reimbursement, relocation allowances, and signing bonuses).
- o [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.
- o [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.

- [Teacher Diversification Professional Learning Community](#) (TDPLC) — a 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 100 districts and schools.
- f. Promote the goals of the cross-sector [Strengthening Partnerships: Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement Framework](#) and related family and community engagement initiatives at the Department. Examples of initiatives are described on the Office of Student and Family Support (SFS) family engagement web page, such as the [Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center](#), the [Family School Partnership Initiative](#), a [year-long family engagement networking and professional development series](#), and more.

These goals support efforts to build capacity at the state and local levels to help schools more actively and effectively engage families and community partners 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 LGBTQ. These efforts can leverage and deepen relationships where they have been built or strengthened by increased family engagement efforts in many communities over the past two years, prompted in part by shifts between remote and in-person learning, by the intensified role numerous community organizations have played in relation to student learning and access to physical or social-emotional needs, and by other health and wellbeing challenges for students, families, and staff. These family and community engagement goals align with the [Commissioner's 2021-2022 school year goals](#), which include fostering a sense of belonging and partnership among students and families (including robust social-emotional supports for students). Additionally, these goals speak to support for districts to implement the [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.*

- g. Explore building meaningful partnerships with other Massachusetts education associations to develop a common and aligned message about racial equity and anti-racist education. Statewide organizations represented on the Commission (please see Appendix C for a full list of organizations and representatives) have worked on creating mission statements and language around supporting anti-racist efforts with the outcome of supporting student's wellbeing and positive student outcomes. Continuing Department partnerships with these

organizations to collaborate on common messaging and ways to strengthen multi-tiered systems of support can yield increased supports for students, build common ground, and increase consistency across stakeholders.

***RECOMMENDATION 3:  
PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS***

**The Commission recommends the Department continue to create, increase awareness of, and promote opportunities that strengthen, enhance, and recognize safe and supportive learning environments.**

- **This includes helping districts and schools to learn about the resources available through the revised Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool and the associated grant program, and other Department efforts that support aligned goals.**
- **This also includes prioritizing, where appropriate, communication with local family and youth organizers, communities experiencing the greatest inequities and the greatest readiness to engage in cycles of inquiry and improvement related to strengthening equitable, safe and supportive learning environments for students, staff and families from all racial/ethnic identities, cultural backgrounds, and experiences.**
- **This also includes raising awareness of the need for and value of safe and supporting learning environments that can both prevent and address pressing concerns about behavioral and behavioral health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE),<sup>26</sup> substance-use disorder (SUD), and co-occurring disorders among children and adolescents. This includes taking an assets-based approach to help schools, districts, and community partners in making connections between mental and behavioral health challenges as well as other initiatives focused on increasing student engagement (e.g., Rethinking Discipline Initiative) with the goal of furthering efforts to establish comprehensive school mental health systems in all districts.**
- **This also includes continuing efforts to further identify ways to promote and increase student and family voice and engagement and use data to inform decisions - to help develop the capacity of schools and districts to offer anti-racist, equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments.**

Now more than ever, it is essential for schools and school districts to recognize, and for state leaders to validate, the importance of creating safe and supportive schools and districts grounded in anti-racist and equity focused values for students across the Commonwealth. A key component of this work is building and strengthening relationships between school staff,

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<sup>26</sup> As described by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, the experience of Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE) can be a function of experiencing inequities in our social systems, institution such as school or government, and living conditions. Dr. Ginwright is a leader of the Healing-Centered Engagement model, a strength-based approach that promotes a collective view of healing – an ongoing process that must also focus on restoring and sustaining the practitioners who work with and support youth.

students, families, and community-based partners. According to the Education Trust’s recently released brief, [The Importance of Strong Relationships](#),<sup>27</sup> the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has left students in turmoil as a result of traumatic experiences. Furthermore, they found that “Students who have access to more strong relationships are more academically engaged, have stronger social skills, and experience more positive behavior.” 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, especially in regions where the need for this work is high. Examples of these practices can continue to 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 of efforts to promote and strengthen safe and supportive schools include the following:

- Help districts with capacity, skills, and resources to be able provide adequate mental health services and multi-tiered systems of support for all students. This includes offering professional development for districts’ existing school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists to efficiently and effectively maximize their time to provide necessary counseling services. This also includes allocating more resources for qualified mental health services, and partnering with other entities (e.g., districts and higher education) to improve the pipeline for prospective counselors and social workers; and providing opportunities for internships and apprenticeships in school districts related to offering additional, high-quality mental health services.
- Encourage school and district efforts to incorporate goals related to safe and supportive learning environments into further updates to their [Student Opportunity Act \(SOA\) Plans](#) (with amendments next due spring 2022), and other types of School and District Improvement Plans. As a part of this, help districts where appropriate to consider ways the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool resources can be used to inform this work.
- Support schools and districts in grounding improvement efforts in the [Essential Elements](#) woven throughout the framework and tool (*support all students, deepen understanding, advance equity, exemplify cultural responsiveness, and continually reflect and adapt*).
- Assist schools and districts with guidance on ways to gather and use available data and evidence to effectively inform root cause analyses — 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 historically 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) and other reports available through [Edwin Analytics](#); [School Safety and Discipline Report](#) (SSDR); [restraint data collection tool](#); and any additional information from local data collection efforts, particularly data sources that allow for disaggregation by race, gender, and more. Local efforts might include universal mental health screenings; social-emotional

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27 Education Trust. [The Importance of Strong Relationships](#). March 2021. <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Importance-of-Strong-Relationships-as-a-Strategy-to-Solve-Unfinished-Learning-March-2021.pdf>.



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.

- Support school staff with strategies and resources that help address students' behavioral health needs and create safe and supportive learning environments. Consider ways to gather additional information from Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, participants in the [Rethinking Discipline](#) Professional Learning Network, and participants in the Systemic Student Support (S3) Academy about their successes and challenges and needs and consult with other stakeholders as appropriate. This information can help guide the Department as it develops or refers to professional learning materials, workshops, institutes, and other opportunities that respond to stakeholders' specific requests for materials to enhance school/district capacity to lead the process of creating safe and supportive schools.
- As previously noted, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities (e.g., educational, health, economic, etc.) for students, families, and staff members throughout the Commonwealth. This includes but is not limited to students of color, LGBTQ students, and students who are economically disadvantaged. 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. In addition to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, two examples of Department resource documents that can help support these efforts include: the [Acceleration Roadmap](#) and [Promoting Student Engagement, Learning, Wellbeing and Safety](#). Additionally, the Department is encouraged to support schools and districts, through professional learning materials, workshops, and other opportunities, in understanding the best ways to utilize support staff to improve mental and behavioral health outcomes for students. The Department is also encouraged to find ways to direct additional funding specifically to increase schools' capacity to provide mental and behavioral supports and wellness for students, staff, and families.

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 overarching focus is to help inform efforts that assist school communities across the Commonwealth with creating safe and supportive learning environments for *all* students. This spring, our educational community will be entering a third year navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and the tremendous impact that it has had on our schools and our students, staff, families, and community partners. Now, more than ever, creating and sustaining safe and supportive schools is critical. It is also essential that we build on, commend, and learn from prior successful local and state efforts related to school culture and climate.

Safe and supportive learning environments:

- ...support the whole child in forming positive relationships with adults and peers, self-regulating emotions and behaviors, achieving high academic standards, and being physically and emotionally healthy. In turn, undertaking a safe and supportive schools approach requires the provision of support to adults to ensure they feel prepared and equipped to do this work.
- ...value the ability of educators to integrate 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.
- ...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. These environments 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 ongoing impact of COVID-19 and how to best prepare to support schools and districts in a post pandemic world, the Commission plans to consider and explore ways to focus on the following areas during this upcoming year and beyond.

***Commission focus areas under consideration for 2022 and beyond are outlined below.***

These areas are informed by the Commission's [legislative charges](#)<sup>28</sup> as well as the annual recommendations included in this report (see Recommendations section).

- With the completion of the latest version of the Safe and Supportive School Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, the Commission's focus will shift to identifying which data the Commission, Department, and schools can review to help **assess effective strategies for schools and districts to strengthen safe and supportive learning environments**. This information can help guide the Department as it develops or refers to professional learning materials, workshops, institutes, and other opportunities. Some possible data points, both qualitative and quantitative, could include, but are not limited to:
  - a. [VOCAL](#) student climate survey data
  - b. State Youth Risk Behavior Survey ([YRBS](#)) data

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28 Commission charges noted in the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law](#) (G.L., c.69, § .1P) are outlined on the Commission's web page: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/commission.html#responsibilities>

- c. [VISTA](#) or other superintendent and principal surveys (if administered)
  - d. School districts with goals in their school and/or district improvement plans that focus on creating and sustaining safe and supportive schools
  - e. Student, staff, and family focus groups
  - f. Department Grantee focus groups
  - g. Department Grantee action plans
- Promote and support the Department’s efforts to foster safe and supportive schools in every Massachusetts school district by encouraging and/or incentivizing districts to use the recently revised **Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool**. This could be accomplished through efforts associated with developing school and district improvement plans, Rethinking Discipline Initiative action plans, Sustainable Improvement Plans, and other strategic initiatives. Specifically, the focus will likely be on districts across the Commonwealth that are most ready to engage in this work or have identified needs in the realm of safe and supportive schools. In addition, the focus will be on the Commission, grantees, and others continuing to provide input to the Department in order to **inform future updates and refinements to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool** based on current trends and research in the areas of social emotional learning, equity, and anti-racist education.
  - Support the Department’s efforts to complete the [revision process](#) for the 1999 **Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Framework**. This includes working with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to seek public comment and then approve a revised version of the framework; and then supporting effective implementation across the state of new standards (once adopted) that address health, physical education, and social-emotional learning competencies.
  - Encourage districts to **review and utilize the Department’s [FAQ on Race, Racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching in History and Social Science in Massachusetts](#)**; to engage in and build off available equity-focused professional development opportunities; and to utilize other pertinent resources with respect to race, anti-racism efforts, and culturally responsive teaching.
  - Through Commission meetings, deepen members’ **understanding and capacity related to advancing goals and strategies that promote equity** related to race and ethnicity; gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation; language and differing abilities; family income levels; and more. This includes finding ways to increase the degree to which the Commission’s work is informed by **diverse perspectives**, including but not limited to diversity related to race and ethnicity as well as sexual orientation and gender identity.
  - Identify ways to further the tenets of safe and supportive schools in the **context of the COVID-19 pandemic** and its wake. This includes accelerating learning, closing opportunity gaps, and providing appropriate social emotional supports, especially in communities that have experienced disparate impacts associated with race/ethnicity, income, and more.

- Continue to find ways to strengthen, communicate and promote **social emotional learning, health, and wellness** associated with guidance and promising practices shared by the Department, schools, and other agencies and organizations. This can be accomplished by examining **possible staffing models** and available **professional development opportunities** and trainings for schools/districts to consider related to most effectively using behavioral and mental health practitioners, through a safe and supportive school lens, including providing adequate mental health services and multi-tiered and integrated systems of support for students and staff in all school districts. This involves, but is not limited to, using school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists efficiently and effectively to maximize their time to provide necessary counseling services; allocating more resources for qualified mental health services; improving the higher education pipeline for prospective specialized instructional support personnel (counselors, psychologists, social workers, adjustment counselors, and nurses); and providing opportunities for internships and apprenticeships in school districts of qualified mental health services. Additionally, further research other state's efforts to consider if there are effective behavioral and mental health service models elsewhere that the Commission and Department can learn from and potentially adopt or adapt. This can also include making additional recommendations regarding schools' **access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services**.
- Find opportunities to actively seek input and listen to **students, educators and family voices** and learn from other efforts to do so (e.g., <https://students-speak.org/> or the Department's regional family coalition meetings or listening sessions, etc.) to best inform Commission meetings and documents, and the Department's (and other member organizations') professional development opportunities.
- Consider ways to further efforts related to effective **collaboration with families**, during the COVID-19 era and beyond. Some possibilities include promoting resources such as the cross-agency [Family Engagement Framework](#) and associated guidance and training. [Examples](#) of Department family engagement initiatives include the *Family School Partnership Initiative (FSPI)* – an opportunity being piloted with several districts to receive training, coaching, and strategic planning support to strengthen district systems for family engagement, and the *Family Institutes for Student Success (FISS)* – implemented in more than a half-dozen districts, with 9-week family institutes and professional development for school staff that helps to strengthen family-school collaboration and more actively engage families in their children's education.
- Work with associations that Commission members represent (e.g., Massachusetts associations of superintendents, school committees, administrators, teachers, counselors, students, and more) to inform the Department's efforts to build **leadership capacity** for superintendents, principals, school committee members, and others to create and maintain safe and supportive environments. This could include, but is not limited to, the use of the Safe and Supportive Framework and Self-Reflection Tool and professional development opportunities.

## Commission Activities Undertaken in 2021

Commission areas of top priority focus in 2021 included the following:

- **Providing and Facilitating Additional Feedback on the Updated Safe and Supportive Schools Framework/Tool**
  - *To inform further updated version this spring/summer, as well as future iterations*
  - *To help the resources be as useful as possible to communities in this upcoming year (and beyond)*
- **Advancing Racial Equity**
  - *Considering Commission meetings, focus groups, and other efforts to inform Commission and Department resources, e.g., framework and tool revisions.*
- **Sharing ways with each other to best support the return to full in-person school**
  - *Sharing strategies, challenges, ideas, concerns, etc.*
  - *Considering ways the framework/tool and related resources can be helpful supports*
- ***Woven throughout all – student and family voice/engagement***

Below is a brief summary of activities conducted during this seventh year of the Commission.

**Seven Commission meetings** were convened in 2021, including a two-part summer retreat. All meetings occurred virtually per the [extension to the open meeting law](#) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary agenda topics at the meetings were as follows. Additionally, meetings generally included some time for Department updates as well as some time for Commission members and participants to share in small groups about ongoing challenges and successes related to Commission topics.

- **February 8, 2021**

*Student voice* presentation from Massachusetts Advocates for Children's ([MAC](#)) Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative ([TLPI](#)) team and Harvard Law Clinic Students. The presentation and discussion were a follow-up to information shared and discussed with the Commission during the prior few years. The presentation previewed a new [Students Speak website](#), co-created by Harvard Law School's Law Clinic and secondary school students from a diverse set of schools, communities and backgrounds - who all want to help schools become safe and supportive learning environments. The website shares students' thoughts about what they need in order to do well in school, and includes the [student focus group report](#) presented previously to the Commission; information about a State House briefing led by students; and a section where high school students shared through zoom interviews in 2020 about experiences and ideas related to racial justice, remote learning, and student voice. The site also includes pages for themes found across many of the students' statements (e.g., related to the learning environment, relationships, equity, and genuine learning).

- **April 14, 2021**  
Review and feedback on the *Leadership & Culture* section of the framework and tool; and a vote upon 2021 Commission focus areas (see above).
- **May 10, 2021**  
Honoring of Susan Cole (see “Remembering Susan Cole” on page 5 of this report); and review and feedback on the *Family and Community Engagement* section of the framework and tool.
- **July 20 and August 11 two-part summer retreat**  
PART ONE (July 20): Facilitated with the Equity Imperative, the Department’s primary professional development provider for the safe and supportive schools and rethinking discipline current professional development series (and the 2020 summer retreat part I facilitator). The session, *Hope and Healing Through Active Anti-Racism*, focused on supporting student wellbeing and advancing racial equity amidst increasing polarization, and addressing what Critical Race Theory (CRT) is and is not in the context of heightened attention to CRT in education. The facilitator reviewed definitions and explanations of critical race theory - and what it is and is not, and other key terms in anti-racist equity focused work. Discussion included aspects of organizational routines that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students. The facilitator and Commission also discussed structural racism and nested racial dynamics.

PART TWO (August): An overview of the updated framework and tool was provided, including ways feedback was invited and received, reviewed, and considered. This feedback included discussions during 2021 Commission meetings on topics described above, as well as feedback from prior years’ meetings.

NOTE: Three focus groups were run between January and May 2021 to provide additional feedback. Two were offered through organizations represented on the Commission: the *Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives* (MOEC) - with their leadership board on January 6, 2021; and the *Parent Professional Advocacy League* (PPAL) - with family members on February 4, 2021. The third group was with a group of students and offered through the *Pa'lante Restorative Justice Program*, from Holyoke High School’s Dean Campus on May 26, 2021. The groups were facilitated by the Commission Co-Chair and/or other Department staff and the BlueScope Group (the Department’s partner on the framework and tool revision process). The Commission and Department are grateful to the participants and organizers for sharing their helpful time and insights.

Feedback was also received from Department staff representing numerous offices and focus areas, to help the resources to be better informed by, aligned with, and complementary to initiatives across the Department. Additionally, an [invitation](#) to provide feedback was posted on the Department’s Safe and Supportive Schools [website](#).

At the Part two summer retreat meeting, Department staff also familiarized the Commission with how to use the tool and provided login instructions and credentials for groups to review and discuss part of the Preliminary Self-Reflection section of the tool. Small groups used a

sample school profile and reflected on the first retreat session and how they might answer the tool questions if they were from that school, and the implications of any insights gleaned during the experience. Feedback about the experience was then shared by facilitators with Department staff and Commission Co-Chairs.

- **October 4, 2021**

Review and discussion of draft annual recommendations; and presentation from Shelagh Peoples, Psychometric Coordinator, from the Department's Office of Planning and Research on data from the spring 2021 Views on Climate and Learning (VOCAL) student climate survey. The [VOCAL](#) survey asks questions related to student engagement, student safety, and school environment. Sample data and summary details were shared.

- **November 9, 2021**

Deliberation and vote on the major substance of recommendations to include in the annual report, and future directions to consider for 2022 and beyond.

Commission member updates:

**The Commission welcomed five new members**, appointed by the organizations cited in the legislation authorizing the Commission that had vacancies in their member spots.

*Starting with the February 2021 Meeting:*

- Madeline Aviles-Hernandez, VP of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, [Gándara Center](#), a 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 - appointed by the Secretary of Education. Dr. Aviles-Hernandez served at the February 2021 meeting and later in the year accepted a position at another organization, and the Commission thanks her for her service and wishes her the best.
- Susan Farrell, Executive Director of the [Central MA Collaborative](#) - appointed by the MA Association of Educational Collaboratives ([MOEC](#)).
- Jack Kamataris, Jr. at Marlborough High School, and Vice-Chair of State Student Advisory Council (SSAC) – appointed by the [SSAC](#).

*Starting with the July 2021 meeting:*

- Marisa del Rosario, Trauma-Sensitive Schools Specialist, TLPI – appointed by MAC. Ms. Del Rosario has contributed for years to the Commission's work as part of the MAC team, and we welcome her in her new role as member.
- Heidi Gold, Senior Policy Manager, MA Executive Office of Education (EOE) - appointed by the Secretary of Education (the Secretary's Designee).

The Department and Commission are **extremely grateful for the years of generous and helpful contributions of the following people during their time as members:**

- **Susan Cole**, Founder and Director of the Trauma Policy Learning Initiative (TLPI), and a Senior Director at Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), served as a Commission member for more than 6 years until she passed away this spring. Ms. Cole was appointed by MAC at the start of the Commission (in winter 2014), and she was the first member-selected Co-Chair and served two terms in that capacity (for four years, 2015-2018). Ms. Cole’s leadership and contributions on the Commission made a tremendous impact will be long lasting, and she will be greatly missed. Please see “Remembering Susan Cole” on page 5 of this report and Appendix E for more information.
- **Colleen Galvin Labbe**, Social Emotional and Academic Development Instructional Coach, Office of Health and Wellness, Academic Division, Boston Public Schools, served **from** March 2019 through December 2021 while representing **AFT-MA as well as the MTA**. The Department and Commission thank Ms. Labbe for her service and wish her the best in her continued work in education.
- **Alexis Lian**, Staff Director, Massachusetts STEM Advisory Council, Executive Office of Education, served from May 2020 through May 2021 while representing the Secretary of Education (EOE Designee). The Department and Commission thank Ms. Lian for her service and wish her the best in her new position outside of EOE.
- **Cathy Riccio**, Nurse Leader, Newburyport Public Schools, served from April 2019 through her retirement in June 2021. Ms. Riccio represented the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization (MSNO). The Department and Commission congratulates Ms. Riccio on her retirement and thanks her for her years of service to the Commission and field of education.
- **Laura Stevenson**, Principal, Holbrook Middle-High School, served from February 2019 through her retirement in June 2021. Mrs. Stevenson represented the Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA). The Department and Commission congratulates Mrs. Stevenson on her retirement and thanks her for her years of service to the Commission and field of education.

**The Commission is thankful to all members** for their time, contributions, insights, and dedication to efforts with and beyond the Commission that can help make schools more safe and supportive for all students. See Appendix C for a list of 2021 members.

Commission meetings are open to the public, and the Commission is also thankful to all **participating guests**, for their interest and willingness to attend meetings to learn and to contribute to the Commission’s discussion when possible. Attendees who participated in more than half of 2021 Commission meetings included Laurie Burnett, John Crocker, Anne Eisner, Paul Hry-Dermith, Dot Lucci, Michael Gregory, Joan Wasser Gish, and Denise Wolk - as well as Jeff Perrotti and Kimm Topping from the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students (a collaborative effort between the Department and the Commission on LGBTQ Youth).



The Commission also thanks all **Department staff and consultants** who assisted with 2021 Commission efforts, and in particular Stacy Cabral for helping inform and move forward all Commission work; Emily Taylor for a variety of contributions including preparing minutes for every Commission meeting this year; and Cyndi Weekes-Bradley (who was a Department consultant until August 2021) for informing the content and process for the revisions to the framework and tool.

## **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:*** From January through June 2021, the Department continued its contract partnership with the *BlueScope Group* 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 <http://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](#) 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 are currently and plan for future efforts. 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.

An updated [Self-Reflection Tool](#) 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 begin to develop a shared 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 work with 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 will continue to be finalized during the 2021-2022 school year. The Department continues to seek [feedback](#) on the updated versions, and plans to make further refinements informed by this feedback over time.

***Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program:*** In July 2021, the Department posted the FY2022 Safe and Supportive Schools Competitive Grant opportunity, Fund Code [\(FC\) 335](#). Grant applications were due on August 24, 2021. Information about this competitive grant opportunity were included in both the July 19, 2021 [Commissioner's Weekly Update](#) and the August, 202

[Holistic Supports & Enrichment: Strengthening Social Emotional Competencies, Health & Safety newsletter.](#)

The Safe and Supportive Schools Continuation Grant, [FC 337](#), was made available in July 2021, 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](#).

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 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 12 applications were submitted for this competitive funding and 9 entities (including 2 regional school districts, 1 charter school district, and 6 other school districts) were [awarded](#) grants to support efforts in 22 schools or programs. Option One (Action Planning) grantees (5) were awarded up to \$10,000 each and Option 2 (Implementation/Mentoring) grantees (4) were awarded up to \$10,000 each. In total, \$84,320 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 FY2021 competitive grant, to implement items from the action plans they created using the self- assessment tool last year (FY2021 Option 1 grantees) or to continue implementing action plans created previously and to continue to serve as mentor/support for others (FY2021 Option 2 grantees). A total of 14 districts were awarded continuation grants, for use in approximately 36 schools or educational programs, supported by \$135,950 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. Some of the work planned for 2021 was put on hold due to the continued pandemic-related school closures and the school re-opening and hybrid efforts in the 2020-2021 school year. That said, CES was able to provide the Department with feedback on leadership supports and district needs as well as a review of participation and feedback on professional development opportunities described below. This work from CES will be used to help support the 2021-2022 grantees. Additional work is planned for 2022, including reviewing action plans created after completing the updated Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Reflection Tool and participating in the anti-racist professional development opportunities.

**Professional development to support work related to safe and supportive schools:** During the 2020-2021 School Year, the Department created a yearlong professional development series that included webinars and virtual networking meetings. The Department continued the contract with the [Equity Imperative](#), a portion of which is funded through the safe and supportive schools line-item 7061-9612, to provide in depth professional development pathways on topics related to equity and anti-racist practices in family engagement, instruction & curriculum, discipline, and other areas of school operations. These pathways were offered throughout the 2020-2021 school year (two during 2020, and three during 2021). The pathway opportunities were listed in Commissioner’s Weekly Update newsletters, Holistic Supports & Enrichment: Strengthening Social Emotional Competencies, Health & Safety newsletters, and on the Safe and Supportive Schools grant page. More than 600 people registered for these sessions. Based on available participation data, CES found that at least 265 people attended the sessions from at least 71 school districts. Nearly two-thirds of attendees were administrators. Thirty-two were principals (or equivalent positions at charter schools), and 26 were assistant principals. Other administrative roles noted by multiple attendants included curriculum coordinators or directors, directors of family and/or community partnerships, assistant or associate superintendents, and deans of students. Among non-administrative attendees, the most frequent roles noted included guidance and/or adjustment counselors, teachers, and family outreach liaisons. Additionally, the recordings and materials from the pathways have been requested over 200 times.

The feedback received on the pathways was overwhelmingly positive. Participants were asked to reflect on their learning and plan for next steps. One shared “I have attended many sessions built upon the idea of diving deeper into race. This was the first one that I felt did what it said it was going to do and I gained a better understanding of concepts”. Many stated that they needed to share the information from the pathways with colleagues and one shared they would begin “concretely calling out the racism embedded in the systems we see so commonplace in school. This always helps me continuously reflect as a critical analyst on our practice”.

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

- Confronting the racist history of our schools and society, and 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 to 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.

The first two of these online modules were made available in January 2021. Participants completed online asynchronous learning on their own and then met virtually with the Equity Imperative to deepen their learning. The cohort will continue their work later in the winter of 2022 and additional cohorts will have access to the modules in the winter as well. The Safe and Supportive Schools and Rethinking Discipline [professional development calendar](#) shows additional offerings planned for the 2021-2022 school year.

***Department Safe and Supportive Schools Staffing:*** Funds from the safe and supportive school line item also enable 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.

***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.

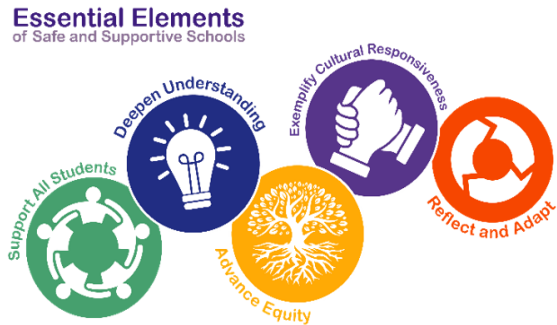
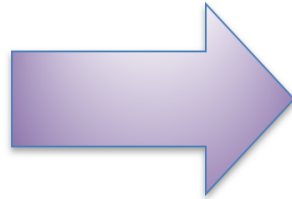
These efforts will be detailed further in subsequent legislative reports, including one forthcoming related to Student Wellness School Supports (line-item [7061-9650](#)) and Social Emotional learning Grants (line-item [7061-0028](#)). These two sources are funding efforts including but not limited to Fund Codes (FC) [613/311](#) *Supporting Students' Social Emotional Learning, Behavioral & Mental, and Wellness through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (SEL & Mental Health Grant)*; 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 examples of many that are in support of the larger umbrella of creating safe and supportive learning environments, and that will build upon and will help further inform work related to the principles of effective practice, the framework, and the tool. Select additional examples of related efforts can be found on the [Mental and Behavioral Health](#) section of the Department's COVID-19 Resources pages.

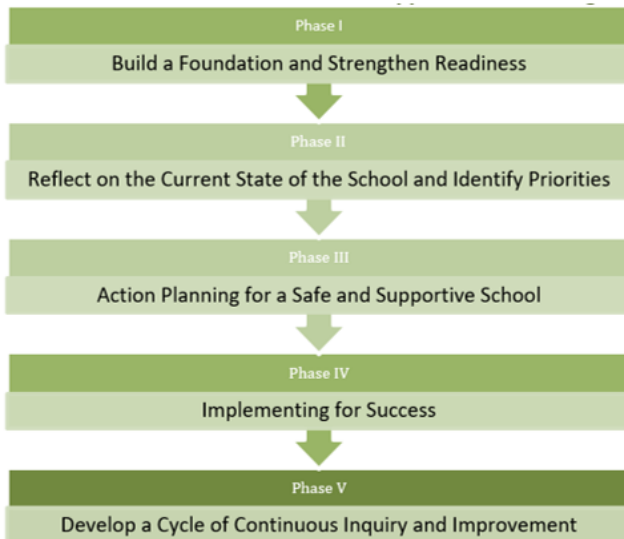
# APPENDIX A: Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Implementation Guide and Self-Reflection Tool, AT-A-GLANCE

The [Safe and Supportive Schools \(SaSS\) Framework and Self-Reflection Tool](#) offers a comprehensive process for school teams to use in collaborative reflection, planning and implementation efforts. For more details see this [video](#) or this [feedback](#) page.

The foundation for the SASS Framework are the [Essential Elements](#) of a Safe and Supportive School



## A Five-Phase Approach to Creating a Safe and Supportive School



The SaSS Framework guides school-based teams through a phased process to create plans based on their local context through a data informed examination of student needs and opportunities, school operations, personnel, processes, policies, family connections, and community services and partnerships available to create a safer and more supportive school climate and culture.

The process supports a locally run approach for school teams to lead the entire staff to develop a deeper awareness of the benefits of the Essential Elements of a safe and supportive school, and the need to make their own school safer and more supportive.



## Implementation Levers

There are six defined [Implementation Levers](#) which include guiding questions and rubrics that speak to a number of areas of school operation in which to focus the planning, implementation, and continuous improvement of initiatives, activities, and other work associated with a school's implementation of the SaSS Framework.

Level 1: Leadership and Culture

Level 2: Family and Community Engagement

Level 3: Professional Learning Opportunities

Level 4: Access to Resources and Services

Level 5: Teaching and Learning

Level 6: Policies and Procedures

The Essential Elements are used as Indicators within each of the Levers to help teams gauge how each of them is in evidence within a school, and where progress needs to be made to improve conditions and outcomes for students, staff, families, and communities.

## SaSS Self-Reflection Tool

The [Self-Reflection Tool](#) is aligned to the Implementation Levers and has two parts. The *Preliminary Self-Reflection* is for teams to use during Phase I to explore how the Essential Elements are currently being practiced or are already embedded in the school, and where gaps exist – and to consider priority areas for greater focus. During Phase II, the planning team uses the *Deeper Dive Self-Reflection* to identify areas where additional school-based action, efforts, guidance, and support are needed to create, expand upon, and maintain safe and supportive schools.

The image displays two screenshots of the SaSS Self-Reflection Tool. The left screenshot shows the 'Preliminary' section, which includes instructions for users to indicate current thoughts and experiences regarding the following questions: Q1: What is one, or a few, of the greatest strengths the school currently has regarding ways the learning environment is safe and supportive? Q2: What is one, or a few, of the greatest concerns that you have regarding the learning environment? Below the questions is a scale for indicating agreement: 1=Strongly, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly, and Unknown or No. The right screenshot shows the 'Deeper Dive' section, which features a navigation menu with buttons for Level 1: Leadership & Culture, Level 2: Family Engagement, Level 3: Professional Learning Opportunities, Level 4: Access to Resources and Services, Level 5: Teaching & Learning, and Level 6: Policies and Procedures. It also includes a 'Go to next page' button and instructions on how to use the tool, such as clicking 'SAVE' buttons and using the menu to navigate between levers.

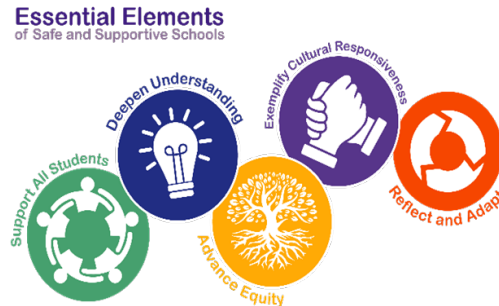
The self-reflection tool is designed to inform *Action Planning* (Phase III) and Implementation efforts (Phase IV). This work is intended to be a part of ongoing Cycles of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement (Phase V).

Together the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework [Implementation Guide](#) and [Self-Reflection Tool](#) provides a thoughtful and inclusive process for districts and schools to use to examine current operations; identify strengths, challenges, and growing edges; and create, implement, and assess concrete plans to improve school climate, culture, and safety for every student from every identity and background – and to support all staff, families, and partners too.



## APPENDIX B: Essential Elements of a Safe and Supportive School

This [Essential Elements](http://SaSSMA.org) one pager can be found live on <http://SaSSMA.org>.



**Safe and Supportive Schools excel in embedding the following Essential Elements throughout the school.**

### ***Support All Students to:***

- Feel safe-physically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically
- Build community connectedness and positive relationships with adults, families/guardians, and peers of similar and different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds
- Manage and self-regulate their emotions and behaviors
- Experience a sense of agency and effectively self-advocate in appropriate ways
- Engage effectively and productively with learning experiences
- Develop a sense of competence and academic success with multiple opportunities to learn and practice newly developing skills as part of a productive community
- Experience physical health and well-being

**Deepen Understanding** of all stakeholders of the need for safe and supportive schools and using a whole-school approach that values the expertise of educators and includes the voices of students and families, and acknowledges the urgency for addressing systemic inequities, including racism, trauma's impact on learning, and other systemic issues

**Advance Equity, Including Racial Equity**, across the school and community for all students, families, and staff by addressing systemic inequities, eliminating predictable disparities, and ensuring students are engaged and challenged to achieve their fullest potential.

**Exemplify Cultural Responsiveness** in the school and community to value students' identities and dismantle implicit biases and systemic inequalities to create learning environments that welcome, include, and support all students to deeply learn, grow, and thrive.

**Reflect and Adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students, families, and staff and the surrounding community by working together as a team with a sense of shared responsibility for all.

## APPENDIX C: Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Members

*Note: Commission members are appointed by entities as outlined in G.L., c.69, §.1P.*

<b>Agency / District / Role Represented</b>	<b>2021 Member Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-MA / MA Teachers Association (MTA)	Colleen Galvin Labbe	AFT-MA/BTU Member; Social Emotional and Academic Development Instructional Coach, Office of Health and Wellness, Academics Division, Boston Public Schools
Community-based organization (CBO) representative that provides services as part of the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI), and that provides mental health services in schools	Madeline Aviles-Hernandez	VP of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Gándara Center
MA Administrators for Special Education (ASE)	John Salovardos	Director of Pupil Services, Athol-Royalston Regional School District
MA Advocates for Children (MAC)	Susan Cole then Marissa del Rosario	(Cole) MAC Senior Project Director, and Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) Director / (del Rosario) Trauma-Sensitive Schools Specialist, Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
MA Association of School Committees (MASC)	Ellen Holmes	MASC President; Ashburnham-Westminster Reg. School Committee Member
MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS)	John Doherty	Commission Co-Chair (Selected by Commission Members); MASS Professional Development Chair, Retired Superintendent, Reading Public Schools
MA Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers	Margie Daniels	Social Worker, and Executive Director, Middlesex Partnerships for Youth
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)	Rachelle Engler Bennett	Commission Co-Chair (DESE Designee); Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support
MA Organization of Education Collaboratives (MOEC)	Susan Farrell	Central Mass Collaborative Executive Director
MA Recovery High School representative with expertise in adolescent substance use disorders	Michelle Lipinski	Principal, Northshore Recovery High School
MA School Administrators Association (MSAA)	Laura Stevenson	Principal, Holbrook Middle - High School
MA School Counselors Association (MASCA)	Donna M. Brown	MASCA Immediate Past Executive Director

MA School Nurse Organization (MSNO)	Cathy Riccio	Nurse Leader, Newburyport Public Schools
MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	Andria Amador	Senior Dir., Behavioral Health Services, Boston Public Schools; and MSPA Past President
Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	Joel Khattar	Program Manager
Practitioner of the Framework	Sara Burd	Director of Social Emotional Learning and Guidance, Arlington Public Schools
Secretary of Education (EOE Designee)	Alexis Lian then Heidi Gold	(Lian) Staff Director, Massachusetts STEM Advisory Council, Executive Office of Education, MA Executive of Education / (Gold) Senior Policy Manager, MA Executive Office of Education (EOE)
State Student Advisory Council (SSAC)	Jack Kamataris	SSAC Vice Chair, and Marlborough High School Student
University of MA - Boston, Former BHPS Taskforce Member and Tool Developer/Evaluator	Melissa Pearrow	Executive Director, Behavioral Health Integrated Resources for Children (BIRCh) Project; Associate Professor in School of Counseling and School Psychology, College of Education and Human Development; and School Psychology Program Director, UMass Boston; and MSPA Past President

## **APPENDIX D: 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>.

## **APPENDIX E: Moment of Silence and House Tribute to Susan Cole**

Read at the end of the Formal House Session on May 18, 2021

"Today we mourn the passing of Susan Cole, one of the state's leading advocates on addressing child trauma. We send our sympathies to her family and colleagues. Susan was not just an expert in her field, but through her work at Massachusetts Advocates for Children, she was also a friend and trusted partner of the House of Representatives on policies improving the lives of our most vulnerable children. Her leadership and perseverance on behalf of the children of the Commonwealth lasted for almost two decades. Susan's work advocating for Safe and Supportive Schools has made Massachusetts a leader in these efforts and her input over the years on state budget and policy to address child trauma cannot be understated. Susan's imprint was felt most when the House's drafted its historic 2014 law An Act to Reduce Gun Violence, which created a permanent commission to ensure schools continue to foster a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive learning environment one that went beyond academics. As the state recovers from the pandemic and students return to school—students we know who have been impacted by multiple stressors over the past year—Susan's work and influence addressing children's social and emotional needs will no doubt continue. The state owes Susan Cole a debt of gratitude for her expertise and commitment to this work, which for her, was a labor of love. The members are asked to please stand for a moment of silence for Susan Cole."